

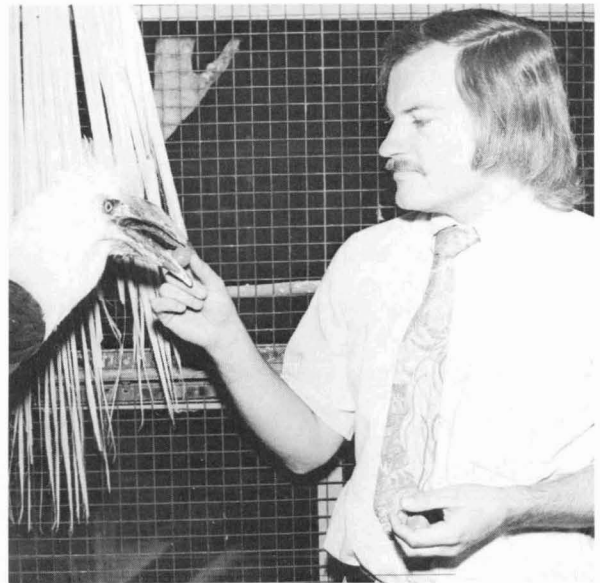
Editor's Introduction

Rick Rundel presently owns and operates a rare bird breeding farm in Sonoma, California based on the belief that with proper management techniques one can earn a living and create a delightful lifestyle breeding birds. Prior to his present endeavor he spent ten years working for large institutions in California including the San Diego Zoo, San Francisco Zoo and the last five years as Curator of Birds at the Los Angeles Zoo. He has published over twenty-five articles including several on the breeding dynamics of toucans, a program that produced several first breedings at the L.A. Zoo. In his first column he presents a bit of his background with zoos and a rare insight into their inner workings.

ZOO REVIEW

by Rick Rundel

*Rick Rundel
feeding a
friendly white-
crested Hornbill.*



Each of us had crazy childhood fantasies and one of mine was about animals of all types. It was a crazy fantasy of empathizing with them and wanting to interact. Animal movies and books led to family outings to zoos and museums and then to pets of every kind at home. A career in my father's business was abandoned when I discovered an outstanding rare bird collection belonging to Alex Isenberg. A pioneer with softbills, he insisted that all of his diets should be totally organic without any prepared foods. Work just didn't seem that important.

College in the late sixties just ran out of control and a biology major only required Biology I and eight additional courses. I'm not exactly sure what went on on campus but I was set free to take every field course offered and happily missed out on chemistry, physics, genetics, statistics, microbiology, and all of the tedious courses that compose the majority of course requirements. After receiving my Bachelor's degree I went on to San Diego for graduate work and, alas, with parental aid gone, I commenced driving a tour bus at the San Diego Zoo, and my zoo experience began. After a thousand tours over a two year span I could recite my tour spiel in my sleep and commonly would interchange parts of the dialog during a tour without realizing it until the tourists would start chuckling — they didn't believe that deer laid the biggest egg of any bird. What I did learn was based on simple day to day observations of populations dynamics of a large collection.

The incredible inspiration of my first visits gave way to my first dissolutionment — zoos prior to 1970 were not breeding centers for exotic animals. Although many, many first breedings were recorded, they were usually achieved in

large group flights. Properly accommodated, a given pair of birds may have a 50% chance for success in a given aviary, but place 100 pairs in the same aviary and the chance may drop to only 2%. With a hundred pairs, one is guaranteed some success although it will rarely be consistent from year to year as proved to be the case. But then there really was no real reason to be concerned because birds were very inexpensive at this time — barely 10% of their present cost and they were available without all our present quarantine procedures, permit requirements or general concern. Accurate inventories were rarely kept and records were based on expected needs — not something one automatically did.

When I went to San Francisco I was going to change all of this. I was hired at the San Francisco Zoo to prepare for opening a large indoor tropical flight cage. It was the last few months before the bird embargo went into effect and buying birds from the extensive lists provided was a childhood dream come true. Tanagers were \$3.00 each with fifteen different species offered. Call up at 8 a.m. and your order would arrive at the airport the following day. The collectors just caught the birds and shipped them, charging you more for their time than the birds they shipped because, generally, they didn't even bother to identify them. One never knew quite what to expect. One friend received a large number of piranhas — carnivorous fish — some of which he still has today. Reform was not to come at this time. At conferences, great ideas were discussed and everybody tried to, at least, pair everything up regardless of its natural social structure. Money however, was not always available and except for an occasional new exhibit, aviaries were still de-

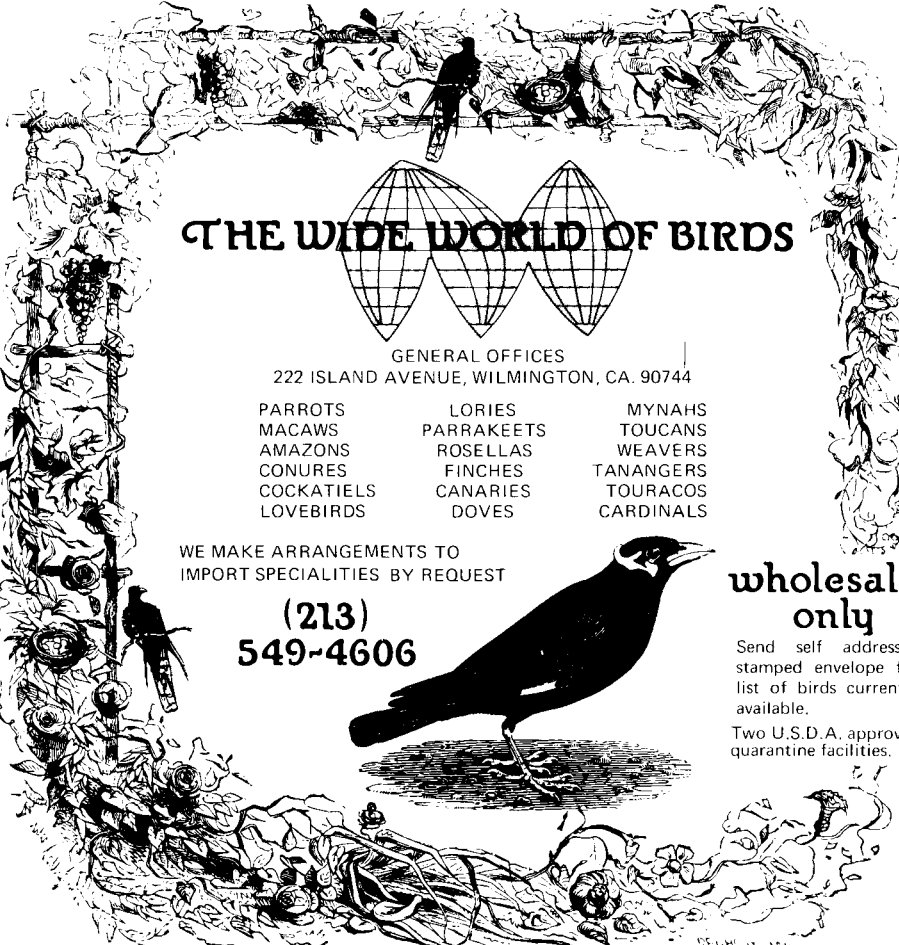
signed without specific occupants in mind. Collections started to fall apart noticeably. Due to the newly established embargo no replacements were available. My worst suspicions were confirmed. After a few outspoken words on what I would do if I ran the zoo, a very dear friend gave me some sage advice. What I knew to be true, I was told, was not only true but worse than I realized. Furthermore, it was common in many zoos and had always been so. If I spoke up, I would simply be replaced by another who would mind the shop quietly. So swallowing my pride, I hung on and was determined to climb to the top and be a great zoo director.

Convinced that it was just my particular situation, in April 1973 I accepted the position of Curator of Birds at the L.A. Zoo. The embargo was lifted but at first primarily pet trade birds entered the country and they were quite expensive and people stood in line to buy anything, at any cost. The first people to open quarantine stations made fortunes overnight. Many wonderful changes were beginning to take place and in my new position I was able to travel and see many zoos first-hand. The Bronx Zoo built an aquatic bird house with environments designed for specific birds followed by an even larger tropical building whose success can be appreciated only by seeing it, and measured by the number of other zoos that have since attempted to copy it. Facilities began to simply be closed off. A rare animal by itself ceased to be enough reason for its place in the zoo—a trend I am delighted to see continue. Off exhibit breeding areas popped up across the country and spectacular results were seen. Guy Greenwell, Curator of Birds at the National Zoo, called me one day to offer in trade a pair of vulturine guinea fowl, a bird rarely bred at that time,

for a few birds he was interested in. Later I found out he had raised 122 guineas that year. But it was more than just this one species. He had done it with roul roul partridge, argus pheasant, and piping guans to mention a few. Other zoos were doing similar projects with interesting results. The Bronx Zoo, as usual, seemed to be trying to do it the hard way, picking the most bizarre birds possible—pittas, tawny frogmouths, and green wood hoopoes to mention three with which they had excellent results. Their support and cooperation with other zoos led a very strong trend away from the stamp collection of old and into a new era. One of the most significant developments was the evolution of a new aviculturist's position called by many different names in different zoos but in essence one who is free of paperwork, meetings and office politics and whose primary interest is breeding birds. Every successful collection has this person and at the L.A. Zoo without Dale Thompson much of what I was able to accomplish would not have been possible.

Zoo animal collections are different from private collections in many respects. Except for a minor percentage of off-exhibit areas, the birds must contend with the everyday dealings with the rock throwing, cage pounding, camera flashing public. The second major problem is that most zoos use hired help as opposed to knowledgeable concerned aviculturists to care for the animals. At the L.A. Zoo, it is general knowledge the three most important factors for picking the specific string of animals one desired to care for were 1) days off, 2) hours worked, 3) physical amount of work involved. Only one out of 70 keepers first request was to work with a specific animal.

On the good side, a zoo is a bureaucracy that in general is tied to an even larger city bureaucracy that generates some financial stability. It is immune from divorce, rapidly changing interests, and the financial set-back of an expensive death. It can afford to wait things out and try again and again. Supportive services can be provided that are unheard of primarily such as security, vet care by specialists, travel benefits to visit other collections and horticulture benefits. Zoos across the world are still primarily recreational facilities to offer the public the enjoyment of seeing exotic animals. They have time for conservation and research programs that recently have produced many significant results. In future issues I will explore many of these new developments in breeding, aviary design, and other new concepts that could apply to private breeding programs.




THE WIDE WORLD OF BIRDS

GENERAL OFFICES
222 ISLAND AVENUE, WILMINGTON, CA. 90744

PARROTS	LORIES	MYNAHS
MACAWS	PARRAKEETS	TOUCANS
AMAZONS	ROSELLAS	WEAVERS
CONURES	FINCHES	TANANGERS
COCKATIELS	CANARIES	TOURACOS
LOVEBIRDS	DOVES	CARDINALS

WE MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO
IMPORT SPECIALITIES BY REQUEST

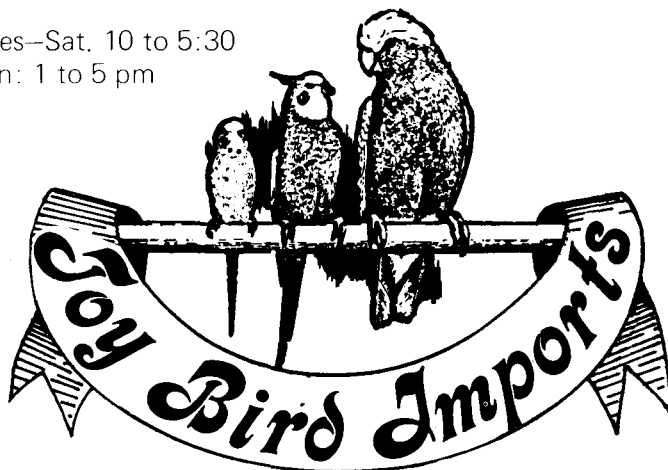
**(213)
549-4606**



**wholesale
only**

Send self addressed
stamped envelope for
list of birds currently
available.
Two U.S.D.A. approved
quarantine facilities.

Tues—Sat. 10 to 5:30
Sun: 1 to 5 pm



WE HAVE A USDA APPROVED QUARANTINE STATION

BUY • SELL • SHIP

BIRDS OF ALL KINDS

*Specializing
in
Finches and Australian Hookbills*

CALL (213) **341-1522** OR (213) **882-7130**

20223 Saticoy St., Canoga Park, CA. 91306