

The Exotic Bird Fair

A Bird Lover's Paradise

By Alyson Kalhagen, About.com Guide

Walking into a bird fair for the first time can be an overwhelming experience. With vendors rushing about, and every bird species from the largest macaw to the tiniest canary chirping, screeching, and squawking in harmony, it can be more than enough to leave an unprepared visitor's head spinning.

In order to make the most out of a day at the bird fair, you need to be aware of what to expect. What lies ahead of you is unlike any pet store you have ever visited before. In fact, by comparison, a bird fair can often appear to be loosely organized and rather unpredictable on the surface -- but truly can be a bird lover's paradise.

Exotic Bird Fairs Defined

Most exotic bird fairs are hosted by localized bird clubs and societies, and can be described as large avian expos filled with vendors, breeders, and others in the "bird business" that have birds or bird products for sale.

Many of the vendors will offer their products at spectacular discounts, even up to 90% less than the price at a regular pet store. For this reason, many bird owners look forward to their local fairs each year so they can buy supplies in bulk at these reduced rates.

Some also attend bird fairs to purchase new birds, or simply to just look around and observe some of the interesting species on display. Whatever an enthusiast's reason for visiting a bird fair, there are rarely any shortages of entertaining sights, sounds, and activities.

What Can Be Purchased at a Bird Fair?

A seemingly endless array of birds, goods, and services are available at most bird fairs. Breeder birds and pets of various species normally abound, and can be acquired at extremely reasonable and sometimes negotiable prices. Products ranging from toys and perches to seed and vitamins can be purchased at wholesale discounts, and cages of virtually every shape and size can be bought at reduced rates.

Some bird clubs also offer additional services at their fairs. For example, Heart of Tennessee Aviculture Society, my local organization, hosts an annual bird fair that includes an auction and surgical sexing performed on-site by an avian vet.

Whether you are looking to buy a new baby bird, or just pick up some supplies for an old

feathered friend, a trip to a bird fair is an almost guaranteed way to find what you are looking for.

Advantages to Visiting a Bird Fair

Aside from the huge discounts and variety of products available, there are several other advantages to buying birds and supplies at a bird fair.

One huge advantage, particularly for those buying pets, is the ability to talk with breeders face to face, and get answers to many common questions that go along with new bird ownership. While many of the same questions can be answered at a local pet shop, talking with the person that has known and cared for a baby bird since it hatched often proves to clue new owners in to special needs that their particular bird may have.

There is also something to be said for being able to buy a bag of bird seed, and then walk over and hold a conversation with the man who grew, harvested, and mixed it. Knowing where each individual grain of seed in your bird's bowl came from can provide a lot of peace of mind to health-conscious bird owners.

Another good reason to buy at a bird fair is that you can literally buy all the supplies that you need to properly care for a bird in one stop. This can be very convenient for those buying a new bird, as well as for seasoned bird owners with busy schedules. Don't automatically expect a trip to a bird fair to be a short one, however -- many visitors find themselves spending hours just trying to take it all in!

Tips for Visitors

If you've decided to visit your local bird fair, there are a few points that you can keep in mind to ensure that the trip goes as smoothly as possible. Remember these tips to protect the safety and happiness of all birds and people involved:

- **Look, but don't touch.** Many of the birds on display at exotic birds fairs are not pets, but are breeding stock not socialized to interact with humans. Reaching to pet or hold these birds can lead to severe bites, so remember to keep your hands off and your eyes on any children you may have with you. Some breeders are also wary about having their birds handled, as it increases the risk of the bird contracting an illness.
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions.** Vendors and breeders are usually eager to answer any questions you may have about their birds or products. Don't be afraid to voice any concerns you may have.
- **Make sure to bring a few dollars.** While you may not have the intention of buying anything, there is usually an admission fee of three to five dollars for most bird fairs.

- **Don't buy a pet bird impulsively.** Fairs are full of cute baby birds all looking for new homes. Make sure not to let yourself fall into the trap of buying a species which you know little about or lack the means to care for. If you are interested in purchasing a bird at a fair, do your research and take care in choosing a species that will fit with your lifestyle.
- **Wash up and change clothes when you get home.** If you already have pet birds at home, and even if you don't, it's a good idea to hit the shower first thing when returning home from a bird fair. While some view the chance as remote, there is the possibility that any sick birds you come into contact with at the fair can leave germs on your skin or clothing. Eliminate the chance of infecting your pets or family by scrubbing down when you come into the house.
- A trip to a bird fair can be an engaging experience and a chance for bird lovers and enthusiasts to grab great deals. To find out more about exotic bird fairs in your area, contact your local bird club for details and dates. Have fun, play it safe, and learn as you go -- you may find yourself hooked on the excitement that a bird fair can bring when it comes to town.