

President's Message



Tom C. Marshall, president

Becoming the Professional Aviculturist

Many aviculturists have as their *modus operandi* "everybody mind his own business." Consequently, they don't participate in supplying breeding information in any systematic fashion to those specialty societies who request it or to AFA when it operated the Breeding Registry. Apparently, we fail to realize how important our breeding information is going to be in the struggle between bird importers and humane organizations. Aviculturists are now seen by outside groups as being on the side of the importers who are perceived by many to have little concern about what happens to the thousands of birds imported annually. We must, in the very near future, produce documented breeding information to justify the existence of aviculture. Many self-proclaiming aviculturists don't seem to care about the larger issues that face U.S. aviculture. The fact is that estimates are being proffered that indicate we are breeding only 10% of the birds that come into this country. I don't know how they know this, but in the absence of any data to the contrary, those figures will be assumed to be accurate. For the future, we have a responsibility to those who come after us and for the present we must do what we can to help conserve the world's wildlife now. The importers and breeders both have responsibilities which, if not met, can alter or abolish aviculture for the would-be aviculturist of tomorrow.

If birds escape or are turned loose, they can be a nuisance and threaten crops. This can upset a substantial number of people, many of whom possess political clout. If there is one case of Newcastle's Disease, a whole state can shut down. Allow me to recount a horror story of a recent Miami importer who allegedly brought in 200 vinaceous Amazons, a CITES Appendix I endangered species. They all died but two. I don't know if they were legal or not, but importers have no requirements for caging, hygiene, survivability, etc. They simply are not held accountable in any measurable way.

If we want birds in the future, we need to raise the level of avicultural responsibility. The only way we can measure this is to see if we are, in fact, improving. Without complete records, we can't determine anything and can prove nothing. If we're not improving, we are not being responsible. Accurate, methodically kept statistics will tell us if we are bettering the plight of birds or not. Are we truly aviculturists or are we like the old-fashioned zoos that warehouse birds? Honest statistics will reveal the truth.

I believe in aviculture and the aviculturist who is dedicated to his birds to such a degree that he shares what he learns himself or is willing to learn from the experiences of other practitioners. We need to share our accomplishments, and our failures, because we can learn from both if we are to insure the future of importation and the emergence of the professional aviculturist.

There are two definitions of the word "profession" in Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* that I would like to call to your attention. A profession is participating for gain or livelihood in an activity or field of endeavor often engaged in by amateurs. A profession is also defined as a principal calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and extensive academic preparation and/or a long term experience or apprenticeship in a field, where there does not exist a specific curriculum, or where such training is prerequisite to acquire the necessary expertise to be considered a professional in one's field.

A veterinarian is a professional veterinarian by virtue of his or her extensive university training, but not all veterinarians can be considered professional *avian* veterinarians until they, like you, expose themselves to opportunities to learn beyond the classroom through hands-on experience and seminars

sponsored by like-minded individuals desiring to learn and share what there is to know about avicultural techniques and avian medicine. There is now an Association of Avian Veterinarians, which received much of its impetus from the American Federation of Aviculture's Veterinary Seminars held in conjunction with the annual AFA conventions each August over the last fourteen years. It is no mere coincidence that AFA's chairman for many AFA veterinary seminars, including this year's seminar to be held in Tampa, and the long term chair of AFA's Avian Research Committee is Dr. Susan Clubb, the founding president of the AAV.

If I were to ask you to name a professional occupation which most people could easily recognize, no doubt you would come up with a doctor or a lawyer. In our culture, a doctor or a lawyer is the consummate professional because of the prestige, income and influence usually attributed to these vocations. These professionals got where they are in our society because of their unity of purpose manifested in their professional organizations, the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Bar Association (ABA).

Try and introduce a different medical technique or a new drug in this country without the endorsement of the AMA! Try to practice law or appoint a Supreme Court Justice in this nation without the approval of the ABA!

These professional organizations have considerable clout because they have established the technical and ethical standards of their profession. These organizations protect their members, in part, by maintaining standards which insure the necessary respect from society, as a whole which allows them to operate as they do. It is in everybody's interest for professional organizations to exist. High standards will produce quality service, and quality service can result in economic benefits which, in turn, allows the profession to thrive and grow as the members would want. It is an excellent example of a symbiotic relationship. A profession united that has the support of its members and the respect of society is self-perpetuating.

Aviculture has in place a professional organization that, for fourteen years, has represented the bird breeders and, although not widely recognized by society, it is the only organization recognized by the federal government and more and more state legislatures — and

that organization, my friends, my fellow aviculturists, is the American Federation of Aviculture.

The time will come when the birds we love will not be as readily available as they are presently. Those individuals who will be allowed to keep them will be individuals whom society feels have the expertise, the experience and the motivation necessary to insure their breeding and maintenance in captivity. Who will decide what standards, technical and ethical, will identify the professional aviculturist? We, the members of the AFA, will be asked to define the aviculturists and to set the standards for the profession. We are the only organization recognized as America's grassroots organization of bird breeders by the Congress of the United States Office of Technology Assessment; the U.S. Department of Agriculture who, among other things, supervises quarantine stations; the U.S. Department of Interior who, among other things, helps to determine what birds may be imported into this country and who appoints the U.S. representation to CITES. AFA has the necessary recognition to allow us to represent you to those governmental bodies who can regulate or destroy aviculture and, to date, we can say with confidence that we have a positive relationship with the U.S. Government and are able to present our position well. Unfortunately, groups who often oppose aviculture, the Humane Society and local chapters of the Audubon Society, are bigger than we are; and by virtue of their size may have greater impact, especially, among politicians who are interested in numbers behind an issue as well as the merits of a particular issue. You can help change that situation by getting behind your professional organization.

Now, what can your club do to promote professionalism among its members? I would start by keeping attendance records of members who attend club meetings where there are presentations that address issues, trends and husbandry techniques. By the end of the year, award a certificate indicating the number of presentations an individual club member has attended. The club certificate of attendance would represent a C.E.U. (Continued Education Unit) in the field of aviculture, and this would help constitute one's professional development. Regional and national conventions or symposiums should offer these CEUs as well. Certainly, no one would argue on the benefits derived from hearing

the accumulated wisdom of the many presenters at the 14th Annual AFA Convention in Tampa, Florida! England's Rosemary Low on endangered parrots, Germany's Thomas Arnt on *Brotogeris* and *Pyrrhura* conures, American illuminaries include Richard Schubot on cockatoos, Ramon Noegel on Amazons, Terry Dunham on Australian finches, and many others. Each presentation definitely rates a CEU toward becoming a professional aviculturist. A folder full of these CEU certificates from local club-sponsored presentations and AFA or other national or regional conventions would go a long way in convincing the skeptic that aviculture has its professionals too. It might even increase attendance at your monthly meetings!

As individuals we need to support our professional organization, the AFA, our local clubs and be sure to keep the following records:

Pairs old enough to breed
Eggs laid
Eggs fertile
Eggs dead in the shell
Eggs infertile
Eggs hatched
Chicks dead and the cause
Chicks fledged
Adult birds that die and the cause

Record information about your successes.

Share your records and aviculture tips.

Insist on this type of information on all birds purchased.

Insist on a three-day period to get a competent avian veterinarian to examine the new bird and an agreement to fix or stand behind any problems uncovered in such an exam.

When possible, purchase only domestically bred birds with closed bands, thus supporting true aviculturists.

Ours is the age of science and scientific discovery. We can make a significant contribution to science and gain the endorsement of society by being and acting professional — by keeping records of our successes and failures when breeding, maintaining and caring for our birds. While some such records are kept by scientists and are available, the laboratory is not a home. The atmosphere of love and care we provide our stock should surely demonstrate the success of our endeavors and keep birds for their own good as well as our enjoyment.

Thomas C. Marshall
President, AFA

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by

Risa Teitler

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by Dr. A.E. Decoteau

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by Dr. A.E. Decoteau

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