

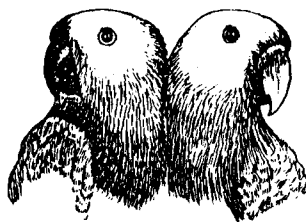
voice of the keeper, and how easily the conure can mimic it.

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 lories. 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

or purple, and yellow tail in some cases, summarize with simplicity the full chromatic spectrum of these wonders of the South Pacific.

Although, the pronounced sexual dimorphism of the Eclectus allows immediate recognition of the sexes, differentiating subspecies within the males is extremely difficult. The variations are slight and not easy to be consistently detected by most fans—except perhaps by the very experienced breeders. In this article, we will focus on the female characteristics, mentioning details on males when considered significant.

In contrast to the males, the females are considerably easier to be sorted out into their corresponding subspecies. However, in some cases, the difference is simply size, a parameter which could introduce errors in our evaluations.

General Characteristics

The Eclectus males are almost entirely emerald green with variations within the different subspecies consisting of slight hues of other colors such as yellow or blue. These variations are relative which make them difficult to assess independently. They all have their very exotic upper mandible orange ending in a yellow color toward the tip of the beak. The lower mandible is black. They have a streak of red feathers on both sides of the breast extending to the under wing coverts. Primaries are deep blue with black with some having a touch of green. Bend of the wing is iridescent light blue. The tail is blackish green and of medium size. Legs are dark gray.

The general characteristics common in the feathers' coloration of the adult

females of all subspecies are as follow: deep scarlet red head, deep burgundy or maroon back from shoulders to tail, jet black beak with a slightly shiny texture, and dark gray legs. Their eyes are piercing and could be from cream to golden yellow or amber-red in color. Depending on the particular species, the coloration of the feathers of the breast can be cobalt blue, purple or red. Primaries are dark blue and black. The bend of the wing is iridescent light blue.

With the intention of simplifying the classification of the subspecies, we are including an identification key for the females of different subspecies in three groups, organized according to the coloration of the feathers of the females breasts.

Subspecies in U.S. Aviculture

The Grand Eclectus

The Grand Eclectus, *Eclectus r. roratus*, also known as the Ceram Eclectus, was the first Eclectus to be reported in the scientific literature and it is called the nominate species. Technically, the nominate species are not considered as subspecies. The Grand Eclectus belongs to group A. The females are of medium size within the Eclectus range, and closely resemble the vosmaeri subspecies except for its smaller size and lack of the bright yellow feather band at the tip of the tail and in the area near the cloaca, which characterizes the Vosmaeri among the captive population. Both exhibit the purplish colored breast feathers; however, in the case of the Grand, these are of a deeper purple tone while in the *vosmaeri*, the feathers are more of a mauve-lavender color. Laurella Desborough, a well-regarded breeder

of these parrots, has reported that all the wild Grand Eclectus she has inspected did have a defined separation between the red feathers coming down from the head and the purple feathers of the breast. This is in contrast to the Vosmaeri which displays a gradual mixing of those feather colors at the upper part of the breast. The Grand female's head is slightly flattened at the rear top, somewhat similar to the vosmaeri. In the wild, the Grand distribution includes Ceram, Buru, and Moluccan Islands of Indonesia.

During the early arrival of the Eclectus parrot to the U.S.A., the Grand was one of the most commonly imported. Unfortunately, at that time, due to a combination of the lack of knowledge and the difficulty in the differentiation of the males within the subspecies, the Grand Eclectus suffered considerable and undesirable hybridization. To add to this mischief, many people call any Eclectus a Grand Eclectus, a usage most likely resulting from their grandiose appearance.

The Grand Eclectus is well established in the U.S.A. but it is not among the most popular Eclectus. Potential breeders interested in breeding the Grand Eclectus should be careful in the selection of their breeding stock to avoid using hybridized specimens.

Vosmaeri Eclectus

The Vosmaeri Eclectus, *Eclectus r. vosmaeri*, first described by Rothschild in 1922, is the second largest of the Eclectus subspecies. It is one of the most distinct and is very striking, with its overall elegant appearance. This appealing look is most likely due to their elongated bodies, and the beautiful contrast of the bright yellow band present at the tip of the females' tail feathers, as well as the yellow feathers of the under tail coverts. The Vosmaeri females have a slightly flattened head at the back top of the skull, and a neck which seems to be longer than all the other subspecies established in captivity. The Vosmaeris belong to the Group A, with their chest feathers colored mauve or lavender. These lavender feathers fuse gradually with the red feathers coming down from the neck.

It is worth mentioning that the Vos-

Eclectus Grouping According to Female Breast-feather Coloration

Group A Purple or Lavender	Group B Cobalt Blue	Group C Red
Grand (Ceram) Vosmaeri Westerman	Red-sided (New Guinea) Aru Australian Solomon Island Biaki	Cornelia Tanimbar (Riedeli)

maeri males differ from the others subspecies in that their under tail coverts contain feathers with a definite yellow color. This characteristic and the slight yellow tint of the tip of the tail, by itself not reliable as wear of the tail feathers will obscure this characteristic, make the male Vosmaeri the easiest subspecies male to identify. It must be made clear that the lemon yellow color present in the tips of the males' tail feathers is not remotely close to the bright yellow exhibited by their females. The Vosmaeri habitat is in northern and central Moluccas in Indonesia.

Red-sided Eclectus

The New Guinea or Red-sided Eclectus, *Eclectus r. polychloros*, first described by Scopoli in 1786, was the first subspecies to be identified, a mere 10 years after the nominate Grand Eclectus was, is slightly larger than the nominate species and shares most of its appearance with members of Group B, with their cobalt blue breast and the blue periorbital ring around the eyes.

The coloration of the Red-sided and all the other members of the Group B, is of extraordinary beauty and offers a considerable contrast with the different shades of red, the deep scarlet of the head and the maroon back of the body.

The red feathers of the head and neck of the Red-sided female extend down to the cobalt blue breast and stop abruptly at mid breast to form a red bib. The Red-sided Eclectus, as it is better known in North America, is well established in aviculture in the U.S.A. The native habitat is in New Guinea and some of the nearby islands.

Solomon Island Eclectus

The Solomon Island Eclectus, *Eclectus r. solomonensis*, was introduced to the taxonomical tables by Rothschild and Hartert in 1901. The Solomon Island species belongs to the Group B, and together with another of its members, the Biaki Eclectus, form the smallest two of all the types or subspecies raised in captivity. In every other physical respect, besides size, the Solomon is very similar to the other members of the B Group.

The Solomon Island Eclectus has the reputation of being the most gentle of all the Eclectus raised in captivity. Its smaller size renders their beak considerably gentler, too. The Solomon Island Eclectus is very well established in the U.S.A. aviculture, and indeed, very popular as a pet. They are found in the wild on Solomon Islands, Bismarck and Admiralty Archipelagos.

Aru Eclectus

The Aru Eclectus, *Eclectus r. aruensis*, since introduced in the scientific archives by Gray in 1858, has been questioned by several authors as belonging as a subspecies by itself.

The Aru is endemic of the Aru Islands and belongs to the Group B.

Until the taxonomic classification is settled, common sense dictates that a responsible aviculturist should consider the Aru as belonging to a valid subspecies and treat it as such. In that way there will be no regrets in the future, should the status of the Aru be classified as an independent subspecies.

Both the Aru male and female are larger than the Red-sided. The females are very similar in coloration to the other members of Group B. Males show green body feathers containing more bluish coloration than the Red-sided and other members of the same group. The adult male's eyes are deep-

er colored with more red-orange than those of the Red-sided Eclectus. The adult Aru male is also relatively easy to identify within the captive-raised Eclectus, due to its large size, reddish eyes and wide yellowish band at the tip of the tail feathers. The Aru is not well established in U.S.A. aviculture as only a small group of breeders are true-breeding this subspecies.

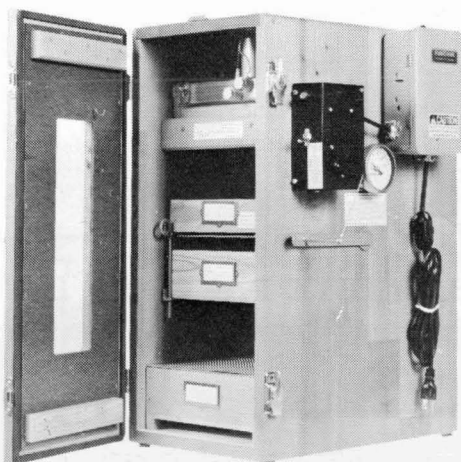
Unfortunately, many breeders do not recognize the need to consider them as a distinct subspecies so hybridization by negligence or ignorance could take its toll with the future population of these captive birds. To assist in future propagation of the Aru Eclectus, a specimen registry is in the process of being organized within the umbrella of The Eclectus Society.

Australian Eclectus

The Australian Eclectus, *Eclectus r. macgillivrayi*, first described by Mathews in 1913, is the largest of all the known subspecies, with an average weight approaching almost twice that of its close cousin the Red-sided Eclectus. It belongs to Group B, with the Australian Eclectus females having deeper red and blue hues compared to the others. The tail of the Australian Eclectus is larger than the others even after taking into consideration the size difference. The eggs of the Australian, when compared to the Red-sided, are

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considerably larger. Due to its size, the Australian Eclectus is recognized as having a magnificent presence. This subspecies is not well established in the U.S.A. nor in its native Australia, where only a handful of breeders are authorized to raise these extraordinary parrots. The Eclectus breeder, George Cave, of southern California, has raised the largest number of Australian Eclectus living in the U.S.A. As its common names indicates, this Eclectus subspecies is found in Australia, mainly on Cape York peninsula in north eastern Australia.

Biaki Eclectus

The Biaki Eclectus, *Eclectus r. biaki*, was the last of the Eclectus to be introduced to the taxonomic scales by Hartert in 1932, and is another of the Eclectus which has been questioned by some authors regarding belonging to an independent subspecies. The Biaki, is a member of Group B Eclectus and shares with the Solomons their small size. In the U.S.A. the Biakis are not widely available, and only a few breeding pairs are set up to produce offspring. The Biakis have an overall lighter coloration than does the Solomon Island Eclectus. The Biaki's natural habitat is in the island of Biak.

As with the Aru Eclectus, a registry for Biaki Eclectus is being organized within The Eclectus Society to facilitate future propagation of this subspecies of Eclectus.

Subspecies Not in U.S. Aviculture

The following subspecies are not established in the U.S.A. but they are included in this article with the purpose of being inclusive of all the different subspecies.

Cornelia Eclectus

The Cornelia Eclectus, *Eclectus r. cornelia*, first reported in the scientific literature by Bonaparte 1850, is of the two members forming Group C, with the females having their breast feathers entirely red. This characteristic is shared with the Tanimbar Eclectus. Basically, these birds are entirely red and maroon, lacking any purple feathers. The Cornelia subspecies is native to the island of Sumba, Indonesia, and is not established in aviculture in the U.S.A. nor elsewhere. Even though lacking blue and purple colors, this bird exhibits extreme beauty. The photos of the Cornelias in the book by Roger Sweeney and Rosemary Low confirm this qualification.

Tanimbar Eclectus

The Tanimbar Eclectus, *Eclectus r. riedeli*, first reported in 1882 by A.B. meyer has not been propagated by aviculturists. As its common name implies, its habitat is the Tanimbar Islands, Indonesia. This subspecies belongs to Group C, with the female being red-breasted. The females are darker than the also red-breasted Cornelias and have yellow under-tail coverts as well as more yellow on the tip of the tail feathers. This subspecies is not established in the U.S.A. aviculture.

Westermani Eclectus

The Westermani Eclectus, *Eclectus r. westermani*, was described by Bonaparte in 1850 and is only known from museum specimens. These specimens seem to have been raised in captivity. In addition, this bird has no known habitat. It is basically not known if these birds still exist nor if the specimens kept in the museums are just aberrant of another subspecies bred in captivity.

Responsible Propagation

Before closing this introductory section, I would like to make a plea and simultaneously encourage all responsible breeders to avoid and reject the practice of hybridizing among Eclectus subspecies. Aviculture has a primary purpose to study and actually propagate birds in a healthy and sound fashion. It is our responsibility as aviculturists to proliferate what nature has

provided us with, instead of our own aberrant creations based on our whims, vanities, and sometimes plain greed.

Let's learn from the example of the Spix's Macaw, whose only hopes to regain its presence in the wild is resting on specimens kept in captivity, and on technologies developed by mankind. There would be no hope for this beautiful macaw to recover from pending extinction if the captive specimens were all hybridized.

What we need is the foresight and the responsible attitude to treat with respect the future of these birds. In doing so, we will be doing an essential and responsible deed to earth and to future generations. As conscientious aviculturists, it is our duty to do so.

References Books

- The Eclectus, A Complete Guide.* By Roger Sweeney.
A Guide to Eclectus Parrots-Their Management, Care and Breeding. Published by The Australian Birdkeeper.
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The Complete Lexicon of Parrots. Publishers Verlag. URL=http://arndt-verlag.com/projekt/parse.cgi?Desc=E108.htm&Pic=108_1.JPG
Parrots: Their Care and Breeding. By Rosemary Low.
The Online Book of Parrots. URL = <http://www.u.b.t.u-clausthal.de/PAhtml/psittaculidae/eclectus.html>

The Eclectus Society

The Eclectus Society (TES) is a non-commercial organization dedicated to the welfare, betterment, and propagation of the Eclectus Parrots. The Society's educational efforts are presently assisting many Eclectus enthusiasts via TES's website at:

www.eclectus.com

For further information on free initial membership enrollment contact:

Jose Perdomo, TES
P.O. Box 5021
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You may e-mail a message to:
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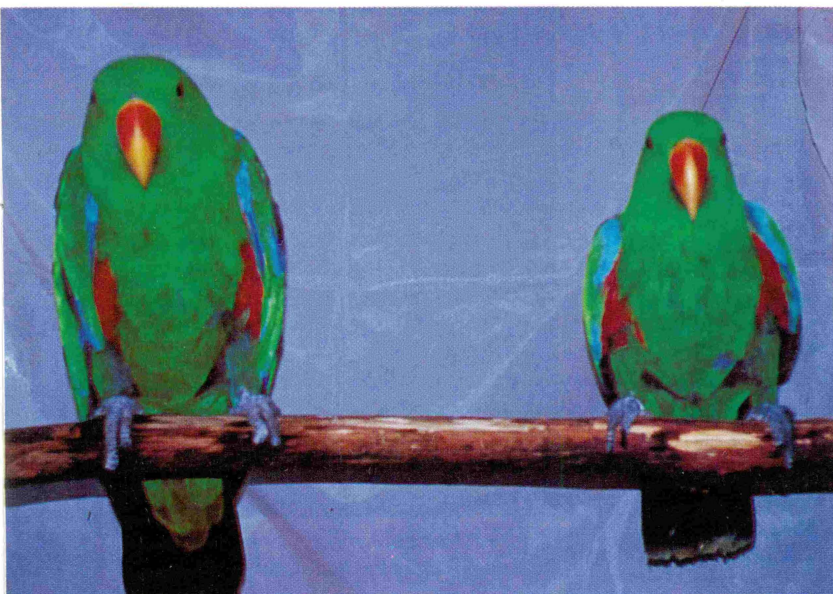
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The Solomon Island Eclectus is among the smallest subspecies. Except for size, it is very similar to other subspecies in group B.

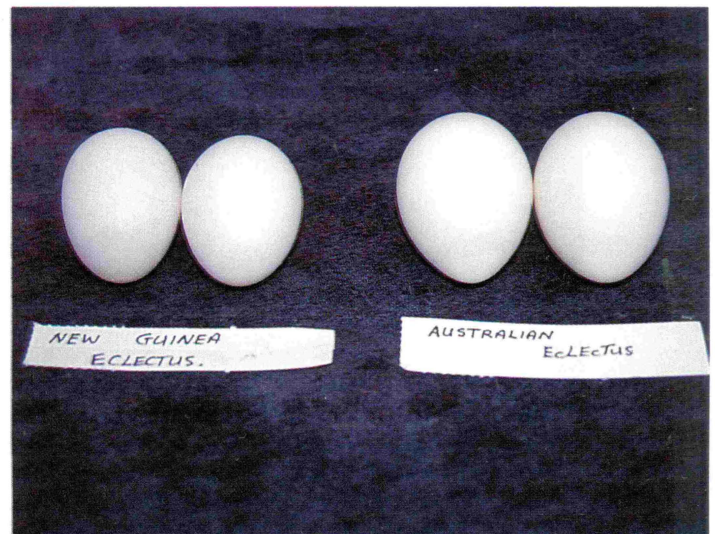
The blue periorbital eye ring, characteristic of all the females belonging to group B, is seen here on this Solomon Island female.

Photo by Graham and David Taylor.



Size comparison of a male Australian Eclectus and a male Red-sided Eclectus. The size difference between these two subspecies is very dramatic with the Australian being much larger.

Photo by Graham and David Taylor.



This photo illustrates the size of the eggs of an Australian Eclectus and those of a Red-sided Eclectus.



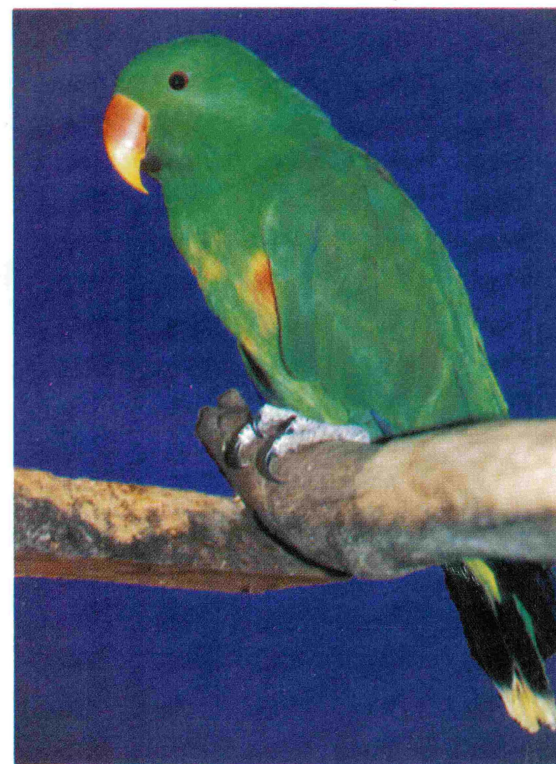
The Vosmaeri male has a yellowish hue which makes his green body brighter. The female has a lavender breast and a daisy-yellow band at the tip of the tail and yellow under tail coverts.



Only a very few of these breeding Biakis exists in the U.S.A. The birds are very similar to the Solomon Island Eclectus but lighter in color.



The head of a female Vosmaeri showing the slight flat area near the back of the skull. Many Eclectus lovers consider the Vosmaeri the most striking of all. The elegant longer neck, bright lavender breast, and daisy-yellow tail tip are important ingredients in the subspecies esthetic reputation.



The Aru Eclectus, another member of group B, is larger than the Red-sided. The Aru is rarely available in the United States. The adult male's reddish eye and yellowish band at the tip of the tail set them apart from the others.