

INTRODUCTION

My practice began 30 years ago during the heyday of parrot importation into the United States. At that time many people purchased wild-caught birds with the intent of breeding them, selling the babies as pets, and making a profit. Parrot aviculture was brand new and most attempts at breeding were by trial and error. However, over the years bird breeders and veterinarians have learned much about aviculture techniques, health-related issues, and ways to provide for the physical and psychological well being of parrots in captivity.



Picture 1: A breeding pair of Festive Amazon Parrots (*A. festiva bodini*)

I entered the field of pet bird medicine in its infancy. My immediate contribution was surgical sexing of birds. I was one of the first veterinarians to develop and promote this procedure. This was in 1978 and I was working at UC Davis near Sacramento, CA. At that time this was the only way to determine the sex of monomorphic species.

I quickly found out that it was impractical for aviculturists who had lots of birds that needed sexing to bring them to me. So I traveled to them. One aviculturist would tell another about my services who in turn would tell

someone else. Before long I was traveling to more and more aviary facilities to sex birds and offer advice on aviculture techniques.



Picture 2: Aviculturists with large aviary in California

I moved from California to Chicago, IL in 1980 to work at the Brookfield zoo. But clients back in California still requested my services as there was no one there to provide it. So I started traveling back to California twice a year beginning in 1981 for a week at a time to continue this practice. As the years went by, the time needed for these trips increased to two weeks, then to three weeks. Then two trips a year became three. My business also expanded into Oregon and Washington. At present I travel back to the West Coast three times a year, for three weeks each trip, sexing and examining birds. In addition I also travel to many states in the Midwest and Southeast. I'm away from home about 5 months each year (I'm lucky I have such an understanding wife!). I do have a home office where I see some patients, but most of my practice is mobile in nature. The nature of my practice has changed over the years. Twenty five years ago 95% of what I did was surgical sexing. Today it is probably less than 20%. I see far more pet birds for routine examinations and groomings than breeder birds that need to be surgically sexed.

There are two main reasons for this. First the number of aviculturists has declined. This is because of less profitability, burn out from a work schedule that can be unrelenting, and debilitating illness and death of old time bird breeders. There are very few young people entering this field to take their place. Second, the introduction of DNA technology in the last 20 years has given aviculturists a non-invasive option to surgical sexing.

This has led to the evolution of Bird Clinics in the different states in which I work. These clinics allow an aviculturist who may have only a few birds to be sexed to see me (close to where he lives) without my going to his home or aviary. They also provide a local place where pet owners can bring their birds to be examined and groomed. Many of my clinics are held in areas where there are not local, experienced avian veterinarians.

Bird clinics are usually sponsored by a local bird club, a pet store, a veterinary hospital, or one or more interested individuals who want to host a clinic. Some clinics are held only once a year. Others are set up on a regular schedule every three, four, or six months.

My treatment techniques have also changed over the years. Likewise, the Standard of Care that veterinarians provide to clients and their pets has also changed. In this section I have attempted to outline and describe the various PROTOCOLS of my unique pet bird practice. These protocols have been examined by several veterinary state boards and at present meet with their approval.



Picture 3: Examining a bird at one of many bird clinics across the country.

PRACTICE PROTOCOLS

When I see a new client for the first time, they must read and sign a consent form (CLIENT INFORMATION FORM). This describes the services I provide and the methods by which I do so. They also fill out a form providing client and bird information which is entered into my database on a laptop computer.

I have described how I set up a BIRD CLINIC and indicate what is required regarding FACILITIES (the room in which I work).

EQUIPMENT AND INSTRUMENT STANDARDS describes how I set up my operating table, the instruments and equipment I use, and how I keep everything clean and sanitized.

Most of my procedures are performed using INHALATION ANESTHESIA. I discuss my reasons why, talk about safety, describe how I evaluate a bird before sedating it, indicate the amount of gas that I give, and how I recover the patient.

I have detailed how I GROOM AND PHYSICALLY EXAM a pet bird, how I perform SURGICAL SEXING, and how I MICROCHIP a bird.

I talk about POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS OF SURGICAL SEXING and have printed a copy of my POSTOPERATIVE HOME INSTRUCTIONS form which all new clients receive. It goes into detail about what the client can expect or should watch for regarding their pet's recent visit.

Lastly I discuss my RECORDS. I will always have sexing certificates and some handouts, but as much as possible I'm slowly converting everything to computerized records.