



BOOK REVIEW

## Aviculture: A History

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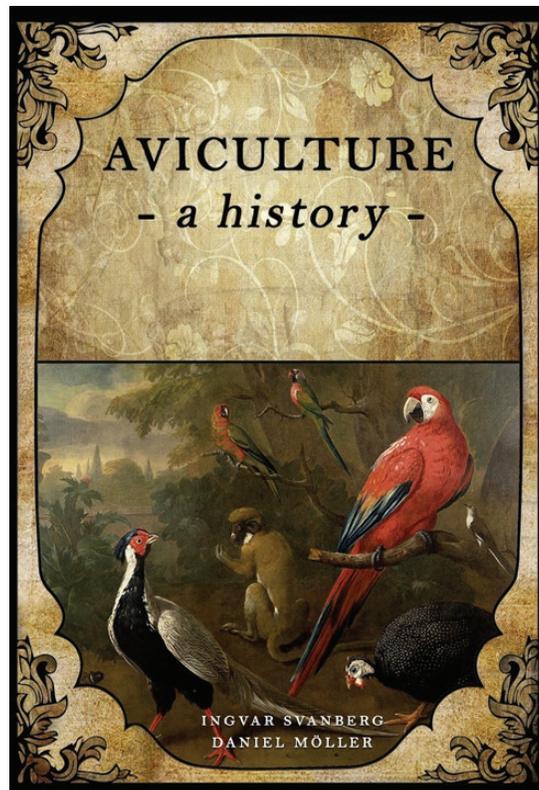
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**Aviculture: A History** edited by Ingvar Svanberg and Danier Möller. 2018. Hancock House Publishers Ltd., Blaine, Washington, USA. x + pp., 53 text figures. \$74.95 (hardcover), \$54.95 (softcover). ISBN 0-88839-013-0.

Finally, the science behind and history of aviculture gets the recognition it deserves. Birds have long dazzled us as a unique component of the natural world. Whether it be their mastery of flight, the occupation of and adaptation to every major ecosystem on Earth, their unparalleled songs, their flamboyant courtship displays, or the possession of an evolutionary masterpiece, the feather, humans have worshipped, sought, and highly prized this highly varied class of vertebrate animals. It was for these reasons, and assuredly others, that man began bringing these birds into the home to study, propagate and enjoy their elaborate behaviors, habits, and ornamentation. The keeping of birds is a widely held, centuries-old tradition that involves methods as diverse as the creatures this book discusses. One of the many reasons for keeping birds was to capitalize on their uncanny evolutionary prowess, putting to use their finely developed abilities to enhance human cultural practices. This text includes many examples of how birds have improved human lives, such as the purpose of pest control, from the tamed wading birds of Finland that eliminated cockroach infestations to the Mexican roadrunners kept in homes to eliminate mice, snakes, and other undesirable visitors. Yet another example, falconry, is an ancient tradition that

is at least 4,000 years old and is still practiced today, and highlights the relationship that can exist between human and avian kind. This tome truly captures the many ways birds have enhanced human societies and have continued to pique our curiosity about the natural world.

Kisling, Jr. additionally highlights the extensive history of aviculture through his examination of parrot aviculture among New World societies, including the Incas who kept extensive collections of living specimens; this long-standing tradition extends to today where many of the peoples of Central and South America keep parrots as pets and also use their feathers in ceremonial ornaments. With certain parrot species being some of the most commonly kept pets in the world, it is of particular interest that this practice has very deep roots. Of particular significance is the extensively detailed account by Lindholm that details the evolution of aviculture in America, from the cross-Atlantic excitement surrounding the trade of the North American Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) to the increased propagation of bird species from around the world in private collections and zoos and the detailed history of the now extinct Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*). Lindholm's encyclopedic knowledge of avicultural history is second to none and provides a rare and fascinating context behind how birds are kept today in both private collections and zoological institutions. To say that aviculture was and is practiced by many different types of people would be an understatement; Lindholm cites



examples from royalty who managed elaborate aviaries with a wide variety of specimens to parrots that called the White House home. He goes on to detail trends like that of the former practice of keeping native U.S. birds and the laws that followed to protect them as well as the history of introducing non-native species such as the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) that can be found across the United States today. Also described is how aviculture has saved species from the brink of extinction. From the propagation of the Bali Mynah (*Leucopsar rothschildi*), to the extraction of birds from islands like Guam and the Marianas, which had been overtaken by invasive predators, aviculture has truly been a revolution of the human spirit.

In additional entries, there continues to be something for every reader. A discussion on the domestication of 2 still commonly held bird species, the Bengalese Finch (*Lonchura domestica*) and the Java Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*), details their origins, breeding practices, and popularity among aviculturists today. Other skillfully detailed chapters guide the reader through the trials and successes of other avicultural innovations like that of hummingbird

breeding efforts and chaffinch singing competitions in Europe. The blending of human interest stories with the science of aviculture is due to delight a wide range of readers and shed light on our birdkeeping origins. A common theme emerges throughout this text that captures the true importance of aviculture throughout the ages. The keeping and breeding of birds in a host of different cultures allowed for a closeness to nature and a deep appreciation for the creatures that inhabit the Earth. These aviculturists, who even today continue to share their vast knowledge and experience with a great diversity of avian species, have added so much to our collective knowledge of the natural history of birds from around the world. This history of aviculture reinforces the work of today's aviculturists, both the professional and the hobbyist, who are keeping countless species in existence to ensure a future with birds. This volume is a true triumph and should be included in the library of every bird enthusiast, zoo, museum, and university.

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