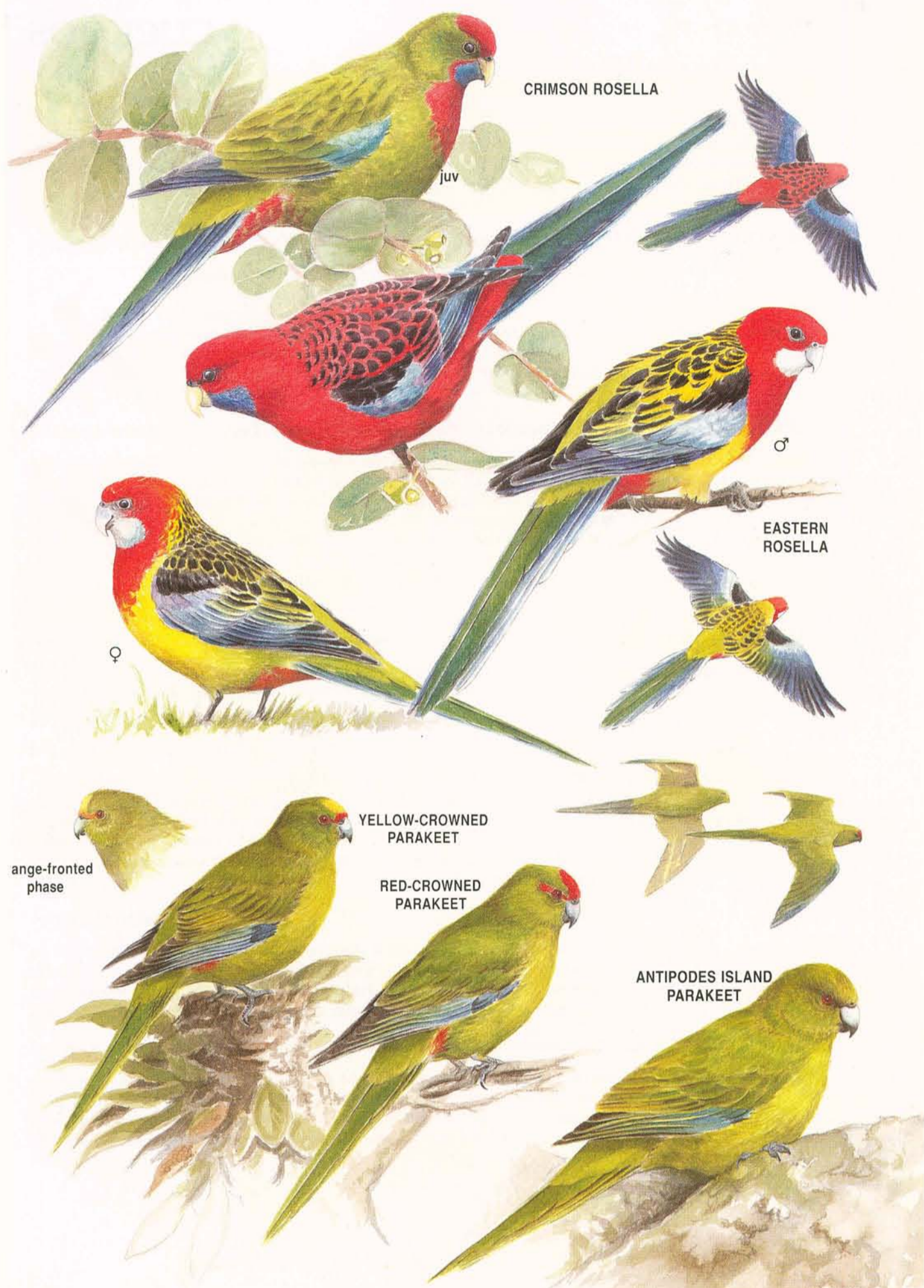


A large cosmopolitan family of often very colourful birds, but the NZ species are relatively drab, mainly green. All have a short bill with a horn covering (cere) enclosing the nostrils. The upper mandible is strongly curved, fitting neatly over the lower mandible. Their legs are short, and their feet have two toes pointing forward and two back.

CRIMSON ROSELLA *Platycercus elegans*

Rare Australian introduction

35 cm, 130 g. Distinctive medium-sized parrot with a long tail. Adult *rich crimson with blue cheeks, wings and tail, mottled black on the back*. Immature green but with crimson on forehead, breast and undertail, blue on chin, wings and tail. **Habitat:** Parks and gardens in Wellington. **Breeding:** Sep–Feb. **[Sp 263]**



COCKATOOS and PARROTS

Cacatuidae and Psittacidae

About 330 species worldwide; 10 breed in New Zealand. Five are endemic to New Zealand, 1 is native and 4 have been introduced.

Parrots are well known for their colourful plumage and are widely held in captivity.

All have a large head and eyes, a short neck, and a short, deep bill. Mainly herbivorous, although some also eat invertebrates. The upper mandible of the bill is strongly curved, sharply pointed, and hinged at the base so that the parrot can crack nuts or other

unyielding food. Parrots can use their bill as an extra limb, showing great agility at climbing. They have a large fleshy cere, surrounding the nostrils. Two toes are pointed forwards and two back, giving a strong grip. Parrots can hold food while shredding it and pass it to their mouth. Most parrots are gregarious, and many have loud, harsh voices. They mostly lay white eggs in holes in trees or in crevices in rocks.

Reading: Forshaw, J.M. & Cooper, W.T. 1978. *Parrots of the World*. Melbourne: Lansdowne.

263. CRIMSON ROSELLA *Platycercus elegans*

Plate 61

Size: 35 cm, 130 g

Distribution: Native to eastern Australia, from northern Queensland to eastern South Australia. Introduced to Norfolk Island and New Zealand. A rare cage escapee in New Zealand, a small number established near Dunedin about 1910 but died out by the 1950s. A few have become established in the wooded parks and suburbs in Wellington, most often seen in Central Park and the Botanical Gardens. A few birds, probably recent cage escapees, are seen elsewhere.

Population: Probably fewer than 20 birds in the wild.

Breeding: Not studied in New Zealand, but juveniles have been seen in October–March. In Australia, the nest is a shallow bowl of

decayed wood dust in a hollow limb of a tree. In August–February, they lay 4–5–8 white eggs (29 x 24 mm). The female alone incubates for c. 21 days. The fledging period is c. 35 days. The young remain with their parents for several months after fledging.

Behaviour: In New Zealand, Crimson Rosellas are usually seen as singles or in small family groups, but in Australia immatures form small flocks in autumn and winter while adults remain in pairs or small parties. Their usual call is a low-pitched ‘kweek-kweek-kweek’, lower in tone than the similar Eastern Rosella call.

Feeding: Diet is mainly seeds of grasses, weeds and trees, and fruit.

Reading: Hamel, J. 1970. *Notornis* 17: 126–129.