

Can Birds Fly?

Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, California

Jean Hessler, sent a Wednesday, 29 October 2003 issue of the Wall Street Journal to me containing an article that contains some very good news for folks with animals – including birds.

The article headline says *“Animal Cargo Is a Pet Peeve At Most Other Airlines, But Profitable at Continental.”*

And it goes on to say, *“While other airlines have pulled out of the treacherous business of shipping pets and zoo animals, Continental’s ‘QuickPak’ program positively caters to critters. Some animal shippers — companies that ship animals for pets, zoos or individuals — say they give 90% of their business to Continental. The airline now ships more than 50,000 animals a year in its cargo bays.”*

The article goes on to explain, *“Four-legged passengers often pay higher fares than two-legged customers do. ‘Foot-Foot the cat, traveling from Dallas to Boston on Oct. 2, weighed 10 pounds but paid \$169 for a one-way ticket — a far better yield, or average fare per mile, than Continental will get from many passengers on the same flight.”*

“As a result, the operation has become the most exotic of airline beasts: a profitable business. Last year, when Continental suffered a net loss of \$451 million, the pet business brought in \$8 million in revenue and turned an operating profit.”

According to Scott McCartney, who wrote this piece for the Wall Street Journal, *“The airline’s strategy: treat pets as express-package shipments, which get special handling and tracking, including climate-controlled conditions to keep them healthy. Continental also takes reservations months in advance, operates a “pet desk” for reservations and information and assigns one person to track animals all day long. Animal cages ride in baggage compartments that are pressurized and heated, and baggage handlers are trained to load the animals last and unload them first.”*

“QuickPak will ship monkeys and other exotics such as penguins and large cats only for zoos and professional shippers. Nor does the airline accept animals that weigh, with their crate, more than 150 pounds.”

“Airlines have long allowed passengers to travel with their four-footed companions. Small dogs, cats and birds can ride caged in passenger cabins of airplanes, subject to certain rules, and air carriers have to allow aboard such animals as seeing-eye dogs. But when because of their size or type, animals have to travel below in the belly of airplanes, many things can go wrong.”

“In 2000, irate owners who lost dogs to airline mishandling pushed Congress to pass the “Safe Air Travel for Animals Act,” which mandated improved training in animal care and safe-transport techniques for baggage handlers. It also required the Department of Transportation to start tracking complaints about animal deaths, injuries or losses. That began in October 2000 and since then, only nine complaints have been filed against U.S. airlines over shipping animals.”

This sounds like a good thing for aviculturists seeking to ship birds. But it is very important that one become thoroughly familiar with the rules and regulations that apply to shipping birds well before the time comes for the bird to fly (pun intended). ❖

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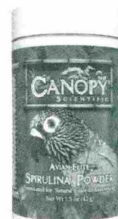
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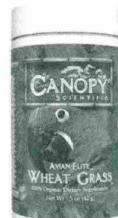
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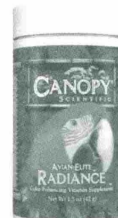
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