



View of outdoor section of suspended aviaries for Cape Parrots. Note the dense foliage planted in the 600mm space between aviaries.

Photos courtesy of William Horsfield

desire to come to South Africa and meet "bird people" and without delay he sent me addresses and telephone numbers of various breeders he was acquainted with. Not knowing what to expect, I allocated 10 days for my initial visit, intending to juggle my time between Joburg, Bloemfontein, and Durban.

I had some homework to do and I started phoning and writing the individuals John had so kindly referred me to. Without knowing me, I had invitations to visit and stay with at least a dozen people. Ignorance is truly bliss! The hospitality and graciousness I experienced was overwhelming and all the South Africans I met were truly delightful.

I had no idea that in South Africa there existed so many people with fantastically enormous collections. Now, granted, I did visit some of the largest, most well known breeders, but the average collection I saw consisted of approximately 400 aviaries. Smaller collections have only 100 or so flights, and one man I met had 1500 aviaries and was in the process of doubling that! Most of the breeders there keep mixed species collections, though some do specialize and at the moment Indian



AFA Visits: Amazona Bird Farm KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

by Roger Bringas
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In June of 1999 Cathay Pacific, one of the more enterprising and reliable airlines, was running a special that was too good to pass up. I had always wanted to visit South Africa, but had very few contacts in that part of the world; thus I wasn't sure if I could meet enough bird breeders to warrant such a trip. Secondly, it's about as far away from the U.S. as one can get, making it normally a rather expensive proposition. I had planned on going to Southeast Asia in October and when Cathay Pacific announced that one could fly from Honk Kong to Johannesburg roundtrip for an extra \$500, I made my travel plans immediately.

I contacted Mr. John Vermaak in Durban, one of the few South Africans I knew, whom I had met at past A.F.A. conventions. I explained to him my



Outdoor section of cockatoo and Macaw conventional aviaries at Amazona Bird Farm.

Ring-necked Parakeet mutations are very popular.

South Africa is a large country and if one wishes to see many breeders in a short period of time, then flying is the only practical way to go. But on such a trip, one really needs to combine air and ground transportation. I did log in several hundreds of miles riding shotgun with many new friends. I'd visit one breeder who knew another breeder, who knew another breeder and by the end of nearly each day we had driven several hundred miles.

Climate and landscape can vary greatly. There are expansive arid regions inland and humid coastal stretches north and south. I was able to go to a few game parks and see much of the indigenous wildlife that we all think about when we contemplate Africa. Being in one's car 10 feet away from a group of lions or a White Rhinoceros and her baby is something very special.

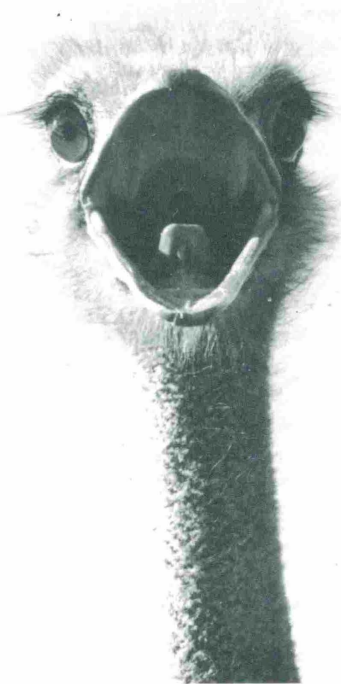
My last day was spent driving through the outskirts of Durban, on a pleasant, sunny November afternoon. Jacaranda trees in full bloom lined the countryside and were seemingly everywhere. The blue sky was filled with puffy, white clouds, and there was a soft breeze that carried only a slight hint that the Indian Ocean was just a few miles away. It was a perfect setting to meet Mr. William Horsfield, owner of Amazona Bird Farm.

The facility is set upon several beautifully landscaped acres that have maintained a distinct character due to the natural undulations of the area. Mr. Horsfield resides and keeps his birds at his farm and has done a terrific job at designing and building some of the most beautiful aviaries I have seen. A good looking facility is one thing, but I am always more curious to know what breeding results and overall successes one has achieved.

Amazona Bird Farm impressed me with their diligence and professionalism. Mr. Horsfield is committed to his birds and although he had a severe setback with Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease Virus (PBFDV) in his Cape Parrots in 1998, he is now gaining ground with them again. His ongoing successes with difficult species

such as Hyacinth Macaws, Palm Cockatoos, and Cape Parrots are impressive and he has generously agreed to share his experience and knowledge with our readership. We hope to publish other articles from Mr. Horsfield in future issues of the *Watchbird* and feel certain that there is much good information to be had.

This particular issue deals with African species; therefore we have chosen to publish an article written by Mr. Horsfield on Cape Parrots. Please note that the breeding season in South Africa is now in progress and, to update the information in his article, several pairs of Mr. Horsfield's Cape Parrots have now successfully bred. He is expecting 15-17 PBFDV-free chicks by the end of this season.



*The great intimidator,
ostrich security watchdog.*

After reading Mr. Horsfield's article, one will understand the difficulties that he had to go through and the impossible decisions he had to make. Mr. Horsfield reports with enormous relief that since the initial outbreak of PBFDV in the Capes there has not been a single positive PBFDV result again. He has tested and re-tested every bird in his facility and will continue with random batch testing in spite of the fact that the entire facility is now recognized as

being one of the few proven PBFDV, APV and *Chlamidia* free collections in the country. He instituted and maintains a very strict quarantine and testing protocol and is working closely with the Cape Parrot research team at Natal University who are liaising with medical professionals around the world to help further research on PBFDV in the wild population of Cape Parrots in South Africa.

At this point the PBFDV test used in SA is a qualitative but not an accurately quantitative test. In other words, it can detect whether the virus is present in the blood but not how much virus is present. Once the *amount* of virus in the blood can be detected then it will be easier to judge the exact stage of infection and therefore predict the outcome more accurately.

It appears as if there may be more pathogenic strains of PBFDV that are responsible for those cases where birds are showing symptoms and death and non-pathogenic strains of the virus where birds are testing positive but are remaining otherwise healthy indefinitely. Birds under two years of age are at the highest risk after exposure and only a tiny percentage of these will survive. Adult birds with an effective immune system (suffering little or no stress) that are exposed to the virus can overcome the virus and are then so-called naturally vaccinated.

However the virus itself is immunosuppressive and exposed birds are more susceptible to co-infections such as bacterial fungal or viral.

Dr. Denis York, a molecular biologist at Durban's Medical School sees the virus as being similar in many ways to HIV. At this stage he is one of SA's biggest hopes in terms of research findings into the PBFDV virus, through the excellent work done by him and his team at Molecular Diagnostic Services.

My trip to South Africa, although too brief, was a most pleasurable and enlightening experience. I wish to thank Mr. Horsfield and his fellow South Africans for all of their kind and generous hospitality and I look forward to returning one day soon.

[Editor's Note: Please see Mr. Horsfield's article on page 9 in this issue.]

