

It Seems to Me...

by Sheldon Dingle
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Change is ablowin' in the wind. Gone are the old days when exotic birds could be imported from anywhere and quarantine hadn't been invented yet.

Nowadays, a few birds are imported from a few Third World countries and they go directly into government-controlled quarantine stations. There are permits, vet inspections, health certificates, fees and folderol which are always connected to governmental enterprises.

And what the future holds, who knows? You can bet, however, that there will be more and more regulations regarding wild birds and the multi-million dollar business of aviculture.

It seems to me that there are at least three ways to react. First, you can hole up with your shotgun and blast away at the authorities until you, yourself, go up in a great puff of smoke (this happens a lot here in L.A.). This might be a more memorable exit than you have any right to, but, in the long run, you can't win that war.

Second, you can scoop seed left and right into the bird cages, eyes glued to the seed bucket, blithely unaware of the real world. Again, you will not prevail. One day you'll look up in amazement at what the new aviculture is like. And you could even wake up in a jail cell scratching your head over what violation got you there.

Third, you can make informed decisions about the oncoming rules and regulations and manage your bird-keeping in such a way as to minimize the effect the new laws have on your operation. We all do this regarding the universally hated — but inevitable — income taxes. We learn the rules. We hire tax experts. We organize our affairs to ensure our maximum benefit (within legal bounds, of course). I think we should try this little known and seldom used method with respect to our aviculture, too.

Gentle reader, it pains me to have to

point out that many conservationists and ecological "Greens" look upon us as the last remnants of Genghis Khan's pillaging hordes. In some quarters, our reputation ain't so hot. If, in the old days, we "took," I believe that now we have a chance to "give back." Not that anyone's efforts can perfectly restore the earth to its pristine condition, but we can do several things which, in my view, will add legitimacy, purpose and responsibility to the sometimes misunderstood field of aviculture.

- The first thing you can do is check out the Model Aviculture Program (MAP). This voluntary program has established guidelines for responsible bird husbandry — recommendations for safety zones, accurate record keeping and inspections by a veterinarian of your choice, for example — things most responsible aviculturists do routinely. This program doesn't record how many birds you have or what kind. The inspecting vet will recommend that your facility be approved or may recommend changes that will improve the quality of life for the birds in your charge. I feel that this is an excellent program and that MAP certification will become a badge of honor to distinguish the professional and responsible aviculturists from the others. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to MAP, P.O. Box 1657, Martinez, CA 94553 for an information packet.

- The second important thing you can do is to get involved in the AFA Exotic Bird Registry. It is my sincere belief that gradually increasing governmental control will eventually require all exotic birds be registered just as automobiles and dogs are now. Indeed, the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 contains some language that may eventually cause every imported exotic bird to be marked. No mark, no control. Currently, marking includes leg bands, microchips, tattoos, etc. Since all of these things can

be moved from bird to bird, they will not satisfy the demands of the government when it becomes more serious about bird control. I believe that the only acceptable bird marking for the future is DNA "fingerprinting" and that the marked birds should be registered. There is an article on this subject in the making.

Take heart, though, there are a number of pluses to having your animals marked and registered — especially if you do it *before* the mandate hits. The State of Arizona, for example, requires that all horses have a registration slip similar to the one for your car that you carry in your glove compartment. It has cut the horse-stealing (a very big business here in the West) by 90%. Marking and registering can serve to protect your valuable birds in a similar manner. There are many other management benefits to having registered birds and I believe that the bird fancy needs to gear up to the idea and get going. Information on the AFA Exotic Bird Registry is available by calling 1-800-BIRDCALL or by writing the AFA Home Office.

- A third exciting thing is going on. The AFA has taken the initiative and actually put some scientists in the field in the first step of the AFA Recovery and Management Plan for the Red-fronted Macaw. Actually, the first step was taken several years ago when an AFA member put together a computer-based model conservation management program for this CITES Appendix I endangered parrot. And now AFA-sponsored scientists are in the field in Bolivia conducting an important conservation-oriented study that, hopefully, will provide a basis for moving this macaw from CITES Appendix I to Appendix II. This Recovery and Management Plan may also serve as a model that can be implemented in conservation studies of other birds. There isn't room in this editorial to lay out the details of this program but we'll try to get an article for an upcoming edition of *Watchbird*.

Well, now you know some of my thoughts on modern aviculture. Two of the "Opinions" letters express related thoughts. The old ways are fading, new things are coming and I've pointed to three new things that I like. We are very interested in what *you* think. What is *your* opinion? Send us a letter. ●