

# Nyasa Lovebirds: Trapping and Smuggling in Africa

by T.E. Cox  
Harare, Zimbabwe

*[Editors note: Mr. T.E. Cox keeps and breeds birds in the African country of Zimbabwe. He has done a great deal of work with the Nyasa Lovebird Agapornis liliana in his own aviaries and has a keen interest in the species. He was appalled at several local newspaper reports that numerous lovebirds were being trapped to be eaten for lunch, among other uses. Mr. Cox penned a letter to the newspaper editor giving his views on the subject. For the AFA's general information, Mr. Cox sent us several of the newspaper articles and his own letter to the editor. S.L.D. ed.]*

there and found three home-made wire cages containing 662 Nyasa love birds.

In mitigation after his plea of guilty yesterday, Bandera implored the magistrate to be lenient. He said he had to look after his large family and was not going to do the same thing again.

Mr. Gry Tabvuma appeared for the State.

From "The Herald Sunday Mail" 29 Sept. 1994

## **MAN CONVICTED OF POSSESSING LOVE BIRDS TO DO COMMUNITY SERVICE Court Reporter**

A MAN convicted of illegally possessing 662 love birds worth \$132,400,

which the court accepted were kept for food, will work 180 hours of community service at an environment that will enable him to love animals.

Member Bandera (52) was yesterday sentenced to six months in jail which were wholly suspended on condition he did community service at the Department of Parks and Wild Life Management's National Botanic Gardens for 180 hours.

The community service should start on Monday next week and be completed within 12 weeks to the satisfaction of the person in charge there, ruled the magistrate.

Passing sentence, magistrate Mr. Cosmas Mukweshu found in Bandera's

## **CONFISCATED BIRDS WERE FOR RELISH, SAYS ACCUSED Court Reporter**

THE Harare man arrested over the weekend with 662 love birds with a street value of \$132,400 yesterday told a Harare magistrate that he had intended to slaughter the birds for "his family's favourite meal."


Member Bandera (52), convicted yesterday of contravening the Parks and Wildlife Act, told magistrate Mr. Cosmas Mukweshu that he went all the way to Nyamapanda border post to buy the birds for his family's relish.

The birds were discovered and rescued when police raided a house in Dzivarasekwa looking for drugs.

Bandera said his wife and 10 children enjoyed eating the birds and he had not intended selling them. Before his arrest, he had already slaughtered 20 birds which his family had for a day's lunch and supper, he told the court.

Asked by the magistrate how long he intended keeping the rest of the birds before slaughtering them, Bandera said: "Maybe for a month or so but not for a long time."

On September 24 this year police received information that Bandera kept drugs in his house. They made a search



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favour that he was an old man who did not intend to sell the birds. "Sending you to jail at that age will not be doing good to justice," he said.

On September 24 this year police, acting on information that Bandera kept drugs in his Dzivarasekwa house, conducted a search there. They found three home-made wire cages containing 662 Nyasa love birds. Bandera was questioned and he told the police that he bought the birds from vendors at Nyamapanda border post. He, however, did not intend to sell them since they were his family's favourite meat, the court learnt.

The birds, 20 of which were eaten before Bandera's arrest, were confiscated by the State. Mr. Gry Tabvuma appeared for the State while Bandera was not represented.

From "The Herald Sunday Mail" 30 Sept. 1994

### 1,000 SMUGGLED BIRDS WORTH \$30,000 IMPOUNDED

**Herald Reporter**

ABOUT 1,000 Nyasa lovebirds, believed to be smuggled from Mozambique and worth \$30,000, were impounded by the Department of

National Parks and Wildlife Management on Thursday in Goromonzi and three men were arrested by police.

Parks chief investigating officer Mr. Graham Nott confirmed the arrest.

#### Hired

A spokesman for the department said yesterday that the men, who had hired an emergency taxi to ferry the birds, would face charges for breaching the Parks Act. Only those with licenses are allowed to capture animals and birds.

If they were not captured in Mozambique, the birds, also known as Agipornis Lilianae, or Lilian Lovebirds, may have been trapped in the Zambezi Valley, the spokesman said.

However, they did not have the remains of sticky lime on their bodies, a common substance used to catch birds locally. This suggested that they may have been captured by using a net, a trapping technique commonly used in Mozambique.

The birds, which are green with reddish patches around the mouths, were cramped into a small cage when they were impounded. In an effort to save their lives, the department has

asked Mr. Thomas Cox, a bird breeder in Ruwa, to keep them safe.

Unfortunately more than 100 of the birds have already died and Mr. Cox is making frantic efforts to save the lives of the remainder. He expected half the birds would die from trauma and the head injuries arising from the cramped cage. He is treating them for dehydration, and feeding them with vitamins.

Mr. Cox, the only breeder allowed to export the birds, estimated the value of the birds at about \$30,000 locally. However, it was also illegal to sell birds in the country without the permission of National Parks.

An emergency taxi used to ferry the birds is still parked at Mr. Cox's residence, awaiting collection by the police.

It is believed that many birds captured in the country have found their way into South Africa for sale.

#### Export

Each bird fetched about US\$30 on the export market, and about \$15 on the black market in the country. Mr. Cox, who has about 1,500 of the birds, said he could not mix the new lot with his as this could introduce disease.

He would keep them until they were healthy to be released into the wild. The arrested men are expected to appear in court soon.

From "The Herald Sunday Mail" 20 Aug. 1994

### POLICE STUMBLE ON BIRDS CONSIGNMENT

**Herald Reporter**

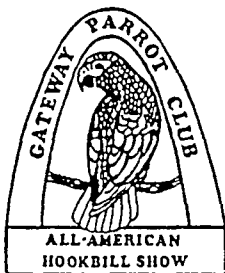
POLICE raiding a kachasu outlet in Dzivarasekwa, Harare, at the weekend got more than they were looking for when they stumbled on a consignment of 662 parrots crammed in three tiny cages.

Two men, a Mozambican and a Zimbabwean, were arrested for illegal possession of the birds as well as brewing and selling of illicit beer by members of the Criminal Investigations Department Drug Squad.

A community relations and liaison office for Harare Province, Assistant Inspector Tawanda Mtodza, said the suspects claimed that they had brought the birds from Mozambique. They also alleged that they were selling them at \$5 a pair.

Each bird costs about \$250 on the export market and about \$15 on the black market in this country.

The problem birds control unit of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management came to the res-



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cue of the birds on Sunday and transferred them to a bird sanctuary near Lake Chivero. About 51 of the birds have since died while a considerable number were still too weak to fly by yesterday afternoon.

A spokesman for the department said due to poor ventilation and shortage of both space and feed for the birds, some of them were in bad shape. Cannibalism was taking place among the parrots, all of them of the Lillian Lovebird species, as they resorted to eating each other's feathers.

When the members of the National Parks went to collect the birds, they found them packed in three cages, each about 60 cm long, 40 cm wide and 30 cm deep. Each of the small cages was holding about 230 birds.

He said the birds would be kept at the sanctuary until the department had finished constructing aviaries to accommodate them.

A spokesman for the sanctuary told the Herald that such birds exist along the Zambezi Valley and parts of Mozambique. Three other species of parrots were found in Zimbabwe - the brown-headed, brown-necked (both found in the Vumba Mountains), and the meyer.

The Department of National Parks were worried about the increase in the cases of illegal smuggling of the rare birds. How the birds found their way out of the country remained a mystery to the department.

From "The Herald Sunday Mail" 28 Sept. 1994

28th October, 1994.

The Editor,  
Herald/Sunday Mail,  
Herald House,  
Second Street,  
**Harare**

Dear Sir,

**Nyasa Lovebirds.**

As the Nyasa Lovebird has been receiving some attention in the news media of late, I feel that the public should be made more aware of the species and the problems which it faces.

The natural territory in Zimbabwe is the Zambesi Valley from Binga to Kanyemba, overlapping into Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. Of

recent years, settlements into large areas of the Zambesi Valley have resulted in the destruction of their habitat and the virtual elimination of the species in those areas.

This species is not protected and our National Parks seemed to rely upon the fact that the birds were found in either National Parks' areas or areas which were controlled by them, viz communal areas, as sufficient protection.

Approximately six years ago, I was informed by the National Parks' Ornithologist that the species was being put onto the protected list. Over two years ago he said that they were on the protected list but I have seen nothing gazetted to date.

Approximately three years ago, authority was passed to the Campfire areas and the local councils were thus allowed to give permission to anyone to capture or obtain unprotected birds, this, I believe, to the exclusion of any National Parks' permits or even their support.

Since then, another instrument has been introduced, this being the Live Wildlife Sellers' License which, however, appears to contradict the authority of

landowners, lessees or councils to own and therefore sell or dispose of the wildlife on their property as they see fit.

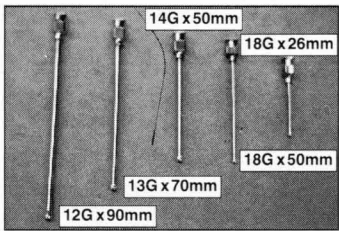
Since the implementation of the campfire programme, there has been increasing backyard trade, as recent news reports have shown and it is apparent that the authorities are powerless to impose any real deterrents. It appears there is also trapping and smuggling of birds into South Africa, these birds suffering severe stress in transit.

One may ask, what is our National Parks doing or planning to do? Are they going to protect them by legislation? Confiscate birds acquired on the black market? Or are they going to let the situation continue as it is until the only remaining birds are in National Parks' areas and the species becomes truly threatened? These are some of the questions I feel the public should have answers to.

Now, on to problems faced with captive lovebirds. There is a demand for them on world markets due to scarcity which results from an inherent problem. People can't keep them alive and so have not been able to breed a con-

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tinued supply.

I initiated a breeding project with 800 wild caught birds just over six years ago and have been heavily involved in overcoming problems of management, breeding and rearing of the species. We became aware of a serious health problem when our first batch of young birds were about eight weeks old. They came under stress easily and died off without any indication of ill health. We have strived to diagnose, treat and cure the complaint and have met with a degree of success.

We believe the problem to be caused by an inherent virus which manifests itself after birds (young birds in particular) come under stress. We further believe it to be inherent in wild populations as we captured our stock birds ourselves and housed and bred them in complete isolation to any other species. We have had indications that a specific virus is present, but have not as yet managed to have it isolated or confirmed. However, we have proceeded along a programme of vaccination and have met with a large degree of success in that we have second and third generation of captive bred birds which are themselves breeding.


Although we have met with this success, there is still a long way to go before a resistant strain could be assured. This would require prolonged and expensive research (with some of it done in the U.S.A.) which we are sure would not be supported by the bird trade itself which is now extremely sensitive to the costs of this malady.

We are therefore reducing our stock and keeping only a few of our now relatively hardy strain for ourselves and have asked if the National Parks will exercise constraint on exports until such time as proven resistant birds are produced by whoever should have the funds and dedication to take up the cause.

The only solution may be for public conscience to produce funds for a trust to save and captive breed the Nyasa Lovebird and I am sure this applies to many other species. I also appeal through the media for CITES Authorities, particularly in neighboring countries, to observe constraint.

Would you please be so kind as to publish this letter in the Sunday Mail? Your indulgence would be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

T.E. Cox 

## A Better Record Keeping System

by Rick Jordan  
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

Keeping and breeding animals of any sort seems to be a controversial issue in these changing times. Local restrictions, city ordinances, or state and federal laws keep popping up to be endorsed by representatives of that particular area. What do they all have in common? They impose some type of record keeping system on the animal breeder. Whether it be for sales or just for health and breeding data, these laws and ordinances are an attempt to make animal breeders keep track of all of their offspring.

If you take a look at some of these "model" laws that are being passed in many cities around our country, you will notice that many are introduced by animal rights or animal welfare organizations. Groups of this nature are attempting to legislate our businesses and control what we do with our birds and their offspring. Ten years ago, these same groups were imposing these laws on dog and cat owners in much the same way. They aimed to put all the "puppy mills" out of business by proving that breeders were overbreeding their stock and producing puppies for the pet trade in an inhumane manner. The only breeder who survived that era were those who were involved with the AKC and had all of their dogs and puppies registered.

By keeping good records on your breeding birds, banding or labeling all of your offspring, and showing the whereabouts of the progeny, you can stop this type of "control" legislation by negating its necessity. If all legitimate breeders were involved with a registry program or were keeping verifiable records, the animal rights groups would not have a leg to stand on. Statistics and facts are the only thing that can stop them. They rely on propaganda to convince government of a need to control the trade. Over-inflated statistics about the survival rate of baby birds, horror stories of how many birds escape from their cages, and myths of "bird mills" are the only thing they have going for them. To Stop the animal rights groups, all

one needs to do is to keep good records and provide printouts of production, incubation data, survival rates, longevity, and health records to smother their agenda before they have the time to make it a law.

Up until recently, I was keeping track of my production on 3 x 5 note cards and scrap notebook papers. This was fine for me and I understood the information that I needed to research. However, if I had ever needed to provide a copy of the breeding records for a certain pair of birds, it would have looked as though I quickly jotted it on a sheet of paper, right off the top of my head. This is exactly why the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has entertained the idea of a Federal Registration Program for all exotic birds. They even built the permission to do so into Section 115 of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992. So, at any time, if they wish, they can suddenly require everyone to band birds and register all of the offspring with the government. Trust me when I tell you that they really don't want to do this but, if certain animal rights or humane groups keep lobbying them to provide humane treatment laws, they will act on this section of the law and we will all have to be registered with the feds in order to sell a baby bird. Of course, within a few years of doing that, the IRS will require a printout from the feds that provides income statistics on all of us also.

So, how do we stop this before it happens? The best plan of attack is to keep our own record systems clean and in an orderly manner. For 10 years I have been searching for the perfect computer program to do this for me. This program would have to be "loser friendly" because the only aspect of computers that I bothered to learn was the word processor. I have tried the programs that came out in the past. They were simple enough to use, but they were also very limited in what they could do. I wound up keeping notebooks of information in addition to the data that I put into the program. This seemed rather stupid and I knew