

## Meet The Eclectus Parrot

**The affectionate Eclectus parrot makes life a little more colorful**

*By Sandee L. Molenda, C.A.S.*

When early European explorers first made their way to the South Pacific, they discovered one of the world's most beautiful parrots, the Eclectus. They also made one of the first mistakes in parrot identification by identifying males and females as different species. The sleek body style and deep emerald green plumage of the males and the stocky body and brilliant scarlet feathering of the females easily confuse an onlooker.

Male Eclectus parrots have green feather coloring and yellow-orange beaks.

Fortunately for those of us in aviculture, this mistake was corrected. Such drastic sexual dimorphism is not Eclectus parrots' only unique trait; their soft, almost "hair-like" feather structure is unparalleled in the parrot world.

According to *Lexicon of Parrots* by Thomas Arndt, there are nine subspecies of Eclectus parrots, plus the nominate (Eclectus roratus). Most of these parrots live on various islands throughout the South Pacific, although some also live in New Guinea, Indonesia and northern Australia. In the United States, three of these subspecies kept as pets are the red-sided Eclectus (Eclectus roratus polychloros), vosmaeri Eclectus (Eclectus roratus vosmaeri) and Solomon Island Eclectus (Eclectus solomensis).

One of the most popular kept subspecies is the red-sided. Slightly smaller than the vosmaeri Eclectus, the red-sided Eclectus possesses intensely colored plumage. Males have slightly yellowish coloring with dark blue coverts and primary feathers with distinct green edging. The topside of its tail appears green with narrow yellow tips and a black underside. Females have red abdomens, sides of the body, under wing coverts and a dark blue to violet-blue band of feathers to the nape. The primary feathers appear dark blue with narrow green edging. The females have a thin ring of blue feathers around the eye just to top things off.

The vosmaeri Eclectus is larger than the red-sided Eclectus or Solomon Island Eclectus, and males look lighter green with more yellowish feathering on the back, nape and back of the head. They also have extensive red on the sides of the body, and their primaries lack the green edging. Females have a violet breast washed with red as well as a yellow band at the base of the tail and yellow on the vent.

The Solomon Island Eclectus is slightly smaller than vosmaeri Eclectus. The males appear darker green with a paler blue on the edge of the wing. Female Solomon Island Eclectus are lighter red than red-sided and have a broader ring of blue feathering around the eyes. The primary coverts are pale blue with pale blue edging. Unlike the female vosmaeri, there is no yellow on the tail.

### Eclectus Parrot Essentials

Eclectus parrots enjoy popularity as companion parrots no matter what the subspecies. In addition to looking beautiful, these talented mimics can learn many words and sounds. Eclectus often form strong bonds with their owners, which gives them a reputation as being sweet and affectionate pets. Eclectus parrots are not known as excessive screamers, but some do emit loud calls. Mitigate loud calls through speech training and diversions such as playing the radio or television. A large, roomy cage with lots of toys and daily quality time are essential for an Eclectus' mental, emotional and physical well-being.

Although not accomplished acrobats like Amazon parrots, the inquisitive and intelligent Eclectus play with a variety of toys, especially swings. Eclectus parrots' strong beaks and jaws require toys with strength, safety and durability. Eclectus also enjoy stripping the bark and leaves from natural, nontoxic, pesticide-free wood branches and perches, so change perches frequently.

Eclectus parrots are comfortable in cages at least 30-inches wide by 30-inches deep, but a larger cage of 34-inches wide by 34-inches deep is ideal. As with most parrots, they need a cage that is strong and safe with no sharp edges. A cage with a playpen on the top is a plus. Most Eclectus will be happy with their "penthouse view."

Place dishes where they will not be soiled by the parrot's droppings, and choose ones that are easy to remove for cleaning and feeding. Most Eclectus parrots appreciate showers or bathing with their owners, so many owners provide their parrots with shower perches and shower alongside their birds.

#### A Diet Rich In Vitamin A

Experts agree that Eclectus parrots need larger amounts of vitamin A in their diet than other parrots. They thrive on a diet based on a wide variety of foods including fresh fruits, vegetables, sprouted seeds, leafy greens, cooked legumes, grains and a variety of nuts and seeds.

Most Eclectus parrots relish fresh fruits such as pomegranates, apples, grapes, papaya and mango. Cantaloupe, berries, citrus fruits, kiwi, banana, cherries, peaches, pears, apricots, figs, guava and nectarines also are good sources of essential vitamins, minerals and fiber.

Vegetables – such as beets, carrots, squash, sweet potatoes, broccoli, kale, chard and other leafy greens – are full of natural carotenes. These foods provide essential vitamin A, help the digestive process and stimulate the production of antibodies and amino acids, which are essential to the maintenance of good health.

#### Be Aware Of Toe Tapping

Some aviculturists recommend feeding high-quality pellets that are not artificially colored, but others completely oppose pellets. Most aviculturists agree that a supplemental vitamin regimen is not necessary with Eclectus parrots and might contribute to a condition called “toe tapping.” It occurs as repetitive extension and contraction of the toes, or “twitching,” and is most noticeable when the parrot is at rest on its perch. Studies showed that toe tapping ceases in Eclectus that no longer receive vitamins. Some aviculturists believe that any processed food, including pellets, might contribute to this condition, they recommend a pellet-free diet. Check with your avian vet for advice on the best diet for your particular Eclectus parrots.

Breeders frequently encounter feather plucking in Eclectus parrots. The most common causes include stress and malnutrition, particularly vitamin-A deficiency. A severe wing-feather trim, overcrowding or inappropriately sized cages might contribute to the initial onset of feather picking. Viral and bacterial diseases, over-supplementation and obesity are other factors. As with any bird, if there are sudden changes in its behavior, eating habits, droppings or physical condition, immediately contact an avian veterinarian.

While Eclectus parrots are known for their beauty, there is so much more to them.