Appendix A: ASAG Position Statements

Position statement regarding bird holding and breeding spaces

We recommend that bird collections be structured to allow at least 30% of the collection to be maintained in dedicated off-exhibit propagation facilities.

Over the last decade, the total number of mammal and bird species maintained in North American zoological parks has declined, while the diversity of animal classes represented has expanded due to the tremendous surge in new aquarium facilities and, now, insectariums. As a result, the competition for institutional resources among curators managing the various taxonomic groups of animals has never been so great.

Birds have always been among the most prominently displayed taxa of animals in zoos. Historically, avian species diversity was dependent on continual importations of wild-caught birds both to bolster existing captive populations and to establish and reestablish species in captivity. In the early 1980s, greater emphasis was placed on establishing self-sustaining captive populations to reduce the need for importing wild-caught birds for exhibit purposes. The Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 greatly restricted the number of species that were regularly imported from the wild and made the need for managed populations urgent.

An analysis of space survey data published by Christine Sheppard in **Zoo *Biology*** 14:197-210 (1995) concluded that in the most optimistic scenario, there is only enough space to manage approximately 141 species of birds under the umbrella of the Species Survival Plan (SSP). This amounts to only around 1.4% of the world's approximately 9600 species of birds. Because of this limitation in avian carrying capacity, we must utilize our existing spaces carefully to ensure sustainability of captive bird populations and to ensure maximum conservation impact. Just as clearly, we will benefit from the addition of bird holding and breeding space.

The short generation time of many bird species presents another challenge for bird managers. Many species of birds have gone through "boom and bust" cycles in captivity. A bird species would come into zoos, breed well, and produce surplus young. Soon all available space for this species would be utilized and managers would be unable to place additional offspring and, as a result, restrict breeding. The population would then age and reproduction would end. Eventually the species would no longer have a viable captive population.

Bird managers have recognized these situations for many years and have been working to develop a long-term plan for all bird species. In April 1997, a number of professional bird managers met prior to the AZA Western Regional to develop a three-year strategic plan for the AZA's Avian Interest Group (AIG), an AZA scientific advisory group. This included discussion on how to develop the resources necessary for long-term management of avian collections. This position statement is a result of those discussions.

One of the strategic planning groups determined that acquiring additional space for long-term management of captive avian populations was an important priority for the AIG. In fact, a stated objective of this group is to promote off-exhibit facilities and programs and market their conservation, education, research, and recreational value. This committee analyzed successful captive bird management programs and looked for common factors between these programs. They found that programs with the highest degree of success had dedicated facilities, trained staff, and often managed multiple pairs of the same species.

Currently, the majority of existing bird spaces in most zoos are on public exhibit. While public bird exhibits can provide excellent breeding environments for certain bird species, dedicated off-exhibit propagation facilities with dedicated staff offer the best opportunity for sustained success in breeding many significant species. In this environment, birds benefit from the considerable advantages of seclusion, segregation, and the ability to be maintained in single pairs or in single-species groups. The ability to maintain multiple pairs of the same species provides flexibility in creating compatible pairs of birds and enhances the likelihood of sustained breeding success. Optimal bird holding and breeding facilities are crucial to meet this need.

The Avian Scientific Advisory Group recommends that bird collections be structured to allow at least 30% of the collection to be maintained in dedicated off-exhibit propagation facilities. The remaining 70% of the collection should be maintained on public display.

Off-exhibit propagation facilities not only provide optimal husbandry conditions and support for the display collection, but also allow the experimental management of bird species for which there is little husbandry information available. Hence, the off-exhibit space provides an ideal environment to gain valuable husbandry experience with new species as well as to advance our knowledge of more established species. This space and knowledge will not only allow for long-term

management of current species but will also allow the AZA to be prepared when a crisis occurs and zoos are asked to quickly assist in emergency management situations.

It is important to note that off-exhibit space is much less expensive to build and maintain than public exhibit space.

To summarize, the development of adequate off-exhibit dedicated breedinn7 space for management of self-sustaining captive populations of avian species is imperative because:

- The Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 greatly restricts the number of species imported from the wild.
- In 1995 there was only enough space to provide long-term management of 141 species (1.4% of the world's bird species).
- Many species do not breed reliably on exhibit.
- Failure to provide adequate space for will result in fewer species being maintained in North America and limit the conservation, education, and exhibit opportunities for birds.

To this end, we recommend that:

1) When possible, institutions should increase the number of spaces available for bird breeding and holding.

2) Bird collections should be structured to allow at least 30% of the collection to be maintained in dedicated off-exhibit propagation facilities with staff trained in bird management. The remainder of the collection should be maintained in public exhibit space.

3) When possible, multiple pairs of each species should be maintained.

4) Public exhibit space should be designed to optimize the potential for successful bird breeding.

1997-1999 Avian Interest Group Strategic Plan
Communications Committee
Ed Diebold, Mary Healy, Jamie Primm,
Tom Schneider, Sherry Branch