

# OPINIONS

## Lima on caiques...

Dear Editors,

I am writing you to clarify information published in the March/April 1996 issue of the *AFA Watchbird*. The information is contained in Fran Gonzalez's article on caiques.

Within a week of the *Watchbird's* mailing, I have received a dozen or so calls from alarmed caique breeders and pet owners looking for clarification on the following items:

1.) In the article, a reference is made to the effect that caiques have a reputation for being "carriers" of the Polyomavirus. All recent medical research points to the fact that caiques are extremely sensitive to the Polyomavirus and will normally display all the clinical symptoms associated with the virus and usually succumb to the virus. This applies to babies and adults alike, which indicates how sensitive caiques are to the virus.

On the other hand, birds that are said to be "carriers" of a virus covertly harbor the disease and expose the virus to other birds. These "carrier" birds will normally live out their natural life span without ever being symptomatic.

In summation, caiques are extremely sensitive to any Polyomavirus exposure and are not considered a "carrier" type species.

2.) In reference to surgically sexing caiques, the article stated that caiques are delicate to this procedure and heavy losses have occurred after sexing.

In the past, my veterinarian, Dr. Max Weiss of Tarzana, California, has surgically sexed literally hundreds of caiques for me, both baby and adult, and I have never experienced any complications or deaths due to the sexing procedure. I feel that the veterinarian's level of skill is very important in performing this procedure. With this taken into consideration, I do not feel

that caiques are any more prone to problems during a surgical sexing than any other psittacine.

One of the phone calls I received was from a frantic breeder who was afraid that her caiques could get the Polyomavirus from being surgically sexed. The article made mention that after surgically sexing 10 caiques, eight became ill with the papovavirus (now better known as Polyomavirus) and died. It should be made clear that the virus was probably brought out by the stress involved in the sexing and not *caused* by the sexing. The source of the virus was either by exposure prior to the sexing or even by the environment at the time of the sexing.

In no way does the surgical sexing procedure cause the Polyomavirus.

3.) The article stated that the *P. l. xanthomeria*, the Yellow-thighed White-bellied Caique, is often called the Lime-thighed Caique. I believe the author was trying to explain that the breeding of the Green-thighed White-bellied with the Yellow-thighed White-bellied created a hybrid known as the Lime-thighed Caique. This cross breeding occurred in this country in the late 1960's and into the '70's due to a shortage of Green-thigheds. The Lime-thighed Caique is certainly a hybrid between subspecies and not a true subspecies itself.

Hopefully, this cross breeding will no longer occur, as we need to maintain the purity of the bloodlines remaining in captivity.

The above information is presented for clarification and is in no way intended to diminish the experience Ms. Gonzalez has had with her caiques. We maintain a friendly working relationship and plan to continue it.

Respectfully,  
Ralph Lima, Woodland Hills, CA

## Gonzalez on caiques...

Dear Editors

I would like to respond to Ralph Lima's comments regarding my article on caiques published in the March/April 1996 issue of the *AFA Watchbird*. I would like to point out that all of the information contained in my article comes strictly from my own observation and personal experiences with my own birds and in my own aviaries. Other breeders' experiences may differ.

I have always been interested in caiques and was first introduced to these delightful birds in 1987. At that time I was warned by fellow breeders that these birds had a reputation for being carriers of Polyomavirus (earlier called papovavirus). That was my experience then and I did not mean to imply that all caiques are carriers of Polyomavirus. I hope my statements in the article didn't cause undue confusion.

For clarification, the article's fourth paragraph should read "Many U.S. breeders have been unable to find Green-thighed Caiques to mate with single birds and have paired these birds with *P.l. xanthomeria*. The resulting hybrid has been called the Lime-thighed Caique."

I am always eager to learn the latest information about caiques and am pleased that your readers have been blessed with so much information in the recent issues of *Watchbird*. I have always believed that bird breeding is filled with so many opportunities for those who wish to partake in the hobby. I think it's great that we can all share our views, opinions and formulas for success in order to enlighten others.

Sincerely,  
Fran Gonzalez, Cypress, CA

## Shame on you, Dingle...

Dear Mr. Dingle:

1.) Shame on you! For shame! Printing that article of Rosemary Low's wherein she uses her tired old phrases bashing U.S. bird breeders ("Aviculture at the Crossroads" *AFA Watchbird*, May/June 1996). Shame on you and the AFA for promoting as speakers at your conventions Ms. Low and her compatriot John Stoodley who makes it a practice to bash U.S. bird breeders. And you wonder why membership in the AFA doesn't grow much beyond your current number of subscribers (and how many of those are of the zoological and conservation communities and don't even own birds) and why you actually may lose membership. I am personally proud to be an American and don't like articles or speeches that make derogatory comments about "U.S. practices" as if Ms. Low and her compatriots never sold a bird or engaged in other practices they seem to feel are contained exclusively in the U.S.

2.) I suppose that under a socialistic government, such as the British have, only a few elitists can presume to have funds to engage in the hobby of breeding birds and perhaps it riles these same people that the U.S.'s currently freer form of government allows more "common" people to enter the exclusivity of their avicultural community.

3.) You once commented on an article that I wrote promoting the commercialization of domestically bred parrots by saying that others, such as those who breed finches, pheasants, hummingbirds, toucans, doves and quail are not doing it for a profit. Well, first of all, let me make it clear that I do not make a profit either and neither do most breeders I know. We make enough (sometimes) to cover the expenses involved in housing and caring for our livestock. Secondly, the breeders of most of the birds you mentioned do SELL babies for the same reasons I do. The only difference between us is that the market for their product is limited. It's hard to convince your landlord to let you have a pheasant or a quail.

4.) How can we defend ourselves

against animal rights activists and radical conservationists whose positions are that we have no right to keep these birds in captivity when we are constantly bombarded with articles in the AFA's official publication that subliminally reinforce these same positions? The AFA can no longer straddle the fence. If the AFA represents conservation/preservation then those who wish to be associated with such an organization must be willing to accept all the rules, regulations and any other consequences of such a position and they MUST NOT SELL THEIR BABY BIRDS. Selling birds is not conservation. Conservation is what is done at Loro Parque and other such places. There is a big difference between that and the domestic market served by most bird breeders in America. One does not breed pets for conservation purposes!

5.) The AFA cannot cater to the conservation community and still pretend to represent those breeding for the domestic pet market. If the AFA wishes to represent those keeping DOMESTIC livestock for pet breeding purposes, then it must accept ALL positions taken by breeders of these domestic pet birds. It would behoove the AFA to publicly clarify just what type of organization they are, i.e., strictly conservation, or does it truly represent the rights and freedoms of ALL bird breeders, including those catering to the commercial market. Does it consider our birds to be domestic and therefore free from restrictive laws or does it consider itself to be preservation and conservation oriented and subject to regulations imposed by the conservation community?

6.) When you straddle the fence you cannot effectively represent either group on a legislative level. The AFA, in its current stand, does NOT represent the majority of bird breeders in America and it is time to let the lawmakers in America and internationally understand that. The future of anyone's ability to keep birds as pets depends on a complete divorce from conservation issues and the realization that the birds we have are OURS, not some God-given trust from the wild.

7.) Perhaps the AFA should move its offices to Europe and change its name to Avian Conservation Authority and let an organization more interested in the potentials of the domestic pet bird

market represent our interests where laws are concerned.

Regards

*Pat Heere, Monmouth, OR*

## Shameless Dingle!

My Dear Mrs. Heere:

"**AVICULTURE:** The keeping and breeding of birds, especially wild birds kept in captivity." *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*

"**FEDERATION:** The union of various organizations." *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*

I was very pleased to receive your letter and will happily discuss it point by point. And we can have a lively conversation just as friends would over coffee.

In paragraph 1, you cry shame merely because you don't like something we published. But there is no shame in printing articles by Low or Stoodley. Please, don't try the old shame trick just because we printed something you don't like. Some folks won't like *your* letter, but we printed it.

But I don't believe the Low article is what's bothering you. You skip right over that and hammer the AFA itself. As we deal with some points in your letter, perhaps we can clarify some things about the AFA and cheer you up.

But first let's get your strange statement about AFA membership out of the way. In our conversations regarding your above letter, you acknowledged that your information on AFA's number of members is based upon hearsay and secondhand information. Alas, it proved to be incomplete and erroneous. Hearsay information is best left unreported.

Regarding the AFA numbers, please read the above definition of "Federation." The AFA is a federation of approximately 150 bird clubs and organization each representing from 50 to 500 or more individuals. The number of clubs in the federation fluctuates but has shown a rise over the years and will, I predict, rise dramatically in the near future. The AFA has been chosen by tens of thousands of members of these clubs to serve as their chief vehicle of education on all things avicultural. There *is* no one else.

And if you check the names of the

member organizations (pages 6-7) you'll see that they are clubs comprised of just such bird breeders as you are—folks raising a few birds and selling some to support the hobby or business. And the AFA has thousands of individual members also, who are not necessarily affiliated with any club.

How many hard core conservation or animal rights organizations do you find listed? None.

And now let's examine the definition of "Aviculture." Webster says, "Keepers and breeders of birds, especially wild birds in captivity." This absolutely includes those zoological members of the AFA whose very profession is precisely the keeping and breeding of birds. How does their keeping and breeding birds differ from yours? Why do you disparage them? They make a living taking care of birds—just as the commercial breeders do. And even the zoos have to buy, sell or trade a certain number of animals. Nor do the zookeepers eat their surplus stock. They sell them, albeit not usually in pet stores. Who'd buy a pet stork or kingfisher anyway?

Don't be so sensitive about the buying and selling of birds. It is perfectly legal and honorable when done within legitimate guidelines.

In paragraph 3, you touch on making a profit or perhaps not. I'm not sure what the point is. Some folks keep weird birds just because they like weird birds, often with no thought of selling them. It's a hobby they spend a little money on. That's OK. They are still aviculturists in the fullest sense.

Others raise birds as commercial commodities to supply the pet or other markets and have to make a profit to stay in business. That's OK too. They are producing wonderful pets for the folks who want pets. And if they are astute in business they may get rich. More power to them. I am sorry to learn that you are not making a profit at Avian Acres. Those who raise birds for the pet market can be aviculturists of the finest sort.

Now in paragraph 4, I have to take issue with you on several points. First, I don't believe in subliminal messages in print.

Webster's definitions of subliminal are "1: inadequate to produce a sensation or a perception. 2: existing or functioning below the threshold of

conscious awareness."

If one fails to perceive printed words on the page, there is no message. Period.

Likewise, if the printed word fails to register on one's conscious awareness, one is, perforce, unaware of the message. (I have had some students in this category). After all, this is the printed word that you can study letter by letter for as long as it takes to get the meaning. If *you* are getting messages that are not plainly visible, then I am a little worried.

Still in paragraph 4, you say the American Federation of Aviculture cannot straddle the fence. What fence?

Recall the meaning of "Federation." It is "**a union of various organizations.**" The AFA supports the advancement of aviculture (note the mission statement on the top of page 6) and ALL of the varying organizations that are involved in aviculture.

If some of the organizations advocate keeping birds with conservation or preservation in mind, that's OK. Think of the fine avicultural work the Peregrine Foundation did to restore that wonderful bird to some of its old habitats. And think of the excellent avicultural work being done with the California Condor. Are not these worthy efforts? And are they not aviculture?

The AFA's umbrella is wide.

And the commercial bird farms and backyard breeders are under its shelter also. Providing pet birds for the market is a very worthy avicultural endeavor. Where else would the loving pet birds come from?

I am not sure why you feel these various aspects of aviculture are mutually exclusive. There are falconers, canary breeders, pigeon fanciers, pet owners, condor and crane breeders, waterfowl and pheasant fanciers, Ostrich and Emu breeders—the list is endless—all qualified as aviculturists and all falling within the bounds of the AFA's concern.

Whatever affects one group also has a ripple effect on all the others. I fail to see how you can divorce the commercial pet parrot breeders from the rest of aviculture.

Paragraph 5, is rather redundant but let me further clarify for you the AFA's mission. The AFA PROMOTES THE ADVANCEMENT OF AVICULTURE. What is so hard to understand about

that? Again, if an avicultural group focuses on preserving certain birds, OK. We represent it. We hope to advance it. If an avicultural group focuses on raising pet parrots, OK. We represent it. We hope to advance it too.

I'm not sure why you confuse the AFA with a conservation organization. Some of our members support avian conservation through various aspects of aviculture—and some don't. But the AFA is an *avicultural* organization.

To answer your question "...*does it [the AFA] truly represent the rights and freedoms of ALL bird breeders, including those catering to the commercial market?*" The answer is a plain, simple YES. And no one else is doing it.

Your next question, "*Does it [the AFA] consider our birds to be domestic and therefore free from restrictive laws or does it consider itself to be preservation and conservation oriented and subject to regulations imposed by the conservation community?*"

I can't believe you asked that. I've already answered the "conservation/preservation" issue. But do you seriously believe that if *you* declare that your macaws are domestic it will free them from the laws of the land? If it were that easy, let's declare ourselves free from income taxes—and head for a cabin on Ruby Ridge (bring your birds).

My dear young woman, the laws are not imposed by the conservation community. They are enacted by the legislators we elect on the local, State and Federal levels.

There are many groups that try to influence what laws get on the books, but that is how our system works. For 23 years, the AFA has been the *only* organization that has made a constant effort to educate our lawmakers regarding what aviculture *really* is and what would best enhance it—in all of its aspects. No one has fought harder or longer to educate the lawmakers and animal rights folks about *your* rights as an aviculturist.

And God forbid your birds be deemed domestic. That would throw them under the multitude of federal, state and local animal welfare laws that that would make you pray for the good old days. Do you really want the local chicken inspector bugging you?

S.L.Dingle, Alhambra, CA ➔