



for AFA's Office and Committees

Funds are tight . . . and we're very prudent about our expenses . . . but there are things that would make life and business sooo much nicer! If any of our members can donate any of these items, we would be very grateful! **Please call the office, (602) 484-0931, to be sure the donation is what we're looking for and still in need.**

Looking for donations from the Phoenix area:

- Secretary's chair
- Small front lobby corner table
- Small free-standing storage cabinet
- Large tree-like manzanita branch (floor mounted base) for office entrance decor

Looking for donations from anywhere, U.S.A.:

- FAX machine
- Plant/floral arrangement for front lobby

THANKS for the donations:

- Hendricks printing, Irvine, CA
Carton (1000) catalog envelopes
4 cartons, 500 ea., #10 envelopes
- M. Jean Hessler, Costa Mesa, CA
Plant/floral arrangement for front lobby

Raising Pet Birds – Can it be Made Safer?

by Ted L. Rothstein, M.D.
Bellevue, Washington

The doctors were stumped. Lung cancer was on the increase with each passing year. Yet smoking of cigarettes was diminished. Stricter pollution standards were imposed resulting in cleaner air. And levels of asbestos, a known carcinogen, were much reduced after it was banned from home insulation. Why were there so many new cases of lung cancer?

The solution to this conundrum was revealed upon analysis of hospital data in three countries in Europe — The Netherlands, England and Belgium — countries that had a disproportionately high number of cases of lung cancer, and were increasing at a faster rate than their neighbors. What did these nations have in common?

In 1987, a group of Dutch lung specialists published a survey of lung cancer patients in four hospital centers at The Hague, The Netherlands. They found that there was a sixfold increase in lung cancer in patients who kept birds. Coincidentally, approximately 70% of tropical bird aviculturists in Europe are located in The Netherlands, England and Belgium.

Two additional reports from abroad have recently appeared in the respected *British Medical Journal* (October 24, 1992) which support the connection between aviculture and lung cancer which should raise concern among everyone who keeps birds.

A study from Germany found that chronic exposure to birds in the previous five years increased the likelihood of lung cancer almost twice when compared to individuals who had no such exposure. The risks increased with each year so that lung cancer was three times as likely after ten years of bird keeping. A group of British doctors found a fourfold increase in risk of lung cancer associated with raising pigeons.

What is it about raising birds which increases the risk of developing lung cancer? No one knows for sure but there are a number of possible rea-

sons. People who keep birds are inhaling excess dust particles and feather fragments which provoke a reaction in human lungs. There are cells in the lungs called macrophages, whose job is to help remove foreign particles and fight off infection, and which lose their normal function when constantly exposed to these substances. As a consequence, there is less protection for lung tissue against infection and foreign particles. Moreover, substances are released by macrophages upon exposure to particulate matter which cause an allergic reaction and scarring of lung tissue. Scarring (pulmonary fibrosis) is recognized as a factor in causing lung cancer.

There remain many unanswered questions about birdkeeping and lung cancer. Does the risk vary depending upon whether one is raising parrots, budgerigars, canaries or finches — or whether one raises large numbers of birds at one time? Does it make a difference whether birds are raised indoors or out? More studies are necessary to find these answers.

Is there anything that aviculturists can do to reduce or minimize the risk? Cigarette smoking remains the major cause of lung cancer. Smoking produces many of the pathologic changes in the lungs described above and although the risks of bird keeping can be shown to be independent of smoking — the combination probably is additive. So if you keep birds, don't smoke! Since passive exposure to smoke also increases the risks of lung cancer, discourage anyone else in your family from smoking. Furthermore, it would be prudent for those of us who raise birds to wear an inexpensive paper surgical mask when in contact with the birds (the masks can be purchased in quantity at any pharmacy) to cut down on exposure to airborne particles. Aviculture has many joys and many challenges and, with a few precautions, should not be hazardous to your health. ●