

Wow! What a Convention!

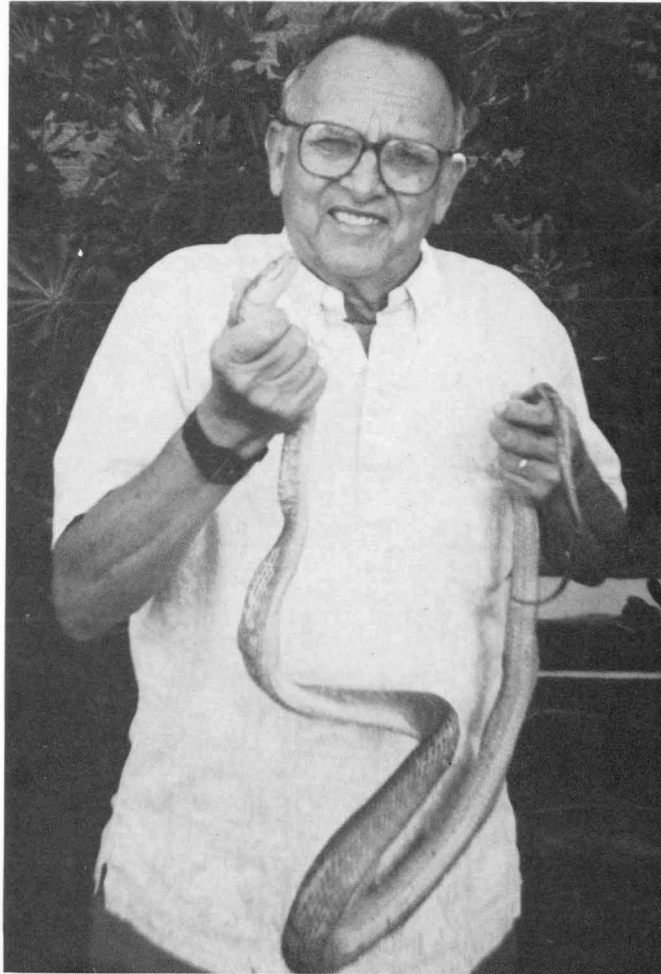
by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

Over the years I've been to a lot of conventions and professional gatherings but, believe me, I've never enjoyed one as much as the just-ended AFA convention in New Orleans. The following blather is a personal view of the thing, which may not have much to do with anyone else's reality.

What do you expect from a convention – people, education, entertainment, food, fun, sights to see, trouble to get into? We had it all, and more besides.

As soon as my room was located, Dale Thompson and I hit the streets looking for a good place for steak and salad. It was early evening and as we walked along I spotted a fellow going alone towards the French Quarter. He just looked like a bird man, you know – that subtle hint of feathers in the hair, evidence of former stains on the shoulder, a nose that resembled a beak, etc. One can tell. We hailed him and got to know Jerry Clark, a very good fellow visiting the convention for just a couple of days. He was on the way to one of the best steak houses in New Orleans and invited us along. With this good omen, the convention began.

There really was something for everyone. For the few who were totally ded-



Paul Breese, the former director of the Honolulu Zoo is an expert on the devastation caused by the Brown Tree Snake on the island of Guam. The snake is likely to spread to Hawaii and possibly even other parts of the U.S.A. The snake practically wiped out Guam's population of native birds.



Mary Perry (book under arm) and Sharon Rosenblatt discuss the convention with the representative from the World Parrot Trust in the display hall.

icated to the business at hand, the convention carried on 24 hours a day. Not always in the formal sense, but in the personal gatherings and individual conversations over coffee, drinks or a light breakfast. Indeed, some of my most enjoyable moments were at Tony's, the little coffee shop across from the hotel (ironically, owned by a fine Vietnamese family formerly of Orange County, California).

At Tony's, over toast and omelets, I heard some of the world's best zoo stories from Paul Breese (outrageous adventures, but his excellent wife Jean assured me Paul wouldn't embellish the truth). Breese is an acknowledged hero in the post WW II zoo-building era. Almost single handedly, he put the Honolulu Zoo on the map and guided it for 20 years. His stories of animal col-

lecting for the zoo are fascinating.

Breese spoke at the convention, though, on a highly unlikely subject for a bird meeting – the Brown Tree Snake. It turned out to be pertinent, however, since the snake ate practically every bird on Guam and is eyeing Hawaii, Texas and the rest of the warm world. Breese's tale of the snakes' devastation of Guam's native wildlife was so graphic, so bizarre and so well researched that when I got home I actually looked under my bed expecting to find a monster snake. (While making my rounds of the Bourbon Street bars I saw plenty of snakes but that always happens when I drink.)

Speaking of Bourbon Street, the festive, carnival-like French Quarter seemed to attract a lot of AFA members. I spotted conventioners of the most sterling character on Bourbon Street, many of them entering virtual dens of iniquity – vice holes of the direst sort (my seat offered a good view of the door) to partake of the infamous "Hurricane" refreshment. "Up to the lips" they toasted, "over the gums – Look out stomach, here it comes" ... a little toast I hadn't heard since the Korean War era.

And a couple of Hurricanes will strip the cultured veneer from the stuffiest among us. You'll never believe which rather refined if ancient several bird ladies were observed in certain bars gleefully stuffing dollar bills into the G-strings of the most macho male dancers. I only know this because some of the bars had the good judgment to put dancing girls in the front and dancing guys in the back. Don't misunderstand me.

Also on Bourbon Street, I was casually weaving along minding my own business when I was surrounded by three or four serious looking individuals who put me up against the wall and began a third degree of the most intense sort. I sobered up instantly. They were visiting the AFA convention and had focused on my accent (which I deny having – in several languages). They queried me about where in Europe had I been during which years. They refused to believe my lies. While being interrogated by one person, one of the others (an obviously Russian woman of implacable determination) would fire a question at me in Russian, then in Spanish and occasionally in German. Such a scare

they gave me. I was finally identified as a Belgian who slipped out of that country under the cover of darkness and migrated thither and yon through Europe, Asia, South America then finally back to the U.S.A. Only the KGB, GRU or Mossad could have done such a thorough job. Once I was undone, my KGB (or whatever) comrades threw their arms around me in a "hail fellow, well met" embrace and left me to regroup my thoughts. I'm totally innocent, folks. I know nothing. But I went instantly to the hotel and put my meager affairs in order. I also tried to hire Mike Shanks as a bodyguard as he was the toughest looking fellow at the convention.

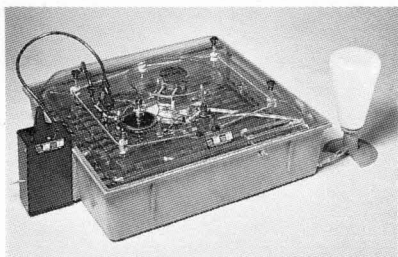
The next morning, having recovered from my shock (but still looking over my shoulder), I rejoined the convention and took in a lot of the talks. You've all seen the list of speakers but you have to be in the audience to get the full impact of their knowledge and entertaining presentations. It is not possible to highlight the talks in this short piece but I've never heard better. There was a very wide range of topics so if you like birds at all, you could find a sub-



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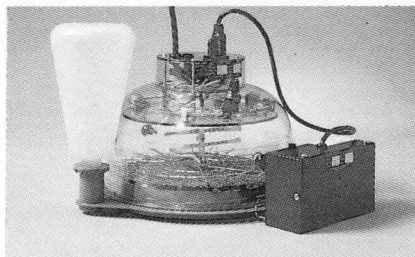
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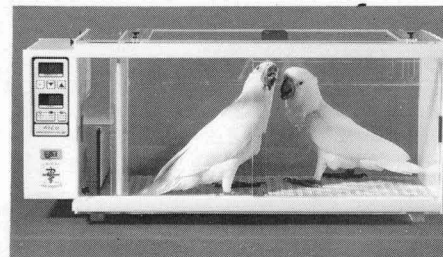
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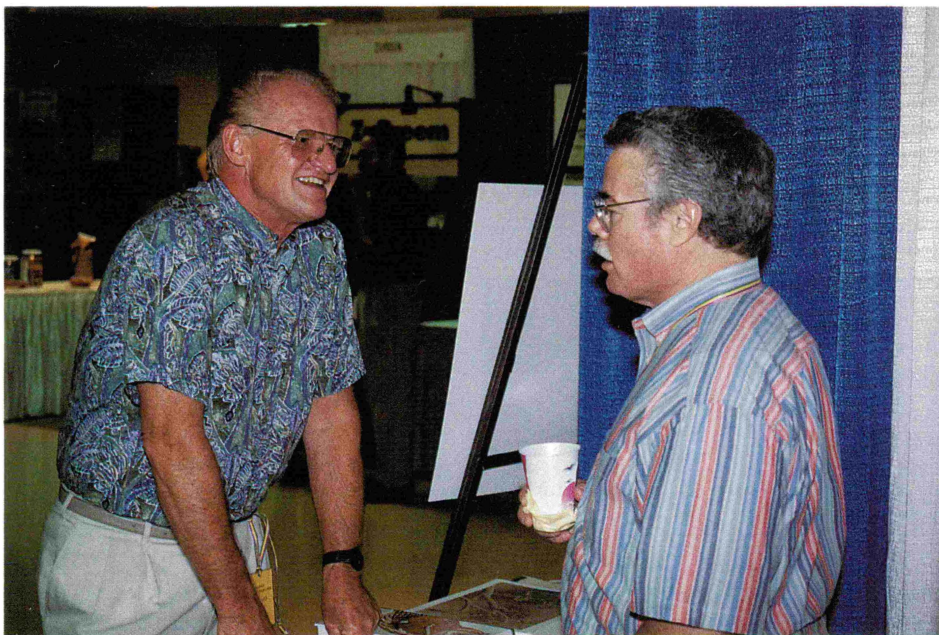
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Dr. Rainer Erhart (left) discusses birds with Dr. John O'Neill. Both were convention speakers.



Convention speaker Paul Breese and his wife visit the AFA booth in the commercial display hall. Jean Hessler talks AFA to them while Marty Muschinske talks to another visitor to the booth.



Is Dingle having fun yet? With Dr. Marie Herzog on his right and Linda Rubin on his left, you bet.



Dr. Branson Ritchie flanked by President Laurella Desborough and CFO Jim Hawley as the AFA presents a check towards his continued research into avian diseases.



President Desborough presents an award to Carol Inderrieden of the AFA's Phoenix office for work above and beyond the call of duty.



Keenan and Joanne Abramson at their Rain-tree Publications booth. Their book, "The Large Macaws", sold out the first day.



Cathy Ford has her arm over the shoulder of Nancy Baar, who made the raffle work so much easier.



The legislative round table. with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife officers went very well. From l. to r. Mark Phillips, Roddy Gabel, Gary Lilienthal and Ken Stansell



Jeff Clark, Sun Seed, Mark Hagen, Hagen (USA), Rebecca Eyre, Kaytee Products and Joe Freed, "Pet"iatric were major supporters of the AFA convention and deserve our support in return.



Aletta Long (front) and Cathy Ford look on while the representative from Animal Environments draws a lucky ticket. There were plenty of prizes and winners.

Photos by Sheldon Dingle

ject dear to your heart.

The liveliest roundtable was refereed (I use the term in the fullest sense) by Gary Lilienthal and featured members of the audience vs. the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, represented very ably by Ken Stansell, Director of the Office of Management Authority, Mark Phillips and Roddy Gabel whom we know from previous meetings. Quite a good show. Better than the last Tyson fight. Several very hard questions were posed to the learned federal officers. And they gave good answers. It is impossible that everyone reach full agreement on the range of issues brought up – indeed, it's probably impossible to find three bird people who agree on *any* given subject – but it was a very good dialogue. The AFA and the USFWS are communicating and I got the impression that each side was actually listening to the other. It's a start.

Something else that impressed me was the number and quality of the display booths in the great hall. There was a great variety of products and services that appeal to birdkeepers. I even ran into Hannis Stoddard in his AVID booth

Big Winners of the National Drawing at the 1995 Convention

Donors	Super Prize	Winners
• AFA/Swancreek Supply	Grumbach Incubator	Eddie Loskot, IL
• Avid	Microchip reader	Kelly Tucker, NM
• Cock "A" Doodle Too	Lesser Sulphur Cockatoo	Julie Tomacari, MI
• Joe Freed's "Pet"iatric Supply Inc.	Nursery/Hospital	Bruce Staska, IA
• Neon Pet Products, Inc.	Cockatoo Cage	Dave Warwick, OK
• Wingers Publishing Inc.	Avian Medical Book	Yvonne Smojo Megee, CA
Special On-site drawing for pairs of birds		
• AFA	Orange-winged Amazons	Linda Smith, TX
• Robert & Sandee Molenda	Parrots	Lorraine Smith, PA
• Danny Gonzales	Softbills (Violaceous euphonia)	Colleen Richardson, MD

displaying his microchip identification system. I hadn't seen Dr. Stoddard since he banished me from his office so many years ago. Not to worry, I've been banished from several other vet offices also and hove out of innumerable public houses – it's me, not Stoddard. It was nice to see him on neutral territory and go over old times. We banished each other from the convention but it didn't work.

The Raintree Publications booth was also fun for me because I enjoy the fine company of Keevan and Joanne Abramson. And their new book, *The Large Macaws*, is the finest ever done on the subject, even if I did do a little work on it myself. The good Dr. Keevan even slipped me some medical advice (he's a gynecologist – I hope he didn't think I'm pregnant) which may be too late to do me any good. Thanks anyway.

And I ran into the esteemed Dr. Brue, the famous Kaytee nutritionist whom I last saw deep in the Mexican wilds scratching ticks. He looked none the worse for wear although I can't say the same for the ticks. The Kaytee people (represented also by the charming no-ticks Rebecca Eyer) have always been supportive of the AFA as have Hagen, represented by Mark Hagen, Sun Seed with Jeff Clark and "Pet"iatric represented by Joe Freed. All of these companies have been good to the AFA, above and beyond the normal, so support them if you can.

There were many other companies with booths in the display hall. We'll feature them now and then with photos and a few words. Remember to patronize those who support the AFA and let them know you belong to the AFA.

There were several field trips or tours outside the hotel. I took the riverboat to some dock somewhere and eventually wound up at the Audubon

Zoo. On the boat, people pointed out a Dr. Herzog, a veterinarian employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Could she be a spy? She was standing alone at the rail so I thought it a good chance to heave her overboard. Alas, she answered all my questions with aplomb and dignity and defused my urge to off her. Indeed, we became good friends and I believe she is a friend of aviculture, too. Over the course of the next few days the learned Dr. Rainer Erhart and I, in our sampling of the Bourbon Street pubs, noticed Herzog and our own Linda Rubin likewise patronizing the pubs and having an all around good time. Once or twice we had to intervene to keep the bootless and unhorsed boors from molesting these innocent young women. Just doing our duty. Erhart made off with them and I got beat up.

Back at the hotel bar each night we had such a good time that no one would leave at closing time. The barkeep (actually, the security man who tried to toss us out) got permission from the boss to keep the joint open until we fell out of our own accord. I really enjoyed these early morning visits particularly when we were joined by the AFA's new Conservation Committee Chairman, the highly respected and very professional wildlife biologist Dr. Benny Gallaway. He and I share the same motto, *Cogito sumere potum alterum* which stood us in good stead during the all night sessions of philosophy. I have the utmost confidence in Dr. Gallaway's leadership and look for continued great things coming out of the Conservation Committee.

The deadline is upon me. The convention was so good and so much fun that I'll continue a few reminiscences in the next *Watchbird*. There will be a few eye-openers for sure. ➤

Deadline Schedule

Nov/Dec '95

Sept. 1 - editorial copy
Sept. 15 - display ADS

Jan/Feb '96

Featuring
SMALL ASIAN HOOKBILLS

Nov. 1 - editorial copy
Nov. 15 - display ADS

Mar/Apr '96

Jan. 1 - editorial copy
Jan. 15 - display ADS

May/June '96

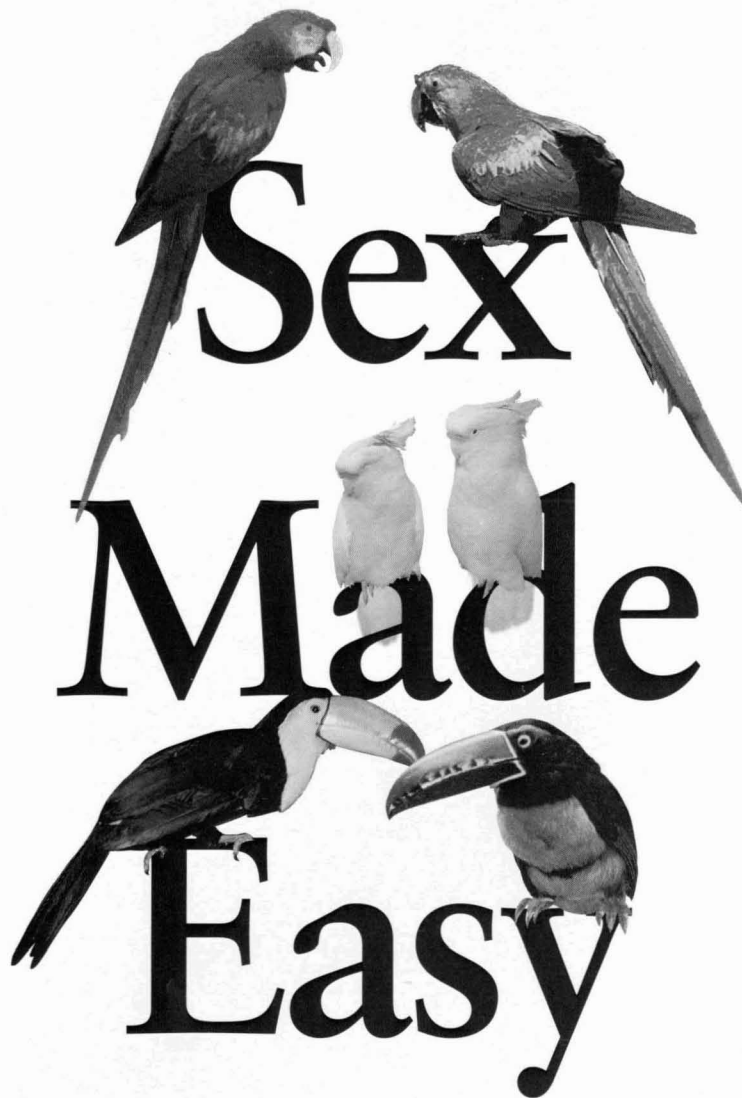
Featuring
ECLECTUS PARROTS
March 1 - editorial copy
March 15 - display ADS

July/Aug '96

May 1 - editorial copy
May 15 - display ADS

Sept/Oct '96

July 1 - editorial copy
July 15 - display ADS



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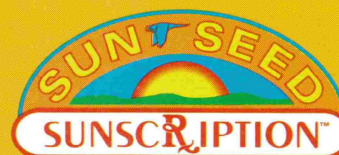
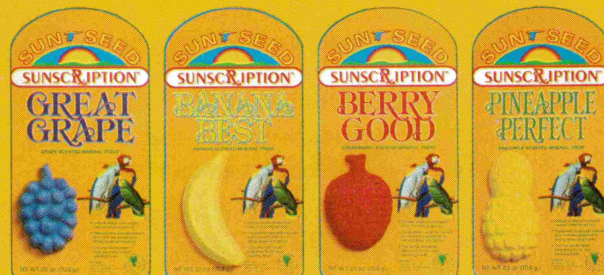
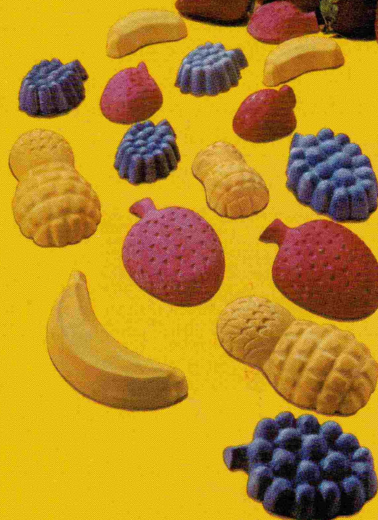
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