

Rolf C. Hagen, Inc. Helps FaunaLink Parrot Foundation

August 2008, Plant City, Florida-

Phyllis Martin of the International Threatened Species Foundation, Inc., d.b.a FaunaLink received a most welcoming bit of news this week. Rolf C. Hagen Inc. has donated 8,000 pounds of Tropicana Bird Food to the foundation. In addition, Bill Richardson, a long standing aviculturist, started calling people. He recruited Brian Sloan, a young aviculturist, to help. They collected donations of money from concerned aviculturists to cover the freight charges of \$1,200 to get the food to Plant City from Massachusetts. The Hernando Exotic Bird Club, an area bird club comprised mostly of aviculturists, also contributed \$500.00 to help cover costs.

Martin reports that FaunaLink, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity founded in 1994, to promote captive breeding and maintenance of exotic birds; to provide a sanctuary "retirement" alternative for birds which are no longer suitable for companion pets or as viable breeding stock; and to educate the public about the field of aviculture.

FaunaLink has been struggling for the past two years trying to generate income to purchase food and supplies for more than 869 exotic birds currently being held at the facilities. Daily food consumption is about 150 pounds of parrot feed and 50 pounds of chopped produce. The average monthly cost of parrot food is between \$2,500 and \$3,000.

There are three basic diets being fed due to the variety of birds such as 154 Amazon parrots, 156 macaws, 75 cockatoos, nine toucans, 58 pionus parrots, 47 grey parrots and hornbills just to name a few. Two local SweetBay groceries donate outdated, trimmings and bruised produce to FaunaLink on a daily basis which reduces the cost of buying food.

In 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service placed 440 exotic parrots confiscated from one shipment with the foundation. During the time the case was in court the USFWS paid a nominal fee to house and feed the birds. However, after the case was adjudicated the birds were turned over to FaunaLink and the income stopped. Eighty percent of the birds in the care of FaunaLink were seized and subsequently abandoned. The remaining birds came from private individuals and zoos. Most of these parrots are getting elderly- documented 20 to 50 years in captivity.

In March of 1997 Martin became the director of FaunaLink and in July the USFWS' 440 parrots along with another 450 parrots sent to FaunaLink from other government agencies and zoological institutions were transferred from Fort Pierce to Plant City, Florida. At the beginning of her tenure as director and CEO of FaunaLink the organization had adequate funds to maintain the birds and pay for two or three part-time helpers. Over the past five years all of the founding directors of FaunaLink have retired or resigned. This left Martin with no one to help care for the birds or to help solicit donations. The birds are housed on three acres of land in Plant City. Martin, 61, is the sole caretaker of the 700 flights of parrots. She has no money to purchase food, supplies and equipment needed to operate the foundation.

Some of the birds have been sold or sent to zoological parks for public display. Martin has been able to generate some income from pairing up a limited number of birds where young is produced and sold for the pet trade. However, there are still a large number of parrots being cared for in Plant City. The majority of the birds were wild caught prior to 1992 so are not suitable as companions. In addition, the USFWS stipulates that the confiscated birds can only be placed with public charity organizations, not private individuals. Zoos do not want wild caught birds for breeding purposes. Martin is concerned that if she contacts USFWS officials the answer will be euthanasia or possibly an auction.

FaunaLink is in need of money. They need to purchase a walk-in cooler to replace a 20-year-old one that finally quit. Martin needs to have funds to hire some part time help to care for the birds. She only gets a very small percentage of volunteers to help out as most people do not want to work outdoors in the heat or away from other workers. Avicultural work involves a lot of cleaning so it is not a job for everyone. If you are interested in helping the International Threatened Species Foundation, Inc., d.b.a. FaunaLink, then please call Phyllis Martin at 813-650-0929. All donations are tax deductible as allowed by IRS regulations.