

## Australian Aviculture '85

by Lisa and Ernie Colaizzi  
Irving, Texas

Most business associates, friends, and fellow aviculturists reacted alike when learning of our upcoming trip to Australia, "We envy everything but the long flight." We were much too excited, though, to worry about a 25 hour plane ride from Dallas to Melbourne.

The Australian Federation of Aviculture, their own "AFA," holds a convention every other year. This year the third national convention was held in May at Monash University in Melbourne. Aviculture '85 "Conservation on the Wing" was the theme.

Although much smaller than our own AFA, the Australian organization's meeting attracted almost 400 serious aviculturists from all over Australia as

well as from New Zealand, England, the USA, and Canada. We never ceased to be amazed at the sincerity and politeness of this group of aviculturists and we were delighted with their willingness to share knowledge and ideas.

"Involvement" as well as conservation could well have been the convention theme. It was surely the goal of the planning committee. From start to finish we found little or no time for any extraneous activities. The schedule of events went much like this: Friday morning was the exhibit set up; Friday afternoon there was a tour of the Melbourne zoo and aviaries; Friday evening was devoted to opening ceremonies and registration followed by a social time with refreshments; Saturday was filled with lectures and exhibits followed in the evening by the gala event—dinner, dancing, and entertainment; Sunday was devoted to lectures, exhibits, and a wonderful bird display; Monday contained more lectures and exhibits and ended with the closing ceremonies and awards; for those who remained after the official end of the convention, Tuesday was taken up with all-day tours of Healesville Sanctuary and two private aviaries. The whole convention demanded full-time involvement and we loved it.

To back up a little bit, we arrived in Melbourne Tuesday morning not knowing quite what to expect. As you can well imagine, the unexpected happened. After all our effort and expense, after 25 hours flying time, plane changes, and lay-overs, all the while worrying about our products for display at the convention, after all this, we were informed that Australian Customs officers had confiscated all the products. To make matters worse, we learned that our reservations had been incorrectly recorded and no rooms in the hotel were available. What to do?

We were disappointed but not discouraged. Fortunately, Max Thomas, who had been so helpful in our early planning, came to the rescue and our luck changed from bad to outstanding. Max, a member of the convention planning committee, got on the phone and after several calls located a room. It was not quite so conveniently located but rooms were scarce. Now politeness and trust ran rampant. We were not required to register, pre-pay, or even produce a charge card. When we inquired about a bank where we could exchange currency, we were promptly given



Wild crimson rosellas, one mature, the other immature.

Photos by Lisa and Ernie Colaizzi



A wild flock of galahs feeding near some aviaries.



Sid and Jack Smith (facing the camera) with a visitor admiring their hybrid galah/sulphur crested cockatoos.

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\$100.00 Australian to hold us over until we could get to the bank. I doubt if all motels are so trusting but the Burwood East Motel definitely has our recommendation.

The next morning found us back at customs prepared to beg, plead, cry, or do anything necessary to get our products released. We didn't even have a chance to go through our routine. We were asked to wait fifteen minutes while paperwork was processed, pay an import duty of about \$23.00 and our products were cheerfully returned. Things were looking up.

With everything finally fixed up we spent Friday afternoon visiting the Melbourne Zoo where we had our first real look at rare black cockatoos. Pairs of red-tails, white-tails, yellow-tails, and gang-gangs left us in awe while the local Australians viewed them with as much enthusiasm as we would have for a cage of sparrows. Birds of the Australians took for granted had brought us thousands of miles. We had come to see cockatoos and this was only the beginning!

One question on our mind was, "Can we bring cockatoos with us when we return to the States?" The answer was simple. Australian law says basically "nothing in and nothing out." The borders have been closed for almost 40 years. We expected to see much the same birdlife in Australian aviaries as we saw in American aviaries with the addition of lots of rare cockatoos. We soon learned that birds *not* native to Australia were quite rare. Virtually no Amazon parrots were in Australia and very few Australians could correctly identify Otis, our double-yellow headed Amazon. There were several pairs of blue and gold macaws around and Australia even has Hyacinth macaws—two to be exact, at separate zoos.

The prices of birds caught us completely off guard also. Blue and gold macaws are \$8000.00 each. A pair of African greys cost \$4500.00. Most non-Australian birds were about ten times more expensive than in the USA. On the other hand, the prices of Australian cockatoos — sit down, please — are less than the price of most cockatiels. A pet shop owner told us prices varied by the season. Christmas time drew the highest prices — aviary-bred handfed greater sulphur-crested "cockies" brought about \$60.00 retail. The rest of the year \$20.00 was an average price. Rose-breasted cockatoos sold for about \$15.00 to \$20.00 each and wholesale could go as low as



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Mark these dates and plan to attend!

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12th Annual Convention

\$3.00 each. And, yes, the rumors are true, the galahs are shot in Australia as pests. If ever anything can be done to change Australian policy, we implore you, please help in any way you can.

No visit to Australia would be complete without seeing cockatoos in the wild. Our gracious hosts, Max and Barbara Thomas, took us out for a look and unknown to them, supplied us with one of the most inspiring sights of our lives. While visiting Sid and Jack Smith at their aviaries we were enthralled by a pair of galah/sulphur crested hybrids. We were told that such hybrids were not uncommon in the wild. As we admired the captive birds, small groups of wild galahs began gathering in the surrounding trees. Soon a group of 40 to 50 were feeding on the ground very near us. Jack and Sid were greatly amused when we commented, "A hundred thousand dollars on the wing." They said they'd gladly trade several hundred "pinks" for one pair of African greys.

Wednesday was spent touring the local countryside with Max and Barbara Thomas. At nearby Sherbrook Forest Park we were constantly treated to frequent visits of crimson rosellas openly feeding at roadside campsites. Later, toward sunset, we had another very inspiring sight. We saw wild sulphur-crested cockatoos, the *Galerita galerita* sometimes called greater. At first they could be heard in the distance and as their screeching calls came closer we caught a glimpse of white and yellow through the trees. Louder and more frequent came their calls until several of these large cockatoos perched right above us in the trees. Their comical antics of head bobbing, crest raising, and wing flaring entertained us until they launched into screeching flight. It was as if they wanted every living creature to know they were present. Any creature with ears definitely knew. We observed the cockatoos until dark and only then were able to pull ourselves away. To see this sight had been our dream for a long time and now it's a dream come true. It is a dream we hope to experience again and again in the future.

The Australian aviculturists are warm and wonderful people and were very gracious hosts. Those who make the trip to the USA are very deserving of our best efforts. As members of the American Federation of Aviculture, it was very inspiring to span the thousands of miles and share the experiences of the members of the Australian Federation of Aviculture. ●