



Natasha Schischakin with the star of the show – the little blue puppet representing the baby Spix's Macaw the village children long for.

AFA Campaign for the Spix's Macaw

“On my desk lies a small blue puppet with fuzzy down that was once the star of a play telling the fairy tale story of the Spix's Macaw. It is a reminder of an event in a dilapidated old theater, in a small rural town, and of a group of children that had been in the play. They had run up to me afterwards and given me the puppet as a reminder to help them get a real Spix's chick... Maybe we are not too far off from fulfilling that wish.”

Natasha Schischakin

AFA Watchbird Nov/Dec. 1999

Those words, written by Natasha Schischakin in her article entitled “The Spix's Macaw – a Non-Extinction Story,” published in the Nov/Dec 1999 issue of the AFA Watchbird, gave then AFA President Robert J. Berry, an idea for a fund-raising effort that would bring U.S. aviculturists and the local community of Curaça together to jointly help in the conservation of the

Spix's Macaw. Bob proposed a project where the children of the area would make a limited number of Spix's Macaw puppets based on the original used in the play. These crafted puppets would be available to contributors to the AFA Campaign for the Spix's Macaw who would receive a unique, one-of-a-kind puppet representing a child's-eye view of the Spix's Macaw (many of these children have grown

up regularly seeing the last wild bird). At the same time, the children would be contributing directly through their efforts to the conservation program that is striving to help the bird they care so deeply about. Part of the proceeds would be returned for education of these and other children of the region through support of the rural schoolhouse program.

Last July, this idea became a reality when the children of the Rural Schoolhouse came together and made the first set of Spix's Macaw puppets. This was a festive and fun occasion for the children (and even some parents) – as they have never had the luxury of having paints, plaster and other art materials (colored pencils are a luxury).

After the puppets were made, Yara Barros, the Spix's Macaw Field Researcher explained to the children that of course the puppet was theirs – but, if they wished to donate it to the AFA for the fund-raising effort and to help the Spix's Macaw – they could.

The response was enthusiastic and unanimous – the children, some who had by now grown quite attached to their special hand-made puppets, willingly gave them up. They wanted the puppets, but they wanted to help the Spix's Macaw more.



Adults and students alike gather in front of the schoolhouse where the Spix's Macaw puppets are made. Note all the puppet heads held by the students. As much as they loved their own little puppets, every single child donated his or her puppet to help raise money for the conservation of the Spix's Macaw.

The AFA 2000 Conference in Los Angeles "kicked-off" AFA's Campaign for the Spix's Macaw. The first puppet (of only 50), which was made by a little girl named Maria, was presented to Genevieve Wall and Cathy Kelly at the AFA Banquet. They had provided, on behalf of the Last Chance Ranch and Sanctuary, an initial donation of \$30,000 to the AFA to support the Spix's Macaw conservation efforts of the Ara Brasil Institute. The Institute is a newly formed non-governmental organization in Brazil which is working with the official Brazilian recovery committees (Spix's, Lear's and Hyacinth Macaws) to implement the priority conservation programs for these species.

In the fairy tale story of the play, the puppet symbolizes hope for the return and reestablishment of the Spix's Macaw to the wild. Next year, five captive-bred Spix's Macaws will be transferred to Brazil from the Birds International, Inc. facility in the Philippines for eventual reintroduction to the wild. It appears that the children's wishes might actually be coming true.

By developing a campaign in support of the Spix's Macaw program, the AFA is providing its members and others with an opportunity to contribute to the



Photos courtesy Natasha Schischakin

Brazilian school children crafting a couple of the 50 baby Spix's Macaw puppets.



Puppet heads drying in the sun. When they get bodies, they become valuable collectibles.

Photo by Sheldon Dingle



(Left to right) Natasha Schischakin, Genevieve Wall, Yara Barros, and Cathy Kelly (holding an encased puppet made by the Brazilian children). Second Vice President Lyrae Perry is in the background.

long-term conservation of a species that is recovering because of avicultural techniques in captive breeding and management, as well as field research and community-based conservation. If you wish to contribute, please send a check to:

American Federation of Aviculture, Inc
P.O. Box 56216,
Phoenix, AZ 85079

Of course, if you are among the first 49 donors to make a contribution of \$1,000 or more, you will receive one of these original puppets in a display case and with a certificate of authenticity. We hope that by the time of the next conference in Houston, Texas, we will be able to report the great contribution that AFA members have made to this program. Thanks to Genevieve and Cathy who got this effort started with their support. Now it's *our* turn.

Benny J. Gallaway, President

