



Richard Topper

(1932 - 1994)

by Kim Edwards

Richard Topper was born and raised in southern Wisconsin. He lived and worked for several years in New York. Over the many years he worked for American Express, he lived in Hong Kong, Australia and many locations in Europe.

Richard began his interest in breeding birds in the mid-1960s. His interest was piqued by the birds he saw being bred (or attempted) by many of the business acquaintances he had in Europe, Australia and the Orient. Many of these people were attempting to breed different species of parrots and finches. Several were attempting to breed hummingbirds. This intrigue over the difficulty and the challenges it presented caused him to try it for himself.

Richard and his wife Bonnie began with finches and canaries. They bred Gouldians, Cut Throats and many other species. He soon saw a challenge in breeding and showing English Budgies. During this period, Richard's job required him to travel extensively. He found many other breeders and began to increase his interest in the parrot family.

In 1971, they moved to a ranch in Gilroy, California and began to breed in earnest. They acquired birds from around the world and began the attempt to reproduce each species. They bred many other avian types such as Ground Fowl (Guinea, Pea and Specialty Chickens) and Waterfowl (Ducks, Geese and Swans). They also raised Koi and Guinea Pigs.

In 1975, Richard had begun to raise birds as a full-time occupation. His kitchen always had boxes full of baby birds that were being handfed. In these boxes were all types of rosellas,

ringnecks, Amazons, macaws, cockatoos, eclectus, conures of all types, African Greys, grass, racket and broad tail parakeets as well as many others.

During the first years in Gilroy, Richard began working with several nutrition companies to help him increase the production of his collection. General knowledge of parrot and finch nutrition was nonexistent. Richard, working with the help of these companies, watched the difference in the production of the flock when the birds were provided a balance of nutritional supplements. Then he began to modify the grains and seeds to increase the nutrition provided and increase production. Thus the Topper Bird Ranch Diets were developed.

In 1982, Richard and Bonnie moved their collection of birds, dogs and cats to Lexington, North Carolina. There they built a new home and a new feed mill to continue to produce the Topper Bird Ranch Diets.

Richard and Bonnie branched out in their interests. They began to raise Llamas, Emus and Rheas. An attempt was made to raise Wallabies, but the winter proved too cold. Their interest in orchids also expanded into several greenhouses.

In 1985, Richard and Bonnie were divorced. Shortly after the separation, Richard met a lovely lady named Gail and married her in 1986. Gail's interests were not the parrots, but she did enjoy the rattites. Gail's main interest is horses. Richard insisted that it had to be a small horse, not a standard. Gail has been doing exceptionally well in the show ring with her miniature horses. Their mini horse ranch is known as GTR Mini Ranch.

Around 1990, Richard decided to semi-retire and sold all of the orchids and almost all of his birds. There remained some eclectus, greys and a macaw on the ranch.

About two years ago, Richard was diagnosed with lung cancer. The growth was slowed and it appeared that headway was being made. But on April 30, 1994, at the age of 62, Richard lost his battle with cancer.

We will miss Richard for the assistance he has given so many breeders. The loss of knowledge from any one individual is hard to measure, but, if you measure it by the number of bird breeders and pet owners he helped over the years, it is a great loss. ●



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