

## Those Crazy Canary People... Radio's Singing Canaries

By Pam Filipski

While most of us would prefer to be called bird enthusiasts rather than bird nuts, we probably couldn't hold a candle to pet owners during the canary craze of the 1920s and '30s. With the bulk import of canaries by Max Stern of Hartz Mountain, bird food manufacturers were soon vying for a share of the market. One of Chicago's two bird food companies, American Bird Products, came up with an idea. If people could sing on the radio, why not canaries? In harsh economic times, canaries were a source of Cheep Labour compared to human stars of radio!

Starting with "uneducated" canaries that were part of a feeding experiment, soon every Sunday from October to June, listeners could tune into a 15-minute program with the original 10 *American Radio Warblers* – to help their pet canaries learn new runs and trills. We assume the birds were learning new skills, not their owners! The peppy little songsters, Ranny, Rudy, Bing, Duke, Eddie, et al, and the fine solosist Goldie, accompanied by organ music, soon became well-known radio stars. Mike Wallace of 60-minutes fame was an early emcee. The canaries (or their "doubles"), accompanied by "bird counselors," started making personal appearances all across the country to sell bird food.



People flocked to hear the radio stars of *American Radio Warblers* in person. Of course, American Bird Products sold tons of birdie accoutrements. Called the 3 Vees (for Vitality, Vigor, Vitamins) the products included everything for molting, mating, and singing. A canary might be had for \$3.95 but a premium Radio Warbler trained songster would run \$5.95. There were phonograph records to help! Soon imitators were catching a ride on the canary band wagon: the *Canary Chorus* from Chicago's other bird food company Kaempfer, Inc; and the *Master Radio Canaries* from Hartz Mountain. But the *American Radio Warblers*, in one form or another, retained their popular attraction from the mid-1920s throughout the 1950s.

