

A TRIBUTE TO SUSAN CLUBB, DVM

by Concetta Ferragamo

In this edition of the AFA *Watchbird Journal* our “spotlight” shines brightly on a multifaceted “Wonder Woman”. Not only is she an avian veterinarian, but a breeder, pet owner, business owner and mother as well. She is recognized as a long-standing member of the American Federation of Aviculture, Inc. (AFA), and Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV). This dynamo has served in various official positions or on committees for each of these organizations over the years.

She is a highly sought after educator who has traveled to over 17 different countries around the world to assist as a consultant for zoos, conservation programs, breeding programs and private aviculture. She has co-authored 2 books: *Psittacine Aviculture, Prospectives, Techniques and Research*, published by the Avicultural Breeding and Research Center (ABRC), and *Avian Medicine, and Surgery* published by Saunders. She has also published over 75 scientific veterinary/avicultural articles during her career, and easily another 100 articles in lay publications involving the pet industry, aviculture and avian medicine. This *Watchbird* edition shines its avicultural spotlight on the charismatic and very interesting –Susan Clubb, DVM.

Susan grew up surrounded by animals but was never able to keep birds in deference to her father’s allergies. It wasn’t until she was a veterinary student that she was able to act on a passion that led to one amazing avian adventure after another. Susan’s first bird was a White-crested, Black Polish rooster named Harry. This chicken sparked an interest that led her to research parrots and seek out those who bred them. Susan met Dr. Bern Levine, who she described as her mentor and who ignited her passion for the world of psittacines (parrots).

Susan recalls that it all started with a trade. She used to breed ferrets (long before they were popular). Dr. Levine was



interested in acquiring ferrets and Susan wanted a parrot. She then traded a group of ferrets for her very first pet parrot, Torro, the wild-caught, Spanish speaking, Yellow-naped Amazon, originally from Central America. Susan went on to share her import story.

At the time, 1977, the natives of Central America would often capture wild parrots or take the chicks from wild nests, and then tame them. Importers from the United States would then buy these “pets” and bring them to the U.S. through the import stations. This meant that the United States import stations often ended up with tamed, Spanish speaking parrots, ready for sale or trade. Susan was blessed with the opportunity to pick out her pet Torro from the Pet Farm wholesale outlet.

Beginning in 1974 importing parrots, or any other birds, into the United States had very stringent rules associated with it. Privately owned quarantine stations and USDA owned stations all had strict protocols to avoid the introduction of exotic New Castle’s disease into the U.S. poultry industry. Proper



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quarantine procedures were adhered to, such as the traditional 30 days of isolation where they were treated for psittacosis and tested for New Castles Disease. Only authorized persons were allowed contact with these quarantined birds. Veterinarians or other authorized people were required to shower upon entering and exiting the quarantine stations. At that time a business in Miami, Florida, called Pet Farm had a series of quarantine stations and an outlet store where wholesalers could visit and pick out birds. Those who had the chance to visit this outlet, like Susan, were often inspired by the experience. This “warehouse” of parrots inspired Susan and kindled the passion for breeding parrots that went on to earn Susan award winning achievements.

When asked about a mentor, Susan stated that she holds great admiration for her friend and mentor Dr. Bern Levine. When Susan graduated from vet school she did her internship for Dr. Greg Harrison in Lake Worth, Florida. During that time she was able to visit Dr. Levine at Pet Farm. Susan ended up working for Dr. Levine for eleven years at the Pet Farm facilities. During her tenure with Pet Farm, Susan learned a lifetime of avian medicine, with hands-on experience. The facility often imported over 100,000 birds annually. Susan described the experience with exhilaration as she stated, “We literally worked with over 1,000,000 birds! Take 100,000 birds times eleven years and it equals over one million birds!” Eventually the wild bird conservation act of 1992 passed and Pet Farm was no longer needed, as importing wild parrots became a thing of the past.

Rick Jordan shared a bit about his history with Susan. Rick stated, “Most aviculturists who have known Susan for any period of time met her during her tenure with Pet Farm. Any given day one could walk into the veterinary lab within Pet Farm and catch Susan with her eye to a laparoscope, determining the sex of a new shipment of birds. Back then they had shipments and species from just about everywhere in the parrot world.” Rick went on to share, “If you were a ‘good friend’ of Susan’s, you could ask her for advice about the birds you planned to buy. I remember that frequently she would point to a certain cage of freshly sexed



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parrots and tell me 'this group is very healthy and they look good inside'. She always took the time to talk with me; she pointed out dimorphisms in certain species or discussed potential medical issues or other avicultural issues with me. Susan was, and still is, the kind of veterinarian that any breeder or parrot lover would want to know." Rick then added, "I'd have to say that if Susan Clubb has not seen or heard of it, pertaining to parrots, it probably does not exist, or it can't be very important." Rick went on to say that Susan sexed his first pair of Moluccan cockatoos for him. He bought them from Pet Farm for \$199 each, sexed and health certified by Dr. Susan Clubb.

Many others seem to share the same admiration as Rick Jordan when it comes to Susan Clubb. On a personal note, each of my interview sessions with her were exhilarating. Her vivid descriptions and her enthusiasm poured out in every word. I was so caught up with her stories that I couldn't take notes fast enough. One of the topics that she pointed out was how sexing of birds has changed over the years. "We couldn't sex birds with a simple blood test 30 years ago." Susan explained, "You would get a bird and wait and guess if you had a male or female." Susan's tenacity for avian veterinary knowledge and her interest in breeding birds led her to learn surgical sexing procedures, which she mastered very quickly. Her pet Amazon, Torro turned out to be a female who must have charmed her pet Black-masked Lovebird named Zit. Susan giggled as she talked about how Zit used to chase after Torro. Zit was a successful product of her first parrot breeding experience which started with African Lovebirds.



Susan reminisced about working for Dr. Levine. In addition to Pet Farm, Dr. Levine also owned a breeding facility called Last Chance Farm, which existed for over 30 years. Her ex-husband, Kevin Clubb, managed this collection and together they learned how to manage a large commercial parrot breeding facility with over 600 pairs of breeding birds. Solid teamwork led to successes in the breeding of many rare birds. The facility went on to win prestigious AFA Silver AVY awards: First in the US Breeding award for the Caninde (Blue-throated) Macaws in 1984 and first in the US Breeding award for the Fiery Shouldered Conure in 1985. In 1988, Dr. Levine purchased Parrot Jungle in Miami and asked Susan to join him as veterinarian for that facility. Parrot Jungle evolved into Jungle Island and Susan



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is still working there part time, with Dr. Levine, after 35 years.

In 1989 Susan and Kevin moved to the Avicultural Breeding and Research Center (ABRC) in Loxahatchee, Florida to work with a collection of over 2000 cockatoos, macaws and other parrots. The strict record keeping and husbandry practices of ABRC enabled Susan to study many species that could not be observed or studied easily in the wild. From her gathered expertise, Susan has written numerous papers on breeding parrots, and many of her publications are still used in educational programs worldwide.

Currently, Susan owns and operates Rainforest Clinic for Bird & Exotics, Inc., in Loxahatchee, Florida. Her clinic offers in-house features such as radiography, laboratory (rapid blood analysis and microbiology), endoscopic exams and reproductive exam. As an added special treat, Susan has an amazing ambassador, Princess Moonlight, her Black Palm Cockatoo. Princess Moonlight greets guests and attends events with Susan. She says that Princess Moonlight is very special, and anyone can hold her. She is an ideal ambassador and a brilliant advocate for aviculture.

Susan also maintains her own breeding facility called Hurricane Aviaries, located nearby. Her vast experiences gave her the opportunity to pick and choose her favorite species to work

with at Hurricane Aviaries today. Sights and sounds at her facility include Blue-headed Macaws, Blue-headed Pionus, mutation Quaker parakeets and a vast variety of other psittacine species. Susan is especially dedicated to her Blue-headed macaw project. She now maintains eight breeding pairs. Hatchlings are hand-reared and then live in free flight flocks. Susan laughed as she described the Blue-headed macaws' comedic antics and said that they are quite animated with "quirky" personalities. Susan devotes a great deal of time to their needs and manages their genetic diversity. She emphasized that developing a strong collection is essential for the survival of the species. Susan keeps a book with each bird's pedigree and recommends that other breeders do the same with their birds.

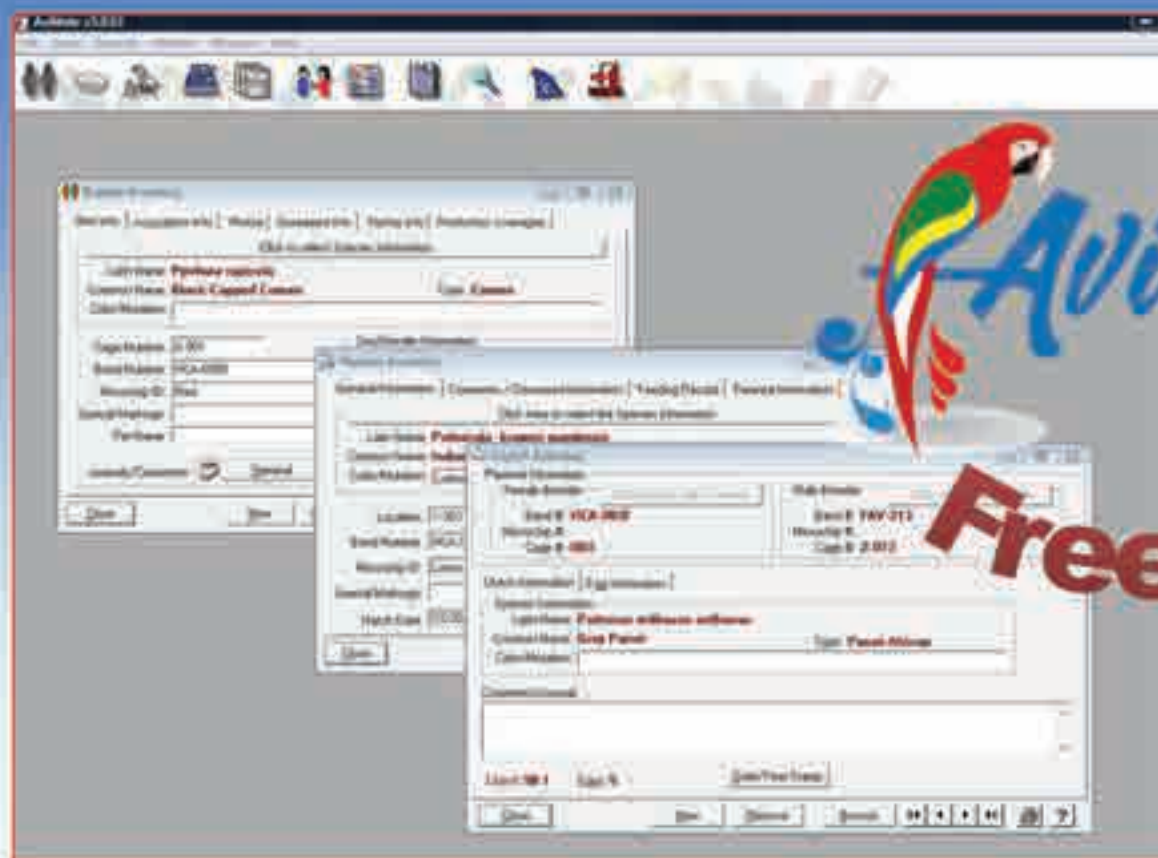
Susan's passion for breeding continues to help others at a national and international level. She shared stories about her Quaker parakeets. In 1992, she was the first to produce a sex-linked Lutino Quaker parakeet in the United States. She went on to explain how it took years to establish the Lutino and other Quaker mutations. Since then, she has successfully produced several generations of numerous color mutations. Susan enjoys working with all of her breeding parrots but highlighted the Blue-headed pionus, Hahn's macaws and Meyer's parrots. She did mention one favorite species that she used to breed but is no longer working with at Hurricane Aviaries, the Queen of Bavaria Conures. As she talked about the Queens, she indicated that she may build another breeding house and start up a flock of Queens in the future.

When asked about what birds she would like to work with in the future Susan mentioned a facility in Panama owned by her friend, Jaco Lacs. Susan has worked with Jaco since 1994. She shared, "He has an amazing bird facility with over 3000 birds." As she described some of the different species of incredible exotic birds at Jaco's, she added that she might like to have a collection of Birds-of-Paradise at some point in her retirement.

In addition to her own businesses, Susan is a staff veterinarian for Jungle Island in Miami, Florida. She has worked as a consulting veterinarian and instructor for the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC), Kaytee products, and the

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Susan shared an important message for aviculture and pet owners: "Birds live a long time. It is important for people to realize that. As life-altering situations occur, not everyone can keep their pets forever." Susan compassionately stated, "There is no shame in relinquishing or re-homing a bird. In many cases a new family can provide a 'new school' or lifestyle for the birds." Susan went on to explain how new generations turn and advancements in aviculture take place. She reiterated that re-homing should be viewed as a good change for the bird and should not be viewed as a negative experience.

The multi-faceted Susan Clubb is a great example of what an

aviculturist can be. She is very active in aviculture at every level. She is a veterinarian, breeder, re-homer, consultant, retailer, speaker, author and educator. If you have not had the pleasure of meeting Susan Clubb, I suggest that you take advantage of your next opportunity to do so. Susan is a highly sought-after speaker who definitely has something worthwhile to say. When drawing on her vast years of avian knowledge, there are few in this industry who could compare to her.

In closing I will share a legendary moment revolving around Susan and the AFA. For many years Susan chaired AFA's Avian Research Committee. As we all know, raising money is one of the biggest challenges for any committee, and sometimes you need to get innovative and original. At an AFA banquet many years ago, Susan singled out a well-endowed female friend and asked whether she could borrow her brassier. This gracious friend was able to oblige, and Susan ingeniously put the black brassier on over her clothing. Susan collected "financial stuffing" from the audience that was to be used to fund AFA research projects. For the record, it was all in good fun, and tastefully executed. When asked how much money they raised that evening, she laughed as she said, "I had no idea but we had a lot of fun."

The next time you are attending an AFA event and want to meet an intelligent, witty, fun-loving, generous, experienced, and seasoned aviculturist/veterinarian, introduce yourself to Dr. Susan Clubb.



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