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AFA visits . . . Tal and Opal Crosser

by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, California



Photo courtesy of T. & O. Crosser

Tal and Opal Crosser

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 aisles are covered to protect from rain. The roof over the aisleway 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 birds to be housed. The Crossers believe smaller flights are more conducive to successful breeding than are large 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 breeding. However, when the birds were moved to flights only six feet in length, things began to happen immediately, 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 shallow 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 eliminate 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 indestructible. The feed flow is good, and the

birds cannot get into the feeder. And, what's more, they are easy and inexpensive to make.

The Crossers have over 100 species and subspecies of birds in their collection. 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 species 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?
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- 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?

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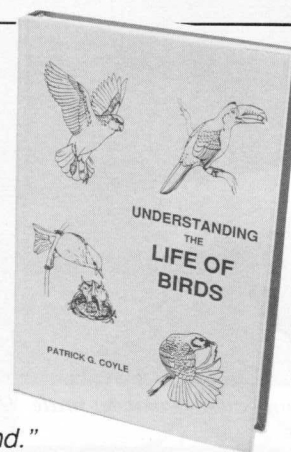
Patrick G. Coyle, a professor of biology, has been keeping and breeding birds for over 15 years. He also teaches a very popular class in aviculture. The author excels at combining his scientific background with his personal interest in birds to present avian information that is both interesting and useful.

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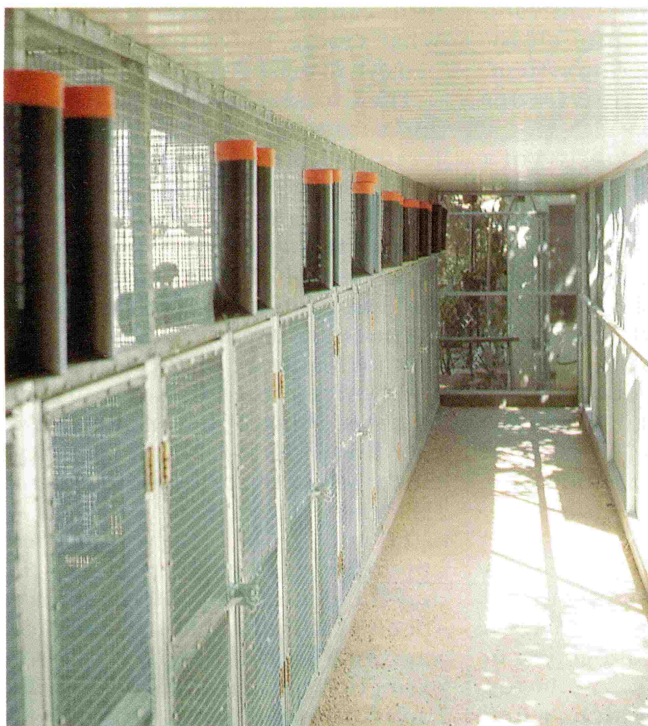


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Crosser's unique 3" pipe feeders made to form an "L" with capped ends in service row.



Row of macaw flights.



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



Green winged doves and white cockatiels share an aviary.



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.

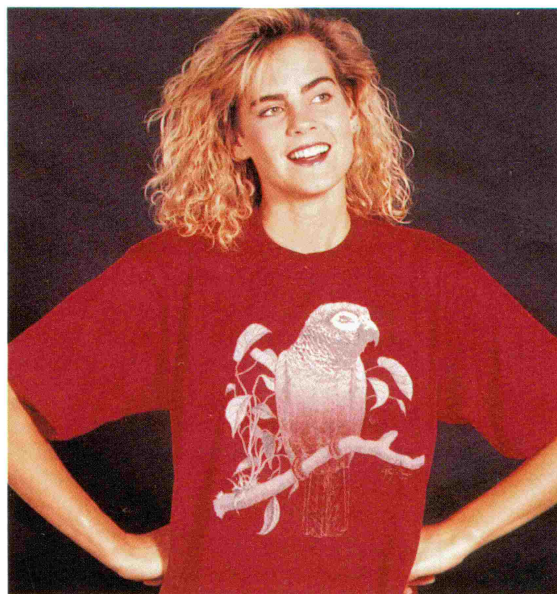
The birds have so captivated the Crossers that it was only natural for them to turn it into a business as well. They have developed a nice wholesale and breeder supply operation right in their backyard. Since they live in a residential neighborhood, they were prudent to first obtain a Special Use Permit 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. ●



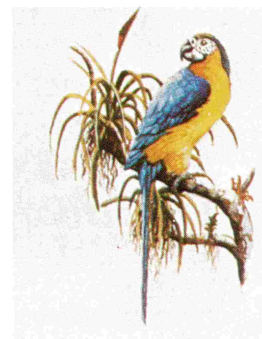
Amazon/African Grey # AAG



African Grey # AFG (Red Only)



Cockatoos # CT



Blue/Gold Macaw # BG



Toucans # TC



Scarlet # SC

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