

## [Abyssinian Lovebirds aka Black-winged Lovebirds](#)

### Relevant Web Resources Abyssinian Lovebirds aka Black-winged Lovebirds

#### Relevant Web Resources

- [Lovebird General Information ... Lovebird Species](#)
- [Lovebirds as Pets ... Breeding Lovebirds](#)
  - [Lovebird Diet](#): Feeding your lovebird for good health
  - [Lovebird Diseases](#) (Diseases and Health Problems Lovebirds are Susceptible to)
- [Lovebird Photo Gallery](#) (Species Photos and Links) ... Also of interest may be:



**Black-winged Lovebirds** (*Agapornis taranta*) also known as **Abyssinian Lovebirds**  
Front: **Male** - Back: **Female**  
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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Agapornis\\_taranta\\_\(female\\_and\\_male\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Agapornis_taranta_(female_and_male).jpg)

#### The **Abyssinian Lovebirds** or **Black-winged Lovebirds** (*Agapornis taranta*) are African

endemics that occur naturally in the mountainous areas of Southern Eritrea and the southwestern highlands of Ethiopia, up to an altitude of 1,800-3,200m (6,000 - 10,000 ft) above sea level. Locally, this bird is sometimes referred to as "Taranta" - after the Pass of Taranta in Ethiopia, where they occur naturally. They typically live in small flocks of 4 to 20 birds.

## Description:

The Abyssinian Lovebird is one of the largest lovebirds measuring between 6 - 6 1/2" (15 - 17 cm) in length (including tail) and averaging around 1.7 oz or 48 g in weight. Females tend to be a little heavier, reaching about 1.9 oz (53 grams) while males usually weigh around 1.6 oz (44 grams). The nominate species (*Agapornis a. nana*) is slightly larger than its sub-species *Agapornis taranta nana*.

Males and females are sexually dimorphic, meaning they can be visually sexed, contrary to most other [lovebird species](#), where males and females look identical.



Male Black-winged Lovebird (*Agapornis taranta*) also known as Abyssinian Lovebird

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Some color mutations have been bred in recent history.

### Male:

- Plumage is mostly emerald green with a metallic sheen in sunlight. The green is slightly lighter on the head, rump, underparts and just above the tail.
- He has a bright red [forehead](#), which extends into the areas around the eyes - with a narrow ring of red feathers encircling his eyes.
- The cheeks have a yellow-brown tinge to the feathers.
- The wing feathers are a rich green, and the flight feathers and underwing coverts are sooty black. The tail is mostly green; except for the black tip and the yellow markings at the base (below the tail).
- The irises dark brown
- He has a coral red beak and grey legs and feet.

### Female:

- The hen is green all over, darker on the back.
- She lacks the red and black markings of the male.
- She has a coral red beak and grey legs and feet.

### Juvenile:

- Immature birds look like adult females, but the underwings are black in males. Immature females have green wing feathers that turn brownish-black as they mature. The beak is a dusky yellow with black at the base. They attain adult plumage after their first molt at about eight or nine months of age.

- Earlier sexing: One way to identify the gender of an immature bird BEFORE their first molt is to pull a few feathers from the chick's forehead. The feathers will regrow in a few days and if the new feathers are red, then it is a male.



Male Black-winged Lovebird (*Agapornis taranta*) also known as Abyssinian Lovebird  
Image by Veli Pohjonen - released photo into public domain

## Subspecies

**Abyssinian Lovebird or Black-Winged Lovebird** (*Agapornis taranta tarana*) - nominate species

*Agapornis taranta nana* -

Range: South of Ethiopia

ID: Smaller than the nominate species, with a more intensively colored plumage. It has shorter wings and a smaller bill.

Interbreeding is likely to occur in captive situations.

Individuals occurring at higher altitudes are larger, but they are not subspecifically recognized.

### Abyssinian Lovebirds

Photo credits: photos by Nancy Porras



Left, female Abyssinian lovebird; right, male  
Chicks below



## Calls / Vocalizations

The calls they make in flight are high-pitched, shrieky notes; or shrill, twittering

notes. Captive birds are less noisy than other lovebird species, but their alarm and contact calls can be loud. Although for the most part, a harmonic twittering sound can be heard.

## Pet Potential / Personality

The Abyssinian Lovebird is reported to have a pleasant disposition. They tend to be more tolerant of other birds - provided plenty of space is available for all. In cramped spaces, they can get aggressive and possibly cause injury. They are said to be less noisy than other [lovebird species](#).

They are very social beings and are typically kept with another lovebird as companion to satisfy their strong need for companionship and they spend a good part of their day socializing and preening each other. Hand-raised Abyssinians also make affectionate pets - although they do need a lot of attention if kept singly.

These active birds require a roomy cage that allows them to fly from one perch to the next and climb around. They need lots of toys to keep them mentally stimulated. If kept in cages, they should be provided extended periods throughout the day to fly about and exercise outside the enclosures.

## Breeding / Nesting

The Abyssinian Lovebirds' breeding season within their natural range is recorded to commence in April and continues through September. However, nests with eggs have been found as early as March and chicks were produced as late as early November.

Their mating display is quite interesting. The male may jump over and around the female, with some shaking and scratching of the head to add interest. Once she is satisfied, she will let him know that she would like to be fed. He regurgitates food held in his crop into her open beak.

The nesting area is chosen by the female. It could be a crack in a rock or the dead limb of a tree, or a tree cavity. Outside the breeding season, these lovebirds typically use the chosen nesting area as a continuous roost for many years.

During the breeding season, Abyssinians are very territorial and protective of their nesting area, which they will vigorously defend against other pairs or intruders - to the death, if necessary.

They are not great nest builders and usually use very little nesting substrates. Materials found in nests have included bits of grass, bark, leaves, and the chest feathers of the hen.

The average clutch consists of 2 or 4 white eggs (rarely 5). The hen may start incubating after the first or second egg has been laid. The incubation period is about 23 - 25 days and the young leave the nest about 45 days after hatching.

The newly hatched chicks are covered with fine grey-white down, which will rapidly thicken as they grow. At around seven weeks, they are fully feathered and ready to leave the nest. After fledging, the young will remain close to the parents who will continue to feed them for several weeks afterwards. In the wild, the Abyssinians tolerate their young quite well and form family units with them. The young from previous years often assist their parents in raising the next generations.



**Male Black-winged Lovebird** (*Agapornis taranta*) also known as **Abyssinian Lovebird**

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## Aviculture:

The Abyssinian Lovebirds are rare outside their range and difficult to find, mainly due to the challenges breeders face in breeding this species. Due to their high price tag, they are not commonly kept as pets and are probably one of the rarest lovebird species.

This species is not as common in captivity as other lovebirds, but they have successfully bred in captivity and several color mutations have occurred in captivity.

They are generally hardy (although to a lesser extent than say the [Peach-faced Lovebirds](#)). They are quite tolerant of cooler tatures, as long as they are protected from drafts and the temperatures are not overly extreme. Obviously, as is the case with all birds, they need to be carefully acclimatized to local conditions.

Abyssinians prefer to breed during the colder season. The Abyssinian Lovebirds are unpredictable breeders. Some pairs are quite prolific while others show no interest in mating for several years. One way to increase success is by allowing them to choose their mates naturally in a flock environment / communal aviary, and then to separate bonded pairs for breeding.

The recommended aviary or bird room cage size is: 6 x 3 x 6 feet (2 x 1 x 2 m). The temperatures should not be allowed to go below 41 Fahrenheit or 5 Celsius. If there are any young, the temperatures should not go below 59 Fahrenheit or 15 Celsius.

Pairs have even been unwilling to breed in communal aviaries and need to be kept singly - at the very least during the breeding season. They didn't even breed if their aviary was next to an aviary occupied by other lovebirds. They would still use the nest boxes for roosting, but they showed no interest in mating and producing young. As a work-around, if aviaries are adjacent, hiding the nest boxes from the view of other lovebirds (with some dividers used between the aviaries, for example) may be a solution. Several natural wood perches of various sizes / dimensions need to be provided, as well as plenty of toys to amuse themselves with. These birds are intelligent and playful and spend hours amusing themselves with their favorite toy or game. One game that has been observed is dropping of perches straight to the floor, but catching themselves inches off the floor to fly back up to a perch on the other side of the aviary.

Nesting boxes built for parakeets, lovebirds or cockatiels have been accepted in captive situations. Several nest box sizes have successfully been employed:



**Female Black-winged Lovebird**  
(*Agapornis taranta*) also known as  
**Abyssinian Lovebird**

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10" long x 6" deep x 7" high (25 x 15 1/2 x 18 cm) or 6" x 6" x 10" (15 x 15 x 25 cm). However, parakeet boxes as small as 4" x 4" x 4" (10 x 10 x 10 cm) have been accepted. The entrance hole should be in the upper center of the box and to keep the eggs from being dispersed at the bottom, a concave in the nest box floor is strongly recommended. For roosting purposes, they will also use finch boxes hung near the nest box. In the wild, lovebirds use roosting boxes throughout the year and they should have access to one in captivity as well.

They are not avid nest builders - although the Abyssinian Lovebird hen may use her own chest feathers to line the nest with. It is important to line the nest box with a thick layer of suitable substrate. Appropriate for this purpose are the following: dried grass (hay), peat and wood shavings, saw dust. It is recommended to microwave any dried grasses / hay for a couple of minutes to kill any pathogens. Other lovebirds tend to use paper, twigs, leaves and other debris.

Box inspections are recommended when the pair is nesting to check on eggs and chicks. The nest box substrate should be changed once the nesting box gets too messy. However, care needs to be taken not to scare / spook the parents enough to prompt them to abandon the eggs/ chicks or even inadvertently trample them.

The hen averages 3 - 6 eggs per clutch, which she incubates alone for 24 - 28 days, while the male feeds her and guards the nest. The newly hatched chicks are sparsely covered with a grey-white down and have tannish colored beaks, which turn red as they approach the first molt. Their eyes may not open until they are three weeks old. They fledge when they are about 7 to 8 weeks old (sometimes earlier - may depend on the size of the nestbox). In cases where the chicks need to be pulled and handraised, or feeding needs to be supplemented, Kaytee Handfeeding formula for Macaws is suitable and readily accepted by the chicks.

Once the young have become independent, it is best to separate them from their parents as the parents are inclined to pluck their young. Two breedings a year are typical. The immature birds are initially susceptible, but grow stronger over time.

## Diet / Feeding:

Their natural diet is quite diverse. They will feed on various small seeds, especially savannah grasses. They particularly seek out berries, fruits - the favorite of which being the fruit of the sycamore fig. They will feed heavily on the berries of the juniper tree, which in large amounts is poisonous to some birds and mammals. The juniper berries have a very high Vitamin B content -- which meets the specific dietary requirement of the Abyssinian Lovebird. In fact, the lack of success in keeping captive specimen alive is thought to be caused by a diet low in Vitamin B.



Male Black-winged Lovebird (*Agapornis taranta*) also known as Abyssinian Lovebird

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Captive birds should be fed a diet as close to their natural as possible. Typically, this will include a good quality lovebird / cockatiel seed mix that includes a variety of \*seeds (millet, canary, sunflower, buckwheat, niger, hemp, safflower, peanuts, sweetcorn, linseed, corn, pinenuts, barley), fruits and vegetables (apples, oranges, kiwi fruits, fresh figs, berries, \*juniper berries, spinach, carrots), green food (dandelion leaves, cabbage leaves, etc.), and commercial pellets (the latter of which is controversial, as pelleted diets generally contain many chemicals, synthetic nutrients, and other inferior ingredients).

\*Try soaking dry figs and juniper berries over night before feeding to soften them.

\*Sprouted seeds, softened rusk and egg food should also be offered, particularly during the breeding season (rationed when not breeding).

Abyssinians require a higher fat content in their diet than other lovebirds; feeding additional sunflower seeds usually fulfills this requirement.

Mineral and oyster shell grit is also part of their captive diet.

Breeders also add avian vitamins and minerals to prevent nutritional deficiencies. Since this species is known for their Vitamin B deficiency, liquid B12 (i.e., Cytacron) may need to be provided twice weekly. Vitamin C is often supplemented in the young or otherwise susceptible birds. Feeding food items rich in natural vitamin C may suffice. When breeding, [avian probiotics](#) are recommended.



A painting of a male **Black-winged Lovebird** (also known as Abyssinian Lovebird) by **Edward Lear** 1812-1888 - Public Domain

## Training and Behavioral Guidance:

The Abyssinian lovebird is said to be a quieter and more intelligent than other lovebird species. It really is important to learn to understand them and to guide their behavior before an undesirable behavior has been established. There are few things to consider ...

- **Biting:** If not properly socialized, however, they will discover their beaks as method of "disciplining us".
- **Noise:** Lovebirds are very vocal birds, making loud, high-pitched noises that can be a nuisance. They make noise all day, but especially at certain times of day, although this species is said to be less vocal.
- **Chewing:** As stated above, lovebirds are also very active, and love to chew things. When they are let out of their cage, it would be wise to watch them carefully, and protect any furniture, electrical wiring or anything else that they could possibly chew on. They are not big chewers - as their preferred medium is "paper."
- **Paper:** They love to tear up paper -- especially when they are in the "mating" spirit -- which is all-year-round for birds kept indoors (not exposed to the seasons). I have learned not to keep important papers laying around - and even use it as a way to keep my lovebird busy.

Training and behavioral guidance is recommended ...

- **AvianWeb Resources:** I put together web resources for you to help you understand your pet bird and properly direct him. Please visit the following website to learn more about [parrot behavior and training](#). If you found a way to resolve a "parrot behavioral issue" please [share it with others](#).

## Taxonomy:

**Species:** Scientific: Agapornis taranta ... English: Abyssinian Lovebird, Black-winged Lovebird ... Dutch: Zwartvleugelagapornis, Abessijnse Agapornis ... German: Taranta Unzertrennlicher, Tarantinerpapagei ... French: Inséparable à ailes noir

Species Research by [Sibylle Johnson](#)

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