Several years ago, as I was beginning to breed exotic foreign birds, my oldest daughter came home from school begging me to bring some birds to her Kindergarten class and talk to the children about the birds. They were doing a little study of our area’s wild birds and this hobby of mine seemed to fit in. Little did I know this would become a tradition and each year I would bring more birds, books, slides, charts, posters, etc. to the classroom. I really enjoyed preparing and presenting the material.

Well, as time went on, more teachers and schools heard about The Bird Lady! So, every spring I would travel around and share my “hobby” with hundreds of boys and girls in pre-school, elementary, junior and senior high schools and convalescent hospitals. This was very enjoyable for me and always very challenging. Besides, I was getting paid for something that was fun for me!

I basically had two programs: a short, twenty-minute slide talk or a forty-minute slide presentation with time for questions, stories from the class and comments or answers from yours truly. The presentations were designed to give the novice bird owner or potential bird owner an overview of bird types, cage selection, general care, good nutrition, and breeding of exotics in captivity, all of which most pet bird owners know very little about.

Last August, when we moved from our native California to Pennsylvania, after birds set up and house in order, I began to think of ways to do my talks here on the east coast, but in a more concentrated effort. I wanted a chance to go into depth with a group of people who had a desire to learn more about exotic bird care. As I was having these thoughts, we received a very impressive community education program brochure in the mail from our North Penn School District office located in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. We discovered a huge variety of interesting classes to take in the evening or Saturdays. I promptly signed myself up for a landscaping class, the kids for swimming, and my husband for vegetable gardening. All the classes turned out to be a positive experience for all of us and it gave me a chance to see that this could be a way for me to do a series on exotic bird care.

After applying to teach and upon being enthusiastically accepted (the school had never been approached with such a class) I began to beef up my quality and selection of slides. The classes were to be six weekly sessions one and a half hours long. I also began to write to several bird related companies I do business with or have heard good things about for free literature or supplies. I put together a portfolio of articles dealing with the appropriate class for each session and categorized my books to take to each session. All of these things took time and I could not wait until the last minute to do any of them. I had to plan ahead, even though there was a chance my class may not make it. I had to reach a minimum of 15 students in order for the class not to be cancelled, so I took one more precaution in assuring bird people would hear about the classes. I put together my own flyer to advertise the classes and mailed multiple copies to pet shops and veterinarians in our area.

The flyer stated the six classes as follows:

- Choosing a Bird — how to decide what’s best for you, selecting a cage and play area, nutrition, hygiene, general taming and training.
- Aviary Construction — a look at many types of aviaries and making the right...
decisions for the number and kinds of
birds.
• Breeding, Incubation and Hatching —
of Budgies, Cockatiels, Cockatoos,
Conures, Doves, Finches, Lovebirds,
Ringnecks or Rosellas. Any combi-
nation or overview of all species is
possible.
• Hookbill Care, Taming and Training —
  teaching a bird to talk and do
  tricks.
• Handfeeding of Psittacines — a look
  at various formulas and techniques in
  the handrearing of parrots. Prepa-
  ration, problems and solutions and
  weaning will also be covered.
• The Sick Bird — how to spot a sick
  bird, emergency care and finding a
  veterinarian.

Nearly two thirds of the class
registered because of these flyers. In one
week’s time I exceeded my minimum
and a total of thirty signed up for the
class. Wow, was I excited and so was the
school district office.

From the very beginning, the attend-
dance, enthusiasm and interest of each
session was very high. When the classes
began, one fourth of the students were
beginner breeders, three fourths being
pet bird owners. By the end of the class
about half of the students were
breeders. There was one lady who
attended all six sessions out of pure
interest. She was pet bird and cage
hunting by the end of the sessions!

I began and ended most sessions on
time, with class permission we went
over on the breeding class; however,
that doesn’t mean we all left or wanted
to leave, there was always much bird talk
after each session. In fact, I plan on
extending the sessions to two hours
next time I teach the series which will
be in the fall of 1986, to, I hope, even
more than thirty people. Already
people are wondering when and how to
register for the next series.

It is my feeling that a class of this
nature could be taught in every state and
in every community education program
by people who enjoy speaking and have
had years of experience in the keeping
and rearing of exotic birds. Some folks
are reluctant to share their failures and
triumphs or their secrets. This is very
sad and really inexcusable. We need to
hear and learn from each other, our
communities need to
hear from us and
so does our government. We all need to
do more in order that we may keep our
birds and continue to raise babies for
future generations of people to enjoy.
Educating the public through classes is
just one of dozens of ways to reach this
goal. How about giving it a try? •