

AFA Visits . . .

The Aviary of Herschel Frey

by Jerry Jennings
Fallbrook, California

Nestled in the outskirts of Pittsburgh, where the Ohio River begins, is the aviary of Herschel Frey, a long-time member and friend of the AFA and contributor to the pages of *Watchbird*.

Herschel is a native of Texas where, as a child, he took many a long walk in the neighboring woods in search of bird nests. His interest in the natural



Photos by Jerry Jennings

Mutations of Lady Gouldians



Handfeeding starts with nestling Lady Gouldians.



Herschel Frey with indoor aviaries.

Young, handfed Lady Gouldians become quite tame and are eager eaters.



Painted Finch



Breeding cages



*Blue-breasted
Gouldian
male*



Cuban Melodious Finch, another of the species Herschel works with.

*Yellow-backed
mutation of the
Lady Gouldian*



world around him led to keeping birds as a hobby, which he began at the age of seven with doves. As with many of us, the collection expanded to include cockatiels and budgerigars. Herschel was fortunate to be one of the first people to breed Harlequins and other rare mutation budgies in the early 1950s.

Over the years, Herschel moved around, living all over the United States. Fifteen years ago he moved to Pittsburgh to take a position at the University as a professor of linguistics and, at last, enough stability was at hand to facilitate the raising of birds. His wife, Harriet, was a bit surprised when he came home with his first pair of Lady Goulds, since she had no idea of Herschel's interest in aviculture.

Little information was available back then, but Herschel was able to get in touch with fellow finch fanciers, Bertha Scroggins and Doris Morgan of the Finch Society of San

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Diego for assistance. It wasn't long before a number of flights went up in the basement and Herschel was on the road to becoming a noted breeder.

Herschel has worked with all the Australian finches except the Beautiful Firetail, which is impossible to acquire in the U.S. He even had several pairs of the Crimson or Blood Finches which he received from the San Diego Zoo. These proved to be quite aggressive, so he was forced to surplus them to other breeders.

Herschel became interested in mutation Goulds after seeing a shipment of White Breasted Goulds about ten years ago. He obtained two White Breasted males, which produced a number of splits, and he was off and running. Today he has most of the Gould mutations available and is breeding them with great success.

Herschel is also working with the lovely and rare Painted Finch (*Emblema picta*). He imported a few himself, but the first shipment proved to be birds of a poor pedigree, which forced another importation. The second shipment consisted of birds of a very high quality, which Herschel purchased from a breeder in Holland. These birds have established themselves as a hardy and sound bloodline, which he has kept going for over seven years. Herschel's work with the Painted Finch was documented in an article published in *Watchbird* in October, 1985.

Herschel feels his birds breed best when kept in a large, uncrowded enclosure. On average, a single pair to a small cage does not work as well as one would like, since the male and female often bother each other, resulting in infertility and a refusal to incubate. Nevertheless, Herschel does cage breed to some extent.

Herschel has very definite ideas about nest boxes. He provides very large boxes for his Goulds, since they prefer to copulate inside. These boxes have an off-center entry hole near the upper corner. This keeps the birds

from flushing off the nest as readily as they otherwise might. The boxes are lined with dried grass and, in the case of the Painted Finches, he uses burlap string and pampas grass tassles.

Diet is very important at Herschel's aviary. He offers his birds a premium finch mix with a lot of canary seed. Supplementing this are sprouted seed, greens, egg food, whole wheat bread, charcoal, and ground chicken egg shell. The Painteds are offered a bowl of panicum seed as well. Fresh water is provided daily, to which Avitron vitamins are added.

One of the interesting aspects of Herschel's husbandry techniques is the use of hand feeding for some of the birds. He uses a formula consisting of one hard boiled egg (minus shell), one cup hulled millet, two tablespoons protein soy powder, two tablespoons dry baby cereal, and a pinch of cuttlebone powder. Water is added to this mixture until it reaches pancake batter consistency, after which it is fed to the babies with an eyedropper while the mixture is still warm. A couple drops of vitamins are also administered in the formula with each feeding.

Herschel is an avid bird organization supporter and is a member of the Greater Pittsburgh Cage Bird Society and the National Finch & Softbill Society. He has received AFA's Silver Avy Award for the breeding of the White Breasted Lady Gouldian and has been very successful on the show bench.

Herschel urges his fellow aviculturists to be as informed as possible and laments the fact there isn't more information available. In the case of many species, there is virtually no information to be had. He also cautions that "just because something is printed in a book, it isn't necessarily valid." A word to the wise should be sufficient.

Herschel will continue to be heard from as a supporter of aviculture and AFA wishes him well. ●



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