

Sexing of Australian Native Parrots/Lorikeets/Cockatoos

Some terms, pointers and examinations used:

Dimorphic: The sexes can be visually determined by the colour variation between the male and female form.

Monomorphic: The sexes can not be visually determined by the colour variation. There are some marginal differences in head size and shape in some monomorphic species, particularly in the Rosella genus, that can be an indication of the bird's sex. However, it takes a great deal of experience to be able to determine the subtle variance.

Under-wing Stripe: The presence or absence of an under-wing stripe can fairly accurately sex the majority of Australian native parrots, particularly those that are monomorphic. The "stripe" is generally a series of whitish dots/small bars that can be seen on the underside of the wing feathers of females and juveniles. The whitish markings can vary from prominent through to very feint. There is a catch though. The under-wing stripe is present in both male and female juveniles. Males will moult out the stripe with full adult plumage. The majority of hens will retain strong to feint markings but there is that small percentage where the markings are that feint as to be non-existent. It is still a good indicator of known adult birds particularly Rosellas and Aussie Ringnecks.

Visual Sexing: Determining the sex of a bird, generally an older juvenile or adult, by looking at the birds and identifying sex by colour and colour pattern. Can also apply to gender indications observed in a bird's behaviour particularly behaviour that is part of a prelude to mating

Surgical Sexing: Done by a Vet. The bird is anaesthetised, a small incision is made in the bird's side, an endoscope is inserted and the sexual organs (gonads) can be examined. The examination will determine the sex and also allow a visual check of other areas. It can not determine virility/sterility but is a 99% accurate assessment of the bird' sex.

DNA sexing: The sex is determined by either a very small blood sample or feather sample that is processed by an accredited lab/institution. The blood/feather sample DNA is compared against a known "standard" to determine sex. A blood sample has probably a better chance of not being contaminated compared to a feather sample. Sterile/hygienic practices will ensure the sample you take is OK. Very commonly used now and much cheaper, more convenient and arguably less stressful than surgical

sexing. Probably just as accurate but does not have the benefits of a visual look. Again, can not determine virility/sterility.

Genus/Species that can be visually sexed:

Budgerigar: Adult birds can be identified by the colour of the cere (fleshy bit above the beak). The male cere is blue and the female is brown. Both these colours generally become more intense when the birds are sexually active.

Neophema: The Scarlet-chested and Turquoise parrots are strongly dimorphic. The sexes in the Elegant, Blue-wing are very similar. However, the males will have a small orange patch, about the size of a fingerprint, on their “belly” approximately between the legs and above the vent. The blue of the frontal band is often more intense as is the blue on the wing shoulder in the male of the above two species.

Neopsephotus (formerly Neophema): The Bourke Parrot can easily be visually sexed. The male has the blue frontal band and the hen does not. Sexing of some of the Bourke mutations can be tricky as they lose the blue frontal band.

Psephotus: This family of Aussie grass parakeets is sexually dimorphic. However, adult plumage can take some time so if sexing is desired before maturity, DNA/surgical sexing is required. The birds in this genus are; Red-rumped Parrot, Mulga Parrot, Hooded parrot and Golden-shouldered parrot.

Rosellas: The only species in the Rosella genus that can be visually sexed even from an early age is the Western Rosella. The sexes are quite obvious with the female being quite a plain bird.

Princess Parrot: In the normal form they are markedly dimorphic. Best indicators are the head colouring, the male has the strong blue tinge and adult males have a spatulate (spoon shaped extension) to the second primary wing feather. This extension can be “snapped” off but will re-appear at the next moult.

Superb Parrot: Again very markedly dimorphic. The male is a “bottle green” colour with a bright yellow face and red “bib”. The female is basically a green bird.

Regent Parrot: The male of the eastern sub-species is basically a bright olive-yellow bird with an olive-green back. There are patches of red on the inner-wing coverts. The female is a more olive-green colour, similar in other colour aspects but has pinkish striations to the under-tail feathers.

King Parrot & Red-winged Parrot: Very prominent sexual dimorphism with the male of both species being a much brighter and varied coloured bird.

Red-capped Parrot: In most cases the male is a much brighter bird and the female will look more “washed out” in colour, and will have some green feathers around the eye and on the head.

Varied Lorikeet: The only Aussie lorikeet that can be readily visually sexed though DNA etc sexing is recommended. The Male will generally have a more intense red cap and will have marked red striations on the chest area. The female will have the red cap but the chest markings a very faint to not nearly as vivid as the male.

Galah & Major Mitchell Cockatoo: Body colour is identical but adult males have a blackish to very dark brown pupil and the female is very light brown to pinkish in colour.

Gang Gang Cockatoo: Strong sexual dimorphism with the male having a bright red cap, crest and upper cheeks.

Genus/Species that are difficult to visually sex – DNA/Surgical sexing recommended:

Neophema: The Rock Parrot can be considered to be monomorphic and DNA or surgical sexing is generally required.

Northiella: The Red-vented, Yellow-vented and Narethae Blue-bonnet are sexually monomorphic and DNA/surgical sexing is highly recommended. There are some visual clues with the Red and Yellow-vented. The males are invariably a substantially larger/bulkier bird and the colour of the shoulder patch is generally more intense. There is no real behavioural indications, both sexes will flare wings, bob up and down and raise a little crest when agitated or excited.

Rosellas: All sub-species with the exception of the Western rosella. The under-wing stripe (or lack of) is a handy indicator in most adult birds but it is not a positive. If you have used this method to sex the birds, the pair seems to be compatible but no breeding results, first thing I would do is DNA sex the “pair”.

Aussie Ring-necked Parrots (Barnadius genus): There are some indicators, the female Twenty-eight will have duller and less red above the cere than the male. The mallee and Cloncurry females are generally a duller bird but there are many exceptions to the above. DNA/surgical sexing is strongly recommended.

Lorikeets: The male Musk Lorikeet may often be distinguished by the blue-green tinge to the top of the head but I have seen true pairs that are indistinguishable. DNA/surgical sexing is strongly recommended for all lorikeets except the Varied Lorikeet. The same applies to non-native Lorikeets and Lory's.

Black & Sulphur-crested Cockatoos: There are some subtle differences in the adult male and adult female. However, the birds are virtually monomorphic so particularly for young birds, DNA/surgical sexing is recommended. Adult female Red-tailed Blacks will generally have bars across the tail feathers. This can be used when sexing adult birds.