



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales Inc. (ASNSW) (Founded in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Life Member - Jack Stunnel

Jack's 90th Birthday!

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By Paul Henry

Last meeting we had a small party to celebrate the 90th birthday of Jack Stunnel. Jack has been a member of the Avicultural Society of NSW since 1955 and was made a Life Member in the 1980s. There are not many men who reach this ripe old age and are still lucid enough to enjoy it. Jack certainly is still with it and it's a pleasure to have a conversation with Jack. We had plenty of cakes to mark the occasion and a good time was had by all present.



Until about 10 years ago Jack was a regular attendee at meetings but then found night driving a problem so dropped out of regular meeting attendance. This corresponded with a life style change for Jack and his wife Valma as they sold their property at Kenthurst, with its 65 aviaries, and moved into a retirement village at Glenhaven. About 3 years ago Jack agreed to accept a lift to the monthly meetings from a couple of other members, Duncan and Janet Macpherson, who live not far from Jack. So we have been most fortunate to again have Jack as a regular attendee at meetings.

Jack has been one of the most successful and knowledgeable bird breeders in Australian aviculture, as well as a jolly good bloke. This is not the only success Jack has had as this article will describe.

This article is a brief history of some of the highlights of Jack's life; with emphasis on bird keeping.

Jack was born in 1926 at Naremburn in Sydney. He started bird keeping at age 10 when he asked his father for an aviary. His father was a budgie breeder and told Jack if he could get rid of his budgies he could have his aviary. Unbeknown to Jack's father, Jack just simply let the budgies out and so took possession of the aviary. He started off by trapping Red Head finches and selling his surplus stock to local dealers. With this money he brought more exotic finch species such as Zebras, Double Bars and canaries.

When Jack was about 12 he was introduced to one of the great bird breeders of the era, George Danks. George had caught Jack peering through the gaps in the paling fence and invited him in to view his collection. George kept and bred such exotic finch species as Peking Robin, Cuban, Cut Throat, Cordon Bleu and Jacarini finches.

Jack started his working life at 15 as an apprentice shipwright. Until Jack finished his apprenticeship in about 1941 he only kept finches and the odd white cockatoo. This particular cocky was free flighted and followed Jack around the neighbourhood.

When Jack finished his apprenticeship, he was 21, and went bush doing various jobs including cane cutting in Queensland, opal mining in Lightning Ridge and strawberry picking in Tasmania. During these years he had to give up birds and never recommenced aviculture until he met and married his wife Valma in 1954.

After marriage Jack started working on overseas ships in Sydney Harbour, which was a very well paid job; and this allowed Valma and Jack to buy a house at Lane Cove, Sydney. Once they moved into the new house Jack reconnected with aviculture. Initially he kept mainly finches and a tame white cockatoo. Contrary to what you hear about when cockatoos came to Sydney, Jacks says, there were always some white cockatoos in the Sydney basin but not to the same extent as now.



Apart from bird keeping, Jack was an outstanding athlete. In 1956 Jack was a contestant for the Australia representative for free style wrestling at the Melbourne Olympic Games. Unfortunately Jack was defeated in the final; he was runner-up, for representative. The following year Jack defeated this man twice from two matches. Jack's record at wrestling was 10 State championships and two National championships and runner-up six times. At 42 years of age he was Australian representative in a contest against the New Zealand champion but unfortunately he was thrashed; Jack's words. Jack said this man was the strongest contestant he was ever against; his strength training was 500 push-ups, 500 chin-ups and 500 deep knee bends each day.

Between all this Jack took up collecting old Humber cars. In this sport he was also a champion, winning the Australia Rally for best car three times. He was also honoured with Life Membership of the Humber Vintage Car Society.

In 1963 Jack and Valma bought a house in Eastwood, Sydney and moved there. This property had a very large block of land, 70m x 20m, which allowed the construction of many aviaries, the largest being 13m x 7m x 4m high. There were lots of smaller aviaries as well. It was while at Eastwood that Jack became more involved in parrots.

Over the years, his parrot collection consisted of Golden-shouldered (which were selling for \$3,000 a pair in the 1980s), Turquoise, Scarlet-chested and Princess parrots. Also in the 1980s Jack was made a Life Member of the Parrot Society of Australia.

In 1981 Fred Lewitzka, curator of birds at Adelaide Zoo, bred a white-fronted blue Scarlet-chested parrot in his private collection. This caused huge interest in the fancy because of the beauty of this bird. Jack bought two green hens from this blue family but never bred any blue birds directly from them. We now know this was impossible because blue is a recessive gene. Over the next few years offspring from these birds were kept for breeding and mixed with his family of birds. Unfortunately no records were kept of these pairings. Then in about 1985 Jack bred a clutch of three blue birds in a nest from a pair of green birds. Some accounts say they were par blue but Jack maintains that they were green, normal birds. It was from this stock that most of the white-fronted blue Scarlet-chested parrots in Australia are descended.

ASNSW Magazine Editor - "I'm not sure if the overseas birds are also descended from these birds."

In the early 1980s, Jack and Stan Sindell went to Adelaide for an aviary tour of local breeders. Jack arranged with a local Scarlet breeder to sell him a pair of white-fronted blue Scarlets for \$2,500 (in today's money about \$7,500). When he got there the gentleman was worried that Jack might renege on the price because in the previous week a pair had sold for \$3,500. Jack stuck to his deal.

While on the field trip they went to Fred Lewitzka's, his private aviaries, for a guided tour. It was here that Jack saw the most beautiful Scarlet-chested parrot, a royal blue. Unfortunately this bird was housed in a very large aviary and died before being bred from.

ASNSW Magazine Editor - "I have wondered if this bird could have been a double factor violet bird which is a well developed mutation in Europe."



Jack and Valma stayed at Eastwood until 1975. They then bought a 5 acre property at Kenthurst. This gave Jack more room for bigger aviaries, the largest was 7m in diameter; and more aviaries, and at the height of his enthusiasm he had 65 aviaries.

At Kenthurst Jack kept an even wider range of birds than previously which included all the Australian finches except the Beautiful Firetail. He also kept many doves, Mandarin ducks, some Australian softbills including Noisy Pitas and Blue Wrens. In foreign finches he kept many species that are no longer common in Australian aviculture, such as Yellow Hammers, Red Polls and Red-crested Cardinals.

Over the years Jack bred in excess of 30 Cardinals; they are now, for all practical purposes, extinct in Australia. This is quite hard to understand why as they are very long lived and hardy; Jack never had a mature Cardinal die. Jack thinks his success was due to how he fed the birds. When the young were small he fed the parents on white ants, then when the young grew he introduced mealworms, grass hoppers and black crickets in their diet. Jack found if the young were only fed on mealworms they died when only a few months old. To complete their diet they were also fed on soft foods.

Only 20 years ago there were Cardinals available, for the right price, although they were never common. What did aviculturists do wrong to destroy this beautiful bird in Australia?

Some of the other common foreign finches in his Jack's collection included: Senegals, Saint Helena waxbills, Parrot finches, Grenadier and Madagascar weavers, Goldfinches, and Cordon Bleus. He was one of the first breeders of the pied Cordon Bleus.

So just to finish off, all the best for the future Jack and I hope I'm around to write an article for your 100th birthday!



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