



Each of Us Can—and Should—Do More TO PROMOTE AVICULTURE

Tom Marshall

We can all do more to promote aviculture. AFA President, Jamie Whittaker, in her inaugural “Message from the President” published in the most recent issue of the *AFA Watchbird* was pleading with us to be more proactive about how we value what we are doing as breeders of avian life and as dedicated pet bird owners. In a 2015 issue of the *Watchbird*, Jason Crean, AFA Education Chair, and Susan van den Broek, longtime AFA member and commercial supporter, authored an article on AFA’s IDEA Program (Interactive Display & Educational Animal program), which produced some worthy suggestions on how to encourage our members to increase the exposure of aviculture and provided program content recommendations as well as some *do’s* and *don’ts* in messaging.

I especially appreciated the understanding the authors had with respect to knowing your audience and the importance of conveying positive information about what it takes to keep a bird in the home as well as stressing the responsibility bird

ownership entails. As a former educator, who has worked with children of all ages in the public schools for thirty years, I was unaware of Jason Crean’s dictum of “no bad news before the fourth grade”, but I certainly concur that this is proper advice to follow in presenting information on endangered species to younger children.

Allow me to suggest that you first read this article (Vol. XLII-Number 2, 2015, pp. 29 - 34) and then contact the elementary, middle or high school close to your home and offer to provide a program at the grade level or subject area that you feel most comfortable with in presenting. I would also encourage you to purchase an appropriate book on or about parrots or other exotic birds that you would donate to the classroom you are visiting or to the school’s library. An ideal time to time to do this would be during American Education Week. Schools are open to the idea that community members may want to volunteer their talents during this week, in particular.



American Education Week—November 14-18, 2016—will present all Americans with a wonderful opportunity to celebrate public education and honor individuals who are making a difference in ensuring that every child receives a quality education.

If aviculture is going to survive, AFA members need to reach out to the younger generation in our home communities and offer to make a presentation to “let people know that birds are awesome”. In explaining that you are an aviculturist, because you “keep and breed birds in captivity” or you support this activity

as a pet bird owner of a captive-bred bird. Be sure to stress that the keeping of birds is a conservation effort, in that preserving more individuals birds in the U.S. population will guarantee some will survive if their wild counterparts are decreasing in numbers due to loss of habitat, destructive weather incidents or illegal trade.

Aviculture has, as one of its goals, the ability to preserve a gene pool of every species bred. Many techniques used in conservation of birds in the wild were developed or refined by the aviculture community.

Good learning can better take place with interactive lessons as we can bring our avian companions into the classroom across America and relate to young and impressionable minds. Espousing what Jamie Whittaker presented in her message to AFA members that there are 19 million homes in the U.S. with birds and they can make great companions for all age groups, while enriching people’s lives with their beauty, personality and intelligence. People with parrots and other exotic birds know the pleasure in having the birds in their homes, and are many of the very people who support conservation of birds in the wild with their financial contributions.

Here is what I did last November. I contacted Leesburg Elementary School and indicated my availability to the school. I brought with me, Lola, my Blue-Fronted Amazon Parrot and a poster I made depicting different species of parrots. I also brought three books for the school library to capitalize on any interest my presentation might generate in students after I left.

If You Were a Parrot, by Katherine Rawson was designed for younger students. It depicted and displayed what the reader would look like if he/she had the same characteristics of a parrot, e.g., two toes forward and two toes backward, a beak with an upper and lower mandible, etc. and directions were provided at the back of the book for making a beak craft as a follow-up to the storyline.

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For older students, I provided *Always Blue for Chicu* by Karen Duncan, which featured a Blue-fronted Amazon parrot and a fictitious tale of his trial and tribulations from a nesting in the wild to a favorite pet. This book also gave valuable information on parrot ownership and care in the glossary section of the book.

On a subsequent visit to the school, I left a third book I found on-line at Barnes and Noble. *About Parrots: A Guide for Children* by Cathryn and John Sill. With the help of beautifully detailed paintings, this book explains the basic characteristics that all parrots share, while offering a closer look at the differences of the many individual species. An "Afterword" section goes into greater detail of the specific parrots in each painting, designed to inspire children to want to learn more about this diverse group of avian life.

These three books cost less than twenty dollars apiece, but will serve as a reminder of my visit and as a source for students to further their interest in learning about parrots. There are a plethora of parrot and other exotic bird books, suitable for students at all ages, and they should be found in school libraries. We can do something about that.

Loudoun County, Virginia, a suburb of Washington DC, where I was elected to serve on the School Board, has opened its 88th school, Madison Trust Elementary School, at the start of 2016/2017 School Year on August 29th. Much to my surprise and delight, the new school's mascot is a caricature of a cross between a scarlet and a green-winged macaw. These Madison Trust students proudly claim to be the "Mighty Macaws!"

Here is an opportunity for me to take full advantage in promoting aviculture to an audience that might be particularly open to my message. In late October, there will be a dedication ceremony for our newest school with public officials, parents and students all attending. My goal is to bring free-flying macaws to this one-time school dedication ceremony in order to add color, sound, natural beauty and genuine excitement to this important occasion for a school community, which clearly identifies with mighty macaws! My secret weapon for this project is my friend and AFA member Buddy Waskey, from Colonial Heights, Virginia, near Richmond, whose free-flying macaws performed at our AFA Convention early August, 2016 in Cromwell, Connecticut.



I hope to engage the school community to raise funds to support conservation efforts that AFA will designate as a priority, especially as it relates to macaws in the wild. Many of our schools do raise funds to save endangered and threatened animals in the world. This would be a natural goal for the 800+ Mighty Macaws and Madison Trust Elementary School in Ashburn, Virginia. The AFA Conservation Committee will select a project for these students and provide them with directions on what can be achieved with their help.

Please let me know if you will take up this challenge to visit a neighborhood school near your home with one or more of your birds. I would love to write a follow-up article on what our AFA members have done to promote aviculture locally, by engaging the younger generations in the neighborhoods where they live. You can contact me by e-mail: tomcmarshall24@gmail.com or call me at (703) 727-2318.



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