



# Olde Tymer

## Bernard Roer, Olde Master Aviculturist

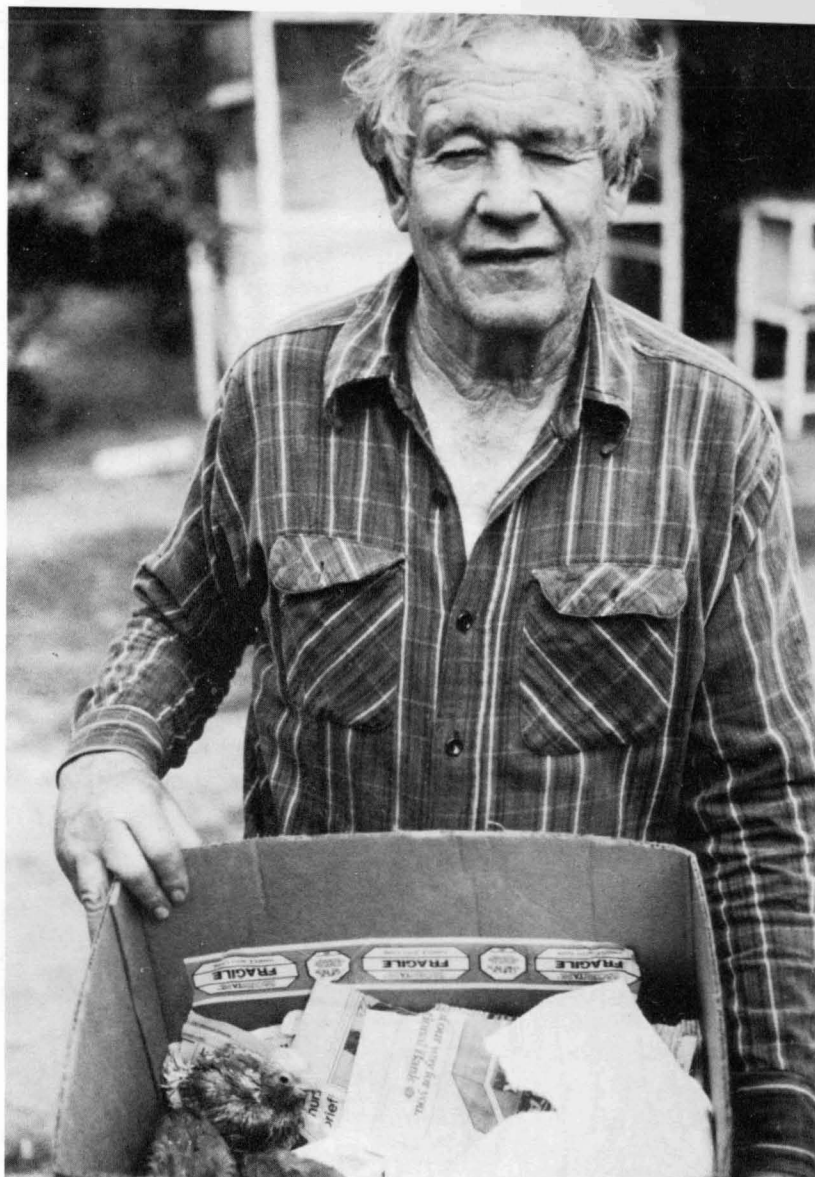
by Jim Hawley, Jr  
Queen Creek, Arizona.

In the year Nineteen Hundred and Sixteen was born into this world the "Olde Tymer" Bernard Roer. Wow, was that that a long time ago or what? Talk about a long time, to the best of my knowledge Bernard Roer has been involved with birds longer on the face of this earth than any other living soul.

I had the opportunity to meet Bernard for the first time in 1958. My Grandmother would always take me with her when she went over to Bernard's, which was quite often. She raised Canaries, finches, Cockatiels and parakeets and was single at that time. Bernard was a devout bachelor until he was 45 years old. I think my Grandmother had designs on him and I think Bernard didn't mind following her all over the bird farm. To this day, because of her political involvement, Grandmother at 89 years old still gets calls from past Governors of Arizona and many other dignitaries checking on her but is never more pleased than to hear from me that Bernard and Barbara Roer want to know how she is

and that they send their well wishes.

Bernard started with birds in 1921 when his father brought a young chicken with a broken leg to the farm house to become that evening's dinner. Bernard begged his father to allow him to care for and fix the chicken. His father finally said "OK, now you have livestock and soon you'll have deadstock." The chicken did not die. Bernard fixed it and it was a pet for many years. When I was eight years old Bernard told me the very same thing his father told him—if you have livestock, you'll also have deadstock—although I did not fully appreciate



*Above: Bernard Roer with young parrots in a box. Simple but effective aviculture.*

*Right: Young Bernard Roer obviously daydreaming about birds.*



Photos courtesy of the Roer family.

what it meant until many years later.

At the tender age of seven or eight, Bernard was raising several types (breeds) of chickens, pigeons, ducks, guineas, and peafowl and working for his dad on the farm taking care of the poultry. When he was just about 15 years old he purchased a pair of lovebirds for \$4.00 from the Southern California Bird and Pet Exchange (this was about 1933 and surprise, they were a pair). He raised 16 babies the first year and sold them at wholesale for \$1.50 each. This has been the touch of Bernard the master breeder and salesman ever since. Remember, as Bernard told me, in 1933 Double Yellow-headed Amazons sold for \$15 each.

At the age of 19 (approximately 1936) Bernard rented four acres of bottom land on the bank of the Cave Creek River from his father for \$100 per year. There he proceeded to farm 500 laying chickens with another 500 meat and replacement birds. Bernard was no dummy even at that young age—he continued to room and board

at his parents' home to hold down his overall expenses.

During World War II a ceiling price was placed on chicken eggs and the government was buying almost all the eggs so Bernard acquired 200 Runner Ducks and started selling the eggs which became a very much in demand food source with no price ceiling (*smart* olde tymer). After the war the demand for duck eggs started to drop so Bernard purchased some Peking Duck drakes, put them with his Runners and sold the eggs to a hatchery for several years after.

In 1941, Bernard bought his own farm, the very one he lives on today, just down the road from his parents yet still rural and way out of town. For those of you who have not visited Roer's Bird Farm, it is now right in the middle of the city of Phoenix.

Over the years Bernard Roer has managed to breed or have involvement with almost every type of bird imaginable from finches to vultures, cranes, parrots, cracids, pheasants and on and on. With his knowledge of

birds ever growing, so did his friendships and acquaintances. Bernard has been visited by dignitaries, aviculturists, ornithologists, professors, and bird enthusiasts from all corners of the world, from all walks of life and all ages. (To name a few, the Duke of Bedford, Dr Jean Delacour, Francis Rudkin, Jack Thropp, Calvin Wilson and K. C. Lint.) Even having such important visitors, I do not think Bernard has combed his hair more than once in his life.

He has received almost every honor and recognition that could be bestowed or given an individual involved with birds. Take into account he has been working with birds, a labor of love, for over 75 years (75 BIG ONES). And, check this out, he is *still* involved with the birds. I go over to his farm and try to haggle prices with him regularly. I keep hoping his brain will slow down a little so I can keep up but, sadly, I realize every time we visit that I just need to get smarter and work harder. Bernard is a great inspiration to many and has been a mentor and has influenced more than his share of the great aviculturists present in birdom today. (To drop just a few names, Mickey Ollson, Charlie Shepard, Ray Sexton, Dave West.)

Bernard has taught me several very important techniques of aviculture over the years but there are five main ones that stick out most in my mind. I feel a need to share these with the whole world at this time.

First—feeding. Everyone overfeeds their birds. Most of the time in the wild the birds survive only on scenery.

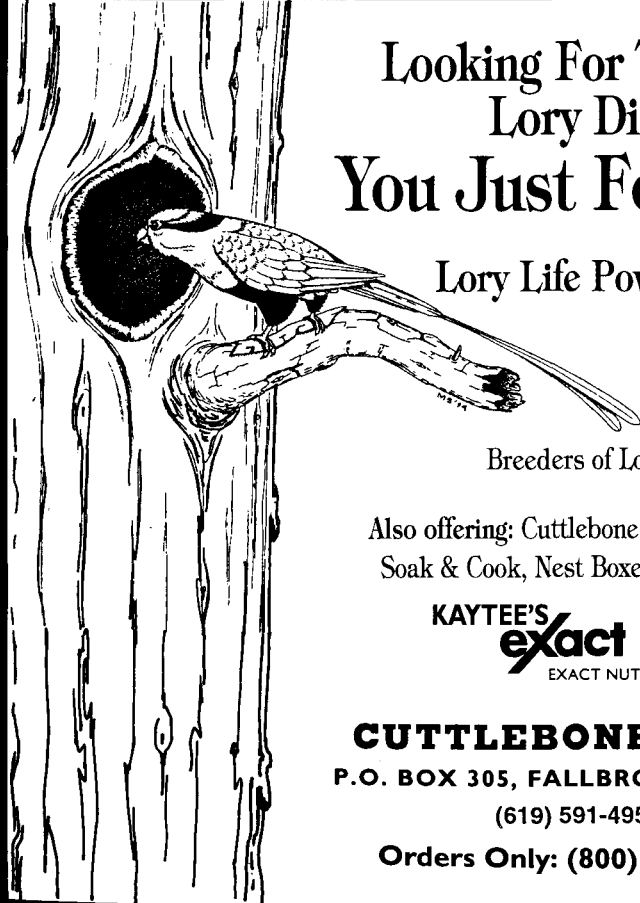
Second—sexing. Determining the sex of monomorphic birds is very easy. The first one you catch is the male, the second one you catch is the female. (Wow, to think I went to school to try and figure this one out!)

Third—handfeeding. There are only two reasons to hand feed baby birds, Need and Greed.

Fourth—economics. The old businessman's lullaby my parents used to sing to me is true, buy low, sell high.

Fifth—mortality. If you have livestock, you'll also have deadstock.

Over the years there have been many incidences dealing with individuals and birds on Roer's Bird Farm, as



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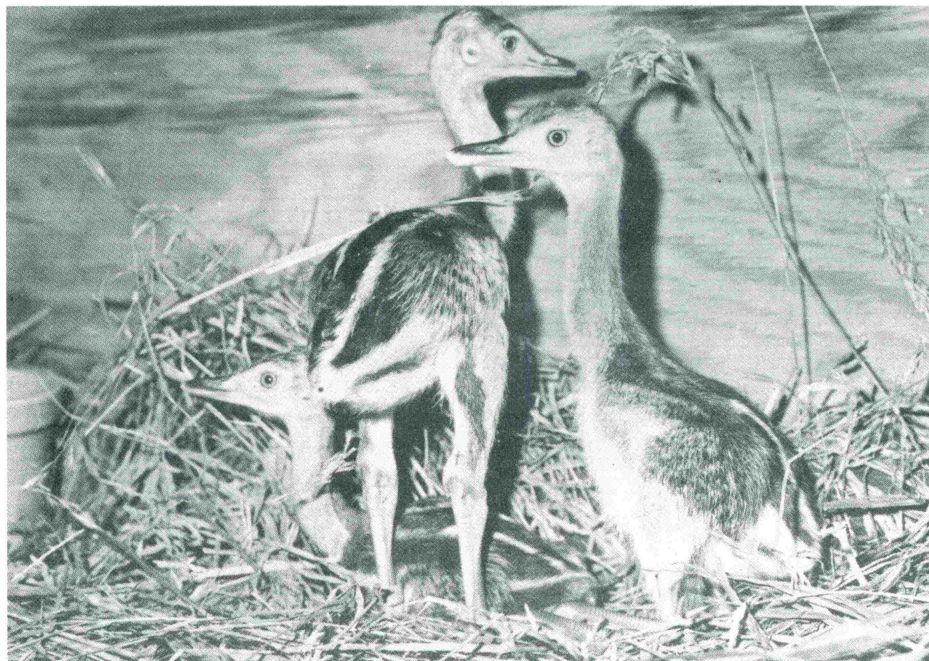
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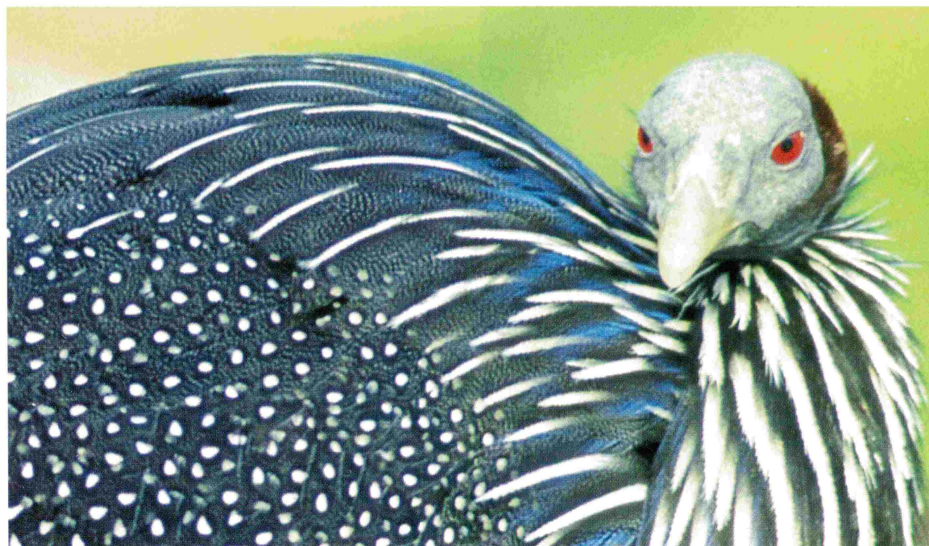




*Leadbeater's Cockatoos are among the most beautiful of all the parrots Roer has raised.*



*Roer raised Rheas. His first three babies were named Pya Rhea, Gono Rhea, and Dia Rhea.*



*The noisy, colorful Vulturine Guinea Fowl served as loud security guards at Roer's Bird Farm.*

I am sure you can imagine. There are a couple of stories that I remember Bernard telling—things that he really enjoyed. One day a lady came to his farm asking to buy some very cheap pigeons. The boy working for Bernard was instructed to catch up a couple of the unbanded pigeons and sell them unsexed for fifty cents each. Bernard was listening while the pigeons were being caught for the lady and she asked if the boy could sex them for her. The boy replied that Bernard had said to tell her you don't get *any* sex for fifty cents!

Another time a visitor from Sea World stopped by the farm to see Bernard and was transporting some penguins that died and had been frozen. He left the frozen birds in the freezer at Bernard's for a few days while he made some other visits around Arizona. The next day one of Bernard's helpers was quite concerned and when asked what was wrong, he said he was upset because Bernard hadn't told him what he was to feed the penguins after they thawed out.

Bernard Roer is an icon in the world avicultural community. He is truly a living legend. Techniques and procedures have advanced and we consider ourselves to be so sophisticated with our knowledge. I am reminded, though, with every visit with him, how important the basics are and how much Bernard has contributed to this understanding which has fostered this high-tech level of aviculture today. And yet Bernard never takes himself too seriously. He is not one of those self proclaimed experts. Bernard is very deliberate and offers his advice sparingly and usually only when asked.

We still must keep in touch with our roots. There are many, many things we can and should learn from the old timers that high tech will never figure out or replace. It kind of gives me goose bumps to write about Bernard and realize what a truly great aviculturist he is. To me he is just Bernard, the gruff guy who never combs his hair, who would always yell at me when I was a kid to get out of his feathers, and today inviting me to come in and have a cookie and talk for a while. 🐦