

AFA Members Respond Well to Captive Breeding Questionnaire

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Editorial Note: Starting in mid-1988, on behalf of AFA, I met at World Wildlife Fund in Washington, D.C., with members of the zoological, avian veterinary, pet and humane communities to discuss the future of the international trade in wild-caught birds. As many of AFA's members and aviculturists are well aware, for many years, members of various communities have been extending efforts to bring all viewpoints together, TRAFFIC (USA) and World Wildlife Fund organized the Cooperative Working Group on Bird Trade (CWGBT) to consider the future of international trade in wild-caught birds. This group emphasized captive breeding by populations. The group has also expressed its desire to encourage captive breeding for the purpose of eventual replacement of wild-caught birds for the pet trade with captive-bred birds as well as for conservation and species sustaining purposes. In order to assist the group in determining the ultimate future of the international trade in birds, the Group needs the assistance of AFA members and aviculturists to fully understand the current status of captive breeding so as to determine and help guide its role into the twenty-first century.

Gary P. Lilienthal

Since 1988, in its effort to move the bird trade debate in a more constructive direction, the Cooperative Working Group on Bird Trade has realized that one of the major stumbling blocks in this debate has been one of perceived bias in the data and information presented by the various factions involved. With this in mind, the Working Group embarked on a major fact-finding project in order to jointly analyze the available data. The Working Group quickly realized that, while many aspects of the bird trade are fairly well documented, there are several important aspects where information is almost non-existent. One such area is quantitative information on captive breeding, and the Working Group recommended that a study into this area be given priority.

Aviculturists' growing willingness to provide this kind of information was clearly demonstrated by their positive response to a breeding questionnaire circulated at the recent AFA Convention in Phoenix, Arizona. Sponsored by the Working Group, the questionnaire was designed to gather general information regarding individual captive breeding efforts. On a broader scale, the questionnaire was intended to "test the waters"

and determine if aviculturists might participate in a more comprehensive breeding survey at the national level.

Working Group representatives did not have to wait long for initial results to the informal survey. AFA members' willingness to provide information was immediately apparent; all available copies were distributed within minutes of the questionnaire's introduction at the Convention luncheon. This limited availability was not reflected by the large number of responses received, however. Close to 100 completed questionnaires were returned before the AFA meeting ended. To date, over 130 completed questionnaires have been received by World Wildlife Fund's TRAFFIC office for compilation. Questionnaire results highlighted below demonstrate aviculturists' diversity and growing professionalism, and point to their increasing willingness to share information regarding their breeding programs.

A total of approximately 18,100 birds was included in the 135 questionnaires, with collection size ranging from 5 to 1400 individuals. While collections varied, interest in psittacines did not! Ninety-nine percent of all respondents owned at last one psittacine, with parrots and parrot-like birds accounting for three-fourths (13,367 individuals) of all birds owned by questionnaire respondents.

In general, respondents seemed aware of the conservation status of the species in their collection, although there was some confusion regarding the questionnaire's use of the terms "endangered" and "threatened." Sixty-two percent of the respondents noted their ownership of one or more species included in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Others commented that they owned species proposed for Appendix I listing such as Moluccan Cockatoos.

Most respondents indicated some level of breeding success during 1988, with 1,365 of the 7,459 total offspring reported as second or F2 generation. While questions regarding breeding results were not species-specific, it is likely that these second generation offspring were primarily the more commonly-bred species such as cockatiels and lovebirds.

Over half (63%) of all breeders noted that they permanently identified offspring, most preferring to use closed-ring bands. Several of the larger breeders indicated they used transponders or

tattoos to identify their birds. Aviculturists new to breeding noted their intent to band their birds' offspring when that day arrived.

Identification systems were often used in conjunction with the maintenance of detailed breeding information, with over 77 percent of respondents noting that they keep some type of breeding records. Most added that they kept information regarding number, types, sex, genealogy, and disposition of their birds in addition to medical records. Hand written accounts remained the most common method of storing this information, although several individuals indicated they plan to computerize their records.

A smaller percentage of respondents were similarly interested in providing their breeding information to studbooks (22%) and/or censuses (39%). Many commented that they would like to take part in these efforts, but were concerned that the confidentiality of their responses could not be guaranteed. Others noted that they had never seen the results of surveys they had completed previously, and felt they had wasted their time.

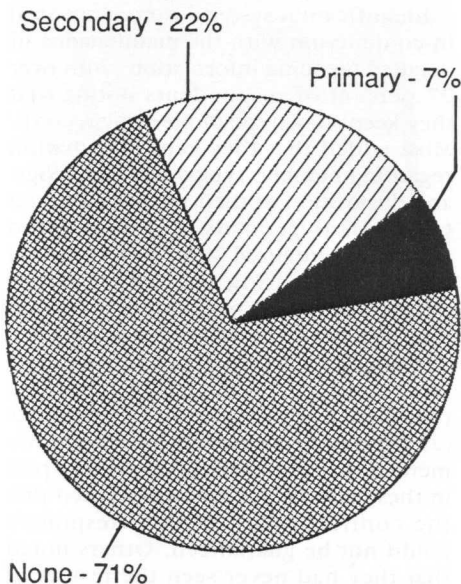
These concerns, echoed in conversations with Working Group representatives during the Phoenix AFA meeting, were voiced simultaneously with an increased willingness to participate in well-managed breeding surveys and other

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Importance of Income From Breeding (N = 135)



programs. Many respondents noted that the Working Group questionnaire was the first breeding survey to which they had ever responded. They expressed confidence in the ability of TRAFFIC and WWF to protect their individual identities while compiling information to be used by aviculturists and the Working Group.

Responses regarding income attributable to aviculture were somewhat surprising. Seven percent of the respondents stated that aviculture provided their primary source of income, with only an additional 22 percent indicating that they received some income from the sale of their birds. These figures are in sharp contrast to the 71 percent of respondents stating that aviculture did not provide any source of income.

Perhaps the most encouraging information gained from this questionnaire was that 85 percent of the respondents were interested in participating in a more comprehensive breeding survey. This response reflects aviculturists' growing willingness to contribute information that may be helpful to individual species and

Table 1
Summary of Questionnaire Results

Number of questionnaire respondents — 135

1. Total birds in 135 collections	18,110
a) Number of psittacines in collections	13,110 (70%)
b) Number of respondents owning psittacines	133 (99%)
2. Offspring in 1988	7,549
a) Percentage of respondents raising offspring in 1988	76%
b) Percentage of respondents raising F2 offspring in 1988	38%
c) Total F2 offspring in 1988	1,365 (18%)
3. Percentage of respondents who kept offspring	61%
a) Offspring sold	42%
4. Total birds added to collections in 1988	1,475
Total breeders adding to collections in 1988	84%
a) Wild-caught birds	756
Breeders	59%
b) Captive-bred birds	719
Breeders	64%
5. Respondents with Appendix I parrot species	62%
a) Total number of Appendix I parrots	135 (9%)
6. Respondents willing to participate in survey/database	85%
a) Respondents willing to promote survey to others	69%
7. Respondents who maintain written or computer records	77%
8. Respondents using a permanent marking system	63%
9. Respondents willing to allow routine blood sampling for DNA-fingerprinting	72%
10. Respondents participating in Studbooks	22%
11. Respondents participating in previous census or surveys	39%
12. Respondents identifying themselves with name and address	72%
13. Percentage of respondents who keep collection records on:	
Species total	68%
Number of male/female/unsexed	73%
Number of offspring	65%
Disposition (sold, died, etc.)	67%
Genealogy (lineage)	55%
Total in collection	59%
Total of species	56%
14. Percentage of respondents who keep individual records on:	
Individual origin	76%
Sex	76%
Disposition (sold, died, etc.)	71%
Genealogy (lineage)	56%
Number of offspring	67%

aviculture as a whole. The many requests received for additional copies of questionnaire forms from bird clubs and organization leaders further confirms this eagerness to pool information in the interest of aviculture and conservation.

Recognizing the growing momentum for a national captive breeding study, the TRAFFIC office of WWF, with support from the Working Group, is currently laying the framework for such a study, planned to begin as early as February or March of 1990. Goals for the study include determination of what segments and percentages of the domestic cage bird market are currently met by captive breeding, and by what types of breeders; whether certain factors are inhibiting the growth of aviculture, or alternatively, are contributing to it; and whether aviculture is capable of fulfilling the needs of the pet bird industry currently met by imported wild-caught birds.

Survey responses will be collected and compiled by TRAFFIC, with results made available to all participants as well as the

broader avicultural and conservation communities. As with the previous questionnaire, primary emphasis will be placed on ensuring the confidentiality of all responses. Information regarding the specific location or identity of breeders will be kept in separate data files from information regarding the collection itself.

TRAFFIC staff will be contacting bird clubs and avicultural societies in the coming months seeking help with the distribution of the captive breeding questionnaire. A questionnaire will also be included in an upcoming issue of the *AFA Watchbird* in the hope of reaching as many breeders as possible.

The questionnaire distributed at the AFA meeting was a small but significant step towards increasing cooperation between the avicultural and conservation communities. Building on this initial effort, we can enhance opportunities for the continued growth of aviculture, breeding efforts, and for species survival in the wild. ●

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