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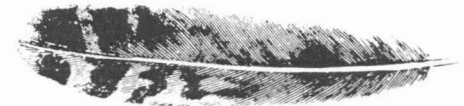
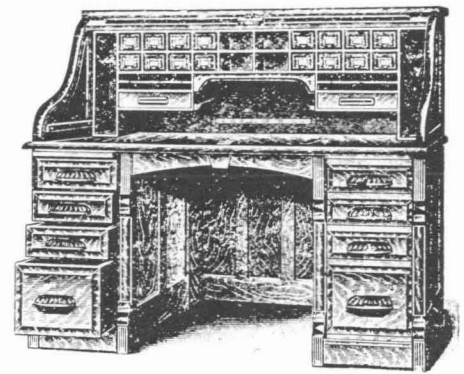
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# From The Editor's Desk

by Sheldon Dingle



Dear Editor:

Can the A.F.A. do anything about the shortage or absence of niger seed? If nothing can be done then what can a canary breeder use as a substitute? How would we use the substitute?

Thank you,  
D.D.

Huntington Beach, CA

*Dear Friend, I sympathize with your problem but there are good reasons for the lack of niger seed. The A.F.A. can do nothing about it as it is a matter of great governmental importance. Granted, Washington has made a few mistakes and has occasionally expounded questionable policy but the Great Niger Affair will, I'm sure, go down in history as a veritable stroke of political genius.*

*Almost all niger seed comes from Rhodesia. And Rhodesia, you'll recall, lacks the ability to direct its own affairs. Fortunately, as it happens, our illustrious leaders in Washington have all of our own affairs running perfectly and in their leisure have turned to counseling the leaders of Rhodesia. The Rhodesians are a bit obtuse and don't understand Uncle Sam's kindly advice hence Uncle Sam has cut off all trade with the belligerent African nation.*

*The end result is that Rhodesian canaries have niger seed to eat and the American canaries don't. Can you not see the genius of that policy — the wondrous subtlety of it? I stand amazed.*

*The only patriotic thing to do is to feed your birds something other than niger. You might chop licorice into small niger-shaped bits and fool your canaries. Or perhaps you could dye canary seed black and feed that. Or you could feed rape seed instead of niger. Niger is 19.37% protein, rape is 19.54%. Niger has 43.22% fat, rape has 45%. Niger contains 3.48% ash, rape has 4.21%. Check with your veterinarian but it could well be that rape will be a satisfactory replacement for niger but God help us if Washington ever finds out where rape comes from.*

Ed.

Dear Sir:

As a practicing avian taxonomist, I turned with interest to the article in *Watchbird*, Vol. 5, No. 2 on "Taxonomy and the Aviculturist." With apologies to the author, I suggest that your readers should disregard the article, which contains factual and conceptual errors too numerous to discuss in a letter of this sort. I feel that this warning is necessary, on the basis that accepting wrong information is worse than being confused in the first place.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Banks  
Staff Zoologist

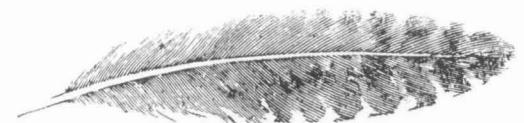
U.S. Dept. of the Interior  
Fish & Wildlife Service  
Washington, D.C.

*Once in a while an error creeps into our printed pages and we greatly appreciate it when that error is brought to our attention. We will go to great lengths to make any corrections necessary.*

*Sometimes, however, we may publish an author's opinion that may or may not agree with yours. You must admit, sir, that even in the world of cold hard science there are many divergent opinions held by professors well respected in their respective fields. Perhaps we have such a divergence in this case.*

*Your letter does not point out any errors. A blanket negation of the article in question is much too easy a way out. I suggest you firm up your criticisms and commit them to paper so that we can all share in an interesting learning experience. Between you and Mr. Wylie I am determined to get at the heart of our taxonomy system.*

Ed.



Dear Mr. Dingle:

I have been referred to you for information on raising and breeding parakeets as a business. I am very interesting in doing this but I am at a stand still now as I don't know how to get started. I already have a male and a female parakeet and would like to breed them, however, I would like to expand and make a business of some kind out of this. Any help will be so much appreciated.

Sincerely,  
C.L.F.  
Pevely, MO

*Madam, a male and a female parakeet is a start. Put them together in a cage containing a parakeet nest box and they will make babies. When the babies are weaned sell them. Viola! You are in business. To expand your operation simply multiply the number of male and female parakeets.*

*Actually, you should consult a good accountant to get advice on beginning a business. A good attorney would be most helpful also. Perhaps what you should do first is develop a parakeet raising hobby. A true business often is bound by a number of legal technicalities that wouldn't burden a hobby. There is no difference as far as the birds are concerned though. In either event you need a few basic ingredients.*

*First off, you need a place, a physical location to keep your birds. Second, you need suitable cages or aviaries in which to place the birds. Third, of course, you need birds. These three basic items require considerable investment.*

*If you can use property you already have you will save money. Be sure to check zoning regulations before you spend any money on improvements.*

*The improvements will consist of aviaries suitable for your area and your birds. I figure my flights cost around \$400.00 a piece and I generally keep one pair of birds to a flight. Construction costs mount up quickly although you may be able to beat my cost.*

*Birds cost money also. Their cost may determine how many you buy.*

*You can assemble the above ingredients one flight and one pair of birds at a time or plunge into the affair on a grand scale depending upon your circumstances and interest.*

*So far you have no income derived from your investment. Next, you have maintenance expenses, i.e., food, labor, etc. You must prevent or control disease. Your birds should produce babies but some of them won't. When you get young birds you must find a way to sell them – wholesale, retail, advertising, etc.*

*With good luck and good sense (the*

*former is better than the latter) the baby birds you sell will bring in more money than your operating expenses and gradually you will recoup your investment and eventually make a profit.*

*My dear Madam, as I reread what I've just written I strongly suspect that whoever referred you to me regarding business made a serious error. I indulge myself with a collection of Australian parakeets and a modest collection of orchids because they are delightful and beautiful. These things are a hobby with me. As I lack either good luck or good sense with my hobbies I lose my tush.*

*I recommend aviculture as a wonderful hobby, its scope depending entirely upon your means. For business matters, I advise emulating a successful businessman in your area.*

Ed.



Dear Editor:

I am a "beak freak" who has a lot of questions. I hope you can help me. I have had about five parrots in my life and am somehow crazy about parrots. My fantasy is to someday have a bird farm. I am always reading accounts of people breeding parrots and I would really like to try it. However, I don't know where to start. Can you please tell me the names of books which give a good basic orientation? Also names of people in the Bay Area who breed parrots and would be open to having a complete neophyte come and ask questions? Is the Bay Area too cold for outdoor breeding? What kind of parrots would offer the best possibility for successful breeding? I have a Mexican Red-Headed parrot, has anyone ever bred them? I hear that a pet parrot becomes totally unfriendly when it gets a mate. Is this reversible. Generally speaking, can you quote a statistic on the success rate for breeding parrots? I'd like to know my chances before investing lots of money. Lastly, I would like to know just how small a pond is acceptable for a swan; does one swan alone do well; can cats kill them?

I know these are a lot of crazy questions but I am really interested in all this. Thank you for your time.

L.H. Roth  
Oakland, CA.

*I am crazy about parrots also. In fact most people consider me just plain crazy so I'll attempt to answer your questions.*

*About your fantasy of having a bird farm – let me say, dear friend, that a bird*

*farm is much easier to acquire than to get rid of.*

*About books I'm not in the mood to talk.*

*About bird people I'm not in the mood to talk either, but for you, a favor. Dr. Larry Swan, 1032 Wilmington Way, Redwood, City, CA. 94062, can put you in touch with the Western Bird Breeders Society. This Society is in your area and has many members who are fine parrot breeders and would be more than happy to speak volumes to you. From them you can learn more than any book would teach you.*

*Of course we've already established that the Bay Area is not too cold for outdoor breeding. Lots of people do it. Hmmm.*

*Regarding what kind of parrots are best to breed – you'll get a variety of answers. I suppose that for a neophyte breeder the more domesticated parrots would be a wise first choice, i.e., budgies, cockatiels, and peach-faced lovebirds. The Amazon parrots, including your Mexican Red-Headed bird, are generally rather difficult and unreliable breeders. I would not recommend them as foundation stock for a new bird farm.*

*Quite often pet parrots become very mean when they acquire a mate. Rather a human characteristic, eh what? And, like wise as with humans, getting rid of the mate often restores the first party to its old jolly self. I recommend experimentation.*

*I know that statistics are important in any business but I dislike them. Tricky things statistics. The only one that I feel qualified to quote comes from my own bird transactions. On every bird deal I lose an average of ten percent. The only thing that keeps me going is the large volume I do. You would do well to confer with successful people in your area regarding this subject.*

*For an expert answer on swans I refer you to one of our advertisers, Ken McConnell. The McConnell's specialize in swans and can give you all the information you want. Quite possibly their excellent articles in the Watchbird, Vol. IV, No. 1, and Vol. IV, No. 6, will furnish you enough data. Part of your swan questions intrigue me – does one swan alone do what well? And of course the cat thing depends entirely upon the size of the swan and the size of the cat. A three hundred pound swan vs. a small mountain lion could prove interesting.*

*You are right, those were a lot of crazy questions but those are my favorite kind. We wackos communicate so well together.*



Dear Editor:

As of late, much concern has been expressed in regard to the locking of the import doors. It does indeed seem that the present direction of importing avian species is headed toward this final destination. At present, I feel we are asking for a ban on imports. Is there not an alternative to getting what we can for another year or two and then, nothing? I would like very much to see the aviculturist continue to exist. That is, the true bird lover and dedicated aviculturist. One who is genuinely dedicated to the conservation of bird wildlife and not bird profits. I fear that we are allowing a relatively small number of importers (not breeders) to plan our future, one which we can nearly see and do dearly despise.

We all know of the realities of importing. We all know that the costs on the birds in the wild are high. We further know, and readily exclaim, the potentials of the trained and earnest aviculturist. How many species can we presently claim to have saved?

Talk of regulation of imports, by the government, always hits a very sore spot with the aviculturist. So, can't we accept a responsible position? A position that would throw the course of destiny into our own hands and at the same time show the bureaucrats that aviculture is a serious avocation and hobby, one certainly worthy of respect and not simply animosity?

We have used our organization in the past to fight Capital Hill, and local court battles, as if to say, "let us, those who are educated about birds, be responsible." In these situations we were forced into the defensive and have come out with small victories and an incidental amount of respect for the organized efforts.

I feel that it is time (past time actually, but certainly not too late) to take the offensive and assertive position, as a professional group and organization, and become self-regulating so that we may continue to exist. We must maintain our own quarantine facilities with the appropriate monitoring of species populations. This may seem a drastic measure but our alternatives are very few and our time is very limited. If we do not support a move in this direction, we will merely be supporting the interests of a seemingly doomed race, the importers. And as a re-

sult, we will sink quickly with them.

We are aware that much more is involved in a species continuation than the importing, with its resultant by-product of dead birds. In the course of monitoring wild populations, we would be in the ideal position of influencing and educating native countries, with backing and support from none other than our own government, complete with its bureaucrats. Also, I would think that a program of this type would be wholly compatible with the interests of the

nation's zoos, thereby, adding greatly to the effort.

I am well aware that a proposal of this magnitude is met with much resistance. Such resistance too often prompted by the almighty dollar. It would be sad to see the almighty dollar decide the fate of aviculture. I think we still can have the birds we want and even be called upon to propigate all endangered species.

Respectfully,  
Steven D. Roper  
Phoenix, AZ

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