

# My First AFA Convention!

R. Kevin Hall  
Boone, Colorado

I have now been home for a few days, and I am still on information over-load.

When I walked in the doors of the hotel in Tampa, I had no idea what to expect. I knew two other people there, both from Colorado, one was traveling with me, but was not there for the convention. Just needed to get away from business for a while and decided to tag along. It was late in the evening and by the time I got checked in, jet lag took its toll.

When I picked up my packet and name tag the next morning, I also found out that I had to wear a first timers button. I wore it with pride! I had the honor of represent-

ing our Colorado based bird club (Rocky Mountain Society of Aviculture) as a delegate. The delegates met all that first day. I was beginning to meet all sorts of people, some that I had talked to on the Internet, most I had not, people from all over this country and from abroad.

Put me with my birds, my dogs, or give me a power plant that is in trouble, and I know what to do, but put me with people and, well, lets say I consider my self socially inept. This was different though, these were bird people. Bird people are a different kind of folk. They like to laugh, and I rarely saw anyone

that did not have a smile on their face. We were there to learn and have a good time, and I am here to tell you, that is exactly what we did!

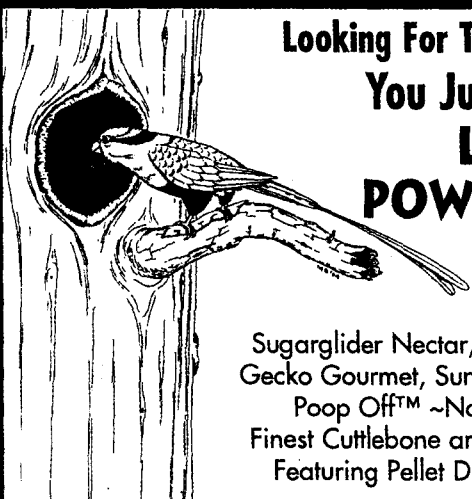
There was an awesome line up of speakers! I was especially impressed with Rev. Ramon Noegel and Dr. Darrel Styles. I sat there in total awe of Rev. Noegel's accomplishments, his dry sense of humor, and his great love for the birds. I left his session thinking to myself, this man is my hero, if I can only accomplish a fraction of what he has, I will be happy.

Dr. Styles was another speaker that captured my full attention. His ideas on fertility and behavior made excellent sense to me. The list goes on and on! Two of the most heavily attended sessions were with the USDA officers on future regulations, and with a CDC officer with an update on the West Niles Virus. Sadly just a couple of days after I returned home the virus arrived in my state, not only in my state, but my county.

I can honestly say that there was not one speaker that I had the chance to listen to, that did not teach me something. Every single one of them managed to hammer something home to me. If you ever get the chance to attend an AFA convention, give it a try, and learn something from each speaker, you will find it is very easy to do.

I decided before I left for Tampa, that I was going to do everything they had to offer. So, I bought a ticket to the Fish Feast at Lowry Zoo. The AFA board of directors cooked and served the feast, buffet style of course. The zoo was closed, except to us. What a great atmosphere, being secluded in a jungle-like setting with great food, and excellent conversations. Again, I saw no one that was not having a good time.

In the evenings people would gather in small groups in the lounge or in the restaurant and have discussions on what they learned that day. It was a chance to unwind from the



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rush of the day and just kind of process all the information you were exposed to.

There was a silent auction, from which I managed to come away with a great computer drawing of the Yellow-eared Conure. There was the Super 8 raffle of which the winners were announced at the banquet. The banquet was a lot of fun. They had good food and afterwards had a live auction, followed by a dance.

Yes, I came home with less money than I started with, and if you were to ask me would I do it again. My answer would be yes. After all, I won the macaw cage in the Super 8 raffle, and the center piece off the table. Beginners luck, I think! Even if I would have won nothing, I would not have changed a thing, it was all an experience of a lifetime, which I plan to experience every year.

The exhibition hall was full of vendors and bird organizations and of course the AFA Store. The AFA store sure got a good portion of my spending money – it had some great items. Now that I am home, I am finding I should have bought another shirt, another cup, another pin, another print.

They say your first convention is your most memorable, and I can fully understand that statement, but some how I think each future convention will be even more memorable than the last. I hope so.

For all of you who have never been to an AFA convention, I challenge you to try it just once, I guarantee you will be back.

You will meet some great people from just about every state (the delegation from Virginia made me laugh more than once), and places like Puerto Rico, Brazil, England, and Spain.

A lot of people worked very hard to put on this convention, and I thank all of you with all of my heart.

I will see you all next year! Thank you all. ❖

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