

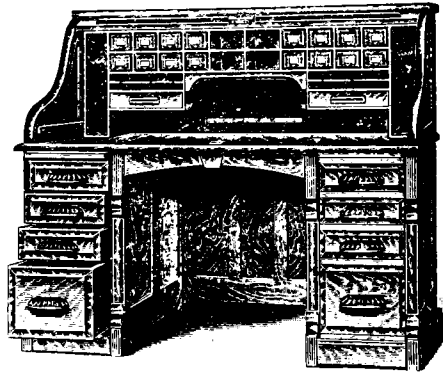
NOTICE

All correspondence intended for the editor of the Watchbird should be mailed directly to his address.

Sheldon Dingle
P.O. Box 340
Norco, CA 91760

From The Editor's Desk

by Sheldon Dingle



Editor's Desk

The Watchbird staff is interested in compiling a comprehensive list of data regarding captive breeding of birds in the U.S.A. This data is vital to the growth and continued success of American aviculture.

It is the responsibility of successful bird breeders to pass their experience and knowledge along to the thousands of devotees of the art that are joining our ranks each year. The number of imported birds has diminished drastically during the past year. The time may well come when our borders will be closed completely. In that event, all of our replacement birds will have to come from breeding stock currently in the country. We must improve our techniques and teach those who follow us. We must get all of the birds that we can — now, and put them to work.

All of you who have successfully raised birds should report your success to the A.F.A. Breeding Registry and record your techniques for publication.

The Watchbird staff has prepared a four page checklist that you can use to write an informative article.

You can follow the guidelines set forth and we will rewrite your data into a suitable article for the benefit of our thousands of readers. They may profit from your experiences and the number of birds bred in the U.S.A. should increase.

If you are reluctant to publicize your breeding successes, we will print the article anonymously. But we do need the data. I, your humble servant, will kick off this program by publishing an article in the next Watchbird on my wife's success breeding the beautiful Amboina king parrots. And I'll gladly accept the accolades even though she did the work.

We are interested in all kinds of birds. If you have raised any birds at all (budgies, cockatiels, zebra finches, and peach-faced lovebirds excepted) please send to our new home office for the Watchbird Breeding Checklist, address:

A.F.A. Home Office
2208 "A" Artesia Blvd.
P.O. Box 1568
Redondo Beach, Ca. 90278
Telephone: (213) 372-2988

And now, dear reader, read the following letter with care. The philosophy contained therein does not bode well for aviculture.



A.F.A. ALERT: ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW by Tom Bradley

Why would any serious aviculturist support Great Britain's proposal to place on Appendix II all Psittiforms with the exception of a few. Quite simply ignorance. We know virtually nothing about the population dynamics of Psittacines. Very little is understood about their breeding, feeding habitat requirements and the niche they occupy within their ecosystem. Most studies of Psittacine populations come only after they are in danger of extinction and then the panic is on to reverse this trend with little or no improvement. I believe the time has come to severely limit the number of birds that may be captured

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NOTICE

For a more centralized and convenient administration, the A.F.A. is consolidating its various functions under one roof in a new home office. The office will be run by a well paid office manager who will be directly responsible to the A.F.A. president and executive committee.

Don't panic if you've mailed something to the old office address — P.O. Box 327, El Cajon, CA 92022. It will remain active for some time.

The new office is located in the greater Los Angeles area very convenient to the Los Angeles airport. The address is:

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and exported for commercial purposes. We also have to insure that enough land is set aside to prevent extensive habitat destruction and to perform extensive long range studies on wild populations to help gain the knowledge in order to secure the future existence of these creatures.

Commercial capturing is probably one of the most destructive influences upon a wild population. Large numbers are taken each year for the pet industry. Given the relatively low natality rate of all psittacines, the very absence of the captured individuals contribute to a downward spiral of population numbers. Less than 50% of all captured birds survive the initial transportation to market. Some estimates run as high as 80% mortality. Of the survivors I would estimate one out of every thousand or one-tenth of one percent are placed into a breeding program. The other 999 are pets and contribute nothing to the preservation of species.

I firmly believe that captive propagation is essential, not only to insure the future of a species but to supply the requirements of the pet industry without having to reduce the wild population. The only way to promote captive propagation on a large scale is by placing limitations on the number of Psittacines that can be captured, exported and/or imported. Great Britain's proposal is the first step towards this goal and I fully support it.

The above point of view was published by the Hookbill Hobbyists, a southern California club, in their monthly journal. Tom Bradley, the author, is that clubs delegate to the A.F.A. Bradley is, I suppose, to be commended for publishing the A.F.A. alert even though he personally opposed the A.F.A. stance.

On the other hand, I feel Tom Bradley should be taken to task for publishing such an ill-prepared opinion. His second sentence is his first major mistake. He says that aviculturists should support the CITES decision because of ignorance. I say that his principle is wrong. People should take positive action based upon knowledge and logic. They should avoid negative action based upon nameless fears, i.e., things they are ignorant of. Ostensibly, the dark ages are over. If we had a rule to cover everything we are ignorant of we would be legislated right under our beds for fear of coming out into the unknown.

Next, Mr. Bradley says we know nothing about parrot population dynamics;

the few studies that do occur focus on birds already endangered and they do no good; and he believes it is time to severely limit commercial traffic in parrots.

Why, I ask, should a severe limit be applied when we don't have any supporting data? Certainly some regulations should apply when we have data that suggests a bird is threatened, but it does not make sense to devise a blanket rule that treats all birds the same. It makes good sense to restrict an ill person from a vigorous sport. But it is nonsense to make a blanket rule restricting all persons from the sport because we don't know their health status. Logic demands a person be kept out of the boxing ring, for instance, when he is known to have a physical debility. That sort of a rule is based upon knowledge, not ignorance.

Bradley goes on to another unsupportable statement when he says "We also have to insure that enough land is set aside to prevent extensive habitat destruction. . . ." Who, I ask, is "we"? Surely not we aviculturists. Not, I hope, we citizens of the United States. The only people that can insure an adequate environment for the world's parrot populations are those peoples and governments in the countries where the birds actually live. We have little enough control over our own American ecology much less that of the rest of the world. Who knows how many Marines that kind of action would require?

In his second paragraph Tom Bradley compounds the confusion. He says commercial capturing is probably a destructive influence on wild populations. If we are so ignorant of parrot population dynamics, how does Bradley reach that conclusion? And why does he assume parrots have a low natality rate? And from which populations are the pet taken? To which species does Bradley refer? Surely not the many species of conures that flock like sparrows in their habitats. Surely not the monk parakeet that is banned in California lest it take over the whole state. Surely not the Indian ring-necked parakeets that descend in huge flocks in the fields and cities — from India to northern Africa. Not, I hopw, sulphur-crested cockatoos or corellas that Australian farmers want open season on. And not the orange-winged Amazon about which Forshaw himself writes, "From late afternoon until after nightfall hundreds of parrots, in pairs and flocks, could be seen in the air at all times as they came into the roosting site from all directions."

Even Joseph Forshaw (no real friend of aviculture) only admits to trapping

pressure on a handful of Amazons, a macaw or two, and one Australian parrot. To infer that all or even a majority of parrot species are pressured by trappers is absurd.

Equally incredible is the unsupported statement regarding the survival rate of captured parrots. Such statistical statements should be supported by hard data. Without data Mr. Bradley is just blowing smoke. And even more smokey is his unsupported estimate that only one in a thousand wild caught parrots winds up in a breeding program. These opinions are unaimed shots in the dark.

From the above shaky ground Tom Bradley moves into a veritable earthquake zone in his third paragraph. Of course we all agree that captive propagation can help sustain some species and can supply some parrots to the pet trade. Where the ground opens up under Bradley's feet is when he says the only way to promote large scale captive breeding is to limit the numbers of parrots captured and imported.

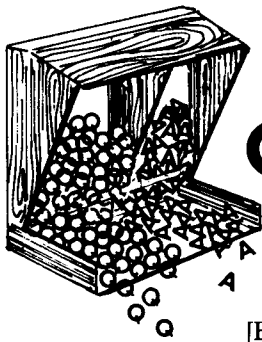
First off, in a free market economy there is no "only way" to do anything. The beauty of the American Way is that anyone bright enough and willing to work can devise as many ways to do a thing as he wants — until he is successful.

Secondly, to severely limit or to cut off parrot imports is to create a monopoly. The few people with large collections will be akin to Arabs with oil. If a little person wants to get started he will have to go to the big guy and pay the price. It makes more sense to me to have millions of backyard breeders raising millions of parrots than to have a few people raising a few really high-priced birds.

The key to this whole controversy, which Bradley seems to have missed, is that there is a real difference between parrots that are actually threatened and parrots that are not. Truly threatened parrots should be protected in the wild and fostered in captivity. Parrots that are abundant in the wild should be reasonably harvested and established in aviculture so, whatever the future holds, there will be a self-sustaining captive population.

There are three hundred and thirty-two species of parrots. Twenty-seven of them are listed as endangered. A few more are listed as threatened. Any regulation that can not distinguish the endangered and threatened parrots from the plentiful, abundant, and even pesty parrots will, indeed, be supported only by the ignorant.

Ed.



Q & A Column

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The following questions both involve moving birds across our national boundaries so we consulted with an expert in the matter—Don Wells. Don is a longtime aviculturist, world traveler, bird catcher, importer, exporter, a sterling good fellow, and an avian factotum par excellence. We took his answers by phone from the hinterlands and translated them into Watchbird English.]

QUESTION

I have been a member of the A.F.A. for about one year and enjoy the Watchbird very much. I do have a question I hope can be answered.

Can you explain how hand-fed baby yellow-naped parrots are brought into this country and maintained in quarantine? We bought one about a year ago and we notice they are often available in pet stores here in Northern California. None of the young yellow-naped babies we have seen had leg bands on.

ANSWER

Despite what you have heard or read, several quarantine stations *do* import young parrots in the hand-feeding stage. These nestlings are taken in the wild by trappers who feed them softened corn or corn meal mush. When the babies arrive in quarantine there are employees present who specialize in hand-feeding. By the time these parrots get to the pet stores they are tame and delightful pets.

Unfortunately, the smugglers can stuff a little corn into a baby bird also. More baby birds are smuggled than are brought in legally. Parrots that go through quarantine must be banded before the U.S.D.A. will release the quarantine. Many dealers, however, cut off the bands as soon as quarantine is over so the bands won't bother the birds.

Most of the birds that are smuggled in are from Mexico or Honduras, i.e., military and scarlet macaws, double yellow headed, yellow naped, and Mexican red-headed Amazons. Birds endemic to more southerly areas are very seldom smuggled in.

When buying a parrot, trade with stores and dealers of excellent reputa-

tion. Ask them the source of the parrot you want. Smuggling and the concurrent disease problems would phase out if no one bought smuggled birds.

QUESTION

Will you please send me information regarding moving birds back and forth across the Canadian/U.S. border.

*Louise Lanctot
Lisbon, N.Y.*

ANSWER

The Canadian government is very watchful and closes its borders to any country that has a potentially dangerous disease factor. In fact, at the time of this writing, the Canadian officials have the U.S.A. on the "closed to traffic" list because of our recurrent Newcastle outbreaks.

The United States honors Canadian quarantine procedures and birds legally quarantined in Canada or hatched in Canada can be imported into the U.S. without any further quarantine. Of course, proper documents are necessary but they're easy to obtain.

Since the situation changes constantly, you should consult with Canadian authorities before you pack up any birds to ship to Canada.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

If you have any questions on any phase of aviculture or related fields please send them to:

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2208 "A" Artesia Blvd.
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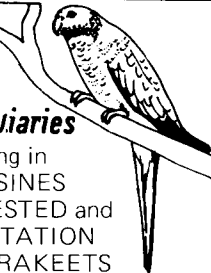
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