

Join A Bird Club

Got pet birds? Then think about joining a local or national bird club.

By Marshall Liger

Local, national and international bird clubs exist all over the country. Some national associations are dedicated to specific species or families of bird. Other national organizations represent aviculture in a different respect, like legally protecting it and supporting conservation projects. And then some organizations hold seminars each year, too, for the purpose of educating and uniting the bird enthusiast community. Of course, involvement with any of these groups is sure to offer you important experiences, new friendships and loads of fun.

Local Bird Clubs

Thanks to the generous efforts and voluntary support of bird fans, bird clubs exist locally across the country that hold regularly scheduled, organized gatherings of bird enthusiasts. These are great opportunities for bird lovers to congregate, share stories and ideas, learn something new and do their part to support aviculture at the same time.

Meetings: Most area bird clubs meet once a month. A bird club is a fantastic source for new bird owners to seek assistance. Brenda Goldstein, co-founder of the Charleston Bird Club in South Carolina, said she supported the creation of a local club in response to the need for a group where bird enthusiasts, "could congregate, share experiences and ask questions. Being able to attend a bird club meeting and ask these questions of others is perhaps one of the most significant benefits that any club can offer to a new member," said Goldstein. Club members will most certainly welcome you and be anxious to answer questions and share their experiences.

Speakers: Bird clubs often invite speakers who are specialists in their fields, some of which may be world-renowned. The speakers available depend on the club's geographic location and financial stability. Guest speakers may include local aviculturists, veterinarians, zoo personnel, conservationists, behaviorists, etc.

Workshops & Socials: Many bird clubs also hold toy-making workshops, host work meetings to organize for an upcoming fundraiser or hold socials in lieu of a regular meeting.

Newsletter: Most bird clubs publish a newsletter. These are enjoyable bulletins for sharing information with the membership. Members can reveal special recipes they make for their birds, or share a short article about their bird in a club's "Bird of the Month" section. Some clubs also offer classified ads allowing breeders, retailers and members to advertise birds, products or services available. If the club is affiliated with a larger organization, there may be an update regarding that group's accomplishments.

Dues: Money has to come from somewhere, and membership dues do not always provide enough money to support the club and its goals. Consequently, there is always a need for fundraising. The most popular forms of fundraising include hosting bird shows, bird fairs or seminars. Regardless of the fundraiser type, every member needs to contribute to the fundraising efforts because it is your club, and it cannot carry on without money and volunteering efforts.

Community outreach: Community outreach projects are invaluable in spreading the word about responsible bird-keeping and should be a part of every club's mission. Many clubs have created educational programs that they offer to various groups such as boy/girl scouts, pet festivals, or local schools.

Clubs might host an educational booth at pet festivals or bird fairs. Club members can create flyers for distribution at such events, or offer a membership application to someone that approaches and thinks they may want a bird.

Children are always intrigued, too. I visit school classrooms regularly and it is amazing how many fantastic questions these children ask and how much they retain, remembering facts that were shared with them one or two years prior. Children should be taught that it is OK and healthy to have animals as pets. They must also be taught how to do so responsibly, because they are the next generation of experts and professionals.

Nursing homes frequently invite "therapy" animals to visit with the residents. The most important thing to consider with this is that the bird must be trustworthy and tolerant. It is most rewarding to see a person who may not be able to speak or feed himself get that special gleam in his eye when you help him pet a bird. It is truly heartwarming for the patient and

you.

National Bird Clubs

There are national bird clubs, including broad-spectrum educational organizations and specialty groups. These organizations are important sources of educational materials, and they provide super networking opportunities. Most importantly, national avicultural organizations can be the most powerful source of representation in matters such as legislative issues and protection against such.

Laurella Desborough, former president and current legislative vice-president for the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA), offers the following reasons why bird fanciers should support appropriate national avicultural organizations:

They are a source of reliable general information in the form of newsletter bulletins, magazines, courses, seminars and conferences.

They provide ongoing projects to assist bird breeders with management of gene pools so that avian species do not become extinct in captivity.

They assist in monitoring proposed state and federal legislation and inform bird owners about the legislation so that they can take action to protect their interest in keeping their birds.

They monitor international treaties so appropriate action can be taken to protect U.S. citizens' bird rights.

Specialty organizations can provide important contacts and information for those with particular interests. Desborough believes these organizations "Provide resources in the way of long-term breeders specializing in specific species who have developed a body of knowledge based on real experiences with the species and who are willing to share that knowledge."

Just because an organization is national doesn't mean that it is intangible or will be difficult for an individual to be an active part. Most of these groups are run by volunteers. Because a lot of work is accomplished by committees that work together on projects, often electronically, dedicated members can be utilized no matter where one lives.

Regardless of experience, every member has something valuable to contribute. And if you do not have time to volunteer, supporting the group with your membership is of equal worth. These are fantastic opportunities to meet other bird people, too. The affiliation dues are well worth the money, considering the quality of the newsletters or full-publication magazines, plus the potential for online communication groups set up for members.

Bird Seminars & Symposiums

Bird-specific seminars, symposiums and conferences are held around the world every year, and the U.S. is home to many of them. Some seminars may be hosted by local or regional clubs, while others may be hosted by a larger organization. Seminars offer a multitude of presentations by a collection of experts. The topics are vast, so there is always something for everyone. The speakers can certainly be expected to have an immense knowledge base. They are also happy to answer questions and can generally be found mixed amongst the crowd when not behind the podium. Proceedings should also be available, so you will have an article from every speaker to take home.

There is more to these events than formal presentations. Many have a vendor hall packed full of booths representing various groups or businesses. At the national conventions, one can expect to find many entities represented, including national manufacturers displaying their latest bird products, specialty groups and clubs promoting their goals, and conservation-type organizations. Raffles and door prizes are popular amongst the attendees.

The social aspects of seminars are exciting also. These events are social havens, and there is not much time to sleep considering the enormous amount of time everyone spends together congregating in the lobbies, restaurants, bars or anywhere else they can find.

Just because everyone returns back to their homes at the convention's end doesn't mean that communications cannot continue. Exchange e-mail addresses and phone numbers to ensure that the new relationships last.