

# **Inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species & ecological communities' protection in Australia.**

Submitted by the Finch Society of Australia Inc.

As an exclusively avicultural organisation our scope is limited to what we can contribute to the discussion but we have included a number of points for your consideration based on the experiences of those within our Society and trust that there is some relevance to your Inquiry amongst them.

Our experiences relate to avian matter only given the obvious nature of our Society.

## **a) Management of key threats to listed species & ecological communities.**

We support any means that enable the avifauna of any State or Territory to be preserved and many of our members are active in the eradication and removal of exotic avian pests such as the European starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*, and the Indian mynah, *Acridotheres tristis* which will take over the nests of native Australian Psittacine species. The Starling is particularly adept at doing this and will even build their nests over the top of the young of many parrot species and has been widely reported by our members.

However, as aviculturists we find it degrading that states such as Tasmania propose to introduce new Bird Keeping Regulations that make a mockery of the long record of aviculture in that state. Their proposed draconian changes to current bird keeping practises are designed to alienate the entire bird keeping public which has contributed nought to feral species in that state. Had a legitimate open consultancy process been embarked upon much of the angst may well have been avoided instead of the current alienation that exists.

## **b) Development & implementation of recovery plans.**

As aviculturists we have much to offer the planning of such programs designed at the captive propagation of endangered avian species. Yet there is little in the way of involvement of these skills in current Australian programs.

As an example I use the captive breeding program of the endangered Swift parrot, *Lathamus discolor*, which migrates to Tasmania every year to breed. These birds were as rare in captivity as they were in the wild and 3 Tasmanian aviculturists set out to rectify this with outstanding results. In consultation with a number of avian veterinarians and Mainland breeders of Swift parrots they were able to rewrite the husbandry manual for this species and debunk a number of previous limiting factors in the captive management

of this species.

The end result was that these breeders produced large numbers of captive bred Swift parrots thus negating any temptation for unscrupulous people to prop up captive stocks with illegally trapped birds.

The price dropped from ~\$3,500/pair down to the current price of ~\$250/pair in a short number of years. In fact the 3 breeders produced more birds in one season than the Official recovery program being undertaken at Adelaide Zoo – in fact they supplied some surplus birds to that institution as a gift.

However, throughout this entire process they were met with every imaginable obstruction from the Tasmanian Nature Conservation Branch whom, apparently, did not believe that they would succeed. Even when they reported back to them with the success of their breeding program at one stage they were told to cease breeding them and to separate breeding birds.

I use this as an example of the gulf that is allowed to exist between the huge skills bank that is residing in the avicultural community and ignored or rejected by the persons involved in decision making for such recovery programs with certain state Wildlife authorities.

With a modicum of sense the combination of both parties would go, we believe, a long way towards a marked improvement in the outcomes of any breeding programs for endangered avian species.

It is possibly no accident that the Blue Macaw Coordinator at the Al Wabra Wildlife Preserve (AWWP) in Qatar is Ryan Watson – an aviculturist from Western Australia. His main involvement is with the Spix macaw, *Cyanopsitta spixii*, a species that is, most regrettably, extinct in the wild.

The involvement of the FSA and many other similar avicultural bodies and societies is also well documented with regards the Save The Gouldian Fund (STGF) which was established by 3 aviculturists to work with state and federal bodies in the preservation of the iconic Gouldian finch, *Erythrura gouldiae*, in outback Western Australia.

This body has made considerable donations to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy in order for it to procure more territory of the Gouldian finch and to fence large areas to further reduce the impact of feral species on the habitat of the Gouldian. It also supports and funds research undertaken at certain Universities into the limiting factors effecting the distribution of the Gouldian finch in the wild.

Many avicultural bodies support this with regular monetary donations and with their own time to participate in the annual census and fund raising activities all designed to preserve this species in the wild.

Through such initiatives we believe it demonstrates the commitment of the

average aviculturist to the conservation of the species that we hold in our aviaries.

**g) Other Matters:**

Simply to restate that there exists a vast reservoir of experience and expertise within the avicultural community that would/could further enhance captive breeding programs of endangered Australian avian species.

There appears to be some reticence on the behalf of State wildlife authorities in involving such talented aviculturists in such programs which we find self-defeating in light of the excellent record of aviculturist with species such as the Swift, Golden shouldered, Princess & Hooded parrots.

Through support of the STGF in the case of finch breeder's it should demonstrate a willingness to embrace conservation values and support such programs.

We trust that the future will break down such negative barriers and allow for our expertise to be allowed to enhance any such State &/or Territory breeding programs.

On behalf of the executive and members of the FSA Inc. we thank you for the opportunity to contribute to such a discussion.

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