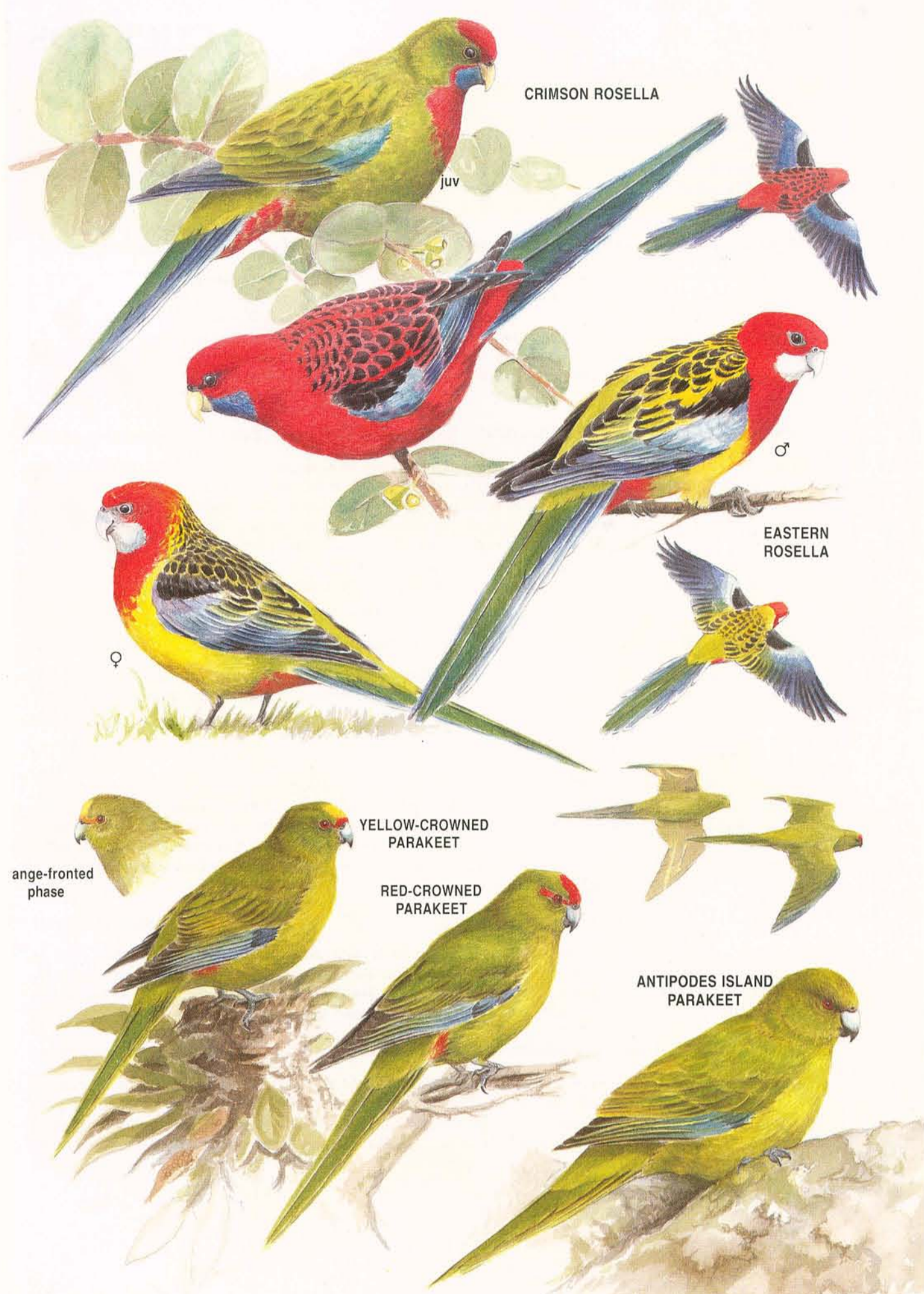


A large cosmopolitan family of often very colourful birds, but the NZ species are relatively drab, mainly green. All have a short bill with a horn covering (cere) enclosing the nostrils. The upper mandible is strongly curved, fitting neatly over the lower mandible. Their legs are short, and their feet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

EASTERN ROSELLA *Platycercus eximius* **Locally common Australian introduction**

32 cm, 110 g. Distinctive long-tailed parrot with a bell-like 'kwink, kwink' flight call. Head, upper breast and undertail crimson; cheeks white; lower breast yellow; back, rump, flanks and belly yellowish green, mottled black on back; leading edge of inner wing black, contrasts with pale blue on the central wing and dark blue on the wingtips; tail dark bluish green, edged pale blue. Female and immature more heavily mottled black on back, and red areas duller and patchy. Loud ringing calls and chattering notes. **Habitat:** Favours lightly wooded country (e.g. scattered totara) but uses forest and urban parks and gardens. **Breeding:** Oct–Jan. [Sp 264]



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.

264. EASTERN ROSELLA *Platycercus eximius*

Plate 61

Size: 32 cm, 110 g

Geographical variation: Of the three doubtfully distinct subspecies, *eximius* of southern New South Wales, Victoria and eastern South Australia was introduced to New Zealand.

Distribution: Native to southeastern Australia, from southern Queensland to eastern South Australia and Tasmania. Introduced to New Zealand as a cage bird, but escaped in Dunedin around 1910. They became well established and spread through southeastern Otago until about the 1940s, when they declined in range back to the Dunedin area. A separate population became established in Auckland before 1920; they spread northwards to reach Wellsford and Leigh in the early 1940s, and by 1970 had spread throughout Northland. They have also spread southwards into the Waikato and Taranaki in the west and to the Coromandel and Bay of Plenty in the east. Another population became established in the Wellington area in the 1960s, and they have since spread northwards along the foothills of the ranges into the Horowhenua and Manawatu in the west and to the Wairarapa and Hawke's Bay in the east. They favour open or lightly timbered country, such as farmland with

scattered totara, and orchards, but may also occupy dense native forest.

Population: Common in many parts of the North Island, especially Northland, Auckland, Coromandel Peninsula, eastern Wairarapa and the Hutt Valley.

Breeding: No New Zealand study. In Australia, they nest mostly in cavities in trees, laying 4–5–9 white eggs (27 x 22 mm) in October–January. The female alone incubates for 22–24 days, and the fledging period is c. 30 days. The young remain with their parents for several months after fledging.

Behaviour: Gregarious when not breeding; often in small flocks of 5–25 birds. Their usual call, often uttered in flight, is a loud, ringing, bell-like 'kwink', reminiscent of a Bellbird call, sometimes a single note, but usually repeated two or three times. Other calls are a loud 'chitty-chew', and strident screech when alarmed. Their flight is undulating, steady wingbeats alternating with long glides, often ending in an upward swoop into a tree. **Feeding:** Diet includes a wide range of seeds, fruits, flowers, buds, shoots and occasional insects, especially case moths. Seeds are often taken on or near the ground, e.g. Scotch thistles in paddocks. They have been reported

to cause some minor damage to citrus fruit and kiwifruit in Northland, and occasionally eat tomatoes, apples and other orchard fruit.

Reading: Fleming, C.A. 1944. *Notornis* 1: 60. Hamel, J. 1970. *Notornis* 17: 126–129. Woon, J.A. et al. 2002. *Notornis* 49: 91–94.