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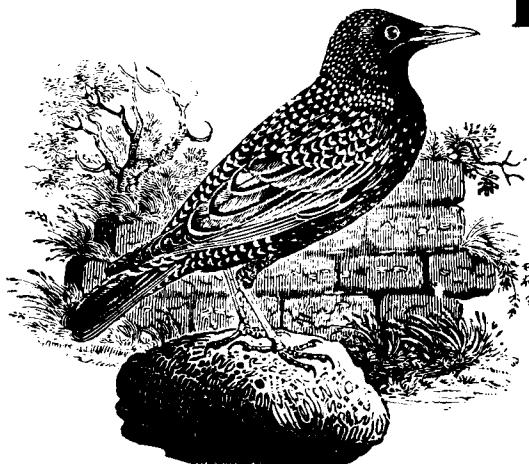


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A Most Magnificent Bird



by Bruce W. Miller,
 Supervisor Bird Dept.
 San Antonio Zoo

After spending a routine day at the San Antonio Zoo working in one of the largest and most diverse bird collections in the country, I come home to my own favorite bird. People generally think a zoo person would obviously have something very rare at home after dealing with so many species. Well, in my case, they are dead right. My favorite is extremely rare in captivity and even rarer as a pet. I was fortunate to find two of these birds offered by one of the nation's most respected aviculturists, Bernard Roer. Having known Mr. Roer for several years now, I can truly say he appreciates this fabulous bird even more than I do. I was so anxious to get one of these birds I took them at one week old from the nest and hand-raised them myself. When they were self-feeding I returned one to Roer's Bird Farm and kept the female.

Those who meet Perky for the first time have two comments; first, what an attractive bird she is and second, what is she? Of course there are those who look down their noses at anything that is not a hookbill, and Perky is a softbill.

In order to objectively evaluate if I was blinded by her striking appearance and rarity I entered her in the Alamo Exhibition Bird Club's Eighth Annual All-Bird Show, held September 1, in San Antonio. Since she is a rare softbill she was placed in the catch-all class called All-Other-Varieties. My appreciation was shared by the judges. She received two blue ribbons and a trophy for best in class, best in section and best softbill in show. She was invited to be entered in the Open Bird Show, in October in the capital city of Austin, as well as the state show in November in

Temple. She will be shown as often as possible in the future.

One of the many joys to a zoo person in the bird business is acquiring a rare bird without the usual reams of paperwork. This bird requires no permits. It is legal under both state and federal regulations. The cost of one of these birds is not really a factor though, as they are rarely available as hand-raised young. They are good talkers and carry a tune. Actually they can be found for less than \$300.00. More often, when they can be found, for less than \$100.00. Sound unbelievable in this day and age of high-priced birds? What do you think a good talker should cost? What could a beautifully marked bird with all its subtleties, which will gleefully fly to your shoulder and talk be? You don't even need to fear those unsightly and often painful notches in your ear, commonly called 'Pscitticine ear'.

Well, Perky's vocabulary after one and a half years includes: Hello, I am Perky Bird; You're so sweet; Good-bye; several other short phrases, many mumbles, several short tunes whistled and unfortunately she will not repeat the first phrase that was attempted to be taught her. This phrase is "I am a darling starling". Perky is a *Sternus vulgaris*, the common starling. In my book the most magnificent of birds.

I hope to see more of these pets and plan to provide a limited number as hand-raised young to those who can truly appreciate this rarely kept, sadly neglected bird. After all, they are the "poor man's mynah". If you are good at hand-raising softbills, then find a nest in the spring and pull a chick at about one week old. Then brace yourself for the treat of your life.