

can indicate such findings as kidney disease, presence of excessive glucose or sugar in the urine (may be suggestive of diabetes), kidney function, and possibility of heavy metal poisoning.

- Polyomavirus - This deadly virus disease may be identified with use of the DNA probe test, from the droppings of affected and shedding birds.
- Liver disease - Decreased function, inflammation of, or infection or insult to the liver may be suggested by a change of the droppings (usually the urate portion, which normally is white in coloration, is affected). Further diagnostic tests such as serum chemistries or specific tests for psittacosis may be warranted.
- Psittacosis (Parrot Fever) - several diagnostic tests are available that detect the presence of or react to the presence of the causative organism of psittacosis, Chlamydia psittaci.

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Conservation and Aviculture

by Rick Jordan
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

What is conservation? Webster defines the word as "the act of keeping from depletion." How does this relate to breeding birds in captivity? If you ask this question of an aviculturist they will say they are breeding birds so they will exist when the habitat has been totally destroyed and no more specimens exist in the wild. That certainly qualifies as "the act of keeping from depletion." If you ask a conservationist how aviculture is related to conservation they will usually tell you there is little correlation between the two. So who is the most correct? Are we, as aviculturists, wasting our time or are we actually

doing some good for the future of certain bird species?

A controversy has arisen between aviculture and "in the wild" conservation. Suddenly there seems to be competition between the captive breeders and the field biologists who both seek the same goal, to save birds in the wild. This competition is not helping the birds but, instead, hampering captive breeding efforts for many rare and endangered birds. Birds that are in need of assistance if they are to survive in their natural habitat for years to come.

The relationship between captive breeding and conservation in the wild

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is very difficult to define. Perhaps there is no relationship between the two. Perhaps we must all adjust our thoughts to accept the fact that, in these changing times, there are two distinctly different sectors of conservation, captive breeding and conservation in the wild. Unfortunately, most of the regulations that have been promulgated by our government are geared towards the benefit of the species in the wild. This eliminates the participation efforts of captive breeding in any given conservation program that is funded by the government. It also gives the field biologist the upper hand when seeking justification for a new "program" to be funded by the government.

The above scenario is a sad one indeed. It does not consider the one fact that has led to the demise of most species in the first place, habitat destruction. Although collection for the pet trade and breeder trade is blamed for the disappearance of many species in the wild, man's interference in the habitat is really the cause of it all. So we are funding more interference, ignoring captive conservation, and continuing to cut the habitat on a daily basis. In the mean time, "save the world biologists" are out there hanging unnatural nests, counting birds, shooting birds, and writing their doctoral dissertations on the possible extinction of yet another species of bird. Then there are a few who are participating in release programs that boggle the mind with justified, governmentally funded, stupidity.

On one isolated island we have a biologist who needs to get a doctorate degree. What does she do to get it except sit in the wild and observe a very rare species of Amazon parrot attempt to nest in a new habitat filled with feral cats. Did she ever stop and consider that perhaps the decline of this bird was due to exactly that which they are observing. Common house cats that have gone wild are destroying the nests, and in some cases, even the laying hen in the nest. Did this field biologist do anything to help the birds or did she only study the nests, write a dissertation and collect her new degree and move on to a new job? As an aviculturist, the first thing that I would have done is have the cats

destroyed! The only way for this species to recover is to restore the habitat to what it was and make it safe for the birds to nest successfully.

Interestingly enough, this biologist is very anti-captive breeding. She feels that the demise of most of these rare birds was due to collection for the trade. However, in all my world travels and all the aviaries, public and private, that I have visited, there are NO representatives of this species in captivity. Whoops there goes another one of those...

Right about the same time, there was another governmentally funded biologist trying to re-establish a parrot species in an area where it has not been seen since the 1930's. This habitat is hostile and full of predators. Could this have been the reason that the birds disappeared from here in the first place? I guess not. The biologist continued to release birds into this area only to find them killed or missing completely. Surely there must have been another reason these birds have moved out of this area.

This same species has another range. A range where it is quite common and not in a highly threatened position, unless of course someone decides they need the lumber. Why not release birds into this area where they already exist in adequate numbers and the newly released can learn from the birds that are already there. Of course this would not be such an exciting project and may not receive as much press and prestige as starting an entirely new group in an uninhabited area. Instead, the final published result of the project is summarized as "reintroduction of birds is not feasible, captive bred birds are not suitable for release." Strike another blow against aviculture.

If you really want to see conservation at work, take a good look at the government project on one of the northern Caribbean Islands. In the early 1980's there were an estimated 50 representatives in the wild. Everyone jumped through the hoop to help save the bird. Of course none were taken off the island and placed with captive breeders who could have done some good with them. Instead, captured pairs were set up on the island (some pairs were two females),

and the results of this captive-breeding farce were used to deny captive breeding as a viable option. The species continued to decline in the wild. As far as anyone knows, this bird is still in decline. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent by the tax payers to save this bird and yet the results of this project are difficult if not impossible to acquire. My guess is that the project has done little to save this bird. If it were a successful project wouldn't the biologists in charge want the world to know what they have done?

I would like to congratulate one conservation effort by Mr. Paul Butler and his associates. It appears that the educational campaign that he has been involved with in the lower Caribbean Islands has resulted in an increase in the number of birds that are in the wild. Keep up the good work Mr. Butler, could you possibly share some of your knowledge and insight with the biologists in these other programs?

Another conservation effort that warrants mention is the Mauritius Parakeet project that is funded, in part, by the World Parrot Trust, a group of captive breeders and others I might like to add. This project shows great potential and is beginning to demonstrate a connection between captive breeding and wild habitat management.

Why am I so cynical, you might ask. Am I the only one that sees that the governmentally funded projects around the world are not working? How many Kakapo have been bred since the government stepped into that project? How many Puerto Rican Amazons? The list can go on but it would only be depressing. Remember, "You can't fight City Hall."

Let's take a look at an interesting conservation effort for the Spix's Macaw. Oh the scandal it is. There is only one left in the wild. In this case, collecting for the trade did in fact deplete the wild, but there were only a few left in the wild anyway. If we had waited for the many "do right" governments to step in there would have been none. So, pairs of this bird were taken from the wild and ended up in private collections around the world. There was a "kind of hush, all over the world" as to who had them.

Only a few would announce the existence of these birds in their collections. My hat goes off to you...that took a lot of guts.

So, there are maybe five or six pairs in captivity around the world, about nineteen in the zoo in the country of origin, and a few in pet homes, as single birds, in the country of origin. I Should mention that there are several hundred dead ones in the museums around the world that have been shot by ornithologists but, I am sure they would not have bred anyway, right? In any case, none have been bred in the country of origin, none have been bred by the pet owners, but many have been bred by the "collector" who managed to get them. Yes, you heard me right, many have been bred in captivity. Does this justify conservation? I say, "hell yes." The world's population of this species has been almost doubled by the few pairs that are in the hands of the breeders. One point for aviculture!

How about the Blue-throated macaw from Bolivia? A few years ago they were extremely expensive to purchase because they were so rare in captivity. Now, thanks to captive breeding they are available and are not much more expensive than the common Blue and Gold Macaw. Another point for aviculture!

Blue-throated Conures, Crimson-bellied Conures, Hoffman's Conure, Queen of Bavaria Conure, Cuban Amazon, Vinaceous Amazon, Hyacinth Macaws, Ducorp's Cockatoos, White-eared Conures, all are now available as captive bred birds from many breeders across the world. There are upward of 200 species available from breeders somewhere. Captive breeding is working. It is "keeping free from depletion" those birds that are in need of help. It even helps to conserve wild flocks. If breeders can buy captive bred birds from other breeders they will not need to look to the wild for any more birds. So, I guess conservation in the wild and captive breeding do have something in common. Why then is it so difficult to get the two groups to work together? Why does our own government pass stupid laws like the "Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992" and make it so difficult to import captive bred birds from other

breeders?

It appears that many laws are being passed that are contrary to conservation. Some of this can be blamed on ignorance, but some of it is, beyond any doubt, due to some type of hidden agenda. Someone doesn't want birds bred in cages. These same people believe that extinction is part of the natural order and should not be interfered with. I am sure glad these same people are not in charge of finding a cure for the many illnesses that plague mankind. We would all be doomed to die an early death.

Conservation and aviculture can

work together. If we must view the world as two separate "groups," those born in captivity, and those born in the wild, then so be it. But, at the same time we cannot allow someone to stop captive breeding or there will only be one group that remains, the most vulnerable group of all. Why can't conservation be content to know that the bird does in fact, live, breath, and breed in a cage somewhere in the world? In the end there will be no habitat to release any wild animals into. It will be as absurd as a release program for Tigers in downtown Los Angeles. ➤

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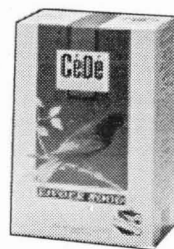
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