

BIRD THEFTS

A Possible Deterrent

Suffering from a rash of bird thefts, several dealers on the West Coast decided to find a solution to the problem.

There are many steps to take to protect your birds, but what if they are stolen anyway? The larger, more expensive birds are the ones most often taken because they are an easy item to resell. There is usually no positive means of identifying them even when they are found.

Robelle Animals in Norco, Calif. tattoos all their larger birds and provides a certificate of ownership. The bird is registered to its owner and any successive owners. This seems to be the best method to be found at this time. However, the tattoo is not immediately visible and people are not keyed to checking for tattoos when they buy a bird.

At the dealers' meeting a new system was presented that is in the working. The plan is for a non-removable band made of stainless steel with another strip of metal inside. A special tool would be necessary to apply the band to the bird's leg. The tool would leave its own mark, no two being the same. This mark along with

the number on the band could be used to trace the bird back to the owner on record in a central computer. Again, each successive owner would be on record.

The cost of the banding would be minimal (around \$10). With the cost of birds, this is to be considered a worthwhile investment. ■



THE CASE OF THE MISSING BIRDS

Sue and Steve Ornison returned home to Phoenix from their week-end ski trip to Flagstaff. Tired from the long drive and arriving late that Sunday evening, they went to bed without unpacking, or for that matter, going out to inspect the aviaries in the backyard, as was their usual custom.

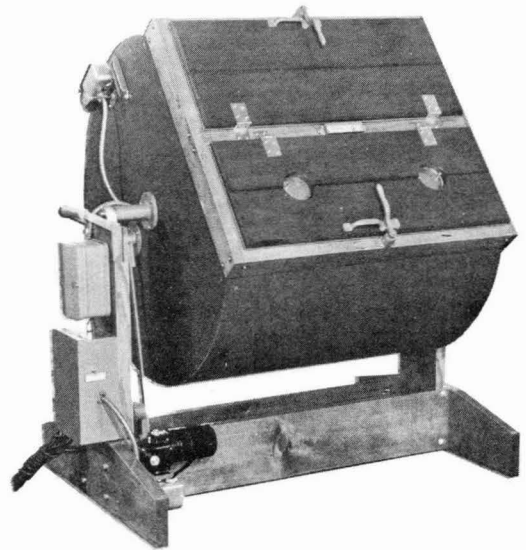
Awaking from a refreshing night's sleep, Steve showered, shaved, dressed and hurried outside to the aviaries to see if any new nests had been built, or eggs hatched. As Steve approached the garage, behind which were located the six ample-sized, well-planted flights, he felt a sense of uneasiness come over him. Where was the chirping symphony of happy birds frolicking in the morning dew?

As he rounded the corner, his anxiety grew to a fever pitch. There was not a movement of feathers to be seen. Heart bearing wildly, Steve raced up and down the isleway separating the two rows of flights. Glancing quickly into each enclosure, he kept thinking he must have forgot something before leaving on vacation and the birds were dead. But that was

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impossible since they had automatic feed and water.

Then to his horror and mounting rage, Steve noticed each cage door was open, the individual padlocks having been cut loose. The flights were empty.

This tale has a familiar ring as more and more aviculturists are experiencing the theft of their birds. However, in Steve's circumstances, such was not the case. The birds were CONFISCATED!

The year is 1977 and H.R. 6631 has been enacted by Congress. This could happen to you.

Under H.R. 6631, all owners of one or more animals, with the possible exception of dogs and cats, will be required to obtain a federal license. Further, to obtain such a license, each animal/bird owner will have to pass a comprehensive written examination proving he/she has sufficient knowledge and experience to justify the federal government's granting permission to keep the animal(s).

Steve and Sue had obtained a federal license to keep their birds and had even acquired the "zoo license" under H.R. 6631, which cost \$1,000.00 a year. However, H.R. 6631 allows any citizen (in fact encourages) to file a complaint claiming the animals are not being cared for properly. Of course, the neighbor who filed the complaint against the Ornison's knew nothing about birds or their care, but he did know that their constant singing was a nuisance, and this was a good way to get rid of them.

The scenario above is somewhat simplistic and fictional. Unfortunately, it may soon be a reality — one that could happen to you!

The A.F.A. is deeply concerned about H.R. 6631 and will be watching it closely. It has not been scheduled for a hearing yet, but will likely be heard in June, according to Mr. James Spensley, Counsel for the House Sub-committee on Fisheries, Wildlife and the Environment ■

RETRIEVAL PROGRAM SEES RESULTS

by Hal M. Koontz

The A.F.A. Exotic Bird Retrieval Program is working in conjunction with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to recapture escaped aviary birds. Although all feral exotic birds are of interest to the program, three species have been specified by the State as possible agricultural pests: the Indian Ringneck Parrakeet, the Canary Wing Bee and the Nanday Conure. Unless the program is successful, the State may prohibit possession of any of these birds. The program has been given until the end of June to demonstrate its ability to recapture some of these birds. The State is apparently not concerned with the presence of other species of escaped birds such as Amazon Parrots and consequently, the program's major effort is in retrieving the three above-mentioned species.

The program has recently seen results. Sixteen Indian Ringneck Parrakeets were trapped in the Chino-Pomona-Ontario area during December, January and February. They were caught in a trap which will be described in this column, in the next issue of the Watchbird. A Ringneck was caught in the Silverlake area of Los Angeles by luring the bird into a carrying cage containing fruit, and quickly shutting the door of the cage. Still another Ringneck was captured in North Hollywood by covering the nesting hole, with

the hen inside, with a board and then lowering a noose over her head and pulling her out of the hole.

These successes help prove our ability to recapture these birds. Our regular meetings with the State biologists, discussions with more experienced breeders and our own attempts have taught us much about the different traps which are successful. More people are becoming involved in the program all the time. The State biologists were impressed by the 81 hours in the field put in during February by the program. They have seen the program's development and success and have indicated that the proposed prohibition of the three species of birds will likely not go into effect this July. More likely, the program will either be extended for another year or the proposal will be dropped completely. We should continue to endeavor, however, to capture as many of these birds as we can to guarantee this result.

Please report any sightings, all man-hours spent working on the program, and especially all captures of birds. The capture of any exotic bird should be reported. Please send this information to:

Hal M. Koontz
441 S. Commonwealth Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 389-4355 ■

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sume it immediately. The public is not impressed with this type of avian interaction. These skilled opportunists are quick to take eggs as well.

A great deal of knowledge of a specific species breeding behavior is also necessary as often avian dispositions will alter drastically during the nesting season. Aggressive species such as whooper swans, Egyptian, Andean, Abyssinian blue-winged and Cape Barren geese must be closely observed during the breeding season if they are exhibited with species of comparable size. If they are to be maintained in a mixed exhibit, the unit must be relatively large. It is also desirable from an exhibit potential standpoint to attempt to maintain species of varying sizes, colors, shapes, and habit, such as whistling swans with ruddy ducks.

The final and perhaps most important consideration, is that of breeding potential. Not only is an effective breeding program part of proper management of a collection, it is becoming increasingly important due to the plights of many species, as well as due to increasing restrictions relative to avian importation and quarantine. For the sake of aesthetic appeal, a great deal of thought should be given to providing natural appearing nesting logs, rather than the traditional nesting boxes which, although effective, are not visually appealing. Appropriate hollow logs of this type are difficult to acquire. Many zoos are now creating their own "natural" logs and quite frequently the fiberglass reproductions are impossible to tell from the real logs and the birds are not hesitant to use them. Palm logs also make excellent nesting hollows as well. They can be hollowed out with a chainsaw and an appropriate sized entrance hole cut. The upright log should then be partially buried and sphagnum moss can be used as nesting material. The moss serves to keep the humidity up and is an excellent substrate for the eggs and incubating hen.

Zoological institutions have great social, cultural and biological potential. Some changes in contemporary zoo management thinking will be required if that potential is to be realized. If an institution elects to display a species, it is obligated to provide the best exhibit possible without compromising breeding potential. The ultimate goal, of course, is to have all species in zoological institutions exhibited under natural or semi-natural conditions. Once this is accomplished, the outspoken zoo critics probably will fade away, institutional education programs will improve significantly and the reproduction potential will be even greater ■