

Eclectus Parrot

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Eclectus*

SPECIES: *roratus* **OTHER NAMES:** Red-sided Parrot, Rocky Range Parrot, Rocky River Parrot.

Description:

Large brilliantly coloured parrot. Highly dimorphic between the sexes. The male is a brilliant green with scarlet underwing coverts and flanks. Lateral feathers blue tipped with white. Upper mandible carrot-red with yellowish tip, lower mandible black. The adult female is crimson, tending to a darker colour on the wing. Blue periophthalmic ring, blue collar and blue band across the abdomen. Blue edging on the wing, light feathers deep blue with scarlet tail. Both mandibles are black. Immature birds resemble the adults but are duller. Young cocks also have a reddish beak whereas young hens do not.

This bird is sedentary, usually found alone or in pairs. It roosts communally and is strictly arboreal, spending most of its time high in the canopy.

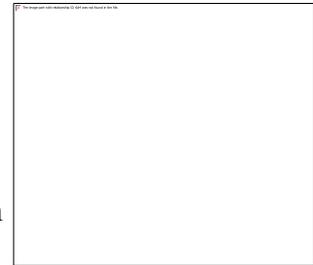
Length:400-450mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Distribution:

Confined to the rainforests of eastern Cape York Peninsula from the Pascoe River to Massey Creek. It is widespread elsewhere however from the Moluccas (northern Indonesia) through New Guinea to the Solomon Islands.



Habitat:

Rainforest and adjacent open forest.

Diet:

Varied, but consists mostly of seeds, nuts and fruits.

Breeding:

August to January.

Usual nesting site is a deep tree cavity, preferably in a deciduous tree near water. The nest may be as much as 10m below the entrance. The bottom of the nest lined with wood chips and decayed wood dust.

The female incubates alone but the male attends and feeds her. Both parents are involved in rearing the young. Parents may be assisted in feeding the chick by as many as 8 (presumably related) other birds of both sexes.

In captivity, Eclectus Parrots prefer to breed in logs. A log should be around 2m. in height with an internal diameter of about 35-40cm and suspended vertically.

Some breeders have also had success with nesting boxes. A box of around 60cm x 40cm x 40cm is also suitable. These should ideally be positioned at a slight angle, and supplied with an internal ladder to facilitate easy entry and exit from the nest. The preferred nesting material is wood chips and peat moss.

Courtship Display:

This is not particularly spectacular. The male simply fronts the female and slowly bobs and bows his head. This is often followed up with courthip feeding and copulation (which takes place in the nest) follows thereafter.

The intent to breed is also signalled by the birds paying more and more attention to their nesting hollow as the onset of the breeding season draws nearer.

Sexual Maturity:

These birds do not become sexually mature and capable of breeding until 4-5 years of age.

Clutch:

2 white eggs (43x34mm). Incubation period: 26days. Fledging usually occurs at about 60 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

No records.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single tame bird could be housed in a "small" cage provided it measures around 600mm x 600mm x 800mm (approximately). Birds kept in such situations should not be confined to their cage and given ample opportunity for exercise. However, Eclectus parrots perform and look much better in aviaries. These need be around 2m wide x 4m long x 1.8m high and lined with a heavy grade mesh. To avoid structural damage arising from chewing, the frame of an aviary should not be constructed from timber. In addition, the aviary should offer plenty of shelter with part of the roof covered in and the back and sides at least partially covered.

Provided the aviary has enough room (it would need to be considerably larger than the dimensions stated above) Eclectus Parrots will share their aviary with a number of other species.

These include Superb and King Parrots, Alexandrines and Indian Ringnecks, Derbyans and Cockatoos. Lorikeets may also be housed in the same aviary.

Species Specific Problems

Eclectus Parrots spend a considerable amount of time on the aviary floor and are therefore susceptible to infection with intestinal worms and fungi. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene. Another problem encountered in this species is Psittacine beak and feather disease. This is an incurable disease which is transmitted through faeces. Essentially, it results in poor feather growth and feathers which don't replace themselves when they fall out. Similarly, the beak is also affected and becomes fragile and does not repair itself. It is advisable to test birds suspected to have this condition. The best course of action for affected birds is to destroy them as there is no cure. Infected birds will infect their offspring simply by feeding them as there is always chances of contact with faeces in the nest and during feeding of the young.

Feather plucking is also common to Eclectus Parrots. This has a range of causes and can usually be rectified (see our articles in the "Regular Features" section of our website). Should the problem persist after applying the more common "cures" it is likely that plucking is caused by boredom or perhaps trauma. The most likely scenario is that the birds are not being supplied with ample chewing materials (branches, nuts, leaves, etc.) or that their aviary is not suitably set up. (see above). It has also been suggested that plucking arises out of an incompatibility between mates. This may be from "sexual frustration" or indeed simply because the two birds don't get on and stress one another.

Some Eclectus hens reportedly kill their young in the nest as soon as they hatch. Similarly, some pairs apparently cease to feed their young once they have fledged. As a result most aviculturalists prefer to either remove the eggs to an incubator or remove the young for handrearing as soon as they hatch.