

# It's About Unity

Notes on the AFA National Convention 2000

by Vince Huntington  
San Diego, California

Who are all these people? Most have some sort of bird pictured on their shirt or jacket. There's a finch, a quail, a macaw. Many wear club shirts: *African Parrot Society* . . . *Flights of Finches* . . . *National Cockatiel Society*. There are a hundred club pins and buttons on hats, blouses, sweaters and shirts – “*President, Avian Club of Piedmont*” – “*African Flufftails Forever*” and others. Overall, the people and atmosphere at the 2000 American Federation of Aviculture (AFA) convention looks much like any National Cage Bird Show (NCBS) or an annual Great American Bird Show (GABS). There is a hall set aside for vendors who offer a myriad of products, things we must have to be a great bird person. I wonder? Do parrots really play with that many toys? Wonder if one of those incubators would also heat my garage as it hatches eggs? Maybe.

The hotel halls are crowded. A lot of to'in and fro'in and “bird-talk” goin' on. People move about to find old friends, to meet for the first time that E-mail person they've talked to for months. Some stop acquaintances and ask, “Did so-and-so bring that Blue-Crowned Conure? Is there anything good about that new medicine for Zinc toxicity? Did you hear all my birds have a bumble-foot kinda' thing?”

The crowd in the bar talks birds until way into the night, or morning. The smokers crowd outside with one another, talking birds between puffs of the cigarette most of them intend to stop using. . . soon. Some breed-fanciers crowd into one another's rooms, perhaps buying, selling or trading birds, trading information, borrowing cages, comparing notes, needs and Nacho's. Most fluff-out the wrinkles in the outfit they'll wear to the Saturday

night dinner.

This is Aviculture Americana. This time it's the AFA convention in Los Angeles, the first week of August. I was there as the NFSS rep to the AFA. I proudly wore my NFSS name tag – “Sally's Husband”<sup>\*</sup> From my name-tag, I receive different extreme greetings, from, “What's NFSS actually stand for, Sir?” “Why are finch people even here?” “Great to see NFSS represented.”

While there for four days, I visited as many meetings as possible, taking notes on what I saw, heard and overheard. There were scheduled meetings to take care of business, a welcome and keynote address, 12 to 14 workshops and presentations per day, an evening reception, daily specialty club meetings, old and new business, and meetings to plan next year's meetings. There was a Saturday night reception/banquet/auction/raffle, and, I noticed with interest something I notice at all other bird people get-togethers. In addition to the planned meetings, many impromptu meetings seem to be the thickest glue of the conventions.

“Let's start a new so-and-so club.”

“Yeah, that's the ticket, and *really* meet the needs of the so-and-so, or the watcha-ma-callit. . . .”

“. . . and you be the president and I'll start the web site and she'll write the rules and he'll print the newsletter.”

“Yeah! Good idea. And we'll have better accountability of breeds, (or of nutrition, or of cage breeding vs. aviary breeding, or of water use systems, or of improved genetic knowledge or of- or of).”

“Good idea. I'll call you next month and we'll get started, this time, really.”

“Really this time. Awaaaay we go.”

But, as it goes with talkin' birds. It is intended well when picked up by the energy of the knowledge and profes-

sionalism of the hundreds of bird people present. “Yes, let's do start a so-and-so-club. Let's *do* make things “better”. Let's *do* stay more in contact. . . let's. . . let's. . . let's. . .”

All ideals are seemingly possible. . . these are charitable volunteer people involved in the activity they love and live for. Anything seems possible. But, as many expressed in conversation, when they do return home after the meetings, they have a real time job to go to, a family to care for, an aviary or three requiring real hours each day of specialty bird care. So, the new ideas often get set aside for awhile, sometimes until the next convention. But they *are* good ideas, and everyone wants to do them. And, it was great to talk about them and make promises and pick up on the enthusiasm and dynamism. But then, we are reminded of the reality incumbent in the volunteer organizations that make up American Federation of Aviculture, or the National Finch and Softbill Society or any Federation of *any* American unpaid voluntary bunch – there is a lot to be done, but, there is only so much time.

I too loved the energy as members discussed research plans, articles they'd write this year, numerous new ideas for inventorying birds internationally, of at last developing that new diet for finches, of sharing everything we know about birds. We are not bad people if it all doesn't get accomplished as promised. The energy we bring back from one another at the AFA, or NCBS, or GABS, is the energy we call upon each day as we take care of our birds. It helps provide the energy required so companion birds will always be here despite the intentions and short sightedness of some who would prefer we stop meeting, stop breeding, and stop talking about birds.

<sup>\*</sup>Vince Huntington, the NFSS delegate to the AFA, is the husband of finch breeder, exhibitor, NFSS judge, and NFSS Region six vice-president, Sally Huntington. His now famous “*Sally's Husband*” name tag is his not-very-effective way of keeping a low profile. 