

AFA Visits . . .

# The Aviaries of the American Bird Company

by Tom Marshall  
Reston, Virginia

Located in north central Virginia about fifty miles southwest of Washington, D.C. in an area which witnessed the last great Confederate victory of Chancellorsville are the spanking new aviaries of the American Bird Company, owned and operated by Steve and Pat Boros. While Pat is the mainstay at their popular retail outlet for domestically bred birds located in Falls Church, Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C., Steve and son Michael spend much of their time installing the latest state-of-the-art equipment for a completely indoor avian facility, perhaps without parallel anywhere on the East Coast.

Pat is calm and easy-going, and Steve, while abundantly friendly and generous, is always on the go with new ideas on how to best improve his existing operation. Not just satisfied with having a store with an excellent reputation for cleanliness and high quality baby birds in addition to an extensive wholesale business for a vast array of products ranging from Prevue-Hendrix cages to Critter Litter, Steve has as his top priority to raise all of his own birds for sale through the Falls Church store — a rather formidable task, given the American Bird Company's volume of business in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Phase I of the ABC Aviaries was completed at the end of February. All breeding pairs, formerly kept in the basement of their store and pairs out on breeding loan, have been trans-



*The American Bird Co., Falls Church, Virginia, a grand store that supplies the pet owner's every need.*



*Phase I, the first half of ABC's breeding facilities, is located on a 65-acre rural setting in north central Virginia. Clearing and grading has already begun for the second half of the building.*

ferred to the new facility. Steve expects new breeding efforts on the part of his collection to commence in May. The larger species of macaws and cockatoos are housed in 6' x 6' x 6' galvanized welded wire (#10 gauge) suspended from the ceiling, whereas African Greys, smaller cockatoos and Severe and Yellow-collared Macaws are housed in facilities that are 4' x 4' x 4' and the Senegals, Myer's, Red-bellies, Moustache and Grey-cheeked Parakeets as well as Sun Conures are in 3' x 3' x 3' set-ups.

Steve's insistence on an entirely indoor facility was predicated on a desire to prevent any contamination from exposure to insects, feral birds and animals and, of course, to control the temperature as well as extend the breeding season. The roof of the building has a series of skylights for natural sun and moon light, however, Steve relies on the use of his Superdimma timers from Scotland to bring on the incandescent lighting, as appropriate, in order to supplement the fluorescent lighting (Vita-lights) and to simulate dawn and dusk for

Photos by Bob Gambarelli

the birds. The comfort and health of the Boros' breeding pairs are accommodated, in part, through a heat pump, air-conditioning and a top-of-the-line ventilation system. Smoke-master is an industrial rated air cleaner, with internal parts by Honeywell, that electronically cleans by ionization all the microscopic dust particles in the air. Steve indicates that, according to manufacture's specifications, one would be sufficient for his size building, but using two has cut down on his maintenance and will ensure the cleanest possible air for his birds. Adding to the tropical ambience maintained in the building, and more importantly to keep the humidity reading at a desired level for his birds, Steve Boros has installed a computerized sprinkling system that produces a warm mist four times per day. The constant "rain" also prevents the droppings from hardening on the cement floor, which has been

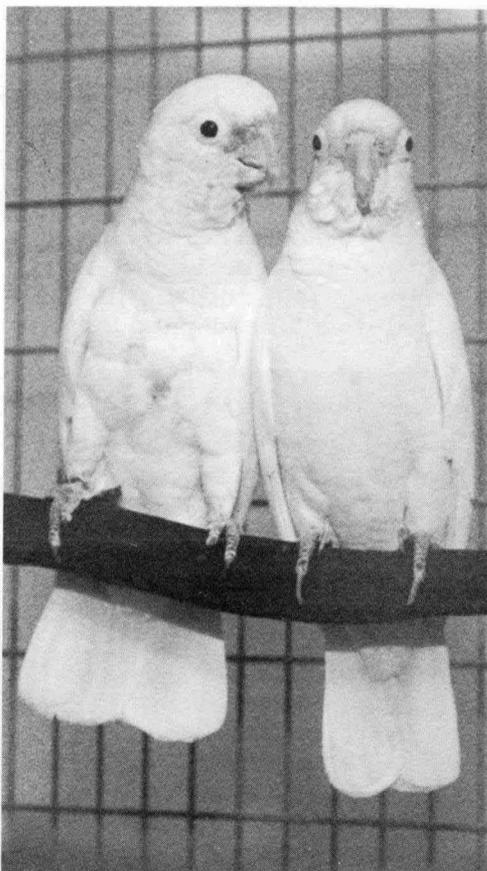
protected by an industrial sealant. With a commercial pressure-washer (700 lbs. of pressure) applied directly to the beveled surface of the floor, the water and debris are quickly eliminated. The computer device (made by the Gardina Company) which regulates the PCV-constructed watering system is quite simple and can be purchased from many home and garden centers.

The industrial flights have manzanita perches, as they are natural and very durable. In lieu of typical wooden or metal nest boxes, Steve has had his boxes constructed of black ABS plastic, which are remarkably light-weight yet very resistant to any kind of abuse from the birds. They are also easy to disinfect, unlike the wooden boxes. The dark interior promotes a sense of security for the breeders and the rigidity of the plastic does not allow for crimping, often a concern in using metal boxes, given the weight and activity of a nesting pair of birds.

Feeding and watering are done in an efficient and non-intrusive manner. The water bottles (made by Reddi) are sealed and have never leaked, according to Boros, and stay fresh for at least four days, at which time he prefers to change them. The food dishes slide into secured holding areas for easy access and are kept in place by spring-loaded doors. The birds can stick their heads into a food dish, but it is impossible for them to remove the dish or turn it upside down, which has been a problem in the past.

The dietary regimen followed at the ABC Aviaries includes Kellogg non-sunflower fortified seed mix combined with Kellogg 19 percent protein pellets. Seasonably available fruits and vegetables dusted with Nekton E and Vionate are added on top of the seed mix. Two Grumbach incubators stand ready in case of emergencies, but usually birds are not pulled until just prior to their eyes opening. The incubators are called into action most often with cockatoos or any pair where there exists large discrepancies with hatch dates in a clutch.

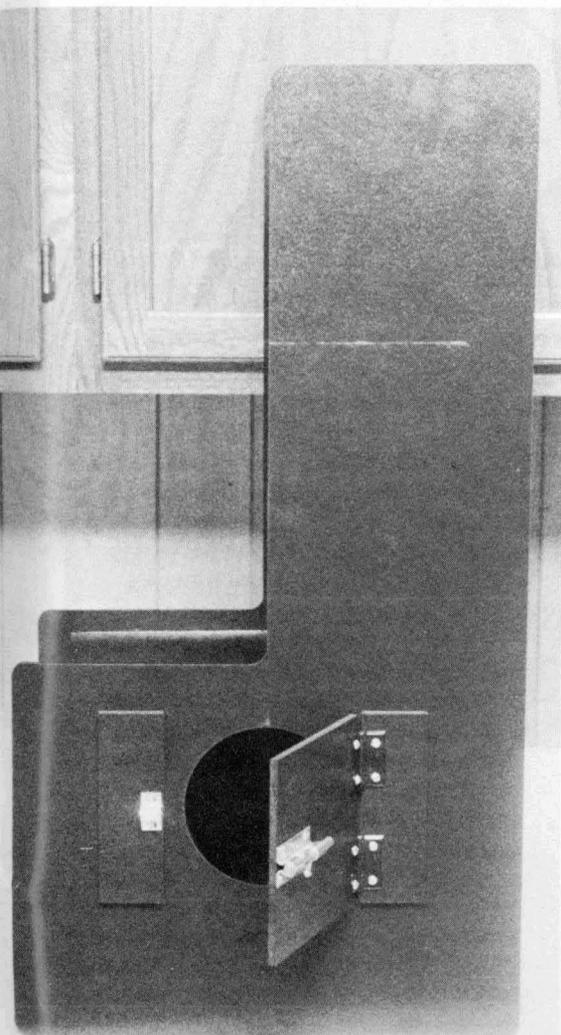
After touring these ideal facilities, I questioned Steve on how he became so involved with birds in the first place. As a teenager in New Orleans, Steve recounted that he tamed wild-caught birds for pet stores the old fashioned way. He let them bite him until they just lost interest in the



Photos by Bob Gambarelli

*This pair of Goffin's Cockatoos is housed in new ABC rural breeding facility.*

effectiveness of their natural deterrent and they realized that he was not going to give up in his attempt to tame them. Once he had them hand trained, he completed the socialization process by involving his family, so that the birds were constantly being held. Later pet store proprietors became so confident in his knack with parrots that they had him go to the quarantine station and pick out their birds for them. Eventually, he invested his own money in a load of birds coming into the quarantine station; he tamed them and sold them to pet stores in "pet quality" condition, which provided a quicker turn over in sales for the store owners. Later he had a "real" job which necessitated travel all over the southeastern United States. This opportunity allowed him to expand his markets for tamed birds to pet stores outside Louisiana. Years of seeing what does and doesn't work and his continual fascination with birds prompted him to find a location where he and his wife Pat could satisfy the increasing demand for domestically bred baby birds. Northern Virginia was especially attractive for its beauty, its relative affluence and Pat had relatives in the



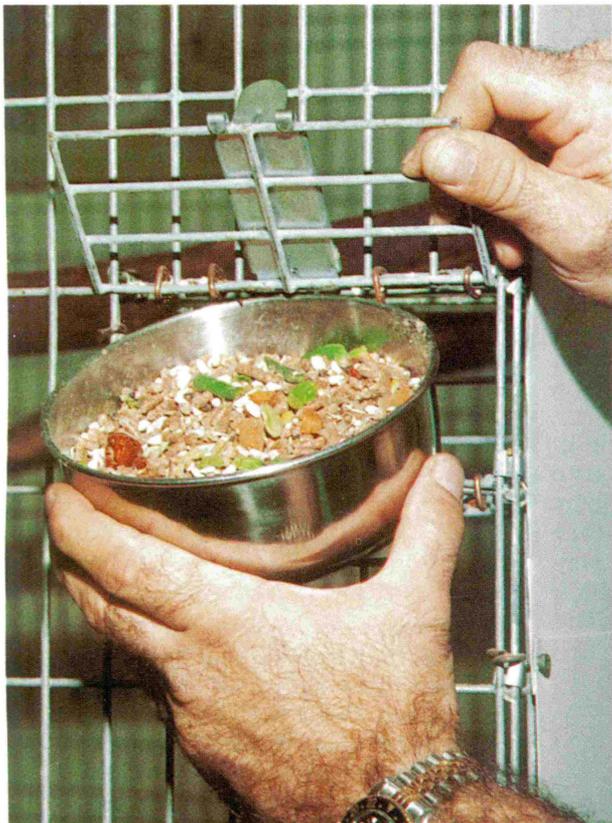
*This ABS plastic nest box was designed for birds that can chew up a lumber yard. Birds enter from the top of the "L" on the other side.*

area as well. A specialty shop dealing only in domestically bred birds had not been fully developed in the area. However, given the apparent interest and the population density, Steve felt the location was ideal for his first retail adventure. He opened his doors in July 1987 and was met with immediate acceptance. The central vacuum system and the use of crushed walnut bedding under the

caged birds gives the presentation of an extremely clean and healthy environment for the birds. The Boros' have staff whose entire responsibility is to keep everything bright and clean. This aspect of their business has been singularly instrumental in instilling confidence in the bird-buying public.

Steve doesn't like to cut corners; he does everything on a first class basis.

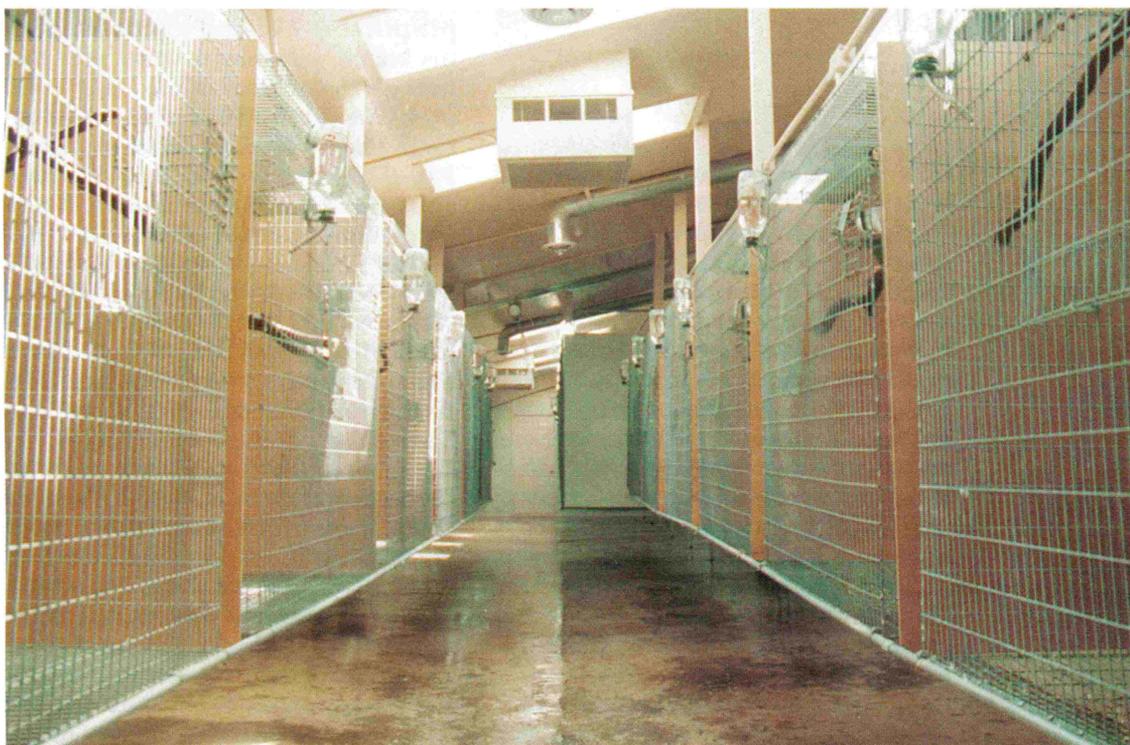
The store and the aviaries both exhibit dedication and commitment to aviculture. Like Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, the heroes of Chancellorsville, Steve and Pat Boros have that indomitable spirit of purposeful individuals intent upon realizing their goals. They can serve as an inspiration to a lot of us who still dream about what we want to do with birds! ●



Photos by Bob Gambarelli

Pat and Steve Boros with store mascot "Rascal."

*No more messy dish holders.  
This system is easy to clean and service.*



*Inside view down aisle way of breeding facility. Notice the overhead Smoke-master ventilation system and sprinklers.*