

The Last Feather

by Kevin Schneider
Lakeside, California

For thousands of years man has used feathers for decoration of personal items and also in his ceremonies and rituals. Feathers are in widespread use all over the world today by all types of people, despite the Endangered Species Protection Laws. The people I am mainly concerned with at this time are the American Indians due to the very real threat they pose to the wild bird population of the U.S., as well as the effect their need for feathers has on the exotic birds in their respective countries of origin.

Please be assured that all you read here can be proven, documented and verified, and is just a part of the total picture. The following information has not been made available to the general public and has been held in confidence for centuries. The following material may not be easily understood by those

who do not worship their God as the Indians do. However, there is one fact that has held true throughout history. Man will not tolerate interference with his religion, for he feels that it is his inalienable right to worship his own God and in his own way, no matter the circumstances.

I assist Native Americans in their preparation for ceremony by supplying them with moulted feathers from macaws, parrots and the smaller psittacines. Every moulted feather that reaches the hands of the end consumer replaces a feather from a slaughtered bird, both indigenous and exotic.

My purpose is to assist in the conservation, preservation and protection of this planet's avifauna. My way is that of the feather. My concern is with one of the final threats to the bird nations, the unnecessary slaughter of birds for their

feathers, which takes place on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis.

I now find myself in a position where I have the background, ability, and distribution network necessary for a successful feather substitution program. This program has been readily accepted by aviculturist and Indian alike. The aviculturists' acceptance is based on appreciation of the beauty of feathers and that something very positive can be accomplished by sending me their moulted feathers instead of throwing them away. The Indians' acceptance has to do with the way I present the feathers to them. In their eyes, the macaw and parrot feathers hold a higher ceremonial value than all other feathers save those of the eagle, wild turkey or water turkey.

The distribution program is designed to flood the Indian feather market with moulted feathers from the captive populations in this country. This program will destroy the price structure which supports the international slaughter of macaws and psittacines in general, for their feathers. It will also reduce the killing of the indigenous species because the "preferred" feathers will be readily available. As the "preferred" feathers become increasingly available, more of them will find their way into the hands of the lower income groups which normally must scour the countryside for the feathers they need. When a permanent program can be established to continue providing moulted feathers year after year, the people will have no

Photos courtesy of Kevin Schneider



Macaw feathers are prominent in the costumes used during the Corpus Christi holiday in much of Central and South America.

The headdress shown here used in the "Dirty Devil Dance" contains 65 macaw tail feathers.

need to look elsewhere. The market will no longer be able to sell at a price necessary to support this indiscriminate slaughter, and the bird nations of the Americas will be given the respite they need from this particular form of predation by man. After this plan is operational in the U.S., I intend to expand to the countries of origin to give the wild population further relief.

When the ancestors of the American Indian migrated across the land bridge between what is now Alaska and Russia, their migrations did not stop until they reached the bottom of South America. They then turned northward and over a very long period of time, settled all of South and North America. Trade routes were established with communities left behind in South and Central America so that the people could obtain needed items. Common items traded were shells, turquoise, jewelry, feathers, skins of animals and live macaws.

Macaws and their feathers were highly prized because they were and are an integral part of the Indian religious ceremonies and rituals. As is stated in *Pueblo Birds and Myths*, by Hamilton A. Tyler: "...The Pueblos [Pueblo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico] have been watching their birds for centuries and during that time have incorporated these creatures into every aspect of community life. Even such mundane tasks as building a room or planting a field require the presentation of feathers from particular birds, while in the rituals that support religious ceremonialism, birds and their feathers become counters that keep a complex symbol system in order. As signs, birds relate to gods, act as messengers between men and gods, or stand as signals between man and man. As a part of the surrounding world, birds relate to all manner of natural phenomena and to weather control."

In reading the book by Lyndon L. Hargrave, entitled *Mexican Macaws — Comparative Osteology And Survey Of Remains From The Southwest*, I have found that trade in macaws was established in the Southwest in the year 1100. The birds were kept under intolerable conditions in rooms with little light; and periodically stripped of their feathers for ceremonial use. They lived as long as their systems could tolerate the conditions. They died and more birds were traded for. Upon examination of sample skeletal remains, many of which were buried or found in trash mounds, indications of premature old age was displayed; a

(703) 759-7687

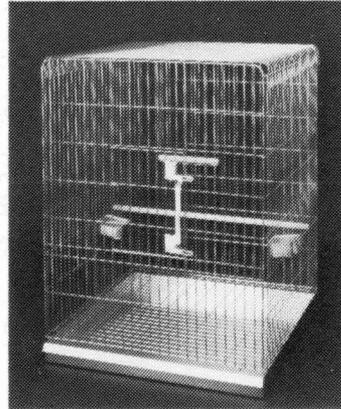
PET-PAL

Pet Supplies Nationwide at Discount Prices
P.O. Box 176
Great Falls, Virginia 22066

**SPECIAL
\$199**

(Shipping Incl.)

Perfect for one or more macaws, cockatoos, greys, amazons, etc. Give your birds some ROOM to enjoy themselves.



3 feet x 3 feet x 4 feet
Knockdown cage, folds
flat but will set up in
seconds.



Tom Marshall,
President

"If you see something you want, check with me for a lower price."

CALL OR SEND FOR FREE CATALOGS!

Pyramid Birds, Inc.
presents

Parrotdisse

The Largest, Most Beautifully Displayed Presentation of Parrots in the Entire Galaxy! Truly a Close Encounter of the Bird Kind! Cockatoos, Macaws, Amazons, Love Birds, Cockatiels, Conures, Budgies and Many Other Rare Exotic Parrots Create a Beautifully Natural and Intimate Experience with Nature Bring your cameras!

Parritz Regency Hotel & Spa Luxury accommodations daily, weekly, monthly, special resident rates.

stands, natural branches, play-grounds & accessories, gigantic book selection on parrots.

The Parrotfanalia Shop Absolutely every kind of service & product imaginable for all parrot-type birds. Custom iron cages, toys,

Parrotdisse Beauty Salon Expertly trained, gentle groomers. Wings, nails, beaks, tails, bath.

Pyramid Birds, Inc.

(818) 843-5505

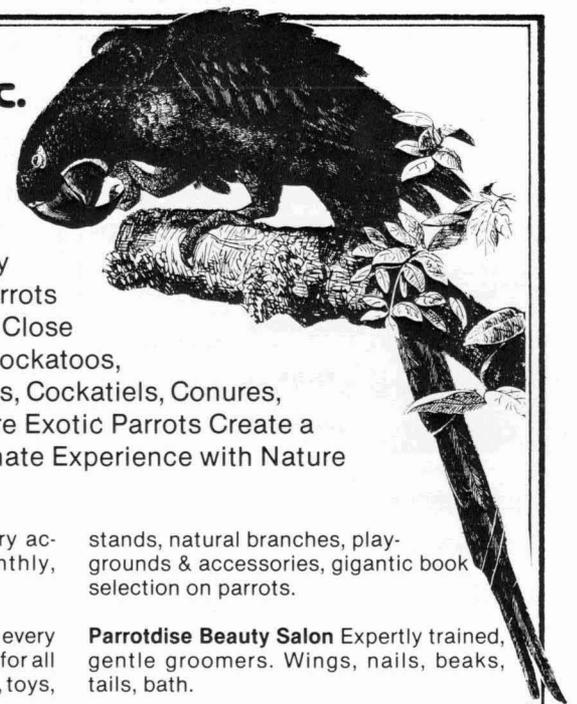
LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP STORE
\$2.00 per family, or group

OPEN 7 DAYS
Monday thru Saturday 9-5
Sunday 9 to 12 noon

Catalog: **PARROT TOYS — "THE BIRDS AND THE BEADS"**
More than 50 toys, gift items, parrotfanalia.
Send \$1 to cover postage/handling.

1407 W. Magnolia, Burbank, CA 91506

DIRECTORS: GARY MORTIMER, JOHN INGRAHAM





1985-1986 COMMITTEES

ALLIED GROUPS LIAISON

AVIAN RESEARCH

Dr. Susan Clubb (305) 226-6778

AVIAN TRANSPORTATION

AVY AWARDS

Dale Thompson (805) 252-3441

BREEDING REGISTRY

CALIFORNIA LIAISON

Hal Koontz (805) 872-1063

CLUB PROMOTION

Linda Rubin (617) 469-0557

CONSERVATION

Bob Berry (713) 520-3205

CONVENTION STEERING

Phyllis Martin (813) 839-4751

CONVENTION 1986

Phyllis Martin (813) 839-4751

EDUCATION AND MEDIA SERVICES

Dr. Val Clear (317) 642-0795

ETHICS

William Maynard (305) 968-4214

FINANCE

Hubert Morris (702) 565-7274

GOAL MONITORING

Dallas D. Johnson (301) 543-6198

HOME OFFICE

Rustie Heinlen (213) 372-2988

LEGAL COUNSEL

Gary Lilienthal (617) 542-7070

LEGISLATION

Lee Phillips (301) 798-1353

MEMBERSHIP PROMOTION

Joe McLaughlin (503) 538-6323

NOMINATING

Janet Lilienthal (617) 542-7070

PARLIAMENTARIAN

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Tom Marshall (703) 759-9431

PUBLICATIONS

Don Cavender (619) 745-8697

RAFFLE

SPEAKERS

Darel Cavender (619) 741-3421

SPECIAL ADVISOR

Dr. Richard E. Baer (614) 836-5832

STATE COORDINATOR

Ray H. Rudisill (314) 645-6757

VETERINARY AFFAIRS

Geoffrey R. Smith, D.V.M. (619) 726-8918

WAYS AND MEANS

WATCHBIRD STAFF

Sheldon Dingle/Editor (714) 734-7448

M. Jean Hessler/Art Director (714) 548-3133

Susan Dingle/Assistant to Editor (714) 734-7448

metabolic deficit contributed to by lack of sunshine and proper food. Of the 145 individual skeletal remains studied, the greatest number of specimens was assigned to the age range of slightly less than 11 months old to slightly over one year of age at the time of death. As no breeding of these birds can be shown to have occurred in the American Southwest, the data suggest a well organized trade in young macaws.

Of special interest is a military macaw that was given by Neil M. Judd to a Zuni Indian in 1924. The bird, denuded of feathers at intervals, died in 1946 (Judd 1954:263). This macaw struggled to live for 22 years under inhumane and deplorable conditions as a producer of feathers for Indian rituals.

The point I wish to make here is that the Pueblo Indians of today inhabit the same areas of the Southwest as did their ancestors, with the same customs but in greater numbers and with a higher standard of living. Macaws and parrots are more readily available now than ever before through the pet trade. What do you think the fate of a macaw would be if purchased by these people today? I will tell you. This great bird stands tall, living and dying as best he can under the circumstances presented...one can always buy more.

Today, due to international borders, the old trade routes are seldom used and the trade in macaws and feathers has taken on a new look. In addition to this, the American Indian population has increased steadily. If my information is correct, Federal law still allows one group of Southwestern Indians to capture eagles for ceremonial use. Birds are taken from the nest in the spring and kept on the roof of an Indian home until late July. At this time the birds are brought down, ceremoniously prepared, held against escape, and slowly smothered to death. In addition, the tail feathers of the scissor-tailed flycatchers are so much in demand for ceremonial fanmaking in Oklahoma, that this bird is almost non-existent in that state. The Aztec dancer groups from Mexico which tour the U.S. every year have headdresses filled with macaw feathers. They sell many of the important feathers as they tour from place to place.

In Peru, approximately 50 miles east of Cuzco, at the time of Corpus Christi, The Snow Star Pilgrimage takes place. Hundreds participate wearing feathered costumes and carrying staffs to which are affixed macaw tail feathers.

This is just another example of the decimation of birds for ceremonial use. American businessmen who deal in the importation of South American artifacts (weavings, primitive art, feather capes, feather headdresses, etc.) also bring feathers into this country as part of their importation shipments. In another instance, approximately two years ago, tail sets (the middle 5 to 7 feathers) from close to 150 military macaws, were brought into the U.S. from Mexico in one shipment, and sold in Arizona. Some of the feathers still had the birds' dried blood on them.

The present situation in Panama is another graphic example of the problem. The rural people of Panama use the macaw tail feathers in their traditional folklorico dances, some of which are staged as tourist attractions and others as private rituals. The colorful feathers are used in the dancers' headdresses, which contain 60 to 80 tail feathers each. The red tail feathers from the scarlet macaw are the preferred feathers. Due to the need for authentic costuming, the remaining wild populations of macaws (ARA Spp.) in Panama and elsewhere are threatened with extinction.

In the countries of origin, the black market will continue to operate as long as there are birds, unless solutions are sought and funding is secured to make feather substitution programs operational. The existing Endangered Species Protection Laws must be enforced.

As you now see, threats to the birds of the world are not limited solely to chemicals, improper land use, status symbols or food sources. The final threat, that may kill the last bird, is the ceremonial need for its feathers.

In closing, I believe that we must take on the responsibility of protecting the birds of this planet. In order to do this, we must also take on the responsibility or providing ceremonial feathers for the Indians. Establishing more laws which can't be enforced is not the answer. We must act now...while there is still time. We can make a difference.

Editor's Note: Kevin Schneider has been buying feathers and trading with the American Indians of the Southwest for a number of years. If you want price lists and more information regarding how you can dispose of the feathers your birds moult, please contact Kevin Schneider, 14292 Jennings Vista Way, Lakeside, California 92040, telephone (619) 561-6303. ●

