

[Editor's note: A.F.A. members unacquainted with the U.S.A.H.A. and its function are referred to an account of this organization published in Vol. VI, No. 1, Feb./Mar. '79, issue of Watchbird entitled "The United States Animal Health Association Establishes Sub-committee on Diseases of Cage and Aviary Birds".]

The United States Animal Health Association met in San Diego, California on October 28 — November 2, 1979, to hold its eighty-third annual meeting. At the session of its Committee on Transmissible Diseases of Poultry, considerable attention was given to the problems of cage and aviary birds. Two resolutions passed by this committee are of importance to aviculturists and to the pet bird industry.

The report of the Sub-committee on Cage and Aviary Birds is of especial interest to all bird breeders and to the bird business.

The following particulars selected from the Poultry Committee summary are pertinent to avicultural concerns:

(Excerpts)

"REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSMISSIBLE DISEASES OF POULTRY

"Chairman: Raymond A. Bankowski, Davis, CA

"Newcastle Disease

"During fiscal year 1978, domestic surveillance of poultry did not reveal any causes of exotic Newcastle disease in poultry in the continental United States. Increased effectiveness in border and port enforcement and alert surveillance by field personnel aided in the effort. In the early part of 1979, two infections were detected in caged pet birds which were recently introduced into the United States.

"On February 20, 1979, exotic Newcastle disease was confirmed at the National Veterinary Service Laboratories (NVSL), Ames, Iowa, from specimens submitted from a citron crested cockatoo at Stanton, Orange County, California. The disease was traced to a bird-holding facility to house birds as they were released from a privately-owned import quarantine station, both under the same ownership and management. Sales and shipments of birds from the holding facility were traced and evaluated. As a result, birds on ten commercial and seven privately-owned premises in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties, California, were positive for exotic Newcastle disease. In addition to California, movements of birds from infected premises were traced to Arizona, Illinois,

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*Report and comments by
Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.*

Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Washington.

"On March 24, 1979, another case of exotic Newcastle disease was confirmed in the holding facility used to house birds after release from a USDA-approved, privately-owned import quarantine station at Miami, Florida. A total of 109 shipments were made from this infected facility to 29 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. As a result of these tracings and evaluations, positive cases were disclosed in Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. No commercial poultry were involved in either the California or Florida outbreaks. Since there is no known treatment for this disease, the infected caged birds involved were appraised and humanely destroyed and the premises cleaned and disinfected. The cost to eliminate these outbreaks to APHIS was estimated to be \$1.8 million.

"Puerto Rico currently is under Federal quarantine for exotic Newcastle disease. Dr. D.C. Johnson reported on a surveillance for exotic Newcastle disease on the Island, which began on June 4, 1979. After an extensive study involving 64 laying flocks, an equal number of broiler flocks, 105 fighting cocks, and 217 backyard flocks, no evidence of VVND was detected. It will be recommended that the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico be released from quarantine for exotic Newcastle disease"

" Cage and Aviary Birds

"The report of the Sub-Committee on cage and aviary birds presented both areas of positive development and points of urgent concern among aviculturists and the estimated \$500 million pet bird industry. The following outlines major findings —

"Positive Developments

1. Active support of pet and exotic bird disease research on Pacheco's Disease vaccination, psittacosis, salmonellosis, bird pox, and colibacillosis, by several major aviculturist associations and institutes.

2. Universities, colleges, aviculture and veterinary associations have begun vigorous promotion of continuing education in aviculture and avian medicine.

3. Mutually satisfactory accords have been achieved between government and aviculture on: the handling of future out-

breaks of exotic Newcastle disease; and, the effective captive propagation of rare or endangered species.

4. **A positive, promotional rather than negative restrictive strategy** towards a national supply of safe, healthy birds is being developed. The American Federation of Aviculture and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture are initiating ambitious programs to promote **domestic production** of cage pet and exotic birds that will hopefully and eventually curb the trafficking in smuggled birds. The former beginning to establish and maintain a national breeding registry of birds not commonly raised in captivity. The latter developing a state directory of small or large local operations providing **domestically bred** cage pet birds for retail sale.

"Urgent Concerns

1. Possible over-restriction of the legitimate, responsible importer and possible weak prosecution of quarantine station operators guilty of questionable activities, poor sanitation, inhumane management of birds, violation of USDA regulations, and seriously deficient antibiotic treatment for psittacosis.

2. Deleterious effects from unsanitary conditions possible during 30-day quarantine period in USDA 'isolettes'.

3. Continuing weaknesses in identification techniques for all birds and especially regarding smaller species.

4. Import station permits may not be granted in the most democratic, impartial basis so as to preclude monopolization and possible arbitrary bird price increases.

5. Lack of attention at quarantine stations to diseases of birds that do not affect poultry but can cause major losses to bird dealers and breeders.

6. Need for recognition and classification of aviculture as a significant, multimillion dollar, form of agricultural livestock production.

"General Recommendations

"The sub-Committee on Cage and Aviary Birds should continue its function and next year's activity should emphasize: expanded and strengthened, instruction by veterinary colleges in avian medicine; and widespread development of state and other official directories of domestic bird breeding operations as positive rather than restrictive programs for aviculture.

"The Committee recommends that USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services, take corrective action concerning the several urgent quarantine facility concerns listed above.

"Additionally, the Committee specifically recommends that: The present responsibility for psittacosis control in imported birds, now vested with the U.S.

Public Health Service, has proved to be ineffectual and that authority for enforcement should now be given to USDA.

"The Committee deliberated the problems and status of the bird import quarantine facilities. There are approximately 96 privately-owned quarantine stations with many pending applications. As a result of the discussion, a resolution was proposed requesting that the U.S. Animal Health Association urge the USDA to establish quarantine facilities for importing exotic birds as is done with all other animals and that no privately-owned stations be allowed. This proposal was approved by the Committee, and the resolution sent to the Resolutions Committee"

Of especial interest is the complete report of the Sub-committee on Cage and Aviary Birds from which most of the above quoted material from the Poultry Committee summary was taken:

REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON CAGE & AVIARY BIRDS

by Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.
Sub-committee Chairman

"A year ago I was invited by the Chairman of this Committee on Transmissible Diseases of Poultry to present a report on the importance of the rapidly growing pet bird industry and the problems associated with aviculture. As a result of my report, **The Problems of Aviculture**, a sub-committee was established to study these concerns and to report back to the Committee on Transmissible Diseases of Poultry at this year's meeting. The sub-committee appointed by your chairman was broad in spectrum and consisted of representatives of industry, technical and regulatory personnel and aviculturists. Participation by these committee members, as with all committees, was varied. Those who did respond remain convinced that USAHA provides one of the best forums from which to work out aviculture's problems and urge that the liaison continue. Not only does USAHA afford a needed place for open discussion; in addition, the informal conversations and associations at the times of these meetings give the aviculturist and the bird industry the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the poultry industry and with regulatory personnel — an opportunity for the latter to know who we are and what we are doing. It is hoped that the bird industry especially will take more advantage of this opportunity.

"Given the diversity of the composition of the sub-committee on Cage and Aviary Birds, the problems presented in this report are variant in that the topics are viewed from different perspectives by the individual sub-committee members reflecting their divergent areas of concern. It is felt that all of these different concerns should be presented to this committee.

"Before proceeding with the present concerns or problems of aviculture, it would be well to mention briefly some of aviculture's accomplishments since our last meeting.

"In the field of pet and exotic bird research: The International Bird Institute is funding research in developing a vaccine for Pacheco's Parrot Disease. The Pet Institute Joint Advisory Council organiza-

tion is sponsoring research on the diagnosis, treatment and vaccination for psittacosis at the Hooper Foundation. Private research is being done at Pet Farm, Inc., involving salmonella, pox and coliforms in pet and exotic birds. And, the American Federation of Aviculture is granting research awards and establishing a fund for research.

"In education, more and more universities and colleges are sponsoring continued education courses on aviculture. The American Federation of Aviculture is holding such education courses in conjunction with its regional meetings and annual conventions and conducts a yearly veterinary seminar on cage and exotic bird medicine. At its first such veterinary seminar last year, twenty-three veterinarians attended; at this year's symposium there were one-hundred and twenty veterinarians registered; next year it hopes to double or triple this attendance. This sub-committee urges other veterinary and avicultural organizations to actively promote education in cage and exotic bird medicine at their meetings; and, it stresses the need for much more adequate instruction in avian medicine in all of our colleges of veterinary medicine.

"In this past year U.S.D.A. and aviculture arrived at a mutually satisfactory accord on the handling of future outbreaks of V.V.N.D.; and, recognizing the importance of captive propagation in the conservation of rare and endangered wildlife and the active part that aviculture is playing to enhance the propagation or survival of these species of birds, the Dept. of the Interior has abolished most of its prohibitions which were interfering with the effective captive propagation of rare or endangered birds.

"Further in the field of avicultural achievements in this past year, is the progress that the State of Pennsylvania continues to make in its Cage Pet Bird Improvement plan, a model that other states would do well to emulate. This is a positive approach to bird health control as opposed to the negative prohibitions or bans that some other states have adopted. I have asked Dr. Mallinson, a member of this sub-committee, to elaborate on his state's improvement plan.

"Again in the area of positive approach to avicultural problems, the American Federation of Aviculture is initiating this month the most ambitious program it has undertaken since its inception. It proposes to establish and maintain a national breeding registry of birds not commonly bred in captivity, to actively promote their captive propagation, to educate the bird breeder in the proper care and breeding of these species through its publication, and to maintain records of these breedings. There may be some skepticism as to whether the private aviculturist can actually produce an adequate domestic supply of the more exotic cage and aviary birds, but given the proper direction, the needed support and the involvement of many of the estimated more than 20 million bird breeders in this country, the Federation is confident of success.

"The captive propagation program, like Pennsylvania's improvement plan, is aimed at making a supply of healthy birds available to the American family; at reducing the exploitation of rare or endangered species in the wild and of actually increasing their domestic numbers; at decreasing the menace of the disease threat to our human population and to poultry; and, hopefully, at eventually curbing the traffic in smuggled birds.

"The illicit movement of contraband birds with its inherent danger to both our own domestic exotic birds and to poultry is still the biggest problem that confronts and confounds aviculture. Even greater

cooperation than is now practiced in the efforts to apprehend smugglers is needed.

"Apparently this trafficking in smuggled birds is not limited to clandestine movements across our national borders; it has been reported that illegal birds have been smuggled into the country even through the Federally approved quarantine facilities.

"The Federally approved quarantine facilities pose another dilemma for the aviculturist. While he does not want over restriction of the legitimate, responsible importer — and there are reputable quarantine station operators; he does want more stern prosecution or the elimination of those stations which continue to have severe disease problems or which have been guilty of questionable activities. It takes only one or a few rotten heads of cabbage to generate enough stink to make the whole crate smell bad. One has to separate the bad from the good. How can this be accomplished? How do you punish the bad without penalizing the good? There is the problem.

"The lack of sanitation and humane treatment at some quarantine stations has been cited as a problem of aviculture. One committee member (a veterinarian) reported that he entered one quarantine facility in the past eight months where:

- a) There was no registration or list of who entered.
- b) The guard was not interested in who he was or why he was there.
- c) The shower was broken and unusable. No hot water was available anywhere in the station.
- d) There were at least three week's collection of feces on and under the cages, which were badly rusted.
- e) A typical cage about 4' x 3' x 2' contained 50-75 small to medium sized Amazons, with only one perch. The birds were hanging all over the wires and packed close together on the bottom of the cage. Some cages had no perches at all.
- f) There was only one filthy 4" square food dish containing sunflower seeds and fresh corn and one water dish per cage. There was no Tetracycline being offered; And,
- g) There was no disinfectant in the quarantine station. (He asked for it at the time.)

"This member of the sub-committee states that he has had reports of similar operations in other states and that the failure to feed chlortetracycline in the above instance was not an isolated case, that other operators have told him that they do not feed it.

"Hopefully, with the recent imposition of stricter regulations by U.S.D.A., the above type of operations have been eliminated. If not, this is the type of station that the aviculturist wants to see corrected or abolished.

"While aviculture has taken a position in favor of the new restrictions on the importation of pet birds, deeming it necessary to more effectively prevent the introduction and spread of exotic Newcastle disease into this country, the question has been raised in committee concerning the possible deleterious effects to the birds confined for the 30 day quarantine period in these 'isolettes' insofar as other health problems resulting from their containment in an unsanitary environment. Perhaps, U.S.D.A. can address itself to this concern.

"Another committee concern is directed towards bird identification. It is felt that the use of the plastic electrician band or any band that is soft and can be pinched shut by the bird should be discontinued for humane reasons in favor of the small round wire bands now in use at the Clifton Importation Center, these for application to medium and large birds; and in favor of the German alloy bands for application to

the largest-legged ones.

"Concern has been expressed that the recent 'upgrading' of import regulations and its cost to the importer has eliminated several smaller stations (many of which were reputable), has resulted in greater monopoly on bird importations and more arbitrary price increases on birds. Accusation has been made that import station permits are not granted in an impartial democratic manner.

"Finally, committee members from different disciplines who responded were all concerned that in birds coming through quarantine, surveillance is now conducted only for those exotic diseases that may affect poultry and that no attention, whatsoever, is paid to other infectious diseases that pose a danger exclusively to cage and aviary birds.

"A recommendation has been made that in consideration of the large magnitude of bird raising in this country, that these birds being raised in such large numbers be classified as agricultural livestock. (It has been estimated that there are more than 20 million bird breeders in the United States and that over 40 million people own one or more birds — that the industry produces over \$500,000,000. in revenue annually, and is growing rapidly.) The classification as agricultural livestock of these birds which are raised domestically in such large numbers and the recognition as an agricultural industry of the 20 million or more bird breeders would encourage government health-control programs and research as well as other benefits.

"CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That this sub-committee continue its function.
2. That there is still need for much more adequate instructions in avian medicine in all of our veterinary colleges.
3. That a positive approach to bird health control such as the Pennsylvania plan is the method of choice rather than the ban regulations of some states. That the 40 million bird owners in this country will not be denied their rights no matter what type of prohibitions may be attempted against the keeping of pet birds.
4. That efforts to apprehend and prosecute the bird smuggler must be greatly augmented.
5. That unsanitary and/or inhumane conditions in the case of birds must be corrected and eliminated no matter where they are found to exist. Laws covering proper conditions and feeding and humane standards must be enforced.
6. That possibly injurious methods of bird identification (i.e. faulty leg banding) must be prohibited in favor of humane methods.
7. That serious deliberation be given to the control of infectious diseases that pose a danger to the cage and aviary bird in addition to surveillance for those that are a threat as well to poultry and humans. And —
8. In consideration of the large numbers of birds now being raised domestically, of the more than 20 million bird breeders engaged in this production, and of the industry created, the classification of these domestically raised birds as avicultural livestock would be beneficial for bird health control." (End of sub-committee report.)

The two resolutions passed that are of importance to aviculturists and the pet bird industry are the one recommending that the responsibility for psittacosis control in imported birds be taken from U.S.

Public Health and given to U.S.D.A., and the other recommending that U.S.D.A. establish quarantine facilities for importing exotic birds and that no privately owned stations be allowed.

The first resolution is the same as the proposal passed by A.F.A. and sent to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (A.P.H.I.S.-U.S.D.A.) as far back as April 13, 1978. Apparently such a change for more effectual control of psittacosis does not meet with A.P.H.I.S. approval and aviculture and the bird industry continues to suffer the deleterious consequences of inadequate treatment of birds passing through quarantine stations as the result.

To better understand the recommendation that privately owned quarantine stations be abolished in favor of government owned ones, it is best to review the resolution as presented to U.S.A.H.A.'s Committee on Transmissible Diseases of Poultry:

**"Resolution No. — 82nd Meeting
Held at: San Diego, California
Dates: October 29 -2, 1979
Source: Transmissible Diseases of Poultry
Subject Matter:**

Importation of Exotic Birds "Background Information

WHEREAS, the importation of exotic birds is a known hazard to the poultry industry of the country because of velogenic viscerotropic Newcastle disease and other diseases; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Agriculture has authorized importation through some 96 privately owned quarantine stations and has other applications pending; and

WHEREAS, importation through privately owned stations causes many serious difficulties in maintaining adequate security because of less than optimum facilities, untrained staff in the stations, inability to control the activities of the station owner or operator, and inability to always assure that birds are not removed from the station without authorization; and

WHEREAS, supervision of importation through privately owned quarantine stations is expensive and inherent difficulties of private ownership can not be corrected and breaches of security are known to occur and it is assumed that many unknown violations of security do occur; and

WHEREAS, a special committee composed of representatives of industry, universities and government met in Los Angeles, California on August 29, 1979 to review the problem and recommended that importation of exotic birds only be permitted through government owned

stations.

"Resolution

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the U.S. Animal Health Association urges the Department of Agriculture to construct or modify existing facilities so that all importation of exotic birds will be through properly designed and operated government owned quarantine stations as is done with all other animals.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the U.S. Animal Health Association urges that no additional privately owned stations be approved and the presently approved private stations be phased out of use as rapidly as feasible." (End of resolution.)

The above resolution was debated in Committee and passed by a vote of 9-7. Those opposed to the resolution objected that it was unrealistic, an encroachment on private enterprise and that the U.S. government would never approve the funds necessary to replace the some one-hundred privately owned stations now in operation so that the same level of service now being extended to aviculture could be continued.

Aviculture's comment was that it makes little difference to the bird interests as to what type of facility (private or government) is utilized for the importation of its birds so long as the imported birds are healthy and so long as there are no increased limitations or restrictions on the numbers to be imported. Aviculturists would welcome additional government owned import stations, but favor that these be established and function in conjunction with those that are now privately owned and are being operated in an ethical and legitimate manner. As stated in the sub-committee report and again in the committee report, **the aviculturist wants the licenses revoked for those quarantine stations that continue to have severe disease problems or which violate U.S.D.A. regulations.**

This second resolution, that privately owned quarantine stations be abolished in favor of government owned ones, **DOES** meet with U.S.D.A.'s approval as it is consistent with its own (A.P.H.I.S.) long-range projections for the handling of avian imports.

The long-range projection for avian imports as explicitly stated in the five year plan of the Import and Export Products Staff of Veterinary Services, A.P.H.I.S., U.S.D.A. calls for **the complete elimination** of all privately owned quarantine stations by the fiscal year 1985.

The projection for FY 1981 is for all pet birds imported to be quarantined and tested at U.S.D.A.-operated facilities

(using the "isolettes"), and for continued inspection of all commercial bird quarantine facilities in accordance with present regulations (CFR Part 92).

It is estimated that approx. 4,500 pet birds will be imported during this 12 month period that will be required to be quarantined and tested. 101 commercial quarantine facilities importing 650,000 birds will need to be supervised. (An increase of five facilities = five requests in process of approval.)

The proposal is for establishing U.S.D.A.-operated quarantine facilities at strategic ports of entry sufficient to meet the bird and poultry import demands and to gradually phase out private quarantine facilities.

It is suggested that the above would make for more efficient utilization of VS-person power and would result in lower person-years required to import the same number of birds. That improved security would be accomplished and import service could be offered to more people instead of the present situation of limiting importations to a few people who can afford to establish private facilities. It is put forward for consideration that the facilities at Stewart Air Force Base be expanded and that bird import facilities be established at Harry S. Truman Fleming Key Import Center. That the Haiku quarantine facility in Hawaii be enlarged and that facilities similar to Stewart Air Force Base be established in California near the Los Angeles or San Francisco Airport. The rationale is that this would allow for cross-utilization of existing port personnel.

For FY 1982 the plan of Veterinary Services is to approach the 100% goal of all birds being quarantined in VS-operated facilities with direct supervision of any remaining commercial quarantine facilities. The effort will be to reduce the number of private facilities as much as possible as U.S.D.A.-owned or -operated facilities are expanded.

FY 1983 will see the phasing out of additional private facilities as U.S.D.A.-operated facilities are expanded to meet the commercial bird import demands, and —

In FY 1984 the last remaining private facilities are to be phased out and the U.S.D.A.-operated facilities are to handle 100% of the commercial and pet bird imports.

If this U.S.D.A. long-range projection for avian imports is carried out, FY 1985 will see all commercial and pet bird imports coming through U.S.D.A.-operated facilities and privately owned quarantine stations will be a thing of the past.

The U.S.A.H.A. resolution for the abolishment of privately owned quaran-

tine stations and the long-range projection of A.P.H.I.S. to accomplish this very end by 1985, as outlined above, raises some very serious questions:

Is it constitutional not to approve applications for additional privately owned quarantine stations, whatever the excuse for denying such requests? Is this discrimination? A denial of a citizen's civil rights?

How will the presently approved private quarantine stations be phased out? Will this be done by a ban? By legal means? By harassment, increased government restrictions, more government "red tape"?

What will the pet bird industry's response be to this projected total elimination of privately owned import stations? Will an industry which is already a multi-million dollar one and which is doubling in size each year effectively oppose such a change? What will be its short term responses? Its long-term plans?

What should the American Federation of Aviculture's position be to this proposal and to this long-range government goal?

Would importation exclusively through government owned facilities improve security and offer the import service to more people instead of the present situation of limiting importations to a few people who can afford to establish private facilities, as stated in the U.S.D.A. long-range projection? Or, will government monopoly on importations result in increased arbitrary restrictions and perhaps limitations on bird importations? Would government exclusive control be free from political pressure by strong lobbying groups, such as conservationists and so-called "humane" organizations, for the total elimination of trafficking in birds? What guarantees could aviculturists have against this? The importation of other forms of livestock is not subject to arbitrary restrictions or limitations.

Will the importation of birds exclusively through government facilities assure the aviculturist of more healthy birds? Reduce importation costs?

Why cannot government facilities be expanded alongside the continued operations by the legitimate responsible importers? This would give the aviculturist an alternative means of importation. Why cannot the legitimate private operation be federally supervised with federal personnel at private expense much like the federal meat inspection service now operates?

Why are not licenses permanently revoked for those quarantine station operators found guilty of violations of federal regulations? Granted, it would require legal prosecution and litigation is time consuming and expensive, but in the long term such procedure would prove

much less costly than the \$1.8 million spent on the most recent outbreak of V.V.N.D.

Is the eventual total elimination of ALL privately owned quarantine stations realistic? Desirable?

A comment was made at the U.S.A.H.A. meeting that the government did not know what it was getting into when it entered into the supervision of quarantine stations. Perhaps, if the Department had consulted with responsible bird breeders at that time before making such a move it may have saved itself these present headaches and a lot of taxpayers' money. Perhaps, a dialogue at this time with knowledgeable aviculturists on the merits of its proposed long-range projections may save it future embarrassment.

It was also stated at the same meeting that the American Federation of Aviculture is so well organized and so powerful that it could cause the government considerable harm in any of its avian programs had our Federation the will to do so. It is not the will of A.F.A. to oppose or hinder any government actions that are logical and not detrimental to the interests of aviculture. The Federation's purpose is one of cooperation in the promotion of conservation through captive propagation of bird wildlife and to protect its members' rights to do so.

The Federation is well organized. It is powerful. It can muster significant political clout. As an ally to either government or industry, A.F.A. can spell the difference between either success or defeat.

The long-range projection of the American Federation of Aviculture is to actively promote the captive propagation of all species of bird wildlife; to make a supply of healthy birds available to the American family; to reduce the exploitation of rare or endangered species in the wild and of actually increasing their domestic numbers; to decrease the menace of the disease threat to our human population and to poultry; and, hopefully, through greatly increased domestic breeding to eventually curb the traffic in smuggled, often diseased, birds.

Government can do much to promote our long-range projections by actively cooperating with aviculture in the promotion of positive rather than negative restrictive strategies towards a national supply of safe healthy birds. A first important step in this direction would be recognition of the large numbers of birds now being bred domestically and their classification as agricultural livestock and the acknowledgement of the millions of bird breeders as an agricultural industry. From this could evolve government health control programs and bird research as well as other benefits.