

PSITTACOSIS ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE HELD

On May 17, 1976 the California Department of Food and Agriculture hosted the first national conference on Psittacosis/Ornithosis at the Quality Inn in Los Angeles, California. The conference was made possible by the untiring efforts of Dr. Ralph Cooper, DVM, with the Veterinary Services Laboratory, and was chaired by Dr. John S. Orsborne, Jr., of the same facility.

Participants at the conference included Dr. Paul Arnstein, Calif. Dept. of Public Health; Dr. Raymond Bankowski of UC Davis; Dr. Leslie Page from the Federal Laboratory at Ames, Iowa and Dr. Julius Schachter, Hooper Foundation at UCSF Medical Center, all of whom represented the research and technical field.

USDA quarantine station operators present were Joseph Griffith of Orn Imports, Monrovia, Calif., Dr. Bern Levine of Pet Farm, Miami, Florida, David Mohileff of Pacific Bird Supply in Los Angeles, and Frank Zamrock of Joy Bird Imports, Los Angeles, Calif.

Bird Dealers participating were Gene Hall of Fortune Glen Aviaries, San Marcos, Calif., Edward Marlatt of Bronze Wing Aviaries, Colton, Calif., and Frank Miser of Magnolia Bird Farm in Anaheim, Calif.

Federal regulatory agency attendees were Dr. Earl Grass, USDA, Sacramento, Calif. and Dr. George Pierson, USDA, APHIS, Hyattsville, Maryland.

Public health representatives included Dr. Arnold Kaufman, U.S. Public Health Service's Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, Georgia; Dr. Edmund Bayer, California Department of Public Health at Berkeley, Calif., and the county health officers for Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, and Los Angeles counties.

Representatives of numerous diagnostic laboratories were present as were private veterinarians, pathologists, and persons from co-operative extension programs and other state agencies.

Under the banner of law enforcement were Dr. Kenneth Stager, Robert Prather, and Gene Wilson — all associated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior. Representing the U.S. Customs service was Mr. Weeda and Mr. Dennison from the U.S. Attorney's

office.

Bird breeders were represented by Jerry Jennings of the A.F.A., Rae Anderson of the Aviculture Society of America, and Mike Cunningham of the Orange County Bird Breeders — all A.F.A. member clubs. In addition, Francis Billie (no organization), Wes Tegtmeier representing the American Budgerigar Society, and Harold King of BAC were on hand.

Hartz Mountin, Red Bird Products, and Ford Bird Farm represented the manufacturing and leg band industry segments of the bird industry.

The conference sought to focus attention on the dramatic fourfold increase in the number of confirmed human cases of Psittacosis during 1975 and the first quarter of 1976 both in California and across the nation. In every instance, these cases have been traced to backyard budgie flocks, smuggled birds, birds coming out of quarantine stations, and commercial turkey farms. In California alone the number of cases in humans has jumped from 6-7 a year to 24 in 1975. The trend, though not epidemic, has alarmed State and Federal officials, who wish to remedy the situation.

The conference began at 8:00 a.m. with a historical sketch of Psittacosis and an update of the current international, national, and state situation. Following thereafter, conferees were given a detailed explanation of the nature and characteristics of *Chlamydia psittaci* (Psittacosis bacterium). A description of Psittacosis symptoms as they appear in both humans and birds, and the means of clinical identification and isolation was provided by Dr. Julius Schachter, a renowned Psittacosis researcher.

The afternoon session concerned itself initially with the prevention and control of Psittacosis in the five major reservoirs of the disease: Turkeys, Budgies, smuggled birds, quarantine stations, and other endemic populations. The turkeys have little or no impact on pet bird populations, according to Dr. Cooper, since they rarely come into contact with the aviculturist's flock.

In budgies, it was recommended that flocks be kept closed. That is, the flock be put on chlortetracycline treated seed

(Keet-Life manufactured by Hartz Mountain) for thirty days, then all newly acquired birds be given the same treatment in separate facilities before being introduced to the existing flock, which is known to be free of Psittacosis because of the initial treatment and the flock's closed nature. This principle should be applied to all other Psittacines, as well.

It was emphasized that Chlortetracycline be used as the drug of choice. Other antibiotics and sulfa drugs are ineffective against Psittacosis. Improper treatment should also be avoided, i.e., treatment at insufficient strength of drug dosage, treatment on a frequent basis, treatment in water, and treatment for less than a recommended length of time, in order to prevent the possible rise of a Tetracycline resistant strain of Psittacosis.

It was recommended that birds in quarantine stations be monitored to assure the proper blood level of chlortetracycline is maintained during the thirty day treatment period. This would guarantee birds free of the disease. Jurisdictional problems between U.S. Public Health and the USDA will be worked out to provide adequate enforcement of the treatment requirement.

The U.S. Customs and U.S. Attorney's Office representatives described enforcement problems in dealing with smugglers. They indicated tighter measures would be undertaken to cut the traffic.

A major problem lies in the identification of the source of birds diagnosed with Psittacosis. It is important to locate the flock from which an infected bird came, so the flock may be properly treated. The consensus of the conferees was to resolve the dilemma by requiring closed, traceable bands be worn by all Parrot type birds. A similar requirement may be considered for canaries and finches, as well.

A committee of five or six individuals will be formed to carry on the work of the conference. There will be one individual representing the bird breeders, one representing dealers, one from the quarantine station operators, and the remainder from other industry areas. State and Federal officials will act in a consulting capacity ■