

# OPINIONS

Sheldon Dingle, Managing Editor  
AFA Watchbird  
20 August 1996

Dear Sheldon,

I have to agree with your reply to Pat Heere in the Opinion section of the July/August Watchbird (pages 55-56). However, I would like to add a couple of points:

I have been involved in aviculture since 1978, both public (zoos and state game farms) and private. In all cases, there is an economic value to the birds we breed, and to say, as Ms Heere does, that conservation relies on NOT selling birds misses a very important point. Simply stated, if there is no economic value, or the value is too low, the birds will not be bred. I am not talking about profit; that's an entirely different bag of mealworms.

Public institutions like zoos and not for profit foundations (e.g. International Crane Foundation) must breed birds for three reasons. One is to provide "a show for the public," the second is to replace their own stock, and the third is to provide surplus for SALE, TRADE, DONATION or RELEASE. If there is no market for the surplus, whether or not money changes hands, the birds will not be bred. A case in point is the Red and White Crake (*Laterallus leucopyrrhus*). In the early 1980's these charming little birds were being bred by a number of institutions, and their sale value eventually fell to the point where zoos were trying to give them away. At this point, zoos stopped breeding them: their economic value was too low, and apparently there were no homes for the offspring. Currently, if there were any crakes available, my guess is that they would cost over \$200 apiece. (Please note that even at this price a zoo would not make a profit on crakes, especially considering labor costs, exhibit costs and equipment costs. A private aviculturist might do better.) I am not going to get into a private vs public aviculturist argument

here, and whether zoo surplus should go to the private sector; that's best saved for another forum.

In the private sector, also, I firmly believe that if there were no market for selling the birds they would not be bred. One favorite pastime of aviculturists is trying to predict the next "trend" bird to come down the pike. Is it Pionus, or is it caiques? Moluccan vs Umbrella Cockatoos? Military Macaws are currently out of favor; how many are being produced, vs the number of eggs laid? When the price for African Greys gets too low, people will stop producing them. If the price remains too low only those few people who kept their breeders (without breeding them while waiting out the slump) will have any breeding stock at all. If the slump continues for too long, there will not be any breeders left; they'd all be too old, and the species will die out in American Aviculture. This is precisely what happened to the crakes (which, incidentally have a much shorter lifespan than African Greys).

Conservation is an economic activity. By breeding birds, either for the pet trade as a private aviculturist or for exhibit or release as with zoos, we insure that we will have birds for the future. By maintaining economic activity we insure that the animals have value.

Maybe we don't make a profit, maybe we don't even break even, but the value of a bird is much more than its dollar cost. In a time when restrictive laws are being enacted daily it is imperative to see that our ability to contribute to bird conservation continues by keeping, breeding, buying and selling birds.

By the way, Ms Heere: I certainly don't consider American aviculture "exclusive." Anybody with \$25 can invest in a pair of Zebra Finches, a nestbox, a cage and food. For most of us, that's all it took.

Sincerely,  
Paula Strasser  
Temecula, CA ➔

## Awards Presented at the AFA Convention

**1995 Silver Avy Award**  
to **Tamra Lawson**

for  
1995 Show Standards in Cockatiels

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**1995 Watchbird Avy Award**  
to **Laurella Desborough**

for  
"Handfeeding *Eclectus Parrots*"  
Jan/Feb 1995 Watchbird Journal

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**1995 Watchbird Avy Award**  
to **Stash & Carol Anne Buckley**

for  
"Indoor Cage Breeding Basics as  
Applied to the Red-cheeked  
*Cordon-bleu*"  
Jul/Aug 1995 Watchbird Journal

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**1995 U.S. First Breeding Avy Award**  
to **Stash & Carol Anne Buckley**

for the  
Blue-headed Parrot Finch  
*Erythrura tricolor*  
Hatched- 11 April 1993

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**1995 U.S. First Breeding Avy Award**  
to **Tod Fox**

for the  
Cinnamon-headed Green Pigeon  
*Treton fulvicolis*  
Hatched - 26 November 1993

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**1995 U.S. First Breeding Avy Award**  
to **Stash & Carol Anne Buckley**

for the  
Bamboo Parrot Finch  
*Erythrura hyperythra*  
Hatched - 06 April 1990

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**1995 U.S. First Breeding Avy Award**  
to **Robert & Angie Petrie**

for the  
Yellow-throated Hanging Parrot  
*Loriculus pusillus*  
Hatched - 05 May 1995

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