

# NANCY SPEED

This edition of AFA Watchbird shines a spotlight on an aviculturist whose dedication and accomplishments are matched only by her tenacious drive, charm, exceptional breeding talents and avian socialization techniques that create the conditions for well adjusted pet birds. This spotlight is on our current President, Nancy Speed. In the past 17 years, Nancy served AFA as an official Club Delegate, State Coordinator, Regional Director and Secretary. Her wit and poise is well known. When asked, others typically characterize Nancy Speed as an elegant woman, gracious, respectful, tenacious and a mentor to others. Nancy has an impeccable reputation in the field of aviculture that she values highly. She was taught from an early age that a good name and reputation are your most valuable assets. Nancy Speed has written numerous articles for various avicultural publications. Her favorite articles are those that entertain and educate pet bird owners by sharing with them the adventures and responsibilities involved in keeping and breeding a large flock of parrots. She's well established as an international mentor to breeders and pet owners alike. Nancy has been a speaker at many events across the United States from bird clubs to prestigious conferences.

*By Concetta Ferragamo*

## For the Love of a Budgie

As with most avicultural life stories, Nancy's love of parrots started as a child with an American Budgerigar named Roger. She visited Roger and his owner often and eventually Roger was rehomed with Nancy. Nancy's mom fostered a love of all animals and it was common to find the occasional chicken, duck, rabbit, guinea pig, cat and dog living in their suburban home.

## The Tune That Sparked an Avocation

The intriguing repertoire of a neighborhood cockatiel that could whistle "Dixie" ignited the spark to own another parrot during Nancy's adult years. That song inspired her to purchase a recently weaned normal grey cockatiel. Nancy proudly taught Barney many things, including whistling "Dixie" and the theme from *The Andy Griffith Show*

In 1986 it was time to add a second bird to the household and Nancy decided the species that would best match her lifestyle was a Congo African Grey. She believes the life changes that they've experienced during the last 26 years are solid evidence that parrots can readily adapt to new situations and lifestyles.

## The Love of Pets Led to a New Adventure

Nancy briefly considered returning to college to obtain a degree as a veterinary technician. Her first husband's passion was collecting cars and a compromise between them allowed



Nancy Speed and her beloved Vinacious Amazons and Golden Conures



Nancy uses spacious, outdoor buildings to encourage parent birds to incubate and feed chicks to fledging

her to begin her incredible journey in aviculture, beginning with breeding normal peach-faced lovebirds. As a typical beginner's bird, the lovebird was highly sought after and was the ideal starting point for Nancy's initial breeding endeavors. Nancy enjoyed pairing and breeding lovebirds for several years. She had no concrete plan or vision for her future in birds and ultimately chose a species simply by viewing an admired photo from a comprehensive book entitled "The Atlas of Parrots" written by David Alderton. She had never seen a Hawk-headed parrot, other than in photos, until she purchased a young pair in 1992. Alderton's book kindled her passion for conservation and Nancy decided to apply for a

captive bred wildlife permit to keep and breed the Cuban and Vinaceous amazon. "My advice to anyone interested in breeding birds is to choose a species in which to specialize and learn as much about that species as possible."

Nancy's life changed dramatically when her first husband passed away. She met her second husband, Joe through a local bird club and they married in 1995, combining his flock of amazons, cockatoos, Eclectus parrots and macaws with her smaller flock of various species including conures, Meyer's parrots, Caiques and Hawk-headed parrots. That year Nancy also purchased a breeder friend's collection of Black-headed and White-bellied caiques. The friend had previously offered her collection of Queen of Bavaria (Golden) conures, but Nancy had never heard of the species and was not interested in them at that time. Upon finalizing the purchase of the other birds, the seller said, "You have to take the Queens too." The species was added to her captive bred wildlife permit and she and her husband drove to North Carolina to pick up the birds and meet their first Golden conures. Her efforts in breeding the Golden conures over the years paid off, and she is now pairing up fifth generation youngsters. She believes her greatest reason for success with this species is due to the southern climate and the fact they are in the company of many other Golden

conures.

Nancy feels her greatest sense of accomplishment in breeding birds are her experiences in successfully encouraging the parents to incubate and feed chicks to fledging. She stresses that one must know the habits of the pair being allowed to feed and fledge and careful management is required at all times during the process. She says it is a thrilling experience to go to the aviary and see a newly fledged youngster (especially a cockatoo) perching with its parents. She stresses that what a pair does one year will not necessarily be repeated the next year. Sometimes, the only thing consistent about the breeding habits of a pair is the inconsistency they exhibit.

Nancy's experience with parent rearing the Golden conure has also been very rewarding. "The year I put up nest box cameras and learned what really took place inside the nest box convinced me to change my management practices. It was thrilling to watch a juvenile hen from a previous clutch feed a neonate while the parents were outside the nest box. I now routinely leave a youngster with the parents to help rear subsequent clutches."

She loves being out with the breeder birds and especially enjoys hanging amazon nest boxes in the early spring. When the boxes are distributed to the amazon aviaries, the pairs



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show their excitement and the anticipation that another breeding season is underway. “Sometimes it is a contest of wit and speed between the pairs and me. I barely get the box hung in place before the hen has jumped in and the male begins defending his territory.”

Nancy is a multifaceted breeder who has raised well socialized birds for the pet trade and parent reared fledglings for the breeding of rarer species and those birds that are classified as endangered in the wild. Many of Nancy’s older breeding pairs are retired, but they remain with her on the family’s 100 acre pecan orchard, living out their enriched lives happily.

### Memorable Moments

When asked to share a memorable experience that was heart wrenching, Nancy reflected on the time a fledgling Caique took its first flight into the kitchen of her new house and landed behind the Sub-Zero refrigerator. The refrigerator was permanently built into the custom cabinetry and it could not be moved. Nancy was fear-stricken as she heard the unweaned chick’s plaintive wailing. She immediately called the company that installed the cabinetry and they sent a team of carpenters to rip apart the custom woodwork and pulled the refrigerator out to save the baby Caique. The chick was retrieved and tragedy was averted. The kitchen was put back together again before her husband returned home. Nancy giggled as she shared that he never did find out about that incident.

Another equally exciting experience involved the fire department being dispatched to rescue Nancy off the roof of a two-story building which housed a local pet store. “I thought it was so cute to let Barney ride on my shoulder. Something scared him outside the pet store and he managed to fly to the very peak of the building’s roof. I moved my car next to the electric meter and climbed up to rescue him. But, I couldn’t hold Barney and get down too, so I just sat there. After a while a crowd started gathering and someone decided to call the fire department. Horns were honking and sirens were wailing. It was a very embarrassing situation but, in the end, my cockatiel was safe. I have never taken a chance like that again.”

### Precious moments keep us smiling

Nancy unveiled many special tenderhearted stories all wrapped around her love of feeding and raising baby birds. Socialization can start as soon as the baby hatches. Chicks are not kept isolated from each other. She’s developed a special protocol when rearing her babies. Her nursery is a custom built room designed with special pull out sectionals for each clutch of baby birds. Feathered youngsters stay in cubicles



Top, a group of young Caique parrots and an Amazon socialize at feeding time. Center, Golden Conures enjoy the sun. Above, a young group of Golden Conures in Nancy Speed’s nursery.



that offer privacy as needed. When chicks enter what she calls the “lookie-loo” stage, they travel to the next cubicle to begin socializing with other youngsters of like age. She adds it is quite hilarious to watch a clutch of young marauding caiques venture into adjoining cubicles to surprise or intimidate others.

As soon as the chicks are walking about they are encouraged to jump in a large shallow container for transport to the countertop for feeding. Nancy related she had always done this and never realized it was called target training. Early training in this respect simplifies the transition to voluntarily entering a pet taxi. She also adds a special cuddle session at night outside of the feeding schedule. This is specifically for socialization and a wonderful bonding period. The youngsters then get tucked into their designated sections of the nursery for the evening.

### Mentors Keep Us Going

Nancy shared heartwarming stories about special people in her life that have helped guide her through her avian adventures. Communication during her early bird-years was mainly by telephone. “There were so many people who helped and encouraged me along my career in aviculture, and most of them probably don’t even remember talking with me. In the 1980s it was common practice to just pick up the phone and call someone who had more experience.” Arthur Freud, author of *All About the Parrots* proved to be a valuable advisor who shared his experiences and gave her encouragement. When she had a problem with chicks from a pair of Masked lovebirds, she wrote Dr. Marge Wissman in Florida and received a letter in reply within a week. “I still have that letter and will always remember her willingness to help me.”

Nancy learned about AFA from a telephone friend and joined in 1987. She remembers the beautiful Kingfisher that graced the cover of her first issue of the *AFA Watchbird*. Nancy singled out Dr. Benny Gallaway as one of the most inspiring and motivating individuals she has had the pleasure of knowing over the years. The late Wayne E. Smyth was another inspirational friend that Nancy admired and appreciated. In her opinion, these two individuals have consistently demonstrated that the secret of true self content and genuine success in this life, is to encourage and assist others in times of need.

### In Her Spare Time

Nancy’s interests outside birds are considerable. Living in a rural area provides a steady supply of puppies and adult dogs needing homes. Some are rehomed and some stay on the farm. Her most rewarding work has been training a stray puppy to



Top, Slender-billed cockatoo, raised by Nancy Speed. Center, "King" and "Jack" are also some of the lucky animals to belong to the Speed farm. Above, Golden Conures playfully gather around a handy perch, complete with toys to keep them occupied.



be a certified therapy dog. She and her Labrador retriever, Uno, visit retirement, convalescent and long-term care facilities on a regular basis to provide much needed emotional support to patients in need. "It is very rewarding to see an elderly or handicapped person react positively to petting a dog." After training for therapy dog certification it seemed only logical to get more experience in obedience, including showing in American Kennel Club events. Nancy commented that learning to train her dog continues to be the greatest challenge she has ever undertaken. Her lofty goal over the next three years is to obtain the required titles to finally work toward a utility dog title, one of the highest obedience title offered by the American Kennel Club. During times of doubt, she remembers her mother's favorite saying "can't never could" and tries to focus on how far she has come rather than how far she has to go. "I don't see myself as a competitive person, but have enjoyed showing in obedience classes."

Nancy's main method of relaxation during the growing season is to grow vegetables and hop on her huge Kubota and mow for hours on end. "And I love my new pole saw. Joe will not let me touch a chain saw, probably a wise demand on his part." She loves tinkering with small engines and trying to figure out why something doesn't work. It helps immensely



A brown turkey vulture which strayed on to Nancy's farm.



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that the Speed family has an extensive professional background in go-carting, motorcycle and automobile racing. Joe often rescues her when she can't figure the problem out on her own. "I'm sure Joe never imagined he would go from assisting his brother, Lake, in NASCAR racing to helping me replace a carburetor on the golf cart."

### What Does the Future Hold

Nancy was asked what her plans were for the future. She replied that presently her main focus at this time is AFA. She believes the organization has served its membership well in the past 38 years and will continue to do so. "The focus of aviculture has certainly shifted in the last 10 years. AFA is dedicated to meeting the challenges of the future and remains dedicated to its mission statement of education."

Nancy delivered a heart-felt speech at the August 2012 AFA House of Delegates meeting in San Antonio, Texas. She described the wide range of strengths the AFA presently holds, and also what the future could hold without a continual strong membership base and active participation in the AFA. She explained that each facet of aviculture—breeders, pet bird owners, conservationists, veterinarians and the retail/wholesale industry, must work together. Nancy also reminded

the delegates that shelters and sanctuaries are also important and, if they support the AFA mission statement, can be a vital part of the future of aviculture.


"One of my goals is to reach out to the typical pet bird owner and convey the importance of being an active participant in this organization. I remember years ago thinking the pet bird owner was safe from restrictive legislation, but now realize what a false sense of security I had." Nancy concluded that by working together we can, and will preserve birds. "Can any of us really imagine a future without birds?"



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