

# Editorial

## It Seems to Me...

By Sheldon Dingle  
Los Angeles, CA

I can't tell you all how much I look forward to visiting old friends and new at the upcoming AFA convention. I have a feeling that there will be lots of good cheer and happy-go-lucky fun at this get together. I, for one, am tired of the gloom and doom, cut throat, paranoid attitudes that seem to have dominated aviculture for a long time. Let's be done with that and once again enjoy and take pleasure in one another's company.

On another tack altogether, I recently had another wonderful week in the field with a group of scientists who were studying wild birds. (I'm still scratching the tick bites on my legs.) Although much field research, frankly, fails to impress me, I was well impressed with some of the work being done deep in tropical Mexico with several species of Amazon parrots. There was much more going on than I can explain here but I can touch on one thing that I feel could eventually have practical application in aviculture.

First, to set the scene, eight or nine years ago the Center for Research on Tropical Birds based in Texas arranged for a permanent field station on a



*Dr. S. Blake Hawley, of Kaytee Products, Inc. takes a cloacal swab from a baby Amazon parrot in the wilds of Mexico.*

remote Mexican cattle ranch. The area is sub-tropical, still has a number of relatively wild stands of brush and forest and supports populations of at least three species of Amazon parrots.

This wild place, over the years, has been field headquarters for a number of scientists who have pursued their studies, often to satisfy the requirements for a doctorate in their own specialty.

One of the studies that is mixed and mingled with several others, seemed to me to be of special interest to aviculture. The scientists are sure that the local Amazon parrots that have young in the nest feed their babies only a twice a day – once in the morning and again in the afternoon. If one of the feedings is disturbed or aborted, the parents do not make another attempt to do that feeding. The kids go to bed hungry. The question is why are these babies fat and healthy and have growth rates that approximate those for hand-reared captive babies that are fed every three or four hours around the clock? Good question.

To learn more about this phenomenon, Kaytee Products Inc. (a commercial member of the AFA) has supported this research for several years by providing funds and sending its own scientists into the field periodically to work with the biologists. It was my good fortune to meet Randal N. Brue, Ph.D., and S. Blake Hawley, D.V.M., both

from Kaytee, in the field taking food samples for laboratory analysis directly from the crops of baby Amazons. While the babies were in their hands they also weighed them and took cloacal swabs. My suggestion that they squeeze the babies in the middle to get food and fecal samples at the same time was ignored.

Now it seems to me that this sort of field research is very valuable and may prove beneficial to future aviculture. Of course, perhaps nothing at all will come of this effort. But the effort must be done or we'll never know.

The reason I even mention the field work now is that so few of you seem to realize just how important field research can be. Granted, not every program has a relevance to aviculture. Even I don't really care how much gas wild bovines expel daily and how it affects the ozone layer. Some studies, though, may be of vital importance to current aviculture – sometimes for political reasons, sometimes for knowledge gained that will apply directly to the captive care of our birds, and sometimes for both.

A case in point is the AFA's own field research on the Red-fronted Macaws in Bolivia. It seems to me that this project is important for all the right reasons. It is important to the birds themselves as it should give us a better understanding of their true status and a better awareness of what, if any, management efforts might be helpful. The well being of the species remains uppermost in my mind as a reason for any research in the first place.

An important second reason is the overall health of the AFA itself. If we are perceived as merely another consumer group, we will be stigmatized falsely and put under even more political pressure. Pure and simple transferring birds from the wild to the wire cages is not acceptable, yet that is how many uninformed folks see aviculture – even though that era no longer exists. It is necessary that we engage in scientifically sound conservation practices to keep and enhance our legitimacy in a world ever more conscious of the pressures on the wild creatures of the earth.

The AFA has two very valid efforts underway, the Red Siskin Project and the Red-fronted Macaw project. Both are worthy of funding. Even I, your humble and very poor servant, have responded to Bob Berry's request for funds for these two worthy projects. I coughed up my fifty bucks. Where is yours? ➤

Photos by Sheldon Dingle



*Kaytee's Dr. Randal N. Brue photographs baby Amazons in the wild prior to taking crop samples.*

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