

Hopes...and Lives, Lost

New Witness Account of Conditions Observed at Breeding Facility

Introduction: New Witness

This website is not concerned with any single “bird farm”. Our focus on Scudder’s Parrot Depot additionally sheds light on the crucial role which local authorities play in enforcing—or ignoring—responsible avicultural practices. Accordingly, we’ve moved on to concern ourselves with broader aspects of aviculture and are preparing materials to be posted here in the near future.

We’ve thoroughly documented the history and situation at Scudder’s from the public record, made available when Martha Scudder failed in her attempt to sue an individual honestly attempting to bring documented abhorrent conditions there to light. Nevertheless, we have one more story to be told.

One where someone had moved away, leaving dealings with the Scudders which ended in tragedy and heartbreak behind her, only to find out recently Martha was still in business. One where an individual researched what they could, then posted some of their experience on a public forum, from where her story eventually found its way here.

These events took place ten years ago. While this story may not have the impact of the latest news flash, it is all the more sobering in that the conditions of neglect described herein are reportedly allowed to persist unchecked for a decade and more.

We have already encountered those unwilling to report what they’ve encountered because they fear repercussions within the community—but this person had moved away—and was shocked to discover Martha Scudder was still running her parrot breeding business. She was so outraged that Martha Scudder was still handling birds that she agreed to allow her name to be used with the first-hand account she provided. At the time of these events her maiden name was Patti Miller, which is the name that Martha will recognize. This is Patti’s story; all that follows is from her direct experience.

The Beginning

Patti was first told of Martha and John Scudder in the mid 80’s when she needed to find a home for a somewhat aggressive Blue-crowned Mealy Amazon (*Amazona farinosa guatemalae*). She was referred to the Scudders by the only other breeder she knew at the time, who assured her that Martha and John would take good care of this bird. A few years later, tragic and unforeseen personal circumstances forced Patti to move suddenly and to relinquish the seven parrots that shared her life and her heart at that time. Not knowing where else to turn, she again put her trust in Martha Scudder. Martha agreed to care for her birds and to keep them as pets in her home, until Patti’s circumstances changed and she could return for them, no matter how long it took. Patti delivered her birds to Martha over two weekends in the late 80’s¹.

¹ Date approximate based on length of time since events; later 1997 date has documentation.

At the time, Martha and John had lost their home, but not their property, as a result of what Patti understood to be tax-related financial difficulties. The Scudders were living in a trailer on their property until their new home could be built, giving Patti limited view to the rest of the property. Martha again assured Patti that her birds would not be intermixed with the breeding stock; they would be cared for in her home. Martha's daughter-in-law Robin was present for one of these conversations, specifically regarding one of Patti's cockatoos, Ivy. Robin expressed interest in taking Ivy, and Martha replied to the effect "No, these are Patti's birds, we're just taking care of them until she can come back."

Unfortunately, it was several years until Patti's situation changed to one in which she could return to reclaim her birds; even then, she did so sooner than she would have preferred because an acquaintance warned her that she should check on her birds. Patti had remained in phone contact with Martha, who always told her that her birds were "fine." As it turned out, nothing could have been further from the truth. A local couple had been trying to help clean up the Scudder property. The husband had informed Patti that she needed to check on her birds. Sadly, this warning came too late for Patti's birds. They had not been kept in Martha's home as pets as promised, but had been paired with mates and used as breeder birds. As Patti frantically tried to identify her birds, she learned from Martha that two of her Cockatoos and a Mexican Red-Head were dead. They were, perhaps, the fortunate ones; as the rest of the story will show, no reasonable explanation was given for the death of these birds, and the conditions that were witnessed and documented were not suitable for any living creature.

The Return

When Patti returned to the Scudder property in 1997, she was shocked at what she encountered. By this point in time, Martha and John Scudder Sr. were living in their new two-story home. The outside was a "dump yard"—grass completely overgrown; garbage, dirty old bird carriers, and cages strewn everywhere. Rows of breeder cages, approximately 20 cages in a row; some protected by plastic, some not, stood outside open to the elements. The breeder birds' cages were in disrepair and in a totally unsanitary condition—the areas under the cages were "absolute filth." This was the outside; what follows is the description of the inside of the Scudder home.

Patti can only describe it as a "house of horrors."

Upon entering the house, to the left, was a room for juvenile birds. Cages were pushed together with birds of all species mixed together in this "juvenile living arrangement." The room was crammed with birds—caged and uncaged—and covered in filth. Feathers, food, and feces coated the floor, the cages, and every other surface; it was difficult to see much of the floor through the bird droppings. Underneath the tables that supported cages was a substantial build-up of feathers, dust, bird-droppings, food, and other unidentifiable dirt, indicating that area had not been cleaned for a significantly long time period. This build-up of dirt, droppings and other impurities was against the wall, high enough to reach the tables and the cages housing the birds within them.

Leaving the juvenile room, through a dirty sliding glass door, was the house's former main living area, now used for keeping birds. There were cages throughout this room full of birds, some holding multiple birds. The cages were dilapidated and dirty, old food in the cages and on the floor. The floor itself was covered in bird feces and dirt tracked in from outside. Patti was particularly disturbed by what she observed in this area. The birds that were kept in this room were all either personal pets of the Scudders or birds they were entrusted to board in their home. Patti observed that most, if not all of the cages had

no perches in them; with nowhere else to perch, in several cages birds were standing on water cups dirtied with their own droppings. Patti saw that the water in several of the water dishes was green, whether from the birds' droppings or from not having been changed, she did not know. Her estimation from the condition of the build up of droppings in the cages was that it had been a week or more since they had been cleaned.

In the kitchen, the counters were very dirty and cluttered, food items left out, and most disturbing, items used to prepare food for the birds were left out to be re-used and were "filthy." Several times Patti was in Martha's home when Martha finished cooking her large batch of mixed food for the breeder birds. Cooking was done during the day and this large pot of food was left for hours with no refrigeration or storage; Patti usually stayed approximately four hours and this food was left out this entire time. The birds were not fed until later in the evening; it was Patti's understanding that they were not fed in the morning.

The nursery was located adjacent to the juvenile room². Patti recounts finding approximately seven incubators (isolettes) in the main nursery. Syringes used to hand-feed the babies were left out to be re-used, only being washed once per day. Patti specifically observed syringes left in cups, unwashed, then reused for later feedings. There were approximately 15-20 babies per incubator, housed in margarine tubs with paper towel liners. The babies "lived" in these margarine tubs, some doubled up two to a tub, within the incubators, removed for feeding, and then returned. Patti did indicate that the tubs were relatively clean; but the floor was smeared with bird droppings, spilled formula, and other miscellaneous dirt.

The upstairs of Martha and John's house, their living quarters, was just as dirty and cluttered as the main floor. Martha and John "lived in filth." Patti describes the rooms as having bird cages throughout, some with personal pets, some of the birds belonged to others. Twice Patti observed people bringing birds into Martha's home for boarding—the birds were immediately mixed with the rest of the birds. No quarantine procedures were utilized within the house nor did Patti observe any quarantine measures with the breeder birds. Dr. Brian Speer's own article published within the MAP guidelines states:

“Quarantine

This is the location(s) where all new arrivals to the aviary are to be housed until such time as they are deemed admissible to the breeding aviary. The quarantine area is the primary defense with which the existing collection can be protected from the introduction of infectious disease agents. Regardless of the intensity or number of screening tests performed, all entering breeding stock must pass through quarantine.”

From: <http://www.modelaviculture.org/flockhealth.htm>

This is not the first time we have been told of the lack of quarantine procedures at this facility; one example can be observed in the court testimony.³

² While standards of hygiene elsewhere may vary, it is indisputable that the nursery area MUST be kept pristine. Baby birds simply do not have immune systems developed to fight illness and disease; any breach of proper avian husbandry within the nursery area can quickly lead to illness and increased mortality rates.

³ See [Kathryn Phillips Scudder Deposition Part I, Section 85](#).

Bird rescues and sanctuaries are filling to capacity as parrot owners tire of parrots behaving like parrots, tire of the continuous responsibility of caring for their birds, or simply come to realize that caring for a parrot responsibly is beyond their capabilities.⁴ Patti had faced a situation where she had no choice but to place her birds in another home until she could take them in again, never imagining it could be years. Believing the Scudders to be reputable business people, neither could Patti have imagined the true conditions at Scudder's nor the circumstances which keep them in business even today.⁵

What happened to Patti's Birds?

We've already mentioned that when Patti returned to Martha's unannounced in 1997, Martha confirmed that her Mexican Red-head, Umbrella Cockatoo, and a Moluccan Cockatoo were dead. The other four were still mixed with the breeding stock and could not be identified. Martha gave no reasonable explanation for Patti's birds being placed with the breeder birds, and matter-of-factly—detached, with no emotion—explained that Patti's male cockatoos had been killed by their mates. (Usually in such tragic fights the female succumbs in battle) *Patti did attempt to obtain clearer detail regarding the death of her birds; Martha provided none, sticking to the story that they were killed by their breeding mates.* Patti was not able to identify any of her birds that might have still been alive. Even though banded, the circumstances that forced her to initially find a temporary home for her birds also caused her to lose many possessions, including the original documentation for the banding for these birds. When Patti tried to find and identify her female cockatoo Ivy, Martha resisted, insisting that even if Patti was able to identify Ivy and split her apart from her mate, it would kill either or both birds. Patti didn't understand why but offered to come up with the money to buy the male to keep the pair together; Martha said John Sr. would never agree. By this point Patti already had reason to fear John Sr's wrath (see below) and did not pursue the matter. *And so, all Patti's birds were lost to her.*

The Rest of the Story

Death was no stranger to the parrots at the Scudders, whether through disease, neglect, or by John Sr.'s own hand. Martha herself mentioned to Patti that John Sr. had killed an Indian Redneck for biting him. As Patti had spent time at the Scudders, she got to know which birds were pets and which were breeders. When she noticed one of Martha's pet birds, a Senegal parrot, was missing, she asked Martha where it was. Martha simply replied that the parrot had been sitting on John's shoulder and bit him, so he grabbed the bird and killed it. No remorse—or even concern—was expressed over either senseless death.

Even the Scudder's black pygmy goat fell victim to this callous disregard for the lives of animals. The goat was routinely tied to a short tether outside the house, by the koi pond, with no shelter. The local

⁴ See: *The Story That Won't Be Told* (<http://www.the-oasis.org/articles/story.php>).

⁵ Martha reportedly had advanced notice of upcoming inspections/visits by the humane society (see [Kathy Phillips Scudder Deposition Part II Sections 93 & 94](#)). Despite volumes of documentation of years-long sub-standard care at Scudders Parrot Depot, members of the AFA have rallied to speak for Martha; one at \$450/hr and craftily wording his testimony (see [Declaration of Dr. Brian Speer, DVM](#)); another was the then legislative VP of that organization (see [Declaration of Laurella Desborough](#)). Finally, even a Pierce County council member has been quoted defending Scudder's Parrot Depot (see [Pierce County Council Likely to Look into Bird Farms, News Tribune](#)).

couple mentioned previously had continued their efforts to help clean at the Scudder's to improve the conditions at the farm.⁶ The husband became alarmed when he found the goat tied up in the hot sun with no water and appearing to be in distress. He informed Martha, who did nothing. He then implored both Suzanne (Martha's daughter-in-law) and Martha again to move the goat. The couple's daughter returned to the property a few days later only to find the goat dead. It had been moved—to a spot with *neither food nor water*.

It was then that Patti realized the Scudders could not be helped. And she could only help herself by severing all ties with Martha.

Patti had been trying to make arrangements with Martha to trade services or goods to get *any* birds out of their deplorable living conditions into better homes. Her last hope to help the parrots there was to return one last time to try to save a Goffin's Cockatoo that had been born with a serious leg and foot deformity. Patti knew this would always be a special-needs bird and hoped that by giving this crippled bird—who could not even perch—a loving and caring home, that her own heart might begin to heal from the loss of her birds. Suzanne (Martha's daughter in law) enlisted her husband John Jr. to rescue the bird and give it to Patti. Now, ten years later, "Digit" lives a happy and contented life in her large, custom made "house" set up to accommodate her special needs.

The Editorial Board of parrotprotection.org would like to thank Patti for telling her story—the grueling process of telling this story over several interviews was very difficult for her to re-live. We feel it's important for the reader to understand what Patti was facing so many years ago. It was difficult for her even now to re-live these events in detail: her return to Scudder's, the loss of her birds, and her experiences subsequently giving of her time and energy to try and clean up and improve the desperate conditions for the birds there. Over a series of calls and through many tears, Patti shared her story with her interviewer in the memory of her lost birds in the hope that they, nor countless other breeder birds suffering and dying in factory farm type operations, will not be forgotten.

⁶ Patti had hoped that her efforts would help the animals at that farm, but from her observations, efforts were not taken by Martha or John Sr. to sustain even a basic cleaning and maintenance regimen. Apparently, this is a pattern that has repeated over the years. We have read several reports of "clean-ups" of this farm, only to have conditions deteriorate soon afterward, see: [Kathy Phillips Scudder Deposition Part II Section 116](#).