

## **Get Involved in the Avicultural Community**

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Through the combined efforts of many diverse groups of individuals including bird breeders, veterinarians, aviculturists and bird club members we have seen great advancements in the field of aviculture. We can readily see it in the improvement of aviculture over past several years.

In the early 1980's, I began in avian medicine under the tutelage of Dr. T.J. Lafeber. When we would see parrots for physical examinations they would mainly be wild caught, wild parrots. These birds had gone through the USDA quarantine process. We rarely saw hand-raised parrots and if so they were mostly smaller birds, such as cockatiels. Now due to the restrictions upon importation we rarely see newly imported birds. We now see wonderful hand-raised companion birds of many varieties, varieties of which were not being hand-raised in the early 1980's.

Nutritionally since the 1980's we began moving away from strictly seed diets. Better diets and supplements have become available. Home-made concoctions were being used by breeders hand-raising baby birds. Commercial baby bird formulas were not available and quite often were monkey chow or dog food derivatives. Dr. T. J. Lafeber was a pioneer in trying to gain acceptance for commercially available nutritionally complete and balanced diets in the form of pellets for pet birds. Due to the efforts of nutritionists we now have multiple varieties of balanced diets available meeting the varied nutritional needs for a wide range of pet birds. Commercial hand feeding formulas are being manufactured that insure a good nutritional start for baby birds.

Medically speaking, we had somewhat limited diagnostic capabilities and limited treatment protocols in the early 1980's. Many diseases were unrecognized. For example, the cause of PBFDS (Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease Syndrome) was initially believed to be bacterial and termed "folliculitis" (a bacterial infection of the feather follicle). Throughout the 1980's and 1990's we have undergone an information explosion in avian medicine. Research in avian medicine has changed from mainly poultry work to include pet birds. The Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) was formed in early 1980's and became one of the fastest growing professional organizations in the country. The yearly meetings attracted avian veterinarians and aviculturists from around the world. Avian research was stimulated as well as supported by the AAV. Many outstanding textbooks are now available relating to avian medicine. More and more veterinary colleges have developed curriculum pertaining to avian medicine so that graduating veterinarians are more skilled in the treatment of pet birds. The end result is that more

veterinarians are becoming involved in avian medicine and are able to provide better than ever care for pet birds.

With great minds buoyed by proper funding and support, the amount of avian research as well as the quality has increased tremendously. We have better understanding of certain disease processes. We now possess improved diagnostic tests and have the capability to detect diseases that were previously undetectable and a scourge to the avicultural community, such as psittacosis, PBFDS and polyoma virus. Treatments for many avian conditions have improved and are more effective. As mentioned earlier, avian nutritional research has led to better balanced diets such as pellets and baby bird hand-raising formulas. Better breeding techniques have led to the hand-raising of numerous varieties of birds and also responsible for conservation of endangered species. Veterinarians and aviculturists alike have benefited from this work - but most importantly - the quality of the life of the birds themselves have improved in terms of longevity and freedom from disease. The quality of aviculture has improved to levels unimagined years ago and all bird owners have been impacted - from the single bird owner all the way up to the large scale breeder.

So what is the purpose of all my preaching you ask? It is to emphasize that all of us that are involved in aviculture, no matter what degree, should become active in its support. We should provide support and funding of avian research, be it medical, nutritional or husbandry. Become involved in some aspect of aviculture. Active participation in these various venues described below guarantee their continued existence, in this way you, the concerned bird owner, can become more directly involved in aviculture on a larger scale.

### **Bird Clubs**

One of the first steps to be taken is to become a member of a local bird club. You are able to meet fellow bird fanciers and make contacts with people of similar interests. You can enhance your knowledge about your favorite type of birds, pick up tips on breeding, but also learn about other varieties of birds and the experiences that other club members have with their birds. But even more than the social aspects, most bird clubs provide knowledgeable speakers at their meetings (typically monthly), discussing varied aspects of aviculture such as breeding, nutrition, disease conditions, behavior and so forth, that would be of great interest to any bird owner.

Many bird clubs will also put on /sponsor bird fairs that will attract the bird owning public, breeders and vendors of bird products. These fairs can be quite a large undertaking but very rewarding. They provide exposure to many new avian products which will expand your own horizons. Quite often lectures may be part of the bird fair. They also serve as fund raisers. The proceeds from these fairs are sent to an individual engaged in some aspect of aviculture or avian research that the club deems worthy of financial support.

So involvement in a bird club can be very satisfying educationally but also emotionally knowing that the efforts of the club members lead to further support and hence

advancement of aviculture. Check locally to determine which club or clubs are in your area. If you cannot find any, check in popular bird magazines which will periodically list bird clubs or their activities. If there is no club in your area and you would like to start one it is quite an endeavor. It would be a good idea to talk to someone who is currently running a club to provide you with helpful hints and potential pitfalls.

### **Bird Fairs**

If you do not have the time to become involved in a bird club, then at least support their activities such as the bird fairs. Keep your eyes and ears open for announcements of local bird fairs. Your support insures that the clubs can continue to put on the fairs, which will strengthen the club. But even more importantly, your financial support will enable the clubs to continue making donations in the name of avicultural research.

### **National Avicultural Organizations**

If you would like to become involved on a larger scale, more than just locally, you can become a member of a national avicultural association. There are national groups that deal with a particular variety of bird, or groups that are more of a general avicultural emphasis. You can also become involved in wildlife conservation organizations on a nationwide or worldwide scale. These groups have regular publications and usually a yearly convention. Involvement in such an organization would broaden your exposure and contacts, but also larger groups can have a greater impact on aviculture. However, no matter how large the organization, it is the support of the individual members that are their lifeblood.

### **Avian Publications/Magazines**

Great sources of information for bird fanciers are publications, magazines, online magazines, blogs, or online groups dealing with aviculture. Each publication or group seem to have a particular focus, such as general bird keeping, bird breeding, wild birds and current news events relating to aviculture. Support of publications or groups such as these, through subscription or participation, will guarantee their continued existence. They serve as a great source of information for the avicultural community.

### **Avian Conventions**

If you are fortunate, sometime in your area there will be a large-scale avian convention. As mentioned earlier some associations will have a national convention, but quite often they will be more on a regional basis. Sometimes an avicultural meeting may be part of another large-scale meeting. Some of these conventions may be a yearly occurrence moving from city to city, while others may be more intermittent. Getting involved in such seminars and attending the lectures, making contact with the speakers/conference participants, exposure to bird product vendors and the overall conference experience is something not worth missing. Check in your region to see if there are any of these convention/seminar experiences.

Quite often a bird club (or group of bird clubs cooperatively) may sponsor a day-long seminar with nationally renowned bird experts as speakers. Sometimes a club may

sponsor a noted speaker for an evening seminar. The admission fee covers the expenses of the speaker, fees, club costs for the logistics of the seminar and often money to be donated to a worthwhile cause in aviculture, usually pertaining to the speaker.

It is imperative that bird fanciers everywhere participate in these types of programs. Needless to say, a great deal of work is involved, but the benefits make it worthwhile. The knowledge gleaned from such experiences is very useful for people with all levels of experience with birds. Supporting these programs insure their continued successes. As these meetings succeed, more funds will be available to be provided to aviculture research from which we will all benefit.

### **Direct Support of Avian Research**

Having been involved in academia myself as a graduate student and conducting research, I understand the importance of outside funding. It is of critical importance nowadays with our uncertain economic situation and in reduction of state and federal funding for universities. The money targeted for particular avian research projects is needed and appreciated. The money reaps untold benefits for those of us involved in all aspects of aviculture, from veterinarians to breeders, as well as the owner of a single bird.

Support of research can be accomplished in many venues. As mentioned throughout our discussion many bird clubs provide fund raisers for avian research and then club members vote to decide which researchers will receive the money. Participate in conventions which support avian research. If you like you can directly support research that is of special importance or interest to you. Make contact with those engaged in your area of interest and provide them with funding.

Quite often researchers could use specimens of birds that have died from a particular disease that they are researching. Sometimes in a terminal disease condition where the bird is deteriorating a live specimen could be sent to someone engaged in active research so that the ill bird could be studied and the information provided could be used to benefit/save birds in the future.

You can also work with veterinary schools in your state or region. Some bird clubs or individuals donate money for avian research at certain universities engaged in such work. You could ask the veterinary school to develop an avian curriculum or an avian faculty position if one does not already exist. But be ready to provide a powerful argument as to why it should be created. Let the universities know of your interest in funding avian research - it may pique their interest. Certain clubs provide money for scholarships for veterinary students whom have demonstrated interest and aptitude in avian medicine. The funds provided for avian research are well spent because, in the long run, we all benefit.

### **Bird Rescue Organizations**

Bird rescues / bird adoption organizations have become a rapidly growing and significant part of the avicultural community. All too often people do not realize what it takes to maintain a pet bird as a companion, they have a dissatisfying relationship, lose interest, or

due to family circumstances, desire to give up a bird(s). The rescue organizations have provided an excellent alternative for these birds, filling a great need. These organizations are typically not-for-profit, run and maintained by selfless individuals / volunteers, who dedicate themselves to providing care for these unfortunate birds. The good news is that they are very successful at rehabbing these birds and placing them in loving homes. However, not all bird rescues are “created equally” with some being absolutely outstanding, while others may be suspect. There are strict guidelines which need to be followed to be a rescue / shelter and some people proclaim that they are a “shelter” when in fact that is the furthest thing from the truth.

These organizations are always in need of volunteers and financial support. Check out the rescues in your area and align yourself with a reputable one. Helping these birds out as a volunteer, or providing charitable, tax-deductible donations are wonderful ways to become involved in aviculture as well, in addition to being very self-satisfying.

### **Conclusion**

I hope that the preceding discussion has stimulated you to become involved in supporting aviculture in some fashion. As you can see there are many ways to channel your efforts. The key lesson is that with our support the process can continue to grow and develop with the result of better care and longevity for our avian companions. Come on, get involved!