

# From The Editor's Desk

Dear Editor:

I have just received the February/March issue of the AFA *Watchbird* and have read it with great interest, as always.

Unfortunately, I also found something in this issue that made me greatly concerned. This has nothing to do with the articles on aviculture, which are informative and well written. Rather, it concerns an advertisement.

On page 24, "Bird Gallery" of Sun Valley, California, advertises a new food mix, "Lories Luncheon Dry Formula," that has been designed for lories and lorikeets. The new formula is being pushed (I cannot find a more appropriate word) on lory keepers with the promise that the liquid droppings of lories will become firm like those of parrots and that the mess and cleaning associated with lory keeping will stop. While I do not question the claim of the advertisers, I feel that a strong warning must be issued to all lory keepers about any products that are designed to make the digestion of lories more acceptable to housekeepers.

Lories and lorikeets represent a special group of parrots, which have become specialized on eating nectar, pollen and fruit. In the course of their specialization, their bills have become longer, so that they can be opened more widely to allow the tongue to be protruded. Their tongues have become elongated and the tip of the tongue has become covered with a brush of papillae, so that the pollen and nectar can be collected from flowers. And the digestive tract (i.e., the crop, stomach and intestine) has been transformed to be able to extract the nutrients from a more liquid diet. The stomach, for example, is less muscular than the stomach of a "normal" seed-eating parrot.

The feeding behavior of lories and lorikeets in the wild, as published in ornithological and ecological journals and as observed by myself in Australia, also clearly indicate that lorikeets actively search for flowering

and fruiting trees and bushes to get to their favorite foods. They are known to migrate in order to follow the seasonal flowering and fruiting of trees across hundreds of kilometers.

The data on the anatomy and ecology of lories and lorikeets leave no doubt about the composition of their natural diet. It is true, however, as I know from my own experience, that especially the larger lories and lorikeets do eat seeds in captivity. Some aviculturists have even reported that they have kept rainbow lorikeets for years on a diet of seeds alone. This does not mean, however, that a dry diet is the appropriate one for lories. For example, we know that the "droppings" of people change their consistency depending on the type of food they eat, but we also know that such changes are not a sign of good health and are usually connected with discomfort for the people that are affected.

Lories and lorikeets have been attracting the interest of pet lovers because of their intelligence and playfulness and because they tend to be less destructive than other parrots. However, lories come as a package: their particular metabolism makes them messy. But if pet keepers really have the best interest of their pets in their minds, they must decide either to put up with the mess or to keep parrots that are less messy. I do not think that a responsible pet keeper or aviculturist would want to keep his birds on an inappropriate diet only to have less work with cleaning their cages!

In the interest of the lories and lorikeets that are kept in captivity, I hope that you will publish this letter or, yourself, write an article on the appropriate diet of lories. Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,  
Dominique G. Homberger  
Louisiana State University

Dear Editor,

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the letter from Ms. Dominique Homberger regarding dry diets for lories and lorikeets. Although our products (Avico Lory Life dry diet and Avico Lory Life Nectar) were not mentioned specifically, Ms. Homberger's "strong warning" regarding the new dry diets for lories certainly does include us.

We feel it is necessary to establish what Ms. Homberger's qualifications are in the field of aviculture. Is she a

practicing loriculturist? If so, what has been her success in breeding, hatching and rearing chicks on her diet? How many species has she maintained in captivity? And what is the extent of her field research?

In answer to these same questions regarding ourselves, we have been practicing aviculturists for over 30 years and keeping lories in excess of 20 years. We have both bred and reared over 20 species of lories and lorikeets including several so-called difficult species. Our field work regarding the diets and habits of these interesting birds has been carried out in Australia, Indonesia and the Solomon Islands.

Although we agree with Ms. Homberger that lories should not be fed solely on a dry diet, our research shows that neither should they be fed a totally liquid diet. One only has to review in Forshaw's "Parrots of the World" the crop contents of birds collected in the field. Items such as flower fragments, vegetable pulp, seeds, insects, fruit, sorgum, corn, pollen and leaf buds are not highly liquid. Nowhere is nectar recorded as part of crop contents. It is a fact that nectar is a luxury and generally found only in limited and seasonal quantities throughout the ranges of these birds. Pollen, it seems, is the main basis of a lory's diet. And this is the main reason for the unique physiological characteristics which Ms. Homberger points out. Based on the natural diet of these birds, sloppy, witches-brew-type formulas have no place in loriculture. Our experience demonstrates the dietary needs of lories varies through the seasons both in the wild and in captivity. By providing a diet which allows the birds a variety of separate food choices, these needs can be more adequately met. Although we cannot answer for other manufacturers, speaking for ourselves we have never recommended a totally dry diet but one consisting of a mainly dry micro-pulverized diet (simulating and containing pollen), a small amount of nectar, as well as fruit and fresh water. Certain exceptions, however, (i.e. the *Charmosyna* and *Vini* species) do require a diet which is composed almost entirely of nectar. These species seem to be able to consume a high carbohydrate diet without becoming obese.

Ms. Homberger's main objection seems to be that these dry diets were developed solely for the purpose of

making lorries more acceptable to housekeepers. Speaking for ourselves, nothing could be further from the truth. Lorries in nature are not messy birds. Our field studies, as well as others, demonstrate that the droppings of lorries feeding in the wild are well formed and do not resemble the droppings of birds fed on the liquid diets used in captivity. We feel strongly that birds fed the conventional, old-fashioned diets are at high risk of suffering deficiencies and obesity resulting in shortened life span.

Anyone who questions the efficacy of a dry diet accompanied by a small amount of nectar and fruit should refer to the work of master loriculturist Stan Sindel in Australia who has maintained all of Australia's lorries and lorikeets as well as rearing several generations of birds on the above dietary regimen. If Mr. Sindel's birds were being "pushed" into eating this type of diet, it seems highly unlikely his breeding successes would be as good as they are.

We receive, on a daily basis, calls and letters from a multitude of customers thanking us for developing products which have not only eased the job of maintaining their lorries but also have increased their birds' health and breeding ability. (See C. Beane's article in *Bird Talk*, March 1989). These reports only confirm the effectiveness of this type of diet. The health and vitality of the birds is our main concern. It is only as a side benefit that these diets help make lorries more acceptable to the housekeeper. We would like to offer Ms. Homberger the opportunity of trying Avico Lory Diets on a gratis basis and ask her to report back to this readership her findings in the future.

Sincerely,  
Don Wells

President, Avico Products

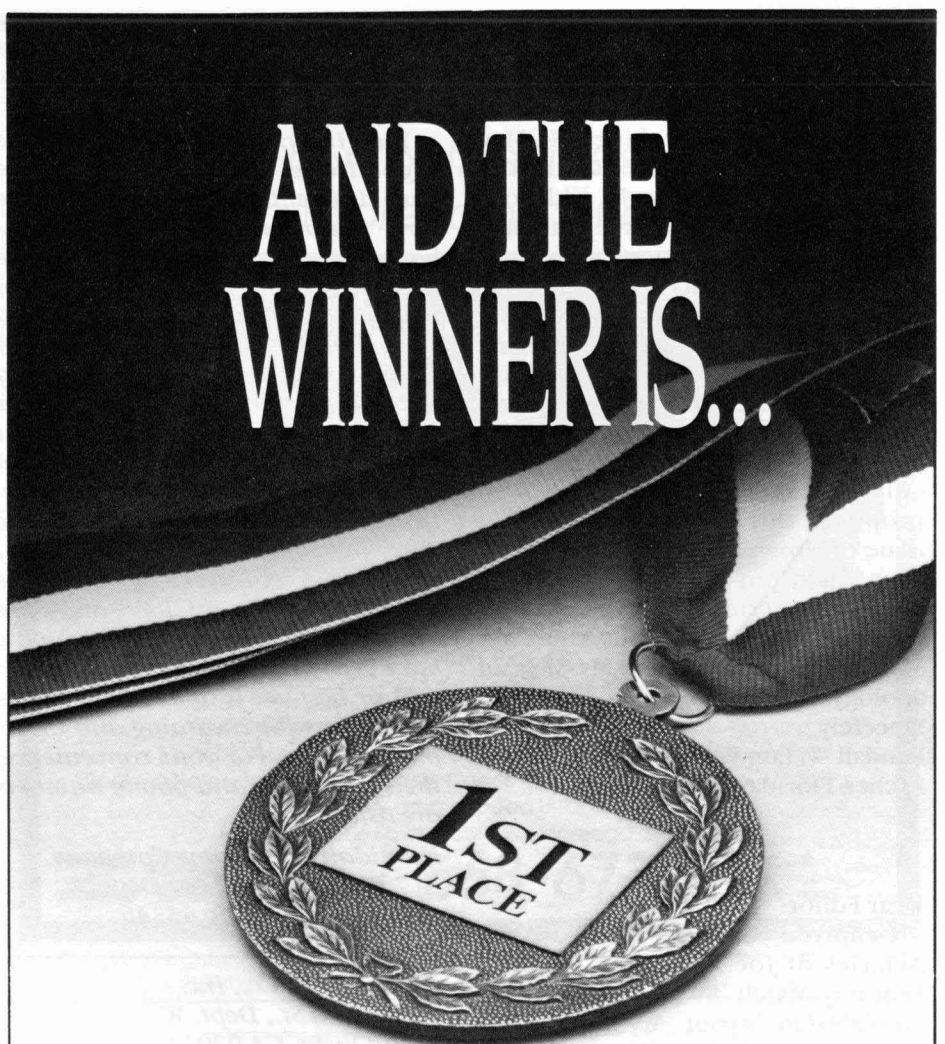
Dick Schroeder  
Cuttlebone Plus, distributor



Dear Editors:

Although I have no qualms with people expressing their opinions within the pages of the *Avi-Watchbird*, I believe that outright disrespect for the opinions of others is unacceptable. Unfortunately, such has been the case in recent issues. Specifically, in Vol. 15, No. 3 (June/July '88)

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David May, in his "Random Thoughts" column, refers to Matthew Vriends as "one of the high priests of avicultural witchcraft." Why? Because, among other things, Mr. May disagrees with Dr. Vriends on the causes of egg-binding. In addition, anyone who does not agree with May is apparently "twenty or so years out of touch with reality." Then, in Vol. 17, No. 1 (Feb/Mar '89) May says that "some bubblehead" decided that one subspecies of blue-fronted Amazon should be called the yellow-winged Amazon. Although he doesn't specify anyone in particular, he is undoubtedly referring to Tony Silva, who proposed this name in the Mar '86 issue of *American Cage-Bird Magazine*. Such put-downs seem out of place in America's premiere avicultural publication. I, for one, think Mr. May owes Dr. Vriends and Mr. Silva an apology.

Sincerely,  
Randall W. Lundgren  
Archer, Florida



Dear Editor:

I enjoyed your article titled "The Aviaries of Joe and Marge Longo," February/March '89 *Watchbird*. Quite an elaborate layout. My congratulations to Joe and Marge! I'm sure every breeder who read this article is envious!

Being a breeder on a smaller scale, I look forward to picking up valuable information through articles by the pros. After suffering the loss of Moluccan cockatoo chicks and various other species that were dead in the shell, I know I need some help!

Where can I buy a Humidaire 21 incubator? Is this item right for the small breeder? Are there other manufacturers out there with similar apparatus better suited for me? Information is very sketchy in most books and articles I read. I'm not getting any place! Help me, please!

Yours truly,  
Marie Nicols  
North Miami, Florida

Dear Ms. Nicols,

*Thank you for your letter re: the column on "AFA Aviary Visits," which is designed to inform members on what each other is doing, their successes and the personalities behind those successes. Often we hear about an individual, but never know who they are, what they look*

*like, etc. And, it is a pleasure to be able to visit them and share their work, which helps every breeder — large or small.*

*Your inquiry about incubators is a good one, and different people have different preferences. There are three major manufacturers of incubators in the U.S. — Humidaire Incubators of New Madison, Ohio; Petersime of Gettysburg, Ohio; and Lyon Electric (Marsh Farms) of San Diego, California. All three have a following among aviculturists and all three have quality products that vary according to size, cost, and degree of sophistication. It is impossible to say objectively which is the best, for there are any number of people who will swear by one or the other. I have used all three, and have one of each. All three, by the way, have been Watchbird advertisers.*

*Your best bet is to write the above three firms for a catalog and information sheet. For your convenience, their addresses and phone numbers are listed below:*

*Humidaire Incubator Company  
217 West Wayne Street, Dept. W  
New Madison, Ohio 45346  
(513) 996-3001*

*Lyon Electric Co., Inc.  
2765 Main St., Dept. W  
Chula Vista, CA 92011  
(619) 585-9900*

*Petersime Incubator Co.  
300 North Bridge St.  
Gettysburg, Ohio 45328  
(513) 447-2151*

*Ed. (J. Jennings)*



Dear AFA:

My husband and I are avid readers of the AFA magazine and other fine publications for the avian fanciers. We are members of several bird clubs, and I personally serve on the Board of Directors of three of them. I wish to respond to a letter to the editor from Jorgan Hare of Denmark in your February/March issue. Mr. Hare explains that he is a judge at many Danish bird exhibitions. He is upset about the talk of mutations and the money aspect of bird raising. The gist of Mr. Hare's letter, as I see it, was to express his opinion and disdain for the subject of hand-feeding birds. We have a very good friend from Denmark who raises a great number of birds and, from talking to him, I am very aware that in Denmark it is not the practice

to hand-feed anything. I understand this, and we have a great understanding with our friend from Denmark, but I take offense to the inference by Mr. Hare that all aviculturists who hand-feed are "bird manufacturers." I also take offense at the insinuation that "normal aviculturists" are those who do not hand-feed. We hand-feed almost everything that hatches on our property, this includes cockatiels, Amazons, macaws, cockatoos of all sorts, African greys, and even occasionally grass 'keets. I disagree with Mr. Hare when he says he prefers wild-caught birds to hand-fed. I'll take a hand-fed breeder any day, for several reasons. They are usually more free of disease, they do not panic when their nest box is checked, I know how old they are, and where they come from. Yes, it is Mother Nature's birds we keep and I, for one, am trying to make sure there are lots and lots of birds bred to replace the ones in the wild when the habitats are destroyed forever. What we have here, perhaps, is a difference in culture. I'll respect Mr. Hare's views, but I won't accept being made to feel like a money-monger for mine. As for the subject of mutations, it is merely a matter of opinion, and I won't comment on the subject in this letter.

Thank you for your excellent magazine, one my husband and I read cover to cover.

Sincerely,  
Jami Kennedy  
Golden Oak Aviaries  
Saugus, California



Dear Jerry,

Since I attended the Conference on Central American Zoos in Guatemala last June, I have received many letters requesting information and help from various zoos.

One letter arrived from Liliana Esrana from the Guadalajara Zoo. She needed information on toucans and banding parrots. I sent her copies of AFA articles (yours and Gail Worth's) on toucans but I couldn't find anything on banding parrots. I suggested she write to you and perhaps you or someone else in AFA could help her. I've sent copies of *Watchbird* to several Central American zoos and I hope a few, at least, have joined. However, I know that some of their budgets are *extremely* limited. They ask for such basic avicultural information that it's a shame AFA can't send some complimentary subscriptions or,

at least, some sort of data sheets (diet, housing, etc.) translated into Spanish. I somehow think this was discussed at one time. If not, do you feel it might be feasible?

At any rate, I hope you can help Liliana.

Sincerely,  
Rochelle Plasse  
Houston Zoo, Houston, Texas

Dear Rochelle,

Thank you for your letter. I am informed that our Conservation Committee has on its agenda for consideration the approval of funding of courtesy memberships for Central American zoos.

The Watchbird staff and other committees of AFA would be happy to assist these institutions with their bird problems, whenever we can.

Sincerely yours,  
Editor (J. Jennings)



Dear Jerry,

Congratulations on being selected as co-editor of *Watchbird* — an excellent choice. I shall miss Sheldon, as I am sure will be true of many others. He did an outstanding job, but one that I am certain will be equaled and continued.

The purpose of my letter is to discuss a facet of aviculture that I find very disturbing. I refer to the practice of hybridization that flourishes among segments of aviculturists, especially those involved with psittacines. This is particularly true of those persons breeding macaws and, to a somewhat lesser degree, to breeders of cockatoos and Amazons. I strongly believe that persons involved in the husbandry of wildlife, be it birds, mammals, reptiles or whatever, have an obligation to breed true species only. The utilization of rare — even endangered — wildlife, such as is true of many of the macaws, is an unconscionable waste of the resource. It reduces these rare forms to the level of mere playthings or toys being manipulated for frivolous and useless purposes. It is bad enough to waste a valued resource in a manner so ill conceived, but the problem is compounded by the fact that the resulting hybrids, inasmuch as they are fertile, are being further involved in the contamination of true species.

We in aviculture are certainly aware that powerful forces exist which are continually working to have legislation enacted to restrict, or even

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eliminate, the husbandry of captive wildlife. Nothing could present these anti-avicultural organizations a stronger argument to use against us than the irresponsibility of hybridization. There is also an increasing level of concern within the scientific community, and certainly it would not be within our best interests to alienate them. It is my opinion that this is a problem we cannot afford to ignore. To do so is to invite disaster for, almost certainly, if we do not take the initiative in an effort to resolve this problem it will be done for us by the enactment of restrictive or crippling legislation.

There is much that can be said on the issue, and I only scratch the surface here. I would, however, like to make a proposal. I would like to be included on the speaking roster of the impending AFA convention which convenes during August in Phoenix. The purpose, of course, would be to bring an increasing awareness of the evils of hybridization, to create a better understanding of why it is wrong, and what must be done to make corrections. Equally important, perhaps, would be an outlining of possible consequences if we in aviculture continue to ignore the problem. I am aware there are those aviculturists who will not look upon my convictions with favor. However, in the best interest of aviculture as a whole, and certainly in the best interest of the resource, hybridization is a practice that must be controlled. Failure to do so will be far more costly than we would like.

I shall look forward to seeing you again in Phoenix. In the meantime, take care and warm wishes.

Sincerely yours,

Bob Elgas

President Emeritus

International Wild Walterfowl Assn.

Dear Bob,

*AFA shares your concern for the hazards of hybridization and has taken an active stand against that practice, as we have often editorially stated in these pages. We continue to oppose this practice; however, it must be remembered that we have only limited ability to deal with this concern, i.e. via persuasion.*

*I will direct your interest in speaking before the AFA at its August convention to Nancy Vigran, Speaker Committee Chairman, (818) 980-4694.*

*Sincerely, Ed. (J. Jennings) ●*

# Feathers and Bones

by Bobbi Hobbs  
Crest, California

Death is an issue that all aviculturists encounter, particularly during breeding season. We agonize over chicks who die in the egg or shortly after hatching, and death among adolescent or adult birds. At times, a necropsy is performed to determine the exact cause of death, other times not.

For the Natural History Museum, their work begins with death. Recently I had the privilege of meeting with Steve Gustafson, curatorial assistant of San Diego's Natural History Museum, Department of Birds and Mammals. According to Steve, natural history museums are always interested in obtaining donations of all types of birds. For the ornithologist, vast amounts of knowledge may be gained through the examination of a bird's corpse. It is through the donation of birds that they can learn and document characteristics of a species, what role they played in survival and how these species currently relate to other species.

External examination provides information on plumage, color patterns, body measurements, molting patterns, and other specific details unique to that species. However, the crux of the study is that which cannot be seen in life; the skeletal makeup of the species. To the scientist, the skeleton provides some of the most valuable information. Each bone is measured and examined to extract the most minute details possible. With this knowledge, a scientist can identify and classify a species and, if needed, reconstruct the species. In addition, the scientist can now determine the similarities or differences between various species of birds.

Since ancient times, birds have played an important role in various civilizations. Their bright plumage and entertaining qualities made them a valuable asset of trade. Numerous anthropological sites have uncovered the skeletal remains of birds which were not native to that particular region, thus suggesting trade with the birds' country of origin. Scientists may also formulate a pattern of migration through skeletal remains.

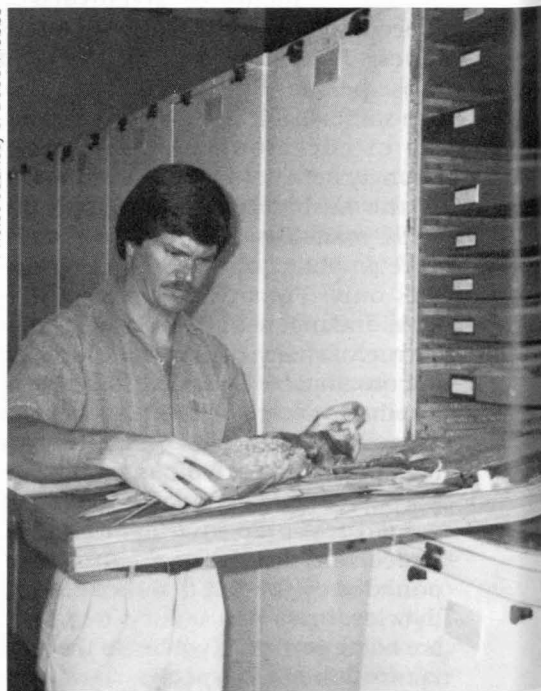
If one of your birds dies, your first consideration must be what you want to accomplish from the death. If you wish to determine the cause of death through a necropsy, then the bird must be tightly wrapped in a plastic bag and placed in the refrigerator. However, if you decide against a necropsy and choose instead to donate the body, then a different procedure needs to be followed.

Birds which are to be donated must be tightly wrapped in a plastic bag ("Zip Lock" if the bird is small enough), and secured with masking tape. On the tape you want to provide the following information:

1. Biological and common name
2. Date of birth, if known
3. Date of death
4. Domestic bred, or
5. Imported — from which country
6. Any identification number (i.e. band number)
7. Your name

Since tissue damage occurs rapidly, immediately place the bird in the freezer. Place a call to the museum to be sure they are interested in the species you have to offer and to make

Photos courtesy of Bobbi Hobbs



Steve Gustafson, curatorial assistant of San Diego's Natural History Museum, takes inventory of a drawer containing full skins of a variety of macaws.