

## THE AVICULTURIST AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

by Jerry Jennings

"Conservation of bird wildlife through captive propagation" is the by-line of the true aviculturist. He is not a collector of birds, but a breeder; not a consumer of wildlife, but a producer.

Aviculture has come a long way in the past dozen or so years. Aviculturists are becoming more sensitive to their unique role and responsibility towards wildlife and its future. They are concerned about their effectiveness and strive for success in their breeding program. They have set goals for themselves.

Many breeders today are engaged in the propagation of Endangered Species. Those interested in Psittacines work with the Turquoise and Scarlet-chested Grassparakeets — some specializing exclusively in the genus. Game bird breeders are working with sixteen species of endangered pheasants and several species of endangered waterfowl. In most cases, the species are well established in captivity, generally outnumbering wild populations.

The aviculturist's responsibility does not end with the propagation of endangered species, however. Although most of the birds handled by aviculturists are not endangered, it is reasonable to assume many will become endangered over the next several years as human population increases, forests are cleared for cultivation, and pollutants continue to devastate our lakes and streams. Therefore, the aviculturist must develop his expertise in avian husbandry techniques for the commoner species (not endangered) to insure they become established in captivity.

Game bird breeders have been successful in establishing most varieties of quail, pheasants, waterfowl, and other precocial birds, which lend themselves more readily to propagation than altricial birds. Unfortunately, those breeders engaged in breeding Psittacines, finches, and "soft-billed" birds cannot lay claim to the same spectrum of success.

How many species of Softbills have been established in captivity? Although zoos have done quite well with the Rothschild's Mynah (endangered), some Toucanettes, and a few other species, private breeders have done very little. Admitted-

ly, the great mass of private breeders tend to avoid softbills because of their specialized feeding requirements and the associated costs compared to the seed-eating birds.

On the other hand, how many seed-eating birds are truly "self-sustaining" in captivity? Finch breeders can claim perhaps a half dozen species of Australian Grassfinches and about the same number of African and Asian finches as being consistently bred in reasonably large numbers such that further importations are not necessary to sustain their captive population in the U.S. Of course, additional species are bred, but not frequently. It would seem that the interest in breeding varies inversely with the numbers being imported.

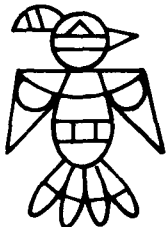
Psittacine breeders are doing a little better than finch breeders. There are four species of Grassparakeets (Elegant, Bourke, Turquoise, and Scarlet-chested) that are well established. Several species of Rosellas, other Broadtailed Parrakeets, Lovebirds, etc., that can be sustained. Even several species of Cockatoos, Amazons, Macaws, and Lorikeets are bred with increasing frequency. However, since the number of Psittacine species worldwide exceeds 300, the percentage bred is probably no greater than 20%.

Obviously more needs to be done. It is surprising how many breeders stick to the "tried and true" species known to breed well, and how few are willing to work with difficult or lesser known species. The few species established in aviculture today are there because of the pioneering generations of breeders who have gone before us.

Where are the pioneers of aviculture today? Who will continue to expand the horizons of aviculture? The gauntlet has been thrown down. Who will pick up this challenge?

There is no question that bird importations will ultimately cease. When the day arrives, we will be handed the 'a fait accompli' of doing with what we have. The answer is to take advantage of our existing opportunities and treat all species as if they were endangered — for truly our opportunities are ■

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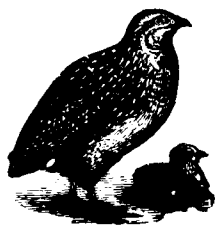


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