

Embrace Tomorrow's Aviculturist Today

The next generation of aviculturists needs a pet bird owner mentor.

By Marshall Liger

Create a "Kids Corner" in your bird club's newsletter so children can offer their perspectives on aviculture.

Aviculture takes desire, time, money, space, patience and hard work. How many young people develop enough interest in and appreciation for aviculture to get involved — enough to keep the industry alive? As the current generation of aviculturists age together, they could find themselves with a shortage of people to take over the birds. If the next generation is not taught the tricks of the trade, aviculture faces great setbacks in the future. Here's where to start.

- 1) Contact local bird clubs and individual aviculturists to see if they have a program already established. If they don't, persuade them to help you start one.
- 2) Aside from having a structured program, bird clubs and other such public gatherings (conventions, seminars, etc.) need to appeal to families with children. Create a "Kids Corner" in the newsletter so children can offer their perspectives on aviculture. Allow families to showcase their pet birds by giving a short presentation before the club, highlighting a few facts about the species. Offer discounts, where appropriate, for students.
- 3) Go back to school — literally. An educational program for your child's class is a good start. Undoubtedly, the teacher will welcome the enthusiasm of a parent. Get your foot in the door, then you can use the teacher as a reference to promote and expand your project.
- 4) Contact the local school board. Send them a well-written letter that highlights your experience with birds and desire to share your knowledge. Include pictures and letters of reference. Send the same letter to the principal of area schools or the teacher who serves as department head for the science department of each school.
- 5) Go out in the community. Check with your local chamber of commerce for events around your town geared toward the younger generation. Kids' fairs are a common occurrence in many cities. Museums, aquariums and similar establishments often host events for children. Volunteer your time to incorporate birds into these events. Support the American Federation of Aviculture's (AFA) Girl Scout badge program (www.afabirds.org).
- 6) Promote aviculture from home. Build an informative website that is interesting from a child's perspective, but not too juvenile because the goal is to reach as many age groups as possible, including elementary, preteen and young adults.

It is up to us to instill an appreciation for aviculture. When you have the attention of even a single child, you have the opportunity to inspire a future aviculturist.