

Most aviculturists are aware of the commonly available Eclectus parrot subspecies – the Vosmaeri, Solomon Islands, Grand, and Red-sided Eclectus. Many never have heard of the “Aru” Eclectus, *Eclectus roratus aruensis*.

The Aru Red-sided Eclectus originated solely from the Islands of Aru. The Aru group of islands to the south of New Guinea consists of one very large central island with a number of smaller ones scattered around it. It is an irregular, oblong-shaped island about 80 miles from north to south, and 50 miles from east to west. There are numerous smaller islands, most of which are on the east side surrounding the main island, some up to 10 or 15 miles from the main Island. The Islands of Aru are covered in lofty, dense forest.

During phone conversations with a well-known and respected Eclectus breeder, I was told that some of the Aru were brought to the U.S. by missionaries who captured them on the Island of Aru. A few of these original

The “Aru” Eclectus

Eclectus roratus aruensis

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pairs are still in her aviary.

Because the *E. r. aruensis* is listed as a subspecies in *Parrots* by Juniper and Parr, Forshaw's *Parrots of the World*, and in the *Handbook of the Birds of the World – Volume 4* edited by del Hoyo, et al., I accept the Aru as a valid subspecies while recognizing some authorities deem it doubtfully distinct from *E. r. polychloros*.

The *aruensis*, on a whole, closely resembles the Red-sided, Solomon Island, and Biaki subspecies. It is only subtle differences in each subspecies that sets them apart.

The male Aru is a large bird, rivaling the Vosmaeri subspecies in both weight and length. He is an emerald green, with a slightly lighter hue than the New Guinea Red-sided with subtle blue tints to the head feathers. One of the most impressive differences is the color of the eye on the mature Aru male. It is quite distinct and bold with its almost fiery red color. My Aru male's eyes are noticeably reddish.

The Aru male has a longer, stocky body with a rather long tail being tipped with at least half an inch of well defined pale-lemon yellow, while the New Guinea males, on average, have a smaller yellow tail band. The average weight range for the male Aru is comparable to that of the male Vosmaeri, approximately 450-600 grams.

The *E. r. Aruensis* hen is a most magnificent creature. She shares the same basic markings as the New Guinea hen, although her plumage tends to be a bit brighter, even a bit more vibrant, if that is possible. The bright red on her rather flat topped

head and her breast feathers extends downward on the front of the breast to form a deep bib. The feathers below the bib are a bright but deep shade of royal blue, and the females from some areas have a subtle hint of purple. Her creamy white eye is ringed with tiny blue feathers. Aru hens are 100-150 grams heavier and have a longer, stockier body build than the slimmer New Guinea female.

About 10 years ago, I decided to acquire a pair of Eclectus Parrots. I knew very little about the species at that time other than how beautiful they were. Over to the breeder's we went where I walked through their large aviary of mostly macaws and cockatoos, holding my breath until they showed me the pair of Eclectus that was for sale.

Sitting on his perch was the most beautiful male Eclectus Parrot I had ever laid eyes on – he literally took my breath away. The sun was shining through the trees as his majesty, appropriately named King Tutt, basked in the bright, warm light. His feathers glowed like fine emerald fur.



Photos by Linda MacDougall

Feisty “Queen Juliet,” my Aru Eclectus female.



King of the aviary, “Tutt” an Aru Eclectus male.

His beak was an incredibly deep, rich orange and yellow against the green of his face. And then I noticed his eyes – dilated pinpoint of irises glistening in the sunlight, a fiery red hue with highlights hinting of mischief! With a graceful flap of his wings he landed on the side of the cage, letting out an ear piercing warning followed by a friendly “Hello.” His mate climbed out of her nest box, studying our every move. She too was beautiful although missing her lavender breast feathers. There was no mistaking her Vosmaeri markings with tell-tale tail band of golden yellow. I only knew that these birds were meant to be mine!

Once home with my feathered treasures, I got a crash course in incubation with the first fertile egg arriving within just three weeks of their arrival! With fear and wonder that I have rarely felt in my entire life, I placed that little fertile egg in the incubator and did not sleep for the next month. How blessed I am that the little embryo grew and hatched under my ever watchful but inexperienced eye.

Little did I know that in a few weeks as the feathers emerged I would discover their offspring was not a pure Vosmaeri Eclectus. The beautiful little female did not resemble her Vosmaeri mother with the daisy yellow tail. Devastated that I probably had hybrid babies, I started looking into the history of my pair. Fortunately they were both easy to trace through the leg bands and I was relieved to learn that both were indeed pure subspecies Eclectus – just not the *same* subspecies.

Beauty is a wild caught Vosmaeri whose age is estimated to be over 25 years, and King Tutt, who sports a Busch Gardens band, came from a Red-sided Eclectus pair at Busch Gardens. Sadly, on further investigation, Tutt’s parents were sold with no records found.

Even though I felt secure in the knowledge that he was a pure subspecies bird, something was just not right. Tutt is noticeably larger than some of the other Red-sided males I had seen, and he had enough yellow on his tail tips to fool me into believ-



Pair of Aru Eclectus “Tutt and Juliet.”

ing him to be a Vosmaeri. He is also larger than one of my Vosmaeri males and just a tad shorter than my largest male Vos.

It was then that I came across *AFA Watchbird Magazine* for the first time. In an issue featuring Eclectus, May/June 1996, I read an article written on the different Eclectus subspecies. After a few phone conversations with the author, it was decided that my Tutt should be considered an *E. r. aruensis* Red-sided Eclectus and should be paired with an *aruensis* hen.

After a few months of searching for an Aru hen, which very few people had even heard of, I almost gave up hope of finding Tutt a female. Then one day I received a call from “Ann,” who had a lonely *aruensis* hen (Juliet) that had lost its mate. Juliet once belonged to Laurella Desborough so when Ann contacted her, she told Ann that I needed an Aru hen.

Juliet is truly the most stunning bird I have ever seen. If Tutt took my breath away, Juliet makes my heart sing. She gives meaning to the words royalty and elegance. Once home from the airport, I opened the crate to allow her to come out and see her new

home and cage. I was truly stunned at her beauty and her size! Surely the color red had never been more vibrant! Her fur-like feathers begged to be touched as she looked so unreal!

Ann had told me she was special and she was right. Juliet has some extra blue feathering that drapes down her back between her wings which is most unusual. Poised perfection comes to mind when I look at Juliet. With quiet dignity, she surveyed her new home, quickly settling in as Queen Juliet!

As with Tutt’s former mate Beauty and her new mate, George, I had high hopes of love at first site with Juliet and Tutt. After a long period of side by side companionship the day arrived to let my beautiful Aru Red-sided pair share a large flight cage. In a new and neutral cage, in a new area, I put Juliet in one side and Tutt in the other. Sparks flew but not love! At first they looked interested, but I believe Tutt came on a bit too strong for her royal highness, and before I knew it they were beak to beak with every feather puffed up, making them look like giant red and green teddy, (I mean grizzly) bears.

I have tried every trick I know to

convince these two beauties that they belong together.

I have noticed of late more contact calling between Tutt and Juliet. They seem to always want to be in contact with each other, making little noises always being answered by one or the other. He guards the nest and reports any strange goings on, like a leaf falling outside his cage or the occasional ant that dares to scurry by. He is particularly vigilant when Juliet is sitting on a pair of eggs, all sadly infertile thus far. Tutt has been trying to feed Juliet, or so I think, as I find some regurgitated food on the perch outside the nest box opening. Both birds are fantastic eaters and easy to feed – the more variety the better, and they love their greens and sprouts.

The time I see the two of them get along best is shower time. Together they put on such a display of wing flapping and tail fanning, expressing total enjoyment as they collect every drop of water. It is then that they will sit companionably, *almost* side by side as they preen themselves back to a state of perfection.

It has been three years now and still they are not convinced they should breed. They live together and several times have come close to bonding but one or the other will turn a bit too aggressive and then they are back to square one. I am hopeful that one day I will have some “Aruensis Red-sided” Eclectus babies to watch over and observe. I am open to suggestions. Please feel free to contact me if you have any *E. r. aruensis* available or if you have any ideas as to how to get my pair to bond and breed.

When I once was asked to give a single word description of the Eclectus Parrot, I took a long look at my Aru pair while wondering if indeed there existed one word to adequately describe their beauty, grace, and regal elegance. Tutt and Juliet are a stunning blend of colors and complex personalities and the one word that comes to mind for such a beautiful array of colors is *kaleidoscope*. It describes perfectly my colorful and fascinating pair of *E. r. aruensis*, King Tutt and Queen Juliet. 