

AFA Bird Census, a tool for your use

by
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Did you know that only 476 of the AFA membership keep and breed exotic birds? Did you know only five hyacinth macaws (and four of these by one individual) were raised in 1981 by private aviculturists? Did you know no Queen of Bavaria conures and Pekin robins were bred by private aviculturists during the same period? And only 16 Cape and 21 Australian crested doves?

Yes, that is some of the startling information revealed by the AFA first bird census. Since the several thousand other AFA members did not answer the survey, we could assume those persons joined AFA simply to experience aviculture vicariously through the beautiful illustrations and fact-filled articles in *The AFA Watchbird*. Of course, you and I know that assumption is totally false — just as much as we know more birds of the above species were also raised in the private sector of aviculture.

But "what we know" does not serve as an effective lobbying tool for AFA officers in their dealing with Federal and State agencies or with conservation organizations totally opposed to aviculture. There must be facts to present as justification for the AFA's various positions with such groups.

Nor does "what we know" — since we usually don't know at all — help us to locate a mate for an unmated rare species or help to bring new blood into an inbred line. The only truly effective tool will have to be the AFA Annual Bird Census.

Here's the place to dramatize the importance of hard statistics in governmental dealings. Only because pheasant breeders cooperated and made no secret of their holdings of endangered species did the Government's Captive Self-sustaining Population list come into being. They presented concrete data demonstrating that some species had been bred through several generations and had reached a certain population level. Right now the first AFA census, even with its poor response, could probably provide the statistical basis for governmental action

on the scarlet-chested parakeet. While probably an excess of 1,000 were raised in the survey period, the census did indicate that 265 specimens had been raised.

The second AFA Annual Bird Census will, in my opinion, be the watershed one. And, regardless of the degree of success or failure in 1982 responses, I will pass on the administration of the census to another individual. But, by then, I hope to have the information on a computer programmed so that, once an AFA member has responded, he can simply update a printout mailed to him each year. That way, only the initial response to the census will be laborious and time-consuming.

And this leads to the simplified form being used in the second AFA Annual Bird Census. As it is redesigned, there will be less confusion about how to reply and less time required to provide answers.

Despite the disappointing response to the first census, it revealed a total of 509 species and subspecies, ranging from hummingbirds to ostriches, being kept by aviculturists who responded. The actual number of species in American aviculture probably is around 700. But we shall never know unless more AFA members make the effort to respond to the census.

With more and more countries forbidding the commercial exportation of wildlife, aviculturists will have to rely upon captive-bred stock for most species in the not-so-distant future. Despite partly justifiable fears of theft and Government knowledge of their avicultural activities, enlightened self-interest should be adequate motivation for answering the AFA Annual Bird Census. Large captive pools of most avian species will never be developed unless we discover what we actually have and who has it to begin with. As much as I like scarlet-chested parakeets, Gouldian finches and blue-and-gold macaws, it would be even more delightful if proper exchange of information could help bring many rare species to the same level of captive establishment. ●

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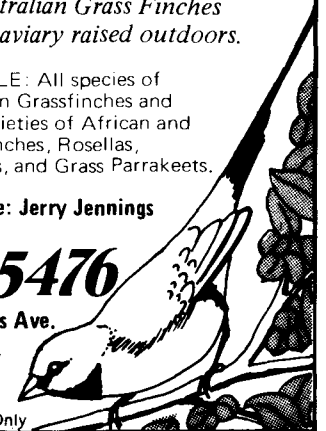
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