

1993 Siskin Summit: A Peak Experience

by Gail Gatewood-Colwell, Ph.D.,
Kevin Gorman & Yvonne Patterson

The Summit is Reached

In politics, a summit is an international gathering of people interested in world cooperation; in geography, a summit is the highest peak; in rhetoric, a summit is a high point in human achievement. In aviculture, the recent Siskin Summit was all of these and more!

On August 21, 1993, about 50 peo-

ple gathered in Kansas City, Missouri to participate in the first annual Siskin Summit. The AFA Red Siskin Project (RSP), which seeks to establish a healthy, genetically-diverse captive breeding population of this endangered finch, met as a group to analyze the current status of the project and to plan for its future. The goals of the Siskin Summit were many:



1) to inspect and improve the general organization of the project,

2) to learn about genetics and other dynamics in establishing a captive breeding population which will someday be appropriate for re-release into protected wild habitat,

3) to discuss fiscal requirements of an ambitious, completely privately funded project such as this,

4) to explore actual mechanics of re-release,

5) to meet with representatives from the Red Siskin's natural habitat range in Venezuela, and many more.

Cool Crest Family Fun Center in Kansas City was the site for the Siskin Summit. Yvonne Patterson, promotional director for the RSP, hosted the Summit and organized the meeting areas, meals, and social activities. All agreed that the Siskin Summit atmosphere was a fabulous mixture of home-style comfort, professional discourse, scientific interchange and festive camaraderie.

Down to Business

In the opening moments of the actual Siskin Summit business day, RSP Director Kevin Gorman was presented with a plaque of appreciation for his leadership. In part, the plaque read, "You have helped us turn our ideals into actions." Shortly after accepting his award, he began the proceedings by showing a very colorful and inspiring slide show about the Red Siskin (*Carduelis cucullata*). He described how pet-trade trapping has driven this little finch to the brink of extinction in its native Venezuela, and how the RSP has undertaken a mis-

Photos courtesy of authors



Red Siskin Project breeder Ray Smith of Carbondale, Illinois is presented with one of two 1993 breeder awards for raising 14 young from two pairs.



Gail Gatewood-Colwell presenting appreciation plaque to Kevin Gorman, director of the Red Siskin Project.

sion to save this bird.

Next, Antonio Rivero, just in from Venezuela to attend the Siskin Summit, spoke on the plight of the Red Siskin in the wild. A private aviculturist and conservationist himself, Professor Rivero told of his own country's role in the international exploitation of the Red Siskin. He spoke with passion and energy of his desire to rectify this situation by aiding the RSP in its mission. He also gave a slide show of the Red Siskin and its native habitat. Professor Rivero was gracious and appreciative for his invitation (the provisions of his ticket fare were paid for by the AFA's RSP).

Robert Smith, Ph.D., ecologist representing the Venezuelan government, accompanied Professor Rivero from Venezuela to provide a slide show about the government's interests in the Red Siskin. He spoke of the difficult political and financial issues relating to ensuring protected habitat in Venezuela. He also made the important point that it is, indeed, trapping which has pushed the Red Siskin so near extinction, since habitat is available and suitable for the bird and its needs. Indeed, he said, the Red Siskin's requirements are very compatible with traditional Venezuelan farming and land management. He presented information on various re-release site possibilities. He also offered the support of the Venezuelan government (in particular, the interim president, who sponsored and paid for his trip to the Siskin Summit) to the RSP, and expressed the hope of being more actively involved in the future.

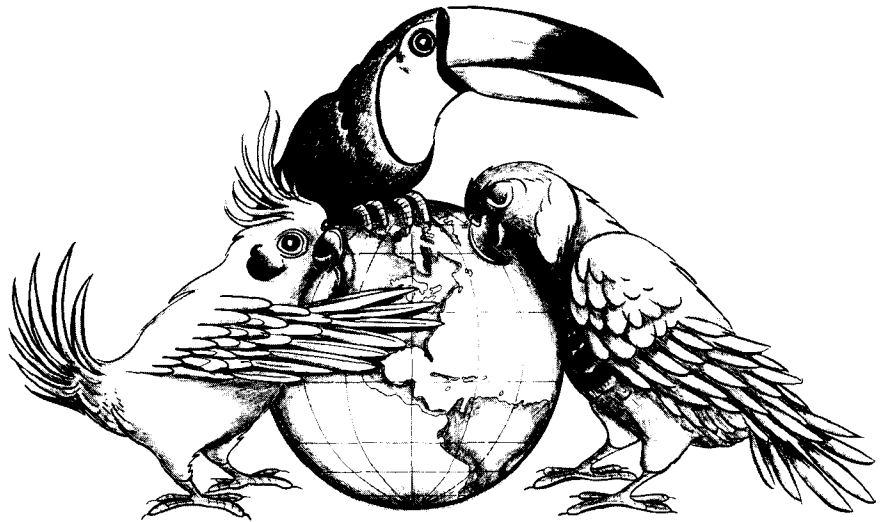
Professor Jim Hardin, wildlife biologist from the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, spoke on the philosophy and mechanics of captive breeding population management. He used flipcharts and lectured to present the many subtleties involved in captive breeding: genetic diversity must be analyzed and maintained, characteristics of wild populations must be explored and utilized in making captive breeding decisions, and various computer-aided techniques can help us pursue these ideas.

Mary Cahow, biologist, also from the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, presented her ongoing Master's research on the songs and calls of the Red Siskin, for which she has received grants from the RSP. She is now carrying out a highly complex study of the

Red Siskin call notes. She showed us some of her techniques, which included direct sound analysis, and more. She hopes to discover the extent to which the Red Siskin's call notes are learned and/or innate, and how this may impact captive breeding and eventual re-release. Her work will be invaluable as the RSP moves closer to reintroduction. Moreover, her work will be of great interest to the ornithological and general scientific communities as well, since it will give more information on the nature of

learned versus innate behaviors in animals. Mary also has a special affinity for the Red Siskin, since she is a successful project breeder as well as a researcher.

Steve Fowler, associate breeder and long-term supporter of the RSP, spoke on his current breeding facilities and gave much useful information about hygiene maintenance, infection control and general aviary management. His beautiful new Red Siskin aviary modules were much admired by the group and, in particular, by the Vene-



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zuelans, who may consider using his plans in the event that they may someday carry out government-sponsored Red Siskin breeding. Steve also had enjoyable information and anecdotes about his emu breeding facilities, which generate much funding for his Red Siskin activities!

Jack Clinton-Eitniear, former president of the AFA and ongoing steward of the RSP, gave a rousing talk that was packed with both tactical and motivational content. He praised and thanked all members and asserted his own devotion to the project. He related the modeling of the AFA's RSP to future conservation programs for other endangered birds. The RSP looks forward to being able to command more of his time and energy now that his presidential duties have been completed!

Gail Gatewood-Colwell, assistant director of promotions, RSP, gave a presentation aimed at showing all members (especially breeders) how they could generate "grass roots" publicity for the project. She related how she and her husband had experienced significant amounts of local coverage by newspaper and television. She advanced the notion that getting such publicity is amazingly easy, since the RSP is such a good cause, and is so well-received by the media. She handed out a step-by-step packet on

initiating and maximizing local publicity and promotional activities. For this packet, please send a 52¢ SASE to Yvonne Patterson, 4630 Blue Ridge Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64133.

A Rewarding Experience

During the luncheon break, Kevin Gorman presented certificates, awards and plaques to many deserving project members for their special contributions to the terrific progress made by the project over the last year. Recipients were:

Red Siskin project breeder award:

Mary Cahow - Stevens Point, WI
Ray Smith - Carbondale, IL

Sponsorship awards:

John Ulrich - Kellogg Seed
Walter Carlson - Spray Millet America

Speaker awards (to thank speakers for paying their own way and donating their time):

Gail Gatewood-Colwell, Ph.D.
Steve Fowler, Phys.
Jim Hardin, Ph.D.
Mary Cahow, Biol.

Support awards:

Jay Fullmer for donating his pen & ink limited edition
Yvonne Patterson for typing and co-editing *Siskin News*

Special award:

Yvonne Patterson for organizing Siskin Summit '93

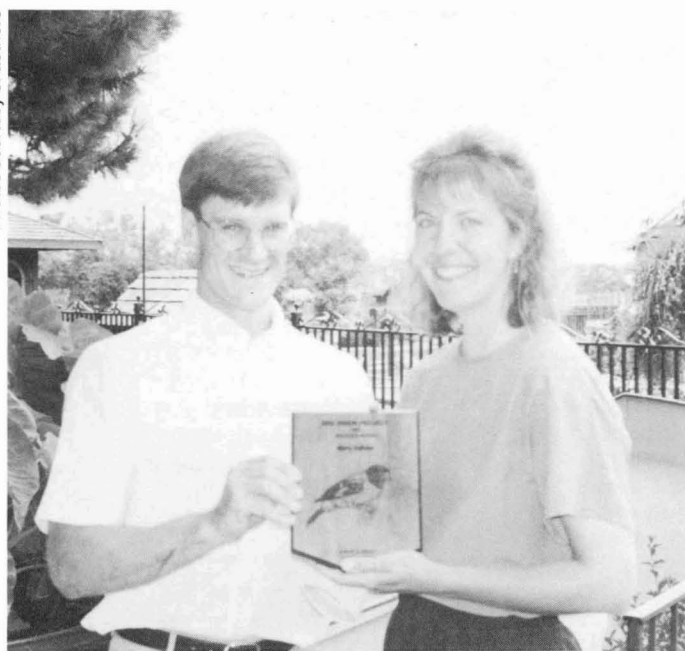
Certificates were given to those project members who successfully raised young this year. In addition, beautiful siskin earrings were presented to successful female siskin project breeders (earrings were donated by Denise Cabral of Massachusetts).

The Local and National Community Rises to the Summit

Many local Kansas City merchants and aviculturists contributed to the success of the Siskin Summit. In particular, the local bird club, the Greater Kansas City Avicultural Society (GKCAS), is to be strongly commended for its help to the project. Many members from the club attended the Summit proceedings and lent their expertise to the open discussions. GKCAS, its President Kendall Crosby and Treasurer Kathy Inboden, jointly donated \$170. Many club members transported Siskin Summit participants to and from the airport, which made for a warm welcome.

"Price Chopper" food store (owned by Donny Cosentino) provided 12 chickens, 24 rib loins and two fabulous sheet cakes. These were not any ordinary cakes . . . these had a giant

Photos courtesy of authors



Mary Cahow of Stevens Point, Wisconsin receives the second "1993 breeder award" for her meticulous record keeping and for raising 16 young.



Jay Fullmer is given an award for his beautiful pen and ink (limited edition) artwork of siskins.



John Ulrich, manager of Cage-Bird Products - Kellogg, Inc., is given an appreciation award for loyally supplying Siskin Project breeders with a continuous supply of free seed.



Yvonne Patterson is given two awards: 1) for typing "Siskin News", 2) for her hard work in organizing the 1993 Siskin Summit.

Photos courtesy of authors

full-color red siskin on them! The wonderful luncheon was prepared and supplemented with home-grown fruits and pies by Sandra McChan (GKCAS member). The picnic luncheon was served on the beautifully spacious Cool Crest patio which is complete with waterfalls and aquatic plants. Another "Price Chopper", owned by the McKeever family, provided a sandwich buffet which was served at the Friday night mixer. Ridgewood Donuts provided an early breakfast donut buffet the day of the Siskin Summit. Jeff Quigley, manager of a local IGA Grocery, also donated various side dishes, eating utensils and napkins. The Coca-Cola Bottling Company donated beverages for the Siskin Summit. Frosty Treat, a local ice-creamery, donated an ice cream extravaganza.

Chris and Gary Meyer of AAA Trophies donated several beautiful plaques which were presented to John Ulrich of Kellogg's Seeds, Walter Carlson of Spray Millet America and RSP Director Kevin Gorman.

Three artists added to the promotional and aesthetic excitement at the Siskin Summit. Jay Fullmer offered some breathtaking Red Siskin prints for sale, which were also on sale at the AFA convention. Gary Murray (GDM Enterprises) donated artwork and production assistance for the Siskin Summit tee-shirts presented to all partici-

pants. These same shirts were available at the AFA convention and Henry Koning of Santa Rosa, California purchased the first new siskin tee-shirt. Mark Wade (Out on a Limb Studios in Overland Park, Kansas) painted a watercolor portrait of a Red Siskin family in the wild. The beauty of the Red Siskins was richly and skillfully set forth by these three gentlemen, and their skill and talent very much enriched the proceedings. All prints are signed and numbered by the artists. Anyone interested in purchasing siskin artwork or a new, limited siskin project tee-shirt, contact the AFA office. Shirts are \$18 plus \$2 shipping, and various prices range from \$10 to \$50 for the artwork.

Patricia Schneider of New Signs donated a red and black banner proclaiming "The AFA's RSP — Saving a Species from Extinction." She also donated a mock street sign proclaiming "Siskin St." and "Carduelis Ct.", Carduelis being the genus name. A red and black finch was perched atop the sign. All Star Pet Supply (owned by Carl Nordstrom) donated a large finch cage for a raffle. Bud and Dee Hammack (of A-Scent Floral) made some really charming miniature Red Siskin floats, constructed of flowers, which were perched in a tropical bush!

Some clubs sponsored Siskin Summit trips for representative members.

The Kentuckian Bird Society, the Middle Tennessee Caged Bird Club, the Wisconsin Cage Bird Club, the Western Kentucky Cage Bird Club and the Arizona Avicultural Society all sent members. Even club members who gave smaller donations such as Mary Masters, helped send a project breeder to the Siskin Summit.

Duro-Test Company has agreed to supply project breeders each with two 4' Vita-Lite full-spectrum bulbs with wholesale prices on additional bulbs. This will be facilitated by a local UPS office ("American Packaging" owned by Kevin Ash), which will donate shipping of the bulbs directly to project breeders. Denis Sloan (of Sloan's Exotics in Indiana) donated 500 pipettes for use in hand-feeding baby siskins.

A description of the proceedings would not be complete without a strong recognition of the contributions from Yvonne Patterson herself. Her organization of the proceedings, the donations, the speakers, the participants and the meeting areas were incredible. Perhaps she was at her best when she was showing the RSP members her resident birds at Cool Crest. Yvonne put on a natural behavior show with all her feathered associates, and it was greatly enjoyed by RSP members. There were cockatoos, macaws, toucans and more and, together, they make up her "Wings of

Love” exhibit at Cool Crest. All showed the health and comfort which comes from being beloved pets. One or two of the birds demonstrated this by refusing to perform their tricks . . . Yvonne took their “jokes” good-naturedly and praised them all the same. Linda Zakarian-Wade, a friend of Yvonne’s (and of the Red Siskins), provided much help with publicity and meeting arrangements, especially with tackling the time consuming job of arranging for GKCAS members to

transport Siskin Summit participants between the airport and hotel.

Another special note of thanks goes to Alberto Berrios, who provided translation for Professor Rivero. Alberto also gave us the benefit of his many years of experience in aviculture. As a canary song judge, aviculturist, international traveler and friend of the Red Siskin, he had much to contribute. Thanks also to Malinda Kidd, who sponsored his trip via a \$350 airline ticket!

Thirteen zoos in Texas have formed a “Bird Interest Group of Texas” or “BIG TEX.” A representative from both the Houston Zoo and the Dallas Zoo attended the Siskin Summit. We are very excited about the interest they’ve shown the RSP and look forward to working with them!

The RSP also wants to thank John Ulrich of Kellogg’s Seeds and Walt Carlson of Spray Millet America. They supplied free siskin seed mixes and millet, respectively, to project breeders this year. Thanks! We love your products!

Bird clubs and businesses around the country made monetary donations to the project. The Tennessee Valley Exotic Bird Club has given \$500; the Wisconsin Cage Bird Club has pledged \$300; Mike Fidler of England donated \$200; Ed Weinberg, president of Nekton USA, donated \$200; Linda Sun, noted aviculturist, gave \$500; and the Bird Clubs of Virginia donated \$1,910. Thank you all from the bottom of our RSP hearts!

The RSP’s future looks bright. There are now 22 breeders ready for the 1994 season. Donations of money, services and support are literally rolling in. National and international networking is moving into high gear. Anyone interested in joining the project is urged to contact the AFA office.

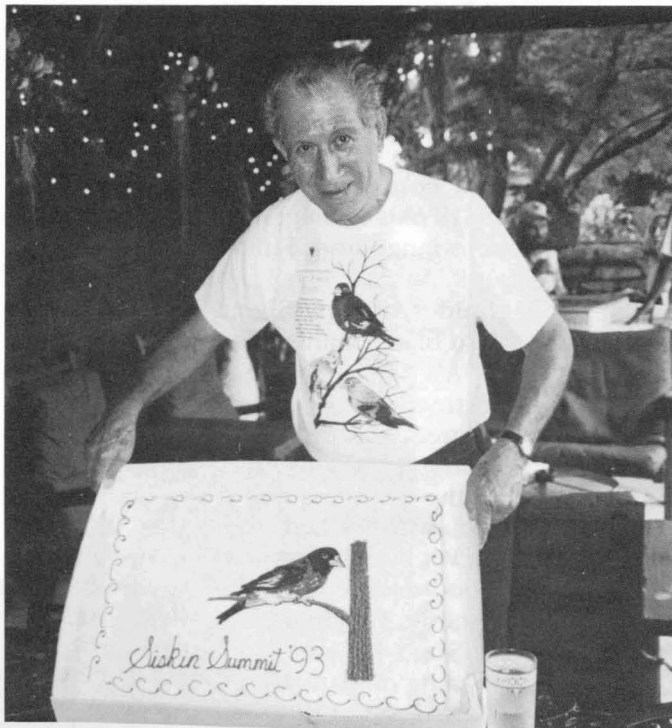
In conclusion, the First Annual Siskin Summit was a resounding success. The proceedings were precisely organized, relevant, and opened many avenues for future exploration. Those who attended will attest to the *esprit de corps* and determination.

The implications for the avicultural community are great. This is a precedent setting project which could lead the way for other species preservation efforts in the future. The RSP should be of critical concern not only to Friends of the Red Siskin, but also to anyone who cares about the future of endangered species. You can become a Friend of the Red Siskin by making an annual contribution of \$50 or more, or by donating one pair of Red Siskins on a yearly basis to the RSP. Checks should be made payable to “AFA-Friend of Siskin” and mailed to the AFA office. This tax deductible contribution also entitles you to receive the RSP newsletter. The next Siskin Summit is in the planning stages even now. Put it in your plans for 1994 and let us hear from you! ●

Photos courtesy of authors



Siskin Summit meeting room . . . the speaker holds the attention of this dedicated group of aviculturists with their special mission.



Venezuelan Professor Antonio Rivero (author of the book “El Cardenalito de Venezuela”) holding siskin cake donated by Donny Cosentino’s Price Chopper. Tee-shirt art donated by Gary Murray of GDM Enterprises.