

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

SOFTBILLS

Care, Breeding and Conservation



Martin Vince

in connection with softbills and provides a long list of plants considered safe and another list of potentially toxic plants.

There is a "Catching and Handling" chapter and then two long chapters on "Diets and feeding Techniques" and "Nutrition." these chapters are quite detailed and can be referred to time and again as you work with your softbills.

The author really shows his expertise in the dietary chapter and it is very detailed. If you were not aware of it, the softbill group of birds are broken down into four general types depending upon their dietary needs. These are: OMNIVORES (for those avian species eating a variety of foods); NECTIVORES (for avian species needing primarily a nectar-type of diet); FRUGIVORES (for avian species needing a majority of fruit in their diet); and INSECTIVORES (for avian species using primarily insects in their diet). Even the omnivorous group of softbill birds are broken down in

this book into two main groups: A) Meat-biased for omnivorous species needing more meat or insects in their diet, and B) Fruit-biased for omnivorous species needing more fruit.

The one aspect of diet that could have had more written about it is the variety of commercial soft pellets or extruded diets made for softbills. The author's use of these products involved just one brand—Tropical Bits. There is a great variety of other proprietary artificial softbill foods but it is always reassuring to know that the author drew on his personal experiences which included the Tropical Bits brand.

The variety of foods needed for all types of softbills is overwhelming but very well detailed in this book. The chapter on nutrition explains the needs of a balanced diet for each type of softbill. These include proteins, fats and carbohydrates; vitamins and minerals.

The next chapter to follow, quite naturally, is "Breeding" which is followed by "Rings, Records and Stud-

books." Then comes "Incubation and Handrearing" and, finally, "Ailments." These chapters have a wealth of information and will be referred to often.

From this point, the volume turns to the birds themselves. This book, however, is not a book on individual species care and breeding, but is focused more on groups of softbills that are in the same genus or are very similar in their needs. One will not find a chapter on how to reproduce the Green Aracari but the author places all the toucans in one group as their dietary and reproductive needs are very similar. Otherwise the book would be repetitive and too long.

Under the chapter "Species Accounts" there are 28 species, genus or grouping accounts that range from tanagers, Fairy Bluebirds, Pekin Robins and Silver-eared Mesias, to the larger toucans, turacos and hornbills. Every group that can be classified as a softbill is included but the author also includes other groups that may not be determined as softbills as we think of them. They do, however, eat soft food. These include groups such as shorebirds and fruit pigeons and doves.

The center portion of the book has 143 color photos of individual species, diets, housing and nesting areas, etc. The color plates depict an amazing number of amazingly colored birds—a real stockpile of birds not often pictured. Many of the photos were taken by the author.

A preview of one chapter of this book can be seen in an article "Diets of Softbill Birds in Captivity" by Martin Vince in the AFA *Watchbird* Journal, November/December 1996.

This is a much needed addition to the avicultural literature and should be in the library of everyone who has or hopes to have a softbilled bird. It is highly recommended.

Softbills, Care, Breeding and Conservation by Martin Vince is 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 Softbound, 272 pages, 143 color photos and can be obtained for \$24.95 from:

Hancock Wildlife Research Center,
1431 Harrison Ave,
Blaine, WA 98230-5005

Order Desk:
(800) 938-1114 fax: (800) 9832262

