

Southern California Avian Relief (SCAR)

Gale force winds drove flames and smoke through southern California in October, devastating many aviculturists, destroying homes, barns, aviaries and birds. Many in the path of the wildfires suffered injuries, burns and smoke inhalation during the efforts to save their birds.

"It was a 20 minute nightmare," one victim said. Able to save only a few babies, they escaped only minutes before home, outbuildings, aviaries and breeding pairs went up in smoke. Many in the collection were second and third generation birds from original pairs.

"If only it had been our home and not all of our beloved birds," said another who lost a barn, aviaries and all but two birds and suffered from burns and smoke saving the two.

During the frantic hours, as wind changed and sped the fires in new directions, volunteers with pickups and cages converged to evacuate hundreds of birds to safety. Feed, water and medical supplies were collected and rushed to survivors before the fires were out. "Without the help of bird lovers and bird club members,

I couldn't have faced this tragedy alone," said one who lost some but managed to evacuate most of the birds.

Within hours, Kaytee Products donated and delivered seed and feed for victims. Planit Enterprises sent hundreds of crocks to replace those that had melted or exploded in the heat, so survivors could be fed and watered. After national TV coverage of the disaster, cash, supplies and volunteers arrived at a central collection point to help.

Veterinarians generously donated hours assessing the birds' conditions, performing surgery, giving medication and supplying oxygen units to save the injured and stressed birds. Laurella Desborough, president of American Federation of Aviculture, said AFA is prepared to use its disaster funds to reimburse veterinary expenses such as medication, lab tests, cultures and oxygen.

To handle donations, distribution, locate victims, and evaluate the losses and needs, San Diego bird club members immediately formed S.C.A.R., Southern California Avian Relief, to aid those who lost all or part of their collections, homes, buildings and aviaries.

Formed as an immediate relief organization, S.C.A.R. now is expanding to be prepared for future disasters. Legal and tax experts have offered their services to gain a non-profit status and a tax exempt number is pending.

From this first-hand experience, plans to provide aid in fire, flood, earthquake, hurricane and other disasters are being formulated by S.C.A.R. Steps from onset to continuing relief will be outlined and distributed to bird clubs throughout the country. Using phone networks and volunteers lists, disaster procedures can be effective and implemented within hours. Preparation guidelines for evacuation, supplies and medical assistance will be listed. Immediate needs can be handled locally and expedited within hours. Following assistance will be supplied through S.C.A.R.'s network of advance contacts.

Those who wish to support S.C.A.R.'s disaster and aid program should write to S.C.A.R., P.O. Box 3110, Vista, CA 92085, or call 619-758-0924 for further information. ●

Managing Large, Mixed Species Aviaries

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The management of birds in captivity is as varied as the number of aviculturists multiplied by the number of species kept. In most instances, aviculturists use their knowledge of an individual species as an aid in developing a management plan. Some species are best managed in cages, while others require flights. Some will have specific needs for vegetation while others are best managed in unplanted aviaries. In an effort to maximize the number of species kept, we often try to mix several species in one aviary. Zoos and animal parks often further complicate the issue by attempting to reproduce in some manner an accurate ecosystem.

In nearly all instances, mixed species enclosures are almost always a compromise between optimal animal management techniques and some other need such as holding, display or education. To demonstrate this you need only to compare a good private aviculturist with a good zoo collection. In the course of a year, the zoo will produce offspring from a greater number of species than the aviculturist; however, on a species by species basis the aviculturist is likely to have greater success. If the private individual has a pair of Blue and Gold Macaws, they will likely be more successful than the Blue and Gold Macaws at a zoo. This comes about because of the intensity of management. One collector with 10 species micro-manages more and makes fewer management compromises than a 15-person staff with nearly 300 species.

In order to better evaluate the system, it may be helpful to list some potential pros and cons of a mixed species aviary.

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PRO

Can be used to illustrate an educational point.

Are a more effective public attraction due to the intensity of the experience.

Parasitic species such as cuckoos or whydahs who require a host species.

CON

Increased competition for food.

Increased competition for nest sites.

Increased possibilities of aggression.

Increased possibility of disease.

Increased disturbance to nesting birds.

Without carrying the list to extremes, you can see that a mixed aviary offers benefits to merely a handful of species, while for most it offers lower survivability and lower production.

Based on this data, how can you ethically support mixed species aviaries? In the case of the non-public facility, it can be difficult. Often the involvement of the breeder in public education programs is minimal while their contributions to captive production is worthy in that it helps to relieve some pressure on wild populations. This is not to say that the private aviculturist should not have a mixed species aviary. A mixed species aviary with three species in it is not nearly so counter-productive as the same aviary with 10 species in it.

Is the situation in a zoo or wild animal park all that much different? I think it is. Take, for example, the AAZPA (American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums) sponsored SSP's (Species Survival Plans). An SSP is a plan that should allow for the survival of a species in collections for the next 200 years. Currently there are fewer than 60 SSP's which cover all forms of animal life in collections from insects to mammals. Harvard University Ecologist Edward O. Wilson estimates that at current levels of habitat destruction we will be losing 20,000 species per year within the next five years. Clearly a zoo must ask itself if captive propagation is the most useful contribution towards ensuring maximum levels of biodiversity on our planet.

To use the Zoological Society of San Diego as a case in point, let's consider a few facts. First, and most important,

the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Wild Animal Park entertain approximately 4.3 million people annually (the state of Hawaii sees a little over 5 million visitors annually). That means we see about 800,000 automobiles that are improperly tuned *and* have under-inflated tires. Correcting that situation could result in fuel savings of about 5.75 million gallons a year (800,000 automobiles; 12,000 miles/year/car; 25 mpg and 15% reduction in efficiency). The impact this could have on the world's ecosystem would be notable. The same could be done with aluminum cans, newspapers and bottles. The point of all of this is that a zoo's motivation in what they do can be quite different (and should be), from what a private collection's motivations would be.

Some basic criteria can be helpful in the planning of a mixed species aviary. Perhaps the most important concept is that of "niches." Assuming a relatively large aviary, it is easily understood that a pheasant is not likely to compete for space with a fruit dove. In between the fruit dove in the canopy and the pheasant on the floor there is plenty of room for various thrushes who most commonly utilize the understory. Their dull markings suggest correctly that they are not particularly territorial and are, in fact, quite social. One must bear in mind, however, that various factors can throw an otherwise well thought out niche use program right out the window. As an example, pheasants suddenly become quite arboreal as they look for a place to spend the night and can interfere significantly with the roosting needs of other species in the aviary.

In most cases, out and out territoriality is exhibited to members of the same species. The concentration of birds in aviaries will often increase sensitivity to include aggressive behavior against a pattern or color. A pair of Double-toothed Barbets will do fine until another Double-toothed Barbet is introduced. In fact, the bright red markings on the barbet give warning that it is likely to be territorial to other barbets. In fact, in captivity it will be safe to assume that barbet-sized birds with red markings will become immediate targets of aggression. The popularity of brightly colored birds often highlights this problem for the exhibitor. If you must

have two red birds in the aviary, make one a pheasant and one a cardinal (very different space usage as well as a significant difference in size).

Birds are very sensitive to even short periods of food deprivation. Sometimes competition for food can be reduced by simply selecting birds with different dietary needs. A fruit dove will not compete for food with a drongo. This pattern of management, however, will quickly limit the number of species you work with. Numerous carefully placed food dishes, complementing the behaviors of your specimens, will help to broaden the number of species kept. Some birds require food in only the quietest and most sheltered areas of the aviary. Others will feed on the ground in the open or high in the trees. Lots of food in many places is the greatest help.

Ultimately, the greatest factor in managing a mixed species aviary is that of a good keeper. Long observations with careful thought and a clear understanding of the birds you keep will enhance your opportunities for pleasure and your birds' chances of a healthy and productive lifetime. ●

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