First Breeding of the Red-breasted Musk Parrot

(Prosopeia 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-
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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. 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' 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 protect 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 bark to give a more natural appearance. For nesting material they used entire box was covered with 1/2” triple cleaned pine shavings from corners with square aluminum tubing frame. In addition, natural perches of varying sizes were used from 1-1/2” x 12” x 30”, constructed of 3/4” brush. The box was built to prevent predator problems.

For nesting material they used plasticine, melaleuca, and bottlebrush. In addition, natural perches of various sizes were used from 1-1/2” x 12” x 30”, constructed of 3/4” brush. The box was well planted using plasticine, melaleuca, and bottlebrush. In addition, natural perches of varying sizes were used from 1-1/2” x 12” x 30”, constructed of 3/4” brush. The box was built to prevent predator problems.

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 weeks, 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 wing 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 26% Ziegler parrot breeder pellets, 2/10% cuttlebone in 1" chunks, 1/10% peanut butter, 3% whole wheat, 1/2 small papaya, coconut pieces, rice and legumes, corn bread. No vitamins or mineral supplements are added to any food.