



FACTSHEET

Rainbow Bee-eater



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Common Name: Rainbow Bee-eater

Scientific Name: *Merops ornatus*

Noongar Name: Birrongawu

Conservation Status: Listed as Least Concern under ICUN (2014). All Rottnest Island's fauna is protected under the *Rottnest Island Authority Act 1987*.

Habitat: Settlement area, woodland.

Body length: 19-25 cm

Weight: 20-31 g

Gestation period: 22-31 days

Number of young: 1-6 (4-6 eggs)

Description:

The Rainbow Bee-eater has brilliant plumage, pointed wings and a graceful flight pattern.

It is mainly green with a pale green forehead and an orange-yellow nape. A thick black band with a thin blue edging band runs from the base of the bill through each eye to the back of the head.

It has a bright orange-yellow throat with a black band around the base. This bird has a green chest, and blue undersides. Its tail is black and it has coppery colouring on its upper wing surfaces. It has grey legs, red eyes and a long narrow down-curved black bill. Longer, thinner tail plumes can be seen on adult males.

Diet:

Bees, wasps, flies, beetles, bugs, dragonflies, grasshoppers.

In the Wild:

The Rainbow Bee-eater feeds in flight, so you can spot it by looking for flashes of bright orange and green as it chases insects. Once they have caught their prey they hit it against its perch to subdue it. One of their favourite insects, as their name suggests is bees. It remove the sting from insects, the Rainbow Bee-eater will rub the stinger on the perch.

The Rainbow Bee-eater is a migrant bird and arrives on the Island from the north, around October, to breed. It stays until late February or March. It is believed that Rainbow Bee-eaters mate for life.

The Rainbow Bee-eater is unusual because it burrows into the ground to build its nest. This is usually done by the female. The nest chamber can be up to a metre below the surface. At least one Rainbow Bee-eater burrow on Rottnest has been re-used for 20 years! The Rainbow Bee-eater likes sandy areas with low or little vegetation for its nest sites and can often be seen perched around Rottnest's golf course.

Threats:

Invasive species

- Pest birds
- Climate change causing habitat change
- Excessive fire

DID YOU KNOW?

The Rainbow Bee-eater is the only species of bee-eater in Australia and first identified on Rottnest in 1977.