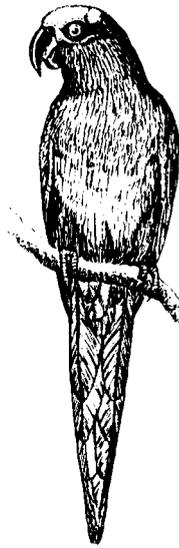


# the Gold-capped Conure



by Eb Cravens, Wahahini, HI

For over 10 years, the Gold-capped Conure, *Aratinga auricapilla*, has been my overwhelmingly favorite among all the yellow *Aratinga* trio of Sun, Jenday and Gold-capped Conures. Not only do they have a lower-pitched call than the first two, but when raised properly and well socialized into a family situation, they use it far less often.

Goldcaps are calmer, behaving more as a mini macaw (Noble and Hahn's) in their daily activity. They have a larger, blockier body and head than the Sun or Jenday and are slightly more macaw-like in their perching, grooming and habits of keen observation. Yet few pet bird shops tend to regularly stock them.

A conure is a conure, I have heard it said, and the Suns and Jendays are definitely more colorful, hence saleable to clients. That may be true but, believe me, this conure is far from boring to look at. Its subtle shades of green, gold, orange and indigo literally shimmer in full daylight.

As babies, Goldcaps are just as playfully mischievous as Suns, snuggling under your sweater, rolling off the back of the couch, and lying upside down in the palm of your hand. As they grow past six months, however, it is not unusual for a pet Goldcap to settle into the home in a near perfect niche. They interact with people gladly when allowed out of their cage, and will befriend visitors who are patient and calm. They are seldom prone to extended bouts of frantic activity, chewing or screeching if cooped up too long (as can be the case with the more high-strung Sun and Jenday Conures). We have noticed that when the Gold-capped Conure is happy in a home, it is less likely to go through a radical change in personality when puberty arrives. Certainly it arrives later in this species than in its more yellow relatives. Sometimes no sexuality change is even noticed in a pet Goldcap until age four.

Care and feeding of a pet Goldcap is pretty much the same as for others in the conure family. When weaned onto rice, beans, cooked pulses and vegetables, fruits and sprouts, most conures become excellent eaters of a variety of nutritious foods. They are known to take seeds in the wild and we make a point of including these in our flock's diet. Of course, the smaller millets, canary seed and Cockatiel mixes are less fatty than large hookbill mixes containing sunflower and safflower. But since conures normally do not have a strong tendency to become overweight, we offer both kinds on alternating weeks.

Our seed feeding percentage runs about 25% of the total diet, increasing to 33% when breeding pairs are feeding older (17 days or more) chicks. Conures also love corn on the cob, nuts and healthy people foods. We have taught our Goldcaps to open almonds by personally cracking off the tips and letting the birds see the nutmeat inside. The stronger-shelled nuts usually have to be cracked before feeding to the conures.

Cage size for a Gold-capped Conure pet should be a minimum of 24 x 24 x 30 inches, and this is for those pets being let out daily to exercise and interact with owners. Freedom inside the home is usually easy to monitor with this group of parrots. They are cautious, quick to learn, and are most comfortable high up on a perching spot rather than on the floor where they could be stepped upon. Even pets like to sleep in secure cardboard sleeping boxes, inside covered baskets or the "snuggle" tunnels marketed at bird supply shops.

Gold-capped Conures are avid chewers. They love fresh branches of safe plants, daisy and marigold buds, spider plants, destructible toys, wooden chopsticks, plastic bottle caps and more. Cloth and rope chewies can be a favorite.

When introduced to water, the kitchen sink, water bottle, backyard garden hose, or a shower with their owner, it does not matter to a Goldcap as long as it is WET! Keepers should be careful around pans of boiling water, if their pet Goldcap enters the kitchen. Conures have been known to dive into hot water in their enthusiasm to bathe.

Young birds can readily be taught to fly to their owner's hand on command. We find the first four flight feathers cut on each wing is normally sufficient to limit their gaining altitude. Lighter, stronger flyers may need five of their primaries clipped. Remember, a severely clipped parrot is often in more danger than one that can fly six to 10 feet and land safely.

There are reports of certain male Goldcaps who learned to "talk." Though this tends to be the exception, this species certainly can communicate in a small mumbling voice. A lot depends upon the tonal quality of the

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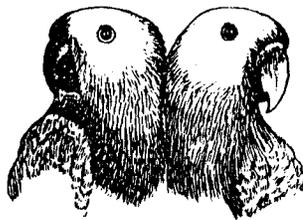
voice of the keeper, and how easily the conure can mimic it.

There are two main subspecies of *A. auricapilla*, but in oh so many cases, *A. a auricapilla* and *A. a aurifrons* have been so mixed and matched and blended in breeding facilities that the offspring are a confused blend of the two colorings. Variable amounts of green and reddish feathering on breast and back, combined with intensities and shading of gold and orange on the crown are the normal differences. Like many subspecies of parrot, dedicated purists and experts in the decades to come will most likely only keep the Gold-capped Conure subspecies separate.

In the wilds of central and eastern Brazil this parrot has been reported in serious danger, some say even to the point of imminent extinction. Land clearing, mining and urban development all occur in its limited range. It would not be surprising if this conure were kept alive in the 21st Century because of captive breeding.

With this in mind, seeking out a Gold-capped Conure as a household pet lends needed strength to the aviculturists dedicated to this species. It is an excellent species to hobby breed in the home. *Aratinga* conures are noted for maintaining friendliness toward owners in a household during the non-breeding season even after years of producing chicks. This species is certainly not overly easy to reproduce (unlike the Suns), with smaller clutch size, tendency to single clutch and need for older age before laying, all being part of the equation. I hope that a greater number of hobbyists discover this intriguing sleeper species in the years ahead, and even make the commitment to obtain four or more pairs and keep a strong genetically variable flock intact.

I recently make the decision to pass on my proven pairs to friends who are conure breeders. As with many hobbyists, I began by choosing too many species and not focusing for the good of aviculture. But I will always cherish the years spent with my Goldcaps beginning in 1986 with "Trickie" bird. And, fortunately for me, I still get to visit previous offspring who now live at nearby homes of friends. ➔



the  
*Eclectus...*

# Winged Flowers

by Jose Ml. Perdomo, San Mateo, CA

In the vast galleries of the avian kingdom, we encounter the most spectacular display of color in plumage with values beyond the unusual, and hues hard to find elsewhere, even in the most complete encyclopedia. This pageantry of chromatic variations is perhaps only matched in nature by the diversity of colors found in two other wonders living on our planet: butterflies and flowers.

Birds, due to their air-handling abilities and, in many cases masterful vocalizations, make the sky their domain, and bring to our eyes and senses the full spectrum of their exuberance, incomparable grace, and harmonious voices. Perhaps because of our humanly constant pursuit of beauty and the unusual, aviculture reflects this inspirational diversity in a most pronounced fashion.

Many birds raised in captivity exhibit astonishing color plumage, from the exquisite display of the incredible Gouldian Finch to the colorful Scarlet-chested Grass Parakeets and lorries. From the balls of fire we call Sun Conures, to the breathtaking toucans. From the remarkable cockatoos to the magnificent Scarlet and Hyacinth Macaws. Within this broad range of visual enchantment and a multitude of characteristics, resides the Eclectus, with its striking sexual dimorphism, one of the most pronounced found in the avian kingdom, and even perhaps in all vertebrates. The Eclectus is a medium size parrot that does not have to move to electrify your visual nerve.

Today, beginning with this monograph, starts a series of articles on the Eclectus, *Eclectus roratus*, a unique kind of parrot native to the South Pacific and Indonesia, delimited by the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of

Cancer. The Eclectus parrots have captivated many of us with their stunning appearance, strong personality and with their mysterious attitude reminiscent of a philosopher in profound meditation. We will try to expose here some of the mysteries and charms of these gems of the sky or "winged flowers." We hope this will help to increase the understanding of these unique and beautiful psittacines.

## The Eclectus Taxonomy.

Unlike many other parrots, all the Eclectus belong to one genus, *Eclectus*, and one species, defined as *roratus*. The Eclectus is then monotypic, as all their members belong to one species. Within this species, the Eclectus are grouped as forming a conglomerate of seven or nine subspecies, depending upon the textbook used.

Stepping aside from the taxonomical arguments, and with the purpose of being inclusive of all types or subspecies described to date, we will list them all, indicating which subspecies are under scrutiny by taxonomists and which ones have been successfully raised by aviculturists in the U.S.A.

## Basics on the Eclectus

Although all generalizations usually fail to stand scrutiny, we can safely say that the Eclectus attitude is relaxed, their movements carefully calculated, and, in many ways, it seems like they are fully aware of their extraordinary beauty and expect us to acknowledge and even admire it.

A pair of Eclectus will supply all the colors one can expect to handle in our daily life. The male with its emerald green plumage, some blue feathers in the wings and the yellow-orange upper mandible; the females with their red heads, black beaks, maroon bodies, breast feathers mostly cobalt blue