

## Paradise In The Backyard

### Paradise found in this great backyard

*By Dick Schroeder*

Huge scrub oaks trees mingle with palms and eucalyptus in most yards. It's in this neighborhood that we find the lovely, traditional home of Robert and Brenda Young.

The driveway is secured by a black wrought-iron gate, which opens into a wide parking area with garage access. At the southern edge of the parking area looms what most visitors would assume is a tall greenhouse. And a greenhouse it is: papayas and figs grow on the tall trees, coffee trees and sinewy vines abound. Various palms and bromeliads add to the lush landscape. The ground is covered in the same bark that orchids are planted in. With the temperature in the mid-80s and high humidity, I felt as if I was in a genuine rain forest.

One day a week it does become a rain forest; Robert turns on the rain system, and leaves are washed and plants nourished. The temperature is controlled by both heating and cooling systems that cool in summer and heat in winter to keep not only the foliage happy, but also the avian inhabitants.

#### Birds, Birds Everywhere

Everywhere I look there are birds. Several Euphonias perch at the top of a fig tree. Tanagers of every description abound, including a pair of the most beautiful paradise tanagers. There are reedlings, high up in the canopy with their offspring, white-cheeked bulbuls flitting among the leaves, and the well-camouflaged lesser-green broadbill sits quietly on a branch.

On one of the lower food stations, a lovely rosy Burke's parakeet makes a nice contrast to the red of the orchid bark. Crickets and waxworms scurry for cover as hungry beaks seek them out. Several food stations hold fruit and nectar bowls. Others offer insects or eggfood. A few have seeds.

Near most feed stations there are two chairs. Robert and Brenda use this as an extension of their house, a quiet place to drink the morning coffee or sip an afternoon wine. It's a place where you could sit for an hour and still not see all the inhabitants. Due to the perfect climate, there are pairs nesting nearly all year long.

The aviary truly is a family affair. Brenda's daughter, Sam, prepares the food each day and enjoys the birds as well. She is always seeking new birds to pair with existing singles or a new species to add another splash of color. The large property includes many rare and wonderful trees and shrubs, and Robert enjoys his plants as much as the birds do. One palm is so rare that there are very few in the United States outside of Hawaii and certainly none on the mainland are planted outside of a greenhouse. I suspect the Youngs spend as much time in the aviary as they do at their beautiful pool.

Looking to someday retire from his endodontics practice, Robert has perhaps discovered a second vocation — he is raising waxworms by the thousands, no, tens of thousands. Where some of the neighbors might have a wine cellar, the Youngs have a worm cellar. A temperature-controlled environment where fat little grubs grow into bird food and fishing bait.

How did this passion for birds emerge? It all started with a one conure, a gift to Sam from Robert. Now they have moved quickly into some of the more difficult species to keep, let alone breed. Brenda is already eyeing other parts of the property for a new aviary, one for a mixture of larger softbills this time. She prefers the birds in a mixed environment rather than a single pair to a flight. That is my favorite way to enjoy them as well, interacting with each other.

I'm looking forward to a return visit, perhaps to see the new aviaries or maybe to share a glass of wine with the Youngs in the existing tropical rain forest.