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SPECIAL CONFERENCE ON CAPTIVITY BREEDING OF RAPTORS—A REPORT

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Part G. Breeding Stock Inventory (Panel I)

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Panel Members: Donald V. Hunter, Jr., Chairman, Robert Hinckley, Roger Thacker, and Bruce R. Wolhuter.

HUNTER. The subject of Breeding Stock Inventory is a general topic that we chose as a starting subject. First of all, I think everyone is interested at least to some degree, in what everyone else has done. But to have each person come up here and describe his breeding project would take our full two days, so we have asked that questionnaires be filled out and sent in. As many as came in on time have been duplicated and are in the packet. The first panelist will be Roger Thacker.

THACKER. The paper that you have got in your folder there, I finished approximately three months ago, entitled Estimation of Birds of Prey in Captivity in the United States of America. It is, to put it quite bluntly, now completely out of date because inventories changed so quickly. It is a piece of work that was completed over approximately 18 months of sending out surveys to various organizations and I think in the few minutes that I've got to go through it, it would be best to start from the beginning and just work straight through the paper. [Thacker then went through the paper, which is printed in *Raptor Research News* 5(4):108-122, 1971.]

HUNTER. Thank you very much, Roger. First of all I'd like to stress the importance of finding out how many birds of prey are in captivity other than

the Peregrines that most of us are interested in right now. I think it is quite obvious that through corollary experiments, knowledge that we gain from other birds of prey may help us in those that are in danger at the moment. From the Lincoln Park Zoo we have Mr. Robert Hinckley who will say a few words to us about the availability of birds in zoos and what the general attitude of people in zoos is as far as doing research in captivity breeding.

HINCKLEY. I'll speak about our zoo to begin with. We don't keep birds as singles at our zoo where it is physically possible to get mated pairs. We don't accept contributions of single birds at our zoo, we accept only mated pairs and we don't display single birds at our zoo. We display only mated pairs wherever it is physically possible to have them. That's our position.

We have outdoor flight cages for large birds. We have a pair of Golden Eagles that have laid eggs for two years and the male has copulated with the female for two years. These birds are on display and we have good hopes for this spring. We have a new pair of Bald Eagles and White-headed Eagles, certainly of breeding age. We have high hopes for them. We have a pair of Andean Condors both in adult plumage and they have nesting facilities available. We have a pair of Griffon Vultures with nesting facilities available. We have a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls with nesting facilities available.

The problems of displaying birds at zoos go into several categories. The first is, after all, we do have birds on display, and that is one of the primary functions of the zoo. One of the next problems with display is security. We can display Golden Eagles and we don't worry about people sneaking in overnight and stealing them. We don't have any doubt, however, that if we put a pair of Gyrfalcons on display in a breeding project that within a week they'd be stolen. So one of the very legitimate problems that any zoo has is that you cannot keep attractive, exotic birds of prey and expect to keep them, so we don't attempt to keep those kinds of birds. The next problem the zoo has is the expense of providing outdoor flight cages. There is no such thing as taking a few posts and some chicken wire and for 60 bucks putting up a display at a zoo. You have to get bids through the park district and then you have to have union people put the displays up and then you're talking about thousands of dollars just for cyclone fence. So it's not an easy project from that view. One of the major stumbling blocks without any question is knowledge and the competence about birds and this is a problem to which this group could readily address itself. Another one of the problems on setting up breeding pairs is the Fish and Wildlife people. We tried for three years unsuccessfully to get an immature male Bald Eagle to go with our immature female Bald Eagle and we still don't have one. There is no question that there is a good deal that Raptor Research Foundation could do to assist zoological parks. One would be some kind of information bulletin, just on the basics of getting your birds to breed. Some people don't realize it's wrong to keep several species in the same flight cage. A consultation committee might legitimately be set up through Raptor Research to assist zoos with breeding projects. It might be possible to set up some kind of breeding award for

zoos, since the public in general does not always recognize how much time and effort and endeavor on many people's part went into successful breeding in front of the public. It might be well to offer some kind of recognition to those people who have succeeded, such as the Topeka Zoo with Golden Eagles nesting this year.

HUNTER. Thank you very much, Bob. We have one more panelist who would like to say a few words, Bruce Wolhuter from the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs.

WOLHUTER. I think the other zoo people here really expect a rebuttal, but I have to agree with everything that's been said. In the zoos we are woefully ignorant, for one, on how to take care of birds, and two, as Thacker pointed out, some of them don't even know what the difference is between the raptors. Zoos basically have several problems; one is that for the most part, zoos are display oriented and they're more interested in displaying the birds, the largest number of birds, without thought to conditions or what they're putting in with what. And of course this is disastrous if you're trying to do any kind of breeding at all. I would say, well over 90% of zoos I'm familiar with have at least one or two exhibits where they have to have at least six or seven species put together. And I think most of you realize this pretty well precludes any chances of breeding. If you want to have birds that are breeding it's necessary, first of all to start out with a pair and some zoos don't know whether they have a pair or not. When I went to the Cheyenne Zoo (I started about a month ago), they had about six female Kestrels in a cage. Obviously it's going to be kind of a rough breeding project unless they can change their ways on that. And those are the birds that are easier to sex. So, you've got to get qualified people that can sex a bird to the point to know whether they have a pair or not. And then you have to isolate the birds, meaning not mixing them with other species. You have to set up conditions that will at least encourage breeding and a lot of zoos will fight this, depending on whether the zoo is run by the City Park Commission or by its own zoological society, but there is a need to get these breeding conditions set up. There's a question in my mind as to the value of removing these birds from public view during the breeding, whether this public contact is detrimental or not. It remains to be seen; some zoos have bred birds where the public has complete access. I know Topeka Zoo with their Golden Eagles, this particular year was the year that they didn't really do that much work with the eagles and the first thing they knew, they had eggs. As soon as they got the eggs they isolated the cage, whereas in the past they isolated the cage entirely all the way through as soon as the courtship activity was started. And something Bob mentioned, the problem in zoos of singles. So many zoos say well, if you've seen one you've seen them all; we'll just put one on display; it's too expensive to get more. I think this is one thing where the zoos can work together, by cooperation. Bob mentioned that they have a pair of Andean Condors and

there are several zoos who, just for example, have just one Andean Condor and I think it would be great if they could get together, you know, loaning birds, strictly for the purpose of breeding.

Let me just mention that the majority of zoos are not feeding the birds food that, in my mind, is even good for maintaining them in healthy condition, and it certainly isn't doing much to encourage breeding.

HUNTER. Thank you very much, Bruce. We will entertain a few questions from the floor now. We encourage participation as much as you would like. I think Joe has his hand up first back there.

PLATT. Yes, Mr. Thacker, the idea of tighter restrictions, has this gone through? As far as impounding birds?

THACKER. Yes, it went through, yes.

WOLHUTER. I want to make a comment—you're asking about the importation of birds. They're really tightening up controls; right now it's impossible. They're particularly watching the falconiforms and also the strigiforms and any more if you import a bird, first you have got to have papers from the country which it was imported from, saying it was taken legally. Otherwise, no soap. Also this has to be cleared with our government before you can bring them in. I've also seen a rough draft of legislation that's being prepared . . . something like the endangered bird, a group that's interested in this. And they're trying to tighten it up even further in such a way that there will be complete control. So I think the era of bringing birds in for pets is about over. What effect this will have on bringing birds in for breeding purposes or anything else remains to be seen. But it's going to get tougher and I think it's probably a good thing as far as getting rid of the commercialism.

THACKER. The other thing you have got to remember on importation of birds is as I understand it, when they're brought in and they're presented at the dock or wherever they're coming, in, the person who inspects that bird is not somebody who is oriented towards them, since he's a customs official, and if he doesn't have an interest in birds of prey he could be looking at a bantam chicken. Now this is serious. He has no idea what's coming in. If the guy tells him, well it's a red-footed fighting cock, he's going to put down on the paper a red-footed fighting cock in many cases. I've seen lots of these papers come through. But I do believe the bureau will be sending people down to instruct these customs people in the falconiforms and the strigiforms.

HINCKLEY. There is one more point here, there is today perhaps as much as 20% chance that some time in the next twelve months there will be a total ban on importing all avian species into the United States because of Newcastle's disease.

THOMAS. Roger, about what you just said. I can remember last year at the NAFA convention someone brought up the point that the federal people had five or six different stations around the country that all the birds of prey or anything like that that could remotely resemble it had to go through those stations and these people . . .

THACKER. They are on call . . . the customs people, as I understand it, if they get something they do not understand, they can get on the telephone and say, come down and take a look at it.

SCHUBERT. I have a point about what Mr. Hinckley was saying. I think Raptor Research should be more in touch with zoos. I used to work at a zoo. We oftentimes got raptors in that nobody wanted. We had too many Red-tails; we tried to trade them off with other zoos, but nobody wants Red-tails . . . just put into a cage until they die, or else overcrowded, 10 or 15 Red-tails in a cage. I think Raptor Research could be in touch with these zoos and with other zoos to provide more information service where they can send those they don't want. Right now we have a Crane Hawk we don't want; if anyone here wants a Crane Hawk they can have it; they don't know what to do with it. They have a Krider's Hawk that isn't doing well in captivity, they want to send it out west. I think there definitely are lots of raptors in zoos.

HUNTER. Thank you very much. And as far as Raptor Research is concerned we'd be very happy to do this sort of thing and we would accept volunteers. Any more questions? I think maybe we've gone over this. We've got lots of very interesting ground to cover and unless there are any more questions we will close this and go on to the next panel.