

OPINION/EDITORIAL PAGE

These OP/ED pages contain editorials, opinions and letters that reflect the opinions and viewpoints of the writers. These are personal opinions and do not necessarily reflect the official view of the AFA. The intent is to have an open dialogue on any subject of interest to aviculturists. Letters should be brief and to the point and are subject to editing for length and clarity. Address letters to OP/ED PAGE, PO Box 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079.

It Seems to Me...

by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

I hope you noticed that this issue is focusing more on the birds of Asia. Not all of the Asian birds, of course, there are far too many species to touch in just one issue—or even two.

But because so many of you are interested in parrots, I call your attention to the two articles on the Red and Blue Lory and the two articles on the Orange-breasted Fig Parrot. These are birds rarely if ever seen in the States and I'm sure you caught the fact that both authors are situated in or near Asia.

Pruitt writes on another fig parrot that is rare but at least alive and doing fairly well here in the U.S.A.—the Edwards's (yes, Edwards's with all those s's at the end) Fig Parrot, an extremely beautiful little bird. You'll learn a lot from his writing.

Another article that will turn the light on in your oft bewildered brain is the one by Perry wherein he really shows us how to tell Plum-headed Parakeets from Blossom-headed or Slaty-headed. And he's talking about the females. I know several oldtimers who can't tell the males apart, much less the females. You'll bless Perry's clever old head for sharing his simple, foolproof method with us.

This issue has a good variety of material. You'll love the interview with Mike Fidler. I liked his tales about field work in southeast Asia, partly, I suppose, because I've done a good bit of traveling there and his stories hit home.

The 1996 AFA Convention, to be held in Concord (of which San Francisco is a suburb), will feature an "Asian Birds" theme. The articles in this issue are the first pointers to the con-

vention and an alert, if you will, to the wonders of Asian birds.

Knowing all this beforehand, and being the dedicated, humble editor that I am (nothing is too good for our readers). I deemed it expedient to venture into the wilds of southeast Asia myself in hopes of getting some good photos and articles for *your* enjoyment. (Someone has to do it).

I went first to the Philippines where I have many friends and some family and where one of the world's best bird farms is. Naturally, while I was on Luzon. I took the opportunity to visit Antonio deDios again and enjoy his extraordinary bird farm. The next issue of *Watchbird* will carry a detailed article on the operation, with plenty of photos. The place wobbles the mind.

To see the Philippine Eagle Foundation's captive breeding facilities, I went down to Davao on the island of Mindanao, ducked the ongoing civil war and had a wonderful visit with Dr. Roberto "Bopeep" Puentespina, the veterinarian who watches after the captive eagles, and the Deputy Director for Captive Breeding, Domingo O. Tadena. Wonderful fellows these, and fanatically dedicated to the recovery of the very endangered Philippine Eagle—there are only four known productive nests in the wild. In an upcoming *Watchbird* you'll get some remarkable stories about this operation.

It seemed the right thing to do so I went to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to see the birds and wound up, via a cross country venture, in Singapore. This was a mistake as I was headed for Kuching, Borneo, but I made the best of it and spent an exciting day at

Jurong Bird Park. Believe me, gentle reader, this is a Bird Park of the first order. It deserves three or four days of intense bird watching. It is huge. Many of the birds have no idea they are in enclosures. More on this later. I left Singapore hastily, just ahead of the big guy with the cane.

All in all, I had a very good trip, with just the right amount of diversion, and without getting caught by bolo wielding rebels or Singapore cane masters. The mosquitoes gnawed on me a lot (hungry for American food, I suppose) but I think I avoided malaria this time. The bottom line is that I got a lot of photos and material for Asian bird articles, and all for the benefit of *you*.

It seems to me that, for once, CFO Hawley shouldn't have his usual heart attack when I submit the expenses.

On another subject, I believe you'll find the opinion pages very interesting this issue. We are finally coming to grips with the concept of conservation biology and the field biologists who conduct it. And, I might add, how it may or may not relate to aviculture. I have a very good feeling about this subject as I hold a lot of hope that aviculturists and conservation biologists are about to stop and listen to one another and hold to the common causes. We'll see.

Thanks for being there, and enjoy. ●



Opinions

Dear Editor:

I was pleased to find in the latest issue (November/December 1995) of the *Watchbird* an article on the husbandry of the Laughing Kookaburra. I have been the studbook keeper for this species for five years and it's good to see them getting more attention.

Mr. Sweeney composed a very thorough article on the kookaburra's husbandry, however, I would like to add some comments and observations regarding the species.

Since I began accumulating data for

the studbook in 1991, I have encountered many specimens that have been improperly sexed. On several occasions, this was due to individuals basing a bird's sex on plumage characteristics, specifically, by the amount of blue feathering on the wing and rump. The amount of blue feathering in kookaburras is *highly* variable, and, in my opinion, should never be used to sex this type of bird. It is true that distinct blue feathering on the wings and rump is more typical in males than females. Females, however, can share this trait. I have encountered enough kookaburras to know that I cannot confidently sex these birds based on plumage alone. As Mr. Sweeney mentioned in his article, more accurate methods of sexing, whether it be endoscopic or DNA, are readily available and I would encourage everyone keeping this species to utilize those methods. The price for incorrectly sexing kookaburras is often paid when attempting to introduce birds of the same sex into an enclosure.

Lastly, I would like to remind all individuals or institutions holding kookaburras to place permanent bands on their birds. Individual birds are often very difficult or impossible to tell apart, and identities and pedigrees are easily lost if birds remain unbandaged or are not permanently marked in some way.

The number of private aviculturists keeping kookaburras has increased dramatically since the studbook was initiated in 1990. Responsible private aviculturists can make a difference in helping to maintain viable, healthy bird populations. I would like to welcome and encourage anyone keeping kookaburras to participate in the North American studbook. To participate, please contact Mark S. Meyers, c/o Audubon Park Zoo, P.O. Box 4327, New Orleans, LA 70178. Telephone (504) 861-2537 ext. 370.

Sincerely,
Mark S. Meyers, Assistant Curator of Birds/Laughing Kookaburra Studbook Keeper



Dear Editor:

"Extinction or Domestication?" by Mr. Tom Marshall in the Nov/Dec 1995 issue of the *Watchbird* was very well

thought out and written. He makes many valid points with which I agree.

The statement "parrots cannot imagine being free," however, is limitative and, according to all my research into psittacine free-flight behavior, not exactly true.

Parrots in my care, once given a taste of freedom, know *precisely* what it means.

Even inexperienced fledglings will excitedly note wild birds flying past their view. Older parrots, once given time uncaged or outside in trees, will learn to beg with wings slightly outstretched or even to call, "Eh! Out!" when they want to be freed from confinement.

The supreme patience, in some cases, resignation, in behavior by parrots required to cope with a lifetime behind bars must not be mistaken for a lack of instinctive understanding about what constitutes freedom.

Birds I've kept at total liberty for years will, when forcibly caged, run back and forth behind the bars, scream, or push against the cage door with their body. As the weeks go by, these same birds will calm down and cope with confinement.

But it is incorrect to conclude that they no longer discern what being unconfined means. The longer I study these fascinating creatures, the more I learn not to sell their intellect short. The evidence is there, I assure you.

Most Cordially,
Eh Cravens,
Waiohino, HI



Dear Mr. Thompson:

I am writing to you regarding the article "Conservation and Aviculture" by Rick Jordan. I find this article to be extremely inappropriate for publication in the *Watchbird*. Mr. Jordan appears to be ignorant of the successful conservation of parrot species via habitat protection. His reference to the Wild Bird Conservation Act (WBCA) as "stupid" appears unprofessional for the First Vice-President of the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA). These statements were published as the WBCA is being reviewed in Congress for re-authorization. In my opinion, this article was designed to mislead readers in opposition to the WBCA.

At the same time that AFA representatives testified at a recent Congressional

Hearing stating that the U.S. government should fund biological studies in the field (to conduct sustainable-use research programs), Mr. Jordan appeared to outrageously criticize studies already done on parrot species in native habitats. I feel that Mr. Jordan is misleading the readers of the AFA *Watchbird* magazine by giving inaccurate amounts of work done by several eminent scientists. His viewpoint is not supported by any primary scientific literature. For example, he referred to a study in the Bahamas ("...one isolated island...") as irresponsible and useless. However, as a result of this study, the Bahamas government established a National Park solely to protect this parrot subspecies from extinction. Dr. Rosemary Gnam's work was directly responsible for the establishment of this park.

I will not cite further examples in his article because they are too numerous. However, I will comment on the article as a whole. The recurring theme is an attack on all research on parrots in the wild. Such research, he claims, is wasteful; the *only* way to save species is to breed them in captivity and maintain them in "living museums." This approach appears narrow-minded and gloomy. Is this the philosophical approach to conservation that the AFA endorses? If so, it is sad. Conservation of habitat for parrot species is the most viable alternative for their protection. Without natural habitats, there will be no place for them to survive as a species.

With this article Mr. Jordan is pitting the conservation biologists and aviculturists against each other. While at the end of his statement he claims that conservation and aviculture can work together, I doubt that any conservation field biologist would consider working together with aviculturists such as Mr. Jordan after reading his inflammatory article. I find Mr. Jordan's manner of communication deceitful to your readers. It appears that he is trying to fire them up to support new amendments that would "gut" the WBCA, rendering it ineffective for wild bird conservation. How can the AFA claim a conservation role when you publish articles such as this one?

I, personally, take full responsibility for this letter. It does not necessarily represent the views of any organizations or institutions with which I am affiliated.

Sincerely,
Dr. Patricia Wainwright
Assistant Research Professor
Rutgers University
AFA Member



Dear Dr. Wainwright:

Thank you for your letter expressing your concerns about the article "Conservation and Aviculture:" by Rick Jordan in the September/October 1995 issue of the Watchbird magazine.

Part of the Watchbird's purpose is to serve as a forum for persons interested in birds, thus it often presents differences of opinion and varying interpretations of issues. From an editorial viewpoint, I feel that it is healthy to publish a wide range of views on a number of subjects and let the dialogues elicit interest and perhaps understanding.

The views and opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect my personal feeling nor the official position of the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA). When the AFA does present an official position, it is clearly identified as a position paper.

In keeping with Watchbird's "forum" policy, we will publish your letter (and any other letters of comment on the subject) in an upcoming issue of the magazine unless you specifically request us not to.

Because the dates of your letter and your joining the AFA coincide so perfectly, I can only hope that Mr. Jordan's article encouraged your participation in the AFA. If so, it served at least one good purpose. Welcome aboard and thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,
D.R.T. ed.



Dear Mr. Thompson,

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the letter received from Dr. Patricia Wainwright with regard to the article "Conservation and Aviculture". Her comments about the article seem typical of the those posted on the Internet. Many, if not all, of the participants in the dialogue on the Internet are members of anti-trade groups who have twisted the position

of the American Federation of Aviculture with regard to the WBCA, ESA, and other issues. It appears Dr. Wainwright is no exception as she has interpreted my article as a personal slam on "field biologists" as a whole, and used this opportunity to devalue captive breeding and support the WBCA in its present form, all at the same time.

2. First off I would like to make it perfectly clear that I purposely did not mention any names in my article. The entire theme of the article was based on outside observations of certain "in the wild" conservation efforts and programs that totally ignored the existence or benefits of consultation with organized aviculture. It was not meant to be a personal slam on any of the biologists involved. The article was designed to illustrate the need for avicultural input to these programs, not to ostracize the field biologists who orchestrated them. The exposure and publication of names involved in these programs came from their own community and from Dr. Wainwright.

3. I retract my comments on the "shooting of Spix's Macaws" by

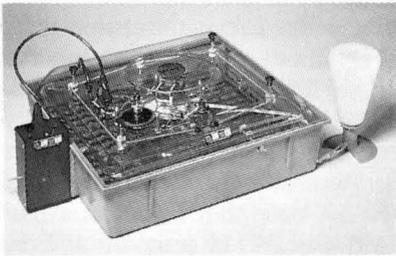
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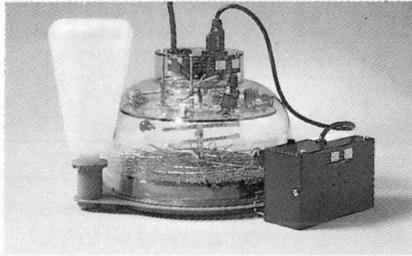
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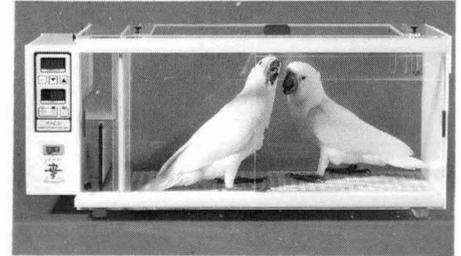
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ornithologists. I was lead to believe that many existed in museums around the world. This is apparently not the case as Natasha Shashockin pointed out in her message on the Internet. Of course, her comments did not go without "ridicule" either, as members of the conservation community "slammed" her for seemingly justifying the "poaching" of birds for the betterment of the species involved. Several commentators said things like, "I sincerely hope that no one is accepting the Spix's Macaw case as an indication of how good aviculture is on endangered species..." and, "Dealing with these people [Spix owners] was the last resort to save the species, so be it. But I definitely wouldn't recommend it as a rule." One comment made by Dr. Orenstein of Canada (obviously not a friend of aviculture) said that I gave credit to the breeders of this bird "without mentioning that these same breeders refused for years to cooperate and only did so when the recovery program was set up with central management and Brazilian government involvement — he fails to mention the existence of the consortium, leaving readers with the impression

that this is the noble work of breeders acting independently."

I will not defend the breeders of this bird for what happened in the past. But on the same note, this is no indication that I "support poaching" as was suggested in other Internet postings by this same group of so called professionals. Obviously, the fact that this bird is no longer in a downward spiral towards extinction is of no consequence to activist anti-trade advocates who only see the "bad" in our work, and not the "good."

As for the Bahaman Amazon Project, my anger at the implication that "the smuggling and poaching for the international pet trade in this species caused its decline" is what lead me to paint such an ugly picture of this project. I have since learned a few good things that came out of the project and would like to point out that the "good never gets the publicity it should." The same holds true in aviculture. I retract my negative comments about the program but would also like to request that the statement that "the international trade in this species has contributed to its decline"

be retracted by the program participants. ***This species is not represented in captivity outside of its country of origin*** and never has been. Can aviculture count on this statement being retracted and publicized as widely as the propaganda about our smuggling and poaching talents have been?

My further comments on this program were aimed at a solution for the biggest problem it faces: predation by feral cats. Building fences around nests and guarding active nests, even in a National Park, is not cost effective or efficient. Consultation with the Government of New Zealand on how they eradicated predators on Maud Island and other Kakapo range islands may have made more sense. Feral cats are not on any CITES Appendix and therefore should be eliminated at all costs.

5. I would also like to say that it is nice to see that some members of the conservation community are getting involved with aviculture even if it is just to keep an eye on us! Welcome aboard. We don't plan to go away and hopefully some valuable exchange of knowledge will now take place and allow all of us to make statements and points that support each other, rather than trying to destroy each other.

Both communities will, at times, irritate each other. It is often difficult to stop and recognize that we all are interested in preserving birds, both in captivity and in the wild. When one group does something that the other feels they could have done better, there will be conflict. Why couldn't there be conversation instead?

In the future, when a conservationist writes with regard to aviculture, please keep the "L" out of aviculturist and we will, in turn, try to keep the "cons" out of conservation.

Sincerely,
Rick Jordan,
Kutztown, PA



Dear Editor:

This letter is in response to the article entitled "Conservation and Aviculture" by Rick Jordan in the Sept/Oct 1995 issue of AFA *Watchbird*.

Let me begin by saying that the article clearly elicits his anger at the "government" for what he perceives to be unsound judgements in mismanage-

Yes, count me as
a member of the

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ment which are leading to the demise of many species. I, too, share his frustration in that. In the past history of government projects, biologists with little or no psittacine experience were put in charge and perhaps were ineffective in attaining the true goal of the survival of the species.

He is absolutely correct in stating that "most regulations that have been promulgated by our government are geared towards the recovery of the species in the wild." He is, however, incorrect in the following sentence "This eliminated the participation efforts of captive breeding in any given conservation program that is funded by the government."

In 1966, the Federal Government passed the Endangered Species Act in view of the fact that many of the world's plant and animal species were disappearing at an alarming rate. The lawmakers realized that there was a need to protect these creatures and their habitats necessary for them to survive. In reference to psittacine species, our government has little or no control over trapping and collection of psittacine species in their countries of origin. The only avenue for our government to pursue is to try to stop importation of these poor creatures and, perhaps, with no demand, stop the supply. I realize that most aviculturists today are concerned with conservation of species in the wild, but to how many famous aviculturists can we attribute the loss of species in the wild to their need to possess the rare or "exotic" species of psittacine? Many. So, many aviculturists in the past played a big part in creating the demand and consequent loss of species in their natural habitat.

I am not implying that all aviculturists should be "punished" for the action of a select few. I am stating that there needs to be some sort of regulations to better control the illegal importation of endangered birds. If a trapper cannot sell a hatchling, he will not go take the hatchling in the first place. I have read countless articles about studies on birds in their native habitat. Usually, the poaching rate is above 75%. This is a crime against nature that needs to be stopped. Do any aviculturists have any ideas on how to stop poaching? If so, the government would surely listen to their ideas.

In reference to the absence of government funded captive breeding pro-

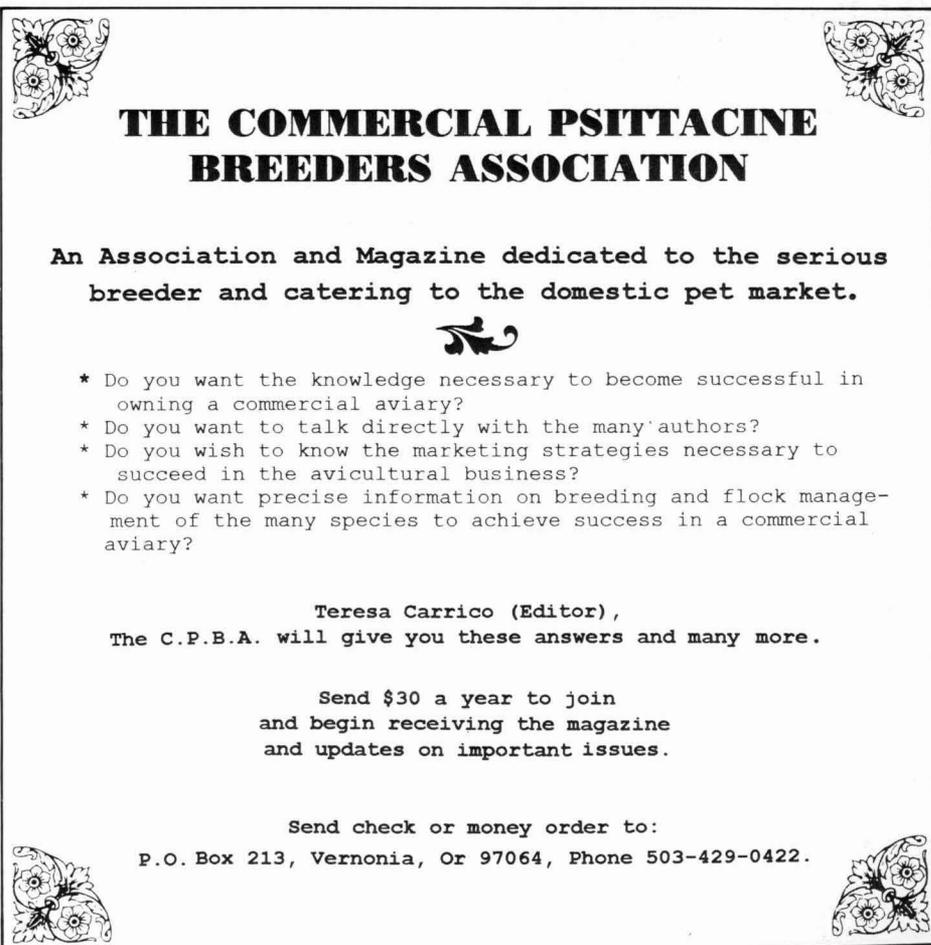


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grams, I will refer to the Northern Caribbean Islands project he alluded to. Obviously he is referring to the Puerto Rican Parrot Project. Yes, I will admit that in the beginning the project was plagued with difficulties as little was known about aviculture as we know it today. Nevertheless, the biologists had the foresight to institute a captive breeding program only two years after the inception of the project in 1968. As the author has stated in the past, Amazons are notoriously difficult to breed. Add to this the fact that the aviary existed in a rainforest with 200 inches of annual rainfall. Also factor in the fact that the initial breeding stock were eggs or hatchlings (almost always taken from nests that were in trouble) which take four to five years to produce. You can see why the program was initially slow-going.

I am proud to report today that the Puerto Rican Parrot numbers well over 125 birds. Over half of them produced in captivity. These are results that the government has not ignored and, therefore, continues to fund. Instead of merely supporting the wildlife management aspect of the program, the captive breeding program has become a full partner in the recovery of the species. In reality, captive breeding has always been a tool of any well balanced wildlife management program responsible for the enhanced survival and recovery of an endangered species.

The aviary operations coordinator works very closely with the field operations coordinator to ensure maximal survival of the birds as well as maximum genetic diversity. Moreover, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the main overseer of this cooperative project, has consulted with many experts in the field of reproductive biology, genetics, aviculture and population dynamics to maximize the effectiveness of the project. With the opening of a new aviary on the other side of the island, managed by the Department of Natural Resources of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, our parrot production has doubled.

I am, and am proud to be, a member of the AFA. As an aviculturist, I have found AFA members to be a supportive, honest, hardworking group of people and a valuable resource for information. I hope to continue working with this group for effective aviculture and equitable legislation. Perhaps

the Puerto Rican Parrot Project can become a model of how aviculture and conservation can work together to save our beloved psittacines.

Sincerely,
Maria Herzog, D.V.M.
Aviary Operations Coordinator
Luquillo Aviary



Dear Editor:

As newly appointed Director of Conservation for the AFA, I feel compelled to comment on the growing rift between conservation biology and aviculture as evidenced above. My comments will be brief and to the point. The take-home message is that all parties need to lay aside real and imagined injustices and differences, and channel their emotional energies more towards protecting and preserving the birds in question rather than themselves or special interest agendas.

The main role that aviculture has to play in the conservation of wild bird populations is to supply the pet trade and breeder markets with domestic-raised exotic birds, thereby eliminating the need for any large-scale and unsustainable level of harvest of exotic birds from the wild. Conservation-oriented aviculturists need to manage the captive populations of exotic birds in the United States and abroad in the most judicious manner possible to maintain genetic diversity and to establish long-term self-sustaining populations. The main role conservation biologists have as it relates to aviculture is to determine the status of wild bird populations, rebuild them to the level where they are less vulnerable and can support some sustainable level of harvest, and to provide insight into the unique biological requirements of the species in the wild that may be of benefit to their maintenance in captivity. Sustainable harvest would give the wild populations value to the local economies, contributing to their conservation as a renewable resource. Further, sustainable harvest would allow aviculturists limited access to new genetic material that might be necessary to maintain captive populations.

Clearly, aviculturists and conserva-

tion biologists have much to gain from one another and should be the closest of allies. For whatever reasons, this is not the case. Since the crafting and re-crafting of the document that has since become the WBCA of 1992, a prevailing atmosphere of distrust and antagonism has evolved between aviculturists and conservation biologists. Ongoing debates about the intent of still emerging regulations associated with the WBCA have also contributed to deep-rooted frustrations. Inflammatory diatribe in the electronic and other media (many of which are opinionated and unconstrained by data or logic) are doing little to solve the problem. Neither aviculture nor conservation biology has much to gain if the present situation continues, in fact there is much to lose. No party ultimately will benefit, **least of all the birds.**

I urge all concerned aviculturists to enact a New Year's Resolution to attempt to better understand the concerns of conservation biology and seek ways that aviculture can contribute to this field. Similarly, I would hope that conservation biologists would encourage participation from aviculture, and seek out and rely upon avicultural resources and knowledge as they design and implement population and management studies in countries of origin. With a foot in both camps, I know that such efforts would lead to mutual respect and productive joint ventures.

In the coming year, the *Watchbird* will publish a series of articles dealing with conservation biology studies—articles ranging from reviews of specific studies, with hindsight evaluation of their successes and failures, to conceptual models of the ideal population management study and how aviculture can best contribute to such studies. We also plan to publish avicultural articles in journals dealing with conservation biology. We all have much to learn from one another and we all have much to contribute to conservation. It is now time to develop understanding and build rapport. We are more likely to solve the problems that lie ahead by working together towards a common cause—the preservation of birds themselves—than we will be if we allow the present situation to continue.

Sincerely,
Benny J. Gallaway, Ph.D.
Director of Conservation



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