

# Battalion Classifieds

## Birds gain in popularity as common family pets

By Tracy Hamm  
Reporter

A recent migration into households across the country has birds of all types gaining popularity as common family pets.

Interest in birds as pets developed in the 1970s with the "back-to-nature" movement and has grown steadily ever since, said Dr. Fred Thornberry, poultry specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Thornberry said the parakeet is the most common and most popular bird to have as a pet because it is small and inexpensive. However, he said, the cockatiel is increasing in popularity because it talks easily and is less expensive than a parrot, he said.

Of the exotic birds, cockatoos and Amazon parrots are the best talkers, he said.

But Steve Feldman, an employee of Pet Emporium in Post Oak Mall, said Amazon parrots are particular about their associates.

"Amazons get bonded to people and don't like anyone else," he said. "They have distinct personalities."

Danny Martillotti, another employee of Pet Emporium, said that people who like birds enough to invest in them love the birds as household pets.

"The birds become attached to their owners," Martillotti said. "They love to be handled and love attention."

Mike Matticola, a sophomore aerospace engineering major, and

"Birds can provide companionship, but they do not take a lot of space or time."

— Dr. Fred Thornberry,  
TAES poultry specialist

his pet cockatiel, Partner, have been together since April 1986.

"Partner is lovable and a good bird," Matticola said. "He wants to be playful. Birds are a lot of fun and they develop their own personalities. Partner responds to people with whistles."

The most important thing to teach a bird is trust, Matticola said.

"They need to be taught to sit on your finger first," he said. "The bird must trust your hand."

Feldman said smaller birds such as parakeets range in price from \$14 to \$18. The average cost for a bird is between \$30 and \$40, he said. However, the exotic birds such as cockatoos cost about \$2,000 and Amazon parrots cost between \$650 and \$800, he said.

Start-up equipment costs about \$75, with an additional \$10 a month for supplies, Feldman said.

The Pet Emporium receives most of its big birds from local individuals and the smaller birds from Texas breeders, he said.

One local breeder, Nancy Gallaway, raises macaws, which she sells to brokers who place the birds in good

homes. The birds range in price from \$600 to \$10,000.

Thornberry said the bird industry is growing rapidly in Texas and generates between \$10 million and \$15 million a year in revenue.

When buying a bird, Thornberry said, people should be certain the bird is not aggressive, it is reasonably tame, its eyes have good color and its feathers appear glossy.

He cautioned buyers to be careful about purchasing bargain birds because they may be illegal, stolen or sick.

Also, birds can suffer from malnutrition caused by being fed only seed in their diets, he said.

"Malnutrition can be a problem because birds are fed too much fat seed so the bird becomes overly fat," Thornberry said.

Birds need to receive protein, vitamins and calcium in their daily diets, he said. Several bird feeds are manufactured that provide all the nutrients required for good health, Thornberry said.

Martillotti advises people planning to buy a bird to read about proper care and handling before purchasing.

Because of the long life expectancy and affectionate nature of birds, they can become members of the family, Thornberry said.

"With our more affluent lifestyles, people may not have the home area or they may be gone and do not have time for dogs and cats," he said. "Birds can provide companionship but they do not take a lot of space or time."

## U.S., Mexico work on technologies to slow killer bees

HOUSTON (AP) — The United States and Mexico are working together in a bid to slow the northward spread of so-called killer bees, which may reach southern Texas within two years, experts say.

"The bee industry itself is the front line of defense against this pest," Darrell Wenner, chairman of the research committee of the American Beekeeping Association, said. "This thing is a serious pest, and it does need to be dealt with."

Wenner, a California beekeeper, is among industry members from around the nation attending the association's annual convention in Houston.

On Monday, convention participants heard panel discussions about the threat posed by Africanized honey bee, or killer bee, and steps being taken against it.

Under a new program, \$1.3 million of U.S. Department of Agriculture funds have been authorized for

a number of techniques to slow the movement of the bees northward from southern Mexico, Ralph Iwamoto, a U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesman, said.

Among the most significant are attempts to interbreed the aggressive Africanized bees with tamer bees in a bid to dilute them genetically.

The bees, introduced to Brazil from Africa in 1956, have been slowly migrating north ever since. The bees, which are visually hard to distinguish from other honey bees, make less honey and are more aggressive than other bees when disturbed.

Wenner said the Africanized honey bee could arrive in Brownsville, Tex., within two years, based upon current projections.

In the United States, bee raising is a \$50 million industry, and the nation's honey industry is worth about \$125 million a year.

## Last of Connally belongings auctioned off to repay debt

HOUSTON (AP) — The last belongings of former Gov. John Connally and his wife, Nellie, went on the block Tuesday in an auction that already has raised about \$2.5 million to help repay creditors.

Over the weekend, the Connallys parted with the memories and treasures of a lifetime when their artwork, china, furniture, saddles, jewelry and gun collections were sold.

"A great many of those, nearly all of those things, we had given to us or we acquired for a particular reason," Connally said. "All those plaques that just went through we bought in

Hong Kong because we liked them."

The auction, he said, has been "emotional and draining."

"I go home each evening exhausted," he said.

Items up for auction Tuesday ranged from cocktail napkins and tablecloths to ashtrays and wastebaskets.

The cheapest item sold throughout the four-day auction was a rectangular terracotta covered cooking vessel. It sold for \$80 Tuesday.

Connally said he was not sure of his future plans, except that "I'll never run for public office again."

## Panel backs EMS worker fired for drugs

AUSTIN (AP) — An Emergency Medical Services supervisor fired after being charged with felony drug possession should be reinstated, a city employee grievance committee has determined.

The committee recommended to acting City Manager John Ware that former EMS field supervisor Robert Hardy be reinstated at a lower position without back pay.

The committee also recommended after a hearing Jan. 12 that Hardy be placed on probation and receive a drug-abuse assessment.

EMS Director Bill Stockton on Monday gave notice he will ask Ware to uphold Hardy's firing. He said he could not comment on the committee's findings.

The panel said in a memo that EMS employees "are indeed holders of the 'public trust,' and are held to a higher standard of behavior." It said the employees "are accountable to their department for those actions that would reflect badly on their position."

But, the committee added, "The extent to which an employee should be held accountable to 'professional standards of behavior' when off the job" was not clear in department policy.

It recommended that the ethics code be developed to guide employees' conduct.

The memo said Hardy admitted "personal use" of marijuana on a limited basis, and he had no performance problems in nine years with EMS.

Hardy was one of three EMS employees arrested in an undercover police investigation. Police said they found 1.5 pounds of marijuana in a raid on his home. His case is awaiting prosecution.

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