

AFA VISITS...

the Aviaries of Bob McDonald

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In 1983, while visiting a local pet store, Bob McDonald was convinced by the shop owner to purchase a pair of Peach-faced Lovebirds. Being somewhat of a newcomer in the world of exotic birds, McDonald followed the advice of the shop owner. With the purchase of the lovebirds came the promise of a ready market for any youngster reproduced from his pair of lovebirds. The shop owner said he would purchase any offspring and sell them through the shop. McDonald took the lovebirds home and placed them in a breeding situation. Sure enough, they reproduced. But when he took the offspring back to the bird shop he quickly found there was no ready market for the babies.

What did result from this disappointing promise, however, was that Bob McDonald persevered and developed an increased interest in breeding exotic birds. This early beginning with a pair of lovebirds then expanded into a collection which is now comprised of 350 birds. This collection includes 14 species of *Aratinga* and *Pyrrhura* conures.

Bob McDonald's birds are housed outdoors year around in central Florida. The aviaries are placed under large, ancient oak trees that allow only dappled shade to cover the aviaries, a very pleasant environment for the birds. The property extends to a small lake that provides high humidity for the birds.

Although many of the conure pairs are housed together, most are mingled amongst cages of Amazons, Pionus, small cockatoos, African Greys, Senegal Parrots and Eclectus. There are also a group of small Australian para-



All *Aratinga* conures, including Blue-crowns (above) and Mitred (right) are housed in suspended cages three feet square by four feet long.



keets (Scarlet-chested Parakeets and Golden-mantled Rosellas) and a pair of Black-headed Caiques.

All of the cage breeding units are suspended above the ground. The cages are constructed, depending upon the species using them, of wire measuring 1/2 in. x 1 in., 1/2 in. x 2 in., or 1/2 in. x 3 in. All wire use is galvanized after welding. Most of the cages themselves measure 3 ft. x 4 ft. x 4 ft. and are raised approximately three feet above ground level. There has not been a problem with snakes entering the cages or nest boxes although there

are snakes (ratsnakes) present in the area. There is a minor rodent problem but several free-range turkeys remove most of the food that falls or is spilled on the ground.

All the cages have roofs that completely cover the cage including the nest box. Only one nest box is placed at the rear of each cage. They are made of either wood or metal depending upon the chewing ability of each species. All perches consist of natural materials and frequently the bark is left on the branches for the bird to enjoy.

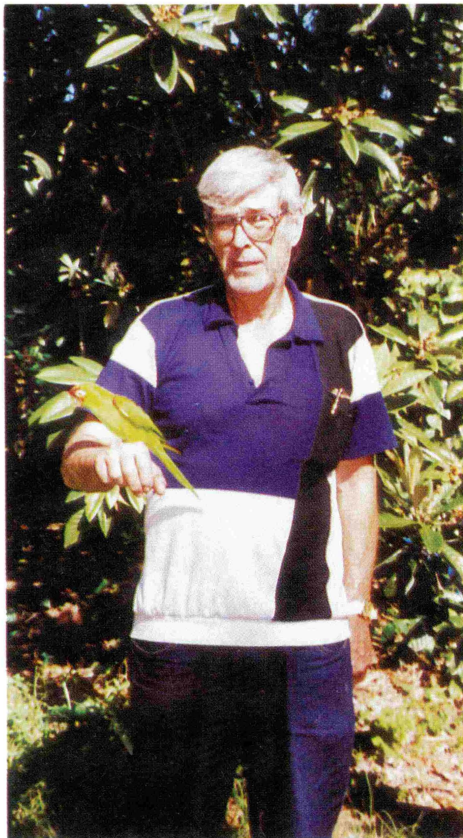
It requires approximately one and

Photos by Edwina Van Antwerp

one-half hours each weekday to feed and water all of the birds. The cages are hosed down daily even with the birds in them. Many of birds enjoy the spray from the water hose. Food and water dishes are cleaned by soaking them in a chlorine solution as needed. Sevin dust (5% Malathion only) is used to control insects, mites, Palmetto bugs (large roaches), lice and ants.

The aviary is located in a suburban setting with older homes on one-half acre or larger properties. There are, however, several dense strands of mature oaks that allow an isolated feeling not consistent with the small size of the land. However, because a neighbor across the lake (ironically, not one of the adjacent neighbors) complained about the noise the birds made, a stockade-type fence has been placed around the property as a sound barrier. This apparently has satisfied the local authorities and the complaining neighbor has stopped.

A diet of a pellet and seed mix (two brands) is fed to the birds on alternate days. Twice a month all of the birds are fed only safflower seed and an



Photos by Edwina Van Antwerp

Bob McDonald with pet conure.

additional two days a month, sunflower seed is fed. A local Farmer's Market is the source of produce. The most common items purchased for the birds are corn-on-the-cob, apples, cucumber and squash. Every three to four years, McDonald feeds all the birds a medicated avian pellet (Tetracycline - put out by Pretty Bird) for 45 days. He feels this treatment assists in getting his birds in top physical condition and his birds really show it.

Dry food (seed and pellet mix) is limited to about one cup per day for the larger birds (Amazons and Greys) and three-quarters of a cup for the smaller birds including all the conures. On Fridays, no feed is given to the birds except for those pairs that are nesting or are on chicks. This is to give the birds a small fasting period which simulates conditions encountered by many of the parrots in the wild. Parrots in the wild have to really work for their food compared to captive birds that have food within a few feet. Many times parrots in the wild have short fasting periods simply because they cannot find readily available food.

Since feeding is done in the late afternoon on weekdays and mid-mornings on Saturdays, this is not as rigorous as it might seem.

To assure help with the handfeeding, Bob sent his daughter for training as an avian specialist. She syringe feeds up to as many as 30 babies (usually in different growth stages) at a time. Pretty Bird handfeeding formula (8% fat content) is fed to the babies with excellent results.

The majority of McDonald's breeding pairs were acquired from a Miami quarantine station, so most are wild-caught. There are, however, several domestic pairs. Breeding success with the conures varies widely. A domestic three and one-half year old pair of Black-capped Conures, *Pyrrhura rupicola*, reproduced in their second year. They produced one chick during that second year and four chicks in their third year. A pair of wild-caught Peach-fronted Conures, *Aratinga aurea*, has produced a single clutch of three chicks each of the three years that they have been in McDonald's collection.

There are many other species of conures in McDonald's collection including the Sun Conure, *Aratinga solstitialis*, Jenday Conure, *Aratinga jandaya*, Golden Conure, *Aratinga guarouba*, Mitred Conure, *Aratinga mitrata*, Cherry-headed Conure, *Aratinga erythrogenys*, Blue-crowned Conure, *Aratinga acuticaudata*, Wagler's Conure, *Aratinga wagleri*, and Half-moon Conure, *Aratinga canicularis*. Those in the *Pyrrhura* group include the Green-cheeked Conure, *Pyrrhura molinae*, Maroon-bellied Conure, *Pyrrhura frontalis*, and Painted Conure, *Pyrrhura pica*. Additional conures include the Patagonian Conure, *Cyanoliseus patagonus*, and 14 pairs of Nanday Conures, *Nandayus nenday*.

In recent years, caring for the aviary and marketing the babies has taken its toll on McDonald who sells primarily to out-of-state buyers. With all of the information gathered over 14 years of being in the exotic bird business, he has decided to switch to brokering birds rather than reproducing them. He plans to do this after he retires from his week-day job. ➤



A Mitred Conure with a large amount of red on its throat.