

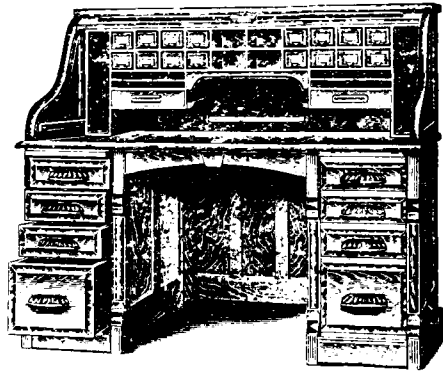
NOTICE

All correspondence intended for the editor of the Watchbird should be mailed directly to his address.

Sheldon Dingle
P O Box 340
Norco, CA 91760

From The Editor's Desk

by Sheldon Dingle



Mr. M.A. Cunningham of the Los Angeles zoo is fortunate enough to have several pairs of the rare hooded parakeets in the zoo collection. These birds were confiscated by U.S. Customs when they were smuggled into the States a few years ago. The birds were smuggled in from Australia and may be some of the illegally trapped birds you mentioned.

Many thanks for bringing this to our attention.
ED.



Dear Sir

Recently, in another avicultural publication ("Bird World") I have seen the flat assertion, "There are no birds endangered as a direct result of the pet trade" reiterated twice by M.A. Cunningham of the Los Angeles Zoo. I would question this for the Hooded and Golden-shouldered Parakeets (distinct subspecies) and the Red Siskin which are on the endangered species list.

The parakeets have historically been quite rare and restricted in range but a marked decline in the numbers of both has become apparent in the years since World War II. While a species decline is often due to multiple factors, I would contend that the prime recognizable reason for the precarious status of these two birds has been trapping (for most of the time illegal) for the bird trade. Both are prized avicultural subjects which command very high prices and intensive trapping for them is well known to have occurred in the last three decades. The Hooded Parakeet has disappeared from parts of its former range and such areas are the most accessible to trappers. Evidence for other causes of decline, i.e. habitat change, competition from other species, etc. is not readily apparent for these birds.

The Red Siskin is another species for whose present low numbers it is difficult to implicate reasons other than the well documented intensive trapping to which the species has been subjected for years. It is probable, in fact, that the favored habitat of this bird, shrubby grasslands, has actually increased due to extensive forest clearance within its range. Recent observers have noted very few or no birds in areas where the species was considered quite common over 25 years ago and the blame is put squarely on intensive trapping. In the recently published "Birds of Venezuela", no exact localities for this species are given because, "the bird is much persecuted by birdcatchers due to its popularity as a cage-bird."

Apart from the above where entire populations are threatened I would also contend that some species and subspecies, while still perhaps holding their own in parts of their range, have suffered greatly

in other areas due to the depredation of the pet trade. A case in point is the situation of some of the large Central American psittacines.

In Central America the main cause of the decline of many bird species is undoubtedly habitat (forest) destruction due to the burgeoning human population. However, in many of those areas of still extant suitable habitat where they were previously recorded as common, birds such as the Scarlet Macaw and the Yellow-naped and Double Yellow-headed Amazons have disappeared or become very scarce. Ornithologists with extensive field experience of the region to whom I have spoken blame this situation primarily on the large scale taking of the birds for the pet trade and secondarily on pot hunting. It is conceivable that the two Amazons mentioned, which are restricted in range, could become endangered in the near future unless curbs are put on their exploitation for the pet market.

L. Clack, Morgantown, W.VA.

Inasmuch as your doctorate is in wild-life biology and you spent years in Australia I am persuaded to agree with you. The vast majority of aviculturists, including many professionals in the zoos, are ignorant of the true status of birds in the wild. Fortunately there is a rising concern among American aviculturists regarding conservation.

During the last decade or so bird keepers, whether in the zoos or out, have become much more concerned with building up viable gene pools among captive birds. I think we all are beginning to realize that there is not an unlimited supply of rare birds "out there".

The A.F.A. is at this moment working on a program to record all the data available on the rare and endangered birds in collections in this country. Mr. Larry Shelton of the Philadelphia zoo is heading the committee and will publish pertinent data as the program unfolds. Our aim is to collect and manage pertinent data that will expedite the breeding of rare and endangered birds so that not one need be lost unnecessarily.

Dear Editor,

The recent rash of birds thefts has called our attention to the fact that many thefts are from pet shops. Often it is the rarest bird, or the tamest, which is stolen. Many of these thefts occur during the day and while the owner and employees are in the shop.

A good security check is indicated. A pet parrot can no longer be kept on a perch near the front of the store without a worry that some day the perch will be empty. Thieves sometimes come in pairs or more, and separately engage the owner in one part of the store while an accomplice makes away with whatever expensive bird is convenient. They may have cased the store previous to the theft.

It might be wise to fasten small cages so they cannot be easily or quickly removed. Locks might be put on all cage doors inside and out, so anyone must leave by one front door only. Personnel should remain in sight of that door, and not be lured to another part of the shop by a stranger unless another employee is watching the front.

Birds seem to be stolen by people somewhat familiar with birds. Juveniles occasionally steal birds, but these cases are easier to solve. People cannot be trusted any more. Some have been known to buy cockatoos, put them in their car, and quickly drive away without paying for the birds.

Attention should be paid to all who enter the store, so that a good description can be given of anyone suspected of a theft. Publicity of a theft in the newspapers should include a description, and if possible, a photograph of the bird, and an offer of a reward for its return. Local bird clubs should be notified; thru their telephone committees they can publicize their local membership and can advise other states thru their A.F.A. representative. Macaws, cockatoos, and parrots are like money nowadays — don't leave them sitting around where anyone can kidnap them.

Don Thomas, Coral Gables, Florida

AN IMPORTANT AVIAN NUTRITIONAL ANNOUNCEMENT

At last, there is now available on the market a **complete** bird food containing, in one mix, all of the nutritional elements thus far known to be necessary for optimal avian growth, development, health, and breeding. Except for perhaps fresh greens, no additional nutritional products (proteins, vitamins, minerals, fruits, etc.) are needed when feeding this seed compound to both adult and young birds. The contents of this seed "compound" produced by Topper's Bird Ranch, comply with recommendations of some of our nation's leading university avian nutritionists.

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Las Vegas, NV 89108
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The New York Zoological Society is accepting applications for an experienced aviculturist for the St. Catherines Island Survival Center. The successful candidate will be responsible for the management of a propagation program for rare or endangered avian species. Salary commensurate with experience, four weeks vacation and hospitalization. Interested candidates should send resumes to:

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Personnel Manager
New York Zoological Society
185th Street & Southern Boulevard
Bronx, New York 10460

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TELEGRAM TO THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT

In view of the probable extinction of the Japanese crested ibis (*Nipponia nippon*) on mainland Asia, the survival of the six birds in the wild on Sado Island, Japan, perhaps offers the only hope for the rescue of this, the world's most endangered avian species.

Since the ibises in Japan are not reproducing in the wild, and considering that techniques have been developed to readily propagate ibises in captivity, we seriously recommend that the Environmental Agency of the Government of Japan grant permission for the immediate capture of the wild ibises, an action that offers the only hope for the survival of these internationally treasured birds.

Signed _____
Organization
Address

Send telegrams to:
THE DIRECTOR
Environmental Agency
Kasumigaseki-ku
Tokyo, Japan

Send a copy to:
Dr. Yoshimaro Yamashina
Yamashina Institute for Ornithology
Nampeidai, Shibuya-ku
Tokyo, Japan

COMMENT:

The local people on Sado Island protest the capture of the last ibises for emotional and economic (tourism) reasons. They prefer the extinction of the species "alive and free to the last bird" than conservation through captive breeding. The Japanese government is heavily influenced by local opinion, but also by international opinion. Your telegram will help influence the Japanese government to reach the decision they must conclude in the immediate future if this beautiful species is to survive.

Thank you,
George Archibald
International Crane Foundation
Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913, USA
608-356-9462

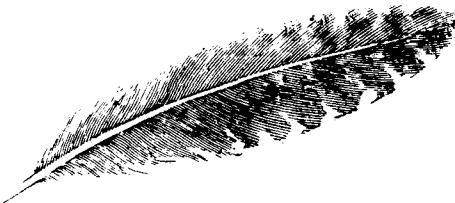
I have said it before, my friend, there are more bird thieves around than there are bird breeders. Your advice is very good and I hope store owners will heed it but you neglected to mention the upswing in burglaries. In addition to the security precautions that you point out, a store should have a very good system of locks, alarms, and lights to protect it after closing.

Years ago a friend had a very valuable tame and talking macaw stolen from his store. Enough evidence was gathered to haul the suspect before a judge. When the time came, the suspect, with the bird in question, argued that the bird was his and he'd had it for years. The store owner insisted that it was his bird and he wanted it back. The judge was honestly confused because there was no way to really identify that bird.

Part way into the trial the store-owner's wife and 5 year old daughter entered the courtroom. The child loved the bird and innocently ran past the officers and gave the huge macaw a big hug. The bird and the girl chatted little niceties to each other — in German. And the judge made up his mind.

I guess the point of this story is that if you have a specially valuable pet bird, talk to it in a foreign language. I recommended Serbo-Croatian or Hindustani. Too many weird birds already speak German.

Ed.



Dear Editor,

I am the show director of the Santa Clara Valley Canary and Exotic Bird Club and am at present going through the club files for judging information. Our files are so scanty that I thought maybe you could help out all of the local clubs by coming up with a system that would provide at our fingertips the names and addresses of some judges who judge type birds, red factors, exotics, finches, budgies, domestics, etc.

This is just an idea of mine that might develop into something helpful that would bring more interest into bird shows and a better understanding of judging and, yes, better competition in judging which in turn may result in better judging standards.

Sincerely in the fancy
Roland Skirrow
Belmont, California

Wow! Are you ever talking to the wrong fellow. I guess you know that we all tend to judge a judge's ability on how closely he agrees with our own judgement. Based on that formula, dear fellow, all the judges I have known are rowing with just one oar in the water. Not one judge, be he traffic, bird, or Supreme Court, has ever reached the same decision I came to. How can so many be so wrong so often? Oh well, it always has been an upstream swim for me.

Your idea is a good one though and it is being worked on right now. Members of the American Cage Bird Show Club are compiling a list of judges they will make available in the near future. As soon as it is complete we will publish the details in the Watchbird.

Ed.



Dear Mr. Dingle,

Recently, I attended my first AFA "psittacine convention" in San Francisco. Although impressed by the open exchange of advice and experience, I was a bit distressed by the banquet address, entitled "Aviculture is for the Birds". During his presentation, the speaker openly criticized both the veterinary profession and the State and Federal regulatory agencies currently involved in exotic bird importation matters. This criticism is unjustified and self-destructive, because aviculture is not for the birds. Aviculture is for the aviculturist!

In attempting to define aviculture as "for the birds", the speaker alluded to the numbers of endangered species currently being propagated in captivity. My question to him, and to others who feel that this propagation somehow benefits the wild population is: how many captive-bred Scarlett-chested parakeets, macaws or parrots have been released back into the wild? Conversely, how many have been sold at exorbitant prices which exceed the "costs" incurred by the aviculturist and merely reflect the "rarity" of the bird?

The breeding of rare birds certainly is educational and it allows us to develop the necessary techniques for successful propagation. However, I contend that this breeding has been almost entirely self-serving and profit-motivated. Certainly a few, and I mean a few, breeders are working with endangered birds for possible reintroduction, but most of them are doing it to receive a substantial profit on their investment. Ask yourself this question: Do you want a Scarlet-chested Parakeet to

breed in your aviary so you can release the young back into the wilds of Australia, or is the prospect of selling one young for \$120 because it is a "rare" bird your real motivation? And you say aviculture is for the birds!!

It is very easy to criticize the ever-increasing restrictions on imported birds. Likewise, it is also easy to criticize the recent history of aviculture and its profit-motivated activities. As soon as people admit that aviculture is for the aviculturist, and not for "the birds", advances will be made in the negotiation of bird importation. As long as aviculture realizes increasing profits in the name of "the birds", with no attempt to help the faltering wild populations, the restrictions will tighten. You've either got to start releasing your Hyacinth macaws back into the wild or stop complaining, for the birds belong to all of us, not just to those who have \$2,000 to buy them. And what better place for a bird than in its natural environment . . .

Sincerely,
Larry Ring
Davis, California

My dear fellow, every speech I hear causes me some distress. If only the points you bring out in your letter caused you some discomfort then you got off remarkably easy. As I interpret it, your letter focuses on two distressing items: a) criticism of the veterinarian profession and the regulatory agencies dealing with birds and b) the fact that aviculturists are raising endangered birds for profit rather than for release into the wild.

Both points deserve some commentary. First off, nothing is so sacrosanct as to be above criticism. Personally, I am very satisfied with the progress veterinary medicine is making with the problems pertaining to exotic birds. In fact, many veterinarians are working miracles with birds nowadays — but none of this came about until there were enough exotic birds around to make a bird practice profitable. Even vets have to feed their kids I guess.

The regulatory agencies, on the other hand, have earned most of the criticism heaped upon them. The A.F.A., in fact, has been one of the most vocal critics of some governmental policies. Actually, the vocal criticism was translated into legal action and found to be valid in a court of law. This criticism and legal action has, however, laid ground work for a much better understanding between government and aviculture. A mutual respect has been forged out. Mutually satisfactory solutions are often worked out now regarding the various problems that crop up in the

exotic bird trade. Criticism that leads to a positive solution of a problem can't be all bad. Unnecessary and unhealthy criticism, of course, is a type of social poison that dwells on the negative and eventually causes much destruction. So much for criticism.

Now for the endangered bird problem. Let me remind you, sir, that Crusader Rabbit is dead. That do-gooder is defunct. Nobody is going to invest a lot of money, time, and experience in endangered birds just to cast them out across the wild Australian outback to be eaten by equally wild Australian aborigines.

Let's try to delve back to the source of the problems that cause birds to become endangered in the first place. The single greatest threat to any wildlife is the loss of their habitat. Man is multiplying so prolifically that he (as a species) is slowly grinding up the face of the whole earth. The natural habitat of many animals has been taken over by humans. Birds that used to perch in trees now perch on bulldozers and tomorrow will have to perch on a rooftop. In some isolated cases a few acres have been set aside as wildlife refuges but they are woefully inadequate. Until the habitat problem is solved, many species of birds will simply have no place to live and breed. With that in mind, it seems reasonable to try to establish in captivity as many species as possible.

Please understand now, that not all of these species can be released into the wild. For some of them there is no longer a wild. It seems to me infinitely better to have a viable, self-supporting population of several thousand birds of a given species in collections all around the world than to have no birds of that species at all. Don't you wish the Carolina parakeet was a common aviary bird? Its habitat is virtually gone. American agriculture would never permit such a destructive conure to exist in feral flocks today.

This brings us to the present day when aviculturists are raising lots of expensive and rare birds. They sell them to other bird breeders and the bird population grows in captivity. As the birds become more common in captivity the price goes down. Somewhere along the way scarlet-chested parakeets will sell for ten or fifteen dollars apiece and then, my friend, then some big-hearted fellow will be able to afford to release a flock of them into the wild. If there is still any wild left.

In essence you are right — aviculture right now is for the aviculturist. But, in the long run, if aviculture is successful, if thousands of rare birds become common in captivity, aviculture is for the birds.

Ed.

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