



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales Inc. (ASNSW) (Founded in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Successful Breeding of Eclectus Parrots (*Eclectus roratus*)

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By Ian Ward

My wife and I purchased our first eclectus parrot in 1987. He was about 1½ years old, could already say 'hello' and had been hand-raised.

He was our house pet for about 3 years in which time we taught him to whistle 'Pop goes the Weasel'. It took him some time to perfect the tune and he then increased his vocabulary considerably. Even after another 3 years in the aviary he still talks all the time.

We decided to breed eclectus, so we built an aviary 6ft x 6ft and 8ft high. We were very apprehensive about leaving him outside; however, he had no adverse reactions to the move.

Part of the reason for moving him outside was that about a year after we first bought him, he went down quiet badly and we could have lost him. We tried a couple of vets who could not diagnose what was wrong with him. We knew he wasn't right, but we couldn't figure out what was wrong. Eventually, [Dr Rob Marshall](#) was recommended to us. So we went to see Dr Marshall who did a blood analysis and a crop swab and also tested his droppings. We waited while he did the tests and told us the bird was Vitamin A deficient plus a couple of minor infections. An injection of Vitamin A was injected into his chest tissues each week for 3 weeks and his diet was changed to the vet's recommendation. Our bird has gone from a sickly bird to a 100% healthy male.

A healthy male is recognised easily by the gloss and feather condition, but most of all the beak. The tip of the beak should start from a golden yellow to a coral red in the upper half. When our 'eckka' was sickly, his beak had leached out to a pale yellow.

Diet and sunlight are the greatest sources of Vitamin A and being outside he gets all the sunlight he needs.

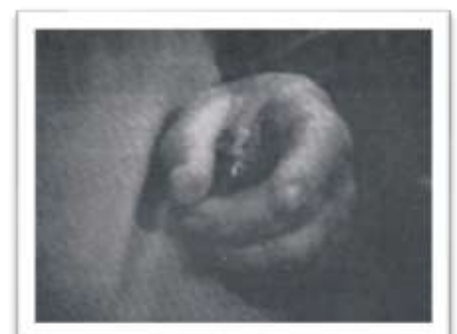
We bought a hen, but it proved to be a disaster. This bird had a deformed foot (one toe was crossed over another). She was kept in a holding cage but never looked happy. We took her to Dr Marshall for testing. There was a deficiency in the liver that was put down to poor diet. But worst of all there was a calcium deficiency. The bird had a deformed spine which was also related to the calcium deficiency. So, we returned the bird and luckily our money was refunded. We were now more cautious in our search for another hen.

Sometime later I was introduced to an eclectus breeder. The only birds he had were 2 pairs of eclectus which he had had for about 5 years. One pair had bred but the other pair had shown no interest whatsoever.

Not long after this he brought a 3-day old chick to us for hand-rearing, as we had been hand-rearing various parrots for some years. My wife kept the chick alive for 7 days. Dr Marshall was amazed that she was able to sustain life for that long as the chick had a digestive problem and was anaemic. It was weighed daily but no weight gain happened in the 7 days, so inevitably it died. Its nest mate was raised by the parents but after 75 days they began to attack it so it was brought to us for hand-rearing until it fledged.



Ian Ward demonstrating how affectionate an eclectus parrots can be



1 Hold the baby eclectus carefully and gently in the hand

It was our first introduction to the [Roudybush hand-raising formula](#). We had also developed our own hand-raising formula over the years which proved quite successful.

First impressions of the Roudybush mix was that it was bland, and we were not really impressed, and we went back to the ritual of making up our own mix again. The chick (Tommy) was weaned and fledged and is now 2½ years old and is a great specimen of the eclectus parrot. The bird was left with us to mind and it was suggested we could borrow a mature hen (the bird that had not bred for him).



2Feeding a baby eclectus parrot with a syringe

So, in May 1991 we brought the new hen home and introduced her to our 'ecka' who was quite friendly to her but a savage snap from her made him move away quite quickly. They kept their distance for about a week or so but 6 weeks later she laid an egg and 2 days later a second egg appeared.

I should have mentioned that there were 2 nest sites for the hen to choose from; one was a huge log 16 inches in diameter and 30 inches deep, mounted vertically. The inside was at least 12 inches giving the birds plenty of room. The second was a large wood 'Z' type box. The first eggs were laid in the log. Both the log and the next box had an inspection door into the breeding chamber area.

We observed the eggs daily until the eggs hatched. The hen was very unfriendly and would just move enough to let us see the eggs but she would snap at us to let us know we weren't welcome.

I will describe our first removal of the young because the 2 young were being feather plucked.

I armed myself with heavy leather gloves and my wife and I went into the trap area and opened the inspection door to the breeding chamber; then all hell broke loose. The mother hen arrived in the nest as I opened the inspection door. I grabbed one chick and at the same time the mother hen grabbed it by the head and a tug of war started to take place. I am sure if I did not release the chick it would have been killed. I then grabbed the mother hen who proceeded to bite hell out of my gloved hand. I got her out of the next box and my wife had a towel we had brought to wrap the chicks in. So, we wrapped the mother hen in the towel to control her. She was screeching, the 2 chicks were screeching, and it sounded like World War III. I removed the 2 chicks who were very agitated, but they did not bite unduly. I released the mother hen back in the nest box and took the chicks inside. It did not take long for them to settle down.

After this experience of removing young we had to modify the nest box. The inspection door was fine to look in but not big enough to remove the chicks easily. So, the door is now 6 inches square. Also, I had to separate the breeding chamber from the next entrance area. So, I cut a piece of plywood ¾ inch thick that could be placed above the nesting chamber to keep the mother hen out. When the door is in place it is held in with barrel bolts. This made removal of later chicks much more orderly.

The pair then acted normally but after a week the hen went missing quite often. During the second week the pair were mating quite regularly, and my wife suggested we had better remove the door and let the hen back into the nest chamber. We then found the hen had half eaten the door away to gain access herself. One week later she had laid again.

The first night number one chick was out she roosted in the uncovered part of the aviary. It started to rain so I turned on the outside lights and I was within 2 foot of her while I placed a fibreglass cover on the wire to keep her dry and she didn't move.

All my pairs of eclectus roost at night in the uncovered section and before you can hear any rain the 'eckas' start chattering and enjoy their shower, no matter what time, day or night.

As I finish this article, the hen has laid again 31/07/1993 and 3/08/1993 and is not very worried about the presence of the 2 young hens in with her. The cock still feeds the 2 young.

I can only say, after reading all the information available on eclectus, that we have not had any toe abnormalities or any calcium deficiency which in my opinion comes from proper dietary requirements.

The list displayed at the end of this article is most of the fruit and veg that we feed our birds each morning.

A fresh fruit salad is cut up in stainless steel dishes for each pair and is dusted with [calcium carbonate](#) powder and with [Ornithon Vitamin Supplement](#), giving the birds all the essential nutriment they require.

Also available is a dish of seed (small parrot mix with 25% walnuts mixed in), which is replaced every couple of days with a cup of fresh mix.

[Roudybush breeding pellets](#) are also available which the birds consume at a lesser rate than seed.

All the young we have hand-reared were fed Roudybush Formula 3 hand-rearing mix with [Goulburn Valley](#) brand apple and strawberry Natural Fruit Snacks. This is mixed to the ratio of 40ml boiling water, 2 teaspoons of fruit and about 3 heaped teaspoons of Roudybush mixed into a glass with a touch more Roudybush or water to arrive at a runny consistency.

In my opinion, it is better to feed the mix thinner rather than thicker and hotter rather than cooler. When first mixed it is around 40o Celsius and, so long as it does not burn your wrist or lip, it will not hurt the bird. If the food is fed too cold or too thick then crop problems can follow. If too cool, then the chick has to use body heat (energy) to warm it up for digesting.

Earlier in this article I stated we were not impressed with Roudybush. Now, I can only say weigh up the convenience of a 2kg packet in the freezer and opening it as required, against all the preparation of making up our own mix, cleaning up afterwards and the freezing that is required.

If you have tried Roudybush and decided 'this stuff is no good, I would rather use my own', I can only say, 'give it another go'. If you prepare it properly, hand-rearing will almost become a pleasure.

I hand-reared 50 parrots of all kinds last season using Roudybush and lost only one bird; and that one loss was not the fault of the food.

Roudybush Formula 3 is kept in the freezer to prevent bacteria spoiling the packet and it can remain in the freezer indefinitely.

When we open a new packet, it is placed in a large plastic container with an airtight lid. A small container is filled and kept in the refrigerator for daily feeding and the larger container returned to the freezer.

I have mentioned prepared fruit puree which is easily available in the supermarkets. For the first nest of chick we pureed our own fresh fruit every couple of days, but again, the preparation time and clean-up time was too great.

Having hand-reared 9 'ecka' chicks, the weight gain was not dramatically altered by using commercially packaged fruits.

To raise 2 'ecka' chicks it takes just over a 2kg packet of Roudybush and about four packets of 140g prepacked fruit.

We always have some spare 2kg packs of Roudybush in our freezer at a moment's notice to use for hand-rearing.

For those of you who read the Australian Aviculture magazine, in the article 'Hand-rearing Four King Parrots by O. Spalding (August 1993 edition), the author states he used 6kg with about 15% waste. I can only say that I used less than twice that to raise my 50 parrots as previously mentioned. So, I can only assume in measuring water quantities and adding Roudybush to it, you can keep waste down to a minimum.

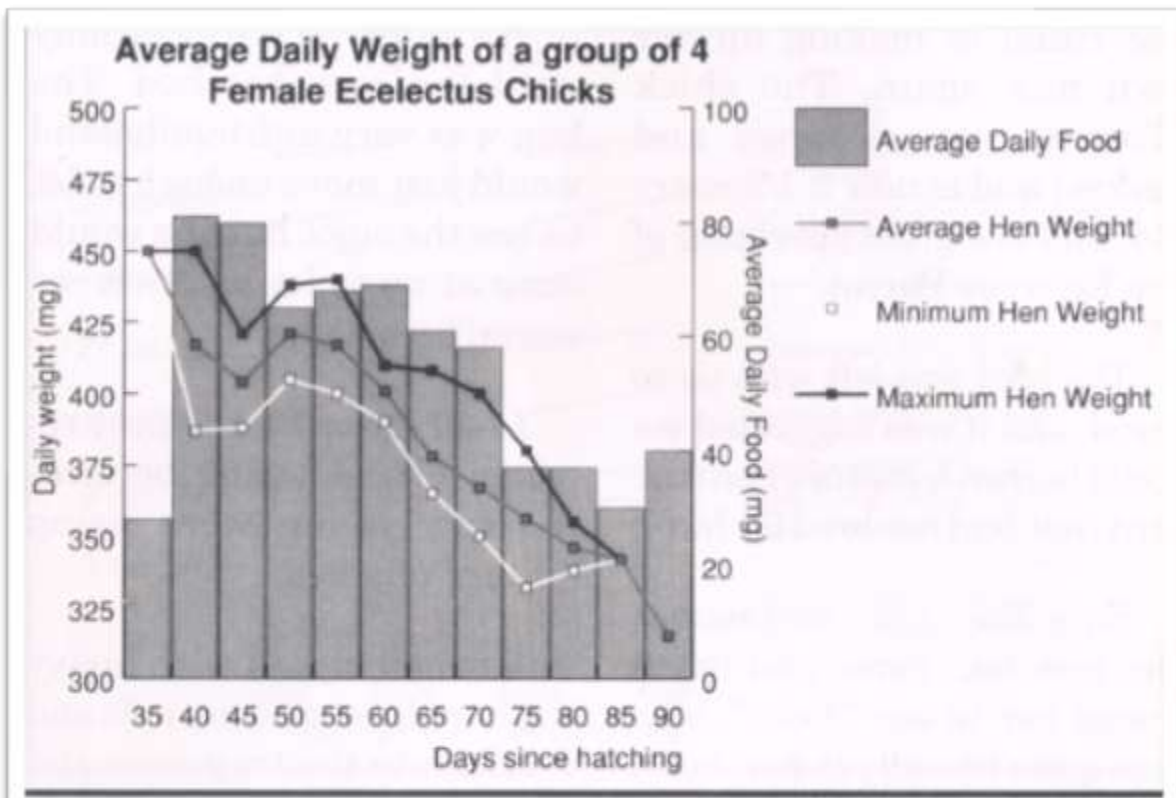
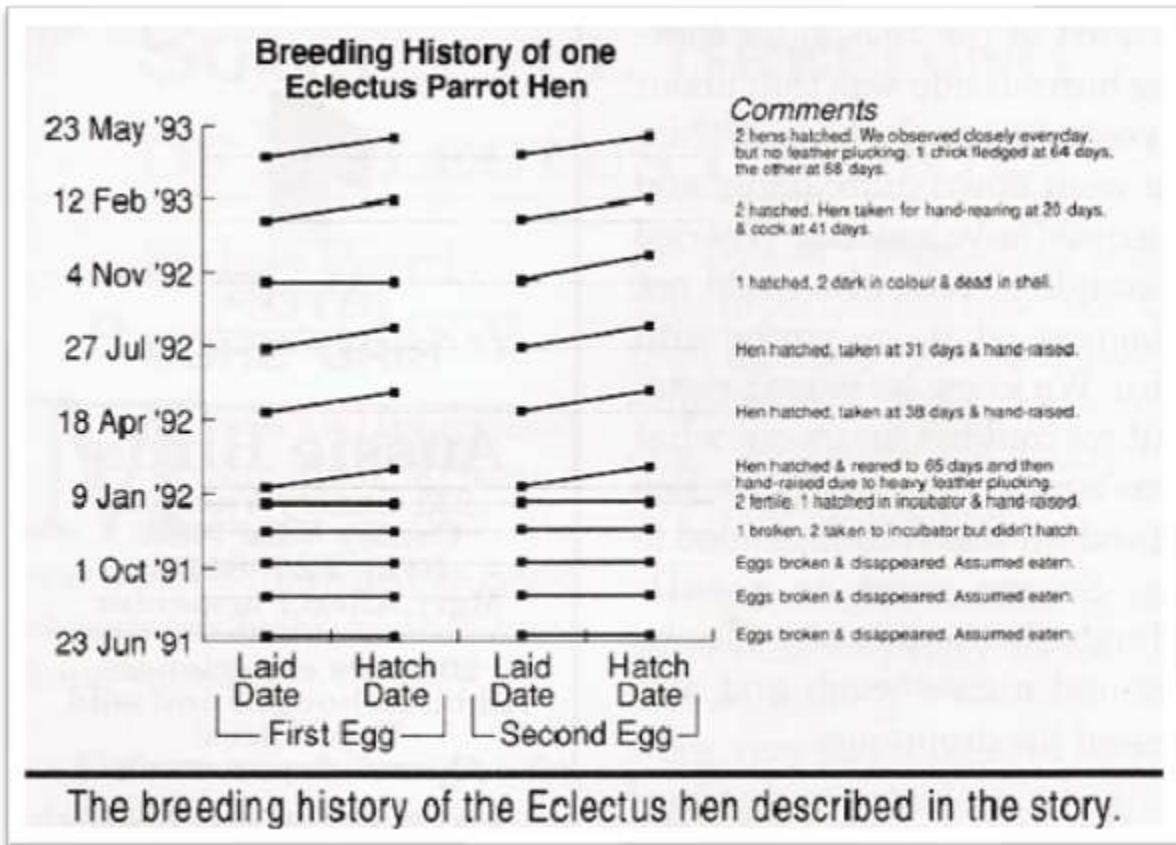
I will conclude by saying eclectus parrots, if given the dedication they deserve in feeding and housing, give great pleasure to anyone keeping them.

Food to Feed Eclectus Parrots

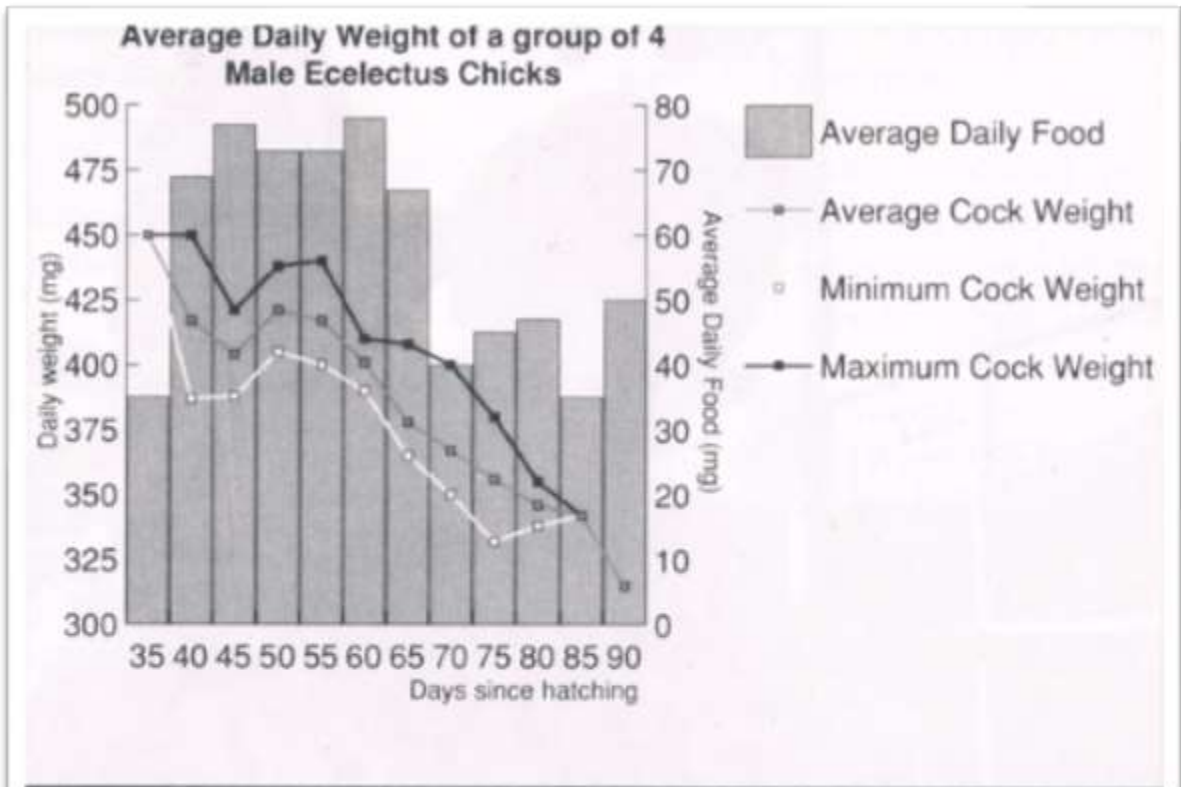
Mango in season (or canned for other times), paw paw and/or papaya, honey dew melon or similar, rockmelon, kiwi fruit, pears and nashi pears, bananas, beans (cut up) and peas, celery, carrot (grated), mung bean sprouts, bean combo sprouts, capsicum, tamarillo, passionfruit, pineapple, coconuts, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, guava, apple, apricots, plums, peaches, carrot cake, nectarine, squash, pomegranates, figs, dates.

Any fruit in season you can eat **with the exception of AVOCADO. IT IS POISON TO BIRDS.**

Dusted daily with calcium carbonate powder. Also dusted daily with Ornithon Vitamin Supplement. Small parrot mix with 25% walnuts. Fed in separate container.



This chart shows how, day by day, a group of 4 female Eclectus chicks grew up. The average daily food is shown on the right axis, and the average amount given each day is shown by the vertical bars. The average, minimum and maximum weight of the group is shown by the lines superimposed over the vertical bars, and measured on the left axis. The top line is the maximum weight recorded, the middle line is the average weight recorded, and the bottom line is the minimum weight recorded.



This chart shows how, day by day, a group of 4 male Eclectus chicks grew up. The average daily food is shown on the right axis, and the average amount given each day is shown by the vertical bars. The average minimum and maximum weight of the group is shown by the lines superimposed over the vertical bars, and measured on the left axis. The top line is the maximum weight recorded, the middle line is the average weight recorded, and the bottom line is the minimum weight recorded.

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