Raising a Military Macaw

by Sherry Rind
Redmond, Washington

Sometimes when I am in my back yard feeding the chickens or pulling weeds, I hear a "squawk" followed by "Knock it off!!" in the same voice, hoarse but high, rather like a man trying to imitate a woman. I know that both sides of the conversation come from the same source: Clinger, my neighbor's military macaw.

That Clinger even had a chance at life is thanks to his owner, Susan Tharp, a former Sea World of San Diego aviculturalist now transplanted to the Pacific Northwest. One summer day in 1979 when tending the military macaws, she found an egg on the floor of the cage. She found two more on alternating days, again on the floor since the birds had no nest box. These were intended to be show birds, not breeders but obviously they did not agree.

Most eggs at Sea World are incubated to guarantee a better survival ratio, so Susan took them out and asked where to incubate them. The answer was, "Nowhere," because there were no proper facilities for raising parrots; Sea World breeds waterfowl, penguins and sea birds.

Feeling that these eggs were precious commodities, Susan decided to do what she could for them and put the macaw eggs in a waterfowl incubator which was kept at 95°F, figuring this at least would give them a chance. And all three did hatch in August, weighing in at 20 grams. Before the babies completely absorbed their yolks, Susan reinforced their feeding response by periodically lifting their heads and moving their beaks with her finger the way a mother bird's beak would. When the remainder of their yolks was completely absorbed, the babies were ready to begin eating. All their plumbing proved to be in good working order, for they all defecated right after feeding, a healthy lime green.

Every night the birds went home with Susan in a shoe box, enclosed in sawdust and eiderdown on top of a towel and sitting close together in an ash tray. They spent their days in a Sea World brooder. Susan fed them whenever their crops emptied. Their formula was based on Wheat Hearts, Karo syrup, egg yolk, water, Sea Tabs (a multi-purpose vitamin originally developed for marine animals), dicalcium phosphate, and chopped lettuce.

The birds were weighed before each feeding and soon learned that a trip to the torsion balance scale meant food was to follow. They were not shy about voicing their anticipation and each weighing session was accompanied by burbles, gurgles, and hoarse mumblings. Susan fed them with a bent spoon which, when at home, she kept on the windowsill for easy access and hoped no one would get strange ideas about her activities. She sterilized food equipment before each use, knowing that these human-fed babies would not have the antibodies that a bird would get in the food regurgitated from its parent.

After feeding each baby—never more than ten percent of its body weight so that the crop would empty before the next feeding—she cleaned off their beaks with a moistened Q-tip to make sure the food that tended to collect around their faces would not cause any beak distortion. She also spent a few minutes handling each one to accustom them to being touched.

At one week the birds could stand by themselves. Their eyes, which at first showed as pale blue spots, began to look darker under the skin and to grow more prominent. They began to open at three weeks and the beaks turned dark grey. They graduated from the bent spoon to a syringe and then to a turkey baster and feeds at three months. By that time, they had most of their feathers and made some attempts at flying, especially when Susan walked into their cage at feeding time. They would leap onto her from their open perch, flapping mightily, and cling hard
"Sacred Macaw of The Pueblo"—Oil.

The young woman is feeding a Scarlet Macaw, considered sacred by the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest. Macaw feathers are used for sacred purposes, headdresses, and in adorning garments. Indian legends relate that the Sun Father used red feathers to make daylight and that the Scarlet Macaw was in charge of taking the sun to its winter home in the South and returning it in the Spring for the planting and growing cycle.

JULIAN ROBLES HAS TO HIS CREDIT 29 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ART AWARDS.

THIS FINE ART REPRODUCTION, IMAGE SIZE 21" × 26"—TRIM SIZE 25" × 31", PRINTED ON ACID-FREE ARCHIVAL PAPER, IS NOW AVAILABLE IN A LIMITED EDITION OF 1500 COPIES. ALL PRINTS ARE INDIVIDUALLY SIGNED AND NUMBERED BY THE ARTIST.

THESE BEAUTIFUL PRINTS MAY BE PURCHASED FOR $150.00 PLUS $6.00 SHIPPING.

FEATHER WAY

RIO GRANDE EASEL ART • WATERCOLORS AND ACRYLICS • PUEBLO POTTERY • WEavings
WRITE: KEVIN SCHNEIDER, 14292 JENNINGS VISTA WAY, LAKESIDE, CA 92040, (619) 561-6303
MEMBER NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

American Federation of Aviculture
Dedicated to conservation of bird wildlife through encouragement of captive breeding programs, scientific research, and education of the general public.

MEMBER CLUBS

ALABAMA
Bird Club of Greater Birmingham
Central Alabama Aviculture Society
ARIZONA
Arizona Aviculture Society
Arizona Bird Breeders Society
Avicultural Society of Tucson
The Seed Crackers
CALIFORNIA
American Canary Fanciers Association
Aviary Association of Kern Avicultural Association of San Francisco
Budgerigar Research Association
Bute County Bird Club
California Game Breeders' Association
Capitol City Bird Society
Central California Cage Bird Club
Contra Costa Avian Society
Exotic Bird Breeders Association
Exotic Hookbill Society
Fitch Society of San Diego County
Footbath Bird Fanciers
Fresno Canary and Finch Club
Golden Gate Avian Society
Golden West Game Breeders and Bird Club, Inc.
Great Western Budgerigar Society, Inc.
Hookbill Hobbiests of Southern California
Inland Game Bird Breeders
Long Beach Bird Breeders
Norco Valley Bird Breeders
North County Aviculturists
Northern California Budgerigar Society, Inc.
New Color Bird Association
Orange County Bird Breeders
Redwood Budgie Hobbiests
San Diego County Bird Breeders Association
San Diego City Canary Club
San Gabriel Valley Parnassae Association
Santa Clara Valley Canary & Exotic Bird Club
South Bay Bird Club
South Coast Finch Society
Tri City Budgerigar Society
Valley of Paradise Bird Club
Ventura County Bird Club
West Valley Bird Society
Western Bird Breeders Society
COLORADO
Rocky Mountain Society of Aviculture, Inc.
CONNECTICUT
Connecticut Association for Aviculture, Inc.
DELAWARE
Delaware Aviculture Association

Floridians
Aviary & Cage Bird Society of South Florida
Central Florida Bird Breeders
Feraried Friends of Florida Avian Society
Gold Coast Exotic Bird Club, Inc.
Greater Brandon Avian Society
Greater Jacksonville Avicultural Society, Inc.
Greater Miami Avicultural Society, Inc.
Miami Parrot Club, Inc.
Polk County Avicultural Society
Suncoast Avian Society
Sunshine State Cage Bird Society, Inc.
Tropical Cockatiel Club of Miami
GEORGIA
Georgia Banana Bird Society
Greater Georgia Cage Bird Society
HAWAI
Exotic Birds of Hawaii
IOWA
Mid America Cage Bird Society
ILLINOIS
Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club, Inc.
McLean County Pet Bird Club
Mid-west Hookbill Club
KANSAS
Capital City Bird Club of Kansas
Kansas Avicultural Society, Inc.
LOUISIANA
Central Louisiana Budgerigar Society
New Orleans Avicultural Society
Louisiana State Avicultural Society
HARDWARE
Exotic Cage Bird Society of New England
Massachusetts Cage Bird Assn., Inc.
The Boston Society for Aviculture, Inc.
Western New England Cage Bird Society
MICHIGAN
Ann Arbor Cage Bird Club
Mid-West Canary Club, Inc.
Motor City Bird Breeders Society
MINNESOTA
Minnesota Cage Bird Association
North Star Parrot Breeders Society
MISSISSIPPI
Mississippi Budgerigar Society
MISSOURI
Greater Kansas City Avicultural Society
Heart of America Parrot Society
Missouri Cage Bird Association
NEBRASKA
Greater Omaha Cage Bird Society
NEVADA
Las Vegas Avicultural Society
Silver State Budgerigar Society, Inc.
Vegas Valley Caged Birds Association
NEW HAMPSHIRE
Birds of Feather
New Hampshire Avicultural Society
NEW YORK
Cockatiel Club of New York
Greater Rochester Hookbill Association
NORTH CAROLINA
Carolina Avicultural Society
Charlotte Memorial Cage Bird Society
Smoky Mountain Cage Bird Society
OHIO
Central Ohio Bird Breeders, Inc.
Cleveland Cage Bird Society
Golden Crested Cage Bird Club
Mid-American Exotic Bird Society, Inc.
OREGON
Cascade Budgerigar Society
Kiska Bird Breeders Club
Emerald Exotic Bird Society
Exotic Bird Club of Oregon
Northwest Bird Club
PENNSYLVANIA
Central Pennsylvania Aviculture Society
The Greater Pittsburgh Cage Bird Society
Work Area Pet Bird Club
SOUTH CAROLINA
Carolina Cage Bird Club
TEXAS
Texas Exotic Bird Breeders Association
Golden Crescent Bird Club
Dallas Dowse Society
Fort Worth Bird Club
Gulf Coast Aviculture Society
North Texas Cockatiel Club
UTAH
Avicultural Society of Utah
Utah Pheasant Society
VIRGINIA
Commonwealth Avicultural Society
National Capital Bird Club
Parrot Breeders Association
Peninsula Cage Bird Society
Virginia Ornamental Bird Society
WASHINGTON
Avicultural Society of Puget Sound
Northwest Aviculture Society
Northwest Exotic Bird Society
Washington Budgerigar Society, Inc.
WISCONSIN
Wisconsin Cage Bird Club, Inc.

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF AVICULTURE

Dedicated to conservation of bird wildlife through encouragement of captive breeding programs, scientific research, and education of the general public.

MEMBER NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

African Love Bird Society
American Budgerigar Society, Inc.
American Cockatiel Society, Inc.
Pigeon Fanciers' Council of America
American Racing Pigeon Union, Inc.
British Columbia Avicultural Society
National Cockatiel Society
Amazona Society
Macaw Society
Southeastern Aviculturists Association
National Cage Bird Show, Inc.
Avicultural Society of America

COMMERCIAL MEMBERS

Animal Exchange, Rockville, MD
Pritchard Bookkeeping Service, El Cajon, CA
Valentine Equipment Co., Hinsdale, IL
Nektos U.S.A., Inc., St. Petersburg, FL
Kellogg's, Inc., Milwaukee, WI
Pinto, Furs, 'N Feathers, Boca Raton, FL
San Diego Exotic Bird Services, San Bruno, CA
Asterlath Ranch, Boerne, TX
Serina Wood, Patterson, CA
Parrot Jungle, Inc., Miami, FL
Horn Pet Supply, Fort Lauderdale, FL
Pet Farm Inc., Miami, FL
East Coast Avian Care, Inc., Conway, S.C.
Royal Plaza Resort Motel and Aviaries, Pompano Beach, FL

For information about contacting any of these member clubs, please call that club's closest state coordinator. There is a state coordinator listing with phone numbers elsewhere in this publication.

wherever they landed—on an arm, a leg, a hip. There they would stay while she fed each one its formula. Clinger received her name because she was the most stubborn clinger of all who, even as a tiny youngster, had ramped onto her bent spoon so hard that she could be lifted up by its handle.

Despite Susan's attempts to keep the birds clean, correctly fed, and protected from drafts, two factors worked against her: she had little experience with psitacines and, in 1979, few of the resources for knowledge that even the ranknest beginner now has. Problems developed. Starting at two months, the babies developed Candida, a yeast infection of the crop, one after the other. Its appearance was frighteningly sudden, beginning with a small scab on the skin over the crop. In only one day, the scab was much larger. The vet prescribed an antibacterial powder which Susan applied to the outside of the crops. On one baby the infection was too far gone. The sore, and the skin of the crop, broke. The tear was too irregular for the skin to be completely stitched back together. The vet showed Susan how to feed the bird through a tube in its stomach. But the bird died.

Of the two who recovered, one had another problem. Its upper mandible was growing twisted. Various theories were advanced to Susan to explain the distorted beak. The problem might have stemmed from the wrong incubating temperature, the wrong diet, a chronic case of nasal dripping which the vet only called by the general term sinusitis, or a combination of the three. At a little over three months of age he died in a fall from his perch. Susan theorizes that his equilibrium might have been affected by the sinusitis, which the vet had been unable to cure.

Clinger, too, did not get through unscathed. During the Candida episode, she fractured her leg. The babies, Susan discovered, were gaining weight fast but had soft bones—the old calcium problem. She switched to a formula given her by the keepers at San Diego zoo. Clinger's leg, which tended to scoot out from under her, was taped and healed quickly with only a small lump at the joint just above the foot to show where the fracture was. Her flexibility was not impaired but arthritis could develop there in later life, just as in people.

Five months after the hatching, Susan was left with one bird, a lot of sadness, and some ideas on what she would do if she had a second chance at macaw rearing. In the seven years that have passed since then, much more know-
ledge about avian husbandry and medicine has been accumulated and Susan wonders if she would have been able to save all three, were they to hatch today. She would expect no guarantees, only better chances.

As if to make up for her absent siblings, Clinger developed enough personality for three—but perhaps any proud and loving owner would say that about her bird. At any rate, Clinger apparently did not know that macaws make poor talkers. At six months she was making mumbiling sounds Susan did not even notice until one evening when she was relaxing in a hot bath after work and heard a voice say, “Hi!” She nearly jumped straight out of the tub, thinking someone had broken in, until she realized the voice was Clinger’s.

Susan never had to teach Clinger words by repetition; Clinger simply seemed to pick up whatever she liked. (She became very careful about her choice of words when angry.) Clinger’s repertoire soon ranged from various human and animal greetings, to endearments, to comments such as “Are you a bat?”, “Ouch, that hurts,” and “Shame on you.” When Susan says, “Goodbye,” and Pat are slowly getting used to each other, with Clinger ready to take advantage of Pat’s inexperience with birds by biting now and then. But in this “love me, love my bird” situation they will have to make a truce.

Maybe Clinger sounds obnoxious with her noise and demands for constant attention, but to anyone who has life and good health, a bird like Clinger is a jewel.