

30 Years, Thank you!

.....(But who's counting)

Jim Hawley,
AFA CFO
Queen Creek, AZ.



1976

In the Beginning there was *Watchbird*...
...There also was Mary Jean Hessler and Sheldon Dingle.

Let's start at the beginning - three decades ago, or to be exact, August 1974 with *Watchbird Volume 1, Number 1*, with Mary Jean Hessler as Artist/Ad Manager and Sheldon Dingle as Field Reporter/Writer. It was a humble start, consisting only of a four- page folded letter-size office memo-like paper with the headlines reading,

"ORANGE COUNTY BIRD BREEDERS INTRODUCES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM" and "AFA OFFICIAL POSITION ON USDI INJURIOUS WILDLIFE PROPOSAL".

Jean Hessler said the name came from what grade school children in the 1930's and 1940's were told by their teachers, "A little bird is watching you". It helped keep the children under control (over the last 30 years it has helped many things from getting out of control). Jean mentioned that the title Bird Watch was considered, but rejected as being too suggestive of the Audubon Society's Bird Watchers rather than aviculturists. The first few issues of *Watchbird* were hand sorted and the stamps licked by volunteers sitting on the floor of Jean's home.



Photo by Jack Whitem: El Morio, California

"Dr. Jean Delacour & Sheldon Dingle after a long day building aviaries."



1978

*Quotations indicate a picture and caption from a previous *Watchbird*.



By around 1975 or 1976, the official publication of American Federation of Aviculture had begun to look more like a black and white magazine. Jean and Sheldon were still there. Mary Jean Hessler was now the Editor/Artist and an "AFA Special Advisor," and Sheldon Dingle was Field

Reporter/Writer and a member of the AFA Board of Directors. During this time Sheldon started his regular column "Ex Libris" which has lasted almost the full thirty years.

By 1976 Sheldon became the Editor and Jean became the Art Editor/Ad Manager, and the first color covers and a few color pictures were introduced. Three of the six issues in 1976 had some color, which became a very involved budget contention with the Board of Directors, resulting in the resignation of then

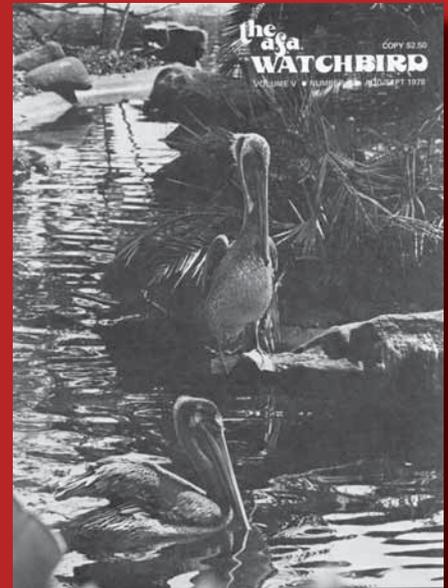


"A convention highlight was the Friday evening boat trip to Blake Island, Indian village of Tillicum, for a traditional baked salmon dinner and Indian dances."

secretary, Russ Sutton (some things never change, budgets!). Sheldon Dingle introduced another column that year, "From the Editor's Desk", which has also been a regular for almost thirty years.

Sheldon said he was asked to help and be involved with the development of the *AFA Watchbird* because he was the only one at hand that had degrees in English and Literature and who also had experience in bird keeping. (For those not aware, when Sheldon was younger, he worked for Dave West for a number of years and had a large mixed collection himself. Sheldon was second only to Gloria Allen to raise the Blue-eyed Cockatoo in captivity).

Sheldon reminded me that both Hessler and he began as volunteers, but after a few years a small stipend was provided to them. Gradually, as the *AFA Watchbird* grew, the modest stipend grew, but was always less than market value. He



1978



1978



1987



1987

Photos by Lawrence McPhail, Florida



"Outstanding service award went to Jerry Jennings, Sheldon Dingle, and Cliff Witt."

continued, and has continually reminded me that a number of times the AFA was unable to pay the labor and the Hessler/Dingle team worked gratis.... A labor of love, if you will.

Sheldon mentioned that the hardest jobs connected to the AFA Watchbird was and is finding writers to provide articles for no pay and contending with the Chief Financial Officer over his budgets and other items. Sheldon said he found that some of the very old timers were actually unable to write out their thoughts coherently to form a publishable article (one well known writer had to dictate his article to his wife, who, herself, could barely write [Wait 'til my wife reads this!]). But, the bird lore in the heads of these "Old Timers" was extraordinary. They KNEW HOW to raise birds and they were delighted to donate their information in the form of magazine articles, no matter that the editor got migraines fixing the language and grammar. Sheldon rehearsed to me his refined repertoire of techniques he developed for softening the skilled aviculturist enough that he might obtain articles - those being intimidation, blackmail,



Photos by Joe McLaughlin, Dundee, Oregon

"Mary Jean Hessler, Watchbird excellence."

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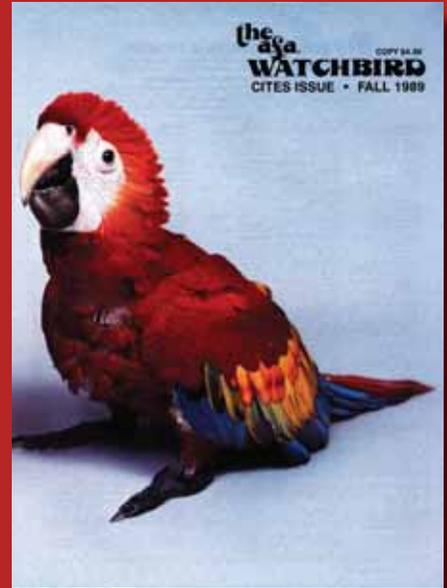


"Jean Hessler, speaking for the Watchbird staff, announced the names of the publication's longest continuously running advertisers."

bribery, coercion, pleading, crying and a few others that could not be published. He could name names and peccadilloes, but because of the gentleman he is, he refrained at this time, thank you Sheldon (By the way, Marilyn Hawley suggests that everyone ask Sheldon about his new tattoo).

All in all, you can see that the AFA owes a great deal of gratitude to both Mary Jean Hessler and to Sheldon Dingle. They have spent thirty years of their lives bringing us to this point, turning the official publication of the American Federation of Aviculture, the *Watchbird*, into one of the premier avicultural journals of our time.

This is an era we should not forget because the future isn't what it used to be. Jean and Sheldon, enjoy your retirement and THANK YOU from me, the Board of Directors and ALL of AFA. ■



1989



1994