

# Record Keeping *Is* Important

By Rick Jordan

Even if you only raise a few birds a year, record keeping can be tedious and time consuming. There are hatch dates to record, then leg band numbers to associate with each chick, and what about the parental (genetics) records? Technically, and to be completely accurate, each band number should track back to one set of parent birds. This is really the only way to assure the new owner of the proper genetics information or relatedness data on any given bird.

How do most people keep records? Probably the system most often used is to record important information onto a calendar or note cards. Of course, after many years of storing these paper documents, they become old and stained, and the temptation to discard them grows stronger with each passing year. But this data is important, so we are all tempted, once again, to rewrite all the information over again onto new cards or papers. The cycle can become unending with the eventual outcome being: the data is thrown in the trash.

The key to keeping good records is to know what information is most valuable to maintain. Pet bird owners are constantly seeking the “age” or “hatch date” of the birds they acquire. This is probably the most important thing to record. But you cannot simply jot down hatch dates for some obscure future reference. That date must correlate to some bird ID of some sort. Maybe it’s a leg band number or a microchip number. That ID number should be traceable to parental records, species information, acquisition of parental stock, or maybe even prices paid for your tax records. Truth be known, you never know what information you might want to research later. So you have to keep it all!

A short list of valuable data about the birds you produce:

## Parental information

Mother’s and father’s ID’s, species of both and ages if known  
Acquired from where? What did you pay?

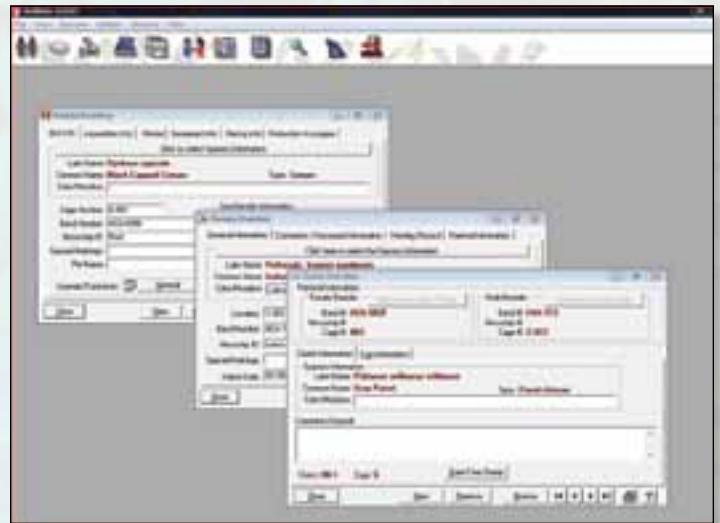
## Clutch information

How many eggs laid? What dates were they laid?  
How many were fertile? How many eggs hatched?  
What dates did each hatch? How many died in shell?

## Chick Information

Hatch date, color mutation, leg band or microchip ID number  
Growth data if known  
Where did it go (sold)?

This is a lot of information to record on a calendar! Also, there are systems that would help to organize the data as well. When numbering your leg bands, do you start each year with number 1, or do you keep going each year with the numbering system? Here’s a hint about leg band numbers. Think about what the person will be able to offer you when they call to ask about a bird. Usually they have no clue about the numbers and codes found on



Detailed records assist the novice as well as the experienced breeder manage bird history or individuals and pairs.

a leg band. If the bird was the second baby of the year and had a number “02” on the band, rest assured the new owner will read that number and assume that bird was hatched in 2002. I’d venture to say that if the leg band had a “17” on it, the new owner would assume it was 17 years old. You must consider that most people are not familiar with leg bands or the coding system and they will not know what the numbers mean.

Even state codes are often confused for other data. I had a woman call me one time to ask about the hatch date on “the father” bird that she just bought. I asked her what she meant by that and she said, “The leg band says ‘PA’, I assumed it was the father bird.” Of course the “PA” stood for Pennsylvania. So the moral of the story is, keep it simple, and record it in a way that will be easily sustained for your future reference.

There are many ways to choose a leg band code. Some people use their own initials, while others use the initials of their business name. Then there are those that just have a favorite code they want to use. Try to choose a code that is not duplicated by other breeders. If you do use a code that seems “common,” at least make sure to add a state code to your bands to help reduce the confusion. For example, Amy’s Aviary may use “AA” on their bands, but so does Arlene Adams. If Amy’s Aviary also has MS for Mississippi and Arlene adds NY for New York, then the codes are more easily distinguishable from one another.

Probably the most confusing thing to most pet owners is the actual numbers that are printed on leg bands. Most breeders use the numbers to distinguish which bird is being referenced. But if the numbering system is duplicated each year, the confusion grows. How can AA-02 be used each year on many different birds and still be a unique identity for any particular bird? It cannot. So



how does the breeder know which bird the caller is asking about? Often they rely on identification of the “species.” Well, even this is questionable in many cases. Pet bird owners do not always know what species their bird is. Often, even when provided with photos, the inexperienced bird owner is not sure what species they have. The truth is, you cannot count on the future owner to provide you with valid information unless it is printed on the leg band.

Taking all of this into consideration, the most effective leg band coding and numbering system is one where the code is unique, the numbers are unique and there is a year and or a state code printed on the band as well. Note that many breeders have stopped putting the year on their leg bands because new owners do not understand that a 2010 leg band may have been a “left-over” and is being used on a 2011 baby. They often feel the breeder is trying to play a game and sell them an older bird, passing it off as a new baby. So, if the year is left off of leg bands it is even more important to not repeat numbering systems.

Continue your numbers in perpetuation with each order of leg bands. This also helps with “ages” of birds through recollection of number groups. For example, if a person says they have a bird wearing a leg band with number 1005 on it, the breeder may know instantly that 1000–1050 leg bands were used in 2010 on their birds.

In reality, there is a lot of information about the birds we keep

that could be valuable. What about the conservation biologist that is researching “Vasa parrots” in the wild? Your records may assist them and save years of observation or data collection. If you are a regular breeder of Vasa parrots, you can give them the average clutch size, time of year of breeding, incubation periods, weaning ages, and so much more. This type of data is priceless in the right hands. Aviculturists must keep good records and make data available to scientists and other researchers. This data can define the difference between a hobby and a profession.

With so much to record, a computer program is probably the best way to go. The American Federation of Aviculture Inc. is now the owner of the Avimate Breeder Software program. Although this software is more than 10 years old, it is still one of the most useful tools for record keeping for avian species. Free downloads and trial versions are available on the AFA website under the “store” tab. Be sure to download a trial version today and try it out. A booklet of helpful hints on how to get setup with Avimate is coming soon.

Think about how organized aviculture would be if we all used the same data collection program. Think about the amount of valuable biological information we would have at our fingertips. Oh, and think how easy it would be to look up a hatch date if all you had to do was type in the band number and hit return on your computer!

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