

Meet Jason Crean

This month we hit the Midwest to visit a man whose biography alone would require more space than this column allows, and that would be in small type! While maintaining his own aviary of various species, Jason Crean also teaches biology at both the high school and the college level, and he works at the Brookfield Zoo in the Conservation Biology Department. His greatest joy is educating people of all ages about what goes on in the natural world.

Q. What sparked your interest in keeping birds?

A. I was an animal lover early on and thought birds were just so unique. I loved dogs growing up, but birds just had an intelligence that was above and beyond that. I started breeding cockatiels when I was 12. I was really interested in the genetics behind color mutations, which probably led me to obtain my degrees in biology.

Q. What species do you keep?

A. Currently, I am actively breeding green aracarís (toucanets), white-backed mousebirds and lineolated parakeets. We hand-raise all of our chicks but watch them via wireless camera through hatching until the day we pull them for hand-rearing.

Q. Why do you keep birds?

A. They're intelligent, and every species is full of surprises. I greatly enjoy avian biology: how avian anatomy works, how they pass genes on to their chicks, and how they use the adaptations to thrive in their environment.

Q. What do you love most about keeping birds?

A. Experimenting. The scientist in me is always interested in seeing how I can improve the lives of my birds through better dietary additions, enrichment opportunities and other things.

Q. What do you hate most about keeping birds?

A. Losing a chick while its still in the nest. I feel so helpless when it happens, as there is just not much you can do. However, every breeder must come to understand that some species are difficult to breed and that this could happen whether in the wild or in a managed setting.

Q. What species do you enjoy working with the most and why?

A. I love working with green aracarís as their personality is unparalleled. When I hand-raise chicks, they are so full of energy and they absolutely love human attention.



COURTESY, JASON CREAN

Q. What species do you find the most challenging to work with and why?

A. Believe it or not, lineolated parakeets can be difficult at times as their parenting skills can leave a lot to be desired. They can be quirky breeder; you never know how a parent will care for its young.

Q. Has a specific bird made the biggest difference, impression or connection with you?

A. Cricket, my personal pet aracari. She's a beautiful bird that is incredibly adaptive in almost any situation. She comes out with me to events and community education programs and just loves the attention from people.

.....

"Anyone can be an 'expert' online and give bad advice, so new aviculturists beware."

Q. Have you received any awards?

A. I have received Distinguished Alumni awards and Innovative Educator awards for my work with animal education in the high school and college where I teach. I am also proud of the articles I have written and published as well as my manual, "Zoo Genetics: Key Aspects of Conservation" published this year.

Q. Do you belong to any groups or organizations?

A. I stay active in avicultural organizations by serving on the boards of the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA) and the National Finch & Softbill Society (NFSS). I am also president of The Avicultural Society of Chicagoland (www.tasc-chicago.org), which hosts the Midwest Bird Expo every spring. I talk to many breeders, not only in my area, but all over the country.

Q. Do you have any mentors? Who have you found most helpful?

A. California breeders Hal Volkaty and Paula Strasser are extremely personable and knowledgeable when it comes to breeding and raising softbill species. I owe them much in gratitude for their willingness to help others in aviculture. I also am thankful to have colleagues at the zoo at which I work who have vast experience as well.

Q. Have you made any changes in the way you keep birds?

A. I built an addition on my house that serves as a four-season enclosed aviary. It was a difficult task but a worthwhile one as the birds are quite happy and breeding more successfully; lots of natural light, fresh air and plenty of room! I also do DNA analysis of my birds, as I aid in service work in the genetics lab at our zoo where genetic testing is done for any zoo in the country.

Q. Do you have any advice to pass along to anyone interested in keeping birds?

A. Don't buy into myth. There is a great deal of bad information out

there and people interested in breeding should consult a wide range of resources before deciding on what to breed and keep. Always ask for references from breeders, not only so you can learn more about the breeder, but to also learn more about how to care for species that others have obtained from that breeder.

Spare no expense! You always get what you pay for, so I always recommend feeding organic diets and using teas and oils in those diets to help your birds thrive, not just survive.

Q. What do you still want to learn?

A. I want to continue to learn more about the emergency care for young chicks. I want to increase the chances of chicks surviving when they must be pulled from the nest too early in an emergency situation.

Q. What do you feel is the most important concern for new aviculturists today?

A. The overwhelming amount of information that is out there via the internet. Everyone has a different way of doing things, and it can be difficult to ascertain what would be most effective for you. Anyone can be an "expert online" and give bad advice, so new aviculturists beware. Meet people, talk to them, visit their aviary, and talk to their references. This will give you a clear picture of what is necessary for a new aviculturist to be successful.

Q. Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

A. Still teaching biology, still raising my birds and still working for the zoo. Basically, still doing what I love to do! ■

Dick Schroeder has kept and bred birds for about 30 years. Schroeder's avian collection contains nearly 200 individual specimens. He served as president of the Avicultural Society of America (ASA) and currently serves as vice president of the International Larinae Society and is a director of the American Lory Society. He writes articles on aviculture for various publications and resides in California.



A Little Bird Told Me...

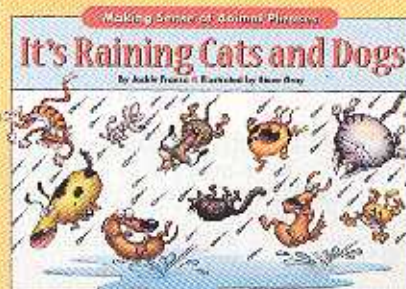
Ever wonder why we say "The early bird gets the worm?"

Find the answer to this and more with

It's Raining Cats and Dogs



It's Raining Cats and Dogs is filled with the meanings and origins of your favorite animal phrases.



\$6.95. 1-931993-74-2

Available at
bookstores
near you!

Call 1-800-PET-BOOK™
for more information.

BOWTIE
PRESS

www.bowtiepress.com