

# Red Siskin Project: Update 1992

by Kevin M. Gorman  
AFA Conservation Chairman  
Rochester, New York

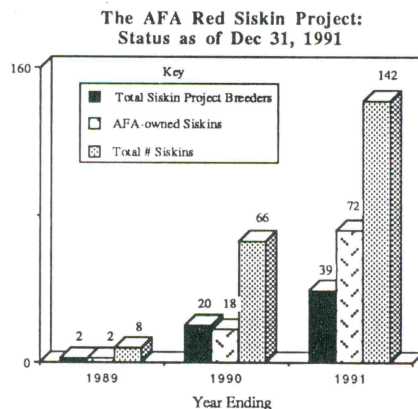
## A Reflection of 1991:

1991 was another successful year for AFA's Red Siskin Project. Both our member numbers and bird numbers have grown significantly since 1990 (as seen in the graph).

We have a total of 44 Red Siskin Project Breeders in the program as of year end 1991. These breeders are found in 19 different states and in Trinidad. The numbers of red siskins in the program climbed by 55 birds since the previous year. Currently, we have 142 red siskins registered in the studbook and approx. 50% of these birds are owned by the AFA. The other siskins are owned by the individual Siskin Project Breeders.

In 1991, many Siskin Project Breeders were given at least two pairs to work with. There wasn't a high rate of breeding success, as many of the birds were young, and ideal conditions were not present at many facilities. We are taking a different strategy in 1992, where breeders are given three to four pairs. It is hoped that the additional numbers of singing males will stimulate breeding in

all females, and the siskins will feel more at home. Standardized lighting conditions, etc. were given to the breeders in 1992 to aid in breeding success. We have already had reports from a couple of breeders who have hatched baby siskins in 1992. It looks like the 1992 breeding season promises to be a good one for the Red Siskin Project!



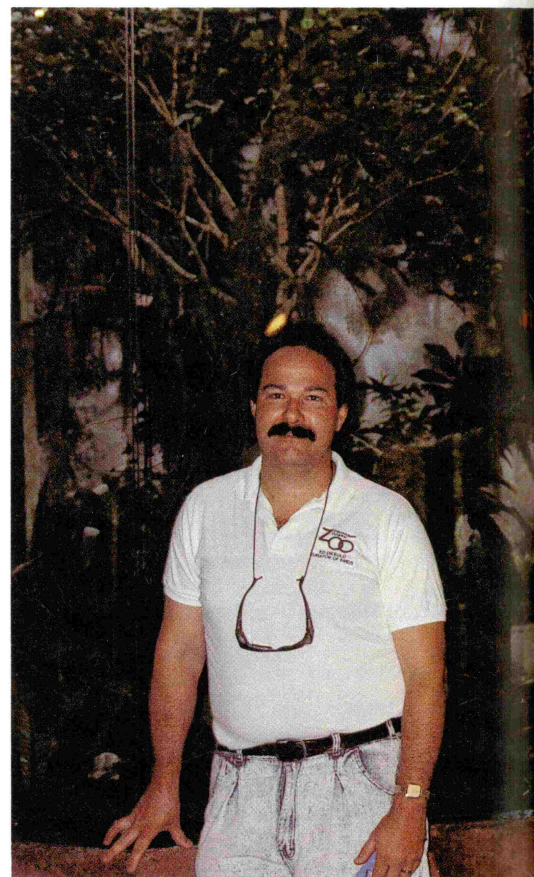
## Studies of Siskin Song and Vocalizations:

During the 1991 year, Louis Baptista, California Academy of Sciences, made song sonagrams (printed voice patterns) from recordings of red siskins within the Red Siskin Project. This line of investigation is currently being continued by Mary Cahow from the University of Wisconsin at Steven's Point as partial fulfillment of her Master's Degree.

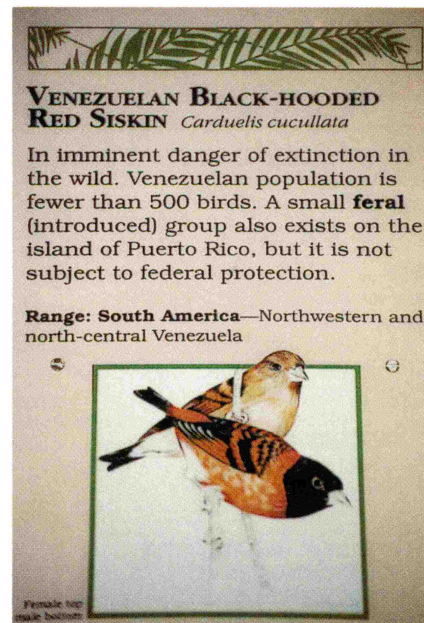
This song pattern analysis will be used to study song learning in young siskins, and to get individual voice prints of birds in the Red Siskin Project to compare with the wild red siskin recordings. Wild red siskin recordings were given to the red siskin project by the late Sadie Coats, who performed extensive studies of the red siskin in Venezuela in 1981 and 1982.

## Concepts and goals of the AFA Red Siskin Project:

The main goals of the AFA Red Siskin Project are to develop a single, genetically diverse population of red siskins in the U.S. These birds are registered with a central studbook keeper and are tracked by computer. These siskins will be held in captivity as a "back up" flock for the wild siskins. This will ensure that if the siskin is eliminated totally from the wild,



Ed Diebold, Curator of Birds at Milwaukee County Zoo, stands in front of their "Neotropical Jewels" exhibit which features the red siskin. This exhibit is accompanied by many educational pictures and text depicting the demise of the red siskin. The Milwaukee Zoo has 10 red siskins and is the only zoo, to date, which participates in the Red Siskin Project.



An example of the graphics seen at the Milwaukee County Zoo. This sign shows a male and female red siskin. The Milwaukee Zoo has an excellent bird facility that is a must to see if you are a serious bird person!

Photos by Kevin Gorman



Rainer Erhart, Ph.D., in his Michigan birdroom. Rainer is one of many private aviculturists considered "red siskin project breeders" who participate by breeding birds for the Red Siskin Project.



there will be a well managed, genetically diverse population in captivity, which will provide this beautiful bird protection from extinction. This effort will be associated with a release program, where captive-bred red siskins are placed back into the wild in their native countries of Venezuela and Trinidad.

The following questions must be addressed by the Red Siskin Project in order to achieve our goals:

1) Can we educate enough "Siskin Project Breeders" to successfully raise young siskins to enable our captive population to grow rapidly enough?

2) Can we identify birds which carry deadly chronic diseases, and eliminate these diseases in a timely fashion before many of the birds in the population are infected? Once chronic diseases are eliminated, can we keep a "clean flock"?

3) Can we rapidly achieve enough genetic diversity in our red siskin population to insure genetic viability over a sustained period of time? Or will our population become too inbred, uncovering too many bad genetic traits which would determine that our population is genetically unsuitable for ever releasing into the wild?

4) Can we successfully work internationally, stirring up interest in other countries to start their own red siskin breeding consortiums?

5) Will there be enough wild habitat left for the red siskin including areas for releasing birds into the wild? Will there ever be a time when released birds will be safe from being trapped and smuggled back into the exotic bird trade?

#### Short Term Goals:

- **Maximizing genetic diversity and rapidly expanding our flock:** Currently, Red Siskin Project breeders are encouraged to raise up to three clutches of young per year. We need to get as many individuals as quickly as possible. The challenge will be in having each pair contributing the same number of offspring to the population.
- **Placing red siskins with many qualified breeders:** so that birds may be distributed evenly throughout the country to minimize losses due to natural disasters (hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, etc.) or disease.
- **Sending siskins to qualified breeders in other countries:** espe-

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cially if these breeders are within the wild siskin's natural habitat, i.e. Trinidad, Venezuela.

## Longer Term Goals:

**Working to protect siskin habitat:** along with BIOMA (The Venezuelan Nature Conservancy) or other conservation groups, trying to help establish protected areas for the wild siskin. A safe haven where they will not be trapped.

**Working toward trial releases into the wild:** Possibly with the Department of Forestry in Trinidad, a protected area might be established where the siskin once foraged in the wild. A wild population might be established from captive-bred birds on a trial basis to determine the survivability of reintroduced siskins. Before performing any releases we would like to establish a captive-bred population of approx. 2,000 siskins in the Red Siskin Project.

## Current Siskin Project Breeders and States of Distribution:

- 1) Theresa Brown, TN
- 2) Mary Cahow-Univ. Wisconsin, Biology Dept.-Stevens Point\*
- 3) Val Clear, IN
- 4) Rainer Erhart, MI
- 5) Stephen Fowler, AZ
- 6) John Friedel, NY
- 7) Gail Gatewood-Colwell, NM (also Director of Promotions)
- 8) Kent Hylton, OR
- 9) Vera Kaminski, OH\*
- 10) Melinda Kidd, WI
- 11) Joan Callum-Kinser, VA
- 12) Paddy Lambert, MO
- 13) Vincenzo Lupo, NY\*
- 14) Maurice Boryzowski, NY
- 15) Ed Diebold, Milwaukee County Zoo, WI
- 16) Kim Moore, KY\*
- 17) Luis/Meitsu Chen, CA\*
- 18) Frank/Diana Murine, NY
- 19) Sandra Jarmuth, NY\*
- 20) Diana Biechler, GA\*
- 21) Pat Collins, NY\*
- 22) Michael Marsicano, FL\*
- 23) Albert Pantin, Trinidad\*
- 24) Fred Shultz, MD\*
- 25) Michelle Rietz, AZ
- 26) Shirley Scott, MI\*
- 27) Richard Sisler, IL
- 28) Raymond Smith, Wildlife Biologist, IL\*
- 29) Barbara Whiteford, NY\*
- 30) Kevin Gorman, NY
- 31) Walley Swett-Primarily Primates, TX\*
- 32) John Topercer, FL\*
- 33) Linda Ward, MO\*

- 34) Joe Witt, CA
- 35) Larry/Kathy Weisz, IL
- 36) Victor Zebak, TX\*
- 37) Yvonne Patterson - Cool Crest, MO\*
- 38) Tony Menendez, GA
- 39) Tony Munoz, NJ
- 40) Sandra Correll, OR\*
- 41) Charlotte Powell, PA\*
- 42) Shirley Adams, TX\*
- 43) Mary Levesque, MD\*
- 44) Carlos Leal Garza, Nuevo Leon, Mexico\*

\* means breeders who have been accepted into the program since the last listing.

**Looking for good people to help raise red siskins for the AFA Red Siskin Project:** The following is a guideline of preferred qualifications.

1) The candidate must have a genuine interest in conserving species through captive breeding programs.

2) The candidate must have experience at raising and handfeeding birds which are similar to the red siskin (it is best if the candidate has at least two years experience with raising canaries. Finch breeders are also encouraged to apply, as long as they keep in mind that raising siskins is more closely related to raising canaries.

3) The candidate must keep clean facilities and be willing to abide by animal husbandry guidelines given by the Management Committee. These include proper quarantine of birds entering the breeder's facility, periodic testing of feces, proper housing, and sanitary practices useful for eliminating the spread of disease.

4) The candidate must be a team player, (i.e. treat the siskins in his/her possession as part of a single large nationwide flock rather than an isolated group) and breed the birds according to the best genetic fit - as determined by the studbook keeper.

5) The candidate does not need to be a large breeder (actually we prefer a smaller to intermediate size breeder (6 to 150 canary or finch-like birds). We are mostly interested in the breeder's ability to provide a safe, productive breeding environment for the siskins. Preferred breeders need to have enough time to spend observing the siskins and making sure their needs are met.

6) It is preferred that the candidate keep the siskins in a separate room from their other birds (if possible), and to keep their food supplies separate from the other birds. Once again, this is an endangered species and we

are concerned for their long term health and survival. Mixing with other birds is a sure recipe for disaster because of the constant threat of disease transmission.

7) The ideal candidate will have an avian veterinarian who works closely with the candidate, who can supply the candidate's birds with professional medical attention. A veterinarian is especially important as we require that necropsies be performed on any siskin that dies, and it is important that birds are brought to an avian vet, preserved, and sent to our pathologist for histopathology as soon after death as possible.

### Joining The AFA Red Siskin Project and What Is Expected of the Red Siskin Project Breeder:

- Candidates who would like to join the AFA Red Siskin Project should write to Virginia Baker - Membership Coordinator, AFA Red Siskin Project, 1550 Bar Harbor, Dallas, TX 75232.

- Once Mrs. Baker receives your complete application (including photographs of general facility, photographs of where the siskins are to be housed; and name, address and phone number of your avian veterinarian; name, address, and phone number of a person who knows you and your facilities well; and a letter of reference from one of the two persons) your application is then circulated to a management committee. This committee gives you a rating (1 to 100) depending on your previous experience, and facilities. Persons ranked with the highest scores receive the first siskins which become available.

- AFA siskins will be placed with you according to your number ranking, and your geographical location. (For instance, if siskins can be placed with you from a breeder in the same state, rather than ship the birds from the east coast to the west coast, the closer breeder may receive the birds first, if both breeders had the same ranking.

- Shipping costs and diagnostic costs (including necropsy costs) will be paid by the AFA Red Siskin Project if these expenses are from AFA-owned siskins, or if the tests are performed on breeder-owned siskins at the request of the Red Siskin Project Management Committee.

- In general, once AFA siskins are placed with a breeder, the adults will remain at that facility unless the



## Commercial Members

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 DRB Bird Ranch, Deming, NM  
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 The 14 Karat Parrot, Sanibel Island, FL  
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 The Reptile Place, Mahwah, NJ  
 Thee Birdie Bordello, El Segundo, CA  
 Todd Marcus Birds Exotic,  
 Cinnaminson, NJ  
 Topp Flock Aviary, Inc., Loxahatchee, FL  
 Topper Bird Ranch, Modesto, CA  
 Tropic Wave, Ft. Myers, FL  
 Urban Bird, New York, NY  
 Valley Avicultural Products, Canoga  
 Park, CA  
 West Coast Bird Farm, Chino, CA  
 Wyld's Wingdom, Chesapeake, VA  
 Zeigler Bros. Inc., Gardner, PA  
 Zoovival, Inc., Clearwater, FL

breeder drops out of the program, or is asked to resign. The offspring will be placed with other Red Siskin Project Breeders around the country according to their genetic backgrounds (as determined by the studbook keeper.)

- The breeder will receive new bloodlines from the AFA on an as needed basis (remember, the population will not only exist at your house, but all across the country. If new bloodlines are needed at a breeder's facility, new birds will be provided from the red siskin project as directed by the studbook keeper).

- AFA closed bands will be provided to All AFA Red Siskin Project breeders to place on any offspring from an AFA siskin or AFA siskin x Consortium siskin mating. Bands can be obtained from me, Kevin Gorman, 204 Conrad Drive, Rochester, NY 14616, free of charge.

- The candidate will be expected to submit to the studbook keeper, an annual report identifying any transfers, hatches and deaths. If these annual reports are submitted to the studbook keeper, no other records will be required from the breeder, as long as the parents of all offspring are identified. The studbook keeper will have the complete lineage records of all birds.

#### **Donations to the AFA Red Siskin Project in 1991:**

The AFA Red Siskin Project is supported by your tax deductible donations. These moneys are used for medical costs (necropsies, diagnostic services, etc.), shipping of birds to Siskin Project Breeders, printing of promotional materials, and mailing (communication) costs.

To make a contribution to the AFA Red Siskin Project, please make your check payable to "AFA Conservation Fund - Red Siskin" and mail check to AFA Business Office, P.O. Box 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079-6218.

We would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their donations and support during 1991. Without the support of people like these, conservation breeding programs would be impossible.

The following groups or individuals **raffled Siskin Project T-shirts** at their club meetings and donated the proceeds to the AFA Red Siskin Project:

- Las Cruces Parrot Club \$23
- Kentuckiana Bird

- Society, Inc. \$56
- Great Lakes Avicultural Society \$18
- Rochester Cage Bird Club \$15
- Stateline Bird Fanciers \$50
- Erie Cage Bird Club \$25
- Santa Clara Valley Club \$24

#### **Miscellaneous events held to raise money:**

- Shirley Scott, Grayling, MI (shirt/bird raffle) \$87
- Malinda Kidd/Michelle Rietz (Macaw raffle) \$362
- National Bird Show (AFA Booth raffles, etc.) (Tony Munoz donated a canary to raffle, ACBM donated books, and gift certificates.) \$480

#### **Donations from individuals and clubs:**

- Las Cruces Parrot Club \$75
- Carlos H. Leal Garza (Mexico) \$20
- Michelle/Don Rietz \$100
- Ann Dranginis, Ph.D. \$200
- Joe Witt \$200
- J.C. Chase Lambert \$50
- Arizona Avian Breeders Assn. \$100
- Stateline Bird Fanciers, Inc. (Jan. 21, 1992) \$500
- Dallas Cage Bird Society (Jan. 30, 1992) \$96
- Mr. and Mrs. Richard Littrell, Dallas, TX \$100 (Feb 2, 1992)

Both the Dallas donations were in memory of Don Littrell and were donated to the AFA Red Siskin Project through the Dallas Cage Bird Society's Don Littrell Memorial Fund.

#### **Siskins Donated (in 1991) to the AFA for the Red Siskin Project:**

- Frank Avoledo 2
- Goldie Dowdy 2
- Kevin Gorman 46
- Joe Witt 1
- Misc. siskins placed with the Red Siskin Project. K. Gorman purchased birds from a breeder using funds donated (from clubs, individuals) for that purpose (a special permit was needed) 8

#### **Red Siskin Project Members Who Have Reported Sales of T-Shirts:**

- Gail Gatewood-Colwell \$150
- Larry Weisz (About Birds) \$150
- Rainer Erhart (raffle at local club) \$20
- Joan Callum Kinser \$36

Individuals who have donated their time and effort in keeping the Red Siskin Project running smoothly:

- Gail Gatewood-Colwell, Ph.D. - Promotions Director-Red Siskin Project
- Michelle Rietz, Michaelleen Rogers, Joan Callum-Kinser, Malinda Kidd - Siskin News Mailing Team
- Virginia Baker - Membership Coordinator-Red Siskin Project
- Orland Baker - Studbook Keeper-Red Siskin Project

The individuals above have not only done a superb job, but they have also donated much of their time and money. Thanks to you dedicated Siskin Project working members. Your time, money, and devotion is much appreciated.

In addition, special thanks to Shirley Scott, Grayling, MI for cutting out hundreds of natural cotton nesting pads which were placed with Siskin Project breeders to put on top of commercially made nesting pads to prevent female siskins from getting toes snagged on artificial fibers.

#### **New Red Siskin Project Promotional Director Appointed**

Gail Gatewood-Colewell, Ph.D. has resigned from the Promotional Director's position and has decided to take on various other roles in helping run the Red Siskin Project. Gail is also interested in continuing her promotional consultation roles with the Green Cheek Amazon Project, and the Parrotlet Project. Thank you for a job well done, Gail!

Yvonne Patterson of Kansas City, MO has accepted the position as The AFA Red Siskin Project Promotional Director. Welcome aboard, Yvonne!

#### **Updated Status of the Red Siskin in the U.S.**

I have contacted several independent siskin breeders across the United States and I am under the impression that the red siskin is in extremely low numbers in the United States (for such a small, short-lived bird). This feeling of mine was confirmed by an associate, Geno Abbate, who is very familiar with many long time siskin breeders in the U.S. and in Europe. All of the breeders which he contacted either said they are no longer breeding the red siskin or that they all died. If numbers were to be estimated (by the author), we may be looking at fewer than 900 red siskins remaining in the U.S. This information confirms the need for our Red Siskin Project at least to the extent of creating and maintaining a strong siskin population in the U.S. ●