

Squawk 'n Talk

Volume 10, Issue 4

April 2010

Greetings from the Presidential Perch!

Spring is here! Along with it came the warmer weather and rain, which in turn bring the pretty spring flowers and blossoming trees. And, along with all of this comes the pollen. That's good for the bees and farmers, but not so good for humans who suffer from allergies. Hopefully, everyone is weathering their allergies OK.

I want to thank Georgia Fletcher for loaning us the DVD on the PDD update from the 2000 AFA Convention. It provided us with a better understanding of what PDD is and the hope that a preventative or cure is in the future.

I also wanted to thank Cheryl Rowland for her presentation during the February meeting about our native Missouri Raptors.

Our fair for this year is growing by leaps and bounds. In addition to our national speakers, Jean Pattison and Michelle Karras, we will also have local speakers Lisa Rose with a presentation on clicker training and Dr. David Kersting, DVM, speaking on avian medicine. Their speaking times have not yet been decided upon.

Did I mention that the GPC will be hosting two cockatiel shows (one regional and one regular) and a parrot show? There is also in the works to include a finch show, as well! At the moment, the two cockatiel shows are scheduled for Saturday and the parrot and finch shows are scheduled for Sunday.

We have been getting a lot of responses from vendors. The spaces are going like hotcakes, and the vendor floor could possibly be filled up by our next meeting on the 18th of April.

Be sure to attend to find out more about the Fair. Our Education Program will be a speaker from the St. Louis Zoo.

See you at the meetings! Dave

Tidbits

April Meeting, St. Louis Zoo Curator of Birds – Our guest this month will be Michael Macek. We are looking forward to an interesting presentation about the Zoo’s avian conservation efforts around the world. A quick web search shows a lot of collaboration within the Zoo community. I’m sure Michael will entertain questions about the material and the St. Louis Zoo.

Show Info – Along with the vendor and seminar preparation for the Fair, we are firming up plans for as many as four bird shows. More details to come, but at this point it looks like we may have two Cockatiel shows, a Finch show and an all-Parrot show.

AFA Update – As you may know, Georgia Fletcher is the AFA Coordinator for the State of Missouri. She sent an AFA news update with news about the annual convention, August, in St. Petersburg. You can find the document, for download, here:

http://gatewayparrotclub.org/Affiliates/AFA_InBrief2010April.pdf

Disaster Assistance – We had a request, from the City of Kirkwood, to help with birds in the event of a local disaster. Think about it... See the article later in the newsletter.

Calendar Attachments – If you received this newsletter by email, you probably noticed a new attachment, GPC_April.ics. This is an iCalendar file. It will add an entry to your electronic calendar or datebook. I’m sure it works with Outlook and Notes. Let me know if you have a problem with it, and if so, what calendar program you use.

You can also update your calendar directly from our website, on the front page. The schedule at the bottom of the page contains links to the same files.

Find Us On Facebook

Trey Shaffer



Be a friend/fan? OK, the Club has a facebook page. The topic came up at last month’s meeting. As the Board’s “techie” I set up a basic organizational page. At the

moment, I consider this experimental, so please offer feedback. I guess that will come through the page itself. I must admit, I don't have a personal facebook page and never felt the urge. This is probably a sign of age.

I'd appreciate some guidance. The goal of the Facebook presence, as I see it, should be to expose the Club to some more people and then drive traffic to our website. I don't plan to spend a lot of time updating/expanding the Facebook listing, but will keep current meeting/event information there.

Good Times for Thick-Bills

Georgia Fletcher

Editor's Note: Georgia sent the following post from Surfbirds. Thick-bills have been a St. Louis interest for years, with a large community at the World Bird Sanctuary. The Club has sponsored the Thick-bills with donations over the years, and oddly, a research paper done by a grad student years ago when the birds first arrived at WBS is still a popular download from our website.

http://www.surfbirds.com/sbirdsnews/archives/2010/03/another_success.html

March 31, 2010

Another successful year for the Thick-billed Parrot

American Bird Conservancy's Mexican partner Pronatura Noreste is reporting another successful year for the Thick-billed Parrot nest box program.

The endangered Thick-billed Parrot breeds primarily at three sites in Mexico's western Chihuahua state. Due to harvesting of timber and fires, the large trees that provide nest cavities for the birds have almost disappeared. Many of the remaining tree cavities are damaged with cracks and openings, and others have built up large numbers of parasites from repeated use year after year. Weather conditions and nestling parasitism have seriously reduced fledging success from these remaining natural cavities.

In 2008 and 2009, ABC helped fund Pronatura and the Instituto Técnico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey to erect nest boxes at two of the sites, Madera and Mesa de las Guacamayas, to replace these lost and unusable nest sites. First year success was minimal,

with only three boxes occupied, but experience with nest box programs for other species in Colombia indicated that parrots need time to become accustomed to the boxes and to begin using them. This indeed seems to be the case here too, as in 2009, eight boxes were used by the birds, with 20 eggs laid and 18 young fledged.

“The birds are clearly beginning to use the nest boxes we have provided, and we expect the number of boxes used in 2010 to increase further,” said David Wiedenfeld, ABC’s Assistant Director of International Programs. “The greater availability of nest sites and increased fledging success at those sites should greatly aid in increasing the populations of this endangered parrot.

What Would You Do To Help

Trey Shaffer

Hurricanes, earthquakes, what else? These things are huge and far away. What would/did you do to help? How about something closer to home, say in Kirkwood? The City of Kirkwood contacted Dave, in conjunction with their disaster recovery planning. It was a fairly open-ended question/discussion... What could/would the GPC do to help pet birds, and their people, if there were an emergency requiring relocation of birds.

The GPC Board discussed it at the March meeting and decided to ask you what you think, or more to the point, how you would be willing to help. We are not looking for a solid commitment at this point, but an indication you would probably be willing to do something in the event of an emergency. This certainly seems in line with the Club’s mission, but the Club can only act as the facilitator for individual actions.

This article kicks off the discussion. There is a questionnaire on the website to offer your feedback.

<http://gatewayparrotclub.org/Interact/DisasterQ/DisasterQ.htm>

If you don’t have Internet access, just send your thoughts to the address on the newsletter. You might ask, “Well what do you want me to do?” A good question, but we don’t have a clear-cut request. Initially I can think of a few ways individuals might help.

- Take a bird into your home for the duration of the emergency.

- Provide skilled guidance to an inexperienced helper who would take a bird into their home.
- Work at some central location where birds might be housed, providing routine care, feeding and cleaning.
- Donate materials, like cages, food, toys and money to the care effort.

There may be other scenarios. These are just first thoughts. As human beings, and bird people, I'm sure we would like to help in some way, but there are many things to consider. Obviously taking a bird into your home requires space, and effort, but also poses health issues for your bird/flock. Housing birds in "non-bird" homes eliminates quarantine issues, but would require skilled oversight. If there were a suitable location to centrally house many birds staffing would be the main issue.

So the general question is... What are you willing to do? Please take a minute to complete the questionnaire on the website and be sure to use the comments section to offer additional ideas on how you think we might organize support for an emergency situation.

So You Want to Breed Birds

Jean Pattison

January, 1999, for Bird Breeder Online

Decisions to Make

When first thinking about writing this article, I searched back to my beginning, trying to think of the best things I did when I first started, seriously, to breed birds. Of course most normal people don't set out to breed birds, they have a pet, then another is added, and another. You start thinking, "One more bird wouldn't cost any more to feed, or that much extra work." You wake up one morning and find you are breeding birds...much to your surprise. When I approached my husband about acquiring my third pair of breeding birds, he informed me we needed to talk. Thankfully my husband has more of a practical mind than I do. What we decided was, I could have all the birds "I" could take care of, and that "we" could afford. Due to our other business, my husband's only free time is spent on his motorcycle, and he did not want to be building cages when he could be riding his bike.

So, from the very beginning, we were very honest with each other, and ourselves. I planned everything with the intention of "me" being self sufficient in regard to caring for the birds. More than 15 years later, I know, that is the number one criteria in my situation, for our success. Too many friends/peers in the "business" have inadvertently caused the spouse to become a partner in something they didn't really want to do. The whole "business" of bird breeding is exhausting and stressful enough, without it becoming a stress and resentment in a marriage, too. From the beginning, my husband was very supportive and encouraging, and with time, he has also become very helpful in the maintenance area. But in the end, the birds are my thing, not his.

Specializing in one or two genera or species has tremendous advantages over mixed collections. All caging/housing can be basically the same configuration, which helps to cut down on the work. Food is much the same for all the birds, eliminating making different diets on a daily/weekly basis.

Leaning the traits of the species you are working with can be invaluable. When you learn the norm for the species, such as posture, behaviors, breeding season, breeding habits, and illnesses, you can make better decisions regarding overall breeding and aviary management. There are times when you may see a hen fluffed up, and know she is going to lay, rather than becoming ill, or a male may be standing in a different place when you go to feed, and you know there is a snake in the nest box. You instantly know these things when you know your birds.

Switching partners, to some, may seem like a cruel deed, but there are many times a new mate is exactly what is needed. This is especially true when working with pairs that destroy eggs, abandon nests, and mutilate or kill chicks. This may be even more advantageous with pairs that have not previously displayed this type of behavior, especially when nothing else has changed.

There are many reasons, and just as many arguments, regarding incubating eggs or letting the parents hatch the eggs and feed the chicks for a few weeks. In my case I vowed never to incubate and feed day one chicks. I have a friend in her 60s who cannot stop now because her birds don't know how to incubate and feed. That was my reason. This is a hard decision because early on there will be eggs or chicks that could have been saved.

This decision has to be made by the breeder, and with knowledge of the species.

In my case, I made the right choice, as all my pairs eventually, did sit their eggs and feed their chicks. Some birds, as we have found, will not feed their chicks, and it is necessary to pull and incubate.

Aviary

The aviary should be planned with the overall security of the birds being the number one priority. Birds must feel safe in order for their best breeding potential to be realized. The aviary must be a safeguarded against intrusions from critters disturbing their nests. Mice, rats, snakes, opossums, raccoons, and hawks can destroy a breeding season, not to mention the potential danger to the breeders themselves.

When designing the aviary, depending on the species, you may need to allow for partitions between pairs to ensure privacy. Partitions can be useful tools in breeding. With some species you may need to remove the partitions for part of the year to stimulate a bit of aggression between pairs, which can be conducive to fertility once breeding season commences and the partitions are back in place. Partitions can prove to be the deciding factor when you have a pair that is easily intimidated by the presence of another bird of his own kind. Once again we are addressing the need for security

Many factors come into play when deciding your aviary, depending on which part of the country you live in. If you build indoor aviaries, you must consider that diseases spread more easily inside than outside. Cleanup is more labor intensive inside, and ventilation is very important, as well as is lighting. On the upside, you have control over the weather conditions, and are more protected against theft. Disease from wild birds and predation from some of the larger wild animals that may be indigenous to your area, are eliminated

Outdoor aviaries have disadvantages to consider when in the planning stages. Preventing escape is a priority when designing the cages or aviary, as well as preventing predators from the outside gaining access to your birds. You are much more vulnerable to theft and weather conditions. Of course the advantages make it worth the effort to build outside aviaries. The ultra violet from the sun is a wonderful sanitizer when it comes to bacteria, virus, fungus, and many of the protozoa. The sun also allows natural vitamin D3 to be utilized, without the worry of overdosing. Natural showers have a tendency to make even the "bath haters" enjoy a good drenching, as well as helping in making cage cleaning much easier.

One of the best things you can have as part of your aviary design is a monitoring system with cameras. I have found this to be an invaluable tool in watching how pairs interact with each other, as well as

watching how established pairs interact with their mates. Most units are rather inexpensive, costing about \$300.00 for a monitor, and at least one camera, and sometimes two. Most have sound also, which is a definite advantage. If you can't see all of the cages, you can hear, and sometimes catch birds fighting before it is too late. You can run an extra 30 or more feet of wiring into the aviary and move the camera to any cage for viewing.

Health

I truly believe in and practice, having my veterinarian annually check all my birds.

I have heard many people state, "Why spend the money. When production drops, you have increased infertility, or dead in shell, you know you have a problem then you call in the vet." Preventive medicine is the key here. Once you have any of the above problems, it is too late in your breeding season. If the veterinarian is called in and treatment needs to be done, you may even lose the second half of the season. In addition to illness, there is now disruption amongst the entire aviary due to catching birds and treating them.

Over the years, in discussing disease and breeding with other aviculturists it has been amazing how just a good going over of the birds, and treating for seemingly minor problems has helped many aviculturists realize the breeding potential of their birds. Often times a good breeding pair may start bickering with each other, and we find out one of them has a low-grade infection. This may be a bird's way of saying, "Not tonight honey, I have a headache." This sort of activity is sometimes found when trying to introduce new birds to each other. Often times it is not incompatibility, but rather one of the birds is ill, and is just "not in the mood."

Disease is of course a major concern to anyone breeding birds. It is important to know which diseases are specific to the birds you house or are planning on breeding. There are many birds that can have some diseases and appear perfectly fine, while other birds can drop dead within days from the same disease. It is important to know what birds can harbor a disease, and which birds are susceptible to exposure and sudden death. All new birds should be tested during quarantine, or prior to receiving them, and then rechecked. There are many ways of safeguarding your birds, and your vet is your best ally in this area.

There is also the concern for diseases indigenous to your area. When breeding Old-World species for example, you need to know they are more prone to sarcocystosis (a protozoan carried by opossums) than are New-World birds. If you live in an area that is over

run with opossums, you may want to only breed New-World birds, which has a greater immunity. In a case such as this, you may be able to build your aviary to guard against diseases that are caused from exposure to other animals such as mosquitoes, flies, opossums, roaches, and mice.

Diet is a major factor with all our birds. Again, knowing the species and working with a good avian Board Certified veterinarian are your best tools for the overall health of your breeders and their offspring. There are many variations on the types of diet one can feed, but I truly believe a good pellet should be used as the base of almost any diet one cares to use.

Business

Record keeping is of prime importance. Over a period of years, your records show which pairs are good parents, which are the best producers, which are the most dependable, which produce chicks with the best temperaments or talking ability, and ultimately which may need to be re-paired. Record keeping is also a tool for keeping the birds offspring and bloodlines sorted out.

Know all your zoning requirements before you become a bird breeder. In many instances, as mentioned earlier, you are a bird breeder before you realize it. Know state, city and county requirements before you engage in any type of bird breeding. Very often one picky neighbor can cause you to give up your birds or move to another location.

When investigating ordinances, or zoning, do it twice and keep the names of all the people you talk to, along with any information they may provide. Very often the laws may be subject to varied interpretation. State and local permits or licenses may be required in some areas.

To be successful you need to know your market. If you are raising birds for income purposes you need to know which birds sell and which do not. Once again, records are invaluable for knowing if you are making a profit, or breeding in the red. Know ahead of time if you will be able to sell your birds locally, or have to ship. If you have to ship there are many considerations. You will need to be close to an airport with airlines that handle live animals. It is important to know if your babies will be ready to ship when the weather is right for shipping birds, or if you will have to hold them until weather permits. This can cause a lot of extra work and expense to the breeder. There are some species of birds that may require special permits to ship across state lines. Most airlines require a veterinarian's health certificate before shipping.

There are no days off when you breed birds for a living. If there is ever a marriage or a death in the family and you have to go out of town, and it takes 15 people to replace you for a few days, you know you probably have too many birds. As funny as this may sound, it is very true. Be honest with yourself from the beginning and every time you see that one more pair of birds that you just "gotta have." In the business, bird breeders say "after all is said and done, we make about five cents an hour."

As part of the business, conferences are a must. They more than pay for themselves in the long run. My knowledge is a culmination of the all the books, articles, and magazines I have read, but most of all, it is the knowledge of all the speakers who stood at the podium before me. For this I will always be grateful.

Many speakers, as well as aviculturists, are there to share what they know, and welcome questions and conversations during social hours and between meetings. In sharing knowledge everyone learns.

Whether you are breeding birds for a living or for love, in the end, a lotta love is what it takes. Somehow, it seems, we are drawn and connect with these wondrous creatures, and in doing so, we must learn to listen to them with our hearts, and learn to use our own "gut feelings." Once we learn to accept that, so much can be learned and shared by each of us.

Book Picks of the Month

Christine Kinkade

Here are the library picks for this month. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have a book request, and I will bring the book to the next GPC meeting. A complete listing of books and videos can be found on the GPC website (www.GatewayParrotClub.org).

Parrot Behavior & Training-Part 2 by Barbara Heidenreich

This DVD, "Training Your Parrot for the Veterinary Exam," shows how to train your bird to step up onto new people, enter and exit a carrier, allow restraint in a towel, tactile exam, nail and feather trimming, and more.

Cockatiels, A Complete Introduction by Elaine Radford

Easy to read book with lots of practical advice on keeping cockatiels. Colorful book covers every topic of importance to anyone, especially a beginner interested in keeping cockatiels. Color photos on every page. (128 pages).

Parrots by Petra Deimer

The handy pet owner's manual that answers questions about purchase, care, feeding, illness, and behavior. Color photos. (80 pages).

The Proper Care of Finches by Phillip St. Blazey

This book contains practical, sensible, and usable advice about what to do and what not to do when starting out with finches of any type. It is presented in an easy-to-read style and indexed for reference. Contains over 200 full-color photos, and drawings. (256 pages).

GPC members can check out any of these featured picks at this month's meeting. Please note that some books are quite old and some of the information may be outdated. Please keep this in mind when reading the books.

A complete listing of the GPC library is available on the GPC website www.GatewayParrotClub.org. If you wish to check out any of these, or any of our books, please contact me prior to the next GPC meeting by phone (636) 343-8097, or email at Librarian@GatewayParrotClub.org, and I will bring them to the next meeting.

All books checked out should be returned at the following GPC meeting. If that is not possible, please return the books by mail to Christine Kinkade, 2412 Angela Dr., High Ridge, MO. 63049-2848.

Happy reading! - Christine

Our Mission

The Gateway Parrot Club, Inc. is a not for profit organization established in 1988 to:

Bring people together in a friendly atmosphere in the interest of exchanging information on bird care and breeding.

Create interest in bird care and responsible breeding through monthly educational programs and annual bird fairs.

Reduce neglect, cruelty and abuse of captive birds through education and public outreach.

Educate the public, as well as ourselves, on the ever present danger of extinction in the wild.

2010 Schedule

Here is the year ahead. Mark the dates.

April 18 – Curator of Birds, St. Louis Zoo

May 23 (Fourth Sunday)

June 13 (Second Sunday)

July 18

August – No regular meeting, Bird Fair

September 12 (Second Sunday)

October 17

November 21

December 12 (Second Sunday)