

# AFA President's Column

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## AFA and Aviculture, Today and Tomorrow

The title of this column was not chosen by accident, but by design. By design because what we do today in aviculture and within the AFA will have a lot to do with the options that we retain for tomorrow, the future for aviculture and for our birds.

Twenty years ago, what you and I chose to do with our birds was of little concern to anyone but ourselves. Today, what we choose to do about keeping, breeding, exhibiting, banding, trading, buying and selling, transporting, importing, exporting, record keeping, and maintaining studbooks, are all of interest to others and to the future of aviculture.

### Who Else

#### is Interested in Our Birds?

Who are all these others interested in our activities with exotic birds?

State and federal agencies are concerned about disease control and control of the introduction of exotic species into our lands.

Federal agencies are interested in our import and export activities, and sometimes, depending on the species, in whether or not we ship birds across state lines.

National humane groups are interested in how we cage and transport birds.

Local humane organizations are interested in how we exhibit and hold birds in shows.

Animal rights groups are interested in preventing us from keeping birds at all and seem to believe that all birds should be released to "fly free."

We aviculturists are interested in how other aviculturists keep records and band birds so that when we purchase birds from them we are assured of being able to maintain healthy gene pools. We are also interested in health records and weights, so that we are assured of receiving healthy birds.

Bird curators at zoos are interested in whether or not we are participating in studbooks for the rare bird species.

Conservation minded folks in the general public are interested in the fact that we do keep and breed birds. Many conservation focused organizations share our interest in birds and favor captive breeding for the companion pet trade. Sometimes it seems hard to just sit back and enjoy caring for our birds when so many people are looking over our shoulders.

### First, Enjoy Caring For Your Birds

Yet, this is just exactly what we must do, for the birds sake and for our sake. Personally, I like nothing better than to spend time in the aviaries, cleaning, replacing perches, checking nest boxes for new eggs and hatching chicks, and bringing in special foods such as pomegranates, papayas, dandelion greens, and branches full of flowers and buds from unsprayed fruit trees. Although the birds receive a

daily diet of vegetables and fruits, beans and rice, they enjoy variety too, and I enjoy this as much as they do. Some of the bolder birds will fly to the wire next to where I am working to see if they might be able to coax a special handout from me. I always give them something.

With our busy schedules and many tasks associated with the care and keeping of our birds, we need to spend special time with them. We need to re-experience their beauty, their uniqueness, their sociability, their vitality, their special intelligence, and be thankful that we have the opportunity to simply be in their presence.

### Additional Things to Do

When we have left the aviary and concluded our chores for the day, when we have finished in the nursery and brought the records up to date, we then need to ask ourselves, is there something else we want or need to do regarding our birds?

Proposed legislation regarding the keeping and breeding of birds and other animals needs to be monitored in every state. One very important responsibility of each AFA State Coordinator is to monitor legislation and regulation. This will keep the avicultural community in that state aware of what is happening so that appropriate action can be taken. The AFA Legislative Committee assists our Regional Directors and the State Coordinators in the work of taking educational action when proposals are made.

Legislators and regulators most often do not have sufficient or accurate information regarding aviculture. It becomes our task to educate them. This is probably one of the most critical tasks facing each AFA State Coordinator. The AFA *Bird Breeder's Legislative Handbook* is a landmark publication to provide assistance in this effort.

We need to be informed about the radical animal rights agenda. (Keep in mind that animal welfare organizations are concerned about the care animals receive, animal rights organizations, on the other hand, are concerned about keeping you from owning an animal.) Each aviculturist needs to become

educated about the basic goals of animal rights organizations—no pets or companion animals.

Why do we need to know about the animals rights people? Because they are the main proponents of new laws and regulations at the state level. They appeal to the public interest in animal welfare but write laws that restrict or prohibit ownership. In states where these laws surface, intense activity by the animal rights contingent is evident.

### Enjoy Life, Attend the Convention

After all these serious concerns, we need to have some fun and share our interest in birds while learning more about them. One way is to attend the upcoming annual AFA Convention to be held in San Antonio, Texas on August 7, 8, and 9. The focus of this conference is "Aviculture in the U.S.A." The AFA is responding to the need for information by bird owners and breeders, as well as providing an opportunity for specialty organizations to meet and hold discussions and workshops, and to provide time for people to socialize and network.

On Wednesday afternoon, August 6, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council's Certified Avian Specialist seminar will be held with Dr. Susan Clubb presenting the material.

Convention speakers will include: Jean Pattison on Breeding the African Parrots; Dale Thompson on Australian Parakeets; Rick Jordan on Incubation Problem Solving; David Phalen, DVM, on Bio-security; Steve Martin on Bird Training; Jim Murphy on Cockatoos; Wayne Schulenberg on Shining Parrots; Darrel Styles, DVM, on Avian Pediatrics and Handrearing. Gail Worth on Guidelines for Crating and Shipping; Natasha Schishakin on Neotropical Conservation Programs; Jerry McCawley on the AFA Exotic Bird Registry; Jim Murphy on Amazon Parrots; Dale Thompson on Conures; Joanne Abramson on Business and Marketing; Gail Worth on Caiques and Pionus Parrots; Jim Hawley on Taxes and Your Birds.

This is not a complete listing of speakers but it is a good sampling. Mark your calendars NOW and we will see you in San Antonio! ➔

## Book Review:

# Softbills: Care, Breeding and Conservation

by Martin Vince

Reviewed by Dale R. Thompson and Sheldon Dingle

When the great majority of recently published avian books on the market involve parrot-type birds, it was wonderful to see a great instructive avicultural book on the large group of birds known as softbills.

Of all the types of bird held in captivity in American aviculture, the most fragile and most likely to disappear in our aviaries are members of the softbill group of birds.

Martin Vince has written an excellent book on all aspects of the care and breeding of softbills in captivity. Having been involved personally in softbills for many years (Sedgewick County Zoo, Wichita, Kansas and most recently at Riverbanks Zoo and Garden, Columbia, South Carolina), Martin Vince's expertise in the care of softbills really shows in this book. Other aviculturists can now benefit from his knowledge. I personally appreciate receiving details on avicultural techniques from someone who has first hand experience in the successes and failures that have occurred in collections of softbills.

The book begins with an introduction that defines the term "softbill." Softbilled birds do *not* have soft bills. Softbilled birds eat soft food. In the main, it is their *food* which is soft, rather than their bills.

Having gotten that out of the way, Vince's first chapter is called "*Acclimating and Establishing.*" and tells how to begin with new softbills in your aviaries. This is crucial as many softbills are rather delicate—especially those imported from their native habitat which may be much different than

the environment in your aviaries. The first step, says Vince, is to provide the newly arrived birds with as enticing a diet as possible. Their high metabolism demands that they consume food frequently—usually fruits, and livefood. Only gradually can one introduce artificial food.

The same chapter also talks about transferring the birds outdoors. I tells which groups of birds are winter-delicate and which are winter-hardy. And it gives some guidelines on feeding the birds in the cooler locations. The chapter ends by saying it takes a full year to get the softbills as acclimated as they will ever be.

Chapter Two is "*Purchasing a Softbill.*" It outlines a number of questions to ask and things to look for *before* your purchase. I tells how to inspect a bird and what to look for.

"*Housing*" is the title of chapter three. Here you'll learn how to build a flight cage, how to plan for an outdoor aviary and flight, plan for an indoor aviary and flight, the use of greenhouses and many other helpful hints on how to make homes for your softbills.

One of the nicest things about a collection of softbills is that plants, in many sizes and varieties, will usually beautify the aviary and enhance the happiness of the birds. From an aesthetic standpoint, a well planted softbill aviary is a joy to behold. You all know how long a beautiful plant will last in a parrots aviary. Most softbills do not share the parrot's destructive nature. Chapter four is entitled "*Plants.*" It contains excellent and specific advice on how best to use plants