



Turkey Anyone?

by Vince Huntington
San Diego, California

Photo by Sheldon Dingle



Vince and Sally Huntington alongside the PVC pipe and netting portable aviary where Turkey blew his talk.

On Saturday, August 5th, at the AFA convention in Los Angeles, Sally Huntington (NFSS 6th regional vice president) and Vince Huntington ("Sally's Husband") presented an NFSS sponsored one hour workshop entitled "Hand Raised, Handfed Finches and Softbills As Companion Birds."

A group of about 30 AFA conventioners gathered at the NFSS presentation that found the Huntingtons sitting inside a 12 by 8 foot netted enclosure made especially for the presentation. Surrounded by small cages which faced away from their audience, the Huntingtons introduced, one by one, several hand raised and handfed birds

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– to the pleasure, entertainment and education of everyone present.

When introduced, the birds sat on fingers or shoulders, or made their way calmly around the enclosure as Sally delivered a brief history of each bird, including how it was handfed, on what, and for how long.

The hero of the show was to be a male Red-headed Finch who was hatched on Thanksgiving Day 1999, thus named Turkey. Turkey was to show off how Sally had experimented with the brief song and language-window that is opened for many finches within a few days or weeks after hatching. Turkey, was to speak out and say “Oh Turkey” and “Turkey, out, Turkey, Turkey”

Well, as expected, Turkey did not utter a word.

Vince and Sally continued their presentation. They brought forth “Who” a five-month-old Bicheno (Owl) Finch who was colony bred in a flight that included African Mouse-birds. Who was joined by a two-inch-long Yellow-legged Honeycreeper named Gem. Gem (and a nest mate) had been par-

ent hatched in a 2-1/2 by 2-1/2 by 4 foot cage in their living room in San Diego. They had been provided 15 hours of vita lighting, plenty of tiny mealworms, 24-hour heat lamp and a cape honey-suckle plant to hide in. Sally took Gem to raise and study, and left the mate with the parents.

Bucket and Squeegie, joined Who and Gem. Squeegie, an Orange-cheeked Waxbill had been neglected by parents in an outside flight. Bucket, an Orange-breasted Gray Zebra Finch, when a week old, was brought in to provide Squeegie with a “warm-friend.” As expected, Bucket and Squeegie are fast friends.

While new birds were brought forth, including Marty, a Blue-gray Tanager, Fernando, a Brazilian Red-crested Cardinal, Hershey, a chocolate Self-Society Finch, Stilton, their four-year-old Blue-naped Mousebird, and Kuchuing, a two-week-old Pekin Robin, wouldn't you know, Turkey remained mute.

While everyone waited for Turkey to speak his name, Sally brought forth Paul Williams, a Blue Button Quail

(named after a button quail fancier), and Fluffy, a four-year-old silver Button. Contrary to all expectations of the usually panicky and quick-to-fly-straight-up-and-bust-their-heads Button Quail, this pair sat calmly while Vince scratched their necks and explained “Though Buttons appear to be self reliant when born, they are actually much like baby chicks. They mimic their mother's eating behavior, which, Sally discovered, is duplicated by letting the baby-button peck egg-food from a fingertip. They then imprint, and remain calm birds.” Paul Williams and Fluffy spent the rest of the presentation calmly walking about the table and floor of the enclosure.

Turkey, however, remained silent as Sally answered numerous questions about hand taming and making companion birds out of finches and soft-bills. Regarding Turkey, there were a few looks of “yeah-sure-he-says-his-name” on some faces as the meeting adjourned, but most seemed to understand oppositional kid-like behavior when they saw it.

Time between presentations did not permit taking down the netted enclosure so the hand-raised birds were left in the room. While Vince and Sally took their turn working at the NFSS booth, Jan Beatrous, (sponsored by the African Parrot Society) used the room to make her well-prepared presentation on Pet Bird Theft Prevention.

Afterward, for a roundtable discussion of the day's presentations, the Huntingtons returned to the room to discover that throughout Jan's lecture, Turkey, perhaps bored, perhaps regretting having let Vince and Sally down, perhaps cautious as Jan spoke of bird's being stolen, began announcing. . . loud and clear, “Turkey, Turkey. Hey, Turkey . . . Turkey out.”

To the Huntington's chagrin, Turkey would not shut up. Brought out of the netting to sit on fingertips and shoulders, he loudly and proudly repeatedly announced his name – proving to everyone's satisfaction that the late Luis Baptista's research had been correct. There is a window for language learning in most of these small birds.


Let us learn more. 

Photo by Sheldon Dingle



Vince Huntington slips out of the portable aviary whilst wife Sally looks on. Turkey the silent stayed in the flight and later redeemed himself by talking incessantly.