

# The Enchanting Eclectus Parrots in Australian Aviaries

by Garry Lee  
Nemingha, NSW, Australia

**T**he Eclectus Parrot (pronounced e-klek-tus) is one of nature's colour creation wonders. First time viewers are overwhelmed by the beauty of the Eclectus hen and mesmerized by the startling difference (sexual dimorphism) between the hen's vivid blue, red, and maroon hair-like feathers and the brilliant green of the cock bird.

## Australian Eclectus

Native to Australia, the Macgillivray Eclectus, *Eclectus roratus macgillivrayi*, is the largest of all the Eclectus subspecies. They look very similar to the Red-sided Eclectus but are considerably larger. In 1913 William McLennan discovered the Macgillivray in the rainforests of the Cape York Peninsula, which is located on the very northern tip of Australia in the state of Queensland.

In Australia, the Macgillivray is classed as an exotic parrot, thus requiring each one to be registered with the National Exotic Bird Register Scheme, each owner also is required to hold a special license to keep them in captivity. According to records dated December 1999, there were only 36 Macgillivray Eclectus parrots registered to 12 Australian owners. This illustrates how few of these magnificent Eclectus are kept in Australian aviaries.

The most widely kept Eclectus within Australia is the Red-sided Eclectus, *Eclectus roratus polychloros*, their place of origin being the island of New

Guinea to the north of Australia. I do not know when the first *E. r. polychloros* was imported from their homeland into Australia, but until recent years, the asking price for the Eclectus was out of reach of the average aviculturist. Polychloros can now be purchased for around six hundred Australian dollars each. Now that it is more affordable, it is a sought-after parrot and is kept in aviaries around Australia.

## Housing

Eclectus in Australian aviaries can be found housed in suspended or conventional aviaries, depending on the space available, owner preferences, and the monetary situation of the individual owner. To my knowledge no one in Australia houses Eclectus in the smaller stackable cages as practiced in some parts of the world. The suspended aviaries are well suited for undulating ground where extensive earth works would need to be performed if a conventional aviary were to be erected. Many choose to use the suspended aviaries to keep the Eclectus away from any decaying fruit, food scraps, or feces that could adversely affect the health of the birds. Although they are not a ground dwelling parrot, the Eclectus on occasion go to the ground for bits of food that have been dropped from their feeding bowls. Problems in conventional aviaries can arise if the keeper is unable to maintain hygienic conditions in the flights.

## Suspended Cages

Suspended cages are not as popular for the housing of Eclectus Parrots in Australian aviaries, although this practice is slowly changing. The size of the average suspended cage would not be less than 4 meters in length 1.3 meters wide and around 1.8 meters high. We at Parrot Haven Aviary are considering housing some of our Eclectus in suspended cages mainly for the ease of cleaning and positioning the nest boxes in the safety walkway. We have had great success with this practice that we use with our Asiatic parrots and it is less stressful on the parrots.

## Aviaries

The general practice of housing Eclectus in aviaries (as opposed to small cages) is very strong in Australia. Each breeding pair of Eclectus is generally housed in individual aviaries that I call flights. Aviaries can vary from 3 to 7 meters (9 to 21 feet) in length, 2.1 to 3 meters (6 to 10 feet) in height and 1.2 to 1.8 meters (4 to 6 feet) in width. I have seen various types of floors used in these flights, including washed river sand, small pebbles, concrete, and earth. Each of these floor fills has its own drawbacks. The washed river sand needs to be raked and sifted for seed husks and fresh food scraps on a regular basis, and when dry, can become dusty. Pebbles are harder to maintain because food and seed husks fall between them, making cleaning difficult. Concrete although easier to keep clean can remain wet and damp. Earthen floors can suffer from all of the other fill problems and more, and therefore is not recommended.

## Eclectus Parrots at Parrot Haven Aviary

Parrot Haven Aviary is located at Nemingha near Tamworth in the state of New South Wales, in Australia.

Parrot Haven Aviary is a commercial aviary run by my wife, Lyn, and myself. We specialize in breeding and hand rearing many species of parrots for the companion market in Australia. One of our most sought after species is the spectacular Eclectus. The subspecies that we breed is the Red-sided Eclectus. These Eclectus are indigenous to the island of New Guinea to the north of Australia.

## Housing

The complex for housing our Eclectus has a central safety walkway, which separates the opposing Eclectus flights. Each flight measures 4 meters long 1.3 meters wide and 2.1 meters high at the front sloping down to the back wall, which is 2 meters high, and houses one pair of Eclectus. Each breeding pair of Eclectus is separated from the others by Trimdeck metal dividing walls. The walls extend from

the back wall to the walkway and are the full height of each flight. Apart from giving total privacy from the breeding pair next door, the metal dividing walls are also used to secure the metal V shaped brackets that we use to support each perch, and the nest boxes or breeding logs.

Entrance to each flight is through a door made from 25mm square tube covered in bird wire, and held closed using a barrel bolt. A lift-up metal flap is used to gain access to the feeding shelf situated at waist height in the front of each flight, where we place stainless steel rectangular bowls for their fresh fruit and vegetables.

We decided to use washed river sand for the floor coverings of our flights, but I have not been completely happy with it. One of the things that turned me off sand is the length of time that it retains moisture after a rainy period. When we decided to use sand, I thought that the moisture would dissipate quickly leaving the sand reasonably dry. Unfortunately the earth below the sand does not allow this to happen. This is one reason that we are considering a change to suspended aviaries for the Eclectus.

### **Breeding**

When pairing up our Eclectus I like to start with young birds six to 12 months of age. I select the ones that seem to be interested in each other. Each new pair of Eclectus is then housed in its own flight. When our Eclectus reach two years of age, they are provided with a nest box that is left with them all year round. The nest boxes are positioned towards the rear of our flights providing privacy and seclusion from the other Eclectus pairs that are in flights adjacent to them on the other side of the walkway.

We remove the young Eclectus from the nest boxes between 10 and 14 days of age for handrearing. At this age their eyes have not opened and the young chicks do not have a chance to imprint on the parents or their siblings, making it easier to spoon feed and to introduce them into the human world in which they are to live.

## **Corporate Sponsor** **Sun Seed Company**

Bowling Green, Ohio

### **Charter Life Members**

Gerald and Elizabeth Jennings

### **Honorary Life Members**

Robert J. Berry

Les Gonda

Frank and Mary Kozeluh

Wayne Smyth

### ***Peregrine Fund Founders***

Tom J. Cade, Ph.D.

William Burnham, Ph.D.

Frank M. Bond

Robert B. Berry

James Weaver

### **Life Members**

Laurie Baker

Laura Barwick

Marion Beal

Diane Martin Bock

Susan Boyer

Sandi & Martin Brennan

Yvonne Catena

Janis & Jeff Clark

Jim Cobb

Belkys Colter

Linda L. Compton

Delia & Bill Colman

Carmen Daily

Wanda & Bill Elder

Susan Kay Ferguson

Sharon Garsee

Beth & Dwight Greenberg

Earl Haga

Mark Hagen

Robert Hansard

Robert Harrison

Marilyn & Jim Hawley, Jr.

### **Life Members**

Jonathan Higbee

Barbara Hill

Don Hedstrom

Veta & Bob Hollaway

Diana Holloway

Jeff Humphries

Melinda Julbert

Mitsuo Kuribara

Danny Large

Tiffany Latino

Mary Ellen & Jim Le Page

Perry Little

Felicia Lovelett

Thomas C. Marshall

Douglas L. Martin

Noella & Dan McCormic

Julie Weiss Murad

Esther & Ken Ohta

David Pesco

Louis B. Pieper, Jr., DVM

Luanne Porter

Richard Porter, MD

Mark Sargent

Ellen Schrieber

Nancy Selz

Martha Siegrist

Nancy & Joe Speed

Larry & Gayle St.Cyr

Kathleen and J.C. Szabo

Michelle Torrey

Richard Towill

Dr. & Mrs. Robert G. Travnicek

Peter Via

Natalie & Steven Weiss

Laura & Bruce Winter

Jan & Don Winter

Don & Sandra White

Henry Wojtaniec

## **Corporate Member** **Sunshine Bird Supplies**

Miami, Florida

A full 70% of money from Life memberships stays in a perpetual endowment fund with only the interest from it being used for AFA operations and projects.

The nest boxes are emptied, disinfected and refilled with hardwood shavings and peat moss, ready for the hen to occupy when she is ready to go back down again. We find that most of our hens usually have between four to six weeks rest before starting to become restless and return to the nest boxes to start preparing for the next clutch.

### **Feeding**

My wife Lyn prepares fresh fruits and vegetables each day for all our parrots including the Eclectus. Fruit is selected by what is seasonally available in Australia. A number of fruit and produce shops in our local city, Tamworth, keep fruits and vegetables for us that have a few marks on them, and for appearance sake cannot be sold to the general public. Apart from the marks on the fruit, it is as good (and as fresh) as the produce on the shop shelves being sold for human consumption. What a saving this is for us, you can imagine the amount of fruit that we go through in a week with a commercial breeding aviary.

**Seed:** We feed our Eclectus seeds, fruits, vegetables, grasses, sprouted seeds, and branches (with leaves attached) from Australian native trees. Our seed mixture consists of two parts of gray striped sunflower, one part safflower, one part hulled oats and one part budgie mixed seed. In summer we reduce the gray striped sunflower to one part.

**Fruit** is devoured by our Eclectus as soon as the afternoon fresh produce is fed to them. The fruits consist of apples, pears, peaches, oranges, plums, and many other fruits that are in season. The fruits are cut up into smaller pieces and mixed in with their vegetables, we find that by doing this they have a larger selection to sort through.

**Vegetables** are another major ingredient that we add to their food bowl each day. Apart from the fresh vegetables that Lyn prepares, she also cooks the prepared frozen mixed vegetable and corn to add into the fresh fruits. On top of the soft foods Lyn adds a vitamin supplement called Soluvet Breeding Pack which supplies

all 13 essential vitamins.

**Sprouted seeds** are prepared and given most days. A friend put us onto an easy way to sprout the seeds. I was a bit skeptical at first but after using it we are hooked and would not sprout seeds in any other way.

Sprouted seeds give all parrots the benefit of live food intake that is so rich in goodness. The preparation for sprouting seeds is very important; all seeds need to be washed thoroughly until any trace of colour in the water is removed. Next we soak our seeds (Gray Striped Sunflower and Safflower) in a large stainless steel pot overnight. We add to the water a product called Aviclen at a rate of 5ml to 10L of water. Aviclen slows the fermentation process during seed soaking, hence reducing the bacterial contamination of seed making it safer to feed to your parrots.

The seeds are rinsed again after the soaking process and placed into plastic shopping bags. To assist in the sprouting procedure we hang the plastic bags containing the seed under the roof of our verandah. First, many holes are put into the bottom of the plastic bags with an eating fork from the kitchen drawer. This allows any water remaining in the seed to drain out of the plastic bag, preventing the seed from becoming unusable from spoiling. We have found at Parrot Haven Aviary that the radiation of heat from the tin roof onto the plastic bags provides us with a little hot house in which to sprout our seeds. This procedure works just as well in winter as in summer.

After the seeds sprout to about one quarter inch long (which takes about a day at our place in summer, and possibly two days in winter), the bags of sprouted seeds are removed, washed, soaked again in Aviclen for about 10 minutes, just to make certain that they are free of any fungi that might have invaded the seed while sprouting. After rinsing, the sprouted seed is allowed to drain in a colander until ready to feed with the fresh produce that afternoon. Food dishes are removed each morning about 10 A.M., washed, disinfected, and ready to refill


at around 4 P.M. to take out into the aviaries for the daily feeding.

**Pellets** are given to each Eclectus and while most readily accept them, some just tip them out of the food bowl. The advantage that we find in using pellets is that it is a complete supplement intake, and an added advantage is the reduction of seed husks in the bottom of the aviary. All of our handreared companion parrots are fed on pellets as well as fruits and vegetables.

### **Correct Diet**

Feeding Eclectus in the correct manner is so often neglected, not only by the single Eclectus owner but also by larger breeders. It continues to amaze me, although sadly, how many people feed seed only to their Eclectus. Many of these people know no better, look at the cheapest and most convenient way to feed, or do very little research into the requirements of maintaining healthy Eclectus. Secondly, the blame can be traced back to the breeders and pet stores who neglected to educate them or reinforce the importance of a correct diet for Eclectus parrots.

### **Conclusion**

Eclectus Parrots are the most sought after of all the companion parrots that we breed at Parrot Haven Aviary. Unfortunately there is a lot of re-educating that must be accomplished as to the true nature of companion female Eclectus Parrots. We as breeders of the companion Eclectus find that the misinformation about the nature of the female Eclectus and her supposed lack of worth as a companion parrot is unjust and mostly unfounded. Any species of parrot including the Eclectus can turn nasty if the person responsible for hand rearing cuts corners in their nurturing and weaning. With the affection, handling, and education that is continually bestowed upon the female Eclectus chicks, we find that the aggression toward humans that can be seen in parent-reared female Eclectus is minimal. People must start to treat parrots as intelligent individuals with the intellect of a five-year-old child. 

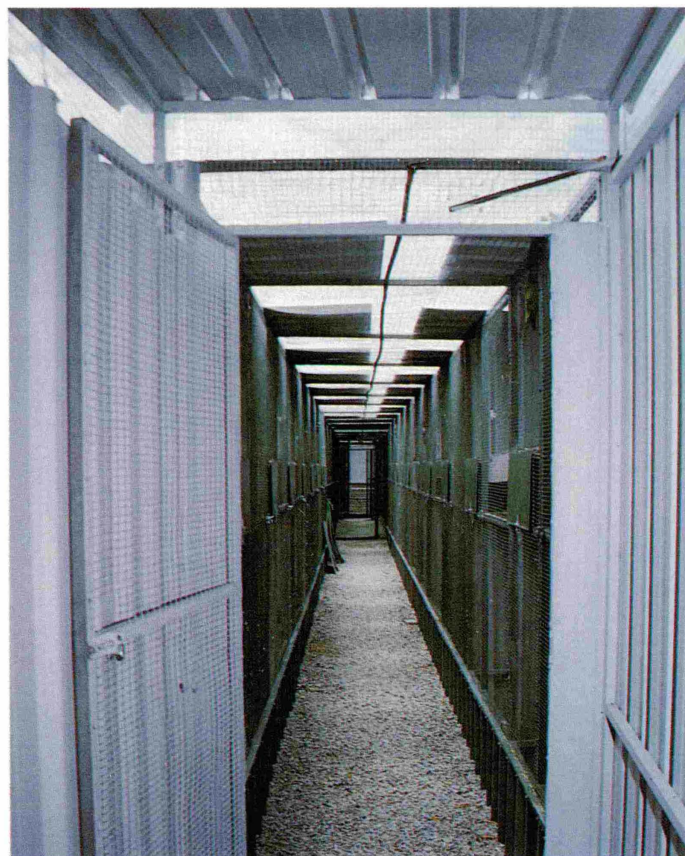




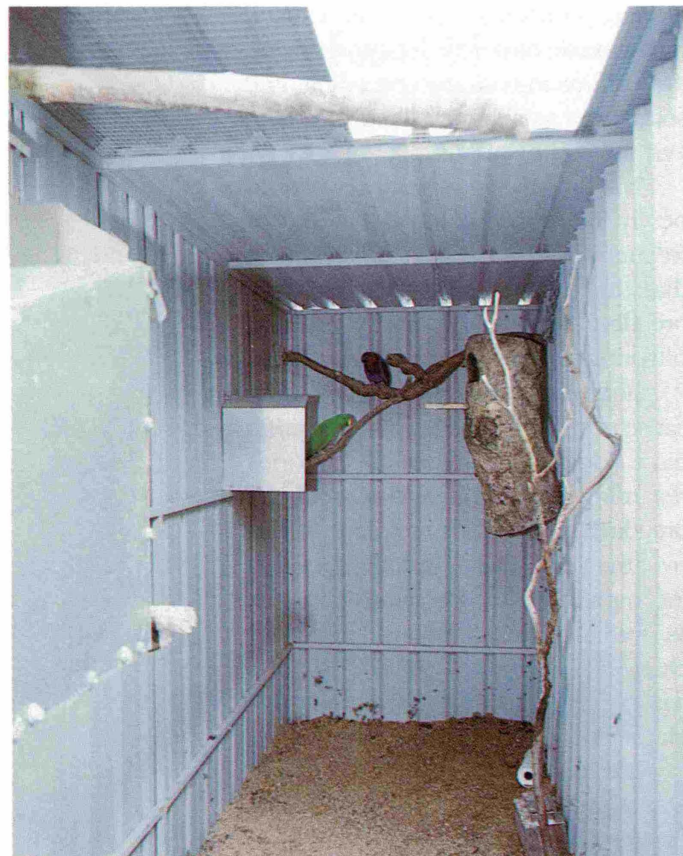
*A pair of Eclectus Parrots with the female peering out of the box.*



*A nest log showing the access door latched shut.*



*The long sheltered walkway with flights off to each side.*



*A view showing the washed sand floor, nest box, and the birds.*