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GIFT BOOKS
by Charlene Beane
and Sheldon Dingle

Books make wonderful holiday gifts because after Christmas is over and before hatching begins in earnest, aviculturists have a little time to catch up on their reading. Most bird fanciers enjoy reading about their favorite species, even if they disagree with the author. There are many classics in avian literature that would make wonderful gifts, but we have selected some more recent releases, most of them readily available, so you can see the range of topics on the market to delight the bird lovers on your shopping list.


It pays every aviculturist to know something about wild birds. The more one knows about wild birds the better one can care for captive ones. And bird conservation is more important today than ever. The general information in this volume will help one to gain a more complete understanding of the part birds play in the overall scheme of things.

This volume is a complete guide to the popular and rapidly growing activity of bird watching. A recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service study suggests that bird watchers were the best informed group regarding ecology and animal life topics. And the author helps you to become a better bird watcher. The techniques can even be used for observing the behavior of your aviary birds.

There are sections on what to look for when observing birds, how to choose and use binoculars, how to photograph birds, educational programs, research programs welcoming amateurs, periodicals and organizations, and building a library.

Many photos, charts, and drawings illustrate the volume and add greatly to its interest. It is well written and will make a great gift to anyone who enjoys birds.


This is a personal story of one woman’s experiences, successful and unsuccessful, comic and tragic, in teaching birds to talk.

The cover is misleading in that it features an Amazon, cockatiel, macaw and budgie. Although the author does write of her work with budgies and cockatiels, the only other important psittacine character in her book is a rose-breasted cockatoo. She is much more interested in the Corvidae.

Ravens, crows, mynahs, starlings, magpies, even jays are the birds the author tries to educate. She deserves a great deal of credit for keeping these birds alive in a cage situation, in addition to coping with their mess. She is good with birds and loves them dearly, but to her dismay hers is not the voice they learn to imitate. In her early experiments, her budgies transferred their loyalty to her mother and learned from her, and later birds could not resist mimicking Hurlburt’s neighbor, Mrs. Hamm. Some people have the touch for handling birds, some people have the knack for training birds, and some people have the voice for teaching birds to talk. The author does not have that voice, and admitting this lack is much of the charm of the book.

Nevertheless, her observations will be invaluable for people who share her fantasy of teaching birds to talk, and her advice on care and feeding is solid gold for those kind individuals who get involved in rescuing abandoned and injured native birds.

As a sample of her conclusions, she thinks that budgies have the best vocabularies, cockatiels are the best whistlers, Indian hill mynahs have the best “human” voices, and ravens are the most intelligent.

This book is hard to put down. Bird lovers will find it as personal and informal as an old friend.

Handbook of Macaws by Dr. A.E. Decoteau, T.F.H. Publications, Nep-
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birds, a little space, either inside or out, and some concern about what to do if his birds have more babies than he is prepared to keep.

Dr. Clear writes about supply and demand, and advises beginners to start with birds that are known to be easy breeders.

Experienced aviculturists may benefit from reviewing how to assess the real costs of their hobby/business. The hobbyist may be overlooking possible advantages to be gained through certain licensing, insurance, record keeping practices and tax laws.

Throughout the book the author stresses the importance of keeping in touch with other bird people through organizations such as the A.F.A., and recommends *The Watchbird*, along with other magazines, as a good place to advertise as well as to find reputable breeders from whom to purchase breeding stock.

Money-saving tips come in the form of advice on aviary design and building materials, buying feed wholesale, and general health care.


If you have a friend who is just becoming interested in canaries, you should give him this book. If you sell canaries to a beginning breeder, this book should accompany the birds.

Roberts is talking to the neophyte and his language is refreshingly strong and clear. He lays down the law. The first chapter opens with four do's and four don'ts, and they are so logical that no one can refute them. Don't buy the first bird you see. Don't buy the first cage you see. Don't buy what you can't afford to lose. Don't buy every gadget in the store until you are sure it will aid you.

The do's are equally simple and logical.

The author then expands and talks in simple terms about the history of the canary, about canary-fancy jargon (until now I couldn't understand half of a conversation between two canary breeders), about breeding, hybrids, colors, diet, and genetics. Roberts' genetic formula charts are very well done and easily understood.

*All About Breeding Canaries* is an excellent introduction to the canary fancy. Gotten in time it could save a beginner many a headache as well as a few dollars.


This is one of the best-written books you'll find on cockatiels or any other bird. The writing is lucid, clear, and very readable for which much credit goes to Christa Ahrens who translated it from the German.

Another great plus is the format. The book is rather large (8 1/2 x 11 inches) and has many color plates—not the same old photos you used to see in every T.F.H. bird book, but new photos appropriate to the text. In fact, the exquisite color makes the book a bargain at twice the price. There are only three pages in the text that do not have full color plates.

The volume is well organized into four sections ranging from chapters on the bird in the wild to care and breeding, color varieties, and the cockatiel as a show bird. The color varieties, again, are beautifully photographed. Eighteen pages are devoted to easily understood and well-illustrated genetics, a great boon to the less-experienced cockatiel fancier.

All things considered, I think this is the best book I've read on cockatiels. Keep the first one for yourself and give the others as gifts that will be truly appreciated.

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the combat zones from North Africa to the Italian Alps. You will learn how the birds were trained to carry secret, urgent, and coded espionage messages from behind enemy lines to their ever-moving mobile lofts.

You'll meet courageous pigeons like Dogface who with his beak shot off and his head bloody came flying through the German artillery to deliver his message. His trainer said "Don't worry, Dogface, I'll see that you live." And he did. Dogface was back on combat flights within a month.

Another pigeon named George was aboard a British plane that was shot down at sea. The surviving airmen revived George, dried him off, wrote their position on a message and tossed George up out of the life raft. George crashed into the sea immediately. The bird was wet, covered with oil, and half-drowned but on the second toss he flew 100 miles over water and delivered the message. The airmen were rescued.

Little Black was ferried by a spy on a submarine to the coast of occupied France. When the spy released him a few days later behind enemy lines, Little Black was to carry a message over water to Corsica. Little Black took a bullet in the chest and couldn't quite complete his flight. He did make it to Corsica, though, where he was found limping down a road toward his home loft.

There are many such moving stories in this fascinating book. You'll also read many of the secret messages the birds carried, including some sent by Germans who took birds off of captured or killed Allies.

The book contains many photos illustrating the men, the mobile lofts and the pigeons. It is very well written, is full of human interest, contains a history found nowhere else, and dramatically portrays how closely intertwined are the lives of man and bird.

The book contains many helpful hints on general care, how to germinate seed, breeding tips, etc. The only statement I take issue with is "...these birds are virtually unable to survive without each other's company." We all know, of course, that a lovebird can live alone and do quite well. In view of all the sound information that every parrot fancier should know. For example, he explains the physical difference between the gizzards of fruit-eating parrots and seed eaters. The fruit eater (loris, for instance) aren't equipped to grind seed very well so an all-seed diet is not right for them.

Burr's narrative style is easy reading (although a bit technical at times) but not well subdivided. You'll have to use the index when you want to look up a specific point—but that won't hurt you.

If you have parrots you ought to have Diseases of Parrots.


If you love lovebirds, you'll love the lovebird photos in this book. Each species is shown in full color. Even the rare black-collared lovebird is represented, although the subject is a mounted specimen. All the other species were photographed live. There are also photos of more peachfaced color mutations than I have ever seen in an English language book.

By and large, the text is well written and informative. Bielfeld's section on diet is quite good and it would be well if more American breeders fed their lovebirds according to the author's suggestions. His section on color inheritance is also easy to understand and gives the various formulas for color expectation. These tables will save the novice a lot of head-scratching and genetic calculations.

The text contains many helpful hints on general care, how to germinate seed, breeding tips, etc. The only statement I take issue with is "...these birds are virtually unable to survive without each other's company." We all know, of course, that a lovebird can live alone and do quite well. In view of all the sound advice Bielfeld offers, he ought to be forgiven this one sentimentality.

The Parrot Disease section of the book does not detract from the whole, but neither does it add. If one is interested in parrot diseases, he should get a full-fledged book on the subject.

I recommend the book. It is worth the very modest price.

Books are always welcome gifts. They are always the right size, come in every price range, and they are enjoyed long after the holidays are over.

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