



NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL ASSOCIATION Inc.

President's Report – 2009

This has been another interesting and active year for NFSA as we have consolidated our profile and memberships, continue to work on relationships, and continue with initiatives which will benefit finch enthusiasts across Australia.

We have continued to maintain publicity across our membership through mechanisms such as our E-newsletters and have used other opportunities to raise the profile of NFSA with aviculturists and with government.

I am particularly appreciative that all NFSA member groups have renewed for the coming year and that we continued to seek new member clubs and individuals. Through this last year we have managed to hold NFSA related events with the Qld Finch Society and with the Avicultural Society of SA and we hope to continue this practice to develop contact with member clubs and societies.

It is pleasing that perceptions about NFSA are now generally much stronger and positive. We can only continue to follow a sound strategic direction, communicate clearly and often, and be responsive to the specific interests and needs of finch and softbill enthusiasts in order to further build a positive reputation.

I can't emphasise enough just how important it is for all State representatives on the committee and the contacts in our member clubs to be active in maintaining contact with their member groups in each state, maintain a profile for NFSA and actively seek input, opinions and concerns from members. This is a particular challenge in NSW and Victoria where NFSA has multiple member groups. NFSA must be active, in fact proactive, must always be doing something and more importantly ***must be seen to be doing something*** if we are to remain relevant. I remain concerned that in some member clubs the information from NFSA does not get past the Secretary or contact point and I am aware of at least one member club where the President wasn't aware that they were members because information wasn't getting through. The information we provide in Newsletters and other communications to member clubs is meant to get to all finch and softbill breeders. So I would urge all Committee members, member contact people and any other committed finch aviculturists to be on the front foot in talking about NFSA and our activities.

Over the past year we have maintained our MOUs with other national bodies – the Canary and Cage Bird Association of Australia (CCBFA) and the Associated Birdkeepers of Australia (ABA). These relationships keep us in contact with developing issues and allow the national groups to support one another and to exchange opinions and positions on issues challenging aviculture.

As I reported last year we have repeatedly sought to develop a dialog with the Avicultural Federation of Australia (AFA) but without success. With the current state of the AFA we do not intend to persevere with that body for the time being. I believe this is unfortunate in that we recognised the AFA as the national avicultural body, but it doesn't appear to be so at the moment and we will continue to represent the national interests of finch and softbill aviculture.

On a more positive note a major NFSA initiative for the year was to complete the census of exotic finches. While the census covered some 14000 exotic finches it is only a fraction of the total exotic finches held in the country. Nonetheless it provided us with a relative estimate of the abundance of exotic species and indicated clearly that many species are in serious trouble and need coordinated help. We have published the results of the census widely and in response a number of formal and informal cooperative breeding efforts are getting underway. We intend to conduct another census commencing in 2010 to be completed in time for reporting at the Finches 11 convention.

One reason for the census and a long-term aim for NFSA was to explore the possibilities for controlled legal import of small numbers of some exotic species. I have personally continued to assemble information necessary to support the risk assessment process needed before any such imports could occur, however, there are many who do not believe we will ever get approval for imports and that the effort is not worth it. Perhaps they are right, particularly with the EPBC Act currently being reviewed and the Federal department not likely to focus on such proposals at present.

We have also been active in communicating with Federal authorities (AQIS) to investigate the volume of exotic finches being exported from Australia. This has revealed that some 1000 exotic finches per month left Australia over the last year. These were mostly goldfinches, greenfinches, red-faced parrot finches and Cubans. We need much more intelligence about this trade. We now have a sound working relationship with AQIS and are seeking further information from them in order to plot the extent of exports over the last few years. In the end we need to develop a relationship with those involved with exports, recognising there is nothing illegal in the practice, but we must get at least some coordination of birds leaving the country to ensure that whole breeding lines are not lost and importantly to ensure that other species are not being exported illegally.

We need also to maintain focus on pure populations of our native finches. In this area NFSA is supporting, where we can, the various conservation measures focussed on field populations of native finches. Obviously NFSA is close aligned with STGF and is now an annual donor to the Fund – in a token way, but so as to encourage all our member clubs to become regular donors. There are other finches that also need some help and we need to explore ways that aviculture could contribute.

A number of NFSA clubs are developing a range of activities which raise the profile of finch aviculture with the general public and in particular seek to ensure that husbandry of our birds meets the highest possible standards – this as away to protect the hobby from public misconceptions. We need many more activities to contribute to the NFSA objective to attract young people into Aviculture and mobilize the great

mass of birdkeepers who do not participate in clubs and societies. It is particularly worrying to see numbers of members dwindling in some clubs and with growing pressures from regulators at all levels of government on hobbies such as aviculture a strong national voice is needed. This is what NFSA must provide.

NFSA has continued to be active in relation to the Federal government and the Exotic Bird Record Keeping Scheme. NFSA is a member of the national avicultural stakeholder group for DEWHA and we participated in the follow up meeting to discuss the evaluation after the first 12 months of the record keeping scheme. The future for this scheme is now bound up in the current review of the EPBC Act, but at this point all finches remain as low interest birds under the proposed regulation.

NFSA also made a submission to this review and many of our points about finch aviculture and exotic finches were picked up in the interim report. We continue to engage with DEWHA through the review process.

NFSA made a submission to the Northern Territory Heritage Advisory Council in support of the proposed heritage declaration for two sites in the NT - Yinberrie Hills north of Katherine and Newry Station, both of which are important Gouldian finch breeding habitat.

NFSA has also been active in the unfortunate developments in Tasmania with proposals to severely limit the import of birds into that state until full risk assessments had been completed. Along with several other groups we wrote submissions direct to the Minister David Llewellyn and had meetings with his Department to try to avert this. At present the Minister has responded to the alarm caused by the Moratorium by deciding that all bird species already present in Tasmania are exempt from the Moratorium until the legislative review is completed. Lists of low interest and high interest species will be drawn up by November 09 and NFSA will be closely involved as the situation develops.

Finally, as the NFSA Constitution requires that I step down after 3 years as President, I reluctantly do so and wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the NFSA Executive members and Committee over the last 12 months. All the Committee operate on a voluntary basis and in most cases they have attended NFSA meetings at their own cost. This is great dedication to the interests of finch and softbill aviculture.

It has indeed been a privilege to be the inaugural president of NFSA, an association which formed on the verandah at Mike and Elisabeth Fidler's just three years ago (October 2006). NFSA has many challenges ahead and plenty to do, so I encourage all members of the new Executive and Committee to put in plenty of effort in support of finch and softbill enthusiasts.

Gary Fitt
NFSA President
Saturday, October 17, 2009