

Twenty Tips for Raising Eclectus

by Jim Janson, Dallas, Tx

Tip # 1. Ignore all the preconceived notions and rumors you have heard about the difficulty of raising Eclectus Parrots. Though members of this genus are different as a whole, each bird must be judged individually; some are cooperative, some are stubborn, some are insecure, all are intelligent. With a few simple techniques, success can be assured. All it really takes is determination to work with them, patience, and a certain amount of extra time. Never be in a hurry with Eclectus.

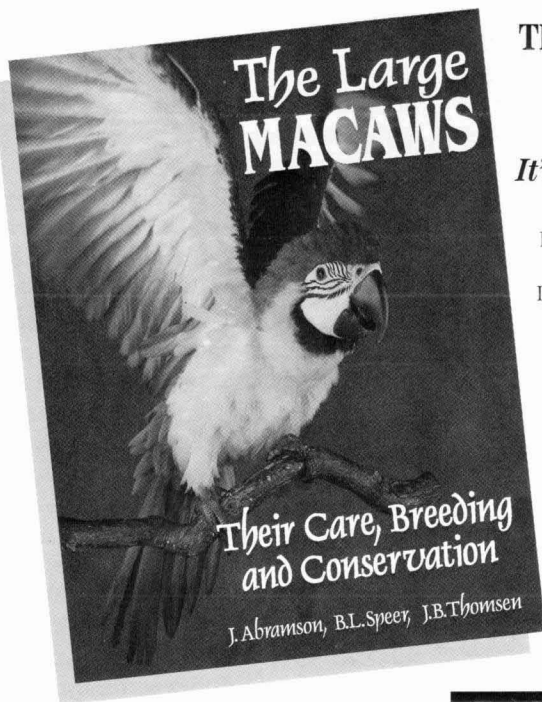
Tip # 2. If you own a reliable breeding pair, it is advisable to leave the babies with the parents to be fed up to the 28th day. We have produced dozens of Eclectus pets and find no disadvantage to leaving the chicks in the nest until this time. It gives the young chicks a huge head start physically and almost assures you of avoiding any nutritional problems, illnesses or stunting caused by inadequate feeding in chicks pulled prior to 14 days. It helps to lift the chick from the box at least twice and talk or murmur to it

after its eyes have opened so the pulling trauma will be softened. It is also important not to startle the hen out of the box lest the chick learn a fear response when the keeper looks inside.

Tip # 3. Though Eclectus are known for having weak feeding responses, the bobbing that they do can be encouraged. Contrary to most psittacines, whose sensitive spots are in the crevasse near the hinge on either side of the beak, Eclectus are prompted to respond by pressure at the tip of the upper mandible. A gentle squeezing or holding of this tip with your fingers, especially the nails, will encourage bobbing for formula.

Tip #4. The dangers of aspirating formula into the windpipe can be lessened with Eclectus by using a smaller syringe with a shorter nozzle and by feeding formula significantly more runny than that used for other babies. The small syringe allows food to be deposited at the front of the mouth for the parrot to swallow more naturally, while the thinner gruel flows quickly down the esophagus and can be

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coughed up very easily if the chick gets some down the "wrong throat." This means that we have to feed a bit slower; and we have to feed more often since liquid food passes more quickly. It has the advantage of avoiding bird dehydration and crop stasis.

Tip # 5. Eclectus babies are extremely sight oriented. I am not sure that they see objects clearly until well past their sixth week. Their young eyes are very sensitive to light. They should be introduced to brightness, bustling activity and quick moving objects very slowly. A majority of the obstinate chicks we have encountered at feeding time are reacting to *visual* stimuli. Sometimes feeding in a dim light or with the baby under a towel with only his beak exposed are valuable aids.

Tip # 6. On the other hand, Eclectus respond exceedingly well to touch. Gentle holding, stroking and beak and head fondling do wonders with these psittacines. We always make hand contact with babies before attempting to put food in their line of sight and will even leave one hand on the bird while we draw food into the syringe. All our pets are raised with other babies' or have stuffed animals to snuggle against in the tub.

Tip # 7. Eclectus youngsters may prove to be quite picky about the temperature of the formula fed to them. If it is too hot (106° or above), they may shake their heads and refuse it; if it is cooled down because the feeding takes a while, they will fight to avoid accepting it. I have settled on a formula temperature of 102° to 104° F. for best acceptance. As they get older, birds may allow more leeway. With young, we keep the cup of baby food in a pan of hot water to avoid its cooling down.

Tip # 8. Besides our small syringe (15cc) method, we have had good results in spoon feeding Eclectus babies. Their sensitivity to hard plastic or aluminum spoons with edges cupped to fit their beak size makes this the most natural method, closely approximating the mother's beak. It has the distinct disadvantage of being messier. For cleanup we use warm, wet washcloths and the babies respond so happily to the face wiping that we have begun offering a warm cloth even to syringe fed chicks. It is our belief that when someone invents a plunger-type syringe with a beak shaped tip, they will have done avicul-

ture a tremendous service.

Tip #9. Consistency is the key word when handfeeding Eclectus. Even the certain ring of our spoon stirring the formula becomes familiar to a bird after a week or so. They should always be raised in a stable situation with a feeding routine. Changes necessary, or the growth and socialization of the babies should be made on a planned basis with as much care as possible.

Tip # 10. There is a delicate balance in the feeding schedule of Eclectus chicks. If left to become too hungry or if a meal is inadvertently late, some babies will become irascible and grouchy, making feeding them difficult. On the other hand, to wait just 45 minutes longer before feeding, for example, can make the chick extra hungry thus increasing the bobbing and the ease of filling his crop. At any rate, the first gulp of food by our babies is by far the most responsive and successful, so it is necessary to be prepared with a full syringe and get a good load into the baby when it is most willing. This is especially true as weaning approaches.

Tip # 11. With Eclectus chicks, a tendency to fight the syringe and to shy away from food may appear at an early age (six weeks?). There are several possible moves that can be made to surmount such difficulties. We change the formula by adding ground hulled sunflower seeds or raw peanuts or fruit. The taste may be more to the parrot's interest. One may begin giving soaked warm bread, pellets or monkey chow from a saucer with the thumb and finger. Most of our babies feed readily this way. Or the keeper may choose to substitute a spoon for feeding. All such changes should be viewed as preliminary to forthcoming weaning.

Tip # 12. If an Eclectus baby throws up a small amount of formula after feeding, it may be that the bird is being filled too full. Eclectus have slightly more elongated crops than have some other parrots and do not have the same bulbous-crop look when full. Another problem with store-bought processed formula is that it may be rejected by the chick at a certain stage. We have stopped this by adding up to 50% ground sunflower seeds and half a teaspoon of mashed papaya to the food. Of course, if the problem persists, if throwing up occurs several hours after the feeding, or if there is

any rank smell to the vomit, take the bird to a veterinarian immediately.

Tip # 13. Weaning handfed Eclectus normally begins when they are about seven weeks old. At this time a low dish of foods should be placed into the basket with the baby. Our favorites are shelled walnuts, papaya and millet spray. At this time we also offer soaked mushy biscuit to the birds, by hand one or two times a day, and use a syringe for the other feedings. To maintain nutrition, we sprinkle baby formula powder on the soaking material and feed it after it is all warm and mushy. Remember that food crumbled in the dish is not food ingested. Feel the crop.

Tip # 14. Some Eclectus chicks seem to gravitate naturally towards warm wet soft foods and soak and cook grains. Others love the crunch and texture of shelled walnuts, millet, crackers and the like. It is easiest to channel a bird's weaning impulses towards the foods it most prefers. We have had Eclectus babies which weaned nearly entirely on apple. Since mature birds are usually exceptional eaters of all foods, there is no need to worry about eating habits at this critical weaning period.

Tip # 15. As controversial as it seems to many, I have had Eclectus babies of weaning age who preferred to eat at the table with me where I would chew food for them and give it to them warm, much as South American Indians have done for centuries while raising baby parrots. In this way my pets would accept everything from pasta and rice to brussels sprouts, fish and coleslaw. I always take care not to do this with a bird less than eight to nine weeks old whose immune system is as yet undeveloped. I will not feed this way if I have had a cold or a mouth sore recently. I must emphasize that *I in no way recommend this behavior to other aviculturists*. In this, my choice in my own.

Tip # 16. One of my favorite weaning time games with Eclectus chicks is "beak scratch." It is a sort of fingernail scraping and pinching that makes the young birds very aware of textures and of the strength latent in their own beaks. A popsicle stick, toothbrush or birdie chew toy comes in handy to channel any pinching tendencies away from fingers. It does wonders for weaning to scratch and click the tip of a baby's beak with one's fingernail

then quickly pop a piece of walnut into its lower mandible. Crunching soon begins.

Tip # 17. Also at the time of weaning, baby Eclectus Parrots begin flapping their wings in earnest preparation for fledging. Our experience is that a more well-rounded, active psittacine is produced if we leave the wing feathers intact until it has learned to hop, flap, semi-hover and land. It may be opportune to fledge Eclectus in small six and eight foot spaces so they do not build up great speed in their flights. Remember, acrobatic skill and maneuverability are the goals in pet parrot fledging techniques, not strength, distance and speed. We have marvelously active Eclectus pets who, even with clipped wings, hang upside down, drop and land on the floor, and hop to one's shoulder from a cage or perch. This should put to rest the notion that these birds are sedentary and boring in captivity.

Tip # 18. This is the phase to begin training pet birds to lie on their backs and to be touched under the wings, on the back, etc. Eclectus like nothing better than an hour's session with you in front of the TV or with a good book when they will lie in your lap and can be stroked all over. Quiet time is important for the secure feelings of these birds and since, as adults, they may be hesitant to allow heavy petting, it is important to begin such training early.

Tip # 19. Vocalization comes naturally to Eclectus. As fledglings wake up to the world around them, they are drawn to mimic the sounds they hear. If soft music is playing they will warble and twitter the sweetest sounds even at the age of four or five weeks. Human voices will seem more natural to them if they are kept away from other loudly screaming parrots. Eclectus raised near their parent's habitat where they can hear the squawks of mom and dad may quite early begin to make the same alarm calls. Most of our trained babies learn to recognize their names long before they can repeat them.

Tip # 20. And finally, enjoy! May all of us who have had the pleasure of working with this phenomenal psittacine genus never forget how fortunate we are. Though this may, indeed, be the finest pet parrot available on the market today, it is still an instinctually wild creature with one wing still in the jungles of Asia. ➔

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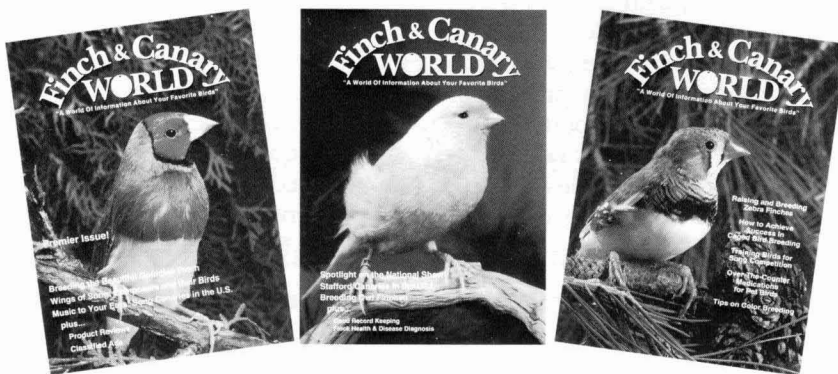
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