On the western edge of Phoenix, Arizona in the community of Litchfield Park, a major collection of birds is forming. With over 260 flights planned, Tal and Opal Crosser will have one of the largest and finest collections of exotic birds in the western United States.

Native Arizonans, the Crossers have lived in or near Phoenix most of their lives. And, most of their lives they have had an interest in animals. They worked with tropical fish for a number of years, then, in 1974, decided to obtain a couple of pairs of pet birds including peach faced lovebirds, cockatiels and nine finches all of which were males of several species.

They hoped to simply enjoy their new friends, but the cockatiels (proven breeders) turned out to be killers, and the lovebirds hid in their box. Four flights were initially constructed to house their birds, but it wasn't long before they began acquiring additional birds, and then new aviaries were necessary.

Not all was an easy road for the Crossers. Although eager to learn as much as they could, they found that other breeders were reluctant to share information. The learning process was slow; the Crossers were self-taught and not without their share of mistakes along the way.

Initially, they started with wooden cages. Since their collection was dominated by psittacine birds, it wasn't long before birds were chewing through and a few even managed to escape. With that in mind, the Crossers began to replace their wooden flights with metal ones. At their current location, they had 87 flights, most of which have now been replaced and, of course, they are much closer to their goal of having 260 flights. The aviary framework is constructed from drywall channels which are screwed together with self-tapping screws. These screws are easy to use, as all you need is a driver that fits into the chuck of an electric hand drill. The wire itself is primarily 1/2” by 1” mesh, galvanized. A shelter area is provided at the rear of each flight and is made of sheet metal. The roof is partially open to allow sunlight in, and the aisleways are covered to protect from rain. The roof over the aisleways extends partially over the front of the flight to cover the feeding stations as well.

All the flights are approximately six
feet high, though the other dimensions vary according to the type of
type of birds to be housed. The Crossers believe smaller flights are more con­
ductive to successful breeding than larger ones. Originally, the macaw
flights were five feet wide by twelve feet long. The cockatoo flights were four by twelve feet. These cages pro­duced not even one successful breed­
ing. However, when the birds were
moved to flights only six feet in length, things began to happen imme­
diately, whereas they had sat in the
larger flights four years!

The entire Crosser aviary complex
is designed in a manner which will
facilitate tours. The Crossers love
people as much as they love birds and
are more than happy to share them
with school groups, and have even
provided access for the handicapped.
They usually permit people to visit all
year long, and have had no apparent
problems even during breeding
season. This year, however, they are
conducting an experiment to see if
the people passing through make a
difference.

When visiting the Crosser aviaries,
three things are particularly note­
worthy. First, despite all the birds and
flights, the cages are quite clean.
Second, the unique watering system,
and third, the interesting feeder
design.

The watering system consists of a
shallower plastic dish with a hole in the
center. The hole permits the dish to
slip on over a drain pipe. When the
water is turned on, it passes out of a
small copper pipe into the dish, caus­ing
the water to swirl around and
down the drain, carrying any dirt and
debris with it. Not only does it elimi­
nate any messy cleanup, it keeps the
floor from getting wet. The slip-on
design also permits easy removal for
thorough cleaning and disinfecting,
when necessary.

The feeders used by the Crossers
are their own unique design. They are
made from two pieces of 3-inch
diameter ABS pipe glued together in
the shape of the letter “L.” At the top
of the “L” fits a cap which, when
removed, permits the filling of the
feeder. At the opposite end of the “L”
is cut a small hole, the size varying
according to the resident bird species
within. These feeders are indestruct­
able. The feed flow is good, and the
birds cannot get into the feeder. And, 
what’s more, they are easy and inex­
pensive to make.

The Crossers have over 100 species
and subspecies of birds in their col­
lection. Not only are there a wide
variety of conures, cockatoos,
macaws, Amazons, Australian and
New Zealand parrots, but an interest­ing
collection of doves, quail, finches,
and a softbill or two. All of this on
only one and a quarter acres.

It is the desire of the Crossers to
concentrate on the Amazons and
macaws, though they will maintain
breeding programs for the other spe­
cies to sell to the pet trade in order to
financially support their operation.

Tal and Opal are very concerned
about the status of birds in the wild
and the declining habitats of many
species. It is their hope that these
vanishing species will be saved from
extinction through conservation and
 captive propagation, and they vow to
do their part to see these species
established in captivity. They look
forward to the day when they can
actively participate in returning
captive-born birds they raise to the
wild.

Continued on page 24

Know more about your birds.

Do you know:

How an egg is formed?
If birds do need exercise?
If grit is necessary in the diet?
Why the birds must turn their eggs?
Why the air space in the egg is important?
Why young birds are more prone to sickness?
How birds adapt to the changes in the weather?
If learned behaviors can be passed on to offspring?
Why birds don’t fall off their perches when sleeping?

This book explains:
Avian reproduction ♦ Egg formation
Chick Development ♦ Digestion
Feather structure and color ♦ Flight
How birds are named ♦ Nutrition
Avian genetics ♦ Sense organs

“No other avicultural
book like it!”
“Finally, a book which explains
the biology of birds in terms that
the average reader can understand.”

Understanding the Life of Birds: read it
from cover to cover, or use it as a reference
book. Contains glossary, full index and orig­
inal art. Hardbound. Over 300 pages.

Price is $21.95 plus $2.00 shipping & handling.
(California residents all 6% sales tax)

MAIL ORDER ONLY
Summit Publications, Dept. W
11565 Sunset Knolls Rd., Lakeside, CA 92040

afa WATCHBIRD 23
Crosser's unique 3" pipe feeders made to form an "L" with capped ends in service row.

Plumbeaded parakeet male. The pair has a choice of nest boxes.

Green winged doves and white cockatiels share an aviary.

Row of macaw flights.

Crosser's water system. Water swirls through dish and down drain in center. Dish slips off for easy cleaning and disinfecting.

This pair of blue and gold macaws uses a plastic nest barrel.
Often people think of Arizona as being extremely hot and dry. For those living in the cooler climes of New England or the Northwest, the question often arises, "How do the birds take the hot weather?" "No problem," says Tal. They used to worry about that, too.

Initially, the Crossers put misters on top of their aviaries, which would be turned on during the hottest part of the summer days. Although the temperature was reduced somewhat, the accumulated water on the aviary floors presented a different and more serious problem. With the constant evaporation, scale and salts built up on the flights, and the damp floors contributed to a fungal and bacterial problem. When the misters were eliminated, the problems went with them. Today, with the metal roofs reflecting the light and heat away, the flights remain surprisingly cool even on the hottest of days. Breeding season, by the way, begins in March and is usually over for most species by the time the hot weather hits.

The birds have so captivated the Crossers that it was only natural for them to turn it into a business as well. They have developed a nice wholesale and breeder supply operation right in their backyard. Since they live in a residential neighborhood, they were prudent to first obtain a Special Use Permit which allows them to operate. To acquire their permit, they had to have several hearings and seek the cooperation of their neighbors. Fortunately, the neighbors were mostly supportive.

Like so many aviculturists who love their birds, the Crossers have become quite active in organized avicultural activities. They joined the AFA in 1975. Tal is the current AFA delegate from the Arizona Avicultural Society, and Opal is chair of the AFA Convention Committee for the 1989 AFA Convention to be held that August in Phoenix. They have also been involved in the Arizona Avicultural Society's activities, including chairing that group's Education Committee.

The Crossers welcome visitors to their aviaries, and hope you will visit them when you are in Phoenix. Their address is 1644 N. 192nd Ave., Litchfield Park, AZ 85340. You may call them at (602) 853-0348 for an appointment. If you don't make it before the convention in 1989, be sure to visit them then.

---

**Feathers 'n Fabrics**

Send to:  
Name ____________________________  T-shirt $11.95  Style #  
Address ____________________________  Sweatshirt $21.95  
City, State, Zip ____________________________  Sizes: S, M, L, XL  Circle One  
CA residents add 6-1/2% sales tax  
Add $1.50 shipping & handling  
(Bird Clubs & Dealer Inquiries Welcome)

P.O. Box 2764  
Escondido, CA 92025  
(619) 432-9213