

The American Federation of Aviculture

The AFA talks about its origins, promoting pet birds, conservation and more.

By the BIRD TALK Magazine

The 36-year-old AFA provides several resources to the avian community.

BIRD TALK sat down with Linda S. Rubin, the American Federation of Aviculture's Public Relations Chair, to ask her about the AFA and its role in the avian community.

1) What is the AFA?

The American Federation of Aviculture Inc. (AFA), a non-profit 501(c)3 educational organization, was established in 1974 to represent all aspects of aviculture and to educate the public about keeping and breeding birds in captivity. Worldwide members include bird breeders, pet bird owners, avian veterinarians, pet/bird store owners, bird product manufacturers, conservationists, and others interested in aviculture's future. AFA also comprises affiliated bird clubs and organizations representing thousands of aviculturists and their specialty interests.

Its mission is to promote better husbandry, management and living conditions for exotic birds; bolster avian research and conservation of affect aviculture and aviculturists, and keep legislators aware of the need for fair and equitable regulations. The AFA supports its members' rights to acquire, keep, breed and sell birds in a responsible manner.

AFA's primarily aims to educate pet owners, hobbyists, avicultural societies, zoos, veterinarians, research institutions, the pet industry and government officials. In addition, AFA is concerned about the welfare and humane care of all birds and promotes the establishment of high standards of avian care both in the United States and abroad. AFA's long-term goal is to help ensure future self-sustaining populations of exotic birds both in captivity and in the wild.

2) How did the AFA start?

During an outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease in California in the early 1970s, thousands of healthy exotic birds in private collections were euthanized by the USDA if even one bird in the collection was suspected of being exposed to the disease. Consequently, the State of California proposed legislation that would narrowly restrict or ban the ownership of exotic birds. This brought together many Southern California bird owners and clubs to form the AFA.

AFA continued promoting aviculture and the conservation of avian wildlife through the encouragement of captive breeding programs, scientific research and the education of the general public. To promote the interests of aviculture, AFA works to educate legislators across the United States and represents the avicultural community at international CITES meetings.

3) What challenges is the AFA facing in the changing bird community?

AFA defines anyone keeping exotic birds in captivity as an "aviculturist," but AFA advocates that this designation carries with it certain responsibilities transcending those of the owners of domesticated pets like dogs and cats.

AFA believes holders of exotic birds need to be aware of the special needs of the species they hold, be aware of their conservation status, up-to-date research findings enhancing the well-being of the birds, and the state and federal regulations pertaining to exotic birds.

To help AFA and become the most responsible bird owner you can, AFA needs all bird owners to join and help carry on its educational programs, activities and efforts to help other bird owners and all birds.

4) How does the AFA promote parrot conservation?

AFA has a long history of funding medical and husbandry research, including psittacine conservation projects designed to better manage and save endangered species in the wild. AFA promotes population management and cooperative breeding programs to ensure the long-term survival, health and genetic diversity of parrots and other birds in captivity.

Recent grants include:

The red-fronted macaw conservation project (Asociacion Armonia, Bolivia);

Project Abbotti, conservation of the recently rediscovered Abbotti's cockatoo (Indonesian parrot project/ project Birdwatch);

The spix macaw project, captive propagation in Brazil;
Nesting ecology of the slender-billed conure;
Proventricular dilatation disease research (Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center, Texas A&M University);
Puerto Rican parrot (PRP) reintroduction;
A joint project with the Loro Parque Foundation in Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain on artificial nest boxes for the Catey, or Cuban parakeet.

Past conservation grants have helped promote:

The breeding biology of the Bahama parrot;
The status and conservation of the cape parrot in southern Africa;
The ecology and breeding biology in the conservation of the yellow-shouldered Amazon on Margarita, Venezuela;
A preliminary study on the impact of Hurricane Gilbert on the psittacine population of Yucatan;
Macaw conservation in Belize and Honduras in Central America; natural history of the el oro parakeet (*Pyrrhura orcesi*);
Determination of the status of the glaucous macaw and hyacinth macaw in Argentina and Paraguay;
The genetics of the Puerto Rican parrot (*Amazona vittata*);
Support for the Centro para la Conservacion de los Psitacidos Mexicanos;
First workshop of the management and conservation of macaws in meso-America;
Halfmoon conure breeding consortium;
Tracking of seasonal movements of the great green macaw in the Atlantic rainforest of Cost Rica and Nicaragua; among others.

Additionally, more than 40 separate grants have been awarded between 1982 and 1993, to proposals in avian research.

5) How does the AFA promote pet bird ownership?

Pet bird owners receive all the benefits included in individual, family and supporting membership, along with membership rates to its annual educational convention, convention CDs, DVDs and other materials.

More recently, AFA has been promoting responsible pet bird ownership through its FOA course to become a certified aviculturist. The Fundamentals of Aviculture is an accredited course with Continuing Education Credit, written by world-class aviculturist Rick Jordan and renown animal and bird behaviorist Barbara Heidenrich, which contains eight chapters creatively illustrated with original photographs and drawings by avian artist Lyrae Perry.

The chapters focus on keys to understanding parrot behavior, and pet parrot behavior modification and training, anatomy and physiology, reproductive functions and behaviors, illness prevention and detection, aviary construction, taxonomic assignments, avicultural history and advancements, domestication of birds in aviculture, and laws and regulations governing aviculture. The graduate receives a certificate and is certified by the AFA as Aviculturist, Level I. Graduates have found the information valuable and informative, and have been delighted with the experience.

6) If you cannot make it to the convention, does the AFA have online resources?

Previous years' convention proceedings of speaker papers are available on CD through the AFA sales store at http://afabirds.org/AFA_Store/index.shtml. Speaker talks presented by scientists, avian veterinarians, national and world-class aviculturists from the 2009 Convention are also available through the AFA sales store address.

7) What resources does the AFA provide?

AFA supports several educational opportunities.

The publication AFA Watchbird

An avicultural certification course, the Fundamentals of Aviculture (FOA), a prerequisite to the upcoming course, Intermediate Aviculture. The course can be taken online, at the participant's own pace. AFA members can take the course at a significant discount.

An annual educational convention with seminars presented by scientists, avian veterinarians, national and world-class aviculturists.

The monitoring of state and federal legislation that affects aviculture, sending member alerts and fast-breaking news. AFA has a long history in monitoring legislation at both the state and national level and in working to help educate government agencies such as USDA and USFWS.

The AFA has an ongoing Disaster Relief Program that mobilizes volunteer efforts to help coordinate aid to our members' birds. AFA assisted in such disasters as Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina in Florida and New Orleans, and the California wildfires, among others.

AFA has further benefits for its affiliated clubs and national specialty organizations, including article reprints to use in club bulletins, newsletters and journals. Affiliates also receive a copy of the newsletter AFA In Brief each month, to keep associated club members current with news from AFA. Specialty Organizations (national and international societies that concentrate on one species or group of birds, or one area of aviculture) receive a Specialty Organization newsletter, the opportunity to meet each year at the annual convention, host speakers, run booths, and advertise their organization at the convention.

AFA members are entitled to nominate aviculturists and those who have distinguished themselves in the field of aviculture, for bronze, silver, and gold AVY Awards, which are considered the highest awards in US aviculture.

Additionally, all membership levels include access to classified ads, closed, traceable AFA logo leg bands, as well as member discounts on the FOA certification course, annual convention registration, and selected convention materials.

8) Who are the board members? What do they do?

All board members are dedicated volunteers, with specific tasks and responsibilities laid out according to the AFA bylaws. Many work on a daily basis to achieve the objectives and goals of AFA. Board members submit quarterly written reports on their activities to the House of Delegates, and attend quarterly meetings at out-of-pocket personal expense in order to discuss and vote the business of AFA and keep it flourishing. Board members are elected on a rotating, annual basis by the House of Delegates and must attend a swearing-in ceremony held each year during the Saturday evening gala banquet during the annual convention.

9) How do you get involved in the AFA?

The American Federation of Aviculture is primarily a volunteer organization; its ability to ensure the future growth and development of aviculture is directly dependent upon people joining and supporting AFA. The organization welcomes all who wish to contribute their talents, abilities, and interests to AFA and aviculture.

To get involved, visit the AFA website at www.afabirds.org and contact the state coordinator or regional director in your area by clicking on the Board of Directors tab. E-mail or call your representatives and let them know how you would like to help, or ask for their assistance in finding an area that is compatible with your interests. Volunteers may also contact the business office directly.

10) How do you become an AFA member?

Membership is available at the individual, family, supporting and commercial membership levels. Individual membership is \$40. Join online by visiting www.afabirds.org and clicking the "contact us" tab, or contact the business office directly at: American Federation of Aviculture Inc., P.O. Box 91717, Austin, TX, 91717, phone 512-585-9800, fax 512-858-7029, email afaoffice@earthlink.net.