

# Fly On Home, Mr. B.

## Free-flying *Eclectus* in Paraguay

by Judith Mura, Pilar, Paraguay

**Editor's Note:** *This story takes place in Paraguay where there may be no legal restrictions on allowing exotic birds to fly free. It is an entirely different situation in the United States. There are myriad laws on the Federal, State and local levels that control very strictly the handling of exotic birds. You must assume that it is absolutely forbidden to allow an exotic bird its freedom anywhere in the U.S.*

*In addition to the legality of the matter, you must consider the well-being of the bird. It is dangerous for exotic birds to be set free. The vast majority of those that accidentally escape and are not soon recaptured, die.*

*The following tale is joyful and lifts the spirit. It takes place in a far distant land where the conditions are quite different than those in the United States. Enjoy the tale—but don't do the trick. S.D.]*

A group of friends were visiting in the small living room of the house, with most of the conversation centering on the sleek, fluores-

cent-green Red-sided *Eclectus* male on William's shoulder. Suddenly, the bird turned toward the screen door, stuck out its long neck and did a quick short flap of his wings, then, looking at his owner, did it again. "It's getting past sundown and he wants to go home," I explained. "Should we drive back or let him fly home?"

"Oh, fly, fly," the guests babbled.

No sooner had we opened the screen door and all walked out onto the porch, when the *Eclectus* took off in a flash of color, burst through an opening in the tropical foliage, and climbed to 100 feet in the sky. He circled the grounds in a wide arc and with several squawking calls, headed straight for home a half mile away. The characteristic laborious wing-flaps of this species carried him away surprisingly quickly.

My pair of Red-sided *Eclectus* Parrots was purchased from a breeder three years ago. At that time, the female was one and a half years old, the male six months. The two birds are

from unrelated parents.

Every time one of my friends would come over to visit and see my new pets, they would exclaim "Oh! They are so beautiful." And so the name stuck. Mr. and Mrs. Beautiful it was.

Though neither *Eclectus* was wing-clipped when I got them, they had not been kept in a very large cage. I built them a 6 ft. x 6 ft. x 8 ft. high cage with play perches and an L-shaped nest box. Mr. Beautiful became the better flyer of the two.

Well, I kept them caged for about eight months. But Mr. Beautiful was so intelligent that he discovered how to open the cage door and get out. The first time he escaped, he stayed in the trees about a hundred feet away from my yard. He would come back to the deck to eat food and get water, but he didn't want me to catch him and return him to the cage. He was out about a week. Most nights he would return to Mrs. Beautiful and sleep on top of the cage. During the days, he would fly all around, sometimes quite far from the house.

When I finally got him back into the cage, Mrs. Beautiful was so mad at him I couldn't believe it. She instantly gave him a beating and bit him. After that, he did not much like being caged. I began the routine of letting one bird out of the cage for a week, then letting the other one out for a week, always keeping one of them *in* the cage. Mrs. B. would stick quite close to home and always come back to sleep in her box, whereas Mr. B. began gravitating towards a friend's house the next block over. He liked to hang out with my friend's two macaws.

It finally got to a point where Mr. B. would not let me catch him because he knew I was going to put him back into his cage. At this point, I made the decision to just let Mrs. B. out also. She would go away for the day but always come back to her box for the night. Their total range tended to extend no more than three miles or so. Sometimes Mr. B. would fly over the ocean, just a little beyond the shore-



*Since his original escape from his cage, Mr B., a Red-sided Eclectus, has developed the stamina and instinctual caution to survive while at liberty 90% of the time. His mate, though, disdains freedom and stays near her nest box.*

line. Their favorite spot was a huge spreading tree in the backyard of a friend's home. People all over the neighborhood loved to see the two Eclectus fly and delighted to have the birds in their yards.

At this same time, I had a Blue and Gold Macaw, Celeste, escape her cage and spend two days in the top of the huge tree. She was so scared. She did not budge even though the Beautifuls would fly over and, seemingly, try to call her down. I have since given Celeste to my friend with the two other macaws.

You know, it was really hard at first to allow the Beautifuls their freedom. I had to let go of a lot of my attachments. One of the reasons here in Paraguay that people do not let their birds fly is that the parrots go into a tree and are frightened and sit there a long time. Then the owners become scared and think "Oh no! There goes my \$2000." They become so worried that when the parrots come back, the owners never let them get away again.

I grew up with my family in Paraguay and have always loved parrots. I remember 25 years ago, as a child, how there were hundreds of Sun Conures in the trees where we played. There were so many Suns that we could not hear each other talk because the parrots were so busy talking. Back then, we would get babies and raise them as pets. Some of the birds, especially the males, learned to speak Spanish like the people.

There was once an escaped Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flying free around the neighborhood here for months, squawking and looking so wonderful in flight. All the people loved it. It learned to eat the pods of the African tulip trees. Then, one day, it chewed up the TV antenna of a man down the way. The man hired a bounty hunter who shot the cockatoo. The whole neighborhood was angry at the man. We had planned to buy him a new antenna and bird-proof it so the cockatoo would be safe.


Mr. and Mrs. Beautiful are now staying with the macaws at my friend's house while I fix up the new home I bought (by coincidence, the one with the huge spreading tree). The male, during his daily flights, will often come over here and perch in the tree to watch or visit me. But he always returns to my friend's house to go in and sleep on the perch beside the nest

box on the wall where Mrs. Beautiful spends most of her time.

I plan to reassemble their big cage and mount it up in the spreading tree where they can be fed, etc. Then I'll bring Mrs. B. and her box back to live here with me.

I do not know how bonded these two birds are. Mr. B. seems to be bonded to my friend, who can pet him, turn him on his back, and such. Still, the Eclectus are quite young and

it often takes years for handfed pets to break their imprinting and successfully mate and raise a family. The female has laid two infertile clutches, but there is plenty of time.

In the meanwhile, it is so wonderful to see Mr. Beautiful and occasionally Mrs. Beautiful out in the tree tops or on the telephone pole, flying free with strength and courage and intelligence, yet still loving we humans enough to return and be friends with us. 

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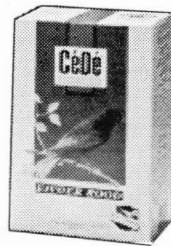
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