

AFA, CITES, Aviculture & You

by

Al McNabney, Chair AFA CITES Committee

Fifteen million people have pet birds, at least that's an estimate often stated by folks who assert they know. Right or wrong, there is no question that thousands of pet birds are kept by bird lovers throughout the United States and the world. New industries have sprouted, strictly as a result of the many aviary and pet birds with owners who care. Among these industries is the extremely important work of avian veterinarians. Twenty years ago, the term "avian vet" was seldom, if ever, heard. Today, avian vets are trained, knowledgeable people who specialize in maintaining the health of the pet bird and aviary populations.

Birds used to be fed a seed diet not based on science or knowledge but on the fact that sunflower seeds were (generally) available. Today, avian diets are available in every pet store. Some created in USA are in use world wide. Some of the avian diets are based on years of special study. Seed companies now have entire sections of their high volume businesses based on how and what birds should be fed.

These days, though, not everyone is happy about people having birds (as they oft say) in cages. This brings me to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and policies created by the delegates over the many years of its existence.

The CITES Animals Committee will consider recommendation(s) which, if adopted, will alter existing policies covering the keeping, breeding and conservation of endangered avian species. The term "commercial purposes" may also be redefined.

One proposal presently being circulated reads: "This conference urges. . . that all contracting Parties encourage the breeding of animals [popular in the pet trade], with the objective of eventually limiting the keeping of pets to those species which can be bred in captivity."

The proposals now before the Animals Committee deal with every species. Aviculturists, eternally optimistic, believe any avian species can be bred in captivity. The record supports such optimism.

However, if other CITES or government policies make it literally impossible to work with endangered or threatened avian species how does anyone learn the characteristics of those particular species? How does one then prove it is possible to breed those particular avian species under aviary conditions?

Who Decides?

Aviculture has paid but little heed to CITES, leaving this important policy making body to government and various Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Few of the delegates have anything favorable to say or write about aviculture, captive breeding and avian conservation. Aviculturists have done a poor job of publicizing their achievements with birds kept under captive breeding conditions.

A review of the CITES record demonstrates that policies have been adopted which give little or no favorable consideration to the captive breeding of avian species.

Every two years, some 125 nations send delegates to the CITES

Convention. The delegates are presented with data, some from governments, some from special organizations and some from Non Government Organizations. Few to no studies have been provided to CITES delegates by aviculturists.

Two years ago AFA's representatives were actively involved in the CITES convention in Ft. Lauderdale. Last September AFA raised issues concerning the captive breeding of endangered avian species during the Animals Committee Meeting in Guatemala. September 1996 will find the CITES Animals Committee again meeting. The Committee will consider sweeping policy changes having to do with captive breeding of endangered species. AFA intends to participate representing aviculture's views on captive breeding of endangered/threatened avian species.

Over the years CITES has been in existence, there is little evidence to indicate studies have been presented to CITES delegates which covered any of the values of captive breeding. On the other hand, many studies have been reported purporting to demonstrate that "somehow" aviculture or aviculture's activities have been detrimental to the conservation of avian species.

Should You Care?

Everyone who owns a bird has some stake in policy decisions made by CITES delegates. This years Animals Committee meeting will be VERY important to aviculture. Serious breeders should take note. Individuals concerned about avian conservation should also take note. Individuals who have a small bird breeding hobby and even people with pet birds should be interested. If a retrogressive policy is eventually adopted by CITES delegates, it will undoubtedly adversely affect the availability of avian species for pets...or breeding...or anything else.

AFA's Role

AFA's commitment to active, continued participation in CITES may be crucial. AFA's commitment to aviculture and avian conservation, requires support of a strong position that captive breeding of (endangered/threatened) avian species is a proven, reasonable, scientific policy.

Also, issues over the term "commercial purposes" can have far reaching consequences to avian conservation, to captive breeding of endangered species as well as to aviculture in general.

AFA's commitment to avian conservation requires solid support and AFA's continued attention to CITES issues, such as captive breeding of avian species. AFA's continued policy regarding captive breeding of avian species must include an adequate interpretation of the term "commercial purposes." Adoption of a retrogressive policy by CITES delegates will likely be adverse to long range efforts to conserve endangered avian species.

AFA's commitment to the avicultural community requires strong backing for CITES policies that support captive breeding of endangered avian species. AFA's policy is based on the view that aviculture, through captive breeding, is a proven, reasonable, scientifically oriented effort that benefits avian conservation.

Aviculturists should "be aware. Show that you care." ●

Silva Request Denied

Judge turns down Silva's request to withdraw his guilty plea.

You may recall that noted aviculturist and wildlife expert, Tony Silva, entered a plea of guilty to several charges of violating certain wildlife laws. On April 17th, after evaluating the evidence against Silva, defense lawyer, Dave Schippers, filed a Motion to Withdraw Plea and a Memorandum of Law and Fact in Support of Silva's withdrawing his guilty plea. The withdrawal of a guilty plea is not unprecedented.

The prosecution, however, preferred to keep the guilty plea and not go to trial. The government's argument against allowing Silva to withdraw his plea consisted of a reiteration of the charges originally made, and the observation that Silva had previewed the testimony of the government's chief witness and that the witness probably would not be believed at a trial. In other words, the prosecution said Silva figured out the witness against him was not credible and that he (Silva) had nothing to lose by going to trial.

On May 17 both parties appeared before Judge Bucklo and she denied Silva's motion to withdraw his plea of guilty.

As we went to press, an evidentiary hearing was scheduled to resume on June 3, at which time a sentencing date for Silva and his mother, Gila Daoud, will also be set. ●

American Federation of Aviculture Presents Two 1996 National Show Awards

*By Linda R. Rubin
AFA Show Awards Project Coordinator*

The American Federation of Aviculture will be presenting two recognition awards this year at the Kaytee Great American Bird Show in Sarasota, Florida during October 5-6, 1996; and the National Cage Bird Show in Detroit, Michigan during November 14-16, 1996.

The new AFA National Show Award will go to the Best of Show (Bred and Banded by an AFA Member) which ranks highest at each of the two National shows. Any traceable closed band will qualify an entry, and qualifying entries need not be limited to AFA bands only.

The first AFA National Show Award was originally presented at the 1992 Great American Bird Show in Metairie, Louisiana, in tribute to AFA Members who show their birds. This year, the AFA voted to reinstate the award and present one at each of the two national U.S. bird shows in 1996.

In order to qualify for the AFA National Show Award, exhibitors must fill in the show entry form during registration, stating they are a current member of AFA, and that their entry bears a closed traceable leg band, including the full written band number. Memberships will be checked.

The AFA Show Awards will be presented during the awards banquet at both the National Cage Bird Show and the Great American Bird Show. A press release and photo of the winners will be included in a future issue of the *AFA Watchbird* journal, distributed to national show and avian magazines and will also be submitted to the winner's national specialty club bulletin for publication.

The Kaytee Great American Bird Show will be held at the Hyatt on Sarasota Bay in Sarasota, Florida. Judging will commence on Saturday, October 5, 1996 at 9:00 A.M. For further information on the GABS, please contact: David Dollar at phone/fax: 813-938-3893. The National Cage Bird Show will be held at the Hyatt Dearborn in Dearborn, Michigan. Judging will commence on Friday, November 15, 1996 at 8:00 A.M. For additional information on the NCBS, please contact: fax: 313-593-3366, or Charles Anchor, Publicity Chair, at 708-543-3757. ●

Orange County Bird Breeders Challenges All Bird Clubs



Photo by M. Jean Hessler

These are the Orange County Bird Breeders who challenged all of the rest of the bird clubs to a duel of the dollars. Orange County Bird Breeders won last year. Who will donate the most this year? L. to R. Donna Reynolds, past president '93, '94, Sherryl Ward, president, '96, Catherine "Punkin" Kelly, secretary, '96 and Mike Shanks, member of the board of directors.

Alright, folks! What have you done for the AFA lately?

Orange County Bird Breeders (OCBB), a long time AFA member club, put its money where its mouth is at AFA's last convention.

Through the generosity of an anonymous OCBB member, the club donated \$10,000 to the AFA for legislative education efforts. Ten thousand dollars—that's a lot of money. It happened this way.

At the New Orleans convention, Mike Shanks, a member of OCBB, bumped heads with Jim Hawley, the AFA CFO.

Hawley, in good CFO tradition, suggested that OCBB make a donation to the AFA. Then, Hawley said, you can challenge all the other bird clubs. OCBB jumped on it, and the whole affair was a rousing success. A lot of much-needed money was raised.

The challenge continues this year, and OCBB urges all clubs to participate in this ongoing fund raising activity to help fund some of the AFA's many efforts on behalf of all the bird clubs and, indeed, all the individual aviculturists.

OCBB came through big time last year—and may surprise you all again this year. What is your club going to do? You club officers, get together and help your club help the AFA. Pitch in. Don't let Shanks and the OCBB get all the glory. ●