

The Time is Now

Changes in Aviculture

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First, before I launch into my comments, I need for you to know that I have the most profound respect for aviculturists. I consider them a community of active, intelligent people who do what they love. Great things are being accomplished in aviculture, from educating school children to preserving species. They are being done by people with unparalleled devotion, people who know more about what they are doing than anyone else does. Aviculturists are truly experts at their jobs.

My observation is that it is time for big changes in aviculture. Aviculture is at a critical juncture. Change is in the air. The right people to make these changes are the aviculturists themselves. No one else cares more. No one else has the power to make it happen. To me, this is the time for our community to set long range goals, and start outlining the steps required to reach them. We need to set high standards for ourselves, for our aviaries and for our industry. We need to help each other to elevate standards.

Take a moment to look at aviculture as an outsider. The condition of many of our facilities could be improved. We need to personally set goals for upgrading our management, making cleanliness, safety and the birds' well-being foremost in our plans. We have some wonderful guidelines to work from through the Model Aviculture Program (MAP). We all have a concept of the ideal facility. Perhaps we can't act on it right away, but we certainly *can* plan to make the next upgrade closer to that ideal, and strive for some worthwhile goals like MAP certification.

Not all aviculturists keep the most rare and exotic birds. I think we need to recognize excellence in aviculture whether a person is a Cockatiel breeder or a breeder of Hawk-headed Parrots. The best aviculturists keep records, mark their birds, keep a clean facility, feed a proper diet, give sales receipts, educate their customers and guarantee their birds. When these are the standards by which we judge each other, we will have made an enormous step towards enhancing the future of aviculture.

What will make our captive bred birds more valuable? There are models out there when you think of it. Look at the American Kennel Club (AKC). It is a national animal breeder's organization which has run effectively for some time. It publishes a magazine, educates its members about legislation and it represents its industry. When a dog is AKC registered it is considered to be more valuable than when it is not registered. That is true for even the most common breeds such as the Golden Retriever. AKC registration implies pure breeding according to certain standards. It isn't a perfect system but it is effective. What do we as aviculturists value? What do we respect that would make certain breeders or certain birds have more value or status? Is it an aviculturist's knowledge, the design of a facility, the band on a bird's leg or the lineage of an individual bird? Whatever it is that we value the most should be promoted and championed. The AFA Exotic Bird Registry is such a tool. The public needs to be made aware of the qualities of a good bird or professional breeder so they know what to look for. We need to proudly state in ads and on business cards "AFA Registered," "MAP Certified," or whatever.

Whether or not we take part in the enhancement of aviculture, we are a part of it. We are in the center of a whirlwind of activity in all aspects of our field. When I talk to bird clubs I tell them that we are walking among giants. The researchers, aviculturists, avian veterinarians and bird supply manufacturers of this time are writing texts, making observations, and creating products which will be the standard for years to come. There are seminars and clubs throughout the country. We can talk one on one to experts. Our avian veterinarians are, for the most part, incredibly dedicated. They are making sure the next generation of veterinarian students interested in birds have classes to attend and appropriate internships. These people are making an enormous impact in their fields.

This is a time of incredible opportunity for the dedicated aviculturist. In most cases we have birds which are one generation removed from the

wild. All of our data and observations are original! This is an incredible time to keep data and observe behavior. Aviculturists keep the birds and know them like no one else does. No one. We need to support professional organizations such as the AFA.

As a pat on the back, I would like to point out the worthwhile programs carried out by bird clubs in this country. Clubs provide educational speakers for their members, publish bird care information monthly, put up aviaries in nursing homes, educate the public, find homes for birds who need adopting, and provide a social setting for bird lovers to get together. They educate new aviculturists about how to breed birds and new bird owners about how to keep them, put on seminars, create species breeding consortiums, work with local or state legislatures, and raise funds for research and conservation projects. Many clubs have a library of books and tapes available for their members. I know of clubs which sponsor scholarships for vet students and others which send their local veterinarians to conventions and buy them up-to-date text books so that their partner in aviculture is the most educated one possible. Some clubs are good at raising funds, others good at putting on fairs or shows. Some help put on cable T.V. programs locally, others rally when a member is ill or in need. There are many aspects about aviculture as it stands which do not need improvement. Maybe some recognition! Bird clubs are doing a great job.

The one thing which always strikes me about aviculturists is their diversity. We are housewives, truck drivers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, maids and office workers brought together by the love of birds. That diversity is positive if we can learn to embrace it. Our diversity means that, as individuals, we are good at many different things. We don't share a common schooling as some other professionals do. We can learn to work together by focusing on our goals rather than being divided by our differences. I encourage you to appreciate each special aviculturist for what he or she does best, and make the best use of those talents in this exciting time.

Lets support each other, value each other, encourage each other...and move forward confidently to an exciting future. ➤