Artificial insemination and the ability to preserve semen for long periods of time should improve the odds with any serious captive breeding program.

Mr. Hargrove explains, "I am collecting semen from male budgerigars (parakeets), diluting it, freezing it at minus 196°C, thawing it out, and artificially inseminating the females."

"I am even attempting to freeze-dry the semen," he reports.

Study Of Bird Droppings Funded

The American Federation of Aviculture awarded $2500 to Dr. Arden Bercovitz of the San Diego Zoo for a project which promises to identify the males from the females in hatchling chicks of one of the world's most endangered species, the Puerto Rican amazon parrot.

Fewer than three dozen of these birds remain alive today on Puerto Rico; all are under the watch of field biologists from the U.S. Department of Interior as part of a captive breeding program.

Waste materials, i.e., bird droppings collected from the shell fragments at hatching, can be measured for the presence of excretory hormones (estrogens). Chicks can potentially be sexed because females are expected to produce and excrete larger amounts of estrogens than males.

"Let's face it," Dr. Bercovitz explains, "knowing the sex of the bird is vital if we are to pair them appropriately and breed them. Two males or two females will not produce babies. Success of this project increases its potential application to other species.

"It is exciting to be working with these unique birds and very satisfying to assist in efforts that can optimize their reproduction."
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