



Avicultural Society of New South Wales Inc. (ASNSW)

(Founded in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Scarlet-chested Parrot Mutations **Neophema splendida**

Paul Solomon interviewed by Wayne Rutherford

Wayne Rutherford

On behalf of the Avicultural Society of New South Wales I would like to welcome Paul Solomon to our meeting. Paul has agreed to be interviewed about his personal experiences in keeping and breeding the Scarlet-chested parrot.

Paul also enjoys painting birds and has brought along a number of his paintings which are on display and may be purchased here tonight. He is a long time member of the Society and has been very generous in donating one of his paintings each year for the past few years as one of the major prizes for our annual Christmas raffle.

Paul has kept Scarlet-chested parrots for quite a lengthy period of time and I am sure he has a vast experience with a whole range of birds. This includes in a captive situation and observation through his workplace at the [Centennial Parklands](#) where he has had experience looking after birds, rescuing birds and helping to provide appropriate habitats for birds.



Wayne Rutherford

Paul how long have you been keeping a variety of different birds and been involved with aviculture?

Paul Solomon

I started breeding birds when I was 13 years old. I had a [Cockatiel](#) given to me for my birthday. Our postman heard some shrieking coming from our house and he came in to see what was happening. My sister had accidentally stepped on the Cockatiel and broken its leg and some of its tail feathers had come out. He was an aviculturist so he put a splint on the Cockatiel's leg and he got me interested in birds. He found me an aviary and invited me along to a bird club in Canberra and ever since then I have been involved with birds. I still have that Cockatiel today as a pet. He is 27 years old.

I originally started by keeping finches and living in a cold climate like Canberra, finches can be very touchy. They get a lot of frost in Canberra so when I first started I bred a few finches but a lot would drop off the perch. I thought that I would like something a lot hardier so I started off with a pair of [Bourke's parrots](#) and a pair of Scarlets. I managed to breed them in my first year of keeping parrots and ever since then they have always been close to my heart and I have always kept a pair of Scarlets.

Wayne Rutherford

So you bred Neophemas successfully down in Canberra?

Paul Solomon

Yes. Aviaries in Canberra are fully enclosed, fully roofed and on the sides, fully covered. In the winter we used to have [Perspex](#) that we put on the front of the aviaries just to keep them warm.

Wayne Rutherford

So you modified the aviaries so that you provided them with a suitable environment?

Paul Solomon

On the roof we would also have a double layer of shade cloth on a frame on the top of the aviaries so that when we got the frosts they wouldn't get cold. In the summer when it gets to 40° the birds don't overheat as well.

I started off with conventional aviaries but in the last five years I have changed my thinking and I now have a couple of banks of suspended aviaries that I breed my Scarlets in.

Wayne Rutherford

Is this in Sydney?

Paul Solomon

Yes. I live in Sydney now and have done for about the last 16 years.



Wayne Rutherford

Where did you obtain your birds from? Did you get them from dealers, breeders, or where did you get them from?

Paul Solomon

Always from people in the Society. I have never had any really fancy mutations until the last few years and now I am just starting to branch out into the different mutations like the Fallow and the Pastel Scarlets. Before that I have always kept the normals, Red-fronted and White-fronted Blue Scarlets.

Wayne Rutherford

What are the dimensions of your aviaries and cages at the moment?

Paul Solomon

At the moment the aviaries that I have most of my Scarlets in are about 150cm long x 700cm x 700cm.



I find that the suspended aviaries are better for keeping the Scarlets in because they are a desert bird and they like to sit on the ground but because I live in a wet climate they are pretty susceptible to getting worms. The suspended aviaries are easier to manage and to clean the cages.



I find with Scarlets that they are a beautiful bird but they are very temperamental and if they get disturbed at night (and I have a lot of possums), if they have a longer flight they just tend to smash themselves into the back of the flight. So having them in a smaller cage they don't get enough speed up to crash into the back wall. However I have lost a couple of birds in the last few months through possums running across the top of the cages during the night.

Wayne Rutherford

Have you tried any methods to overcome this problem with the possums?

Paul Solomon

I have cut trees and I have tried CDs and bird scarers and I tried pepper and salts and all different things but where I live there are possum nests that surround my house so it is pretty hard to deal with it.

Wayne Rutherford

Are they Brush-tails or Ring-tail possums?

Paul Solomon

Mainly Ring-tails. That is one of the things that I have to contend with at the moment. Last year I was successful in breeding Scarlets. I had about five pairs and I bred about 40 Scarlets. However, just in the last month I have lost five Scarlets and they're all from different pairs and all from these possums running across the roof. Because the Scarlets have a very thin skull when they crash into a wall or something like that they do a lot of damage and they get concussed and they die. I lost four due to that and I also lost one due to a mega bacteria. I kept it alive for the past few months on fungicides and things like that.

Wayne Rutherford

Do you take them to an avian vet?

Paul Solomon

Yes I do and I examine them myself. I cut them open to see if it was worms or things like that. The thing with Scarlets is that they are a very touchy bird. People say that they are good for a beginner but they will curl their toes up if you don't keep on top of your worms' programme, if you are lazy in terms of feeding them. Stuff like mega bacteria happens because a bit of seed gets into the water, the bacteria grows and then they ingest the bacteria in their gut and you start to see them losing weight. If you go in there and you see them running along the floor because they have lost the ability to fly you think, I will put them in a hospital cage to keep them warm; but it takes month to get them right. If you do get them early enough you can save them but with a lot of them you tend to lose them.

Wayne Rutherford

What kind of hospital cage do you have?

Paul Solomon

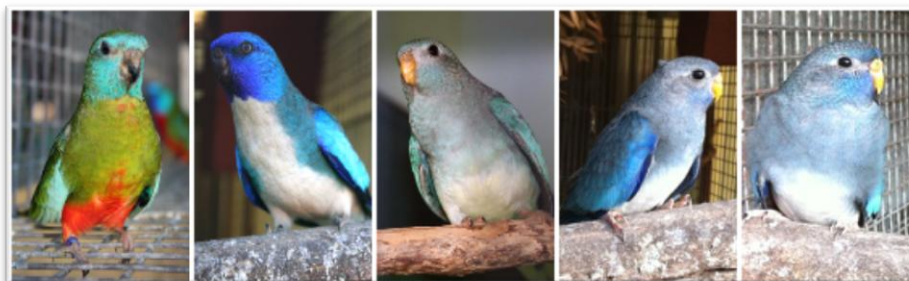
I have a cabinet with two lights underneath and a thermometer and it has Perspex on the front. I usually keep it around 30° and they can move away from the light if it is too hot.

Wayne Rutherford

With the genetics do you source birds from other breeders to ensure genetic diversity?

Paul Solomon

Yes, coming from Canberra it took me a while to find out different Scarlet breeders but I try to make sure that my genetic diversity is quite big so I only pair birds up that I know which breeder has which bird and how he got his birds, etc. With the Red-fronted mutation there is quite a big genetic diversity now but with things like Pastels and Fallows, I only know a few breeds who keep them so in terms of genetic diversity it is pretty limited with those mutations at the moment.



Wayne Rutherford

You mentioned before that you keep the normal Scarlets too don't you?

Paul Solomon

Yes, I try to. To be honest the normal Scarlet-chested parrots are probably the most beautiful and striking. If I have visitors in my backyard who are not really "birdie" people, the first bird they look at is the normal Scarlet and they'll say... oh wow, what a beautiful bird... because it is not a common looking bird. Then they will look at the White-fronted blues and they'll say... oh that's pretty... and then they will look at the pastels and they'll say... that's not bad. To me Scarlets have always been appealing to me for their vibrant colours especially the cock bird. I suppose from the visual effect as a painter I relate to those brightly coloured birds.



Wayne Rutherford

Does the Parks and Wildlife Service require you to have a licence to keep Scarlet-chested parrots?

Paul Solomon

No. At the present time in NSW you don't require a licence to keep them; they are fairly common in aviaries. However if you keep Turks (Turquoise parrots) you need a licence but not with Scarlets or Elegants.

Wayne Rutherford

What does the diet them mainly consist of?

Paul Solomon

Basically I feed them a small parrot mix which is a budgie (Budgerigar) mix with a bit of sunflower thrown in.

- I also feed them fruit and vegetables so that might be celery, carrots, apples, endives, or whatever is in season.
- I [sprout seeds](#) every day to give them during the breeding season and in the off season I will give it to them two to three times a week.



Just in the period before the winter solstice say for maybe a month or two (so from about now to the middle of June) I'll just feed them on a fruit and veggie diet. Then probably in the next two to three weeks I'll will start introducing the sprouted seed again which is usually from about the middle to the end of August when they will want to start going down and laying again.

Wayne Rutherford

What is the length of their breeding season?

Paul Solomon

You can breed them from any time in August through until about April. Last year I had three pairs triple clutch and another two pairs that double clutched but from my experience last year I would stop them at two clutches. The third round of birds were pretty small and the parents get tired especially the hen bird. So I think that once you've bred maybe eight birds from a pair of Scarlets you should give the hen bird a rest. The cock birds on the other hand, you could introduce another hen and if she breeds and lays you may be lucky. However probably two clutches out of pair is enough.

I find that they can lay from between 3-6 eggs or more commonly 4-5 eggs, and usually the runt of the litter doesn't survive.

Wayne Rutherford

Do you try and foster them or hand rear them?

Paul Solomon

No. They are pretty small and I don't really have a lot of time to foster them or hand feed them. I usually find that parents will try to feed them but they don't survive.

Wayne Rutherford

Do you give them any mineral supplements?

Paul Solomon

I sprinkle calcium on the sprouted seed during the breeding season when they have got young. I also give them shell grit and [Cuttlebone](#) and also some charcoal.

Another thing that I feed them is the Salt bush, the plant that I brought in tonight as "bird" plant of the month. They like that as well.



Wayne Rutherford

Do you have any external vegetation around your cages in relation to changes in light conditions for your birds? You mentioned before that you had to cut it back because of the possums.

Paul Solomon

Yes, that's interesting because the Fallow Scarlets are a red eyed bird and I also used to keep the Pink Bourke parrots. They like a darker aviary so in my suspended aviaries they are half way to three quarters solid walls on both sides and the middle cages tend to be darker and have my Scarlets in them. The black eyed birds are normally in the lighter and brighter aviaries. Scarlets don't like damp and they don't like wind so you have got to keep the aviaries draft free and fully roofed. They are very susceptible to cold and change and so all of the front of my aviaries are facing northeast towards the house and they don't really get any wind going through the aviary. They get the first sun in the morning and I try to have them so they get maximum sun during the day.

Wayne Rutherford

When is their moulting period?

Paul Solomon

They moult around April or May before it gets cold and then I am not too sure, I can't remember off hand.

Wayne Rutherford

What type of nesting boxes do you use for them and what type of substrate?

Paul Solomon

A lot of what I use is ply board and in terms of diameter they are 15cm x 15cm by about 30cm high and I use them both vertical and as a 45° angle box.

What I have found with the Scarlets is that as soon as I know they are going to hatch young ones I won't open the box until I know they are about a week or two old. When the hen has got eggs it is usually okay but when she's got young, especially in the first three or four days, if I open the box she will tread on them and with the shock she will spread them all over the bottom of the box. They are very fragile when they are young and disturbing them may result in one being deformed or one might die. I have found that if I am patient and let the hen do her job, after about a week to a week and a half when they grown and they have started to open their eyes, that is when they are stronger and then you can check them. You can usually hear them feeding in the morning and when you put the food out you can see them come straight away and get it. So I find that if you disturb them when they have young in the nest you may end up losing one or two.



Wayne Rutherford

How long is the incubation period and is the incubation done by the female or is it shared between the partners?

Paul Solomon

The female sits on the nest and the male will come and feed her and she usually stays in there for the first two to three weeks and then she will start come out and feeding the young.

Wayne Rutherford

In that three week period does she leave the nest at all or not?

Paul Solomon

Yes, usually first thing in the morning and late afternoon otherwise she is in there most of the day until the young start getting their pin feathers and she will start coming out a bit more.

Wayne Rutherford

How long is the incubation time to the time they start fledging?

Paul Solomon

The hen incubates for about 18-21 days give or take a few days. Sometimes the weather can influence that a little. Then I think it is about 6-7 weeks before they fledge.

When the young Scarlets first leave the nest they are very poor flyers. Having them in a suspended cage is good because it keeps them off the ground. If you've got them in a conventional aviary and if you have got damp floors, etc., you can lose them quite easily. It probably takes from 2-3 days before they get okay at flying, but if you've got them in a conventional aviary and you walk inside and you can every easily startle them. As I as before they have got very soft skulls so if they do hit the wire they will do themselves damage quite easily. They have very short tails and it probably takes about a week and a half before they become strong flyers.



What I have found is that about two and half to three weeks after the young fledge the cock bird wants to put the hen down again and he will start getting aggressive towards one or two of the chicks, usually the young cock birds. I remove the young two and half to three weeks after they fledge and they are able to crack seed on their own. I put them in a holding aviary and the hen will go down again in a couple of weeks after that.

Wayne Rutherford

In that time period when she is ready to go down again and you have got the cock bird there do you increase the supplements for her?

Paul Solomon

Yes, when I sprouted seed every day and I put the calcium in usually 2-3 times per week and that usually builds her up a little bit again.

Wayne Rutherford

Do you band the birds in the box?

Paul Solomon

No, I usually do it afterwards. With the Ringnecks, etc., I place bands on them but with the Scarlets because they are so small and fragile and I don't want to lose them or damage any part of their body I just put slip bands on them at the end.



Wayne Rutherford

What is the most common signs to look for with Scarlets when a bird is unwell and what do you do?

Paul Solomon

If you see a fluffed up Scarlet no matter where it is you put it straight in the hospital cage. Scarlets are usually bouncing around the aviary looking pretty fresh and vibrant so if you see a Scarlet with its beak tucked into its back that is a sign that they are not well. Another sign is that they get what I call an almond shaped eye because its an almond shape and they get water in the eyes and that is another sign that they are not well. Also if you see a Scarlet eating all the time and it just keeps on eating and eating it could be a sign that it is going light. You need to catch it up and feel its keel bone and if there's no meat on it you know you have got problems, it could be that it has worms or it might lead to something else.

Wayne Rutherford

Do you do your own microscope work or not?

Paul Solomon

I have a go at it but I am not an expert.

It is one of those things. If a bird dies I want to know what is wrong with it and so I will cut it open and try and look for worms. I will try and work out what's wrong with it and the more you look at a bird when it dies you gain some indication as to what has happened. If the bird has hit the wall you can often see the bruising on its head if you pull some feathers out. It is just getting a little bit more experience every time you lose a bird. It is just one of those things, they are a very fragile bird and you might breed a lot of them but you might also lose a few which is heartbreaking but it is also expedient in trying to improve that.

Wayne Rutherford

What do you do with your surplus birds after the breeding season?

Paul Solomon

Last breeding season I sold a lot of my birds that I bred and it paid for the new aviaries that I have put in but it was kind of a mistake, because having lost a few birds and then selling my first round birds, you lose your good stock that you can breed from. Scarlets can breed from a year old but probably better at 18 months to two years. This coming season I will probably keep a lot of my first round birds and sell my second round birds.

Wayne Rutherford

Well I think that is a pretty comprehensive view of Scarlet-chested parrots and I would like to thank you Paul and appreciate your time and effort and also your knowledge and skills. Also thank you for being a member of the ASNSW and passing that information onto the members. I have noticed that Paul is always here at the meetings and has spoken to a lot of people on a lot of occasions and helped them out. On behalf of the Society I would like to thank you Paul for your talk here tonight.

See also [*"Bird Art and Aviculture" by Paul Solomon.*](#)

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