

OPINIONS

Oct. 24, 1996

From the pen of Eb Cravens,
Waiohinu, HI....

"*The Large Macaws*" by Bob Elgas (*Watchbird* Sep/Oct) was informative, thought-provoking and refreshingly written. The statement concerning the Hyacinthine Macaw—"As is true with any rare species, captive-reared offspring should not be sold as pets, but should be placed in appropriate breeding facilities"—however, needs to be considered in a more detailed context.

U.S. aviculture has produced literally hundreds of Hyacinth Macaw babies in recent years. Considering the extended breeding years to which this species is accustomed, it is likely that many more hundreds will be raised in the future.

To expect this many Hyacinths to enter an appropriate breeding facility upon weaning and subsequent sale is unrealistic. Furthermore, a vast majority of these birds have been handfed by human keepers, often from day-one incubator hatching. To thrust these human-imprinted fledglings into a barren, unstimulating breeder cage is both insensitive and invites behavioral problems (ie. depression, overeating, feather plucking, etc.). After all, the average Hyacinth chick has roughly six years to wait before its reproductive urges are in full swing.

So much better it would be to keep a Hyacinth as a pet—completing its natural training, reinforcing its health, security, contentment and need for adolescent excitement and play—while making arrangements to pair the pet with an unrelated mate, preferably prior to full puberty!

In our bird store, we encourage serious pet owners to recognize the inevitable needs of their birds. As such, customers who choose to experience the closeness of owning advanced pet species such as Hyacinths, Hawkheads, Vasas, Capes, Queens, Painteds (and dozens more), are instructed at the time of purchase that they have a responsibility to eventually pair their pets. To be sure, this may take place five, seven, even 10 years in the future.

So many young parrots are now being urged to lay and produce offspring; but in truth, there is NO rush. The further past puberty a captive-raised psittacine is when turned to nest, the more mature and better prepared it should be to successfully complete the reproductive process.

Breeders, bird shops, and all who sell rare parrot species must know that it is in everyone's best interest to seek out and educate customers who are buying the thousands of rare psittacines bred and sold in the U.S. annually. This could effectively transform our pet-owning public into a public of interested and knowledgeable, conservation-aware aviculturists.

Once again, it is not THAT we sell a Hyacinthine Macaw to a pet owner or hobbyist that is the question; it is how we go about it. Getting into the habit of making our every day avicultural decisions FOR THE BIRDS is easily done...

"Mahalo" ebc

Stoodley responds to Heere's letter

I cannot avoid making comment following Mrs. Heere's somewhat unbalanced and critical letter in the July/August edition of the *Watchbird*. It was pleasing to read Sheldon Dingle's response that was relevant in his point by point answer. However, perhaps I might add that I am at a loss to understand Heere's comment about Britain under a socialistic government. Where has the lady been for the last 17 years whilst we have enjoyed a conservative government.

It has been my great pleasure to speak at many AFA conventions, always intending to share knowledge, experiences and what I perceive as a way forward in our pursuit of excellence in housing, breeding and the conservation of avian creatures. In the early 1980s I well remember a convention in Washington D.C. where I talked on incubation and hand rearing and the interest was unbelievable. I made many friends, a number of whom are still in touch today.

It was in New Orleans in 1995 that I felt I must correct the balance and state my reservation about hand rearing everything. When in 1982 I spoke on incubation and hand rearing, I did

not consider that people would crop their birds so intensively or feel that they had the right to adapt species to meet today's pet requirements.

So be it. But those techniques are not for me. Hopefully, with education, that outlook can be changed. Take care. I have long been aware that there are those out there opposed to the keeping of wild creatures in captive situations and we should avoid giving them ammunition to shoot at us.

I do note some positive thoughts in Mrs. Heere's letter. Her mention of what is happening at Loro Parque brings a smile to my face as I think of what an international success it is.

Many years ago my wife and I were invited to Loro Parque and a rewarding friendship followed. Now I have been pleased to accept an invitation to become an advisor to Loro Parque—an invitation accepted because I believe in what is envisaged for the Parque.

The present curator at Loro Parque, Roger Sweeney, shares my belief in parent-reared stock, appreciating that this is the most reliable way to reproduce the character of the birds. I always intended the incubator as a tool to assist, not to make the parent birds obsolete. The dramatic increase in numbers and variety of birds bred under Sweeney's management is proof that parrots can and do make good parents when the husbandry is to their liking. Only about ten percent of the chicks are now assisted.

Obviously, some situations call for the incubator and I was delighted that my work with it helped the very successful Condor Project.

During my recent visit to the Australian Federation of Aviculture's National Convention in Perth, Australia, Graeme Hyde, a highly regarded Australian aviculturist, said in his talk that two paths lie directly before us. We can choose the one marked "avicultural conscience and satisfaction" or the one marked "financial gain and avicultural ruin." The challenge of this message applies to all of us and is very close to my heart. Think about it!

The *Watchbird* continues as a leading avian magazine, having balance between the various aspects of our hobby. ➔