

Order Psittaciformes, Family Cacatoidæ,
Genus Psephotus

Psephotus haematonotus (Red-backed or Grass Parrot).

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There seems to have been no attempt to split this bird into sub-species, and as far as the writer can see there is little or no variation even in the shade of colours between the New South Wales, Victorian, and South Australian birds.

The Red-rumped Grass Parrot was once a very common bird at the Reedbeds and they nested in the large gums on the river bank within a very few yards of the house. This was in the days of my boyhood. Suddenly the birds began to diminish and many died of a skin disease which caused their feathers to drop out, and often almost naked live birds were to be seen on the ground. There is little doubt that this state of affairs was brought about by the imported Starling (*Sturnis vulgaris*), these pests having taken the nesting hollows in the trees and leaving them in a filthy state. I believe the Grass Parrots have returned to the district of Lockleys, but they have not been seen for many years at the Reedbeds.

Description.—Male—Crown of the head, back and sides of the neck, also chest, emerald green; forehead and cheeks, greenish blue; green of the chest tinged with yellow, the feathers also minutely edged with brown, giving them somewhat of a scale-like appearance; feathers of the back, bluish, with a minute edging of dark brown; rump, deep scarlet; shoulder and spurious wing, bright blue; spot of rich yellow below the shoulder; wing coverts, blue with green tinge; primaries, brown, with two-thirds of outer web dark blue; upper tail coverts, rich green; two central tail feathers bluish green, remaining feathers blue tipped with white; under tail coverts, white; abdomen, rich yellow, becoming lighter in the centre; bill, dark horn colour; feet, ashy grey; iris, brown. Female—All upper surface, greenish grey, each feather minutely margined with dark brown; under surface, grey with a yellowish tinge, each feather minutely edged with dark brown, giving a scale-like appearance; wing coverts, bluish grey; primaries, pale blue on outer webs, dark brown inner webs, a conspicuous white spot near the base of the five inner feathers; rump and upper tail coverts, rich dark green, two central tail feathers bluish green, remainder light blue tipped with white; under-tail coverts, bluish white; iris, brown; bill, bluish grey; feet, ashy grey.

Distribution.—Over the greater part of New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, but does not inhabit the dry interior.

Habitat.—Prefers the open forest country to either open plains or bush. Where the large gums (*Eucalyptus rostrata*) flourish, so will this bird invariably be found, be it ranges, undulating country, or low and swampy.

Habits.—At nesting time these birds are met with in pairs, or with the young broods. In the winter they congregate in flocks, very often up to a hundred or more. When feeding they move over the ground very rapidly, and spend much time on the ground in search of food. They will often perch along the dead branches of a tree-top in compact order chattering to one another, and often squabbling between the male birds.

Flight.—Strong and at times undulating.

Call.—A remarkably sweet whistling note resembling a song, and when a number are together it has a very pleasing effect. It has a shrill whistle when alarmed and as a warning note.

Food.—Grass seeds of many kinds. They are very inoffensive birds.

Nesting Season.—Extends in South Australia from September to December.

Nest.—No nest is made. The eggs are laid on the bare wood or wood-dust of a hollow spout or limb.

Eggs.—White, four to six in number. Dr. Morgan gives the following dimensions for a clutch of four, taken at Wirrara:—No. 1, 2.60 c/m. x 2.05 c/m.; No. 2, 2.60 c/m. x 2.05 c/m.; No. 3, 2.60 c/m. x 2.05 c/m.; No. 4, 2.50 c/m. x 2.10 c/m.
