The Aviaries of Joe and Marge Longo
by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, California

Nestled in the verdant wooded and fern covered foothills of the Cascades, thirty-eight miles southeast of Seattle, Washington in the village of Kent, are the picturesque aviaries of Joe and Marge Longo. The beautiful surroundings provided by their 3.5 acre farm belie the consistently successful production of a wide range of species from psittacines to softbills in impressive numbers.

While most breeders in colder climes scurry for cover at the first sign of icy weather, the Longos merrily cater to their avian friends in the great outdoors of the Northwest, tromping along snow covered paths in the heart of winter as easily as through fields of wildflowers that intermingle with the mosses and ferns on a pleasant summer’s day. And the birds? Well, they do quite nicely in their outdoor pens, offering up a cornucopia of youngsters.

It all began for Joe and Marge twenty-four years ago with a pair of Barbary doves and golden pheasants. The pheasant collection quickly grew to nineteen species, and along with the collection arose an interest in formal avicultural groups, of which there were none in Washington focusing on the Longos’ interests. What to do? Why, form a club — so they became some of the founding members of the Washington Ornamental Game Bird Breeders in 1965. Joe served the club as its president, while Marge oversaw the duties of the club bulletin as its editor.

Interest in game birds expanded into other groups as the Longos added doves, grouse, curassows, a pair of cockatiels and Indian ringnecks (their first parrots) to their flock. As the collection multiplied, new quarters were sought, culminating in a move to their present location in 1976. Since the land was bare, the Longos had the fortunate opportunity to build an attractive and comfortable custom home. Hand in hand with their house construction came their first bird house — a complex for their curassows. Immediately following was the erection of their lory building. The Longos had certainly hit the ground running.

By the time Joe and Marge moved into their new facilities, the cockatiels were but a memory and shortly thereafter the ringnecks escaped into the towering pines, where they were indiscernible amongst the boughs. During the following years the Longos added to their lory collection until they had fifteen species, and over one-hundred-sixty individuals producing over eighty young per year. In fact, so successful were they with lories that they received two AFA Avy Awards — one for “outstanding success with, and perpetuation of, the family Loriidae” and the other for “consistent propagation of Stella’s lory.”

Naturally, you wouldn’t expect the Longos to sit back and just “raise” lories. They wanted to encourage interest in these colorful birds to ensure their establishment in captivity, so they helped start the Lory Society. Joe served this new group for three years as its president, while Marge served as secretary and treasurer in Joe’s administration.

During the lory expansion period, the growing collection witnessed the addition of larger parrots, including macaws, cockatoos, African greys, and eclectus (of course, there are a few smaller, seed eating parrots such as their sun conures). And all are doing well, especially the eclectus. Joe and Marge have set up fourteen pairs of various eclectus subspecies, such as the Vosmaeri, red sided, and Solomon Islands. In 1988, thirty-seven youngsters were reared from just four pair and, so far this year, two more pair have begun to reproduce.

Parrot production at the Longos is fairly routine. All eggs are removed from the nest for artificial incubation immediately after they are laid, with the exception of conure eggs, which the parents incubate for two weeks, when they are also pulled. The Longos have relied, in the past, on a Marsh Farms Rollex incubator, but have just switched over to the Humidaire Model 21 incubator with which they are extremely satisfied. Once the eggs are hatched, Marge has the privilege of handfeeding the newborn.

It should be mentioned here that the Longos’ parrot diet consists of their own seed mix (sunflowers, peanuts, plus many others) in which they mix a little wheat germ oil, Vionate vitamins, and tri-calcium phosphate. The oil provides some vitamin E and the medium for the Vionate and tri-calcium phosphate to adhere to the seeds. These latter ingredients are added fresh to each day’s ration to prevent the mixture from turning rancid. To supplement the seed mix, the Longos offer a good variety of fruits and vegetables.

If the Longos have earned a reputation for success with lories, they have more deservedly earned one for their very important work with the African group of softbills known as touracos. While most aviculturists devote themselves to rearing parrots (most species of which are well established in captivity), Joe and Marge elected to specialize in touracos, with which few others were occupied — surprisingly so, since the twenty-three species of touracos are among the...
This postcard scene is the view of the Longos' property looking toward eclectus bird house in the background. One of the Longos' other interests, a sika deer, occupies the foreground.

A handsome pair of the Longos' Solomon Island eclectus.

most colorful and entertaining of all softbills. Their relatively large size and extreme hardiness make them an ideal aviary bird.

The tryst with touracos began like many an avicultural pursuit — love at first sight. It was the picture of a

Fourteen pairs of eclectus are housed in this well designed structure providing year-round shelter from and access to the elements.

White crested touraco — the species that started the Longos on a touraco breeding binge.

Longo aviaries are nestled among the tall trees and hardy greenery of a Washington landscape.
Like all of the Longo bird houses, the conure building was designed for the birds' comfort, choice of environment, fresh air, sunshine, etc. and human convenience for feeding and cleaning.

white crested touraco on the cover of the AFA Watchbird, April/May 1979 issue that set Joe's heart a-pounding. He just had to have a pair (we all know the feeling). And, so he did — several pairs, not only of the white crested, but of fourteen different species. In 1988 the Longos reared seventy-one offspring, all of which were incubator hatched and handfed.

Joe and Marge's accomplishments with touracos place them in a class all their own, for they produced so many young over the past few years, they could be justifiably credited with establishing several species in captivity single-handed. Few aviculturists can lay claim to such a feat. Remarkably, their accomplishments occurred in a short five years since they acquired their first pairs, a pair of white crested and a pair of red crested.

The care of the touracos is fairly simple. They are fruit eaters, so they receive fresh fruit; usually diced apples, grapes, bananas, papaya, or whatever else is seasonally available. Protein is provided via Purina Hi-Pro
dog kibble, which is served dry right out of the bag. Fresh water is routinely available.

While touracos have been the mainstay of Joe’s and Marge’s interest in softbills, we must take note of their flirtation with toucans. Though they no longer keep toucans, they successfully reared tocos for several years, keeping five pairs of them at one time, along with several other species including red bills, citron throated, and some emerald toucanettes. These, like all the other birds, were housed outdoors all year in flights that allowed them to enter a shelter in the harshest of winter weather, but at their own free will. They would still have the toucans, and some of the others too, but they needed to retreat some from the many different diets they were feeding, to a more reasonable consolidation of their energies.

The Longos now devote full time to their bird collection, since Joe’s retirement from the insurance business in January 1986. “Retirement” is used here loosely, since the birds were really just more interesting than selling policies.

Over the years the Longos have given greatly of their time to avicultural organizations. In addition to their service to the Lory Society and the local game bird group, Joe has been a member of the American Game Bird Breeders Cooperative Federation, of which he was a vice-president. He became a game bird show judge in the late sixties, and was active in shows for many years.

Joe and Marge have been long standing members of the AFA, almost from the beginning. In fact, Joe was, for several years, the state coordinator for the state of Washington.

Devoted aviculturists, the Longos see their passion as not only a fun thing, but as a noble and worthy endeavor, from which they derive great personal satisfaction knowing they are making a contribution to the conservation of the species with which they work. Their guiding light is the oft-quoted William Beebe, former Curator of Birds at the Bronx Zoo, who said, “The beauty and genius of a work of art may be re-conceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; the harmony of a vanished melody may yet again inspire a composer. But when the last individual of a race of living things breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again.”

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