

## **A Tribute to Gordon Taylor McAlpin, a Visionary in the Field of Aviculture**

Gordon Taylor McAlpin, a Texas rancher, independent oil man and rugged individualist died at the age of 84 on 26 September 1996. This man, probably unknown to all but a few aviculturists, had a passion for neotropical parrots, especially macaws, and he made a substantial contribution to aviculture that needs to be recognized. His love of these birds was acquired during his business dealings, mainly involving cattle, in Central and South America during the 1970s. Wherever he traveled, he saw the plight of wild populations of parrots and the corresponding plight of indigenous peoples. He also recognized the value of parrots in international trade, particularly in the United States. He envisioned a program of population studies to determine sustainable harvest levels, harvest and aviculture programs in the countries of origin benefiting the local peoples (not middlemen), and a corresponding study of the husbandry and health care of parrots in captivity in the United States. His vision was that a healthy trade in parrots would benefit the birds; i.e. their value as a sustainable resource for local peoples would insure habitat protection and even protection against overharvest. His view also included the concept that U.S. aviculture would ultimately need to produce the majority of birds for the pet trade simply because wild populations of most species were simply too small to supply any demand much above those birds that would likely be required for captive breeding purposes.

Gordon didn't look to the government to fund and implement his conservation program, he simply did it, drawing upon his belief and faith in the capabilities of the individual to make a difference—and a profit for all involved. He traveled across the neotropics presenting his ideas to local governments and soon found a taker—Bolivia. He personally funded a field research program in Bolivia with a local University; and funded a companion program in the United States with Texas A&M University—the so-called Macaw Project. He provided additional financing enabling the U.S. University in 1983 to import 200 macaws from the Bolivian University to begin research on the husbandry and health of captive macaws. Prior to this point, no one took Gordon's program seriously—it simply couldn't be done, certainly not without funding and support of the U.S. government and NGOs. But, suddenly, here the program was, with the initial and most difficult hurdles already overcome by a man in his 70s with no track record with the conservation community or aviculture for that matter. There then ensued a hail of controversy, particularly from NGOs representing the conservation community, but also including some

importers. The numbers of macaws to be imported were exaggerated by a factor of 10, the motivations and ethics of the universities were called into question, and McAlpin and his Macaw Project were stridently vilified. Research permits were cancelled or became "impossible" to acquire. The upshot was that the program was quashed at the level achieved prior to the 1983 campaign of disinformation. None of the planned population studies were ever performed, thanks to the conservation community. A promising program was nipped in the bud.

Whatever happened to the birds and the Macaw Project? The birds and selected progeny are thriving in a breeding colony which is operated and maintained in the private sector by McAlpin's daughter. This colony is still being utilized as a research and teaching resource by the Veterinary College of Texas A&M University. Additionally, they presently comprise the nucleus of a genetics study being performed by a private-sector company with funding from the prestigious National Science Foundation. Initially, there were problems concerning the ownership of the birds imported by the University. McAlpin's position was that these birds belonged to the School; the School's position was that they belonged to McAlpin. Gordon was strongly disillusioned, and neither party wanted to bear the ongoing cost of maintenance in a program having little chance to pay its own way without outside funding. The default position was that McAlpin's daughter, a local resident near Texas A&M, took possession and maintenance responsibility for the birds in an attempt to bring at least part of her father's original vision to fruition.

As time went by, the availability of the birds and the struggling research program attracted more favorable attention to the University as an institution seriously interested in exotic birds. Within a few years, the University received the largest endowment in its history from a wealthy aviculturist to fund a dedicated staff and a comprehensive program of health-care research on exotic birds. With this support, the College has since become a leader in this field of research. Production from the breeding colony has finally (since 1995) been sufficient to support the the cost of maintenance. Aviculture has thus benefited greatly from McAlpin's original vision.

And, by the way, Gordon's vision is how Nancy and Benny Gallaway became involved in aviculture. Prior to arrival of the birds, we had absolutely no interest in birds and, in fact, we had little choice in housing the birds when they first arrived at the University in 1983 (for that story see *AFA Watchbird* August/September 1984). Our world was turned upside down on 6 April 1983, and has never righted. Gordon, we wouldn't have it any other way. Thank you.

Benny and Nancy Gallaway

[Editor's Note: Dr. Gallaway, a noted wildlife biologist, is presently Conservation Director for the AFA, his wife, Nancy, is recognized as an expert in the husbandry and rearing of macaws. SLD] ●

# Bulletin From the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## What's new?

All persons engaging in business as an importer or exporter of wildlife are now required to obtain a license. The cost of a license is \$ 50.00 annually.

## How does this differ from previous licensing requirements?

In the past, a license was required only by those persons doing business which exceeded \$ 25,000.00 annually.

## When is it effective?

As of August 1, 1996.

## What if a shipment arrives and an importer or exporter has not yet obtained a license?

After August 1, shipments will be detained until an application form for a license is completed and all required fees collected. Application forms are available at all designated and non-designated ports of entry for wildlife.

## What else is new?

License holders must pay a fee of \$55.00 per wildlife shipment for inspections during normal business hours. (The previous fee was \$ 25.00).

## Are there additional costs associated with inspections?

Yes—If you import or export at a non-designated port and a port exception permit is required, or if you import outside of normal business hours, additional fees will apply.

## Will I still pay the \$ 55.00 fee if the shipment is not physically inspected?

Yes. All fees will apply regardless of whether a physical inspection is performed or just an inspection of all the accompanying documents.

## Can shipments be combined to avoid payment of fees?

No. Individual shipments cannot be combined on one Declaration for Importation or Exportation (form 3-1777) to avoid payment of fees.

Contact your local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office  
for additional information ●

## Roger Tory Peterson of Field Guide Fame Dies at Age 87

Almost everyone interested in birds has used a field guide produced by Roger Tory Peterson. He made bird watching very popular which is why Audubon magazine called him "the man who turned birdwatching into a super sport."

Peterson claimed it was his seventh-grade science teacher who encouraged him in his bird drawings. He later studied at the Art Student League in New York and at the National Academy of Design. later, while teaching science in Massachusetts, an editor of Audubon magazine encouraged him to do a pocket guide for bird watchers which resulted in the 1934 *A Field guide to the Birds* and set the pattern for all future field guides.

Peterson became an excellent artist and drew and painted literally thousands of illustrations for his field guides. His prints and paintings are highly prized by collectors of natural history art.

Peterson became one of America's most noted naturalists, combining the artistic talents of a John James Audubon or John Gould with the environmental concern of a John Muir. His books have reached millions, in many languages, and his films and photography even more. His lectures always drew huge crowds.

Many honors have been awarded to Peterson including the Brewster Medal from the American Ornithologists' Union, the Gold Medal of the New York Zoological Society and the Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire Gold Medal of the Société d'Acclimatation. He has traveled widely throughout the world in his quest for more knowledge on birdlife and for opportunities to paint and photograph birds in the wild.

Peterson died in August at his Connecticut home several months after suffering a mild stroke. He is survived by his wife Virginia. ●

## Bird Theft Notice

**Your help is urgently needed.** Blue Skies Aviary, near Chattanooga, Tennessee, was burglarized 7 October 1996 and many breeder birds were stolen. We'd like to catch the thieves as well as recover the birds. If you come across any of the following birds and/or bird band numbers, please contact Sandra Dobbs at 423-658-6886 or the Marion County (TN) Sheriff's Dept. at 423-942-5667.

Some of the following birds are identified by band numbers (bands may be removed by the thieves) or patterns of speech or behavior that are unique to the specific bird.

### Birds Stolen

#### Pairs

**1 pr. Yellow-naped Amazons**—very vocal, sings "I'm Just a Gigolo," favorite phrase is "Silly bird. You'll kill yourself."

**2 pr. White-fronted Amazons**

**1 pr. Lilac-crowned Amazons**—very shy birds

**1 pr. Blue-fronted Amazons**

**1 pr. Umbrella Cockatoos**,—female sheds feathers, shy of people

**1 pr. White-capped Pionus**—tame and trusting

**1 pr. Blue-headed Pionus**—shy

**1 pr. Green-cheeked Conures**—band #AFA PO95 29 or XFA AFA 307 or XFA 308 AFA

**3 pr. Souancé Conures**—bands #SA854, 28P28, 28P25, 28P26, DF2, CHP790

**2 pr. Fallow Green-cheeked Conures**—bands # AFA95PO72, AFA95PO28, 78K9068CO, 78K9531A2

**1 pr. Painted Conures**—bands # AFAFL95207, open purple band #5

#### Unpaired birds

**2 Blue-fronted Amazons**—female has open band #FAG 516, says her name "BLU" a lot, says "I've fallen and can't get up."

**1 Green-cheeked Amazon, 1 Red-lore Amazon, 1 Double Yellow-headed Amazon**—tame, sings opera, **1 Maximillian Pionus, 1 Bronze-winged Pionus**, and 30 Cockatiels, assorted mutations including 14 White-faced, all of which have closed bands. ●