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Tony Silva's *Psittaculture*:

the breeding, rearing and management of parrots

reviewed by Ernesto C. Enkerlin
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The attractive title as well as the author's name are sure to generate a considerable amount of attention for this book. It is written in an interesting narrative style, especially the first ten chapters. In these chapters the author gives background on different topics of aviculture as they pertain to parrots before getting into the species by species descriptions, which constitute the remaining 34 chapters. Maybe because of my bias as a researcher, conditioned to reading technical literature, I would have liked to see the standard citation style of listing the author and year in parenthesis every time it is used and an organized structure to the information being delivered. On the other hand, the book, intended for people of very diverse backgrounds, makes up by being interesting and enjoyable reading. The insertion of large portions of text from other sources might seem a bit odd, because it is not frequently found in other books, but serves to give other people credit and saves the author time in trying to "reinvent the wheel" when it comes to describing something in which somebody else is better informed. A nice detail is the use of both the metric and English (Standard) systems of measurement. The proof reading and typesetting could have been better as many typos made it through these processes. For example, in the chapter on cockatiels he uses the expression "most ideal"; this is improper because there are no degrees of ideal, it either is or it is not. In the table on inheritance of color in cockatiels of the same chapter, the pied mutation is listed as sex linked and it is an autosomal recessive.

The book is full of anecdotes on personal experiences and/or opinions of the author many of which are very valuable. Others might be of less value to experienced breeders, but not to the novice, and there are a few with which I have to disagree entirely. This is natural as the book was not written to please but to inform. Therefore it obviously reflects the bias of the author. But the value in Silva's opinions is that

they come from his experiences as a parrot breeder for many years and curator of a very large, psittacines only, collection at Loro Parque. His authority therefore follows from these accumulated experiences and even so he does not pretend that his techniques are the gospel word. Silva encourages people to make informed decisions based on different sources. I would recommend people read the entire book, digest and process the information, underline if you wish. The book, as I mentioned earlier, is not written in the cookbook fashion that some of us have come to expect but once you read it and go back to it as a reference, it will allow you to make better avicultural decisions. In the next paragraphs some of the information that caught my eye is cited in quotes followed by my reactions to it. The chapter number in parenthesis is given as a reference.

"Aviculture has made tremendous advances . . . We should and must . . . become more efficient so that all rare species become established." (1) I like the way in which, several times across the book, Silva calls for a responsible aviculture serving the needs of conservation.

"A lack of knowledge about their dietary needs resulted in both dying. . . . This taught me an important lesson that I have attempted to pass on to many entering the bird-keeping hobby." (2) This is a bold statement that speaks well of the humbleness of the author. It should be taken as an advice to, by all means, prevent this type of outcome and not as a justification for something like this happening to a novice or even an expert.

"In my collection, only two bowls are ever in the cage, one holds the food and the other the water." (3) The author explains many of his techniques including the reasons for using only two dishes, situations in which more should be used and how to prevent soiling and bathing. This chapter is densely packed with information.

"These breeders believe that things ought to move faster. . . . get to impose what turns out to be hindrances as help." (4) The chapter on

incubation is nicely done. For individuals wanting to do some incubation it should provide enough information. If you desire to get heavily involved with incubation procedures, the book by Rick Jordan is recommended.

". . . thus these young greatly increased the gene pool available" (5) Definitely producing many young of rare or threatened species is very desirable but the gene pool is not increased much in this case when several full siblings are produced. This is why stud books are so important to increase genetic variability (i.e. gene pool) by producing many unrelated individuals. ". . . they will develop into healthier stock and lack imprinting . . . , in fact the pros of hand rearing far outweigh the cons."

(5) First, imprinting, as being used by Silva, refers to human-bird bond only; in reality, imprinting, as defined by Konrad Lorenz who discovered it and coined the word, always occurs between offspring and parents. It is only when a human acts as the parent that the bird imprints on humans. Second, it is risky to endorse hand rearing so heavily. This has to be done on a case by case basis. Hand rearing does increase productivity but, if the ultimate purpose is to release birds back into the wild, it can be very important to have birds that possess the complete behavioral repertoire which they can only get from the parents. This critique should not take merit from this chapter which I find very helpful. I have been frequently encountered during my avicultural endeavors with some of the situations for which the author gives answers.

Chapters 6 and 7 would be better treated as appendices as the information provided is very useful but more in a tabular form than to be narrated. I would not have started to talk about genetics and mutations in chapter 8 as in the limited treatise it generates more questions than answers. In relation to the breeding of mutations for some cases Silva states: "Such would be wasteful aviculture, especially when juxtaposed with the oft-carried banner that reads 'aviculture is conservation'."

"The Hyacinthine should only be kept as a pet until it reaches sexual maturity; at that time a mate should be found and the birds should be bred and so it should be for every member of this endangered species

in captivity." (9) Well said!

"... if the owner cannot spend this little time replacing the perch, then he or she should not be allowed to have parrots, for they lack proper consideration for the bird." and "... like humans, no two parrots are the same." (9) This chapter is full of good advice on selecting and keeping pet parrots and on some of the implications and responsibilities in owning them. A big inaccuracy which I could not let pass is that a parrot could not get electrocuted because the tongue is dry? Of course they can, if they bite and make contact with both lines simultaneously they will get a shock just like a child inserting something metallic on both slots in an electric outlet.


In chapters 9 and 10, Silva gives some advice on how to buy and tame a bird. Much of this comes from his experience as a pet store owner and the advice is valuable because he has been on both sides of the counter. One of the most important suggestions, mentioned in the introduction and again in these two chapters, is to have a good avian veterinarian that you consult as frequently as necessary on aspects of avian health. They are trained professionals who are exposed continuously to similar problems and, therefore, will have much better judgement than we, as bird keepers, can hope to have.

The chapters with the species accounts are very varied as is the subject. Some groups, which are better known in aviculture or Silva has more experience with, are treated in depth, others superficially, but still, they contain much of the latest information and the successful techniques presently being used. The species accounts are more specialized and do not make as interesting reading as the first ten chapters for the general public. I recommend that these chapters be read also because many of the techniques can be used across groups or you can get new ideas on how to approach a problem. A major flaw that I noticed after reading the book and trying to go back for some information is the lack of an index. The usefulness of the book would be greatly enhanced by having an index even if added as a card or leaflet by the publisher.

I hoped that Silva would give us the ultimate parrot book. He did a good job but fell short of this definition. All things considered this book would

not, in my opinion, make a good "only" book on parrot aviculture. Especially if the person is a novice wanting to start with the cockatiels for example. For these people a specialty book is recommended. Most conscientious parrot keepers though will probably want to associate with others, get information and, as Silva states, learn as much as possible by reading several sources. For these concerned individuals, investing in four to five good books would be very wise. If an index can be pro-

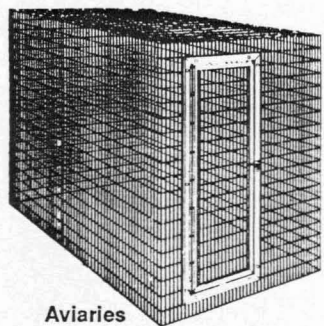
vided, I would definitely pick Psittaculture to be one of these reference books in my collection. Mainly because it contains a large amount of valuable information, is up to date, readable and at \$45.00 is one of the best parrot information values around. Remember finally, as Tony Silva writes, "no one can gain avicultural skills from conversing with fellow enthusiasts or reading books, for this is something that accumulates with time and from direct involvement with birds!" ●



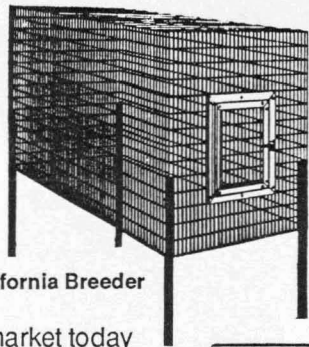
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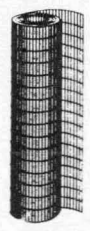


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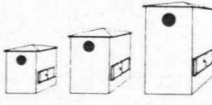
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
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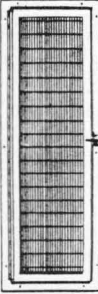
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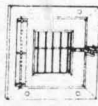
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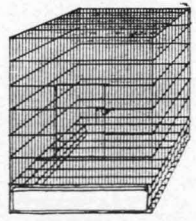
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