



Photo by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson

Red breasted musk parrot adult.

# First Breeding of the Red-breasted Musk Parrot

(*Prosopiea tabuensis tabuensis*)

by Tom Ireland  
Lake Worth, Florida

## Description

Length 45 cm. This is a large, blunt-headed and long tailed parrot with maroon, green and blue plumage in which sexes are alike. Head and under-parts are maroon; undersides of tail black. A narrow blue collar separates the maroon head from the green back and wings. Flight feathers and tail are green but overwhelmingly flushed with blue. Eye color is orangish-yellow. The narrow, heavy, curved bill is greyish black. Feet are dark grey. Young birds have brownish eyes, yellowish bills and long, greyish down.

## Distribution

Fiji Islands.

I can remember the first time I saw the red breasted parrot. It was at the Avicultural Breeding and Research Center (ABRC), Loxahatchee, Florida. This first sight remained clear to me for a long time and several years later, when I heard there was an egg and then a chick, I couldn't wait to see it. When I arrived my first question was, "Can I see the baby?" Dick Schubot's reply was, "What baby?" I answered, "the musk parrot," and he gave me a large grin and took me, like a proud father, to aviary number six where was perched a young, just weaned copy of the parents, slightly duller, but somehow more beautiful.

ABRC purchased these birds from a private aviculturist in April 1983 as a surgically sexed pair, about three years old. After a quarantine period of ninety days, during which the birds were dewormed and various tests were performed, they were placed in a flight cage 3' x 8' x 10' with a con-



Red breasted musk parrot chick a few days old.

Photo courtesy of Tom Ireland and ABRC



Photo courtesy of Tom Ireland and ABRC

Red breasted musk parrot adult.



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\* Indicates 2 year term has been fulfilled. If no new interested party  
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crete floor, joined to other cages.

The hen spent most of her time perched on the entrance hole to the nest box which was placed on the front of the cage facing the rear. In early 1985, numerous times the hen had been plucked on the nape area and feathers covered the floor. In August 1985 they were moved to a similar aviary but a larger cage (8' x 5' x 8') was provided and the nest box was moved to the rear of the cage where the hen continued to sit in the entrance hole. Plucking of the hen's nape continued but seemed to be less frequent. The pair seemed very shy so they were moved in June of 1986 to an outside aviary 16' long x 6' wide x 12' high with a dirt floor. Construction of the aviary was 1" x 1" wire with square aluminum tubing frame. A second wire and frame enclosure was built to prevent predator problems.

A 5' closed shelter was used to protect the nest area and to give additional privacy. On the opposite end was placed a wire enclosure for a feeding station allowing feeding without entering the cage, cutting down on stress to the birds.

The aviary was well planted using eucalyptus, melaleuca, and bottlebrush. In addition, natural perches of varying sizes were used from 1-1/2" to 2-1/2" diameter.

Only one nest box was offered, 12" x 12" x 30", constructed of 3/4" plywood, the entrance hole was 4". The box was hung vertically and the entire box was covered with 1/2" bark to give a more natural appearance.

For nesting material they used triple cleaned pine shavings from New Hampshire, filling the box two thirds of the way up thus allowing the birds to remove what they did not want. The pair added only feathers to the shavings; no sticks or leaves were found. They worked their nest until only three or four inches of shavings and feathers were left.

The feeding program used at ABRC is as follows:

Seed Mix — 70% large grey stripe sunflower, 5% safflower, 5% buckwheat, 3% scratch (cracked corn and wheat), 3% whole shelled corn, 2% dried red hot peppers, 3% Ziegler parrot breeder pellets, 2% large white proso millet, 3% pine nuts, 1% spray millet clusters (stripped from the stalk), 1% cuttlebone in 1" chunks, 2% milo.

Soft Foods — Fruit and vegetable

mash, whole wheat bread, 1/2 small papaya, coconut pieces, rice and legumes, corn bread. No vitamins or mineral supplements are added to any food.

The birds were fed daily. The only variation to the feeding is the removal of high spoilage foods during the summer months. Water is changed daily.

On March 23, 1987 after the birds had been at ABRC for approximately three years, during a normal weekly inspection of nest boxes, one egg was found. The egg was left with the parents until March 30 when it was candled and found to be fertile. At this time it was decided the egg should be moved to a pair of eclectus parrots known to be good parents. On April 14, 1987 at 9 a.m. the baby was found hatched and in good condition; it had long, greyish-white down.

At 1:30 p.m. the same day the chick was again checked and found to be well fed and very active and completely dry. On April 16 they noticed the chick didn't stay under the hen as much as eclectus chicks do; maybe the extra down keeps it too warm. On April 25 the down was thinning and pin feathers started.

At 22 days of age, on May 4, 1987 the female eclectus started to feather pick the baby so the decision was made at that time to pull it for hand feeding. Its weight was 161 grams.

The hand feeding formula used was Zupreen monkey biscuit and water at 25% solids. At this stage the baby was fed five times a day. At first it only swallowed food from a syringe like an eclectus. As it grew older and more accustomed to the syringe, it began pumping and flapping wings vigorously during feeding.

The following are a portion of the notes from the nursery ledger:

5/12 — 215 grams — Reduced to four feedings a day.

5/18 — 241 grams — Reduced to three feedings a day.

5/25 — 249 grams — Picking at fruit and vegetables.

6/4 — 263 grams — Added peanut butter and oatmeal with applesauce and banana to monkey chow.

6/23 — 243 grams — Cut to two feedings a day, eating a lot on its own.

6/30 — 243 grams — Reduced to one feeding a day (evening).

7/13 — 227 grams — Fully weaned. Eating fruits and vegetables, papaya, pine nuts, monkey biscuits and seed mix. ●