



**Pet Owners**

**Breeders**

**Veterinarians**

**Conservationists**

**Together, we are one  
and the same;  
AVICULTURE**

**One does not exist without the other,  
stand together for the future of birds...**

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# The 4 Leaf Aviculture Clover:

## CONSERVATIONISTS, BREEDERS, PET OWNERS (INCLUDING SANCTUARIES AND ADOPTIONS) & VETERINARIANS

By Concetta Ferragamo

It is no secret that aviculture (the keeping of birds) is in danger of not surviving. Ask yourself these questions. Do you want to live in a world that does not have parrots? Do you want to live in a world where the only surviving parrots are kept in glass enclosed aviaries found only at high profile zoos? Do you want to live in a world where your great grandchildren will be able to learn about parrots only from books and e-books because there are no living parrots left to see? These scenarios have real potential. Let's not let our beloved parrots die out like their dinosaurs relatives. Understanding aviculture is comprised of four vital sections that will help us all to see how working together isn't just a choice, it is a necessity. Conservationists, breeders, pet owners and veterinarians all have an equally important role for the survival of aviculture as is depicted in [AFA's 4 leaf Aviculture Clover](#).

### AFA 4 Leaf Aviculture Clover and Clover Field

The AFA Membership Committee developed the 4 leaf Aviculture Clover and Aviculture Clover Field in 2013, as an easily accessible metaphor to depict the partnership among all aspects of aviculture. The goal was to find a way for all people involved with birds to see where they belong and to understand that we are all united as one. Utilizing St. Patrick's metaphor, we decided that the ever-so-popular clover could help all bird people realize how we are all part of the same [aviculture clover field](#) and have the same goals - "For A Future With Birds".

### Communication lesson from a Saint?

As the story goes, St. Patrick was standing on a clover covered hill speaking to crowds of people. They asked how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit could be one in the same. St. Patrick

picked a clover and held it up. He showed them how the three separate leaves of the clover equals one whole clover and that they are equally important. Without one, the other cannot exist therefore it would no longer be a three leaf clover. We used this concept as we created the AFA Aviculture Clover. We decided to highlight how lucky we are to have birds in our lives, so we used a four leaf clover as our official AFA Aviculture Clover.

### What does the 4 Leaf Aviculture Clover represent?

The four leaf sections of our Aviculture Clover holds a title of equal importance.

**Conservation:** Without conservation we would have no birds to save. AFA is very active with helping conservation. Please take a moment to look up the wonderful conservation projects, past and present, that AFA has been involved in, such as the Red Siskin Project, the Cuban Amazon Nestbox Project, the "Ears for Lear's" project and many, many more. Pay attention to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) lists, as well as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora reports for legitimate facts instead of the skewed and fictitious reports made by anti-animal groups and the media, etc. Conservation efforts in the wild alone are insufficient to recoup populations of a majority of threatened species. Captive breeding through skilled breeders and diverse captive populations of birds offers the greatest advantage—the only advantage—to many species. Moreover, skilled breeders have contributed their knowledge of optimal breeding conditions to conservation efforts worldwide with increasing success.

**Breeders:** Without breeders, there will be no more birds. Despite what the media and other sources say, the legitimate facts show an alarming rate of deforestation in the wild. The species are, in truth, dying out due to habitat destruction. The consistent growth of the "threatened in the wild" lists shown by CITES and ESA prove that too many birds are in danger of inevitable extinction.

**Veterinarians:** Without our doctors and avian medical teams we would not be able to save our birds from diseases and keep them healthy. Look up the latest research on avian medicine; it's quite impressive. The message that the 4 Leaf AFA Aviculture Clover gives is that we need each other equally. We each have an important role to uphold, or else aviculture will simply cease to exist.



**Pet Owners:** In our perfect world birds will continue to be beloved members of households, or live in comfortable aviaries that suit their personalities, where people can come to know and appreciate them. Without pet owners who will take care of the birds that are not ideally suited to breeding? As with humans, reproduction is never a guarantee, which is why the CITES and ESA lists for birds continue to grow at alarming rates. Pet owners have many titles, each of them equally important in aviculture.

### Who is a pet owner?

Pet owners are the largest group of people represented in the clover; this group is defined as anyone owning birds. It may seem obvious that you are a pet owner if you have companion birds in your home as personal pets. Yet the term also applies to a few other entities:

If you run a rescue or sanctuary or adoption center, you are responsible for the well-being of those birds in your care, which means they are your pets.

If you own a store, until the birds are sold or placed into other homes, you own them; and therefore they are your pets.

If you are a breeder and you have birds that are not producing, then you are their care giver; and therefore they are your pets. FYI, most breeders consider their breeding stock as their pets anyway.

**(Please remember, these statements may seem obvious to you as AFA members. However, it is surprisingly common for the general public to be a bit confused on these points.)**

The AFA realizes that we have a role in helping others to see the importance of their roles in aviculture. All “pet” owners need to understand and know how and where they fit in. For example, aviculture needs legitimate sanctuaries just as humans need qualified retirement centers or nursing homes. People can outlive their families just as birds can sometimes outlive their homes. They need a place to retire and receive proper care. Rescue and rehabbers can be valuable and beneficial to aviculture, just as foster care and rehabilitation centers (physical rehab) are important for humans. Aviculture provides many opportunities for the bird-loving public to take part in, resulting in enrichment for humans as well as the birds.

### Feeling overwhelmed?

Caring for and about our beloved birds can be emotionally and physically exhausting, whether you are a conservationist, a breeder, a pet owner (including rescues, sanctuaries, adoptions centers, and stores), a veterinarian, or, as is the case for so many of us, if you have a foot in more than one category.

Conservationists are fighting an uphill battle against time, industry, weather and funding. The odds against each endeavor having an impact beyond the current season are lower than those which permit comfort or rest. Moreover, conservationists rely on support from every other segment of aviculture to make scientific advances, spread the word, raise interest and provide a back-up plan, so that fieldwork can continue. Each season, conservationists begin again, counting survivors, setting up nestboxes, monitoring chicks and observing fledglings, all while hoping the reintroduction will be successful, that hurricanes will detour around their sites, that mates will be chosen and that flocks will grow. But the tension of all these factors results in continued uneasiness.

Breeders are working continually to optimize conditions and maximize survival, first of fertile eggs, then of chicks, and later fledglings. A breeding center’s survival of a species, especially a species endangered in the wild [list], parallels the efforts of in situ conservation worldwide, contributing to population growth. The financial burden of pursuing genetic diversity and health of the birds is rarely offset, even as the lucky public shares the inspiration of beautiful companion birds through the pet trade. Yet it has become popular to challenge the motivation behind these financially lean endeavors. Breeders also rely on support from every other segment of aviculture to acknowledge the importance of their contributions to the survival of species, their contributions to innovation that can be translated to natural conservation habitats, their contributions to support research that promotes advances in avian veterinary medicine, and their contributions to bring the inspiration of avian companions into the lives of interested people without further incursion into wild habitats.

Veterinarians face life and death challenges with our birds daily. They are elated by the expanding possibilities of avian medicine as it advances. Yet, more than any, they are aware of its limitations. They fight the good fight for people and birds in all aspects of aviculture. Medical research has not advanced nearly as far for avians as it has for cats or dogs—or humans. Additionally, their funds are shrinking. Yes, it is important to realize that avian veterinarians rely on support from all aspects of aviculture as they research, develop, and

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provide care for the birds in the wild, as well as in breeding facilities, in stores, in our homes, in rescue and sanctuary centers, and adoptions programs.

Rescues, sanctuaries, adoptions centers, and individuals who are independently fostering and finding homes for "parrots in transition" feel a very specific pressure. With the help of dedicated behavior consultants and other educators, these people do an amazing job with re-taming and re-training the birds that come to them. They give companion birds a second, third, and fourth chance at life. This is up-close emotional work; and it is easy to feel overwhelmed and fearful that birds in need will exceed available resources. Many of these resources will ultimately come from the other aspects of aviculture, as the conservationists provide insight into the wild impulses behind inscrutable behavior and its function in the wild. Breeders provide a better understanding of hormonal behavior and the implementation of optimal habitat, veterinarians help us to diagnose and treat individual illnesses across avian lifetimes, and pet owners provide smooth transitions that are part of all long-lived animals' lives.

### For the love of aviculture

We all have a common interest—the love of birds. Aviculturists are passionate about what they do. It is important to acknowledge everyone who makes up aviculture. Aviculture consists of breeders, pet owners, veterinarians, conservationists, educators, manufacturers, zoo keepers, exhibitors, trainers, shelters, behaviorists, enrichment specialists, bird clubs, sanctuaries, pet stores and anyone and everyone involved with the keeping of birds—all birds. Do not alienate anyone, because they are just as important to the survival of aviculture as you are. Extend an invitation anyone you know who is involved with birds to join AFA for the future of birds; and congratulate them for being part of the clover field of aviculturists.

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**Me**

**Rescues, shelters, sanctuaries, pet owners, breeders, veterinarians, conservationists...**

**We are all part of the same clover field.**

**The American Federation of Aviculture, Inc. explains it all...**

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