

# Electric Eclectus

by M.L. Simmons, DVM, President

**T**he *Electric Eclectus* is a free monthly newsletter sponsored totally by the Parrot Conservation Group, a division of Veterinary Resources Americas, Inc. The newsletter is mailed to people who provide self-addressed and stamped envelopes, faxed to people who provide fax-only phone numbers, and placed on the internet for those people who are traveling along the superhighway.

The response to the newsletter has been astonishing and the use of the e-mail question and answer function is used on a daily basis. Eclectus owners can ask questions through our e-mail box and usually get a response the same day. Many of the questions concern breeding, handfeeding, and, of course, feather plucking.

There is a classified section where people can place ads free of charge in each monthly issue. We have guest authors from time to time writing about their experiences with Eclectus Parrots, and we plan to have articles by guest veterinarians on specific avian diseases in the future.

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(This is the home page for the Flying Colors Aviary which has kindly donated space for the newsletter.) ➔

# Breeding the MacGillivray's Eclectus

by George Cave, Newberry Park, CA

**S**ince the signing of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992, it became apparent that imported wild birds would no longer be a source of additional breeding stock. I decided I had better hurry to acquire some of the species of birds I wanted but had been putting off. The Ducorps Cockatoo was one of the species I wanted and while at a local importer's quarantine station to get some, I noticed some of the biggest, most striking Eclectus I had ever seen. I later learned that they were MacGillivray's Eclectus *Eclectus roratus macgillivrayi*.

I had no Eclectus in my collection so I purchased one pair each of Soloman Island and MacGillivray's Eclectus. There were only seven MacGillivray's, five females and two males but one male had a severely overgrown beak so I took the other one.

Within a few days of the purchase, I took both pairs to my veterinarian to be surgically sexed and checked for any subtle problems that were not observable to me. Now if there is one species of parrot that doesn't need to be surgically sexed to determine its gender, it is the Eclectus. However, I have all of my psittacines surgically sexed to get an accurate account of their sex organs. This was one of those cases when it was really good to hear the news. The birds were, indeed, a pair and the female had egg follicles forming. When weighed, the male was 587g while the female weighed 577g.

The MacGillivray's Eclectus looks very much like most of the *E. roratus* subspecies. Its coloring is very similar to that of the Red-sided *E. r. polychlorus* but it is much larger. All of the colors on the MacGillivray's are much more pronounced due to its larger size. The female has a very pronounced ring of tiny blue feathers around her

eyes. This was one of the most striking features when I first saw the birds. The female's tail feathers are a light shade of red at the tips. About one inch up from the tip of tail the color becomes a much deeper shade of red almost forming a band of about one inch width. From the "band" to the body, the red is a lighter shade than the band but not as light as the tip of the tail. The male, as most Eclectus, is pretty much the same as other Eclectus except, of course, they are bigger and their color is an emerald green, unlike the Red-sided and Vosmari.

After 30 days in my quarantine area, and with all tests results coming back clean (including PBF) I set the Macs up in an elevated flight 3 ft. wide, 4 ft. high, and 10 ft. long. There are perches at both ends and one in the center of the flight but placed lower than the other two. I provided a nest box 12 x 12 x 24 in. placed on the outside of the rear of the flight. The box has a 4 in. entrance hole located 3 in. down from the top. There is a welded wire ladder down the inside of the box so the birds can enter and exit easily. An inspection door in the rear of the box is covered with hinged aluminum over the wooden plug.

The diet provided to the Eclectus is the same one given to all my psittacines. The main diet is a Roudybush pelleted food which I mix with a high quality large hookbill parrot mix which is available to the birds at all times. In addition, I give them grated carrots and spinach daily. Once a week I give each pair a handful of sunflower seed that has D-Cal Fos added to it for calcium. This way, I am sure they are eating calcium.

I placed the MacGillivray's flight next to the flight of Soloman Island Eclectus with dividers between the two pairs so they could not see each other.

Within a few days of placing the MacGillivray's into their flight, the female was seen coming out of the nest box. Over the next few days she would come out of the box when ever any one would approach. Soon she would *retreat* to the box whenever any one approached. The male would come as close to the observer as possible, spread his wings wide open and scream until the intruder went away.

I check all my nest boxes every day. This is so I'll know when eggs are laid and, subsequently, when to pull them for artificial incubation. And I believe it gets the birds used to some one checking on them and therefore isn't too intrusive. On the morning of June 16, 1994 the first egg was observed. A second egg was laid three days later.

At the end of the second week after the second egg was laid, I removed both eggs for artificial incubation. It was at this point that I decided to acquire the other pair of MacGillivray's Eclectus from the importer if they were still available. They were, and I purchased the second pair. I took them to the vet and the results were great. The weight of the two new birds was almost identical to that of the first pair. On this trip we also took measurements of the male and compared them to the measurements in Forshaw's *Parrots of the World* with all of my measurements exceeding Forshaw's.

I had no experience with Eclectus Parrots and didn't want to take any chances with these first babies. I asked Gail Worth, a good friend and aviculturist extraordinaire, if she'd handfeed for me. She was happy to do so. Worth feeds many of my more difficult birds from day one—birds such as toucans, touracos and hornbills. In a few days I put the eggs (cushioned by a towel) into a cardboard box and hauled them about an hour's drive to Worth's place. It was a very hot day and no additional heat was required to keep the eggs warm. Both arrived without any problems.

On the morning of July 12, 1994 I got a call from a very excited Gail Worth telling me that sometime in the night the first egg hatched. Three days later the second egg hatched without incident. I thought it a little odd that their incubation cycle was just 26 days and thought that possibly I had made a mistake regarding when the eggs were laid. Everything I had read indicated that Eclectus Parrots have a 28

day incubation period. Incubation periods, however, can vary quite a bit. I once had an Umbrella Cockatoo egg that didn't hatch for 32 days. So I felt that this was just one of those times when the eggs hatched early. However, after the successful hatching of more than 20 MacGillivray's eggs from two different pairs, records indicate that nearly all of the chicks have hatched at between 25 and 26 days.

After Gail Worth handfed the first two babies, I went ahead and fed the future chicks. The handfeeding is pretty much the same as that for any other parrots. I use Exact handfeeding formula, and add a very small amount of D-Cal Fos, some carrot or sweet potato baby food, a little bit of monkey chow and a small amount of creamy peanut butter. I fed with a syringe with the formula at a temperature of between 95 and 105° F. On the first day, I feed them a very diluted mixture of the formula every two hours and slowly increase the amount (starting with 1cc per feeding) per feeding while decreasing the number of daily feedings just as I do for the other parrots. The babies wean at around 90 days.

The babies grow up a little shy and even try to nip at people they don't know if they come too close. This is, of course, just a bluff and once they are out of their cage they are very content to sit on anyone's lap for hours while watching TV or reading a book. The babies may even fall asleep while doing so. They make excellent pets with their disposition almost as good as that of an Umbrella Cockatoo and their talking ability is excellent.

Unfortunately, the number of breeding stock in this country is very limited. I know of no other MacGillivray's in this country. They are rare even in their native country of Australia. Hopefully, in the future some sort of trade will be opened up with Australia to allow these and other rare parrots to be imported into the United States for propagation.

Australia has a number of parrots that are pests to the farmers and are dealt with in a very harsh manner. The nets and poison grain lines are extremely unbiased and do not discriminate as to which species of birds they affect—common or rare. It would be a shame to lose this species to that sort of indiscriminate slaughter. ➤

The advertisement features a dark, textured background with a large, stylized title 'TIMBERLINE' in a jagged, woodcut-like font. Two evergreen trees are positioned on either side of the title. Below the title, the location 'MARION, ILLINOIS' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. The main text of the ad is in a clean, bold, sans-serif font, listing the products and services offered. The phone number is prominently displayed at the bottom.

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