

The National Finch and Softbill Society

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"To encourage breeding programs, enhance the knowledge of our members in the keeping and care of these birds, cooperate with organizations for the preservation of aviculture in this country and introduce the enjoyment of keeping and breeding finches and softbills to all interested parties." Lofty and ambitious goals? Yes! These are the goals stated in the by-laws of The National Finch and Softbill Society. Founded in 1984 as the National Finch Society and expanded in 1987 to include the wonderful world of softbills, our membership roster is now up to number 1385. NFSS has members in all 50 states and a number of foreign countries, including a very enthusiastic hummingbird keeper in Zimbabwe and a panel judge who keeps sunbirds in England.

Our educational bi-monthly bulletin has carried articles on softbills ranging from "Keeping Hummingbirds" to "Plush-capped Jays" and "Bali Mynah Breeding." Plans for the next issues include articles profiling the honeycreeper family, a lengthy article on the Pekin Robin and an update on the re-introduction program involving the endangered Bali Mynah on the island of Bali. An index of all articles is printed each January and back issues are available from our *Finchshop*. Our classified ads have offered an incredibly diverse selection of softbills including hornbills, hummingbirds, thrushes, babblers and barbets and the display ads showcase products tailored to the softbill keeper. The *Finchshop* page offers, for sale, show cage plans for softbills and finches, mugs, t-shirts, pins and other collector's items including lithographs. These sales support, in part, the society's other programs. Raffles also contribute funds and a raffle of a hand-fed, domestically hatched, closed-banded Indian Hill Mynah is planned for the future. Miki Spartzak, a NFSS Board of Directors member, has kindly donated a future chick for this purpose. When you become a member of NFSS, the Bulletin becomes your link to other softbill fanciers and breeders. Annually, NFSS publishes a census of softbill and finch breeders in this Bulletin.

This provides you, as a member, with an opportunity to exchange offspring and/or information with other folks who are keeping the same species in which you are interested.

NFSS has established an internationally acclaimed specialized breeding program called 'Finchsavé.' The goal is to establish and maintain all finch and softbill species in American aviculture. All NFSS members are invited and encouraged to participate in this effort to enhance the propagation of the many species of softbills and finches. Already enrolled in this program are numerous softbill species including Pagoda Mynahs, Zosterops (White-eyes) and the endangered species Bali Mynah.

A very comprehensive overview of the softbill group is available as a slide program, with a lively and entertaining speaker from NFSS for your club meeting. This overview includes tips about keeping and breeding many species and information about what species are most suitable for beginners. The well known bird magazine columnist, Jon Hoffman, NFSS's second vice-president, is in charge of our educational programs and is now at work on video productions that will eventually include softbill educational programs.

Traceable closed bands are available to NFSS members in sizes that will accommodate all softbill species, utilizing our comprehensive cooperative band cross-registration program.

NFSS now has over 80 affiliated clubs in the United States and several foreign countries. These clubs provide a one-on-one support group for softbill fanciers and breeders. NFSS provides Bulletin subscriptions and plaques and rosettes as awards for exhibitions to these affiliated clubs. A level two or three affiliation includes a special plaque for best softbill in show.

NFSS has a panel of highly qualified judges, many of whom are knowledgeable softbill keepers themselves, who judge and award championship points to both NFSS exhibitors and NFSS closed-banded birds. In the 1990 show season, softbills were increasingly popular on the show bench and accounted for six best-in-show wins. Among the most notable was a splendid Rufous Tree Pie who was best in show at the prestigious 1990 National Finch and Softbill Society's National Show, held in conjunction with the National

Cage Bird Exhibition. An indication of NFSS' commitment to the welfare of softbills in shows is the fact that softbills are judged first, before the finches, to ensure that they have a fair chance and do not tire or stress out.

NFSS is continually adding to its list of "Species Exhibition Standards" and a standard for the Pekin Robin is now in the rough draft stage. This will be the first softbill exhibition standard in the United States. A second is planned for the Indian Hill Mynah beginning in the early spring.

The Board of Directors consists of 19 people, spread out from Atlantic to Pacific and of that number, 13 are now, or were, keeping softbills. The states are divided into six regions, each with its regional vice president and three of them are softbill fanciers. Advice on diets, management tips and other information is available to NFSS members from these highly qualified experts. Information about hand-feeding softbills, from the egg, is available from NFSS members with extensive experience.

A 1991 update of the NFSS Handbook, due in the fall, will contain reprints of valuable articles concerning softbill keeping and exhibiting and new information on the availability of softbill species.

The National Finch and Softbill Society is a supporting affiliate of the American Federation of Aviculture and has contributed significant amounts of money to assist the AFA's Siskin project. NFSS holds a Class A affiliation and sends two delegates to the annual AFA Convention. At the 1991 convention in San Diego, NFSS "unveiled" two beautiful new educational display boards with color photos and text. One features softbills and the other finches. These displays will be at the Kaytee Great American Bird Show and at the National Cage Bird Exhibition in 1991 also. They were designed and created by Martha Wigmore of Colorado, an NFSS regional vice-president with an interest in the softbill group.

It is often said that the NFSS "family" is the most open to the exchange of information and advice of any of the specialty societies. If you have an interest in softbills or would like to find out more about them, we invite you to join us.

For more information write to: The National Finch and Softbill Society, 125 West Jackson Street, York, PA 17403-2265. ●