

The Conservation Corner

By Janice Boyd, PhD
AFA Conservation and Research Committee
Chair

Hello to all AFA members and other readers of the Watchbird. As the new Chair of the AFA Conservation and Research (C&R) Committee I'd like to introduce you to the Committee and its subcommittees, to myself, and to this new column, the Conservation Corner.

I hope, with your help, to make this committee an active one. If you have ideas for what efforts you would like to see this Committee undertake – particularly if you would be willing to lead or at least help – please contact me (email is best: turbo_tabby@hotmail.com or my work email, janice.boyd@neptunesoci.com). We already have two subcommittees: The Red Siskin Project ably headed up by Paula Hansen, and the AFA CITES Committee, ably led by Rick Jordan. Both of these subcommittee chairs have been in their positions for multiple years, which is more than can be said recently for the Conservation and Research Committee chair! There are opportunities for you to serve on these subcommittees or to help on a new effort for OUR Committee.

The longest existing subcommittee is the Red Siskin Project (RSP). The Red Siskin Project (RSP) has been in existence since the 1970's under the AFA's umbrella. Its membership is made up of breeders and fanciers who are interested in making sure this lovely little (4") bird does not go extinct in American aviculture, both because it is a pretty bird in its own right and because it provides a red coloration gene for canaries which is independent of diet. Paula Hansen would be happy to talk red siskin with you and you can read more on the Red Siskin Project website either using the link on the AFA website or by going directly to <http://home.earthlink.net/~redsiskinproject/>

Rick Jordan has headed up the AFA CITES Committee for over seven years.

The purpose of the CITES Committee is to monitor the positions and actions of the international CITES Commission (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – see www.cites.org) and its associated Animals Committee. This is an important committee from the standpoint of making sure international decisions are based upon accurate information. Rick says that until the AFA and PIJAC began to monitor the CITES meetings, various advocacy groups would present dubious claims as the absolute truth and sway decisions at meetings in directions that were not supported by actual facts. Not hard to believe, is it? Rick and his committee members have been involved in educating some of the Animal Rights groups that lobby at the meetings and have provided breeding information for some CITES Appendix I avian species.

The Conservation Corner will be a regular feature in the AFA Watchbird to help spread information about conservation and research issues that are of interest and import to AFA members. If you have topics you would like to see covered or if you would like to make a contribution or express your opinion on some topic related to the C&R Committee's theme, please contact me.

I will close with a little bit about myself. I am by profession an oceanographer. Not the Jacques Cousteau-type that goes scuba diving, but the type that goes around on ships and airplanes making measurements of temperature, salinity, waves, and so on. How did I come to an interest in aviculture? Ten years ago I got my first pet parrot: a one year old African grey I named Paula. I had carefully researched what type of parrot I wanted and had decided upon an Amazon. But I went to a bird fair and my eyes met hers across a crowded room and something clicked. I looked at the available Amazons, but kept coming back to this grey parrot hanging upside down from the top of her cage. There was something in her eyes

that fascinated me. She really looked at me. Something was inside that little head. So I started with an African grey, and went on from there. After Paula came Paco the double yellow headed Amazon, then Weeja the citron cockatoo, then Molly the blue and gold macaw.

What I learned from these feathered dinosaurs (yes, science has concluded birds are!) has opened my eyes to a whole new world of creatures, but a world of creatures whose very survival is becoming increasingly threatened. I had always support conservation and animal welfare organizations, but I wanted to do something more direct than write a check once a year. I decided to make my second career a self-funded one in parrot conservation. I took early retirement in 1998 from my position with the Federal Government and took a part-time job to pay for my new career. I founded a nonprofit parrot conservation organization. And here I am! I haven't saved the parrots, let alone the birds, of the world yet, but together we can make a difference. And our efforts are needed. A report published December 2004 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences said 10 percent of all bird species are predicted to go extinct by 2100, and 700 to 2,500 species will be critically endangered or extinct in the wild. There's a lot for us to do! ■



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