



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia

The Parrot Society Convention 2012 (feedback)

(ASNSW Meeting - August 2012)

Presented by Colin Morgan and Ian Ward

Colin Morgan: The Parrot Society Convention is held every two years. A feature of the conference is the Parrot Society of Australia Conservation dinner. A couple of years ago when we attended the conference they were focussing on the Palm Cockatoo and they actually directly sponsored some of the research into that. This year they were supporting the efforts to conserve the Western Ground Parrot.

One of the aims of the conference, and they work very hard to achieve it, is to raise the standard of avicultural education and like we do, they talk about caring for birds as well as caring about birds, and recognising the difference. They have concurrent sessions (it's quite a big event).

They run one session for an hour or so on bird behaviour and at the same time another one on bird keeping and bird breeding. We were interested in the bird keeping and the bird breeding but in some ways the bird behaviour is becoming the larger part of the programme and appeared to dominate the convention this year.

Ian Ward: It's gone that way for pet trades.

Graeme Phipps: Training birds?

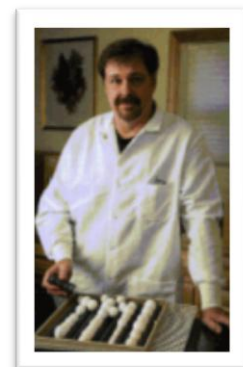
Colin Morgan: Yes the companion birds side of it.

Ian Ward: The year before they had twice as many as this time but they were all the vet people who brought their staff up to handle birds. You would think we don't know how to handle birds in Australia. This year there was more aviculturists there than there were pet bird owners.

Colin Morgan: Yes, although when some of these concurrent sessions were being run, the bird behaviour often had the larger facility and the session that we attended had the smaller one.

They had good speakers. They had a couple of international speakers pull out at the last minute but they still had a good line up.

Colin Morgan: Rick Jordan is a real entertainer. I think he was at the AVES Conference the last time we saw him. He's a commercial breeder of parrots; he breeds them by the thousand – a lot of Amazons, a lot of Conures. He is based in Texas. It's big business for him and he is obviously very knowledgeable and very successful with his business. He is a bit of a force in the world of aviculture; he holds quite a number of positions in quite a few of the international bodies. What he was talking about this time is how to increase production, health and the emotional stability of birds. Here again, even as a bird breeder one of the trends you can see happening here is towards getting very heavily into the health and the welfare of the birds, almost the mental welfare of the birds.



Graeme Phipps: Well I think they need to because studies have shown that especially with the larger parrots – they are very intelligent. So you can't just keep them caged.

Colin Morgan: And bear in mind that for someone like this fellow who is a commercial breeder, his market is people buying birds for companion pets.

Colin Morgan: Scott Echols is quite a brilliant fellow in many ways. He's a scientist. He did mainly behavioural sessions. The one session that I attended with him, was about links from the dinosaurs to birds. It was quite interesting; he covered recent advances in his field of research. They've identified feather growth in fossils and can actually show now that the feathers had distinctive colours and of course the only logical conclusion for that is that like birds, they're there for reasons other than warmth or anything else, because the colours don't mean much. The colours are there to attract mates or whatever reason applies to parrots and the like. It was a little bit strange in a way to go to a parrot conference and be listening to a bloke talking about dinosaurs. The organisers tried hard to lift things (in their own words), somewhere above what we know as aviculture i.e. bird keeping, bird breeding, etc, – looking after the birds, and yet I think (for me) it wasn't really clear what they were trying to achieve. They were trying something different but it didn't quite come across what the difference was.



Colin Morgan: Don Bird is a Queenslander. He was talking about exotic Lorries.



Colin Morgan: Brian Rechelt was a very nice and friendly bloke. He was talking about keeping exotic parrots in pretty harsh conditions in South Australia. He had a lot of good advice for things like the importance of the material you put in the next box. He was very focussed on something that would retain moisture, something that we probably assume most things do. Big thinking again and most of his establishment is built around temperature and humidity control.

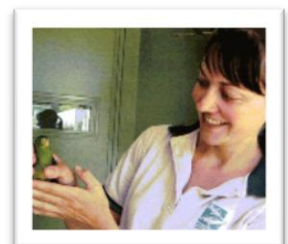


Ian Ward: He had a lot to do with the Exotic Bird Advisory Group (EBAG) - a group addressing the importation and registration of birds.

Colin Morgan: Jade Welch is from [Perky Parrots](#) a business venture on the Gold Coast – he rears Black-headed Caiques.



Colin Morgan: Kristy Penrose was from the [Healesville Sanctuary in Victoria](#) – she was talking about the Orange-bellied Parrot programme – the captive breeding aspect of trying to conserve these birds.



Graeme Phipps: She gave the same talk at the Softbill Conference and what I asked her to do at that conference was to say whether they had a husbandry manual available on the Orange-bellied Parrot. Kristy said that they had. So I said how about tabling it so everyone can see the manual. I asked this because one of the things we can do as aviculturists is produce these husbandry manuals.

One of the interesting things with the captive breeding programme is that it has been expanded recently and there's four sites, including private enterprise, that are now involved in the captive breeding programme.

Ian Ward: [Priam Australia](#).

Colin Morgan: It seemed to us that although she was both competent and caring, and skilled in conservation management, her experience in part relates to frogs rather than parrots. What kept coming through to us about the programme was that there seemed to be a need for input of expert bird keepers. Introducing private enterprise with this background seemed to be a really positive move.

Graeme Phipps: We need people with more avicultural depth.

Ian Ward: One thing they said was that they now don't feed the Orange-bellieds canary seed. They reckon it can compact in the crop and that it has been killing them – puncturing the skin in their crops.

Colin Morgan: They said they attribute the cause to the shape of the canary seed rather than any nutritional aspect claiming that it is penetrating the wall of the crop which seems strange, so they've cut out canary seed totally and I don't know if any aviculturists would actually do that or see it that way.

She spent a lot of time talking about how they manage the actual pairing of birds, and that highlighted to us the competing objectives of maximising numbers and maximising genetic diversity.

Ian Ward: The original stock they are breeding from they only had one cock so all the progeny are from that one cock – so they brought in some extra cocks and added them but all the original stock is from that one cock bloodline.

Graeme Phipps: I think it is fair to say that Glen Holland the Director of Healesville Sanctuary just wants to hold the line. He thinks they're going to go extinct in the wild for sure. They are down to 35 birds in the wild now so for a migratory bird that comes across Bass Strait that's not sustainable.

Colin Morgan: Trina Carney has been talking here about the Coxen Fig Parrot but she is now with the Adelaide Zoo and she has been looking after the Palm Cockatoos there.



Graeme Phipps: She bred Owlet-nightjars.

Colin Morgan: The problem that she was putting forward and she put it forward quite well, was now we've reared one so – what now?

Ian Ward: I think they were the first one to rear one.

Colin Morgan: So they have got ageing stock and they don't anticipate they are going to get any influx of new stock, no new vigour into them. They have a bunch of aged birds and one young one and they really don't know where to go next.

Colin Morgan: Matt Baird was talking about African parrots in Australia – the Grey, the Red-bellied and the Senegal Parrots.



Colin Morgan: Ian Brown is fairly well known to a lot of people for his Softbills.



Ian Ward: He used to be a member of the Avicultural Society of NSW many years ago.

He was talking in particular about the fig parrots and one of the things that came out of that was (in his view) just how important it is for the birds to have fig branches to chew on. Not just the fruit but fig leaves. He makes sure that his birds have fig branches, fig leaves, all the time.

Graeme Phipps: While you were in Queensland at the conference and out west, Ian Brown came here and gave a presentation on Scarlet Honeyeaters and he just did it off his phone.

Ian Ward: Yes I know it was terrific wasn't it? He did the same thing up at the conference – not on the Scarlets – on the Fig Parrots. It was good quality too – it was an iPad – it was terrific.

Colin Morgan: After the conference and our trip to Cunnamulla Ian and I went to his place and I have a couple of clips to show you - it was quite impressive some of the birds he's got there.

Colin Morgan: At the conference they had this Lutino Blue and Gold Macaw on display. He seemed in pretty poor feather condition – he had no tail. He had been flying in a large flight with other Macaws and the story was that they're knocked it about a bit and chewed its tail off. They've had a fair bit of coverage lately in magazines since a couple have been bred and it was good to see one in the flesh. It was pretty generous of the owner to have it out on public display like that.



Colin Morgan: Rick Jordon closed the conference in an address which was quite thought provoking. He spoke about the future for aviculture. It was his view that aviculture was on a pretty serious decline in the USA largely due to financial reasons. There's not that much money around to spend on expensive things like parrots. From his knowledge of what's happening here in Australia, and he is pretty well informed about what's happening here, he suggests that we are following the same decline some years behind them. His views aren't gloom and doom but certainly from a business point of view it is wise to be aware of the trends and think ahead. What that meant for him was that the shifting popularity and values of birds will actually shift demand and then the supply at the individual species level.

What he is saying is that some things that were popular can become not so popular and other things come and go like fashions, and the just as demand shifts, breeders have to follow to align with demand. So some birds which have been quite common in the States are becoming uncommon now and fortunately some birds have gone the other way where they had become uncommon are now much more readily available.

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