

# Captive Breeding Surveys: What's in it for Aviculture?

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U.S. aviculturists have something today that they did not have a year ago: quantitative data that private aviculture in the United States is not only capable of but actually demonstrating the ability to meet an increasing portion of the pet industry's growing demand for captive-bred parrots of many species.

I am happy to report that the 1990 TRAFFIC USA Psittacine Captive Breeding Survey was a success. An unprecedented 1,221 aviculturists from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and two foreign countries responded to the survey. Collectively, they provided census information on over 31,000 birds of 192 species and subspecies. Of these birds 22,518 — or 73% — were set up for breeding and produced 17,259 chicks in 1989.

Many aviculturists have expressed amazement at the number of respondents and birds recorded in the census, while others note that the results represent only a small fraction of the real size and scope of U.S. aviculture today. Whatever your opinion, it is important to understand the significance of these survey results and the far-reaching impact they have on the future of U.S. aviculture and the avicultural community throughout the world.

Why are the 1990 survey results significant? First of all, the results represent the first time such a large number of U.S. aviculturists have cooperated in a national survey on captive breeding. While the questionnaire results only provide an accurate profile of the aviculturists who responded to the survey, and the census results represent minimal figures on the number of species and number of individual birds in private aviculture today, it is still the most comprehensive information gathered to date on captive breeding of parrots by private aviculturists in the United States. With the one breeding season covered by the 1990 survey, we now have base-line figures on the number of birds and species present in U.S. collections.

Second, these results demonstrate that U.S. aviculturists are eager to participate in gathering much needed captive breeding information. We received many positive comments from respondents expressing their full support for the survey and their hope that surveys would continue in the future. The survey results also indicate that a new era in aviculture is emerging — an era in which an attitude of distrust and secrecy about sharing captive breeding information is being replaced with an understanding that cooperation to share captive breeding information is the only way to ensure the survival of both aviculture and the birds in captivity.

Although they represent only one breeding season and a relatively small number of aviculturists, the 1990 survey results do seem to accurately reflect several trends in aviculture which until now could not be substantiated with quantitative information.

Results of the questionnaire indicate that many private aviculturists in the United States use modern avicultural techniques such as permanent marking systems, surgical sexing, written and computerized breeding and pediatric records, and artificial incubation of eggs.

Results of the census confirm that U.S. aviculturists maintain a wide variety of psittacine species in their collections, from very common to very rare, and they are breeding many species successfully. Popularity as a pet, the value of individual birds, and availability from the wild appear to play an interrelated role in determining what species are emphasized in captive breeding.

a) Eleven of the 25 most abundant taxa are species for which there is great commercial demand, but which are no longer available from the wild. Seven of these species were among the top ten in the category of young hatched per breeding pair, indicating a strong emphasis on captive breeding of these species. Not surprisingly, they are currently among the most

popular psittacines in the pet trade.

b) Of those species still imported from the wild in relatively large numbers, census representation is directly related to the value of individual birds. Larger, more valuable birds such as macaws and cockatoos are represented in relatively larger numbers (compared to number imported), while inexpensive, readily available birds are not, as reflected by the low numbers of commonly imported conures and smaller parrots.

c) The uncommon or rare species in captivity, such as are generally held by breeders and collectors who often have an interest in the genus as a whole.

A comparison of how respondents describe themselves with census

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The 1990 TRAFFIC U.S.A. Psittacine Captive Breeding Survey provided census information on over 31,000 birds of 192 species and subspecies. Two highly significant numbers reproduced in captivity included the Blue and Gold and Scarlet Macaws.

information from those same respondents gives a picture of which species are being held or bred by what type of aviculturist. What emerges is a spectrum of people calling themselves "breeder," ranging from a novice breeder attempting to breed their pet birds, to the more experienced breeders who breed popular species to supply the pet trade, to specialty breeders who emphasize only certain taxa or rare taxa. Breeders of common species may also breed less common or rare species.

Aviculturists can benefit greatly from information collected in captive breeding surveys. While the 1990 survey results can be considered useful for establishing base-line numbers of psittacine birds and species in captivity and their captive breeding rates, a clear picture of the level of captive breeding in the United States will emerge only if captive breeding information is gathered over several breeding seasons. Aviculturists can use this information in several ways:

1) To determine which species are bred in large numbers and which species need more emphasis to increase their captive populations. Whether a species is captive-bred for the pet trade or in a special captive breeding program, it is vital to know population and captive breeding levels.

2) To compare captive breeding levels of species in their own collec-

tion with the national captive breeding levels.

3) Having quantitative evidence that aviculturists are successfully breeding many species of birds. These data will be useful when participating in special captive breeding programs for endangered species, applying for permits to export captive-bred birds to foreign markets, or when justifying the need to augment captive populations with wild-caught specimens for captive breeding purposes.

4) Finally, aviculturists will benefit from the unity that cooperating in a national survey requires. Building trust and dialogue among aviculturists and non-aviculturists is critical at a time when aviculture must gear up to be the principal suppliers of exotic birds in captivity.

Because of the success of the 1990 Psittacine Captive Breeding Survey, we have initiated a 1991 survey. This second survey reflects the valuable comments and suggestions aviculturists provided in the last survey. We hope all U.S. aviculturists who breed psittacine species will take the opportunity to participate in the 1991 Psittacine Captive Breeding Survey. As domestic and international pressure to limit the trade in wild-caught birds has increased, understanding the status of captive breeding and aviculturists' ability to produce captive-bred birds to meet the demand for pet birds has never been more critical. ●