

# THE NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY



November  
December  
1990

GWNOREEN



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 Awards Director..... (203) 649 8220 ....Chris Voronovitch  
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Region 1-Northeast.....(617) 899 8523 ....Roger D'Connell  
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 Region 3-Mid-Central... (217) 774 5265 ....Tom Rood  
 Region 4-Mid-West.....(405) 382 7066 ....Gene Miller  
 Region 5-Mountain.....(719) 275 1787 ....Rita D'Dell  
 Region 6-Pacific Coast.(916) 933 1619 ....Helen Caudle

Presidents' Message:

I am very sorry that this edition (and the next one) are so late. I have had an almost total break-down of my computer and have spent much time (and quite a bit of money) getting it's ailment diagnosed. Although it is still not cured it is at least sitting up and taking information and processing it again. I apologize. And I offer a word of advice. If you buy a computer - NEVER put it on the second floor of your house. When it fouls up, and it will, you only think about how satisfying it would be to throw it through the second floor window. I think we will be "up to speed" again by the first of March. Cross your fingers ! I am (as usual) doing the best I can and I appreciate your patience. As you know I was very pleased to have "caught up" with the Bulletin and this is a BIG disappointment to me too.

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### ARE YOU A BIT TIMID ABOUT WRITING ?

Jon Hoffman, our Second Vice President, and well-known BIRD TALK columnist, has volunteered to help you! In a letter to me Jon wrote, "since some people are shy about writing and aren't comfortable about their ability to write, perhaps they could submit the outline or sketch of what they want to say, and then I can put it into an edited-form of article for them. The procedure might be that a breeder sends me the information or calls me to discuss what they want to say. I then write it up and it goes back to the breeder for approval. The breeder makes notes of any clarifications or requests for changes and sends it back to me. I put it into a final form and send it to the bulletin editor for publication."

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This is a very generous offer and I hope many members who have hesitated to write for the bulletin will be contacting you soon Jon! Thanks. The Editor.

Send your ideas to Jon at:

1226 S. 6th Street  
Louisville, KY 40203

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**NFS PANEL OF JUDGES      1990**

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**CHARLES ANCHOR**  
630 Lake Park Drive  
Addison, IL 60101  
(708) 543-3757

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Bixby, OK 74008  
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Marietta, GA 30062  
(404) 973-1790

**DR. VAL CLEAR**  
1001 Martin Drive  
Anderson, IN 46012  
(317) 642-0795

**EARL COURTS**  
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Lee's Summit, MO 64063  
(816) 524-0921

**CLARENCE CULWELL**  
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Springtown, TX 76082  
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Naples, FL 33962  
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(603) 878-4391  
Panel Chairman

**DAREN DECOTEAU**  
P. O. Box 369  
Groton, MA 01450  
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Louisville, KY 40203  
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**STEPHEN NOPPIN**  
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No. Ft. Meyers, FL 33903  
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**JUANITA MC LAIN**  
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Judge Emeritus

**CONRAD WEINERT**  
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RITA D'BELL  
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PO6 4ET

PAUL S. WILLIAMS  
703 Donegal Drive  
Papillion, NE 68046  
(402) 339-8772

For further information on the NFS Panel of Judges,  
contact Dr. A. E. Decoteau at the above address.

=====  
Please check your address label and keep your membership and your address up to date. Save the Society the work and expense of sending reminders to you. Those who have dual memberships will see that now both names are on the label  
RENEWALS AND ADDRESS CHANGES SHOULD BE MAILED TO:

NFS Membership Services  
Russell Armitage, Jr.  
345 Boston Road, Middletown, Ct 06457

=====  
**AN INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE**

Tom Rood, Vice President for the Mid-Nest Region, is working on an international program with clubs in Europe and elsewhere. The object is to exchange rosettes and/or trophies between NFS and those clubs. Tom has been doing this for several years, on his own, and it's because of his efforts that we've had those nice rosettes at past National Shows. This year, NFS will help him expand his efforts. Tom says he has already received 3 plaques and 2 or 3 medals, including TWO GOLD MEDALS from the German National Club! We'll have more news about this in upcoming issues. To get involved, contact:

Tom Rood  
313 N. Broadway  
Shelbyville, IL 62565  
(217) 774 5265

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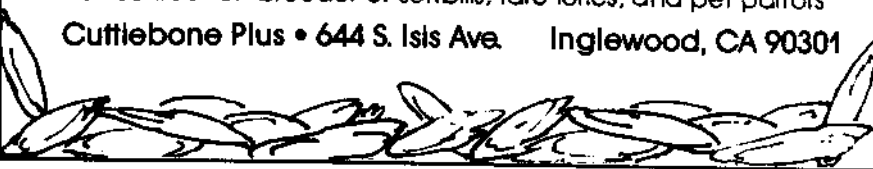
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## TO ALL FINCHSAVE PARTICIPANTS

All of the statistics and correspondence are now (finally) transferred from the previous director to Jeff Brissette. The 1989 year-end report that the previous director did not do will be handled by Jeff. PLEASE HELP JEFF make this program work the way it was intended to work! Please write to, (please don't call), Jeff today and update your status. It doesn't need to be a fancy or lengthy report, just get in touch so he knows you're still there. Thanks.

Jeff Brissette, 34 Liberty Street, Manchester, CT 06040

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A LITHOGRAPH by ERIC PEAKE for NFS

Each signed and numbered by the artist. offered exclusively by  
THE NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY



"In my art work, I have been able to add or subtract areas of development in the avian subjects I choose. Being an artist who loves birds, and having been fortunate to paint the things I love has been a rewarding achievement in itself.

Most of my years as an artist, I have been connected with the parrot family. But from time to time, I paint other birds, Raptors, Cage Birds, etc. When I painted the beautiful "Diamond Firetails" I tried to portray the beauty of this lovely bird, also to show its' character for bird lovers.

It has been my pleasure to have the "Firetails" issued by the National Finch and Softbill Society as a Limited Edition print. Please support the Society by purchasing a print. I will continue to paint one subject a year, if it proves successful."

*Eric Peake (UK)*

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**NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY  
AFFILIATES, DELEGATES AND SHOW DATES**

=====

**ALABAMA**

Central Alabama Avicultural Society; Danny Mall, (205) 491 8603

Bird Club of Greater Birmingham; Judy Johnson, (205) 836 3023

**CALIFORNIA**

Aviary Assn. of Kern Co.; Mal Koontz, (805) 872 1063

Capitol City Bird Society; Melen Caudle, (916) 933 1619

Finch Society of San Diego County; Larry Russell, (619) 274 2095

Fresno Canary and Finch Society; Richard Lujan, (408) 984 1453

Golden Gate Avian Society; Mary Payne, (415) 449 8719

San Diego Bird Show, Inc.; Janice Pritchard, (619) 442 1164

Santa Clara Valley Canary & Exotic Bird Club; Marty Von Raesfeld,  
(408) 985 2712

South Bay Bird Club; Gregory Aden, (213) 379 2418

**COLORADO**

Colorado Cage Bird Association; Martha Wigmore, (719) 574 1594

Rocky Mountain Society of Aviculture; Donald Locke, Jr. (303) 289 5721

**CONNECTICUT**

Connecticut Association for Aviculture; Chris Voronovitch, (203) 649 8220

New England Finch Fanciers; Russell Armitage, Jr., (203) 346 5875

**FLORIDA**

Aviary & Cage Bird Society of South Florida; Len Brover (305) 931 3468

Gold Coast Exotic Bird Club; Cynthia Patton, (407) 659 3880

Greater Brandon Avian Society, Inc.; Andrea Whiting, (813) 888 5935



Jacksonville Cage Bird Assn.: Jerri Meisenfeld (904) 731 7173

Suncoast Avian Society; Joe Ventimiglia, (813) 392 9391

Sunshine State Cage Bird Society; Dale Laird, (407) 657 7989

#### GEORGIA

Georgia Cage Bird Society; Cecil Gunby, (404) 254 1261

#### HAWAII

Honolulu Canary and Finch Club; Cynthia Pregana, (808) 456 3793

#### ILLINOIS

Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club; Jane Muscato, (708) 305 9043

National Institute Red-Orange Canaries; Catherine Wiegale, (219) 922 1146

#### INDIANA

Indiana Bird Fanciers; Dr. Val Clear, (317) 642 0795

#### IOWA

Mid-America Cage Bird Society; Rhoda Shirley, (515) 243 2255

#### KANSAS

Kansas Avicultural Society; Marilyn Galvan, (316) 524 8128

#### LOUISIANA

Capitol Area Avicultural Society; Tim Schexnayre, (504) 562 3579

Gulf South Bird Club; Evon Kruse, (504) 469 2435

#### MARYLAND

Baltimore Bird Fanciers; Deb Clark, (301) 242 8471

Maryland Cage Bird Association; Theresa Brown, (301) 735 7662

#### MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Cockatiel Society; Elizabeth Vaughn, (508) 663 7874

Boston Society for Aviculture; Roger O'Connell, (617) 899 8523

Exotic C. B. Society of New England; Roger O'Connell, (617) 899 8523

Massachusetts Cage Bird Association; Kim Rendigs, (508) 540 2248

## MICHIGAN

Mid-Nichigan Bird Club; Mary Rue, (517) 394 1047

Mid-Nest Cage Bird Club; Bro. Anthony Michael, F.S.D., (616) 245 0049

Motor City Bird Breeders; Patrick Vance, (313) 443 0643

## MISSOURI

Heartland Canary & Finch Club; Earl Courts, (816) 524 0921

Greater Kansas City Avicultural Society; Chris Hunsberger, (816) 461 5582

Missouri Cage Bird Association; Eileen Lambert, (314) 962 8186

## NEBRASKA

Greater Omaha Cage Bird Society; Susan Traylor, (402) 435 7886

## NEVADA

Las Vegas Avicultural Society; Vernon Born, (702) 363 6565

## NEW JERSEY

South Jersey Bird Club; Erika Inkster, (609) 694 2004

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

Birds of a Feather Avicultural Society; Larry DeLorenzo, (508) 927 5494

New Hampshire Avicultural Society; Ken Akey, (603) 880 9804

## NEW YORK

Astoria Bird Club; Douglas Olsen, (212) 865 5841

Fingerlakes Cage Bird Assn.; Oonna McLeod, (315) 834 9362

Rochester Cage Bird Club; Jeanne Murphy, (716) 232 5477

## NORTH CAROLINA

Charlotte Netrolina Cage Bird Society; Nanda McCormick, (704) 825 1972

## OHIO

Cleveland Cage Bird Society; Joseph DeLuca, (216) 225 0517

Golden Crescent Cage Bird Club; Joan Gangle, (216) 666 9773

## OKLAHOMA

Bird Fanciers of Oklahoma; Gene Miller, (405) 382 7066

Oklahoma Cage Bird Society; Laura Bewley, (918) 369 2580

PENNSYLVANIA

Central Pennsylvania Cage Bird Society; Jerry McCawley, (717) 288 0529

Chester County Bird Breeders; Sherry Downing, (215) 935 2868

Delaware Valley Bird Club; Kris Kroner, (215) 628 4143

Greater Pittsburgh Cage Bird Society; Dr. Lindsay Clack (412) 323 7235

Philadelphia Avicultural Society; Rick Szlachta, (215) 635 2097

SOUTH CAROLINA

Palmetto Cage Bird Club; Earl Owens, (803) 855 3193

TENNESSEE

Middle Tennessee Cage Bird Club; Eva Duffey, (615) 361 5949

TEXAS

Capitol City Cage Bird Club; Sarah Goodrich, (817) 491 2535

Fort Worth Bird Club; Clarence Culwell, (817) 523 5568

Texas Bird Breeders and Fanciers Assn; Sarah Goodrich, (817) 491 2535

VIRGINIA

Peninsula Cage Bird Society; Linda Oja, (804) 874 8581

WASHINGTON

Northwest Exotic Bird Society; Nancy White, (206) 523 3602

MISCONSIN

Milwaukee Bird Society, Ltd.; Linda Reynolds, (414) 482 1345

INTERNATIONAL AFFILIATES

Australian Finch Society; England, Martin Mogg.

Budgerigar & Foreign Bird Society of Canada; John Bennett (416) 473 5612

New Zealand Finch Breeders; New Zealand, Valerie Nughes

Zebra Finch Society, England; Chris Blackwell, Durham, England

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## NFS NEWS AND NOTES

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NFS Board of Directors Meeting, November 15 & 16, 1990

Directors present: Geesey, Gunby (late), Hoffman, Decoteau, Armitage, Hoppin, Miller, Parlee, McCawley, Voronovitch, Spartzak. Several members also were present.

Meeting called to order around 9:00 P.M. Letter from Hal Koontz was read for informal discussion at his request. Consensus was to write to Hal, thanking him for his work on FINCHSAVE and for NFS.

Minutes from last board meeting accepted as published in bulletin.

Denise Capazzi sent her report on band sales. 1990 bands have sold well, leaving a profit of \$669.78 after costs. By 11/13/90, NFS sold 19,660 bands filling 235 orders from 195 members. 1991 band color will be green. All '91 bands have been ordered at a cost of \$3,646.09 plus \$79.28 import duty charge. Denise recommends raising price to \$2.25 per string of ten. So moved, motion carried. Moved: response to a returned check for a band order will be a certified letter with a 30-day deadline for payment. After 30 days, band numbers will be invalidated and points director so informed. Motion carried.

Marty van Raesfeld is willing to help directors with correspondence. It was suggested that he could be helpful to Jeff Brissette for FINCHSAVE correspondence.

Russ Armitage submitted treasurer's report, annual financial statement and NFS financial history since inception. A motion was made to keep Russ! Motion carried unanimously, with applause. Membership report: Russ reports 770 members, 69 affiliated clubs, 4 international affiliates. Russ reported that a certain judge who is an officer is delinquent in paying dues. After discussion, the motion was that this person should be sent a certified letter with a 15-day deadline for payment. If payment is not made, after 15 days this person is to be dropped from membership. Motion carried.

Al Decoteau reported that the Diamond Sparrow and Lavender Finch standards are now complete and ready for publication. Bill Parlee and his committee have submitted a proposed standard for the Star Finch. Roddy Gabel's committee has submitted a preliminary report on the Fire Finch standard. There was no report on the Pekin Robin standard committee. It was decided that the next standard should be for another softbill and Hill Mynahs were suggested.

Al reported that we have a complaint against one judge, but that all the specifics are not yet in. He reported a panel of 30 judges with 5 names on the apprentice list. Only one apprentice has actually passed the exam so far. Previously -passed proposal for apprentice program requirements was presented in revised form, in response to suggestions from directors. Acceptance of revised version was moved and carried.

Moved: that the asterisks which indicate judges on our list who also judge in other specialties is to be discontinued. Originally a courtesy to clubs trying to save money, it is seen as demeaning to single-specialty judges and potentially divisive. Motion carried.

As points director, Al reported high-scoring bird as of 11/15/90 is Kris Kroner's Java Rice Bird with 33 points. Moved: that the Bulletin publish an "honor roll" of exhibitors who earn 200 points or more. Motion carried.

Jerry McCawley reports T-shirts and pins selling well in FINCHSHOP. Mew Gouldian pins had not yet arrived. All lithographs paid for have been delivered and the remainder are available for immediate shipment. A few mugs are left. A very few of the popular Gouldian T-shirts have been re-discovered and are for sale. The new water bottle proved popular and sold well in Atlanta.

FINCHSAVE report: Jeff Brissette has received materials from Hal Koontz. Jeff has sorted through the material to try to organize it.

Chris Voronovitch's report, as awards director, indicates that in 1990 we "caught up" on some previously owed awards as well as all that were owed in 1990. Of our 69 affiliated clubs, 7 chose Level 1, providing a "service award" plaque. 19 chose Level 2, providing two plaques. 35 took Level 2 with the rosette/or softbill plaque and 5 clubs decided on the Level 3 with 2 plaques, rosettes and the softbill plaque. These affiliations brought in \$3855.00. Our actual cost - for both 1990 awards and those past due, including postage was \$4508.23 for a deficit of \$653.23. Chris suggested raising affiliation fees to cover expenses. Motion: to raise affiliation fees by \$10. Motion carried. (Note: at general membership meeting, the motion was amended by vote of directors present in response to input from members. Level 1 affiliation fee - for non-show clubs - will NOT be raised.)

Advertising director, Miki Spartzak reports 4 new ads, 2 of which have been paid for. Ads are badly needed to cover the Bulletin costs and it was suggested that we appeal for help to the members in the regions.

Brenda reported that the November/December bulletin is being held up in order to include reports on this Board meeting and other events at the National Cage Bird Show. She pointed out that the Bulletin is costing nearly \$1000 an issue to produce and generates very little income. We need more advertising to help cover the costs.

Jon Hoffman reported that the major portion of the handbook revisions is complete, although we need HELP with the actual typing. What remains is to pull changes from Bulletins more recent than the '88 Handbook. Education: At the membership meeting Jon reported that he has contact with a media expert who will consult on cost-effective educational programs to be made available to clubs and members.

Promotions: Brenda reports that the new Gouldian pins have not arrived as manufacturers promised. Price has gone up, too. Sandee Gregorich submitted a T-shirt design, (Black-crested Finch). We may use a slightly

## News and Notes

changed version of this design in '92 and suggestions were made for changes. Directors prefer a more colorful bird for '91. Brenda will contact her about perhaps working on something else for '91.

Cecil Gunby reported on the Regional Vice Presidents. Stephen Hoppin and Gene Miller held regional meetings and Stephen held a raffle. Tom Rood put out a newsletter and provided rosettes to all of the delegates in his region. They were unanimously commended for their efforts. We have received two requests for regional shows. Moved: to encourage clubs to apply for regional show status; that plaques and rosettes for regionals will be printed with the words "Regional Show"; and that a regional meeting should be held in conjunction with the regional show. Motion carried.

Meeting re-convened the following evening around 9:00 P.M. in the hospitality suite. Directors present: same as above, except for Decoteau. Parlee left early.

Rick Szlachta had sent his committees report on the band size study. The following changes were voted and passed: Blue-capped Cordon Bleu - from B to C; Blue-headed (Blue-faced) Parrot Finch - from C to D; Cutthroat - from C to D; Pintail Nonpareil - from C to D. Society Finch was not changed. Canaries were to be deleted from the list. Owl finch was tabled until we had more information. Moved: to inquire through the Bulletin if softbill breeders would be interested in purchasing larger size bands if they were to be made available. Motion carried, and a list of suggested sizes will be printed up. The directors thank Rick and his committee for their time and interest.

Tom Rood was commended for all of the work he has done for NFS, most recently on the international awards exchange program. The list of exchange awards he brought to the National show was remarkable! Anyone with trophies, plaques or rosettes that can be re-engraved and/or reconditioned should send them to Tom.

New Business: Brenda has received a letter from member Andrea Supler with several suggestions about a roster, promotional material and membership solicitation. The Board expressed its appreciation for Andreas initiative, and Brenda will keep in touch with her. She has expressed a willingness to work on such projects.

It was moved and carried to nominate Brian Binns (England) as NFS judge for the 1991 National.

Ken Gorman, new chair of the AFA's Red Siskin breeding consortium, has written to ask for NFS support. The Board expressed its approval of the program.

The following two resolutions were moved and carried:  
\*RESOLVED: NFS Panel Judges are expected to set an example to other exhibitors when they themselves are exhibiting. Accordingly, a Panel Judge who, as an exhibitor, violates show rules, fails to co-operate with the show committee or exhibits birds in less than humane circumstances (i.e., without

food or water; in a cage that poses a danger to the bird, etc.) will be subject to dismissal from the judges' panel. A complaint in writing or an oral complaint in the presence of the Board of Directors will be sufficient to initiate an investigation of such behavior."

"RESOLVED: The first concern of NFS should be the welfare of our birds. All NFS judges are REQUIRED to disqualify any entries caged in an inhumane manner (i.e., without food or water; in a cage that poses a danger to the bird; etc.) and to explain to the spectators the reasons for the disqualification. The following statement shall be added to our show classifications and communicated to all our affiliated clubs, marked URGENT: "All finch and softbill entries must be supplied by the exhibitors with appropriate food and water. Waterers are NOT to be removed from cages during judging."

It was suggested that judges instruct stewards to watch for food and water when they arrange entries. If the exhibitor provides food and water before the judge begins the preliminary overview, the entries need not be disqualified.

Board meeting adjourned.  
Respectfully submitted,

Jon Hoffman

\* Underlining indicates actions taken by the Board.

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WHY NOT KEEP SOFTBILLS ?

=====

persist in sticking to finches, the peanut butter sandwich makes a great rearing and moulting food.

\* from "The Voyage of the Beagle."

=====

Editor's note: We met Les in Portland this year at the Kaytee GABS. If I remember correctly, he is a Scot and has lived in quite a few places around the world. Jerry went to visit his aviaries and was very interested in some of the construction techniques and materials. Les says in a letter "I have bred some 60 or so species of finches and softbills (35/25), if you need articles, let me know what topics, etc." I hope he'll have time to write more for us as he says he may be going abroad for a year or so. Also he tells me he'll have European Blackbird chicks for sale this summer. He says they breed readily for him. He is interested in buying other softbills too. You can reach him at 7036 N. E. Wygant Street, Portland, OR 97218. (503) 284 3609.

=====

## KEEPING HUMMINGBIRDS

by Ubaldo Leli, M.D.

It was a surprise to me to discover that so few people keep hummingbirds. At the NEFF Symposium last June in Sturbridge, Massachusetts I realized that what I have been doing for the past years is not something really popular. When NFS president Brenda Geesey delivered an informative presentation on softbill keeping, but stated that sunbirds and hummingbirds are difficult to keep and unbreedable, I felt I had to stand up for my hobby. So I accepted her invitation to drop a note to the Bulletin in case somebody else might be interested in these avian jewels.

I am not a hummingbird expert, but I am an experienced bird fancier. Since my childhood in Italy I have hand-raised hundreds of birds of different species, from finches to hawks, from jays to hoopoes. But hummingbirds have always been so fascinating for me that I decided to try them as soon as the occasion came.

About three years ago I contacted various companies that sell softbills but for one reason or another I could never acquire hummingbirds. Recently, however, with the assistance and encouragement of Dr. Val Clear I finally fulfilled this avian dream of mine. (I should mention that I have several other avian dreams, possibly less feasible than this one, for instance keeping large hornbills in the apartment.)

I bought my first pair of Andean Emeralds (*Amazilia franciae*), a species from Peru from Dr. Clear. The birds came in a cardboard container with sides of wire cloth. These birds must have light while traveling because they feed every 10 minutes on the average.

The Andean Emeralds were beautifully shaped, with graceful long beaks, and were not at all nervous. They hummed (as expected) and ate very well. I kept them free-flying in my bird room from the beginning of September until Christmas. When I went to Maine for the holidays, I paid a professional birdkeeper to tend my collection. Both birds died. They escaped from the bird room and could not find the food, so they died. It is strange that it happened with the caretaker, because when I was around they never escaped. However, having learned a hard lesson, I lined the doorway of my bird room with gauze to cover the gaps in the black curtain already there, so that the birds cannot escape any more.

Since then I have kept Oasis hummingbirds (*Rhodopis vesper*) and Sparkling Violet-Ears (*Colibri coruscans*.) The Oasis are beautiful, the male with a long, forked tail and a purple gorget which glitters in proper light. This patch under the throat appears jet black during display. The Sparkling Violet-Ears are large, amazingly beautiful birds. Peacock green with a series of metallic violet streaks under the throat and on the sides of the head. The



violet feathers are raised during aggressive display in a way that reminds me of the Calliope hummingbirds of North America.

Properly housed and treated hummingbirds get tame quickly. They do not let you touch them; but they will hover near your nose, or sit a foot away from you when you change their food. My female Violet-Ear eats from my hands every morning when I replace the feeders. Their husbandry is extremely straightforward. They eat nectar (see below) and fruitflies, if available. The manufacturer of one of the best brands of nectar states that the birds do not need anything else, but aviculturists usually know better.

A positive advantage of hummingbird keeping is that their droppings are totally irrelevant. They sprinkle little droplets of clear water. Once you locate their favorite perch, you can put down some newspaper to catch the mess because it is like sugar water, and in the long run will become sticky. However, I have never had to do it in my bird room, since my regular floor washing routine is sufficient to keep the place immaculate.

The birds can be kept caged, but will not thrive, although in Germany many species have been bred in cages of 3' x 2' x 2'. I prefer to keep my birds free-flying in the bird room with their cage open where they go to sleep. These birds are very territorial. One of them usually takes over the control of the cage and the other will perch elsewhere. My hummingbirds like to visit with the finches.

Very few hummingbird species have been bred in this country, except for some local ones. In Europe, the Sparkling Violet-Ear has been bred in Germany and England. This species seems hardy. It would be exciting if aviculturists could establish these birds in captivity. They are ideal pets for the urban person with a work routine, living in a small apartment. Of course, these birds do not mix well with cats. I have also been told that they can be eaten by Toucans, so don't keep them in the same aviary. However, they have had no problems with my parrots.

During the first week after receiving them it is better to keep them caged, to make sure that they eat properly. They consume about 30-40 ml of nectar each day. They can be kept in small finch cages with only one perch arranged so that they can feed on the wing. Beware of hummingbirds that do not feed on the wing as they are usually sick. After this initial period the birds can be allowed to fly freely in the room. Make sure that they know where the feeders are. I leave the feeders in the cage, then move them slowly to other locations, a couple of feet each day, so that I am sure the birds always know where the food is. It is important that you have some feeling for how your birds think. One of them may be dominant and prevent the other from getting to the feeder. It is a good practice to have at least one feeder per bird, and one of them in a secluded spot.

The best feeders are made of glass, so that they can be sterilized often without problems. Of course they break. I hope somebody will soon invent disposable hummingbird feeders. I have three sets. One is in use, one

## ===== Keeping Hummingbirds =====

is soaking in the disinfectant solution, and the third is drying. I use 1/4 cup of liquid dish detergent diluted in a quart of water, to which I add 1/2 cup of bleach. This solution can be used for several days. I change it twice a week. However, no matter how strong the disinfectant, the inside of the feeders must be brushed before soaking (an old toothbrush works well) because the nectar contains pollen and other goodies that do not dissolve and stick to the walls. Nekton markets a product - Desi-Plus - which is supposed to be the best for disinfecting the feeders and it allows you to change the nectar only once a day instead of twice if you do not rinse it out. I feel strange about not rinsing the containers after sterilization, but it is worth a try. I normally change the nectar twice a day. In the morning - during breakfast, and in the evening - during my pre-dinner cocktail. It takes five minutes and you get used to the routine quickly. If I cannot change it in the evening, I make sure I change it in the morning before the birds wake up. Incidentally, when hummingbirds sleep they go into catalepsy and look dead. They revive if warmed up in the palm of your hand. However it is a great trauma for a bird to be grabbed and awakened in the middle of the night. It should be avoided.

I use commercial nectar, Nekton Nectar Plus. One tablespoon in 1/2 cup of water. The powder does not dissolve completely, but goes into sufficient suspension. Every other day I substitute my own recipe for the nectar. It is given below. I also supply spongecake soaked in nectar. The spongecake contains no fat, and is delicious for humans, if soaked in brandy and served with a liquid custard sauce.

My own nectar: 1 tsp of pollen (I use the health store fresh pollen, but I imagine that any other can be used) ground up with 1 tsp of sugar in a mortar. Add 1 tsp of brewer's yeast and 2 tsp of purified soybean protein. Mix these components well (the yeast may need to be ground, depending on the brand). Add 1 1/2 cup of white sugar and 1/4 tsp of Nekton-S This powder can be stored in the freezer or refrigerator. To prepare it for use dissolve 1 tablespoon in 1/2 cup water. I have used it since I unexpectedly ran out of Nekton Nectar Plus. The birds love it and it is good for them.

I started to use spongecake in addition to nectar because my Honeycreeper needs it and I discovered that the hummingbirds also eat it. I mix 1 egg with an electric beater, after a minute I add 40 grams of sugar followed by 40 grams of flour and 1/2 tsp each of baking powder and vanilla extract. I bake it for about 30 min at 350 F. When it is cool I remove the crust and cut it up into 1/2" x 1/2" x 1" cubes. I store it in the refrigerator in a closed jar, up to 10 days. To serve it, I put a cube in a small finch hook-cup feeder and moisten it with a couple teaspoonfuls of the same nectar served to the hummingbirds.

Hummingbirds like to bathe, so I spray them every other day. Do not

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### Keeping Hummingbirds

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overdo it because if overwet they may be unable to stay airborne. Clear water should always be available. Hummingbirds do sing. One of my Sparkling Violet-Ears sounds a little like the chirping of swallows.

I hope that these few notes have convinced some readers that hummingbirds are not difficult to keep and that more aviculturists will get involved with these incredible creatures.

=====

Editor's note: Ubaldo certainly has made an eloquent stand for his hobby. I think two of the things I said in Sturbridge were that Hummers and the other nectar eaters require an organized and dedicated keeper. It is obvious that Ubaldo is that kind of keeper and his advice should help others to understand how to manage these birds. In his letter he adds that his Salvadori Fig Parrots have hatched a chick but unfortunately lost it and that they have another fertile egg which he plans to take for hand-feeding. I hope we get an update on that soon. He says he likes to write and I should let him know if I need any other notes. You bet I will!

=====

### NOTE: NEW HOME OFFICE ADDRESS IS

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### WANTED !

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PLEASE HELP ! I am In need of plaques, trophies and other awards to exchange with other overseas bird clubs. If you have any unwanted awards of any type lying around collecting dust, please send them to me. (You can even send the dust!) I can clean and refurbish them for use in our Overseas Exchange Project. You can send one or many; we'll take what you have. Your help is needed and appreciated. THANKS ! Please send to:

Tom Rood, 313 N. Broadway, Shelbyville, IL 62565.

P.S. They don't even have to be bird awards as I can get new trophy figures.

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LAVENDER FINCH STANDARD

(Lavender Maxbill)

*Estrilda caeruleascens*

Accepted by the NFS Board of Directors, November, 1990

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| CONFORMATION:     | 45 Points |
| CONDITION:        | 25 Points |
| COLOR & MARKINGS: | 15 points |
| DEPARTMENT:       | 10 points |
| PRESENTATION:     | 5 points  |

CONFORMATION: 45 POINTS

Head, body, legs and feet:

This bird must be approximately 3 to 3 1/2 inches. The head should be gently rounded at the crown and somewhat broader at the jaw, with smooth mandibles that meet evenly at the point. There should be a straight topline with no sharp curves. The line from under the chin past the neck and the chest should be gracefully arched. The Lavender is a deep bodied bird with a full curved abdomen. The legs must be wide set and free of scaling. The straight back should be wider at the shoulder, gradually tapering to the tail. The wings must be carried evenly while blending smoothly into the back.

Wings:

The wing tips must meet at the base of the tail and not cross. The Lavender frequently drops its' wings so that the primary flight feathers form a straight line with the tail. This exposes the crimson rump. This is a typical behavior and should not be faulted unless it is noted as a chronic weakness in the wing carriage.

Tail:

The tail should be 1/4 of the total length of the Lavender. It must be carried to follow the backline. It should not be elevated or droop. It must be compact and full. Fanning of the tail is important.

CONDITION: 25 POINTS

The Lavender must be a bird of immaculate feather. Exhibited specimens must be in top show condition. All feathers, skin, beak, legs and feet must be clean, smooth and lustrous. There must be no pinfeathers nor any missing feathers, toes or toenails.

COLOR AND MARKINGS: 15 POINTS

The Lavender is a bird of soft feather with a pearly white to pearly

red beak ending with a black tip. Legs are reddish brown to black. There must be a sharp black stripe running from the gape of the mouth to just past the

eye. The cheeks, ear coverts, throat and upper breast are a whitish gray. This blends into a delicate bluish gray above the eye stripe, over the back and wing and through the flank. This shades to a sooty gray in the lower flank. There are small white spots on the lower flanks, most readily seen when the Lavender is in motion. The lower back, long tail coverts, rump and tail are a rich, vivid crimson. The Lavender is prone to melanisa; this should be penalized heavily if it occurs.

The Black Tailed Lavender, *E. perreini*, is slightly larger and darker with a darker red over the rump and a black tail. There is a greater velvet look to the finish of the feathers.

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**DEPORTMENT: 15 POINTS**

This waxbill is, and should be, a very active bird. It is bright and inquisitive and quite active in the show cage. On the perch it must have a backline with a 35 degree angle. The legs should be parallel, wide set and strong with the weight of the bird evenly distributed. The bird moves from perch to perch spreading or fanning out the tail as they move giving a bold appearance.

**PRESENTATION: 5 POINTS**

At this time a specific show cage is not required, however an NFS # 1 cage is recommended. Any clean cage suitable to the birds' size may be used. Flat top preferred. Use suitable size perches and position them to go from front to back of the cage, giving the judge a full side view of the bird.

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# Future of Avian Imports in the U.S.

Susan Clubb, DVM  
Jorgen B. Thomsen, MS

The commercial trade in live, wild birds generates much controversy. Ecological, humane, ethical, legal, and economic considerations, often pit animal welfare groups against user groups, the pet industry, and aviculture. Since 1988, World Wildlife Fund has convened the Cooperative Working Group on Bird Trade (CWGBT) to try to bring together the various factions involved in or interested in, the bird trade.

The CWGBT has held eight meetings, participating in a comprehensive analysis of bird import and mortality data as well as federal wildlife regulations. Members each learned of the problems and viewpoints of the other groups, and all members agreed that trade-related mortality represented a waste of natural resources. They further agreed that captive breeding efforts were paramount to the resolution of many of the import problems associated with trade in wild-caught birds.

While disagreement still remains on certain aspects of the trade in wild-caught birds, recommendations were prepared for the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, including their specific agencies that oversee bird imports. Not all recommendations represent the views of the individual participating organizations, but they do represent a compromise toward resolving the disputes.

The CWGBT recognizes that habitat loss and local use, as well as international trade, contribute to the decline of several species in the wild. It was recommended that the U.S. should reduce its reliance on wild caught birds for import and replace those birds with captive-bred birds. Limited importation for zoos, research, or to replenish captive-breeding stock was not opposed.

The recommendations that came out of these meetings were as follows:

...the United States should take prompt legislative action to:

1. Reduce the demand for wild-caught birds by facilitating domestic and international captive breeding of exotic avian species, encourage purchase of captive bred birds... promote avian conservation... educating the public.
2. Institute a new system of federal regulatory controls for live exotic imports that will:
  - a. Provide for import quotas on a gradually declining scale that will reduce and ultimately end within five years, the import of wild-caught birds for sale as pets.
  - b. Continue to allow import of wild-caught birds for approved use in Scientific research, zoological display, education, private and commercial captive breeding to produce captive-bred offspring for aviculture, pet trade and breeding programs specifically designed to prevent the extinction of species or sub-species, pursuant to approval procedures developed in cooperation with affected parties.
  - c. Suspend imports for the pet trade of all wild caught species for which captive bred specimens are or become available in commercial quantities for the pet trade.
  - d. Suspend imports for the pet trade of wild-caught specimens of species whenever it is determined that such trade is contributing to the long-term decline of the wild population.
  - e. Suspend imports of avian species which experience excessive mortality during import process until the cause of such mortality can be identified and mortality can be reduced to acceptable levels.
  - f. Facilitate the expeditious processing of import and export documentation for shipments of captive bred birds.
  - g. Notwithstanding paragraph a., in special circumstances, pursuant to a finding on the Office of Scientific Authority and a permit application process, allow the import for the pet trade of wild-caught specimens of certain common or abundant species when such imports can be demonstrated to benefit the conservation of that species or ecosystem it inhabits.

Additional recommendations were made as regards Federal responsibility for controlling imports, encouraging closer working relationships between agencies, utilizing combined permit application and issuance, form a central, interagency data file between USFWS and APHIS so as to avoid duplication of data, and provide public information terminals to provide access to important information. Recommendations were also made to implement permanent identification markers (implants perhaps) to identify legal birds, and to make confiscated birds available to zoological parks and recognized aviculturists.

Additional recommendations were made regarding quarantine of birds, transport requirements, captive breeding, pre-export mortality, holding, and vaccinations.

Any individual wishing to have a photocopy of the entire report as presented to the Association of Avian Veterinarians, may obtain a copy by sending \$4.00 plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: AAV Client Education Committee, Amy Worell, DVM, 6330 Fallbrook Ave. Woodland Hills, CA 91367

## BIRD RECORDS—WHAT'S THE USE?

by Roddy Gabel

Although record keeping is one of those things that may make our time with our birds seem more like work than play, it is an essential part of aviculture. If we want to treat our bird keeping as a business, we need to keep track of sales and expenses. If we want a viable breeding program, we need to keep track of pedigrees and relationships among our birds. If we want some measure of our success within a given year, accurate breeding records must be kept with information on fecundity (numbers of eggs laid), fertility, and survival of chicks. These same records can be compared between years to see if things are getting better, doing worse, or staying the same. Such comparisons can be helpful in evaluating a breeding program.

The "data base" on even a modest flock of birds can become substantial. Well-organized and accurate records will make information quickly accessible and eliminate guesswork. In addition to assisting individual aviculturists in the management of their flocks, accurate avicultural data will be increasingly important as more and more attempts to regulate and restrict our hobby are made. Collectively, our records documenting successful breeding can be used to demonstrate that aviculture is a producer more than a consumer of birds.

The center pages in this issue of the NFS Bulletin are record forms that I have used over the past several years. Feel free to remove, copy, and use them. You may feel that you need additional types of records (e.g., show results) or that you need to modify the record forms provided to include other information. Better yet, you may already have a record-keeping system of your own that you find quite adequate. Whatever the case, let's all make a commitment to better document the goings-on in our aviaries.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Editor's note: The following pages are printed "across the ditch" (in the words of our printer), as a favor to you to make it easier for you to use them after you have them photocopied. They are a gift to the NFS members from Roddy. His article makes several very important points about the need for, and the value of good record keeping. I hope many, many of you will remove them and use them. Thanks for the gift Roddy.  
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THE NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY  
AFFILIATION AGREEMENT 1991

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- \* SEND THE APPROPRIATE FEE AND THIS FORM TO THE ADDRESS AT THE BOTTOM BY JUNE 30, 1991.

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GUIDE TO ORDERING 1991 NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY CLOSED LEG BANDS

Thanks to the work done by the Band Size Committee we are able to offer an expanded list of suggested sizes for more species of finches and softbills. We're hoping to get more updates from societies overseas in 1991. We also welcome members suggestions for the list.

SIZE TO FIT LEGS OF:

- 
- A Small Waxbills, Owls, Strawberry, Orange-cheeks, Red-ears, Gold-breasted, Quail Finch.
- 
- B Cordon Bleu, Black-cheeked Waxbills, Fire, Cuban Melodious, Olive, Lavenders, Rufous-backed Mannikin and others.
- 
- C Blue Caps, Green Singers, Silverbills, Stars, Shafttails, Cherry, Red-headed Parrot, Painted, Heck's, Pileated, Grey Singers, Pytilias, Bronze-wing and Black and White Mannikin.
- 
- D Zebras, Gouldians, Pictorellas, Yellow-rumps, Chestnut-breasted, Blue-faced Parrot, Pintail Monpareil, most other Parrot finches, most smaller Mannikins and most Twin Spots.
- 
- E Society, Spice, Siskins, Golden Song Sparrows, Diamond Sparrows, Nuns, Peter's Twin Spots and Black Crested Finches.
- 
- G Magpie Mannikins, and other large Mannikins, European Goldfinch and small Tanagers.
- 
- J Pekin Robin, Silver-eared Mesias and other small softbills.
- 
- K Java Rice, Shana Thrush, Saffron and Red-crested Cardinal.
- 
- L Diamond Doves, other small doves, Quail and other softbills.
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| C    | -----        | K    | -----        |
| D    | -----        | L    | -----        |
| E    | -----        |      |              |

See expanded list of sizes recommended for particular species on previous page.

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THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY.

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DIAMOND SPARROW STANDARD

(Diamond Firetail)

*Steganopleura guttata*

*Emblema guttata*

Accepted by the NFS Board of Directors, November 1990

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| CONFORMATION:     | 50 points |
| CONDITION:        | 20 points |
| COLOR & MARKINGS: | 20 points |
| DEPARTMENT:       | 5 points  |
| PRESENTATION:     | 5 points  |

CONFORMATION: 50 points

Head, body, legs and feet.

From the beak to the tip of the tail the Diamond Sparrow should measure between 4.5" and 5". The head should be nicely rounded, blending with the thick neck and back. There should be a slight dip in the nape area between the head and the backline. The straight, conical shaped beak should be red with a silvery cast. Eyes are large with an orbital ring. The Diamond should be a robust and full-bodied bird exhibiting substance. The body should appear thick, muscular and compact. However, a lumped chest is considered a fault. The dorsal line of the back should be a consistently smooth straight line from nape to tip of tail. The ventral line should exhibit slight concaveness in the throat region, then gently curve into a rounded chest. This curvature continues to the under tail coverts. The legs should be parallel and both feet should grasp the perch appropriately.

Wings:

The wings should be held close to the body and meet evenly atop the upper tail coverts. Crossed wings are to be considered a fault.

Tail:

The Diamond has a short, squared tail with gently rounded outer tail feathers. The tail should follow the straight dorsal line of the bird. A tail angling downward or a skytail is considered a fault.

CONDITION: 20 points

While Diamond Sparrows are not difficult to maintain, acquiring excellent condition requires additional work, including frequent bathing. For exhibit, all feathers should be present, clean and shiny. Legs and feet should be clean and free of abnormal growths and scaling. Pin feathers, missing feathers, soiled or frayed feathers, missing toes or toenails are all

condition faults and will count against the bird. Any sign of obvious disease shall be faulted.

COLOR AND MARKINGS: 20 points

Cocks: Beaks should be deep red with a silvery grey cast covering all but the thin rim at the base. Forehead, crown, nape and lower neck are medium dull grey. This fades evenly to a pale silvery grey white on ear coverts, lower cheeks and throat areas. Broad black lores initiate at the base of the beak (centered evenly at the point which maxilla and mandible meet) and extend to posterior eye. Reddish to dark brown eyes are fully surrounded by a ring of pink orbital skin. The back and wing coverts are a dull greyish brown. Primaries and secondaries are a darker greyish brown with narrow, pale fringes on the outer webs. Underwing coverts are whitish. A broad horizontal black band extends across the chest, marks sides of chest and halts at posterior flanks. Bold white spots dot the black sides and flanks, with rump and uppertail coverts a brilliant scarlet red. Tail is jet black. Legs and feet, a dark bluish grey with a silvery cast.

Hens: Similar except more narrow chest band and paler orbital skin.

Mutations:

Fawn: Fawn replaces all grey areas and deeper, darker fawn replaces black areas. Scarlet rump also somewhat dilute.

DEPORTMENT: 5 points

Having been domesticated in cage or aviary for several generations, the Diamond Sparrow should exhibit in a composed manner. Appearing alert, steady and bold, the Diamond should stand up straight and move from perch to perch calmly. Excessive roosting or crouching on the perch to be faulted.

PRESENTATION: 5 points

At this time, a standard show cage is not required. A National Finch and Softbill Society Standard show cage, size # 2 is recommended. However, any clean cage suitable to the size of the bird can be used. Flat top preferred. Perches suitable to the size of the birds feet need to be used. Perches should run from the cage front to rear and be positioned far enough from the sides so as not to injure the tail when the bird moves from perch to perch. Position perches to give the judge a full lateral view of the bird.

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The Bulletin costs about \$1000 an issue to publish and distribute and it is not paying for itself. PLEASE, consider running an ad or ask suppliers that you deal with to consider running an ad. The rates are very reasonable, considering that each issue is seen by about 1600 very interested finch and softbill fanciers. Rates are published on the "Classified ad" pages. Thanks.



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## WHY NOT KEEP SOFTBILLS ?

by Les Gibson

=====

The term "Softbill" is older than you'd think. In 1832, Darwin, when cruising down the Parana River in Paraguay, remarked that the flight of a local Kingfisher was "like that of the soft-billed birds".\* When I first came to Portland, Oregon, I immediately went to a local bird club (there are two) and asked if anybody kept softbills. I have done this in several places around the world, and have usually been led to some old geezer, wheezing from bird-borne aspergillosis, who remembered softbills from his boyhood days. But in Portland nobody at the club had heard the term (like Dave Barry, I am not making this up). In this NFS Bulletin I am preaching to the converted, but there must be some finchkeepers out there who have been swithering, convincing themselves that softbills are difficult. They're not.

For a start, softbills make little mess of their surroundings. Compare this with finches. As soon as their owners go out, finches indulge in a game of "boot-the-millet". This entails kicking millet seed, which rolls best, as far as possible from the cage and in any direction. Variations of this are "blow-the-down" and "rip-the-newspaper". Either way the results are always the same - mess! Of course, parrots are much worse. The average parrot aviary usually looks like a Desert-Shield bomb site.

The two secrets to successful softbill keeping are accommodation and feeding. Outside, planted aviaries are best, with inside planted flights a good substitute. Space and plants are the trick. Small, unfurnished finch-type cages are out.

Many people (especially in zoos) enjoy pottering about with a wide and unnecessary assortment of gourmet softbill foods, (like chopped newborn mice). Feeding can be kept simple for those who do not have the time or inclination. Almost every species I have kept has moulted and thrived on a staple diet of - PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICHES! (I am still not making this up!) Spread peanut butter on one side of a piece of any kind of bread except sourdough, and soft margarine on the other. Chop this up as required for the size of bird, or put it through an old hand-operated mincer. The margarine supplies some elements lacking in the peanut butter (particularly calcium and vitamins A and D.) The only problem with this is that it dries out in hot weather and most birds prefer it soft. Dried surplus makes good mealworm food.

As a back up, a bowl of ground-up dog kibble should be left in the aviary. This is cheap, nutritious and keeps indefinitely if dry, but whereas everything eats the bread, some perseverance and training is needed for the kibble. Nectar-feeders won't eat it at all. And that's it. If you still

Continued on page 13

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# SOFTBILLS, A MIXED COLLECTION

by Kenneth Archer

=====

We took the leap from keeping finches to softbills. As hobbyists with limited space it was a serious step because we read that softbills are aggressive, need lots of space and special diets.

The enclosure which I constructed is 8 feet long, 3 feet deep and 3.5 feet tall. It is divided into a 5 and a 3 foot long compartment. The floor and lower part of the walls are tiled; a pool built into the floor holds approximately 3 gallons of water. The floor is tapered and has a drain. The back and one end is sheetrock covered with a photo mural covered with Mylar. The front and one end is glass and allows for good viewing. The enclosure is lighted with Vitalites. Cleaning is done by hosing the enclosure down.

In the 3 foot area is a Blue-streaked Lory and a Green-naped Lorikeet. The other space is for softbills. Pekin Robins were the first pair, a Cinnamon Rock Bunting was added, a Siberian Tit, a pair of Pagoda Mynahs and finally a pair of Blue-naped Mousebirds. The Siberian Tit died, we assume from age. The rest have gotten along very well together. In July 1990, the Mousebirds expressed an interest in going to nest. After the Pagoda Mynahs ate two of their eggs the Mynahs were removed to a separate cage. The Mousebirds have settled down and now have 3 more white with brownish-red speckled eggs. They take turns sitting. Sometimes they sit side by side but facing opposite directions.

The diet is prepared fresh every morning. Two types of pelletized food are given, fresh fruits and vegetables mealworms and hard-boiled egg, lory nectar is given every other day. Always in the cage are powdered cuttlebone, grit, finch seed and a supplement made of Nutra Care and Quintrex Nestling food "A". The supplement is eaten in good quantities. Treats include occasional releases of crickets.

=====

An additional note says "The Pagoda Mynahs have built a messy nest from newspaper, grasses and eggshell in a cockatiel box." Kenneth's pair are both domestic and parent raised. This should contribute to his success with them. Best of luck and please let us know what happens next! The Editor

=====

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P.S. They don't even have to be bird awards as I can get new trophy figures.

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All articles, anecdotes, artwork,  
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Thanks.

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5. Once three apprenticeships are completed and satisfactory reports are received from the judges involved, the apprentice must submit a request through the Panel Director for final Board approval.
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  - c. All judges must respond to all inquiries and must participate on Standard committees.
  - d. NFS Panel Judges must adhere to all NFS Judges rules and must judge by current NFS Standards.

=====  
**Editor's Note:** This article is reprinted from THE JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AVIAN VETERINARIANS. I subscribe to this fine magazine and I wrote to their editor, Linda Harrisou, requesting permission to reprint from it. In her reply she wrote, "I am pleased that you find them useful and I am happy to extend permission for you to reprint selected articles." I gratefully acknowledge the JAAV as the original source and I hope you will take advantage of the fact that there is a relatively new "subscriber category" and that an application is published on page 20. I have learned a lot from this publication and I am honored to be able to reprint some of it.  
=====

## **BACKYARD MYNAHS: STARLINGS AS PETS**

**by Mark Spreyer**

=====  
According to one estimate, each year 600,00 parrots are packed and delivered around the world. As we all know, many of these birds, which include some endangered species, do not reach their destinations alive. Parrots and other rare exotics are in demand because they are colorful, are capable of mimicry, and, due to their high value, impart high status to their owners. I would like to suggest that colorful, talkative exotics can be had for much less money and at a much lower risk to rare species. I offer an alternative view to the often maligned and rarely appreciated European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Its prying adaptation and mimicry skills make it a success in the wild as well as an entertaining pet.

In my early years as a naturalist, I never heard anything good about starlings. They were held up as an example of the evils wrought by introduced species. It was not until I started work as an ornithologist for the Chicago Academy of Sciences that my attitude towards these birds began to change. I acquired a starling and have had him since June of 1987. His name is Rod ... Rod Starling. My experiences with Red have taught me much about starlings as household pets.

Starlings In The Yard. Starlings rapidly spread across the country after they were introduced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Starling advocates quickly turned into starling critics. Today, starling control efforts are usually futile and can be fatal to non-target species. For example, in Illinois, the use of fenthion, an organophosphate pesticide, against starlings has recently been questioned. Evidence indicated that at least two state endangered species (Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk) were among the raptors found dead from secondary fenthion poisoning. These results resulted from eating starlings and other so-called nuisance birds that had absorbed fenthion from treated perches. I suggest it's time for a different approach. Rather than trying to eliminate starlings, let's start appreciating them.

continued on page 43

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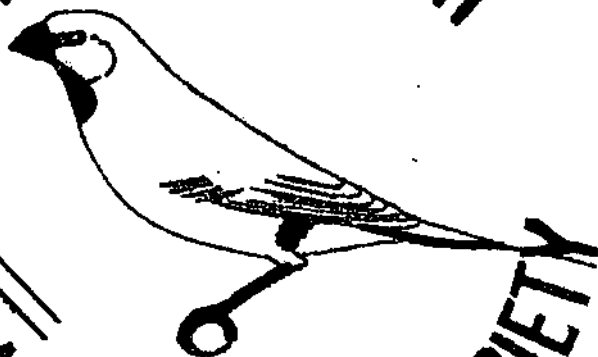
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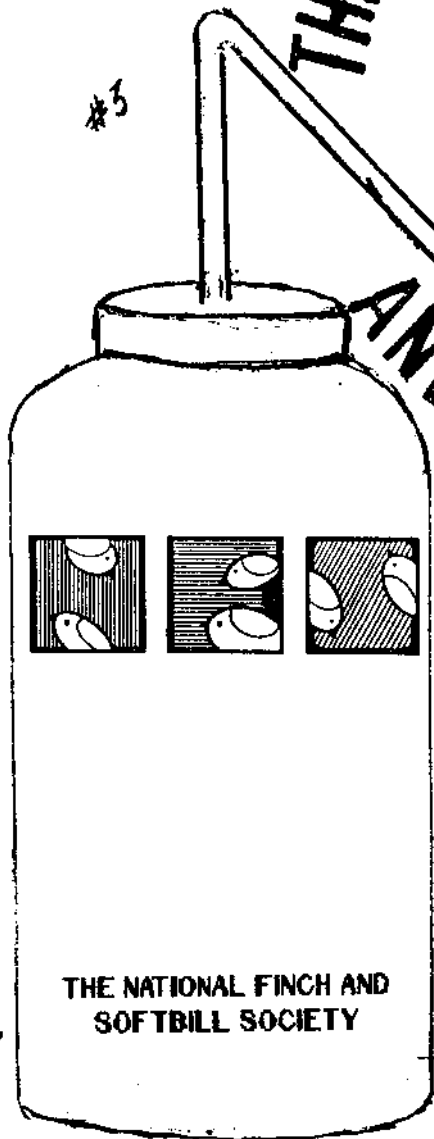




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AND...Bruce, the cut and paste master, got them all on one page! Mooray! The Editor.

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## BACKYARD MYNAHS: STARLINGS

Starlings In The Yard Having starlings in your backyard provides a action. Instead of hopping and pecking like most backyard birds, starlings walk and pry. As they open their beak, they spread apart dry leaves and grass exposing larvae and grubs that no other bird is likely to find because no other bird has this ability.

Anatomical studies reveal that in the bird's skull it is the abductor muscles that close the bill while the protractors are responsible for opening the beak. In most birds the protractors are small and weak, but in the starling they are enormous and powerful. Further, the starling's skull narrows dramatically in advance of the eye. So as the starling opens its beak to pry, its eyes are pulled forward so it can examine the prey it exposes.

Starlings In The House Personal experience has taught me that a starling leaves no stone, pencil, watchband, paper clip or other household item unturned or unpry. With the additional incentive of a mealworm in an old-fashioned matchbox, Rod quickly discovered how to use his beak to slide open the box and obtain the matches within.

If Rod did nothing more than pry his way through the house, he'd make a wonderfully entertaining pet, but he does much more. Starlings can be taught to speak. Rod, though, didn't need formal lessons. He taught himself with the help of the phone and my answering machine. "Hello, this is Mark Spreyer. Beep!" is one of his more frequent remarks. He doesn't do just human voices but also bird calls, neighborhood dogs, mechanical bells and, last but not least, genuine starling calls. His skill at mimicry is easily understood when one recalls that starlings are in the same family as the mynahs. More than once I have dashed out of the shower to answer a phone that turned out to be Rod.

To obtain a starling, one should contact the local nature center or wildlife rehabilitator. Visitors often bring young starlings to these centers in the hopes that they will be raised and released. It is a young starling that you want, as an older bird will not imprint on its owner. Many nature centers do not treat any wildlife but they would probably give you a call if they were aware of your interest in starlings. Since starlings are imports, they are not protected by the migratory bird laws. The folks who work at these centers might have some useful suggestions about cage design or on books to read about raising birds. One source I would suggest is the bird section from The Introduction to Wildlife Rehabilitation, available from the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association.

I keep Rod in a modified McKeevlar-style post-operative cage that was originally built for small raptors. I recommend natural perches that are changed on a regular basis. Proper perches are important, as captive starlings can develop bumblefoot. Remember that starlings will try to pry in any opening so watch for sharp edges. Starlings can adapt to a variety of

enclosures but I would offer two suggestions. First, the larger the space you can afford your starling, the better. Second, orient your cage so that it is partially in the sun. Rod rarely sits still but more than once I have found him prone, wings outstretched, basking in a shaft of sunlight.

Rod does not spend the whole day in his cage. His morning bath is a daily ritual. I open the cage and he flies to the bathroom sink where the bowl slowly fills from the dripping faucet. Rod hops in and proceeds to spray water at least three feet in all directions as he enthusiastically bathes. Afterward he flies to the towel rack where he preens and dries. If you're not willing to surrender your bathroom to a starling, make sure he has a bath-sized water bowl in his cage. All starlings love to bathe. With a little encouragement, Rod returns to his cage where a fresh bowl of food awaits.

I have heard of many possible starling diets. Rod thrives on the diet used by Andrea Kane, a bird rehabilitator who runs the Wild Bird Care of northern Illinois. She has successfully raised and released scores of starlings. Andrea starts young starlings on a mixture of dry cat food and mynah bird pellets that have been soaked and washed into a paste. Once they reach the self-feeding stage, the same combination (approximately 60% pellets and 40% cat food) is provided but it is only moistened and not washed together. Mealworms can be used as rewards or inducements for proper behavior.

The most common problems I have seen with captive starlings are overgrown bills or toenails. These can easily be corrected with common nail clippers and emery boards. Of course, the bird may object to this procedure but it is much easier to work on a thin-billed with well-developed protractors than it is to handle an angry thick-billed psittacine with huge abductors!

If you are still not convinced about the merits of starlings as pets, I'd like to tell one more story. In Austria, on May 27, 1784, a customer dashed into a local pet store. He was stupefied to hear a caged bird whistling the Allegretto theme from Mozart's G Major Concerto. He paid 34 Kreuzer for the bird and named him Vogel-Stahl. Vogel-Stahl soon became a cherished pet. The bird, of course, was a common starling. The customer, however, was not your everyday passer-by. His name...Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

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Another Editor's note. The photos that accompany this article show a bright-eyed Starling with gleaming plumage prying open a matchbox, singing to Mark Spreyer while perching on his hand, and bathing in typical exuberant starling style. From the Summer 1990 issue of JAAV. I wish we could reproduce them. My thanks again to the JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AVIAN VETERINARIANS and to Mark Spreyer. Best wishes to Rod, and all of his tribe.  
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