Aviculturists interested in the Australian Psittacines have often held the desire to build a complete collection of those lovely and unique birds. At least that is the impression one gets from many conservations with those specializing in that area. Most of such conversation is mere fantasizing, rarely going any further.

Dick Topper is one aviculturist whose fantasy dream is rapidly approaching reality. Owner of the Topper Bird Farm, he has come so close to building that complete collection that it is far simpler to merely list those species that he doesn’t have. Again, that doesn’t mean he won’t have them eventually. Currently absent are the Slender Billed Corrella, Golden Shouldered Parrakeet, Paradise Parrot, Gang Gang Cockatoo, Night Parrot, Swift Parrot, Naretha Blue Bonnet (he does have the Red Vented Blue Bonnet), and the Neophemas with the exception of the Bourke.

More interesting, perhaps, are the species he does maintain. In the Cockatoo department he keeps Leadbeaters, Banksians, Bare-eyed, Umbrellas, Greater Sulphur Crested, and Lesser Sulphur Crested. In the Rosella category he has them all! The Golden Mantle, Stanley, Blue or Mealy, Pennant, Yellow, Adelaide, and the incredibly beautiful Tasmanian or Green Rosella are on site. The Northern Rosellas have been acquired and just recently delivered. Dick is possibly the only private aviculturist in the U.S. to have the Tasmanian and Northern Rosellas.

Other broadtailed Parrakeets include the normal and yellow Red Rumps, Many Colored, Barnard’s or Malee Ringneck, Hooded, Conclurry, Pileated, Red Vented Bluebonnet, Port Lincoln, Twenty Eight, Rock Peplar, Crimson Wing, and King Parrakeets. In addition, he has two species of Grand Eclectus, the Timor Crimson Wing, and the Amboina King Parrakeet.

Five species of Lorikeets were on hand — the Black-capped, Yellow-streaked, Chattering, Dusky, and Duvenbode. All of these were properly set up to breed.

A number of Latin American Psittacines were being bred, as well. In the Macaw group Topper is raising Scarlets, Blue & Golds, and their crosses — the Catalina, Greenwings, and the unusual Red-fronted Macaws, which are quite rare in captivity.

Several species of Conures are set up. These include the Painted, Jenday, Queen of Bavaria, and Sun Conure. In fact, a Sun Conure was being hand fed.

Amazons comprising several species and Black-headed Caiques were in abundance.

A good collection of Asian Ringneck species are represented in Topper’s collection by the Alexandrine, Madagascar, and Indian Ringneck. All of the Indian mutations — normal, lutino, blue, albino, and cinnamon — are being bred. Mustache and Derbyan Parrakeets rounded out this Asian group.

Two avicultural oddities, the Great-billed Parrot and the Pesquet or Vulturine Parrot were also in residence. It is unusual to see these two even in zoos.

More familiar, on the other hand, are several species of Lovebirds — Fischer, Blue Masked, Black Masked, and Black Cheek.

In short, the Topper Bird Farm is a breathtaking display of, perhaps, the greatest variety of Psittacines to be seen in private hands. Housed in 246 separate flights (and still a buildin’), the entire
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The bird diet is one that Dick has painstakingly developed over the years — one that is fairly complex, it not unique. Besides sunflower, safflower, and parakeet mix (not a standard commercial mix), the Psittacines receive walnuts, peanuts, pecans, almonds, greens, and grit. Greens are comprised of Fillerie Weed, Spinach, Swiss Chard, or Carrot tops served up daily. Supplemental to all of the above, a softfood (whose recipe he has developed and had laboratory tested for nutritional value) is prepared according to the following recipe.

First, a slurry is made in a blender: 3 cups Pyracantha or Rose Hips; ½ cup honey.

When using Rose Hips it is important to be sure no systemic insecticide or fertilizers were used on the plants since they collect in the hip.

Second, to two gallons of sprouted seed (any and all seeds are O.K.) add 1 cup Several Protein, ¼ cup Vionate Vitamins, ¾ cup Wheat Germ, 2 cups powdered milk, and 1 cup fishmeal. This will form a crumble.

After the crumble has been made in

step two, the slurry is added to it.

Each aviary is given a handful of this softfood, which the birds eagerly consume. Remember! This recipe feeds 246 flights, so the quantities need to be scaled down for smaller collections.

The Parrakeet Mix in use at the Topper place consists of the usual Canary and Proso plus Red Proso, Buckwheat, Thistle, and Oat Groats. To this mix, Topper ads “VIM” oil, which contains wheat germ, Norwegian Cod Liver, Safflower, and Corn oils. The VIM oil has a patented process that prevent the oil from becoming rancid. The oil is added to the seed at the ratio of 8 ounces to 50 pounds of seed, and mixed thoroughly. Additional additives include soybean meal, which equals 3% of total weight of the mix and a man made algae, which accounts for 4% of total mix weight.

Dick has also been working recently with Super Preen, which he believes is a well balanced amino acid compound. Super Preen can be mixed in with the seed right after the seed is oiled, he feels.

Topper also feeds shredded carrots and apple. Apple is offered daily and is a natural laxative. However, the apple seeds should be avoided as they are poisonous.

With a diet of such proportions, it would appear that breeding results will be nothing short of spectacular. It is apparent from a stroll through the aviaries, that many young are indeed being reared.

Such a magnificent collection deserves magnificent security. As in every other facet of his avicultural enterprise, Topper has spared nothing to protect his birds from theft. An extremely sophisticated alarm system has been installed that is virtually impossible to foil. This system, known as an intrusion detection system, can detect any person on or near the property and identify their location for Topper, when he is at the house, as well as for the police, who are hooked up via a dialer. Topper demonstrated its effectiveness, it is so sensitive as to be able to detect the slightest movement. Needless to say, such a system is expensive, but then so are the birds.

We will look forward to breeding reports from the Topper Bird Farm in the years ahead.
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