

A LOOK AT THE HAGEN AVICULTURE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

By Melanie Allen

When it was suggested that I write an article on the Hagen Avicultural Research Institute (HARI) for the Watchbird, especially since this year's AFA Convention Key Note Speaker is Mark Hagen, I truly thought the article would just write itself! There are so many things to say about HARI that I wanted to share, but when it came down to just an article that explained the dedication and rich history of a parrot breeding facility in Canada, there was just too much to tell. And, honestly, the initial article sounded much too much like a polished press release. After giving much consideration to the process, I decided to tell the HARI story from not just an employee of Rolf C. Hagen perspective, but from an aviculturist's perspective. After all, it is from that perspective that I came to appreciate what HARI stands for!

And, this is HARI...

The most significant thing to say about HARI stems from a statement that is widely expressed by the HARI Team - "nothing is absolute - we are always learning". And nothing

could be more true when one looks at the many spokes of the avian community and all that the world of psittacine encompasses - be it companion bird, retailing birds and bird products, breeding, rescue and adoption, veterinarian contributions and especially wild parrot conservation. HARI has contributed to each of those spokes of the avian community with financial as well as supportive experience and knowledge that stems from the facility's meager beginning in a rented warehouse in 1985 to the self sustaining state of the art facility in Rigaud, Canada that it is today. With that being said, HARI has its roots well planted with a solid foundation fed by experiences of successes and failures, and then coupled with budding innovative philosophies to ensure the future for parrots and the avian community. With the passion of keeping parrots as pets, all while having a strong and committed concern for parrots in the wild, Mark Hagen, Director of Research at Rolf C. Hagen Inc. and HARI, has lead his facility with a "share the knowledge" philosophy within the avian community on a global scale for decades. In



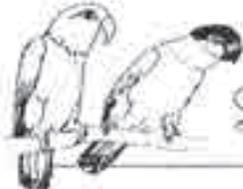
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fact, Mark Hagen and members of the HARI Team have spoken on all topics at avian seminars and conferences all over the world. In one of my most memorable aviculturist conferences many years ago, Mark Hagen, while presenting his talk at a US conference, “The Acquisition of Amazons”, openly discussed HARI’s Pacheco’s virus outbreak. That was remarkable to me! After all, back in the 1980’s when so many of the avian diseases were still a baffling and heartbreaking experience for many aviculturists and avian veterinarians, here was an aviculturist willing to admit that a disease was present at his facility. He offered not just solutions in husbandry protocol, but also support to the veterinarian community, with hopes that the avian community would benefit. I have learned that from that point forward, sharing knowledge is probably the most notable aspect of Mark Hagen and HARI, which benefits the entire avian community.

How HARI started...

In HARI’s infancy, Mark Hagen’s first facility was set up in a converted warehouse to hold the flock. His initial objective was to study the nutrition, husbandry, and captive breeding strategies for captive bred parrots. While the founding HARI flock of parrots consisted of 400 wild-caught pairs and included a broad array of species including Amazons, macaws and cockatoos, today, there are now about 250 pairs, many of which are captive bred from the original founding flock members. In fact, many of the original founding flock at HARI today are still part of the collection today. These older birds continue to provide a valuable and continual source of data for one of HARI’s longest ongoing research projects in longevity studies in parrot nutrition. Some of the Amazons, a particular favorite genus of Mark Hagen’s, have produced 2nd generation on 100% extruded diet. (photo of DYH pair-among the oldest residents at HARI)

Wild Parrot Conservation - Always a forefront with HARI philosophy...

While many members of the avian community focus on their companion birds, the HARI philosophy has regarded efforts in wild parrot protection and conservation with high respect and utmost importance. This is due to a sense of duty, as many of our companions and breeding livestock are just a few generations from their wild counterparts. In recent years, Mark has traveled extensively to observe the many wild parrot conservation projects he and the company have supported, as the HARI philosophy has always included a strong message to support wild parrot conservation endeavors such as the re-entry of the Great Green macaw (*Ara ambiguus*) through the ARA Project as well as the Abaco Parrot Project in the Bahamas to name a few. Highlights from his visits to Costa Rico facilities are captured in his photo journal, which can

be viewed at www.Hagen.com.

HARI’s support for wild parrot conservation has not always been a matter of writing a check or sending product. Sometimes necessary support for important field work comes with a different approach. Here’s an example of how one spoke of the avian community serves another which begs the question, how effective can a field researcher be with in situ parrot conservation projects if he requires experience and skills to evaluate and safely restrain wild parrots?

Such was the case for Charles Britt, Avian Field Ecologist, with regards to a collaborative effort with Dr. Janice Boyd of Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center, Dept. of Veterinary Pathobiology, Texas A & M University, in an ongoing study using telemetry devices to track macaw movements in Belize.

It is one thing to climb up Ceiba trees that often reach 230 feet to inspect macaw nests, but it is a whole new ball game when it comes to installing these telemetry devices on wild macaws! Britt spent a very intense week with the HARI staff and the HARI macaws as they provided training that included compassionate and ethical handling techniques as well as advice and lessons in general health assessments for the nestlings and the adult birds that proved to be vital in this study.

HARI - Now and the future...

HARI’s breeding program challenges have evolved to reflect the dynamics of the parrot world as we know it today. Much like the avian community over the past 28 years, HARI has faced challenges in the avian community with regards to pet bird industry. One of those challenges includes an increase of awareness for parrot adoption and rescue facilities in North America as well as some of the various reasons these facilities exist. With that being said, one of the highlights of HARI’s involvement in this area has centered on how to raise a parrot so that the young fledgling is

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better prepared as a companion pet. This strategy, known formally as the HARI Early Parrot Education or EPE program, developed as a structured approach to prepare young fledgling parrots deemed for a life as a companion animal to thrive and ultimately make a well adjusted and better pet than uneducated birds. The EPE program also addresses many of the negative attributes associated with maturity and mishandling on the part of the pet owner. While an EPE graduate is not guaranteed to stay in one home for its life, the potential of re-homing a pet bird in need, which may very well be expected due to the average life span of some species, is much easier as the bird will not have developed the negative attributes normally associated with parrots relinquished to parrot rescues. For pet retailers and breeders in Canada, EPE birds sell quickly and hold a higher value, as the lessons they learn remain with them for life. EPE is not just a program for companion birds. EPE also has its place in breeding and HARI's future plans in producing what will expect to be a more domesticated companion bird. Of the numerous parrot fledglings each season, the HARI Team retains the cream of the crop for HARI's future breeding flock. These fledglings are chosen by their aptitude for EPE as well as for confirmation of the species. In fact, some graduates of the EPE program are entering in their first breeding season at the time of this publication.

Networking and building relationships to aid advancements in avian veterinary medicine

As with any avian facility, veterinarians and their skills are required to properly and ethically manage livestock. HARI maintains a close and respected relationship with many facets of the veterinary community, and often the HARI flock members serve this need as a "hands-on" teaching tool. The respect stems from past collaboration in avian health advancements to the needs of the up and coming

veterinarians and veterinary technicians today. Historically, the HARI flock has served as research subjects for veterinary colleges for many of the diagnostic and preventative procedures we know today. We must keep in mind that, at HARI's inception, avian veterinary medicine was in its infancy. One of the most interesting advancements that aviculturists and avian veterinarians utilize today basically originated as a "win-win" benefit for both HARI and for Dr. Michael Taylor, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph.

While veterinary medicine utilized fluoroscopy or endoscopy procedure for many animals, the sheaths or tools used to do this diagnostic work on psittacines did not exist in the 1980's. Dr. Taylor, in association with Karl Storz Endoscopy, created these tools specifically for psittacines, using the HARI birds as his first subjects. This was a "win-win" for HARI, as the founding flock which was comprised mostly of wild caught imports had unknown health conditions, gender confirmation or proof of age. At the time, very few aviculturist clients were willing to allow their birds to be used as research subjects for the benefit of Dr. Taylor's endoscopy tool development. However, Mark Hagen realized the advantage of offering his collection to University of Guelph and to Dr. Taylor for this vital research. This advancement was especially beneficial since one of the HARI research mandates was to establish longevity studies in nutrition. It was critical to know that a bird included in the nutritional study was of optimal health and did not have pre-existing conditions that could alter the results of the study. Today many aviculturists have utilized this endoscopy, also known as surgical sexing, procedure with determining sex and overall health and condition of a potential breeding bird prior to adding it to their collection. Today HARI and the HARI flock continue to serve as a teaching venue for veterinarian technicians. As a well established exotic animal



care facility, HARI provides students of avian health technology with internship programs in order to gain valuable hands-on experience with parrots and other exotic animals at the facility. Momentarily, internships such as these are granted as time and space permit. However, the HARI Team, along with retired HARI birds, often participate in nearby curriculum programs accredited by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), and the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC).

As it stands now, and what's in store for the future...

Is the research complete? No! HARI continues moving forward with a more proactive approach to the ever-changing avian community. The HARI Team will continue to collaborate with aviculturists all over the world. Also, with recent expansion at HARI that includes the addition of reptile and small exotic mammal research for Hagen's pet product development and animal health, the HARI facility will expand on the educational commitment with site expansions to accommodate seminar venue and hands-on opportunities. It is the spirit of this nature that drives the HARI TEAM daily to develop strategies that improve lifestyle for companion birds and manage companion parrots responsibly.

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