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by Sheldon Dingle

PARROTS AND PARROT-LIKE BIRDS

Most of you, no doubt, have a number of exotic birds trained to fly at liberty during daylight and to return to a roosting perch at night. If, perchance, your Crimson Wing Parakeet does not return one evening, you should have your man make a thorough search of the chimneys. Crimson Wing Parakeets have a penchant for exploring chimney holes and emerging into the various rooms through the fireplaces.

This extraordinary bit of avicultural lore is given from personal experience by the Marquiss of Tavistock (later Duke of Bedford) in his wonderful book *Parrots and Parrot-Like Birds*. Now, I grant you, this bit of counsel is rather superflous — after all, how many of you have birds at liberty, or numerous chimneys, or even a man to conduct the search. Come to think of it, how many Dukes or Duchesses have you seen lately? A few Queens maybe; but Dukes?

On the other hand, though the good old days are gone (the book was published about 1929) *Parrots and Parrot-Like Birds* is quite filled with pertinent information that is very applicable today. You must, of course, remember that Tavistock is writing about parrots. Not all of his data can be applied to operations that include pheasants, for example, or waterfowl.

To put yourself in Tavistock's position you'll have to imagine a vast English estate with a huge old castle on it, surrounded by formal gardens, with stables,

kennels, great stands of timber, servants quarters, and numerous attendants. In fact, the chapter on aviary management begins, "First thing in the morning the aviary attendant goes round pulling up the slides if the birds have been shut into the shelters for the night. He then takes a box of mixed seed on his arm unlocks the little side door of each aviary shelter and replenishes the food dish, at the same time carefully observing the birds to which the aviary belongs to see that they have come through the night in health and safety. . . . After breakfast he goes along the front of the aviaries with a can of water and a supply of apples . . ." And so it goes. Good life, old Bean, eh wot?

Well, even if Tavistock himself didn't have to arise early, he certainly had his man on a schedule that was designed for the good of the birds. Then, as now, close observation of one's birds should be a daily habit. Those who were "to the manner not born" must perforce get up and observe their own birds and then get off to work each morning. Tavistock carries the observation a bit further. He says, "A collection of birds should be looked over carefully after daybreak and at 2:30 P.M. in winter and after daybreak, at mid-day, and at 5:30 P.M. in summer to see if any are showing signs of incipient illness."

Tavistock goes on to explain how he determines the health status of a bird. "A parrot when ill partly closes its eyes and usually, though not invariably, ruffles its feathers and is inclined to put its 'head under its wing'. A bird which sits with its 'head under its wing' and both feet on the perch is practically always ill, but if it has one foot tucked up it is only sleepy. A sick bird has the lower breast and abdomen more puffed than a sleepy one."

"Some birds when dozing may be seen to ruffle up a lot on the back and wings but if the feathers of the breast and belly are fairly tight, probably all is well. A bird that stretches itself seldom has much the matter; neither has one that cocks its head sideways to look at an object above or below it."

Regarding these aviaries that you inspect daily Tavistock says, "There are two types of outdoor aviaries which can be considered really satisfactory — moveable aviaries and fixed ones with the floors made of brick, concrete or similar hard material which is as easily washed and disinfected as the floor of a well made dog kennel. The usual type of outdoor aviary — a fixed one with an earthen floor to the flight — is a disease trap which gets steadily more destructive the


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longer is stands." This excellent advice was given nearly fifty years ago yet so few American aviculturists have heeded it. More's the pity. How many rare and wonderful birds have died because of unsanitary conditions?

All throughout the text of *Parrots and Parrot-Like Birds* one finds these astute tips and techniques of good aviculture. They are all phrased in the first person singular — it is like having a lively chat with the Marquess himself in the smoking room over a good glass of Port.

In addition to the delightful conversation, the book has a satisfactory organization. It is divided into three parts. Part one deals with cages and aviaries and with the management of the aviaries. As I mentioned, you will have to either hire a man or assume the man's duties yourself if you are to follow Tavistock's tips.

The second part is on diseases and their treatment. As it was written half a century ago it is rather out of date. There are some valid concepts mentioned but the various medicines are quite obsolete.

You'll probably find the third section the most interesting. It is the longest, consisting of twenty one chapters on the different types of parrots and parrots of diverse geographical zones. The first chapter, for example, is African and New Zealand Parrots. Chapter two is Lovebirds. There are chapters on Hanging Parrots, Fijian Parakeets, Grass Parakeets, Lories and Lorikeets, Cockatoos and Cockatiels, Caiques, Macaws, Amazons, etc., etc.

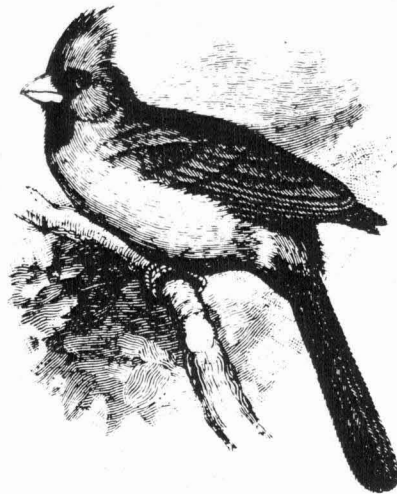
When discussing each species of bird Tavistock gives lively and entertaining anecdotes illustrating a feature of the particular bird. He talks about what happened when he put such and such a bird in with this or that bird. There is a wealth of information on diet and nesting and hardiness. I had once considered putting an odd male Barnard's Parakeet into a flight with some Port Lincoln Parakeets until I read that Tavistock's Port Lincoln killed a male Barnard. The volume is filled with valuable information that only an excellent and experienced aviculturist could know. You cannot fail to learn something that will be of great help to you in the management of your own collection.

The original *Parrots and Parrot-Like Birds* by the Marquess of Tavistock is quite hard to find and is a collectors item. A modern edition by the same name but attributed to the Duke of Bedford is available for a modest price. I confess that I have not read the modern edition. If it has the original text and language of the old Marquess, it too has to be an excellent volume. ■

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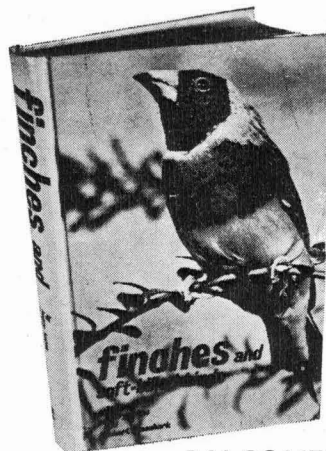
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