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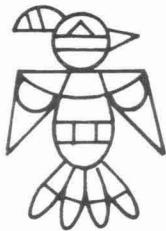
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an interview with **Ed Maruska** director of Cincinnati Zoo

by Terry Dunham



Edward J. Maruska, director, the Cincinnati Zoo, and president, the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA).

Ed Maruska is director of the Cincinnati Zoo, an institution perhaps best known to aviculturists as the home, earlier this century, of the last known living specimens of both the Carolina Parakeet and the Passenger Pigeon. A shrine at the zoo memorializes their passing and poses painful environmental questions for the hundreds of thousands of persons who visit there each year.

Maruska is also president of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA), a 215-member organization concerned with many of the same issues wrestled with by the AFA. In a visit to the Cincinnati Zoo, the Watchbird asked Maruska about zoos and aviculturists and their common interests.

WATCHBIRD: What is the relationship between zoos and private breeders?

MARUSKA: I think many private fanciers are members of the AAZPA, and that's the only formal relationship at this time. At the Cincinnati Zoo, we're also members of many private avicultural (groups) and subscribe to many private ornithological magazines... There's a serious problem with birds, as with other animals, being sold through the pet trade and decimating wild populations. We certainly don't approve of the exploitation of wild fauna for the pet industry.

On the other hand, I'm a firm believer in serious hobbyists... We do recognize the serious hobbyist and the contributions he makes. (Consider for example) the various stocks of ducks and pheasants, of which there are good captive populations, yet the wild populations are dwindling. We have a great deal to learn from the private aviculturist, because he has more time to devote to his particular interests.

WATCHBIRD: What is the zoo's main function with the birds it has and the space it allocates them?

MARUSKA: That's a difficult question, answered differently by each zoo. But most zoos operate in four areas. First, recreation: zoos and aquariums are the urban citizen's only chance to come into contact with wildlife and enjoy it, and we should never underestimate that. Second, education: we have a large and receptive audience, since zoos and aquariums and private exhibits attracted better than half

the population of the country last year. Third, conservation: we can be a great force in encouraging better conservation laws, by preaching conservation and by teaching environmental literacy. The fourth area is research: it, too, varies from park to park. Here, it takes a small role, because of funding (founded in 1875, the Cincinnati Zoo was bought by the City of Cincinnati in 1932, but receives no tax monies for its operation). But we have a number of research projects going on here, which basically deal with husbandry.

Our bird department has been neglected, but I think now we've got a good, energetic crew in there, and you can see the improvements already. We're breeding birds on a small scale that we never had bred before. Rothschild's Mynahs are probably our biggest success with birds so far. Our strength is mammals--we've got the greatest primate breeding program in the country, and we've bred more species of cats than any other zoo in the world. (Because of its birth records, *Newsweek Magazine* called it "the sexiest zoo in the nation.")

WATCHBIRD: Few private individuals keep primates or exotic cats, but thousands of them are keeping and breeding various types of birds. Does that create a dilemma for zoo bird houses, and if so, how do you cope with it?

MARUSKA: We're an old zoo, so we opt for diversity. We have an insect house, a nocturnal animal house. I'd like us to have a diverse collection of birds.

WATCHBIRD: How has legislation affected your bird collection?

MARUSKA: It obviously has put restraints on the numbers and kinds we can exhibit. It's made it much more costly. But I think we're making progress in legislation, even regarding endangered species,

where legislation has made even the moving of specimens difficult ... Hopefully, as it works out, it's like the migratory bird laws at the beginning of the century: there was chaos until things got sorted out.

WATCHBIRD: You'd consider it progress if the endangered species act was amended to make it easier to work with such species?

MARUSKA: Yes, and I think it would affect private breeders as well as zoos. We have to do something to stop the massive exploitation of wild populations, and sometimes we get caught in the morass of legislation (that constitutes a solution). We just have to fight our way up and prove what we're doing is the right thing. (I think) some great things will happen in the near distant future that will greatly alleviate at least the problem of moving captive specimens of endangered species. It's the greatest thing we at AAZPA have on our docket.

WATCHBIRD: What would you think of allowing captive breeding of our native American birds?

MARUSKA: I think that's an excellent idea. We have to make certain the birds don't fall into the wrong hands: I've seen shady pet shops with caged birds locked up in a back room. We might concentrate on

forms we're having trouble with.

WATCHBIRD: But why wait until a species is threatened?

MARUSKA: We aviculturists — and I say aviculturists because zoo curators are



The memorial building in the background was home to the last living specimens of two different American bird species: "Martha," the last Passenger Pigeon, died here in 1914; "Inca," the last Carolina Parakeet, died here four years later.

indeed aviculturists, too — have been preaching that we should've taken the Whooping Crane under tow long ago. Now that's done, we've seen fantastic increases in the Whooper. They have to be managed. Some of the early conservationists were very much against that. But I say, save a species any way we can.

WATCHBIRD: Let's shift directions for a moment. When you set out to hire a birdkeeper, or when other zoos do, do you automatically look for an academic background? Or would you consider a person's background as a serious private breeder?

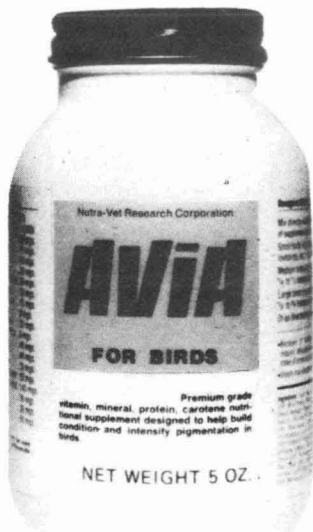
MARUSKA: I'd consider that background, and if they had a good academic background, that would be all the better, for publishing, for example... There's a dearth of good bird men in the zoo field. This is probably one of the most wide open curatorial areas. A good bird staff is difficult, if not impossible, to find at this time.

WATCHBIRD: Academically, what advice would you have for a serious breeder considering pursuing a zoo career?

MARUSKA: There's a great move in the AAZPA for professionalism, and with that comes a greater demand for an academic background. I'd recommend a least a bachelor's degree in zoology or if possible, related ornithological courses. But that's not an absolute criteria. I'm sure if a

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The Passenger Pigeon population once numbered almost a billion specimens. Now there are none. How many cordon blues fly in the wild? "We cannot approve of the exploitation of wild fauna for the pet industry," says Cincinnati Zoo director Edward J. Maruska: "... let's provide hobbyists with a good captive raised supply . . ."

person came into a park and had ten years of successful breeding experience and was well written, I think the academic background would still be at the bottom of the list. But I would encourage any youngster

to get that academic background.

WATCHBIRD: Are there any types of birds you'd especially like to see American aviculturists concentrate on?

MARUSKA: Any of the perching birds,

because of the difficulty of acquisition. I don't like to (take the pleasure of keeping birds away from the non-specialist). But let's provide him with a good captive-raised supply of those birds. Let's not be draining the wild population. If we can provide a number of species in captivity for the pet trade, fine, I have no qualms about that. People should still enjoy keeping animals responsibly and properly.

WATCHBIRD: If you could influence serious bird breeders to make contributions zoos can't, what would you do?

MARUSKA: I'd have them concentrate on certain families or species of birds, learn as much as they can about them, and make sure that information gets published. I'd have them work closely with zoological parks: most of the major zoos have good avian collections and good people in charge of them. (Aviculturists should) work closely with them. Most curators are going to be delighted by their contributions. After all, that's how most of us got started, as serious breeders, amateurs, and then we worked into the profession. There're a lot of contributions the serious aviculturist can make, but record keeping is more important now than ever, so that when he disbands his collection, for health reasons, or because he loses interest, or whatever, that information is documented. In the distant future — or the near future — we may have to depend on those resources...

WATCHBIRD: What do you mean by "publishing" one's findings?

MARUSKA: First, keep records of what you're doing, good and bad. Next, compile enough of that so it can be put into legible form and published somewhere. (Editor's note: the Watchbird welcomes unsolicited manuscripts: the staff will help you put your data and observations into article form. Contact us with your ideas and suggestions.)

WATCHBIRD: Keeping birds alive and breeding them — what most aviculturists do — that's important enough research in and of itself?

MARUSKA: It is paramount in our profession, as animals are more and more difficult to get — a trend I think will increase rather than decrease.

WATCHBIRD: Are we going to see our borders closed to imported birds?

MARUSKA: I don't know. At this time, at least, no. But I think there's going to be greater selectivity, fewer varieties, because of embargoes on them in countries of origin. We're already seeing more restrictions, and rightly so. Our fauna's disappearing at a rapid rate. Underdeveloped countries (haven't had the necessary laws) to protect their wildlife. But somewhere you've got to begin.

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