

FLOCK MANAGEMENT...

# An Introduction to Future Flock Health Management

## Part I

M. Scott Echols, DVM

Brian L. Speer, DVM, Dip, ABVP, Certified  
in Avian Practice, Oakley, CA

Over the past decade, aviculture has been experiencing many changes. The significance of the worldwide success in captive propagation of many non-domestic bird species continues to grow in the opinion of an increasing body of people. Although the specific reasons for captive propagation vary immensely between different species and aviculturists, there is, nonetheless, an increase in interest in the breeding of a wide number of birds—and in obtaining success in doing so.

When we consider our concerns about the destruction of native habitats, the declining status of many bird species in the wild and in captivity, the pet trade with its rising interest in low cost but higher quality birds, limited financial resources in both the private and public sector of aviculturists, animal rights issues, etc, we can quickly realize that forward progress and successful goal attainment is becoming increasingly more important in aviculture. The evolution of "bird farming" as an avicultural concept has matured at present time to a point where economic, social and conservational pressures have placed a considerable amount of demand for results on the bird farmers (aviculturists) of today.

### The Concept of Flock Health Management

In this column, you will be introduced to the concept of flock health management, and we intend to help demonstrate to you the importance of utilizing a team approach to aviculture in the future—for the sake of ourselves and our birds.

The most commonly stated "bottom line" goal of aviculture is to produce chicks. The underlying purpose of this production goal may range from successful rearing of an endangered species such as the California Condor

(*Gymnogyps californianus*) to the successful propagation of a common pet species such as the African Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erythacus*) for sale into the pet trade. Another common production goal of aviculture may include the breeding of common caged birds species such as the Zebra Finch (*Taeniopygia guttata*) purely for the enjoyment that successful aviculture can provide an owner.

Since there is such variety in underlying goals of aviculturists, it is easy to see that success does not necessarily come from hatching eggs in many aviaries. We may need to be able to release progeny back into the wild, strengthen the genetic diversity in some species through cooperative breeding efforts, sell hand reared chicks to the pet trade for either fun or profit, or simply obtain enjoyment and satisfaction from the results of our avicultural efforts.

### Team Approach

Realistically, some of these successes would be difficult to consistently obtain for most aviculturists without assistance from others, and this is where a team approach can enter the picture of progressive aviculture. Most of our goals as aviculturists can be more easily attained by properly using a "team approach" rather than isolated individual efforts. The need for success oriented team management is not hard to find in aviculture—it is almost everywhere!

### Initial Flock Review

Initial review of a flock for the purpose of establishing a health management plan often reveals some basic and intrinsic problems within the aviary. For the extent and purposes of this article, the *aviary* is defined as our primary patient, and includes the facility, its management, its owners and operators, and finally, the birds them-

selves. Identified problems or potential problems within the aviary in the initial flock profile are used to help guide an assembled team towards effective goal attainment.

Functional and potential contributory members of an avicultural management team will generally include the aviculturist and an experienced avian veterinarian. Outside contributory help may be solicited to meet specific needs or address identified problems. This help may come from an accountant, nutritionist, a marketing consultant, etc. In ratite farm management, such as the ostrich industry, the local feed miller, university toxicologists, pathologists, etc may all be brought in should there be a specific and economically viable rationale to seek their input.

Fairly quickly, the aviculturists may find themselves controlling and working with a 3-6 person "team," rather than having to attempt to do it all themselves. As long as all team members have a clear understanding of the desired goals, it is fairly easy to see how an aviculturist should be expected to succeed more easily than than doing everything alone.

This team approach to the management of breeding collections of animals is not a new one, and is used in a similar manner with swine, deer, poultry, beef and most commonly, dairy cattle. Historically, those farms utilizing a complete management approach through this type of team work are those that succeed most optimally. Just as has been seen in these other animal industries, flock health (herd health) management plans allow for the organized mixture of data, observations and ideas which can potentially lead to improved success.

### Some Components of Flock Health Management Plan

A well balanced flock health management plan has several components, such as a Mission Statement, Structural Design and Facility Maps, Traffic Flow Maps, Production Records, and Business and Financial Records. In our following articles, we will discuss each of these components and how they are used either alone or in combination to help yield improved avicultural success. ➤