

the
Eclectus...

Winged Flowers

by Jose Ml. Perdomo, San Mateo, CA

Beyond the material benefits that education may bring to our lives, it transfers light to our reasoning, and facilitates our search for truth, one of the most important of human endeavors. This introductory article on the Eclectus Parrot hopes to initiate such a process and within its many limitations, intends to plant a seed of interest and concern in the mind of potential owners and breeders of these parrots.

It is designed for all of those considering breeding or simply owning one of these parrots. Its main purpose is to assist them in understanding some of the idiosyncrasies and basic requirements of owning or breeding these beautiful birds. Consequently, this article is being written with the hope that breeders will use it as a starting point to orient and educate new Eclectus owners on the basic care of their parrots.

It is a guide in the most succinct form, and it does not claim to be perfect nor to be a recompilation of all facts known about these unique birds of the South Pacific forests. Indeed, in the world of parrots the Eclectus has one of the most stunning displays of plumage colors and unique appearances. To call them "winged flowers," "bouquet of feathers," or "gems of the sky" does not represent the most minimal exaggeration. Their brilliant palette of colors could have inspired in Chagal, Kandinsky and even Picasso a fury of creativity with chromatic values

forged by nature.

To put it simply, these parrots seem to be unreal, and their sexual dimorphism is extreme, and different from many other avian relatives. They exhibit an abundance of exotic traits in both sexes. They are wonders of the vast spectrum of nature's seemingly unlimited reservoir of exuberance.

Although their beauty is certainly able to captivate our senses, it is important to learn more about these birds, as their plumage is not their only charm.

The Eclectus, an Overview

A total of up to nine subspecies or races have been described for the *Eclectus roratus*. Others consider the number of subspecies to be only seven. Four of these subspecies are well established in U.S. aviculture. These are: the nominate species, *Eclectus roratus roratus*, also known as the Grand Eclectus; the subspecies *Eclectus r. vosmaeri*, called the Vosmaeri Eclectus; the *Eclectus r. solomonensis*, known as the Solomon Island Eclectus; and the *Eclectus r. polychloros*, called the Red-sided Eclectus or New Guinea Eclectus. For a more detailed account of the subspecies, see the articles "Which One Are You?" by Laurella Desborough on AFA's *Watchbird*, May-June, 1996 issue, and on the Part I of this series "The Eclectus; Winged Flowers," published in the Jan-Feb., 1998 issue of AFA's *Watchbird*.

Size

The Eclectus is a medium size parrot. The average length of an Eclectus is 14 inches. The Solomon and Biaki varieties are smaller by approximately two inches. Their wing span is nearly two feet, and their weight ranges from 350 grams for the smaller subspecies, to nearly 900 grams for the Australian Eclectus, the largest of them all.

Distribution

Their distribution is the islands near New Guinea, the Moluccas and the Solomon Islands. Other subspecies habitats include the northeastern tip of Australia, where the magnificent Australian Eclectus shares the skies with the remarkable black cockatoos and other feathered beauties of Australia's Northeast.

The Eclectus is a relatively new bird in aviculture with approximately 100 years of successful propagation in captivity. Although these parrots are not in direct ecological danger, the unfortunate destruction of their natural habitat to agricultural and urban development, and the general instability of these islands, may in the future, change their status. As is the case with many others members of the avian world, if this unfortunate destruction continues, it may be up to the Eclectus aviculturists to save this bird from complete extinction.

Appearance

Although aesthetic values are hard to define and categorize, the general consensus on the established subspecies grown in captivity, is that they are all strikingly beautiful. The females lack even a single green feather but have a striking gradient of red and purple or blue, with one of the subspecies displaying a bright yellow band at the tip of the tail. In adulthood, both mandibles of the hen are extremely dark brown to black with a slight shine.

In contrast, the male Eclectus plumage is bright emerald green with some highlights of iridescent blue in the upper bend of the wings and scarlet red inside of the wings and in part of the chest. In the adult males, the beak's upper mandible shows a gradient of orange to yellow while the lower mandible is predominately black.

Some like the females of the vosmaeri with their daisy yellow band in the tip of the tail, while others are partial to the Solomon, the Red sided, the Aru and the Biaki sub-species with their brilliant blue markings in the breast and the blue feathers surrounding their eyes.

In addition, many prefer the smaller size and compactness of the Solomon Island or the Biaki Eclectus. Within the full range including the nominate race and all the subspecies, males are similar in appearance and are very hard to tell apart except in some cases by their size and slight color hues, neither of which is easy nor a very reliable criteria.

The Eclectus as a Pet

Only handraised or handfed specimens should be considered as potential pets. In general, they are best adopted after the weaning period is over, which is at approximately four months of age. A tamed older Eclectus will be a good adoption if you are willing to spend some time to get to know each other. Although debatable, many breeders believe that the males are of gentler nature and less territorial than the females. Following this reasoning, in households with small children, a male Eclectus would be the best choice.

Owning and taking proper care of an Eclectus is a serious responsibility. They require some efforts on the part of the owners. This includes socialization, nutrition and general care for these parrots. Although the Eclectus is not among the strong bonding parrots, the more you pet and preen your Eclectus, the stronger it will bond to you, especially if done during their infancy.

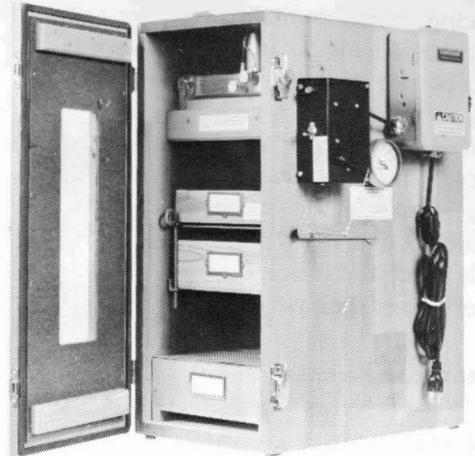
The Eclectus for Breeding

The breeding of Eclectus requires a much more critical selection than that needed to be implemented for obtaining a pet. First, the purity of the subspecies stock should be established, and only same subspecies should be paired for breeding purposes. Obviously, these paired specimens are to be unrelated in order to avoid genetic defects and weakness.

Although used successfully by

The Egg and Us

FIND OUT WHY HUMIDAIRE EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN THE CHOICE OF ZOOS, PRESERVES AND PROFESSIONAL BREEDERS WORLDWIDE FOR OVER SIX DECADES. WRITE, CALL OR FAX FOR YOUR FREE CATALOG!



P.O. BOX 9, NEW MADISON, OH 45346 U.S.A.
TELEPHONE [U.S.A.] Toll-Free (800) 410-6925
WORLDWIDE (937) 996-3001 • FAX (937) 996-3633
E-MAIL hatch@bright.net

Baltimore Firsts

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1771 First post office system - inaugurated by William Goddard. | 1821 First Catholic Cathedral - Basilica of the Assumption. |
| 1828 First umbrella factory - "Born in Baltimore, raised everywhere." | 1827 First public carrier railway - Baltimore and Ohio Railway. |

it's official...

BALTIMORE

is the place

for the AFA Convention '98

at the

beautiful Omni Inner Harbor Hotel

July 29 thru August 2

(Wednesday thru Sunday)

Mark your calendar...make your plans early!

The '98 promises to be the best ever...filled with exciting lectures, seminars, tours and the largest exhibit hall ever!

You don't want to miss this lovely historic location and all the action and excitement already in planning!
More details will be confirmed and announced soon.

many breeders, Eclectus initially raised as pets will not be among the top producing pairs, as their attachment to humans seems to interfere with the acceptance of their mates. For breeding purposes, parent-raised specimens, paired at an early age are the best choice. Since in matters of love, nothing is chiseled in stone, it must be qualified that many pets are successfully bred, and in some cases, with the retention of their pet qualities.

A Male or Female Pet?

In the Eclectus world, the hen is the dominant partner. Generally, the hen, with the exception of the mating days, exercises this domineering power. It seems as though a change in hormones bring the female to a docility which facilitates the mating, a key element in the perpetuation of the species. Even if many believe that the males are generally easier to manage, and therefore better for inexperienced owners, if you like the red and blue or purple hues of the females, if you are willing to do additional work, and dispense gentle guidance, the female will

be a wonderful companion. Their striking presence will fill your life with their extraordinary beauty and strong personality. Since their life span is estimated to be nearly 40 years, a little extra work at the beginning is easily justifiable, as it can be amortized in up to nearly half a century of mutual enjoyment.

Speaking Abilities

The Eclectus speech capabilities are among the top in the parrot world, perhaps only second to the skillful vocalizations of the African Grey Parrot, widely recognized as the top mimicker of voice and sounds. An Eclectus excelling in speech abilities combined with a good tutor can develop a repertoire of sentences which, when interacted, will give the impression that they are carrying on a conversational dialog. This takes time but it will bring you exhilarating joy, as they start to display their talking skills in response to your teachings. As charming as you may find the meow of a cat, the vocalizations of one of these parrots is in a different class, many levels higher. Realistically speaking, one should not expect an Eclectus parrot to recite the Declaration of Independence nor to repeat the six o'clock news. Typically, they will learn several sentences and the more time you dedicate to tutoring your parrot the better it will develop a repertoire.

Master-Pet Relationship

The Eclectus is a very intelligent parrot. It is capable of developing a very strong relationship with its master. This relationship could be close to that which a dog shows to his owner. In contrast with the canine expression of love, most Eclectus will not look for physical contact and continuous petting. Instead, they will demand your attention and company. They enjoy looking at the TV while in the lap of their master or running around you full of curiosity while you repair the kitchen fixtures or do the laundry. Eclectus can be moody and they will let you know if they are upset with a particular situation. Besides their striking beauty, their strong personality makes them very appealing to many pet owners.

Caging Requirements for Pets

A pet Eclectus should be kept in an ample cage while resting away from its master. In addition, a perch stand or a playpen will make its life more colorful and interesting. Make sure to get a cage that will fit two birds, in case you decide in the future to get a cage-mate for your Eclectus. An enclosure 36 in. H x 20 in. W x 20 in. D is sufficient for one Eclectus and a 48 in. H x 36 in. W x 20 in. D, is good for two Eclectus pets. By all means, get the biggest cage you can afford and place it in your house away from dangerous chemicals. Avoid round cages and any enclosure, which may allow the parrot to stick its head between the bars. Cages having a playpen on the top are very convenient as they provide an easy access to recreation and exercise.

For best socialization, place the cage in an area such as the family room. In that way, the parrot will be around people and will be able to become more sociable, and in addition, it will have more opportunity to learn. During the hours the bird is alone, leave a radio on in the same room where the bird is to keep the parrot's mind busy. Alternatively, a pair (male and female) of Eclectus will not only give you the beauty and contrast of their plumage but also serve as companions to each other during the hours of the master's absence.

If you believe that you may want to breed them in the future, make certain to get pure subspecies of unrelated blood. Breeding hybrids is undesirable, and breeding closely related birds will only produce headaches and inferior specimens.

Caging for Breeding

Most Eclectus breeders use galvanized wire cages measuring 6 ft. H x 4 ft. W x 6 ft. D or 4 ft. H x 4 ft. W x 6 ft. D and usually nothing smaller than 4 ft. x 3 ft. x 3 ft. Generally, Eclectus do not use much of the space provided by these cages. In most cases, before you see an Eclectus flying inside of an aviary, it has to be of considerable amplitude.

Nest boxes can be of a variety of shapes. I particularly prefer the Z-shaped nest-box, which allows the male to remain on the upper platform

Our 61st Bird Mart

EVERYBODY'S BIRD MART

June 14, 1998

L.A. County Fairplex, Bldg. #4
Pomona, California

9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Admission \$5.00

Kids under 12 free

The Pomona Bird Mart has
become the marketplace for
buyers and sellers.

**BIRDS • CAGES • FEEDERS
NEST BOXES • VITAMINS
SEED • PERCHES • GIFT ITEMS**

parking \$4.00

Use White Ave. parking lot
(Tram service from parking lot to building G)

a division of

J. Williams Financial Services Inc.
P.O. Box 794, Acton, CA 93510

(805) 269-0424

The Original, The #1 Bird Mart

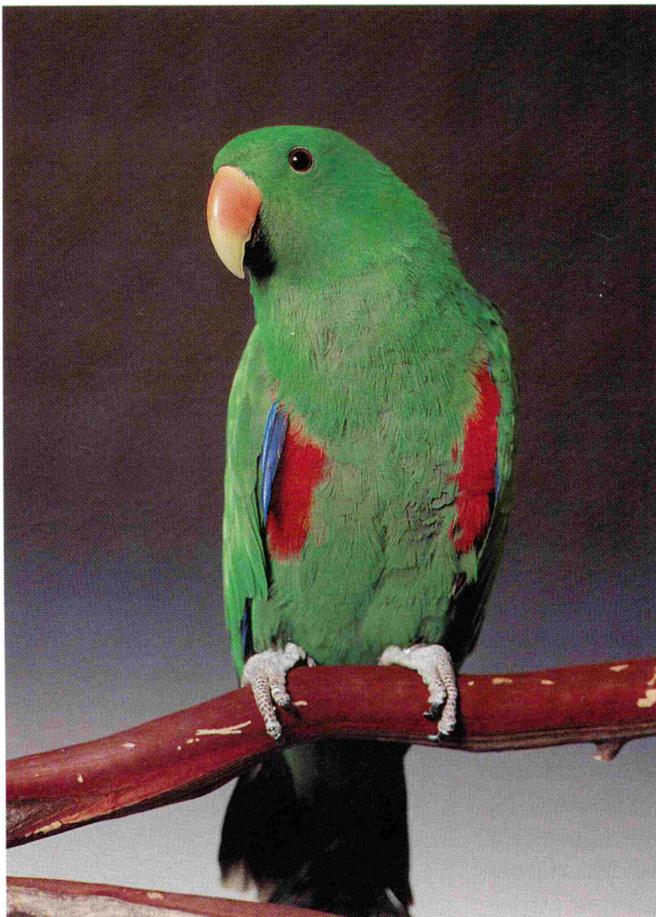
in the event that the female is aggressively protecting the nest. The nest should be supplied with a nesting material such as coarse pine shavings or the equivalent.

Toys

It is important to supply toys to your Eclectus. First introduce a toy in a gradual way by placing it near the cage, then closer, and then inside of the cage. This gradual introductory process can be extended to several days depending on the personality of your Eclectus. Remove the toy if you detect any fear of the toy by the parrot. Do not be disappointed if your Eclectus ignores these toys for weeks. These parrots are not at the top of the list of highly agile birds.

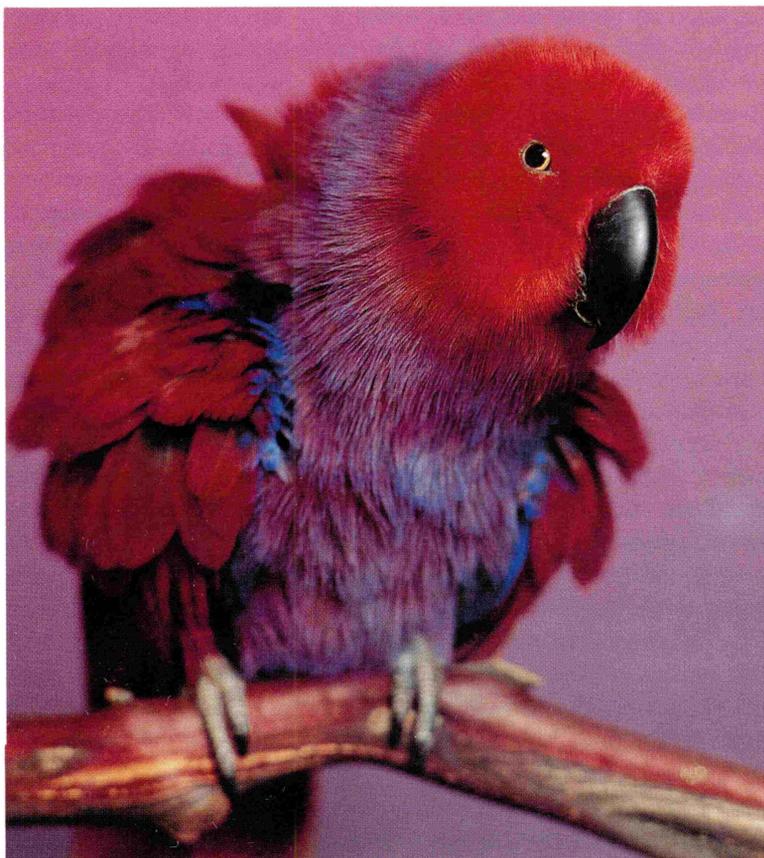
Feather Plucking

Some parrots, especially the medium and large size indulge themselves in pulling their feathers. It could happen to your Eclectus. This bad habit is certainly more distressful to the owner than it is to the bird. The causes for this happening are varied and many but it is believed that skin disease, boredom



Photos By Jose M Perdomo

A young male vosmaeri showing his juvenile eyes and well pronounced candy corn beak.



This image captures an unusual pose by Lucy, a female vosmaeri who recently passed away after many years of happy existence. This pose can be a greeting or even an aggressive stance.

or lack of attention, poor nutrition and stress are among the major culprits. If you avoid these conditions, you will be minimizing the onset of this habit, which unquestionably shatters the beauty of the Eclectus plumage and brings undue stress to their owners.

Noise and Destructive Power

Eclectus are neither destructive nor noisy. They are capable of producing a powerful noise but generally do not do this with great frequency unless they are extremely frightened or have a behavior problem. An agitated Eclectus will produce a repetitive sound, which you soon learn to recognize as their irritated call. In general, with some exceptions, a well-mannered Eclectus can well be a tenant of an apartment dwelling.

Although their destructive capabilities are not in the same class as most of the other mid-sized parrots, caution should be taken since their beaks are very powerful and even while driven by just curiosity the results of their quest may be disastrous to furniture.

PART II TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE: 