

The Alex Studies

Reviewed by Mary Latterman
Cottonwood, AZ

THE ALEX STUDIES: COGNITIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE ABILITIES OF GREY PARROTS BY IRENE MAXINE PEPPERBERG (HARDCOVER, JANUARY 2000, \$42 - SOFTCOVER, APRIL 2002 \$18-95)

The new book, *The Alex Studies*, covers more than two decades of Dr. Irene Pepperberg's research exploring parrot cognitive abilities; and most specifically, her results with her main subject, Alex, an African Grey Parrot. It explains her use of the "Model - Rival" technique to train Alex and documents his successes and failures in various areas. Much of the information in this book has been previously published in various research papers written by Dr. Pepperberg. The writing style is technical with each chapter stating the subject or question(s) to be explored, how it was researched, and test results. The

text is liberally sprinkled with references to back up statements; yet the book remains very readable.

If you are hoping for light anecdotal stories of Alex meeting the press, Alex interacting with Alan Alda, and the general antics of Alex, you'll probably find the book disappointing. While there are the occasional amusing glimpses into what it must be like to work with a feathered subject with the nature and brainpower of a precocious three year old, the main focus of this book is the research itself.

However, if you are interested in hard-core evidence of just how intelligent parrots are and what they are capable of, this book is for you. And if you wish to gain additional insight on how a bird's mind works and what may motivate them, this is very compelling reading. Casual followers of Dr. Pepperberg's work will find the meticulous way in which she has designed each test quite impressive. Skeptics will have a hard time dismissing avian intelligence in the face of such significant work.

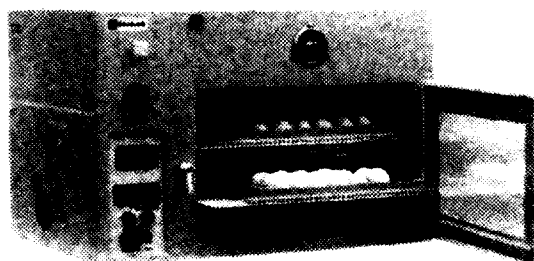
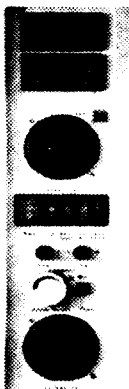
I found the chapter on teaching Alex to vocalize, "I want," and his later use of the phrase particularly interesting. I was also very interested in the chapter of previously unpublished research exploring Alex's vocalizations while his trainers were not there. After all, how many of us parrot owners have caught our birds practicing their words and phrases in private?

The book obviously was not written for the purpose of entertaining the reader, but it certainly has entertaining moments. Some chapters do get rather clinical, like the analysis of how parrots speak and the descriptions of their vocal apparatus but, overall, the book is written in a very comprehensible manner. The last quarter of the book (105 pages) contains notes, references, and the index.

For those readers who crave more information on this fascinating subject, and appreciate having it presented in a thorough and indepth manner; the book *The Alex Studies* by Dr. Irene Pepperberg is certainly an excellent fit. ♦

GRUMBACH INCUBATORS OF GERMANY

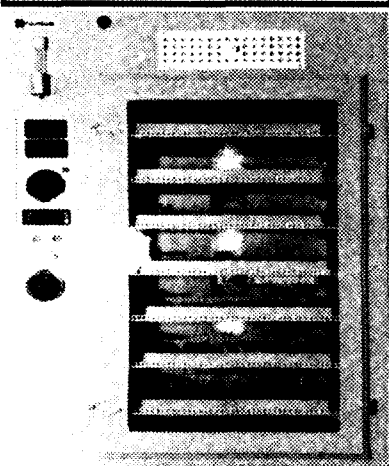
WHEN ONLY THE BEST WILL DO



Item shown Compact S84

Larger units available

Item shown 8203/01/02-Incubator BSS300, includes programmable motor turning, 7 egg trays, each with 8 turnable rollers, adjustable to the size of the egg, directly adjustable automatic humidification system, cool down timer, digital thermometer and humidity readouts.



- **Electronic regulation of temperature for maximum precision.**
- **Egg tray with rollers, adjustable to each size egg.**
- **Automatic humidity control, adjustable from 40% to 99%, water reservoir 4.5 liters. It can add humidity only.**
- **Automatic turning, determination of turning intervals and degree by pressing tabs on timer.**
- **Circulation air system for optimum distribution of temperature.**

 Grumbach

LYON ELECTRIC COMPANY INC. IS NOW THE EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTOR FOR
GRUMBACH INCUBATORS OF GERMANY FOR THE U.S.A. AND CANADA
1690 BRANDYWINE AVENUE
CHULA VISTA, CA 91911 U.S.A.
TEL: (619) 216-3400, FAX: (619) 216-3434
EMAIL: LYONELEC@CTS.COM, WWW.LYONELECTRIC.COM

 LYON
ELECTRIC COMPANY, INC.