Los Angeles Reception Honors Forshaw

Once in a while in this rather shoddy day and age someone still does something right. And to prove the point I refer you to a nice reception last November 5th in a hall at the Los Angeles Zoo. The affair was sponsored by Lansdowne Press, Inc. and was given to honor Joseph Forshaw and his new book *Kingfishers and Related Birds*.

The reception included the elite of the southern California ornithological community with Dr. Jean Delacour and William Cooper, Joseph Forshaw being the men of the hour. The whole thing was, of course, great fun but its whole reason for being was *Kingfishers and Related Birds* by Joseph Forshaw and William Cooper, published by Lansdowne Press, Inc.

Receptions are quite nice, you understand, but books, my friend, good books are a delight to the soul. And making good books is the thing that Lansdowne Press does right. Lansdowne took Joseph Forshaw's meticulous ornithological text and William Cooper's extraordinary color plates and made a truly magnificent book — I mean in the finest nineteenth century tradition.

This great work will be comprised of three parts of two volumes each. The first volume is done and was on display at the reception. The remaining volumes will be published one per year until all are completed.

The first thing to impress you is the books imperial folio size — 20 inches by 14 inches. Put the tape to the largest book on your shelf for a comparison. Believe me, gentle readers, books like this are not made every day. It was designed, printed and bound to the very highest standards. Specially imported paper was used to enhance reproduction of Cooper's outstanding color plates. Each book is hand bound with the finest English leather and French fabric reminiscent of the bindings used by nineteenth century master craftsmen. The two volumes of each Part will be presented in a cloth covered solander box. *Kingfishers and Related Birds* is limited to 1000 copies worldwide of which only 100 are allocated for sale in the U.S. and Canada. The recommended price per volume is $750.00. You may contact Lansdowne Press Inc., 420 Madison Avenue, New York, New York, 10017 to place your order. I intend to buy several sets as soon as I overcome a temporary state of mendicancy.

Letters to the editor:

Dear Sheldon:

On the cover of *Watchbird* (Jun/Jul 83) you featured a beautiful color photo of a Painted Finch, which demonstrates, once again, the high quality of photography exhibited regularly in the magazine. However, the bird depicted is not exactly a true exemplar of the naturally occurring bird, in that it should not have the white wing feathers. True, the white feathers will probably disappear in the ensuing molt, but then another bird could have been photographed. Just thought you should know in case some of your readers are ultimately disappointed because the birds they receive lack the white splash. So rare are these birds I would be happy to receive them in any condition, so long as they are still upright.

Regards,

Jerry Jennings

continued on page 44
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Dear Editor;

As a breeder of Zebra Finches, I feel I must write to you on behalf of myself and my birds. So many articles written about aviculture and/or finches are passing these delightful creatures off as being the bottom of the ladder in aviculture.

These birds are not special as an endangered species (neither are cockatiels, canaries, or budgies!), but this fact should not exclude them from being taken seriously. In other countries Zebras have their own show standards, specific show cages, and various clubs and societies. (Unfortunately, the typical American-Bred bird would be laughed off the bench if shown in England!)

Most references state that Zebras are an ideal choice for the novice breeder because of their prolific nature. I wonder how many newcomers have tried the advice of these articles only to find themselves faced with problems such as: infertile eggs, egg-binding, feather-picking, refusal to incubate, high mortality of young, and others.

My rule of thumb is this: Zero effort equals zero success! If Zebras are so incredibly simple to breed why isn't the market flooded with them? Why don't they sell for a dollar a pair at the local pet shop?

Many authorities claim that Zebras can and should be colony-bred. My reply is that you had better have a full room to house a maximum of a dozen pairs! Among other problems, Zebras are highly susceptible to stress due to overcrowding. At the end of a year's breeding you will find that you have a motley crew of "mutt" birds that are in poor feather and poor condition due to their squabbling and inbreeding. You may (if you're lucky), find that you have produced as high as an average of two offspring per pair at the end of the year. Of course, you will not have the faintest idea of the parentage of these offspring since you have no control in a colony set-up.

Sadly, I have seen the quality of Zebras steadily fall over the years. The birds offered for sale as being "high quality" are only one-half of two-thirds the size of the show standard in England. These are usually "snaky" (long, narrow-bodied) birds with flat skulls and poor markings.

Unless serious breeders of Zebras speak out soon on behalf of their species, nothing will remain but a memory of the champion Zebra long ago.

If you're thinking of breeding Zebras, please invest a little time into learning about them. Start with the very best pair you can find, NEVER crowd them, and study their genetics. If you do these things you may find yourself hooked for life, ever striving for a better bird. Isn't that the way aviculture should be?

Thank-you for your time.

Susan Smith, V.T.
Minneapolis, MN.

Dear Friends at Watchbird,

Hi! I've been reading the Watchbird faithfully for about a year and cannot tell you how much knowledge I've gained from your informative articles. Two years ago I had one cockatiel. Now I have over 150 birds of ten species.

I'm 23 years old and never seem to meet any bird people my age. Are many young people taking up aviculture? Are there any organizations that combine the inexperienced with the experienced bird breeders so as to pass along the things the experienced folks learned the hard way?

Keep Up the Good Work
Roger Crowden, Salem, Oregon

In answer to your second question, the various local bird clubs are precisely the place to go for a mixture of novice and expert aviculturists—not always to the benefit of the novice, however. I firmly advocate bird club activity and a few old timers will give you a lot of help with your birds but some of the other old bats will be part of your learning the "hard way".

Now, regarding your first question, while at the local club meeting please note that stooped, bald, wizened fellow with the shaking hands. And there next to him is a wrinkled up fellow chain-smoking and nervously tapping his cane.

These fellows (and others like them at every bird meeting) are in truth not yet thirty years old. They began keeping birds just a few years ago and the task has taken its toll. Raking up dead birds daily, vet bills for other dead birds, being bitten by one's own guard dog, paying for birds that never arrive, club politics, hand feeding at ungodly hours, rats and mice—the list is endless—all combine to age one rapidly.

Be of good cheer, Roger, many of those bleary-eyed ancients are not much older than you. Another year or two and you'll blend in perfectly.

Ed.
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