

# CITES

## Aviculture and You

by Al McNabney, Chair,  
AFA CITES Committee

**A**n old saying: "One bird in the hand is worth two birds in the bush." Maybe, but those who participate in CITES activities won't agree. To *you*, as an aviculturist, either rank amateur or professional making a living through captive breeding, the decisions and policies adopted by CITES delegates *may* be the last word.

### So What Is CITES?

After years of urging and prodding, on 3 March 1973, 21 (now about 125) countries signed the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The Convention was actually approved 1 July 1975. So CITES was born. The CITES preamble carries this message:

**Wild fauna and flora in their many beautiful and varied forms are an irreplaceable part of the natural systems of the earth which must be preserved for this and the generations to come.**

Now, 20 years later, why should anyone interested in aviculture be writing about CITES in an avicultural magazine? Unknown to most aviculturists, CITES has had, is having and will continue to have a major impact on avian conservation, aviculture, captive breeding and perpetuation of endangered avian species.

### AFA's Role

AFA leaders, recognizing that CITES was affecting aviculture, sent representatives to CITES Conventions, held every two years. That participation, while valuable, failed to recognize the full import and impact of CITES on avian matters.

In 1994, AFA's president, Laurella Desborough, supported by the Board of Directors, recognized the importance of CITES to aviculture. This despite the enactment of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992. The 1994 CITES convention held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, brought together about 125 nations of the world, plus the largest contingent of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that had ever participated in a CITES convention. The AFA participates in CITES as a NGO.

Attendance at the Ft. Lauderdale convention convinced AFA's representatives that much was at stake for avicul-

turists, captive breeding and avian conservation. It was decided that AFA had to become a major player at the CITES conventions and meetings.

### The Animals Committee

The CITES Animals Committee plays an important role in CITES decisions and policy making process. The Ft. Lauderdale meeting covered captive breeding issues and the transportation of birds, to name just a couple of important subjects. Clearly, the transport of birds within the United States and around the world via air has been affected by policies initiated at such meetings. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has drafted and from time to time implemented proposed rules to govern shipments of birds by air. AFA has had limited input into such policy matters. Issues involved in the captive breeding of endangered avian species have long been considered by CITES delegates. Again, unfortunately, there has been very limited input from pro-aviculture people.

At the same time, various organizations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Humane Society of the United States, and the Environmental Investigative Agency have prepared extensive reports covering many topics and phases dealing with avian matters. Such reports seem to have been accepted by CITES Delegates as factual.

The Animals Committee (with AFA participating fully) met in Antigua, Guatemala 11-14 September 1995. Among reports provided by NGOs were "Mortality of Birds," RSPCA; "Comments On the Regulations Governing Captive Breeding of CITES-listed Specimens," EIA; "Bird Species With High Transport Mortality Imported Into the U.S. 1989-1992," HSUS.

A major item on the Animals Committee agenda involved the whole issue of "captive breeding of endangered species." AFA prepared a position which was presented during this meeting. Throwing that rock into the pond created so many ripples that there was no possibility of any consensus. CITES decisions are made when there is a consensus. Since there was no consensus Charles Dauphine, a Canadian who chaired the subcommittee meeting, announced that the issues involved in captive breeding would be

referred to a special committee for further consideration and recommendation. AFA's CITES Chair is a member of that committee.

### Has Conservation and Aviculture Been Well Served?

As reported at the last 1995 AFA Board Meeting, CITES delegates have, over the life of the organization, divided up the world's wildlife. Governments have sent delegates to CITES conventions who understand little or nothing about aviculture or the knowledge that exists in the avicultural community. Representatives of many organizations have agendas totally inimical to captive breeding or avian conservation in aviaries and in the wild. As a result, there appears to be very little understanding of aviculture, its proponents, and the important progress that has been made through captive breeding of avian species.

### What Now?

AFA's President and Board of Directors have made a determination that AFA *will* be involved in CITES in a meaningful way. AFA will be participating in CITES meetings and conventions consistent with available funding and the importance of the event to conservation and aviculture.

"So why should I care about that?" asks an AFA member. In response, we can assert that, clearly, CITES has already had a substantial impact on aviculture. It can also be assumed that had the avicultural community been fully involved in CITES since it was created, there is at least the possibility that the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 would never have been promulgated.

It is also likely that future CITES meetings will give attention to matters involving captive breeding of avian species. The policies resulting from such considerations may well become part of the WBCA unless aviculture carries its own lamp and tells its own story.

### Support Essential

AFA is committed to future CITES participation as *the* organization in the United States that speaks in a meaningful way for avian conservation and captive breeding as a major part of that conservation. AFA also speaks for aviculture and the future of avian species. AFA's commitment must have the financial and philosophical support of bird breeders, owners of pet birds and the entire industry that has grown up around bird keeping. ➤