

Birdman with Soul

by Richard D. Tkachuck, Ph.D.
Perris, California

There is a saying amongst bird people, that once bird seed gets into your cuffs, it is there forever. It is surprising how many people one can meet, who, when they find that you keep birds, often say that they used to raise pigeons, canaries, budgies or what ever. And with a wistful eye, wish that they were still in the hobby. Many do return when education or the raising of children are completed. Others adapt their interest to other related fields.

Our artist, James McClelland, is one such person who has had seed in his cuffs for a long time. In fact it has now germinated in some very beautiful work as can be seen in the following pictures.

Jim began his work with birds as an owner of a petshop. Upon graduation from high school, he opened a general pet store which included birds as part of the stock. At one time he had a breeding colony of about 1500 birds. After several years in the business, however, he gave up his store and returned to college and earned degrees in art and English. After graduation, he began teaching at the high school level in Michigan. His paintings at this time were abstract and at times somber. Upon moving to Lincoln, Nebraska, his current home, he became chairman of the Art Department at Union College. It is here that he began to paint native birds.

Using water color as his medium and a very realistic style, he soon caught the attention of friends and neighbors. It was not until about 1977 that he began to



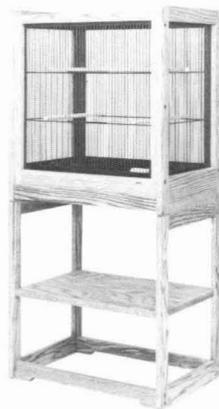
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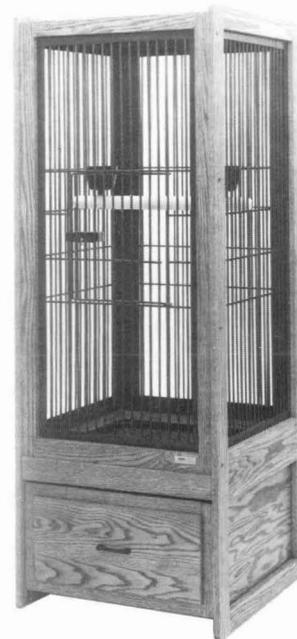
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develop a commercial audience. Meeting with almost immediate acceptance, he soon was doing a brisk business.

Much to the dismay of his wife Huda, the freezer of his refrigerator soon was filled with an assortment of road kills and other birds that had died a natural death. The close examination of these birds as well as an avid interest in birdwatching gives the paintings a very realistic appearance.

As one watches him paint, one is astounded at the confidence of his strokes. The types of watercolors he uses do not allow for an overpainting and if a mistake is made, the entire painting must be started again.

Another feature of the McClelland paintings is the beauty of the background that surrounds the birds. Examined closely one can see the smallest detail, all of which adds to the overall feeling of naturalness. The size of the paintings varies from small five-inch cameos to large yard-square scenes.

It seems natural that McClelland would begin to win recognition at wider levels.

Mourning Dove



Black and White Warbler



Blue Jay

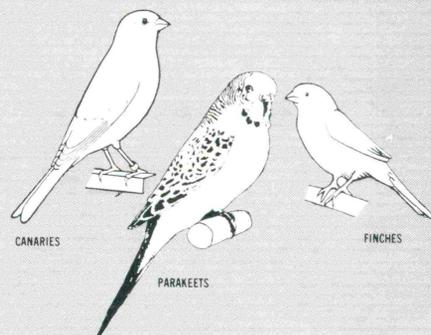


Cardinal

His most recent awards include the 1980 Nebraska Habitat Stamp; Best of Show, Nebraska Wildlife Federation, 1980; Best of Show, National Wildlife Federation, 1981. Wildwing Galleries has chosen McClelland as one of their contributing artists. They are presently working on developing prints of several of his paintings. Wildwing Galleries is probably the most widely known of the galleries which caters to the wildlife art collector. Presently they serve nearly 500 other galleries nationwide. Within the last few days, McClelland has signed a contract to paint the hummingbirds that are found in the United States. This book will be written by Paul Johnsgard and will be published by the Smithsonian Institution.

That bird seed in McClelland's cuffs has re-sprouted in the form of a fine collection of macaws, cockatoos and other birds, housed in a room in his home in Lincoln. As he draws with one bird tugging at his leg and another nibbling at his ear, we can see a portrait of a man who loves birds and is doing his best to show others the beauties of nature.

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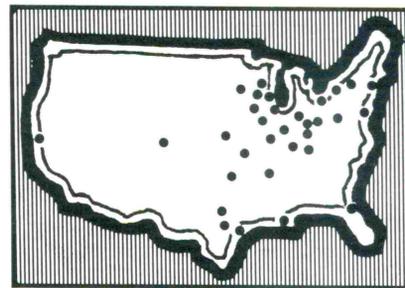
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