

# 'Hatz' off to Walter for the care of 440 rare avians

**KAJANG:** Birds, especially the endangered, protected and exotic kind, share a special intimacy with Walter Hatz.

Such is the Austrian expatriate's passion to save their dwindling figures that he has painstakingly cared and nurtured a good number of them for the past 13 years at an aviary at his Country Heights mansion in Selangor.

Hatz's prized array of 440 rare, colourful birds come from 49 species of various sizes, and are believed to be worth an estimated RM7 million or more.

In fact, Hatz' privately-funded home-aviary that houses the melodious chirping birds — some of which can live up to 70 years — could probably be one of its kind in the world!

They range from macaws (*Ara*, *Anodorhynchus*, *Cyanopsitta*, *Primolius*, *Orthopsittaca* and *Diopsittaca*), toucans (including aracarís and toucanets), Amazon parrots, cockatoos and hornbills.

The more popular macaws include the blue-throated, blue-and-gold, military, hyacinth and

green-winged species.

And all done legally with the blessings of local authorities for research and development purposes of the aviary industry and educational institutions, including the Wildlife and National Parks Department, as well as Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) veterinary medicine faculty.

Hatz, who has lived here since 2001, became an avid aviarist seven years later by establishing Haldig-Garden Breeding and Research Sdn Bhd.

Through collaboration with renowned veterinarian Dr Friedrich Janeczek of Germany, the company professionally handles the aviaries, including surgically tagging the birds' underskin with microchips for data collection and tracking their movement when they are eventually released to the natural wild habitat.

"The microchips also enable veterinarians to evaluate the birds clinically from the outside and endoscopically from the inside.

"Apart from determining the fertility of the birds, the mi-

crochips help detect diseases like fungus infection of lung sacks (aspergillosis) during the endoscopic procedure, for cloacal or choanal papillomas during clinical evaluation."

Hatz added that the aviary also undertook cross-breeding by way of familiarising different flock, so as to generate healthier, stronger and colourful mixtures.

"I hope my effort can avert the smuggling and poaching of wild birds that end up in pet shops (and some even in cooking pots), through the availability of legal progenies.

"What began as a hobby on conserving and breeding a small number of endangered and protected macaws I purchased in Malaysia eventually blossomed into a specialised task involving large numbers of similar species from South America.

"I am glad that my effort is much appreciated by the Malaysian and other aviary authorities," said Hatz, 70, who hails from the Lienz dolomite alpine mountain range located in

Walter Hatz holding a prized pesquet's parrot at an aviary at his Country Heights mansion in Selangor. PIC BY ADRIAN DAVID



East Tyrol, bordering Italy.

One project undertaken, he said, saw the successful breeding of 60 offspring of green peafowl — an almost extinct species of peninsular Malaysia and Java, Indonesia.

Interestingly, Hatz said that some of the birds could mimic local languages, which they picked up from the workers.

Sadly, Hatz and his family here will be bidding farewell to Malaysia by the year's end.

Nevertheless, Hatz assured that his birds would not be left in the lurch as negotiations were underway with corporate organ-

isations and UPM to adopt his aviary.

On another note, UPM deputy vice-chancellor (industry and community relations) Prof B.T. Hang Tuah Baharudin said the university had been providing consultation for the birds' well-being.

UPM, he added, could leverage on the park as it had expertise in avian medicine and husbandry sciences, while its vast facility could create another international reference centre for experts via bilateral collaboration with countries where the birds originated from. **By Adrian David**