

Eclectus: The Calm & The Calmer

Find out what makes the Eclectus parrot a great pet bird, and learn how to care for them.

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Eclectus parrots have an aura about them, a certain calm that soothes and pacifies them and their surroundings. But it's not their aura that gets them noticed; it's their extreme color. The male Eclectus is typically green contrasting with red on its wings, and he has a "candy corn" colored beak. The female Eclectus has a radiant red head, neck and dark red wings, and a blue, lavender or purple breast (depending on the subspecies), as well as a jet -black beak. Their strikingly different appearances makes them unique, but it's their aforementioned aura that makes them one of a kind.

Unique Appeal Of Eclectus Parrots

Eclectus parrots are highly intelligent, easy-going birds. They thrive in peaceful settings and tend not to be as noisy as some parrots. Susanne Cochran, owner of Avalon Aviary in Colorado, said that Eclectus do not flourish in "loud, raucous, chaotic environments. They like calm, peaceful situations, which fits with their calm, peaceful personalities."

According to Cochran, when things around the Eclectus become tumultuous, they become overwhelmed and might scream, bite or feather pick and can become antisocial. Ultimately their health can suffer.

But when they are in the aforementioned tranquility, they tend to slip into a dream world. Cochran noted that Eclectus daydream, which contributes to their calmness. "They spend so much time in the nest, especially females, and are so intelligent that they have learned to daydream," she said. "Consequently, they can be looking right at you and not be in the present moment, but instead off somewhere in their mind. Always talk to an Eclectus, and make sure they are in the here and now before asking them to Step up or before reaching for them, otherwise, you might get you a nasty bite."

"When an Eclectus is startled it will freeze, instead of screaming like many other parrots," related David Skidmore, who runs Austral Eclectus Aviary in Indiana. Although the Eclectus is known for being less noisy than most parrots, it does make a diverse and unusual chortling sound and, when vocalizing, Eclectus have a "soft cooing language and a variety of calls unique to the species, such as bonging when courting," Skidmore added.

According to Laurella Desborough, owner of Wildwood Aviaries (eclectusbreeder.com), Eclectus parrots have excellent voice quality and tone when "speaking" like a human. The Eclectus can become quite accomplished talkers, but many don't start until after their first year.

Distinctive Eclectus Appearance

Scott Lewis, owner of Old World Aviaries in Texas, believes that this parrot's "remarkable contrast and beauty" make the Eclectus unique from other birds. "With their brilliant and wildly different coloration, nothing in the world of psittacines is more striking than a pair of Eclectus parrots," Lewis said. "They are the most dimorphic of all psittacines."

The distinction between the male and female Eclectus is so radical that for a time they were thought to be two distinct species. Not only does their extreme dimorphic coloring separate them from other parrots, so do their feathers — the Eclectus parrot has hair-like feathers. The feathers on the head, neck and breast don't have an interlocking hook that normally fasten the feathers together, giving each feather a smooth, uninterrupted appearance.

Eclectus History

According to Skidmore, Eclectus parrots are a monotypic genus, and experts believe they might be related to *Tanygnathus megalorhynchus*, the great-billed parrot, but not closely.

Confined to the Australian continent and its surrounding islands — New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the Islands of Indonesia and Australia's Cape York Peninsula — Desborough stated that the genus Eclectus is composed of one species, *roratus*, and there are nine recognized subspecies

According to Graeme Hyde, editor of Australian Aviculture, the Eclectus *roratus macgillivrayi* is the subspecies that naturally occurs in Australia and is "only found in the northeastern corner of Cape York Peninsula, North Queensland. The grand Eclectus *roratus roratus* is nowadays considered to be the nominate race. This subspecies was first described in

1776 from a male discovered on Ambon [an island off the western coast of Australia].”

Skidmore said that, due to the habitat and the many small islands spread across Australasia; several distinct subspecies have evolved, “some on the tiniest islands.”

Eclectus In Australia

In the wild, the Eclectus’ habitat is the densely wooded tropical rain forests, usually nesting in standing trees near the edge of the forest. Female Eclectus spend the majority of their time around their nests, caring and protecting it from other females.

“Due to the remoteness of the area where they are found and the wildlife licensing system in the different states of Australia, very few are held in captivity,” Hyde said. “The Eclectus parrot in Australia is not kept as a pet bird in the same way as in the U.S. As a highly prized aviary bird, persons owning them keep them as breeding birds, not as pets.

“In terms of pet birds, Eclectus parrots are not considered an exotic species. There is no ongoing debate as to how many subspecies are held within Australian aviaries. Persons who are fortunate to own a pair or pairs are simply happy to have such beautiful birds in their aviaries, even if the subspecies have interbred at some earlier stage.”

Graeme also added that Eclectus are not considered pests in Australia. “No is the short answer.”

Home Environment Of Eclectus Parrots

An Eclectus owner that understands this tranquil bird must know that they also love to be admired. Susanne Cochran said that they need people around them who think they are beautiful and appreciate them because they know they are beautiful and love to be told.

And the Eclectus adapts well to multiple-pet households. David Skidmore knows of single pet birds that get along beautifully and others that live in multiple-bird households. Skidmore has more than one so they can socialize with other birds.

Linda Blessing, owner of Oceanside Orchids & Parrots in California, said that males tend to be more of a family bird if everyone in the family handles them from the beginning. She also stated that both males and females get along with other birds and pets when introduced at a young age.

According to Desborough, Eclectus don’t necessarily choose one person as the only person whom they will interact, as some parrots might, and they can also adapt from having one owner to having a new owner. “They are very sociable and enjoy interacting with humans,” she said.

Although Eclectus enjoy human interaction and attention, they do not necessarily need or ask for it. Skidmore indicated that most do not like scratching, but they prefer hugging, stroking, and being pressed under the chin and kissed.

Bill Backus, owner Birds of a Feather in California, added that Eclectus are easy to keep because they do better than most birds “as far as not requiring attention around the clock. You can keep a normal routine at home, while playing with your bird from time to time on a daily basis, and keep an Eclectus very happy.”

The Cage For Eclectus Parrots

Regardless if you have one or more birds, one of the most important decisions you’ll make regarding this bird is its cage. According to Desborough, Eclectus thrive best in good-sized cages, 3-feet wide and 2- or 3- feet deep, with at least one soft wood perch.

“Because their beaks are not as hard as other parrots, they use soft perches to groom their beaks,” she explained. “They also love spiral swings in their cages or outside their cage.”

Skidmore agreed that they need large cages, “with plenty of toys, ropes and things to chew,” he added. “They need time out of their every day with a separate play area, like a play stand, where they can go.”

If Eclectus are confined to a small cage, they tend to become obese and suffer health problems. Cochran added that they need a roomy cage and “the bar spacing should not exceed 1 inch, preferably 3/4 inches so they climb around easily.”

The cage’s placement will also determine your Eclectus’ happiness. Parrots are flock creatures by nature, so they need to be near you. By locating the cage in your living space, instead of placing it in its own room, the Eclectus will feel secure

and protected.

“Eclectus enjoy daily interaction with people but do not demand it,” Desborough said.

Now that you’ve placed the cage, the next decision is how to furnish it. Because they are not strong grippers, Cochran recommends against manzanita perches for Eclectus because they are too slippery, and Eclectus may fall and hurt or frighten themselves.

According to Cochran, Eclectus need toys that are smaller and more detailed with interesting varieties of texture than most other birds their size. Because they are not highly destructive and large chunks of wood are not fun for them, thin wood, beads, leather, sisal and cotton rope are all favorites.

Skidmore pointed out that good toys are anything shredable, “a boing above all things, and stuffed animals to rough up.”

Diet Requirements For Eclectus Parrots

In the wild, Eclectus are treetop feeders, eating treetop blossoms, nuts, seeds, fruit, buds, shoots, grain, corn, bananas, coconuts and papaya. But in captivity, they require noncolored pellets “because they are hyper-chromatic and the addition of food coloring to their diets stresses them out,” Cochran explained.

“Eclectus people believe that our birds suffer from vitamin-enriched diets,” Skidmore said. “Too much supplementation can cause hyperactivity, aggression and feather destruction.” Skidmore believes that a natural diet is best, one rich in Vitamin A, naturally derived from whole-natural foods. “Beans, brown rice, fresh fruits and vegetables should make up most of their diet,” he said, “supplemented with protein, like occasional lean chicken, boiled egg or tofu.”

This diet includes a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits and greens, cooked legumes and dry seed variety mixes without added vitamins. “They have more critical dietary needs, and many seem to be more sensitive to food items with man-made vitamins and other chemical additives,” said Desborough.

One thing to look out for is obesity. Eclectus do not show obesity as well as some psittacines, such as Galahs and Amazon parrots. “They add fat inside the body cavity before they add it to their breasts,” Lewis said. “An Eclectus with a breast looks and feels heavy, and is dangerously obese. Because they store fat inside their body cavities, excess fat in Eclectus can crowd and seriously impair the internal organs.” He added that Eclectus appear to have a more efficient digestive tract and, as a result, they are more sensitive to high levels of micronutrients in their diets.

Exclusive Habits For Eclectus Parrots

Cochran indicated that the Eclectus loves to bathe, so provide a way for them to bathe in nice, cool water frequently. Eclectus love mist baths, and Cochran mists the birds in her aviary in their cages so they can “hang upside down and spread their wings for maximum coverage.”

Eclectus have been known to be territorial, especially the female at sexual maturity. According to Lewis, they start going through periods of being very territorial about their cages. “In nature, it is the male’s job to perch outside the nest hollow and yell his head off if he thinks something’s wrong; it is the hen’s job to defend the nest hollow,” Lewis explained. “In captivity, her cage is the closest thing she has to a nest hollow. So, she is just doing what nature tells her she is supposed to do.”

By recognizing when a female is in ‘cage-defense’ mode, you can avoid a peck or bite by opening the cage and letting her come out on her own and going to a ‘neutral territory’ before interacting with her, which effectively side-steps this problem,” Lewis said.

Cochran suggested never giving a female Eclectus anything she might consider a nest, such as a box, paper bag, tent or bureau drawer. “She will defend it, and even the sweetest bird can deliver a very nasty bite when she is instinctually defending her nest.”