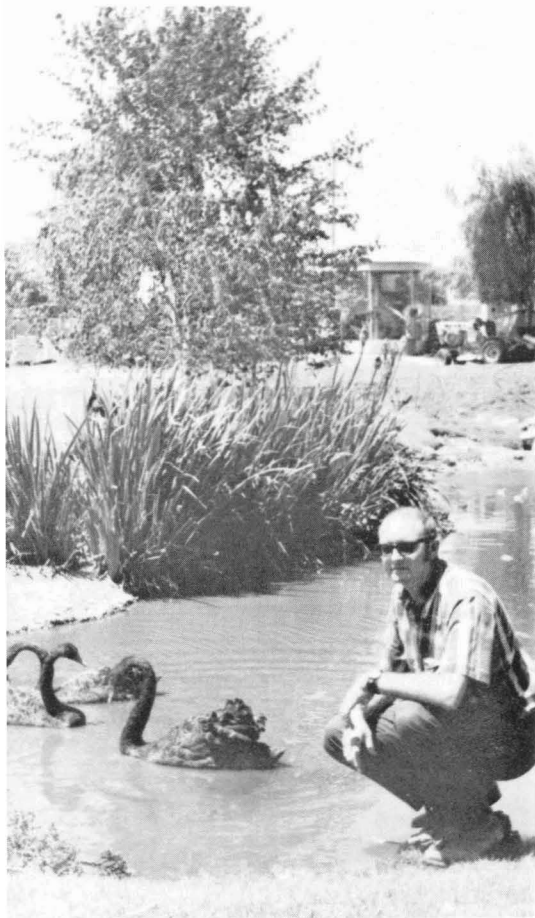


A.F.A. Visits A Member's Aviaries

by Jerry Jennings



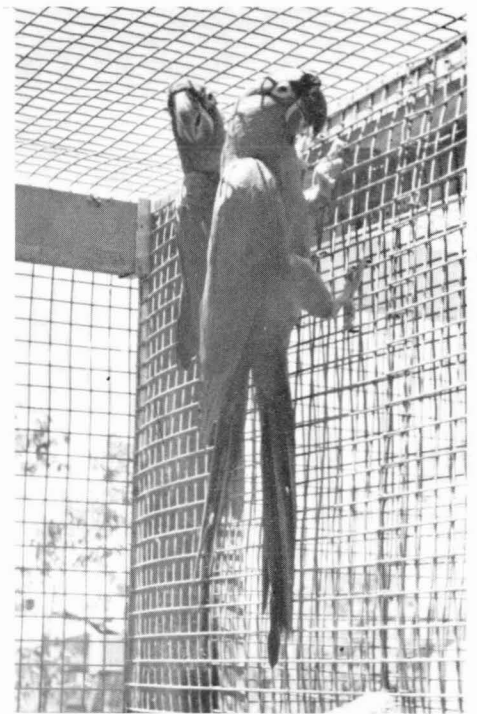
Dick Topper by pond and Black Swans.

Aviculturists interested in the Australian Psittacines have often held the desire to build a complete collection of those lovely and unique birds. At least that is the impression one gets from many conversations with those specializing in that area. Most of such conversation is mere fantasizing, rarely going any further.

Dick Topper is one aviculturist whose fantasy dream is rapidly approaching reality. Owner of the Topper Bird Farm, he has come so close to building that complete collection that it is far simpler to merely list those species that he doesn't have. Again, that doesn't mean he won't have them eventually. Currently absent are the Slender Billed Corrella, Golden Shouldered Parrakeet, Paradise Parrot, Gang Gang Cockatoo, Night Parrot, Swift Parrot, Naretha Blue Bonnet (he does have the Red Vented Blue Bonnet), and the Neophemas with the exception of the Bourke.

More interesting, perhaps, are the species he does maintain. In the Cockatoo department he keeps Leadbeaters, Banksians, Bare-eyed, Umbrellas, Greater Sulphur Crested, and Lesser Sulphur Crested. In the Rosella category has them all! The Golden Mantle, Stanley, Blue or Mealy, Pennant, Yellow, Adelaide, and the incredibly beautiful Tasmanian or Green Rosella are on site. The Northern Rosellas have been acquired and just recently delivered. Dick is possibly the only private aviculturist in the U.S. to have the Tasmanian and Northern Rosellas.

Other broadtailed Parrakeets include the normal and yellow Red Rumps, Many Colored, Barnard's or Malee Ringneck, Hooded, Conclurry, Pileated, Red Vented Bluebonnet, Port Lincoln, Twenty Eight, Rock Peplar, Crimson Wing, and King Parrakeets. In addition, he has two species of Grand Eclectus, the Timor Crimson Wing, and the Amboina King Parrakeet.



Red Fronted Macaws

photos by Jerry Jennings

Five species of Lorikeets were on hand — the Black-capped, Yellow-streaked, Chattering, Dusky, and Duvendode. All of these were properly set up to breed.

A number of Latin American Psittacines were being bred, as well. In the Macaw group Topper is raising Scarlets, Blue & Golds, and their crosses — the Catalina, Greenwings, and the unusual Red-fronted Macaws, which are quite rare in captivity.

Several species of Conures are set up. These include the Painted, Jenday, Queen of Bavaria, and Sun Conure. In fact, a Sun Conure was being hand fed.

Amazons comprising several species and Black-headed Caiques were in abundance.

A good collection of Asian Ringneck species are represented in Topper's collection by the Alexandrine, Madagascar, and Indian Ringneck. All of the Indian mutations — normal, lutino, blue, albino, and cinnamon — are being bred. Mustache and Derbyan Parrakeets rounded out this Asian group.

Two avicultural oddities, the Great-billed Parrot and the Pesquet or Vulturine Parrot were also in residence. It is unusual to see these two even in zoos.

More familiar, on the other hand, are several species of Lovebirds — Fischer, Blue Masked, Black Masked, and Black Cheek.

In short, the Topper Bird Farm is a breathtaking display of, perhaps, the greatest variety of Psittacines to be seen in private hands. Housed in 246 separate flights (and still a buildin'), the entire

project is personally and exclusively cared for by Dick Topper and his lovely wife, Bonnie. Their adventure in aviculture has become a full time job.

How does one arrive at such a point? Dick would say, "through love for birds and ten years time". His first spark of interest came from a chance visit to a pet shop in 1967, where he greatly admired and purchased a pair of Fischer Lovebirds with cage for his kitchen. One week later, an egg appeared on the cage floor. Dick returned to the pet shop for advice. He learned about nest boxes and palm fronds and that pet shops have a limit. He soon located other breeders, who infected him with their enthusiasm. The first "pair" of Lovebirds turned out to be two hens — a situation quickly remedied with the purchase of several more birds.

It wasn't long before Dick expanded. He next attempted his hand with Budgies not yet fully realizing that he was inextricably "hooked" by this hobby of aviculture that is not really a hobby, but, as he calls it, a disease, whose prognosis for cure is not in sight. His obsession with birds became so acute in terms of demands on his time that he turned it into a business. What else could he do, if he had no time for his job?

Dick had been a professional tax accountant for many years. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he grew up. He graduated from Marquette and received his Master in Finance from NYU in 1953. After his years in New York and in Richmond, Virginia, he moved to northern California in early 1967. First settling in Sunnyvale, he moved shortly thereafter to Gilroy, where the Topper Farm is presently situated.

Nestled on five acres in the Santa Clara Valley in the midst of prune orchards, Dick and Bonnie have built a pleasant home, erected a green house, constructed all those aviaries, and sculptured an attractive, free form pond measuring 182' by 81' (at its greatest extent) complete with stream, waterfall, and filtration system.

The pond is home to a nice waterfowl collection of Black-neck, Australian Black, Mute, and Trumpeter Swans. Green-wing and Blue-wing Teal, Red Crested Pochards, White and Gray Calls, Wood Ducks, Mandarins, and Ruddy Shelducks grace the pond, as well. Roaming near the pond are several Peafowl and Sikka Deer.

With such a large collection of animals, feeding can become a taxing ritual. The Toppers have innovatively met the challenge of diverse dietary requirements, however, and still manage to have some free time.

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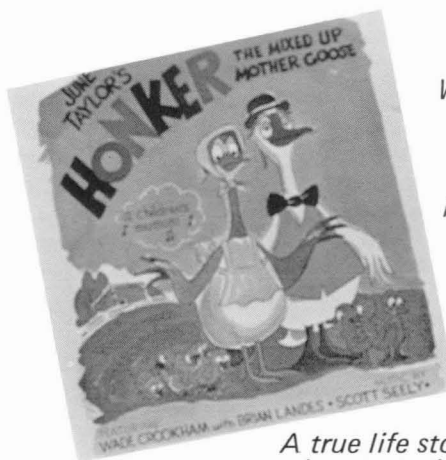
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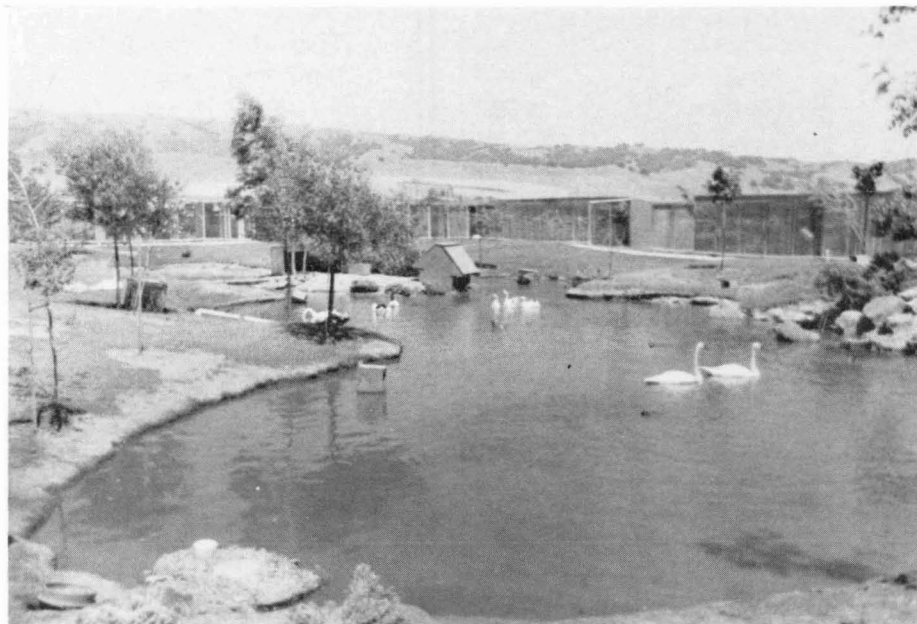
The bird diet is one that Dick has painstakingly developed over the years — one that is fairly complex, it not unique. Besides sunflower, safflower, and parakeet mix (not a standard commercial mix), the Psittacines receive walnuts, peanuts, pecans, almonds, greens, and grit. Greens are comprised of Fillerie Weed, Spinach, Swiss Chard, or Carrot tops served up daily. Supplemental to all of the above, a softfood (whose recipe he has developed and had laboratory tested for nutritional value) is prepared according to the following recipe.

First, a slurry is made in a blender: 3 cups Pyracantha or Rose Hips; ½ cup honey.

When using Rose Hips it is important to be sure no systemic insecticide or fertilizers were used on the plants since they collect in the hip.

Second, to two gallons of sprouted seed (any and all seeds are O.K.) add 1 cup General Protein, ¼ cup Vionate Vitamins, ¼ cup Wheat Germ, 2 cups powdered milk, and 1 cup fishmeal. This will form a crumble.

After the crumble has been made in



View of pond surrounded by aviaries in background.

step two, the slurry is added to it.

Each aviary is given a handful of this softfood, which the birds eagerly consume. Remember! This recipe feeds 246 flights, so the quantities need to be scaled down for smaller collections.

The Parakeet Mix in use at the Topper place consists of the usual Canary and Proso plus Red Proso, Buckwheat, Thistle, and Oat Groats. To this mix, Topper adds "VIM" oil, which contains wheat germ, Norwegian Cod Liver, Safflower, and Corn oils. The VIM oil has a patented process that prevent the oil from becoming rancid. The oil is added to the seed at the ratio of 8 ounces to 50 pounds of seed, and mixed thoroughly. Additional additives include soybean meal, which equals 3% of total weight of the mix and a man made algae, which accounts for 4% of total mix weight.

Dick has also been working recently with Super Preen, which he believes is a well balanced amino acid compound. Super Preen can be mixed in with the seed right after the seed is oiled, he feels.

Topper also feeds shredded carrots and apple. Apple is offered daily and is a nat-

ural laxative. However, the apple seeds should be avoided as they are poisonous.

With a diet of such proportions, it would appear that breeding results will be nothing short of spectacular. It is apparent from a stroll through the aviaries, that many young are indeed being reared.

Such a magnificent collection deserves magnificent security. As in every other facet of his avicultural enterprise, Topper has spared nothing to protect his birds from theft. An extremely sophisticated alarm system has been installed that is virtually impossible to foil. This system, known as an intrusion detection system, can detect any person on or near the property and identify their location for Topper, when he is at the house, as well as for the police, who are hooked up via a dialer. Topper demonstrated its effectiveness, it is so sensitive as to be able to detect the slightest movement. Needless to say, such a system is expensive, but then so are the birds.

We will look forward to breeding reports from the Topper Bird Farm in the years ahead.

Magnolia Bird Farm



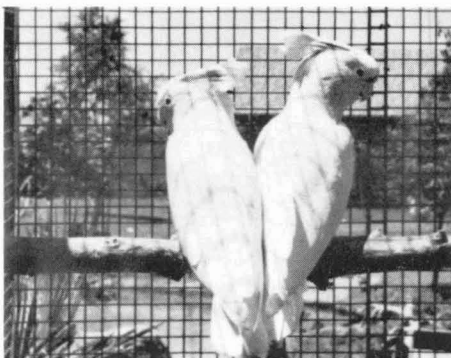
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