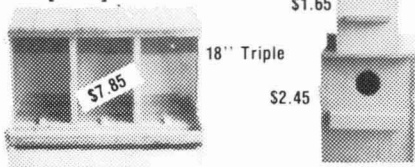


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Larry Shelton to Head AFA's Non-domestic Bird Registry

For a number of years Larry Shelton had been strongly convinced that American aviculturists should compile data on which undomesticated birds were being kept and bred in captivity, and by whom, to be published in an annual register. "After all, how many single specimens of many rare species have been wasted in bachelor existences until they passed breeding viability or simply died because their owners could not locate suitable mates?" asks Shelton rhetorically.

"We all know the answer," he continues. "Tragically many. In many cases, species that may never again be easily available to private aviculturists or even zoological gardens could have been bred and captive populations perhaps established."

His conviction of the need for such a register became even stronger when he joined the curatorial staff of the Philadelphia Zoological Garden in 1977. As Curator of Birds, he discovered that, if another zoo or dealer did not have a prospective mate for a lone bird, the Zoo's search too often simply stopped there and

the bird remained unmated. While ISIS (International Species Inventory System) did help to locate birds at other zoos, not all American zoos and only a very few foreign zoos belonged to the system. And, of course, ISIS did not provide assistance in knowing which species private aviculturists had. At the same time even the most serious private aviculturists, except for a very few waterfowl, pheasant, and psittacine breeders, thought of zoological garden activities as completely divorced from their own work in breeding rare avian species.

As a former private aviculturist who had maintained over 140 species since his sixth birthday gift of a canary and now as a curator of a zoological collection of nearly 250 species, Shelton fully realized how much one hand of aviculture needed to know what the other hand held. Familiar with the British Avicultural Society's annual **Register of Non-domesticated Birds Bred under Controlled Conditions in Britain** and believing the American Federation of Aviculture to be the proper organization to publish an American

Larry Shelton handfeeding Lilac-breasted rollers.

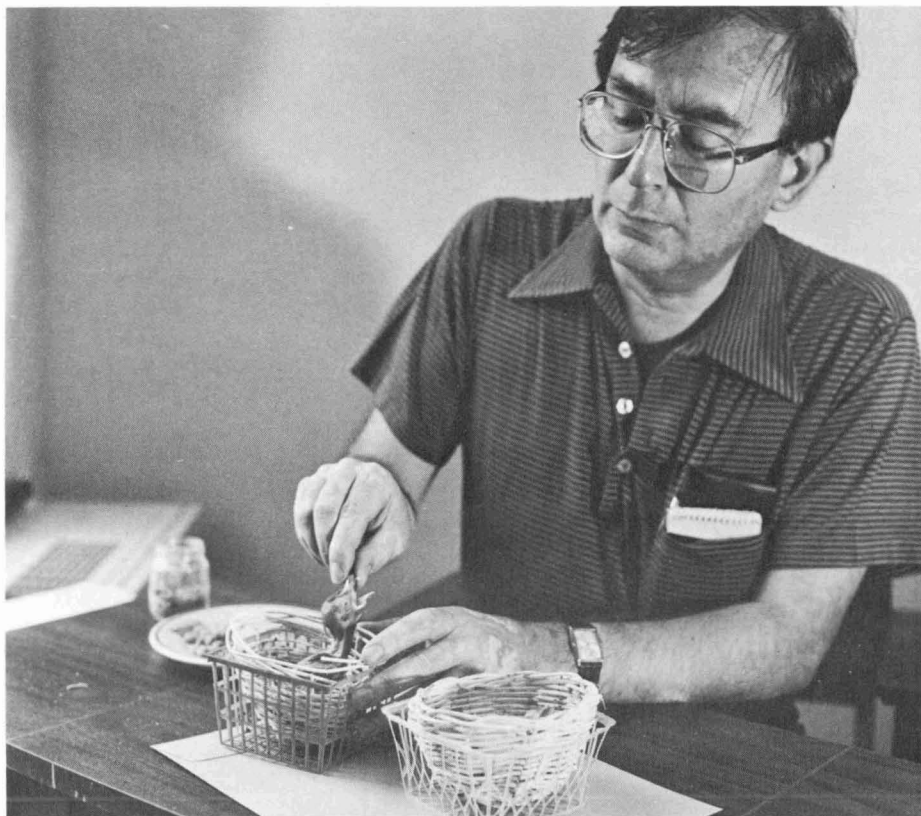


photo courtesy of Philadelphia Zoological Garden

equivalent, he first broached the subject to Clifton Witt, AFA Legislative Liaison and a long-time acquaintance, and later to Dr. Richard Baer, AFA President.

Both agreed on the value of such information in a world where sources of wild-caught stock were decreasing and captive stock was becoming more inbred yearly. They also felt that the compilation and the publication of the data in an annual register could become one of the AFA's most valuable services.

In late 1979 Dr. Baer, with the AFA Executive Committee's approval, asked Shelton to launch the registry project. "With his good relations with both private aviculturists and zoo personnel and his publishing background," Dr. Baer stated, "he should be the ideal individual for making the Annual AFA Registry as successful as our other endeavors have been. Of course, he cannot do the job alone, and all AFA Members must cooperate with him when he later decides upon the proper methodology for the project."

Our bets are that Shelton will make the Annual AFA Registry a highly valuable reality within a year, for he has always been one for challenges. As early as high school, he had bred the Indian zosterops, red-billed hill tit, and red-whiskered bulbul, and while employed as a publishing executive, he maintained,

without assistance, a large collection of rare and delicate birds (flycatchers and hummingbirds to kingfishers and broadbills) requiring a minimum of 35 hours of work weekly. He had only been in charge of the Philadelphia Zoo's bird department for two years when the Zoo received the 1979 Significant Achievement Award of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums for breeding the lilac-breasted roller.

The breeding of the lilac-breasted roller at the Philadelphia Zoo was especially rewarding, according to Shelton, because of the ornithological data it provided. For example, the nesting site was an artificial tree with an access door for checking the progress of the incubation and development of the young. The exact incubation period, previously unrecorded, turned out to be 22 days, and the date of fledging to 28-30 days. Three rollers from one nest were raised in 1978, and a total of six from two nests in 1979. He plans to have the young birds surgically sexed, and match them with other rollers that have been raised at the Denver Zoo (also, a co-winner of the AAZPA's Significant Achievement Award for breeding them) in 1978 and 1979, and the Brookfield and San Antonio Zoos in 1979. After this is done, the various institutions will have unrelated F-1 pairs as the first step toward the establish-

ment of a viable captive breeding population.

He obviously can get things done, but he recently pleaded to the **Watchbird** editor: "I'll need all the assistance and cooperation I can get from the membership at large, not from just Dr. Baer, the Executive Committee, and the State Coordinators, if this publication comes alive to serve the purposes we envision. Aviculturists who are tight-lipped about what they have and are breeding (perhaps in some instances from fear of theft) or too lazy to answer a simple questionnaire do not serve aviculture in the long-term any more than an AFA Annual Register of blank pages shall.

"Captive Self-Sustaining Populations for many species in the '80s will become a necessity if we are to have them at all, and aviculturists will need more and more information about sources of potential mates and bloodline background to reduce the deleterious effects of inbreeding in a closed captive population. Last November I attended World Conference III on Breeding Endangered Species in Captivity in San Diego. Several reports given at the Conference gave such dramatic evidence of the early negative effects of inbreeding in many species that, had I not been an advocate of this Register before, I would be now!"



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