

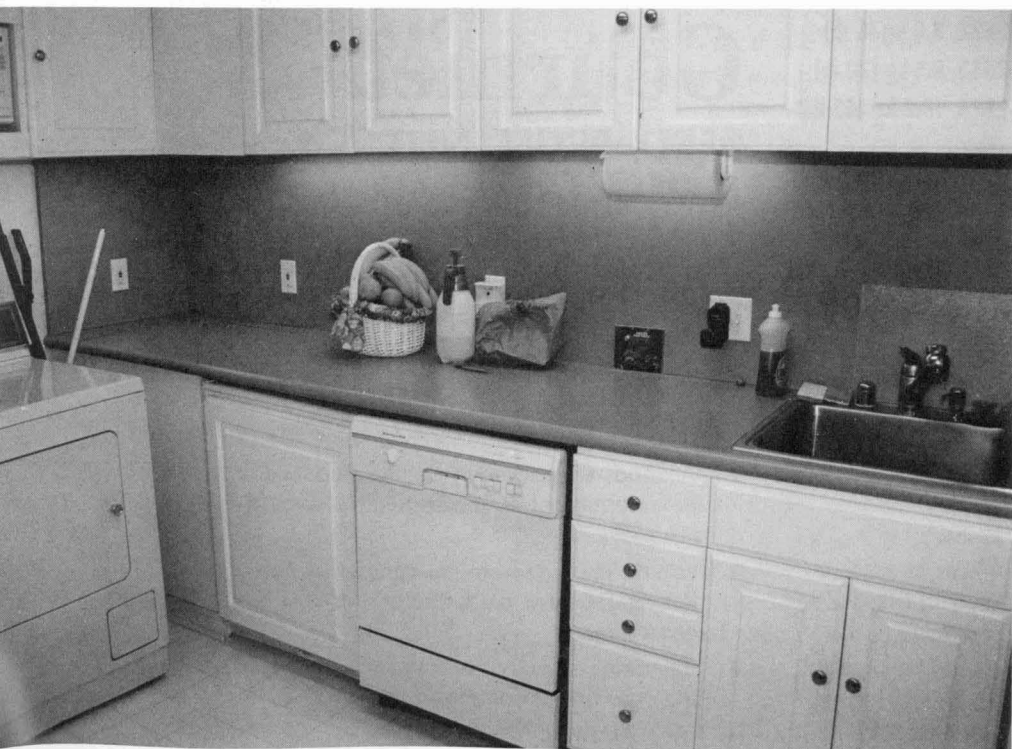
a Very Uncommon Bird House

An Extraordinary Way to Do It

by Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, CA



This wide angle shot of the bathroom suggests the birds might visit. (Note the circular perches?). Check out the bathroom photos on the following pages.



This spotless and fully equipped kitchen sports a microwave, dishwasher, trash compactor, and every other convenient device known. This bird restaurant gets an "A" for cleanliness.



The Umbrella Cockatoo has a full feast prepared each morning but heads for the bagel first.

When thinking about pet birds in the house or in an apartment, one usually thinks about a Cockatiel, lovebird, Budgie, parrotlet, or other rather quiet species. Some folks, though, really love large parrots and just put up with the noise and other hassles of big pet birds.

There is, I learned, more than one way to do a thing. Mark and Marie Stafford of Pacific Palisades, California, love *huge* parrots and have figured out how to keep them in their home *without* the noise and destruction.

What, you say – macaws in a home and no noise? Quite so, my friend. And I wouldn't have believed it either if I hadn't seen it.

But first something about the Staffords. Mark is a dentist with a practice near their large and lovely home overlooking the beautiful Pacific Ocean. Both Mark and Marie had been exposed to birds at an early age, Mark as a kid nursing indigenous wild birds back to health (sparrows, mockingbirds, doves, pigeons, and even

Photos by Sheldon Dingle

Sparrow Hawks. His family had a one-eyed pet crow named Igor.

Marie was introduced early to a home containing lots of exotic birds. Her grandmother had a house full of birds plus two outdoor aviaries. The assortment of birds included toucans, Amazon parrots, pheasants, canaries, and even peacocks.

Birds were a natural part of early life for both Mark and Marie. Then came university study, marriage, and the raising of a family. Birds were in the mind but not in the house during these years.

Then, about eight years ago, the spark ignited and the conditions were right so they bought a Goffin's Cockatoo as a pet. Marie says, "It was nice, small, and manageable. After all, how hard could it be to take care of one little bird with one little cage? Soon it was a larger cage, a play gym, a T-stand, more toys, shower perch, and a tree stand for downstairs." They were hooked. You all know that feeling.

Now they have 12 parrots including Goffin's, Citron-crested, Umbrella, and Moluccan Cockatoos. Of macaws they have a Green-winged, two Blue and Golds, two Hyacinths, a Blue-throated, and a Hahn's. A little Senegal Parrot makes the twelfth bird. They are all pets. *And they are all in the house.*

That ought to be an ear-shattering situation. But it isn't. The Staffords have figured out how to keep macaws and cockatoos in the house without the the terrible din and raging raucous racket common to such bird-filled households.

First off, the house is quite large, three stories if I remember correctly, and the birds are kept in two upstairs rooms with a common entrance. The door to the rooms is the beginning of sound control. It is custom made with marine grade foam insulation sandwiching a layer of lead. The two foam layers are different in consistency so as to absorb different frequencies of sound. On both sides of this foam/lead sandwich are sheets of heavy plywood. The door is very well made, good looking, and heavy but manageable. It sports the same insulation qualities as the insulation around the engine rooms of expensive yachts.

The windows of the two bird rooms are double paned. The outer pane is quarter inch plexiglass while the inner

Photos by Sheldon Dingle



On the third story roof top are aviaries where the birds can take a little sun, wind, and rain while looking out over the wide Pacific Ocean.



The spacious and well-lit bird room with Marie Stafford holding one of the Hyacinth Macaus. Note the large well built cages against the walls and the kitchen in the background.

pane is three sixteenths of an inch thick. Again, the different measurements absorb or block different sound frequencies. The air space between panes helps also.

The walls of the rooms have double insulation and double thicknesses of wallboard. The ceiling also contains a double dose of insulation.

Around the borders of the walls, at floor level, are placed four-inch strips of white rubber marine bumpers normally used to protect boats from bashing against the dock. In this case, the bumpers keep the large Animal Environment Cages from bashing the walls.

The rooms are lighted first by the windows but also by a double system of track lighting with 1200 watts of floodlights per room – quite bright. The floodlights are on two circuits, each with its own timer. At about sunset the first circuit dims out. About 10 minutes later the second circuit goes off and night has fallen. There is sufficient light left in the rooms to approximate gentle moonlight.

Within the bird rooms complex is a kitchen equipped with a microwave oven, stovetop, dishwasher, refrigerator, sink, and trash compactor. It is a full service kitchen where food can be prepared for the adult birds as well as for those that need handfeeding. Over the years many of the Staffords' birds were gotten very young and handed to maturity. The kitchen helped.

But of all the unique items in the Stafford bird house, the thing that most impressed me is the way the Staffords really interact with their pet birds. And the specific interaction that blew me away is the shower routine – yes, shower.

Believe it or not, folks, but every night four or five lucky birds get to sleep on special perches in the Staffords' huge bedroom. When dawn lights up the sky, the birds climb all over the bed and wake up Mark and Marie. Then Mark, following a strict routine, takes the birds, one by one in a predetermined order, to the great shower room. He places each on its PVC perch and showers – Mark *and* the birds. Everyone splashes.

While the birds are in the shower, Marie goes through the cages in the

Photo by Sheldon Dingle



Mark Stafford interrupts a wonderful cocktail party to play with one of his favorite pet birds, a beautiful Hyacinth Macaw. No, the macaw doesn't get a sip of the Margarita.

Photo by Marie Stafford



You've heard of "singin' in the shower," well, this is "swingin' in the shower." All of the birds get their morning shower. Everybody gets wet in here.

bird rooms changing food and water and wiping off the cages – general maintenance. She supplies seeds, nuts, pellets, pasta, fruits, veggies, their warm breakfast, and one bagel each. It doesn't get any better than this.

The birds are given a great deal of

outside stimulation and environmental enrichment. After the bagels, not all at once but by rotation, birds are taken to the dental office where they delight and educate the patients. Many patients have become friends with the birds and even request a certain bird as they call

for an appointment.

On weekends the birds, again, one or two at a time, are taken out to grab a cup of coffee (Mark and Marie drink the coffee), pick up a video, or just sit out front interacting with the neighbors.

Every other weekend all the birds are packed up, each in its own carrier,

and taken to a cabin in the mountains where there are 14 large cages and 14 stands (never know when one might need an extra). When conditions are right, six birds at a time are allowed to clamber about a small pine tree next to the cabin. I don't know any human kids that live so well.

The Staffords are very active in various bird organizations including the AFA, the Avicultural Society of America, World Parrot Trust, West Valley Bird Club, West Los Angeles Bird Club (they are AFA Delegates), and Orange County Bird Breeders. They are PIJAC-Certified Avian Specialists and are Foundation Members of Loro Parque, Tenerife.

With a lot of creativity, even more love, and a few shekels, the Staffords have proven to the world that parrots can, indeed, live in the house in great comfort – comfort for the birds and comfort for those whom the birds own. I've never seen such a remarkable blending of birds into the family.

Marie told me, "The birds have a great time here. As you can see, they have actually taken over. It's fun to watch them interact with each other. They talk, sing, and teach each other new phrases. As members of the flock, they also learn to eat new foods and try new things. We are very lucky they came into our lives."


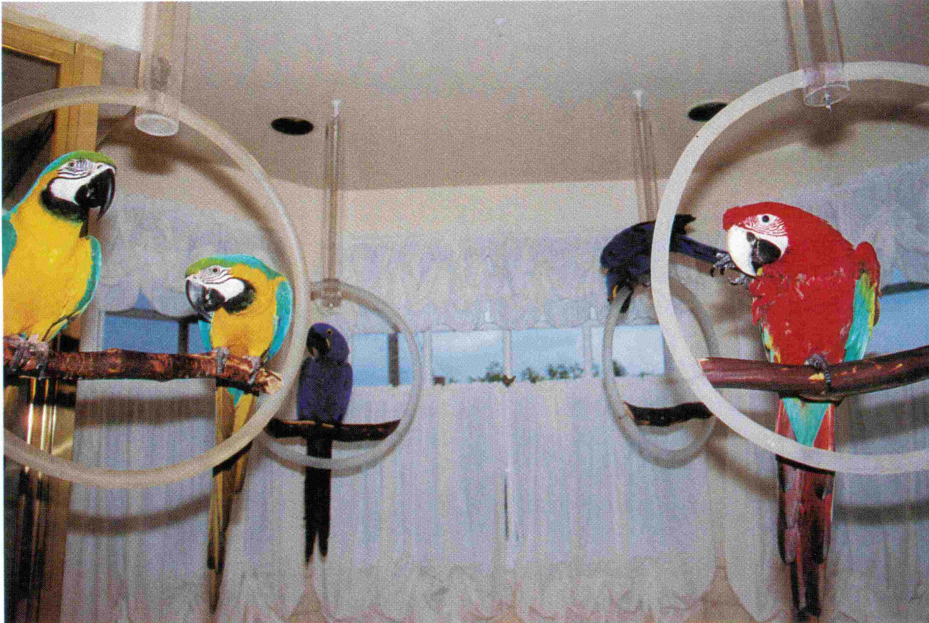
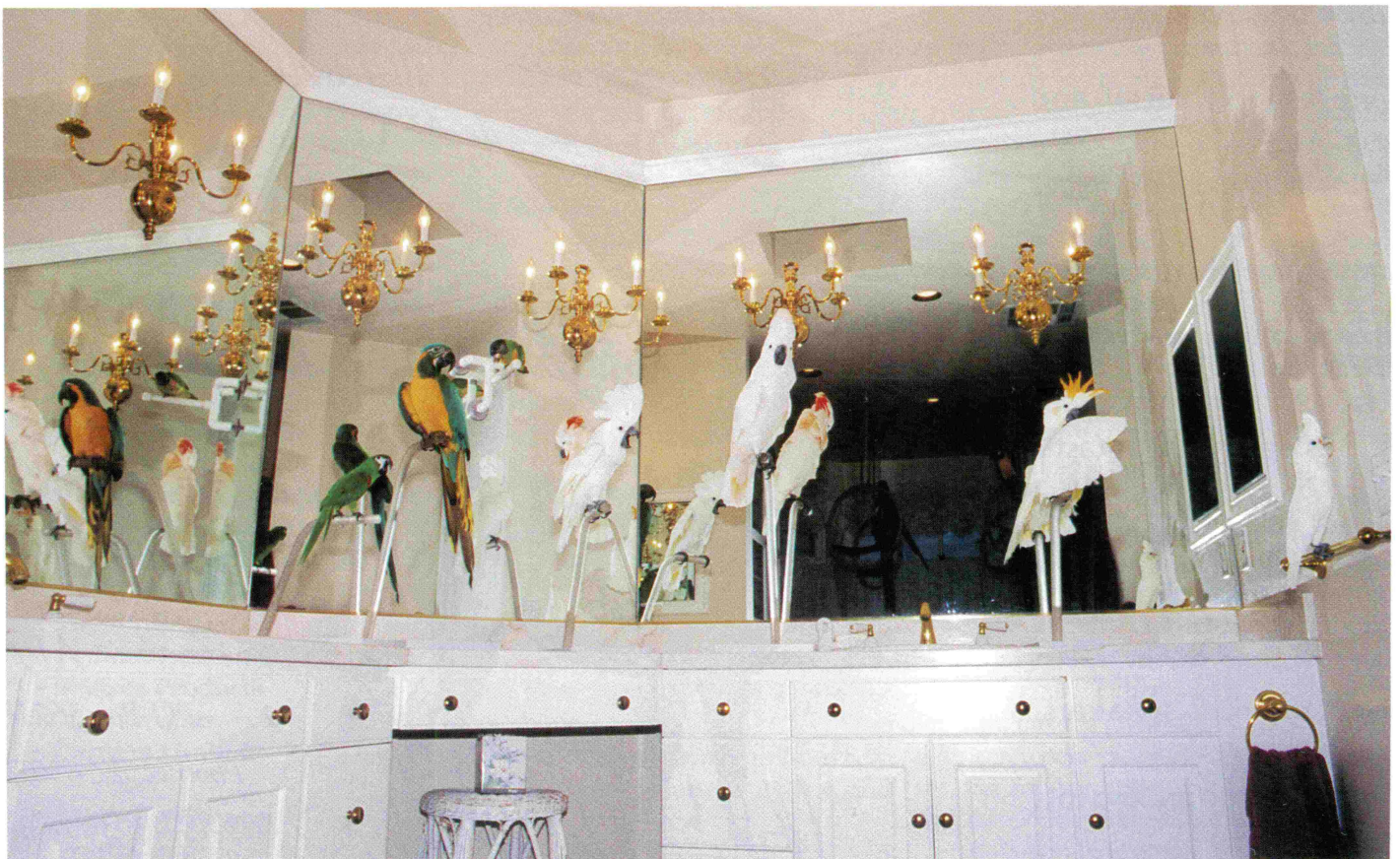
I might add that the birds are very lucky also. 

Photo by Marie Stafford



The birds hang around waiting their turns in the shower.

Photo by Marie Stafford



This ritzy bathroom would have done Liberace proud. As it is, the birds (and the Staffords) have full use and enjoyment of it.