



100 Years of Aviculture, An Australian Perspective

by Graeme Hyde, Elliminyt, Australia

A **Introduction**
viculture in Australia commenced after European settlement in 1788 when the early settlers kept birds they brought with them from the United Kingdom and Europe. From an Australian viewpoint, remembering its isolation "deep-down" in the Southern Hemisphere, probably the most significant events in Australian aviculture in the past 100 years were:

Aviculture of Native Australian Birds

The development of the appropriate techniques and methodology of the housing, management and breeding of native Australian birds, especially Australian grassfinches and parrots, within the wide-ranging climatic conditions that existed in the areas "settled" by the immigrants from the Northern Hemisphere was both important and significant.

Importance

Because Australian finches, parrots, cockatoos, doves, pigeons, quail, and soft-billed species all live in an environment completely different to England and Europe, it was important the bird-keepers of 200 years ago learned how to care properly for these "strange new birds." The methods they were used to, based on breeding canaries in small cages, were totally inappropriate to the avicultural needs of the Australian birds they could then so readily acquire (trapping of native Australian birds is now banned).

Establishment of Clubs and Societies

The establishment of avicultural

societies in major capital cities, viz, Adelaide, South Australia; Melbourne, Victoria; Sydney, New South Wales; and Perth, Western Australia; and the eventual publication of regular avicultural magazines, such as *Australian Aviculture*, journal of the Melbourne-based Avicultural Society of Australia and *Bird Keeping in Australia*, magazine of the Adelaide-based Avicultural Society of South Australia, enabled breeders to obtain new knowledge and share their avicultural experiences with other enthusiasts.

Importance

Bird clubs catering for the breeding and showing of canaries were established by enthusiastic fanciers. Importantly, many aviculturists decided that the hobby of birdkeeping also needed avicultural organizations (usually termed "society") for those who preferred breeding birds as compared with those whose main (and legitimate) interest was in the showing of birds. This, for example, was the reason why the Avicultural Society of Australia was formed in 1940.

The oldest avicultural society in Australia is the Avicultural Society of South Australia founded in 1928. This well established society was result of a small group of keen Adelaide bird breeders getting together with the purpose of having a "local club" for like-minded persons in what is one of the best areas in Australia for breeding of birds in outdoor aviaries.

The importance of such organizations, such as the Avicultural Society of South Australia and the Avicultural Society of Australia – of which I am the secretary/editor, cannot be underestimated. Such societies – based in

Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne, functioned long before the current ease of communication that we all now take for granted. Few aviculturists of the 1930s - 1940s and early 1950s owned a telephone or an automobile, and fax machines and e-mail hadn't been invented. Monthly meetings around Australia enabled enthusiastic aviculturists to meet, listen to guest speakers, and "talk about birds." The natural "flow-on" was the publication of monthly journals or bulletins. Thus information sharing became firmly established and, eventually, the quality of the material published improved as the experiences and the knowledge of the members increased.

Formation of a National Coordinating Organization

The formation of the Avicultural Federation of Australia (AFA) in 1980 as the coordinating body for aviculture and birdkeeping in Australia was, in all probability, the major turning point for aviculture in Australia. The AFA, which is modeled on the American Federation of Aviculture, established state affiliates and has now held nine national conventions since 1980. (They are usually held every two-three years in different capital cities.)

Importance

The formation of the Avicultural Federation of Australia two decades ago was, I believe, the single most important event in the history of Australian aviculture. A coordinating organization based on the well established, and successful, American Federation of Aviculture, was not only needed – it was welcomed. Apart from the important task of establishing "state affiliates" who meet regularly, the AFA is the facilitator of our national conventions. The most recent – "Birds 99" – held in Brisbane, Queensland in June last year proved, yet again, that the opportunity to listen to, and meet local and overseas guest speakers is a most important and enjoyable aspect of aviculture that not only broadens one's knowledge but is the motivation – or the stimulus – required for us to forge ahead despite the challenges of the computer-generated age we live in.

Publication of Avicultural Books

The proliferation of Australian produced avicultural books now available, compared to 55 years ago when I commenced in the hobby, is (almost) impossible to comprehend. The only bird breeding book published in Australia in the 1940s was *Canary Breeding in Australia* by Cyril Kirby. Yes, the home country of the Budgerigar – Australia, couldn't boast even one book on the breeding of Budgerigars in captivity.

Importance

The paucity of avicultural literature in Australia can, perhaps, be illustrated best by mentioning that, when as a young schoolboy (late 1940s - early 1950s), I was breeding Budgerigars in cages in the backyard there wasn't a book available about captive breeding them written by an Australian Budgie fancier. The first three Budgerigar books I owned were *The Budgerigar in Captivity* by Denys Weston; *Budgerigars and How to Breed Them* (Fifth Edition - revised 1948) by Cyril H. Rogers; and *Colour Breeding Budgerigars* by W. Watmough. They were published by *Cage Birds*, England, and readily available in Australia.

As an entire article could be devoted to Australian avicultural books [*Graeme, please write one! S.L.D.*] it is sufficient to say that the market today is well catered for and all areas of interest – from finches to pheasants – and every thing in-between, are available, written by experienced aviculturists, and gotten at affordable prices. The proliferation of easy-to-read informative books, in Australia, is a success story in its own right.

Development of Avian Medicine

The interest shown by several Australian veterinary surgeons in avian medicine has been a most important development that has, and continues, to assist aviculture "Down Under." The number of skilled and (now) widely experienced avian vets in private practice has done so much for the birds in our care – both pet birds and aviary species.

Importance

The regular ongoing contact that Australian avian veterinarians have with their American counterparts, including attendance at annual conferences in the US, has kept the Aussie vets up to date with the latest developments in avian medicine, surgery, and techniques. One of the reasons for the quality of avian veterinary medicine in Australia is due to the Australian Chapter of the US-based Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV). The Australian Chapter has an annual conference each year and is at the forefront of avian medicine in this country.

In addition, our avian veterinarians speak on a regular basis at monthly avicultural meetings around the country and are always included on the list of speakers at the national avicultural conventions.

The New Century: The Challenge

I am convinced that the single most important thing facing aviculturists around the world, especially in Australia, is the desire to maintain the stocks of aviary birds currently held. The ability is there – this must be "backed-up" with the desire to ensure that we don't "lose" any species through neglect or indifference. Because present-day aviculturists don't need to join an avicultural club or society to obtain information, we might experience the closure of well established societies. This has occurred already in Australia where two long-established avicultural societies folded last year.

The availability of phone, fax, computer, internet, and e-mail technology – plus the general ease of communication and travel – gives access to information that was once only available by attending the monthly bird meeting, or reading the monthly magazine. Modern technology has changed that forever.

Conclusion

As the "wings of change" flutter through aviculture around the world, it is important we remember that how we practice the "culture" of aviculture today will determine the future of aviculture tomorrow.

