



Parrots: Perspectives and Solutions from Aviculture and Field Conservation.

Welcome!

We thank you for joining us. The approach for this conference is somewhat different from those hosted previously. It has been several years since IAS hosted a Convention. The economy has reduced the average aviculturist's disposable income to fund research and conservation projects. The results of 911 and the pending potential Gulf War have severely hampered international travel. It has been a difficult time for charitable organizations. Avian research and conservation projects are no exception.

Previously there has been an emphasis on avian breeding and reproduction; now, we are faced with a perception (and probable reality) of increased behavioral problems resulting in unwanted parrots in rescue situations. Unquestionably incubation and hand rearing techniques, under the right conditions, are very useful and necessary for propagating and increasing the numbers of endangered species in captivity. Unfortunately, though difficult to document, the mass production of hand reared birds in the absence of proper socialization, fledging, and other avian behaviors has probably adversely affected the desirability of such birds. We need to be doing it better such that the ultimate companion bird owner has a long term positive experience, both for the owner and his avian charges.

We need to work together to ensure genetically diverse, self-sustaining, captive populations are maintained for future generations. This will involve the "good old boy" network, keeping records and exchanging offspring in a coordinated fashion. Unfortunately, it appears that many successful breeders in the USA are of advanced age, and the future aviculturist population is threatened, if not endangered. We have done poorly with recruitment of young aviculturists and need to improve our efforts. School programs, mentoring, special projects, etc. have been considered.

Avian Research has progressed and we now have a variety of diagnostic studies and vaccines available to help with our avian husbandry and disease prevention. University avian research is often funded by aviculture. There is little industry to supply grants to universities in contrast to the livestock, poultry, and even tropical fish industries. Research programs have intermittently been put in hibernation pending funding for basic supplies. Aviculture has received many tangible results from support of some research programs. In spite of this, schools and nursing homes are afraid of the liability of housing a bird in their facility. West Nile virus appeared in



the New World. There is currently an Exotic Newcastle Disease outbreak in California. There is much to be done.

Politics, egos, and personal agendas continue to hurt aviculture. Mudslinging continues in the popular press. Imagine what could be accomplished if it was a perfect world and all the parties could work together. Unfortunately the disagreement between parties and subsequent negative press hurts all. It reflects negatively on the whole industry. The avian food manufacturer, the pet supplier, the companion bird owner, the breeder, the researcher and the conservation biologist are all adversely affected, either directly or indirectly.

Security concerns are becoming an ever increasing problem. It is paradoxical that we have difficulty in finding homes for unwanted parrots, yet parrot theft is a major concern. We are told in excess of 100 parrot thefts have occurred yearly in this state alone. Rarely are birds recovered. Breeders are afraid to participate in public breeding programs as locations or other identifying data are published in studbooks, and the ISIS database. The public is usually not allowed to visit and learn from breeders in their homes. Aviculturists are increasingly reluctant to give lectures. Security concerns have helped propagate closed aviaries.

Conservation efforts and opportunities abound. Unfortunately many of these efforts do little for the long term survival of parrots and their habit. Although there are exceptions to every generalization, funds used to sponsor research by graduate students from the US or Europe frequently do not help avian species long term. These students usually have an exit strategy (graduation and job), without long term community involvement in the species country of origin. Organizations compete for the companion bird caretaker's dollar. Frequently funds donated to charities are utilized for salaries and overhead with only a percentage of dollars going to projects, particularly those carried out by employees or directors of the nonprofit. We can probably agree all conservation research is of at least some benefit but we would like to get the greatest value for our dollars. The most successful conservation programs virtually all seem to include long term community involvement by local people. A community education component seems to be essential. Ecotourism may be a fundraising component. Parrots are a charismatic flagship species for protecting an environment.

It may well be the time of a fund raising convention benefiting Avian Research and Conservation is past. At present, it is not time and cost effective to convene all of this expert talent for the sole benefit of the relatively few who can afford to attend the convention. We must have some multiplier effect to benefit the birds both in captivity and in the wild. Accordingly, these presentations and the audience will function as a working group to address some of the avian needs. We have experts from many backgrounds donating their time and energy in addition to a dedicated audience of companion bird owners and breeders. Let's work together to forge resolution to some of the issues. It is anticipated the material and discussion from this conference will form the basis for a low cost publication (university press) available



to the bird loving public. We hope this publication will serve as a vehicle to reach a much wider audience than possible from attending the physical convention

What topics should be included in the presentations for a meeting such as this, given the obvious time and financial restraints?

Previous feedback has indicated a desire for information on husbandry and reproduction of parrots in captivity. In this regard we have asked successful breeders to discuss what works for them and their individual philosophies. Security concerns prevent others from sharing their knowledge.

Specific information on aspects of husbandry such as incubation and pediatrics is desired as well as information on avoiding disease.

Meeting nutritional needs is a vital component of husbandry.

Avian research updates, including diagnostic testing and preventative measures are fundamental components of educational conferences.

The preceding topics cover much of the basic knowledge needs of the companion bird owner or breeder. It is something of an understatement to say additional information needs to be conveyed.

Additional subject matter might include the some of the following parrot related information:

Field research, status and conservation efforts in the country of origin.

Traffic and trade – Historical and Current – Within the country of origin and for export. This might also include regulation and policies (USA – CITES & WBCA, Europe, Asia, Indonesia, Africa, Australia, South America, Central America, etc.).

Reintroduction and Translocation Efforts

Captive Populations and Management Issues

(USA, European, Brazilian, and International?)

Paradigm events in captive breeding

Birds of the World

Minimal breeding Amazons thru 1980

Sexual determination methods

Fecal steroid analysis



Surgical laparoscopy with otoscope or laparoscope / anesthesia

Karotyping

PCR/DNA technologies

Incubation and hand feeding techniques / mass production

Disease

Surplus, unwanted, disposable parrots

Cooperative Breeding Programs - Success and failure –Zoological Institutions and Private Programs

Space allocations and priorities

Problems & solutions

Breeding success?

Historical Problems:

Apathy

Standards (lack thereof)

Identification

Records at transfer

Management

Record keeping

Continuity of programs

Population Management

Sparks

PM 2000

Training courses

Satellite PCR technology

Ethics, Welfare, Rescue and Sanctuary Issues

Entire conferences have been devoted to these important issues. With limited time, and because these issues have been explored in depth at yearly conferences for the past three years, we will focus much of our attentions elsewhere.

USA Bird Distribution System and Responsibilities

Breeders (Private and many commercial)

Standards and obligations

Lack of contact with ultimate owner for many reasons:

Security concerns, time, airline transport costs (and unavailability)



No visitor policy necessity due to

Disease concerns

Security concerns

Lack of contact, mentoring, and hands on education of potential buyers

Internet and phone sales poor substitute

Necessity of sale to distributors

Unweaned from nest box

Cost effective

Usually birds assembly line produced

Poorly socialized unfledged product

Permitting difficulties and delays

Not able to timely or cost effectively place endangered species with other breeders. Not able to ship across state lines. Result: Endangered species such as Golden Conures (*Aratinga guarouba*) are sold in local pet stores.

Hand feeder Distributors

Cost efficient mass production and distribution for “super pet store” market

Avoid airline expense and unavailability

Pickup from breeder backyard

Cost efficient labor in hand feeding and production

Transport throughout country via specialty vans or trailers on a route.

“Setup” birds in “Super store”

“Super store” must have birds in order to sell merchandise and feed.

“Super Store” may require merchandise vendors to supply birds.

Distributors (usually weaned)

Purchase in volume from breeders

Problems with air shipping except in spring and fall.

Supply to individual pet stores

Mass marketers:

Walmart got out of selling parrots due to employee contracting Psittacosis from Mollucan with Psittacosis at a Memphis store. They were afraid of the liability to employees and public.

“Super Stores”



Multiple varied problems

“Smaller Pet Stores”

May contract with local breeders when able, otherwise with distributor.
Most prefer to purchase unweaned birds and feed out, both as a sales tool and for economical considerations.

Problems engendered by the delivery system

Perceptions of Overall Poor product

Mass produced (not necessarily bad)

Unfledged

Poorly socialized

Health?

Suitability?

Behavioral difficulties

Deficits

Education

Responsibility

Resources

Solutions?

Mechanisms for private individuals to provide for their birds at death.

Wills, living trusts

Endowments

Foundations

Mechanisms for providing for care of surplus or unwanted birds:

Private

Institutional

Rescue Organizations

Accreditation?

Minimal Standards

Behavior – Emphasis on preventing or treating those behaviors leading to placement of birds in rescue programs.

Parrot Conservation Organizations

Accountability for the ultimate distribution of funds. Full disclosure: How much and when to each project, how much to overhead, publications, advertising, salaries, travel



expense of directors, etc. What have actually accomplished (includes educational conferences). Not enough to say the funds were sent to xyz foundation in w country but need to show how were actually spent on behalf of birds vs. overhead at multiple steps.

The list goes on. From a practical standpoint, there is way too much to try to cover in a limited time period.

As part of this conference, we invited Kaytee Preferred Birds to give a presentation. They are, in my opinion, one of the largest, if not the largest hand feeding and distribution networks in the USA. Currently they distribute approximately 20,000 birds yearly including approximately 12,000 cockatiels and 6,000 larger parrots. They transfer very young birds from breeders in a very well equipped, environmentally controlled, high tech trailer to a multimillion dollar facility capable of hand feeding up to 6000 birds daily. Birds are ultimately transported and placed in retail establishments throughout the country with which the parent company has contracts. The company CEO declined to allow a presentation to be given. Ross Pittman and Dr. Wilson assure us they will be present and have literature available for those interested. They were listed as speakers in one of the BirdTalk ads before being required to cancel. We regret any inconvenience.

The proceedings are published on CDs in an effort to save a few trees and dollars. They should be available for pickup near the end of the conference.

We very much appreciate our wonderful group of speakers donating their time and talents on behalf of the birds. Please take a moment to express your appreciation to our speakers.

Special thanks are due to the Rolf C. Hagen (USA) Corporation who has pledged an unrestricted \$1000.00 to help offset the expenses of putting together these meetings. Thank you Mark Hagen and Melanie Allen!

We very much appreciate BIRDTALK sponsoring the reception for Exhibitors and Participants on the Tennis Terrace Friday evening. Thank you BIRDTALK!

The Friends of the St. Vincent Amazon Foundation has generously sponsored the travel expenses for three of our speakers from the Caribbean. Again, thank you Ramon Noegel and Greg Moss!

We appreciate our exhibitor support. Thank you!

Without the help of our many volunteers, this conference could not have taken place. Melanie Allen, Mark Lowery, Lisa McKinney, and Cynthia Webb have dedicated many hours preparing



for this conference. Again, thank you!

I very much appreciate the patience and support of my wife, Luanne.

Thank you for attendance, your contributions, and please enjoy the conference!

Richard Porter