



by Peggy Dalrymple, Galesberg, IL

In the not so distant past, most finches in this country were imported. The business of selling finches was controlled by large importers who often had thousands of birds of various species in quarantine facilities throughout the United States.

The birds were quarantined for a minimum of 30 days then released for sale to middle-men, pet shops, or individuals.

Importation was a big business, high finance, risky, and a bit shady at times.

By the time an importer offered birds for sale, stress, disease, and poor care along the route had diminished the numbers substantially. Yet due to the enormous number of finches quarantined yearly, and the low prices paid to trappers in the country of origin, imported finches remained a bargain by today's standards. For years there was a seemingly endless supply.

In the early 1990s, most private U.S. sanctioned quarantine stations were essentially closed by new government regulations. The years of inexpensive wild-trapped finches in the U.S. were over. Thus ended the era of finches as a disposable commodity to be purchased and admired until they expired.

Quarantine of finches for entry into the U.S. still exists in a very limited capacity, both in the U.S. and in Canada. The quantities and the variety

of species are greatly diminished. They are no longer cheap, and they are seldom available. These imported finches do afford genetic diversity and are often the only breeding stock for some finch species.

I began my finch breeding business 10 years ago. The initial investment was so substantial that the only justification for it was a goal of profit. The 15 years prior were spent on bird projects of one sort or another, so my expectations were realistic.

My goal then, as it has remained, was to produce large numbers of perfectly healthy birds for sale; to do it with integrity, honesty, and in a businesslike manner.

I breed and keep only one species of finch—Gouldians. I believe that specialization means a concentrated effort on one or possibly just a few species. Space constraints, financial resources, and species compatibility are considerations that led to this decision. I have not regretted it nor have I wavered from my original plan.

From the first year, even though there was no profit, I hired professional help with my tax returns to include the up-and-coming business. Records are kept, receipts and business checks are kept, and income is documented. The IRS is as involved in my business as it would be in any other type of small business.

I sweep the floors, sterilize the drinkers, visit the vet, pair the birds, and clean the flights. I handle all the sales, I do all the advertising, I am the head shipping agent. The glory is all mine—as is the responsibility and the blame. I am a small business owner with a never ending passion for finches.

In an effort to dispel the rumors of untaxed income, finch breeders need to recognize that legal deductions (and therefore compliance with business tax laws) can be a benefit rather than a liability. A *bona fide* business is allowed to deduct items such as seed expenses, electrical and phone usage as it applies to the business. These and other business expenses are deducted from income produced by the business and income taxes are paid only on the actual profit.

A legitimate business endeavor can give pride of accomplishment and add legitimacy to the world of finch aviculture.

There is a very real possibility that some species of rare, difficult to breed finches are not suited to domesticity. Unless breeders in the U.S. concentrate on breeding these birds, some of the rare species may soon disappear from our borders.

Perhaps there are certain finches that belong only in their native habitats. After hundreds of thousands of finches have been imported for us to work with, there are still species of finches with no known domestic populations.

Hopefully, specialization and profit motivation, along with good aviary and business practices, can reverse this trend.

From Zebra Finches to Gouldians to the more rare and exotic finches, a demand exists. It is up to the American finch breeder to pick up the current slack in supply—with domestically bred birds.

Peggy Dalrymple is no stranger to the AFA having been active in it as early as the 1970s. She has always had a fascination with finches. Indeed, during the heyday of bird importation, she spent a dozen or so years in Europe searching out the best finches for importation into the US. She came to know most of the top European finch breeders and polished her own skills among them. 