

# What is CITES?

(an interview)

*[Editor's Note: because I am often asked about CITES and actually wanted to learn more myself, I presented some questions to Rick Jordan, Chairman of the AFA CITES Committee. The following is a summary of our Q & A session. SLD]*

**Question:** Just what is CITES?

**Answer:** CITES stands for The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species. It is an International Treaty.

**Q:** Does CITES deal only with endangered species in International Trade?

**A:** No. Actually CITES deals with the trade in any Appendix listed species. Basically there are three appendices under CITES. The most endangered species are found on CITES Appendix I, threatened species, or species that may become threatened by over harvesting from the wild can be found on Appendix II, and Appendix III is a list of species protected by a country of origin, designed to limit trade of that species from that particular country.

**Q:** I hear about CITES "Conference of the Parties" (COP)? What is that?

**A:** The actual "COP" is the meeting where all the member countries come together to vote on resolutions or changes to the Convention Treaty. This

is the meeting where Parties (government representatives to CITES) may vote to add or remove species from the appendices, or to change or update definitions found within the Convention Treaty. Only government Parties have a vote.

**Q:** What, then, is the role of the AFA in CITES?

**A:** The American Federation of Aviculture, Inc. (AFA) is an approved Non-Governmental Observer, or NGO. The role of an NGO is to monitor the proposed resolutions to the treaty or appendices and provide comment or scientific data to support or oppose these changes. In other words, the AFA's role is to *educate* the governmental Parties to CITES about the decisions they are about to make concerning aviculture and the breeding of birds in captivity.

**Q:** Are there other NGO participants? If so, who are the other US NGOs?

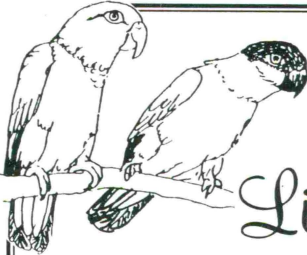
**A:** There are many NGO status organizations from the United States. Some of them include the North American Falconer's Association, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, Born Free Foundation, Ringling Brothers Circus, Environmental Investigation Agency, The Humane Society of the United States, and many more.

**Q:** When did AFA become an NGO? How? What does it cost to be an NGO?

**A:** The AFA was granted NGO status to CITES back in 1984. An organization can apply for NGO status to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, DC. In order to qualify, the organization must serve as a scientific advisor, conservation organization, or trade organization. Actual NGO status does not cost anything. However, the attendance to a committee meeting is \$100 and to attend the Conference of the Parties costs \$600.

**Q:** A committee meeting is obviously different than a Conference of the Parties. Why is Participation on the Animals Committee important?

**A:** The Animals Committee is an annual meeting consisting of Parties and NGO organizations. The Conference of the Parties often assigns



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"problems" to the committee to be solved and put into resolution form for vote at the next COP. This meeting is a *working* meeting where problems are solved and where ideas are translated into "possible resolutions" to the treaty. One of the most important reasons for AFA to attend these meetings is that NGO status organizations and Parties all have a "say" in what is being discussed.

Just a few months ago in Antananarivo, Madagascar, the AFA attended the Animals Committee (a smaller subset of the attendees to the main Convention) that met to discuss possible resolutions to several captive breeding issues. Usually a committee, such as the Animals Committee, is assigned the task of coming up with a workable resolution before it is taken to the meeting of the main convention. At these committee level meetings, government Parties (CITES member nations) and NGO status organizations all participate in the discussions and suggest possible resolutions to the issues at hand. It is vitally important that aviculture and other "user" groups have a voice in

these deliberations. Our voice often assists the attending government Parties to better understand how the system really works on a "trader's" level. In addition, many NGO status organizations have a better grip on "captive breeding" and what is actually being produced in captivity than the governmental attendees. At the end of the day, with input from humane groups, user groups, and governmental Parties, any suggested resolution should better suit the purposes of CITES.

**Q:** Which meetings has the AFA attended and what is the next meeting and where?

**A:** In the past the AFA CITES Committee has had a representative at the Animals Committee Meetings in the Czech Republic in 1996, the Conference of the Parties in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida in 1997, the Animal's Committee meeting in Caracas, Venezuela in 1998, and as mentioned above, Madagascar in 1999. The next meeting is a full Conference of the Parties scheduled for the year 2000 in Nairobi.

**Q:** Can the AFA actually present "papers" to the Conference of the Parties?

**A:** Formal position papers or scientific papers dealing with a CITES subject must be submitted through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in order to be distributed to the members of the Conference. However, other "unofficial" papers or educational materials can be approved and then distributed to the attendees in the exhibit areas of the Conference. The AFA has prepared several documents over the years to educate the members about avian captive-breeding. These documents were distributed to CITES Attendees at the meetings in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, and in the Czech Republic.

**Q:** How many countries have signed the Treaty?

**A:** To date, there are over 145 nations that have signed onto the CITES Treaty.

**Q:** Why should a bird owner or small breeder have any interest in CITES?

**A:** Good question. Because a majority of the World's countries have signed onto the treaty, many of the "concepts" and "rules" put forth at the Convention are becoming domestic law in signature countries. Many countries are beginning to use the CITES Convention as an internal tool for conservation management, and have designed national legislation around the Treaty. Even the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has incorporated many of the "concepts" of CITES into our national import/export permit system. In the future, we may find that CITES will have a major influence on our own domestic legislation pertaining to the keeping and breeding of birds in captivity. This will probably occur in order for the U.S. to comply with CITES and to be on the same level of communication with other signature parties that have adopted the CITES Treaty as domestic legislation.

**Q:** But if I do not import or export birds, CITES does not have any effect



on me —true?

**A:** It is true that, for the time being, CITES rules in the United States deal mainly with import and export of wildlife. However, as more and more species are added to the appendices, and the Parties to CITES develop an increased interest in captive production of many species, the rules of the Treaty may find their way into our national legislation as a means to be consistent with worldwide conservation efforts.

CITES is beginning to look at specimens "bred in captivity" in a different way than those removed from the wild, therefore a whole new set of rules will probably be implemented to monitor and control the trade in captive-bred CITES listed species. This could mean that the same rules and definitions will eventually become U.S. law, either in part or as a whole.

**Q:** Is CITES *really* a World Organization with so much influence over how the USA deals with trade in birds?

**A:** Since the President of the United States signed the Treaty and agreed that the U.S. would participate, our country is bound to implement any and all portions of the Treaty and any resolutions to the Conference. This means that the USFWS, as the official U.S. government CITES agency, must review all the decisions that are voted "in" at CITES, and they must build them into our laws pertaining to the permitting of any international wildlife trade, *including* the trade in our captive-bred birds.

The CITES Treaty gets closer to home each time they redefine a term within the Treaty. For example, recently under CITES it was agreed that the term "commercial trade" would include "any and all trade that involved the exchange of money, or barter or trade for economic value." This definition has now placed virtually *all* bird breeders into a "commercial" category under CITES and under the permit system at the USFWS.

Even if a breeder wants to trade offspring with another breeder in a foreign country, the trade is commercial because the birds are not being donat-

ed to an official conservation program, and there is an economic gain through the movement of the birds. Also consider that CITES has defined "Bred in Captivity" as "the production of, or potential production of second (F2) or subsequent generation offspring (F3, F4,...)." This rule now applies to all species listed on any appendix under CITES. Therefore, the simple production of offspring from a pair of wild-caught birds no longer qualifies to be classified as "Bred in Captivity." The keeping of records and the sharing of breeding data such as second generation production, is becoming *vital* to the survival of aviculture in the U.S.


**Q:** How can breeder's support the AFA's attendance to CITES?

**A:** The attendance of CITES meetings and Animals Committee meetings is expensive. But the *absence* at these meetings of the AFA and other animal user groups could be a disaster for aviculture in the U.S. As long as the anti-trade groups can afford to attend these meetings and cast a vote, the AFA and

other avicultural organizations must make budget allowances so they can attend these meetings as well.

The AFA CITES Committee has begun an aggressive fund raising campaign to offset the costs associated with CITES attendance. They have developed lapel pins depicting the parrots now listed on CITES and they plan to have wildlife art auctions in the near future to raise money for the committee.

Please support your AFA CITES committee so that our voice can be heard worldwide—and by those people who make the decisions about our birds. Contact the AFA office to make a donation or for details on the latest lapel pins and any future projects planned by *your* AFA CITES Committee.

*[Another Editor's Note: I have all the CITES Pins offered thus far and plan on collecting all the rest as they are produced. They are already becoming collectors items. Did you know that two of the second issue pins garnered about \$700 at auction during the AFA convention in Denver? Ed.]* 

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