

Are You Focused?

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Is your aviary like a box of chocolates? You never know what you're going to find? If your collection includes everything from Amazons to Zebra Finches, read on.

Fifteen years ago, bird lovers lived in a bountiful land of plenty. Thousands of birds of every species were available from importers and wholesalers. That was then.

Now, new laws restrict the import of birds from the wild. It is getting increasingly difficult to find certain birds, replace lost mates, or locate new bloodlines. Orange-winged and Mealy Amazons, once commonly imported, are now in demand with breeders. Fifteen years ago, few breeders would have considered having them.

Aviculture has become serious business. That is good.

What is not good, is that too many of us have not established breeding goals. Backyard aviaries, hobby aviaries and commercial aviaries all over America house too many different kinds of birds. I call this the Noah's Ark Syndrome. At this critical hour, there is no excuse for this type of Aviculture.

It is time for all of us to focus.

Ideally, a breeder should focus on one genus and commit to having at least four breeding pairs of each species.

For example, a breeder with a special interest in macaws, should house four pairs each of Green-wingeds, Scarlets, Blue and Golds, etc. in his or her aviary. Since the breeder's focus is macaws, they should not house single pairs of rare Amazons or lorries, for example. Larger aviaries could focus on African birds only, or softbills only and so on.

If this approach is too radical for some aviculturists to consider, in the very least, they should commit to having three to four pairs of each species. Gone are the days when it was perfectly acceptable to have an aviary with 'a little bit of everything'—like the local zoo.

More and more, dedicated bird breeders are specializing. Benefits of this are:

- Increased production permits holding back the best specimens,

improving the species

- Several bloodlines makes it easy to pair unrelated offspring for resale, especially for birds not being sold as pets.
- The possibility of re-pairing incompatible pairs
- Uniform cage size, diet, care requirements for all birds, also makes it easier to instruct assistants
- Increased knowledge in one specialty

With increased experience in production of a given species, breeders develop expertise. They are recognized as experts by other aviculturists. This is good; buyers like to buy from the experts.

Some aviculturists have a wide variety of birds in their aviaries. Some, even worse, are "collectors"; they like to have one pair each of the rare stuff. Many aviculturists are at least "partial collectors". After all, who doesn't enjoy a pair of really rare birds that no one else has? But aviculturists are not dealing with stamps or butterflies, they should not be collectors.

What are the drawbacks to having "Noah's Ark" in your aviary, or even one pair of rare birds?

- Is this bird or pair here because their needs can be met, resulting in successful breeding?
- Are they here because of selfish reasons?
- Do you have enough expertise and resources to breed the pair?
- What will happen when they do breed? Or, most importantly, what will happen to the offspring?
- Since most people buy from experts, does anyone even know you have one or two babies of this species?

Very often, especially with larger birds, these few offspring end up handfed, improperly socialized and sold to the pet trade.

Experts generate more sales.

While on the subject of pet trade, many breeders resist the idea of focusing, saying they need a variety of birds to supply their clientele. They justify this thinking saying they want not only to meet different needs of buyers, but to

also have birds available that happen to be popular this season. The same breeder will readily tell you which species are preferred over others and which ones are kept on the premises as a source of income. We all know the daily care of birds is hard work, but it comes easier for the 'special' birds. Our aviaries, therefore should house birds that we not only love, but that will also have our undivided attention.

Buyers of pet birds also like to purchase from an expert, someone with a large selection. After all, wouldn't you rather buy a German Shepherd from a breeder that specializes in that breed rather than from a kennel that stocks various breeds?

Dedication to a particular genus usually results in more careful placement of offspring. This is especially true when dealing with rarer birds.

Whether hand-raised or *parent-raised*, more birds will be placed with dedicated aviculturists interested in propagating that species, rather than being sold as a pet to first time buyers.

Focusing can increase a clientele in many ways. Aviculturists that specialize in smaller birds, such as *Neophema* parakeets, can sell pairs to one aviculturist over and over again. They can sell different bloodlines to the same buyer or replace lost mates. If there is an interest they can sell mutations of the same species. Can another breeder that 'dabbles' in many species provide the same service to his clients?

Have you heard the saying "Jack of all trades, master of none?" By spreading ourselves too thin with too many different kinds of birds, we will never develop the in-depth knowledge that will make us a true master. Precise data on breeding set-ups, clutch sizes, egg weights, weight gains, diet, habits and peculiarities help us all become better care-givers to our birds. Who can provide us with this specialized knowledge, but the specialized aviculturist?

We all can benefit from "masters" willing to share their expertise!

As serious aviculturists we have a responsibility to our birds to provide them with the optimum care. We have a responsibility to gather as much knowledge as possible about our birds and share this wisdom with fellow bird keepers.

Would *you* rather be an expert or a dabbler? It's up to you! ➔