

(continued from previous page)

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**Central New York Caged Bird Club's  
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Cicero Great Northern Mall  
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RD #8, Box 1540, Fulton, NY 13069  
or Martha Cardassi (315) 697-9934  
RT #5, Box 80, Canastota, NY 13032

**Central Penna Cage Bird Club's  
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10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
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For more info. contact:  
Sam Karns (717) 957-4846  
2204 Whispering Pines Drive,  
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Pet Bird Show:  
Gail Blake (717) 533-2393  
1148 East Caracas Avenue,  
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# Handfeeding Eclectus Parrots

by Laurella Desborough  
Martinez, California  
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**F**our subspecies of eclectus parrots are commonly available in the U.S.: Grand or *Eclectus roratus roratus* originating from Ceram and Buru, Red-sided or *Eclectus roratus polychloros* originating from New Guinea, vosmaeri or *Eclectus roratus vosmaeri* originating from the larger northern and central Moluccan Islands, and Solomon Island or *Eclectus roratus solomonensis* originating from the Solomon Islands. Each of these subspecies originates from a distinct island or group of islands or New Guinea, separated by many miles of ocean. Although all eclectus parrots display many common characteristics, each subspecies also displays distinct developmental and behavioral characteristics, indicating aspects unique to their subspecies. Eclectus males are basically green and females are basically red.

The three common methods of raising parrots are the following: 1) parent rearing from day one to weaning; 2) handrearing from day one (or close to day one); and 3) handrearing from two to three weeks of age. Over the past 10 years we have employed all three methods of raising eclectus parrots.

## Parent Rearing Eclectus Parrots

This method produces a youngster that is completely familiar with being fed and reared by a parent and thus has the knowledge and first hand experience to be a highly qualified candidate for successful pairing with a mate, making a nest, producing fertile eggs and successfully rearing youngsters.

## Handfeeding From Day One

Many parrots are handfed from day one in order to produce a young parrot

that desires human companionship. Handfeeding from day one may be a necessity if the nesting hen refuses to feed the chick or if the hen's mate refuses to feed her. This may be no fault of the hen or her mate but may be the fault of the bird breeder who has not provided the pair with the correct cage set up or the correct diet for rearing youngsters. Occasionally a hen who normally feeds from day one has a health problem which requires the eggs or chicks to be removed from the nest, necessitating handfeeding from day one, or close to day one.

## Eclectus Chicks Are Different

Eclectus parrot chicks are very unlike Amazons, greys, macaws and cockatoos: they do not have any down and seldom have more than one clutch mate. Therefore, a brooder temperature that works well for Amazons and greys may stress and chill an eclectus chick. A cold chick cannot properly digest formula and grow, but generally dies within five to seven days with food in the crop.

Many breeders who have extensive experience and success in raising other species follow the same procedures that produces fine Amazon and grey chicks but which do not work for eclectus. The three critical areas for eclectus chicks are as follows: 1) brooder temperature and set up, 2) correct formula and formula temperature, 3) proper handfeeding procedures.

## Brooder Temperature

The type of brooder used is not critical, although if a fan moves the air, the newly hatched chick should be pro-

tected from the moving air. We have used modified six-pack styrofoam brooders heated with Christmas tree lights which are controlled by a wafer or electronic device and monitored with a calibrated thermometer. Temperature for the first day is usually 99° F. This temperature is maintained for about two days if there is no clutch mate. If there are two chicks in the clutch, the temperature is reduced to 98.5° after the first day. These day one chicks are placed in a plastic mesh basket which is lined with a washed and disinfected washcloth, with one corner placed over their bodies so that the wind from the fan does not touch them and so they can cuddle into the cloth. The use of paper towels is not recommended for these chicks as they have no down, the paper is rough and does not provide enough comfort or warmth. Day one chicks will be kept at 95° and 96° F for the first week, unless they show signs of being overheated. Brooders are washed with soap and water, rinsed and then disinfected with a fresh 5% chlorine solution. This is done weekly for tiny babies as they only soil the towelings; it is done daily for feathered babies on wire mesh in larger brooders.

Day one babies eat and sleep and are generally not active for the first 10 days (except immediately before and after feeding when they may stand at the basket edge, grasp the washcloth or basket edge with their beak and 'pump' for food, while calling repeatedly). The thermometer is always placed in a location comparable to that of the chick's body, but *not* next to the chick (i.e., place the thermometer in a basket set up similar to that in which the chick is placed). By 10 days the temperature is down to 92° or 94° F. After the chicks start producing down, (even when the down has not yet come through the skin), the chick will begin to be much warmer and require less heat in the brooder. Individual chicks may vary in their temperature requirements. Some chicks must be kept warmer and we base this decision on their behavior. When small chicks are placed in a 'cold' brooder, they are unable to maintain body temperature and digest the formula. Their crops slow down and eventually they die.

#### Accurate Thermometers

With the exception of thermometers used in the more expensive incubators,

such as Grumbach, we find that many thermometers are inaccurate, even those provided with incubators. Therefore, we make it a practice to calibrate each thermometer. Prior to use each one is calibrated close to the range of temperatures for which it will be used. In other words, if we plan to use a thermometer in an incubator, we calibrate it by comparing it to a laboratory grade ASTM 18F thermometer at 99° F. Laboratory grade thermometers are accurate. The two thermometers are placed in a glass of water that is at 99° F with their bulbs held next to each other. If the reading is off one degree for the common thermometer, we use it in a brooder or in formula, not in an incubator. If one knows that a particular thermometer is off by one degree, you can take that into account when you use it. We *never* use candy thermometers as they are manufactured to be used at the boiling point, not around 100° F. Thermometers are produced to be accurate for their purpose and if inexpensive (under \$15.00 U.S.) must be calibrated to assure accuracy. Since the laboratory grade thermometer is more costly (\$20. to \$30. U.S.) it is used only for calibration of the less costly thermometers which are used for brooders and formula. Since many failures with day one eclectus chicks are the result of chilling in the brooder and cold formulas, use of accurate thermometers is essential for the otherwise experienced breeder as well as the new breeder.

#### Handfeeding Formula

Experimentation with homemade formulas in the early 1980's did not produce satisfactory results. Eclectus require a low fat and medium protein formula. After trying several commercial formulas, we found that Roudybush Original Formula (3.5% fat and 20.5% protein) and Roudybush Formula 3 (fat 7% and protein 21%) when used in combination with Gerber's dry cereals and babyfood vegetables from jars produced strong healthy eclectus babies. We have used this combination for years and raised many day one babies through to weaning on this formula. We use the five pound bags, which are stored in the freezer after opening. We prepare a weekly batch of dry formula in a large glass jar which has been disinfected immediately prior to use. The proportions are as follows: Dry Roudybush Mix: four parts Roudybush to one part cereal, mixed well. The dry cereal

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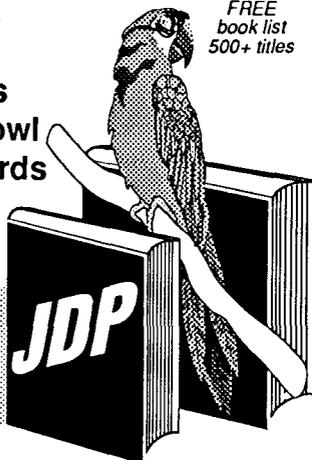
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provides a binder for the fine textured Roudybush and prevents the formula from settling in the water. This jar of dry mix is kept in the nursery for use. Day one babies are started on Pedialyte mixed with formula, very thin for the first feeding and slowly thickened over the next few days to a creamy pancake batter consistency that will pour off a spoon.

### Preparing the Formula Mixture

When preparing to feed chicks, we use a Gerber baby food jar for each single bird or each clutch. These glass jars are stored in a 5% chlorine solution and rinsed prior to each use. We place distilled water in the jar and add the dry Roudybush mix, stirring with a short stout thermometer. To this wet mixture is added babyfood vegetables, approximately one part vegetable to three parts moist Roudybush mixture. Vegetables provide the special vitamins and fiber needed by eclectus chicks. We use green beans, sweet potatoes, and fruits, alternating them. This wet mixture is brought up to 105° F. by placing the jar into a very hot cup of microwaved water. *We never microwave formula*, only the water used to heat it. The thermometer stays in the formula and is used to monitor the temperature and keep it at 105° to 106° F as the chicks are not fast feeders and the formula could cool down or it could continue to heat up, depending on the temperature of the microwaved cup of water. Using this technique for heating the formula and monitoring the heat, we have fed hundreds of eclectus and many other baby parrots from day one and never had a case of crop burn. This process takes time but we feel it is worth it as the chicks are protected from formula that is too hot or too cold.

### Handfeeding Equipment

All equipment used in the handfeeding process, such as syringes and the thermometer, are stored in a Wavicide solution and rinsed well in hot tap water prior to use. For the tiny new babies, we use a one cc syringe. As the babies grow, we use larger syringes. We use the same syringe for two clutchmates but always use separate formula jars and separate syringes for each clutch. Once they take more than 10cc, we do not use a larger syringe, just refill the 10cc syringe. Other breeders may find it useful to go to a larger syringe. Some breeders use a spoon to feed eclectus. This method does require a lot of cleanup or young-

sters will have formula all over their down and pin feathers. Eclectus chicks *bate* being fed with a gavage needle or tube. This requires holding onto their heads and beaks which they do not like. Occasionally a chick is sick and not taking food from a syringe, or requires removal of crop contents, we use a soft rubber catheter for this purpose (stored in a Wavicide solution). We do not store equipment in a Nolvasan solution as Wavicide is active against a broader

range of disease agents.

### Handfeeding the Chicks

Tiny babies should be kept in a warm, cloth-lined basket during feeding. Placing their bodies on cold countertops or into cold plastic bowls will chill them. We do remove them from the brooder to feed them, keeping them in their brooder basket which is placed on a fresh paper towel inside a larger plastic container. However, the nursery is generally kept at about 80° to 85° F. If we



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were feeding babies in a colder room, we would place their basket on a heating pad while feeding them, or under a warm light. It is important not to grasp the head of the eclectus chicks during handfeeding, but to lightly guide the head and beak to the syringe during feeding. Grasping their heads firmly aggravates and frightens eclectus chicks at any age.

### **Growing Babies**

As the babies continue to grow, we place them in larger baskets. After their down is out and they are better able to maintain body temperature, their brooder is kept at about 88° to 90° F. After they develop pinfeathers over most of their wings, back and head, we place them in larger brooders on 1/2 x 1/2 inch wire, which is raised about an inch from the brooder floor. This allows droppings to fall through the wire mesh and keeps the babies cleaner. However, even at this age they love to nestle into the toweling, so we place towels around the walls of the plastic brooder and at one end of the brooder floor. The chicks will move to the toweling and sit on it, rather than on the wire when they are young. Their bodies are soft and plump, not tight and firm like Amazons. They need to be handled gently if they are picked up for feeding. Otherwise they will be stressed and probably will become poor candidates for pets. Rough handling of eclectus chicks will produce bitey, cross babies. The same handling that might not bother an Amazon will frighten an eclectus. We believe this is one of the major factors in producing 'mean' eclectus chicks.

### **Selling Unweaned Eclectus Chicks**

Next to cold formula and cold brooders, this is probably one of the worst situations for eclectus chicks, leaving the security and daily routine provided by their regular handfeeder and being sent to a stranger. We believe it is harmful to eclectus chicks, but not necessarily harmful to Amazons or greys and some other species, to leave their first handfeeder when they are on one or two feedings a day. Based on experience, unweaned eclectus chicks that are transferred to a new handfeeder find this a difficult experience. With the best of intentions handfeeders new to eclectus chicks will feed formulas that are incorrect, will keep babies at the wrong brooder temperatures, and will incorrectly handle the chicks. The results are

bacterial infections resulting from a combination of stress and incorrect disinfecting procedures, stunting which results from incorrect feeding and weaning, and sometimes death from a combination of the above. Many transported chicks refuse food for a day or more and some never feed well from the new handfeeder. Many develop bacterial infections due to the stress of losing their known human parent. Every handfeeder has a unique way of feeding. Baby eclectus are intelligent and learn to respond to the particular style of their handfeeder. When the handfeeding style, person, place, and brooder are all changed, the bird is stressed. For these reasons, we believe it is never wise to sell unweaned eclectus.

### **Species Preferences**

As bird breeders work with different species over the years, they develop preferences for specific species, such as macaws and cockatoos, or greys and pionus. Believing they need to respond to the demands of the marketplace, many breeders will acquire a pair or two of a wide variety of species. In the case of eclectus parrots, we would recommend against breeding and handrearing chicks unless the bird breeder likes the eclectus parrots, provides what eclectus need, and raises the babies with gentleness. Breeders who are too busy or too set in their ways to rear eclectus chicks with calm and loving care will end up with bitey birds which will make for unhappy clients.

### **Handfeeding From Two or Three Weeks**

Although we have raised hundreds of chicks from day one, it is our present preference to have parents raise the babies for two to four weeks and then to remove the chicks for handfeeding if they are to become pets. When pulling chicks that are down-covered or pinfeathered from the nest, one should wait until the crop contents have cleared before feeding. Generally the first feeding should be Pedialyte, to prevent dehydration, as clearing the crop may take hours. If the chick is removed from the nest very early in the morning, this may assist in a faster emptying of the crop. If feathered, babies removed from the nest can be traumatized a bit by that event and should be placed in a dark brooder or dark room on the same kind of substrate used in the nest.

If they are still down covered, we use toweling so they can nestle into the tow-

eling for security and warmth. Chicks removed at this age for handfeeding should be monitored carefully for correct brooder temperature and for cleared crops prior to feeding them.

### **Growth Rates**

Day one chicks should triple their hatch weight in seven days. Starting with the day of hatch as zero, the next day is day one. Average hatch weight is 14g to 17g. That means a seven day old chick hatched at 15g should weigh 45g or more. Chicks gain weight between each feeding. Occasionally there may be no weight gain between feedings, but you never want to see a weight loss, unless it is between the last feeding of the day and the first feeding of the next morning. We record weights on all eclectus chicks on a daily basis, weighing each morning prior to feeding and after feeding. After the first few days, chicks are fed 9% of body weight at each feeding. This ratio of formula to body weight is maintained throughout the handfeeding process until the chicks are on two feedings a day. Then a larger amount of formula may be fed, *if* the chick will take it. We never feed so much that formula fills above the crop and into the neck area.

### **Recording Weights**

For day one chicks, we may weigh at every feeding, which means about eight times a day for three or four days after hatching. By the end of the first week the chicks are usually on six times a day feedings and by the end of the second week, five times a day feedings. At three weeks of age we go to four feedings a day. By six weeks we are on three feedings a day. By 10 weeks we are on two feedings a day. This is continued until the chick indicates it is interested in weaning, which occurs between 12 and 14 weeks most of the time. Solomon Island Eclectus wean earlier than the other subspecies, at about 11 or 12 weeks. The larger subspecies vary in their weaning times and behaviors, with *vosmaeri* being the most problematic. Weights prior to weaning for Solomon Island Eclectus range from 350g to 400g. Post weaning weights for young birds range from 325g to 375g. The larger eclectus generally reach 450g to over 500g prior to weaning. After weaning, their weights range from 385g for *vosmaeri* females to 425g for males and Red-sided. We place the feathered babies at about 10 weeks of age (and on two feedings a day) in cages with low

perches and provide cheerios and soft foods. During the first two years after weaning, all eclectus chicks continue to grow and put on more weight at a slower pace. Eventually they reach average weights in the 400g to 500g area for the larger subspecies and the upper 300g area for Solomon Island Eclectus.

### Commonly Encountered Medical Problems

We have heard that constricted toe is a problem for eclectus chicks. The only chick we have ever seen with constricted toe came out of the nest at three weeks of age with both of the back long toes constricted. The veterinarian sliced through the constriction, pressed out the trapped liquids and the toes healed nicely. Constricted toe is a problem that can be readily solved. Over the years we have occasionally seen chicks under two weeks of age with cramped necks which can be cured by placing the chick in a specially designed harness for a couple days. A disease to be concerned about is polyoma virus, which can be prevented through proper management of the nursery and never placing chicks from different parents together or feeding non-clutchmates from the same syringe.

### Pet Quality of Eclectus Parrots

Eclectus chicks grow up into the most wonderful of pets; they are beautiful, they are very interested in people and they speak with great clarity and good voice tone. Again, the manner in which they have been fed, handled and reared by the handfeeder is crucial to their pet quality. Chicks that have been roughly or insensitively handled will be less likely to make tender, sweet, and interested-in-people pets. By nature, both the males and females are curious and desire to interact with people. When this is encouraged, you will not find a more attentive pet. In addition, they do not require the kind of constant attention that some cockatoos do. However, they do not take well to sudden changes in their cage location or the insensitive introduction of new pets. They do require larger cages than Amazons or greys and do require a daily diet of vegetables, fruits and cooked beans and rice. They do not do well on seed or pellets only diets, as they need the vitamins provided by fresh produce. Additional vitamins should not be added unless so directed by veterinary advice. Toxic reactions to over vitaminizing is a distinct problem which should be avoided. ➔



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