

# The Exciting AFA National Convention of 2000

by Susie Christian, Morro Bay, California

**D**id we have fun? You betcha! Did we learn a lot? You betcha! Not to mention all those faces we only knew as E Mail addresses previous to this. It is so nice to attach faces and real live people with the "dot-coms" in my computer's address book!

This was my second time at an AFA Convention, but I had been gearing up for months. Lots and lots of arrangements to be made before I leave my crew of Eclectus and Rose-breasteds behind for three days. I know we can all sympathize with one another regarding this problem. No one else takes care of them *quite* like we do.

The morning of the big day was upon me and I was up at 2:00 A.M. to start the four-hour drive to the Wyndham Hotel, located at the Los Angeles Airport. Accompanied by seven un-weaned, juvenile Eclectus that I preferred not to trust to anyone else, I had plenty of good company for the drive.

We arrived in time for the first speaker but, as I knew from previous experience, there were so many people I hadn't seen in a while that I would have to enjoy a quick visit. All of my friends were enthusiastic about the Delegates Meeting the previous day. It was attended by delegates from AFA member clubs all across the U.S.A.

When the Delegates Meeting adjourned for a trip to the Los Angeles Zoo, everyone headed there for a pizza lunch and a tour of the zoo. I was told the behind the scenes visit to the California Condor breeding facility was an unforgettable experience.

When the delegates reconvened their meeting Wednesday evening, a

couple hundred of them saw a fascinating program presented by Yara Barros and Natasha Schischakin who are working "hands on" with the last remaining Spix's Macaw in the wild. Yara works in the field where the Spix's Macaw lives, and Natasha is the coordinator of a worldwide program involving aviculturists who hold the captive Spix's that will hopefully repopulate the wild. The delegates saw a wonderful video of the villagers in Brazil who have adopted the last wild Spix's Macaw as their own bird. It lives in their neighborhood. Some of them actually *see* it. Can you imagine seeing the *only* creature of its kind alive in the wild?

After chatting with friends and learning about all I had missed the previous day, I finally got my video gear figured out. As I have done at other conventions, I try to tape as many of the talks as I can. I always ask permission and the speakers are quite flattered to think I am taping them. The filming is so valuable because I have the chance to watch one talk while I am taping another. Then when I get home I have the opportunity to catch a lot of the things I missed the first time when I watched them in person.

Two of the friendly faces I saw were Roland and Ilana Cristo scurrying around from one speaker's room to the other trying to keep it all coordinated. They did a fantastic job of recruiting awesome speakers as well as making sure the talks went off on schedule.

I finally got on schedule and attended Dick Schroeder's colorful presentation on Softbills in Planted Aviaries. Don Brightsmith followed with his Tambopata Macaw Project in Peru. He had some amazing slides of the Macaws and I found it very fascinating the steps he is taking toward Macaw conservation in the wild.

Frank H. Pearce of Brinsea incubators and brooders spoke on Thursday afternoon presenting an enlightening in-depth talk on incubation. I had an opportunity to talk to him at the booth in the Exhibit Hall and was able to ask a few questions on the Brinsea incubator I purchased this spring.

All the way from Australia came one of the most interesting and enthusiastic

people I have met in a long time, Graeme Phipps. I'd been alerted about his energy and he was everything I'd heard about and even more. I listened to his plan for The Millennial Project for Aviculture, which he delivered with great enthusiasm and I was impressed with his do-able ideas and plans for conservation.

Thursday evening I grabbed my little female Eclectus who needed socializing and headed for the Past President's Reception. (Thank goodness the hotel was cooperative about us having birds everywhere you looked.) It was nice to see so many of our past leaders in person and be able to give them a round of applause and appreciation for leading us to where we are today. There was also a very funny question and answer skit with each of the attending past presidents, involving John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe, and Clark Gable (professional look-alikes, of course).

Friday morning came sooner than I wanted it to and I was up at the crack of dawn to see Marc Boussekey, from France speak on the Red-vented Cockatoo. His slides were fantastic of these parrots in the wild and he accompanied them with a great talk.

Another speaker I'd been alerted to was George Smith from England. I was told by a noted aviculturist not to miss George. I am not personally too keen on the subject of mutations, however I decided to film his talk after hearing previously of his witty presentation. Turns out this was the most fun and painless talk I have ever listened to on mutations, mostly because George would wander into other areas that were incredibly more interesting to me.

Kashmir Csaky rounded out my Friday afternoon with her talk on Co-Parenting Macaws, comparing parent-raised and hand-raised siblings. From her lovely slides, her Hyacinths look to be almost the same size as Kashmir. She is a petite woman but exudes lots of drive, ambition and dedication.

Friday night, coinciding with the birthday of Graeme Phipps, a handful of us arranged to have dinner together. Of course our dinner lasted five hours and it was pure entertainment and education to have a ring-side seat with this group. The only thing more side-split-

# Convention Corner AFA 2001 Houston, Texas

ting was witnessing an encounter between Graeme Phipps and George Smith the next morning, bantering back and forth trading friendly insults with their wonderful Australian and British accents.

Saturday we were privileged to have Thomas Arndt, author of *The Lexicon of Parrots*, who came all the way from Germany, give a marvelous two-hour talk on Conures. His talk was accompanied by unbelievably stunning slides. He also spoke later in the day on Pygmy Parrots with equally stimulating visuals.

Eb Cravens from Hawaii had a lot of very useable ideas to share regarding Avicultural Techniques in a Controlled Mixed-species Psittacine Colony. He always comes up with new and creative approaches that I can't wait to take home to try on my own flock.

The title of "Who Told You That?" nailed my attention and I was very entertained and informed by Lyrae Perry with her avicultural facts and fiction.

Saturday's schedule was further complicated for me because the two speakers ran simultaneously in separate rooms and at the same time there was Pet Day seminar going on in still another room. My only complaint was too many choices and I didn't want to miss any of them.

A feature of the convention I especially appreciated was the Speakers of the Day Q & A Round Table, held after the last talk each day. I probably enjoyed the daily roundtables as much as I did the prepared talks they had previously given. My video camera was left to run during this time too because I didn't want to miss a morsel of information.

After the last lively round table discussion, I put my feet up for an hour, fed the babies, and headed back downstairs decked out in the first dress I have worn in a couple of years. My job requirements these days don't call for a dress. The flock could care less how I'm garbed to tend to them!

The Reception and Banquet were packed elbow to elbow with aviculturists exchanging information, names, phone numbers and E Mail addresses one last time before next year's event.

The silent auction, awards and great menu rounded out the evening in grand style.


The recurring theme plain to see at this convention was that of aviculturists' involvement in avian conservation. Judging from the number of new special interest bird groups visible in the exhibit hall, this was a very heartening thing to see. Aviculturists are picking a particular species and forming a club. I counted about 20 specialty clubs each with a particular species as its focus.


A number of the speakers, including Don Brightsmith, Thomas Arndt, Marc Boussekey and many others, shared their wondrous slides of birds in the wild. They gave us a glimpse of the birds in their native habitat and what we are doing to help preserve it for them.

Captive breeding and conservation were also covered. I think the message may finally be sinking in that conservation begins at home and it is done by each one of us taking a small step at a time and realizing the delicate future of aviculture and of the environment is in our hands.

All this carried through at the grand Banquet. It was just after the feasting ended that Yara Barros and Natasha Schischakin made a touching presentation of a Spix's Macaw puppet made by the Brazilian village children where the macaw lives. We were all moved – and I saw a few tears of emotion when Genevieve Wall and Cathy Kelly received the puppet into their care – a small but heartfelt token of gratitude for the generous donation they arranged for the Spix's Macaw Recovery Program

I am very grateful to have attended this once a year assembly of the most awesome folks in the feathered-world. A dedicated and passionate lot! My thirst for knowledge kept me running in and out of the talks, not wanting to miss a precious word or idea. I happily renewed old acquaintances, made fantastic new friends from all over the United States and the world and learned so much I didn't think I had room in my head for all that new stuff!

The 2000 AFA Convention was without a doubt the grandest highlight of my year! 

Mark your calendars and make your summer plans early. AFA Convention 2001 will be held in exciting Houston, Texas, August 8-11, 2001 at the beautiful J.W. Marriott Galleria Hotel. The hotel is conveniently located between both Houston airports. Room rates are a low \$99 for both single and double rooms and plans are already underway to make this convention a memorable one! Stay tuned to this column for more information and be sure to check out our web site [www.afa.birds.org](http://www.afa.birds.org) for the latest convention news. 

## National Finch and Softbill Society Awards Lifetime Membership

On August 5th, 2000, at the AFA annual convention in Los Angeles, Vince Huntington, NFSS delegate to the AFA, presented the first ever National Finch and Softbill Society "Lifetime Achievement and Membership Award."

In one of the closing ceremonies of the AFA convention, Vince presented the award to author and long time bird antiquarian, Robert Black. Mr. Black is the internationally respected speaker and author of *Problems with Finches* (1980, 2nd edition 1999), *Establishing a Strain in Aviculture* (1987, 2nd edition, 1998), and *Avian Nutrition* (1981, 2nd edition 1999).

After gaining near unanimous NFSS support to make this unique presentation to a non-NFSS member, Vince Huntington spoke for NFSS in front of over a hundred aviculturists when he declared - "and NFSS requires nothing more of Mr. Black than he continue his great research and work. . ."

This impartial support for Mr. Black's research received a standing ovation. Afterward, Vince reports he received "countless" hand shakes and congratulation to and for NFSS. 