If birds escape or are turned loose, they can be a nuisance and threaten crops. This can upset a substantial number of people, many of whom possess political clout. If there is one case of Newcastle's Disease, a whole state can shut down. Allow me to recount a horror story of a recent Miami importer who allegedly brought in 200 vinaceous Amazons, a CITES Appendix I endangered species. They all died but two. I don't know if they were legal or not, but importers have no requirements for caging, hygiene, survivability, etc. They simply are not held accountable in any measurable way.

If we want birds in the future, we need to raise the level of avicultural responsibility. The only way we can measure this is to see if we are, in fact, improving. Without complete records, we can't determine anything and can prove nothing. If we're not improving, we are not being responsible. Accurate, methodically kept statistics will tell us if we are bettering the plight of birds or not. Are we truly aviculturists or are we like the old-fashioned zoos that warehouse birds? Honest statistics will reveal the truth.

I believe in aviculture and the aviculturist who is dedicated to his birds to such a degree that he shares what he learns himself or is willing to learn from the experiences of other practitioners. We need to share our accomplishments, and our failures, because we can learn from both if we are to insure the future of importation and the emergence of the professional aviculturist.

There are two definitions of the word "profession" in Webster's Colle­giate Dictionary that I would like to call to your attention. A profession is participating for gain or livelihood in an activity or field of endeavor often engaged in by amateurs. A profession is also defined as a principal calling and/or a long term experience or apprenticeship in a field, where there does not exist a specific curriculum, or where such training is prerequisite to acquire the necessary expertise to be considered a professional in one's field.

A veterinarian is a professional veterinarian by virtue of his or her extensive university training, but not all veterinarians can be considered professional avian veterinarians until they, like you, expose themselves to opportunities to learn beyond the classroom through hands-on experience and seminars sponsored by like-minded individuals desiring to learn and share what there is to know about avicultural techniques and avian medicine. There is now an Association of Avian Veterinarians, which received much of its impetus from the American Federation of Aviculture's Veterinary Seminars held in conjunction with the annual AFA conventions each August over the last fourteen years. It is no mere coincidence that AFA's chairman for many AFA veterinary seminars, including this year's seminar to be held in Tampa, and the long term chair of AFA's Avian Research Committee is Dr. Susan Clubb, the founding president of the AAV.

If I were to ask you to name a professional occupation which most people could easily recognize, no doubt you would come up with a doctor or a lawyer. In our culture, a doctor or a lawyer is the consummate professional because of the prestige, income and influence usually attributed to these vocations. These professionals got where they are in our society because of their unity of purpose manifested in their professional organizations, the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Bar Association (ABA).

Try and introduce a different medical technique or a new drug in this country without the endorsement of the AMA! Try to practice law or appoint a Supreme Court Justice in this nation without the approval of the ABA!

These professional organizations have considerable clout because they have established the technical and ethical standards of their profession. These organizations protect their members, in part, by maintaining standards which insure the necessary respect from society, as a whole which allows them to operate as they do. It is in everybody's interest for professional organizations to exist. High standards will produce quality service, and quality service can result in economic benefits which, in turn, allows the profession to thrive and grow as the members would want. It is an excellent example of a symbiotic relationship. A profession united that has the support of its members and the respect of society is self-perpetuating.

Aviculture has in place a professional organization that, for fourteen years, has represented the bird breeders and, although not widely recognized by society, it is the only organization recognized by the federal government and more and more state legislatures — and
that organization, my friends, my fellow aviculturists, is the American Federation of Aviculture.

The time will come when the birds we love will not be as readily available as they are presently. Those individuals who will be allowed to keep them will be individuals whom society feels have the expertise, the experience and the motivation necessary to insure their breeding and maintenance in captivity. Who will decide what standards, technical and ethical, will identify the professional aviculturist? We, the members of the AFA, will be asked to define the aviculturists and to set the standards for the profession. We are the only organization recognized as America's grassroots organization of bird breeders by the Congress of the United States Office of Technology Assessment; the U.S. Department of Agriculture who, among other things, supervises quarantine stations; the U.S. Department of Interior who, among other things, helps to determine what birds may be imported into this country and who appoints the U.S. representation to CITES. AFA has the necessary recognition to allow us to represent you to those governmental bodies who can regulate or destroy aviculture and, to date, we can say with confidence that we have a positive relationship with the U.S. Government and are able to present our position well. Unfortunately, groups who often oppose aviculture, the Humane Society and local chapters of the Audubon Society, are bigger than we are; and by virtue of their size may have greater impact, especially, among politicians who are interested in numbers behind an issue as well as the merits of a particular issue. You can help change that situation by getting behind your professional organization.

Now, what can your club do to promote professionalism among its members? I would start by keeping attendance records of members who attend club meetings where there are presentations that address issues, symposiums should offer these CEUs as well. Those individuals whom society feels have the expertise, the experience and the motivation necessary to insure their breeding and maintenance in captivity. Attendances would represent a C.E.U.

As individuals we need to support our professional organization, the AFA, our local clubs and be sure to keep the following records:

- Pairs old enough to breed
- Eggs laid
- Eggs fertile
- Eggs dead in the shell
- Eggs infertile
- Eggs hatched
- Chicks dead and the cause
- Chicks fledged
- Adult birds that die and the cause
- Record information about your successes.
- Share your records and aviculture tips.
- Insist on this type of information on all birds purchased.
- Insist on a three-day period to get a competent avian veterinarian to examine the new bird and an agreement to fix or stand behind any problems uncovered in such an exam.
- When possible, purchase only domestically bred birds with closed bands, thus supporting true aviculturists.
- Ours is the age of science and scientific discovery. We can make a significant contribution to science and gain the endorsement of society by being and acting professional — by keeping records of our successes and failures when breeding, maintaining and caring for our birds. While some such records are kept by scientists and are available, the laboratory is not a home. The atmosphere of love and care we provide our stock should surely demonstrate the success of our endeavors and keep birds for their own good as well as our enjoyment.

Thomas C. Marshall
President, AFA

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