



A closer look at the lory cage.



Leanne Collins, David Sefton's wife, with a young Red Lory.



Leanne with a handful of healthy young lory.



David Sefton's Red Lory facility in Austin, Texas.

An Interview with David Sefton

by Jack Clinton Eitnrear
San Antonio, Texas

Face it, folks, many people have birds not as a hobby but rather with the grand aspirations of making money. While my father was always preaching that you shouldn't invest in it if it "requires feeding or repainting," the attraction of raising animals and birds for pleasure and profit has lured many an unsuspecting soul into animal-keeping. With this in mind, it was most intriguing to meet and listen to fellow Texan David Sefton at the 1993 AFA Convention held in Salt Lake City, Utah. Sefton has no qualms about it, he got into birds because he liked them and wanted to make some money (as well as initially keep his mother-in-law busy). With a background in economics, taxation and agriculture, he "jumped in head first" and has proven that it can be done.

In hopes of learning more, I visited Sefton at his place in Austin, Texas and conducted the following interview.

Eitnrear: David, when and why did you start breeding birds?

Sefton: I always had an appreciation for nature and an interest in exotic birds. I simply did not have an opportunity to get involved with bird breeding until I met Leanne Collins, my wife. She had been breeding cockatiels and other birds on and off for a decade. Additionally, in the beginning my mother-in-law was living with us so I thought that it would be a great home business for her.

Eitnrear: Why did you decide to concentrate upon Red Lorries?

Sefton: I looked at a number of breeding operations from a financial standpoint. It seemed to make sense to me that you should concentrate upon a single species. The question was what species? We established the

following criteria for selection:

1. Somewhat unique
2. Small enough for apartment residents
3. Colorful
4. Good personality (not known to become aggressive)
5. Not noisy
6. Modest price range
7. Not a species known to "feather pick"

After this point in 1987, we got on the telephone. Our bill was frequently around \$500 per month! The list was finally narrowed down to rosellas, Indian Ringnecks and Red Lorries.

Eitnrear: How did you determine the number of pairs to start with?

Sefton: We felt that, given the need to do some mate switching, we would need at least three pairs. Five seemed even a better number. The added benefit to multiple pairs is that you start to become "in tune" with the species as a whole. Statistically, five is the smallest number acceptable in scientific studies to preclude the possibilities that what you observe is not typical of the species. By knowing the species, you improve your husbandry abilities and can also better market your birds.

Eitnrear: Certainly you have more than five pairs now. Explain.

Sefton: In the beginning, we wanted to know everything we could about Red Lorries so we read everything. It became apparent that the Red Lory was not faring well in the wild and that possibly we could assist if we established a genetically sound breeding program. We did discover that profitability does not increase proportionally with the number of birds you have. The energy and resources to care for 20 pairs is greater than 20x caring for a single pair.

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Eitnrear: *What is your breeding strategy?*

Sefton: We believe that perhaps up to 50% of all parrots in captivity simply will not breed in a captive environment. This varies from species to species and depends on the bird's age and history as well as a number of other factors. My point is that we simply do not want a flock of non-breeding birds. Our plan is to wait five to six years. During this time, we try pairing birds with three different mates (two years per mate). If, at the end of six years, we see no evidence of production, the non-breeders are moved out of the facility.

Eitnrear: *If a bird stops producing, do you surplus it as well?*

Sefton: No, once in production we plan to keep them. I believe that most birds have good years and bad years, for whatever reason. It's not uncommon for people to tell me that a pair has stopped producing for several years then restarted again. Our objective is to have 100% of our pairs reproducing. From a financial perspective, I believe that most collections need to have at least 30% of their pairs producing for the endeavor to be profitable with a goal of 75 to 80% production at which time you should have a very profitable business.

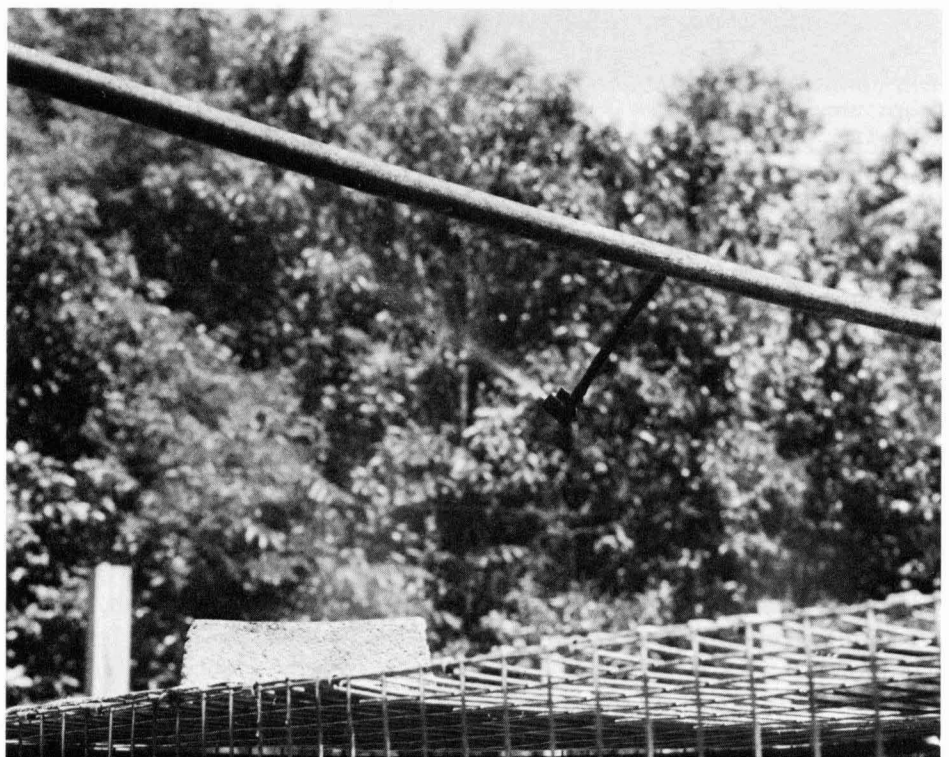
Eitnrear: *You started with wild-*

caught birds but now are purchasing captive bred. Why?

Sefton: We had a lot of problems with the quarantine birds. I honestly believe that lorries receive a higher dosage of antibiotics in their liquid diet than do other parrots which eat mostly seeds. I believe this resulted in liver damage to the lorries. Also, there is no clue as to the age or reproductive history of imports. On the other hand, many domestics are fed poor diets and are stunted in growth. If a nominate race of Red Lory does not weigh at least 180 g, we're not going to purchase it. I've seen them as low as 135 g! I believe that there is a 50% chance that a wild-caught will breed and a 90% chance a domestic will produce.

Eitnrear: *If you were to establish a breeding flock now, where would you source the birds?*

Sefton: I would buy proven breeders from individuals who are selling them in order to advance to more exotic lorries. Red Lorries are "beginner birds" for the lorry enthusiast. I would be very cautious and check references (ask for them if you must) before I purchased a bird. Stay away from those collections that have many species and lots of birds coming and going. They increase the risk of bringing disease into their facility with every new bird.



Fern misters used to "beat the Texas heat."

Eitnrear: *Let's discuss hand-rearing versus parent-rearing of chicks.*

Sefton: Well, since I can often obtain multiple clutches from one pair, there is a financial cost to allowing parent birds to rear their own young. These aren't domesticated species, hence they are unlikely to lay so many eggs that it pulls calcium from their bones as sometimes happens in domesticated species. We let them produce at whatever level they can, then allow them to parent-rear the last clutch themselves. If we note problems of chick survivability, thin eggshells or stunted growth, we pull the nestbox. We have found that hand-reared chicks seem to have some sort of communication deficit. It takes a couple of months for them to adjust to the other birds.

Eitnrear: *How do the birds take the Texas heat?*

Sefton: We lost a number of birds, in the beginning, from heat stress. It was one of those days when cool weather (80°F) was followed rapidly by 100°F weather with high humidity and little wind. We thought some devastating disease had struck but, after numerous necropsies and telephone calls, we determined it was heat stress. The fact that these were predominately quarantine birds (wild-caught) might have made a difference as well. After this ordeal, we looked into misters and settled on a system with a "fern mister" attachment. Normally, this releases a heavy mist but with full water pressure it delivers a very fine mist. Our first attempts resulted in puddles of water. Such pockets of water indicate the mist is not as fine as it should be to evaporate properly. We have the system on a timer that runs from 1:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. throughout the summer months. The difference the misters make on your water bill is negligible.

Certainly Sefton has proven that specializing on a single species makes good sense. It's not really a novel concept but one that people seldom put into action. It seems you're stacking the deck against yourself if you insist on having a menagerie of many species. Sefton has been breeding birds for only a few years, yet, with a handful of pairs and good common business sense, has developed a small scale operation with significant profits. And what a splash of red he has in his backyard!●

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