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PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE: The Problems of Shipping Birds

*by Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.
President, A.F.A.*



photo by Nancy Vigran

Dr. R. E. Baer and Helen Willett stopped to enjoy a colorful posing spot on one of AFA's 1979 Florida Convention tours.

One of the most troublesome problems facing the breeder of birds today, whether he be a fancier of canaries, pigeons, exotic birds or game birds, is getting his birds sent to other breeder/buyers or off to shows.

There was a time when the shipment of birds by air cargo was both convenient and relatively inexpensive. This is no longer true.

Restrictions upon restrictions have added up to where the airlines now accept birds only when environmental temperatures at the points of origin and destination are within arbitrarily set limitations; they require special health certificates (obtained at high costs from veterinarians, some of whom don't know a cockatiel from a cockatoo, and who would recognize an unhealthy bird only were it laying on its back, feet up); and, they frequently empirically rule on the acceptability of the shipping container. Often as not complete prior arrangements are made by telephone by an owner to send his birds, only to arrive at the airport after a long drive to find that the work shift has changed and the present shipping agent-in-charge refused to accept the shipment due to some fabricated excuse apparently of his own making.

With the Civil Aeronautics Board's deregulation of airline responsibilities and its permitting them to be free of the obligation to serve shippers on reasonable request, bird breeders can expect more inconveniences and even refusals by air carriers to accept their animals. C.O.D. shipments are already a thing of the past with almost all airlines.

Added to all of these frustrations, today's high cost of live cargo shipping make the use of air freight almost prohibitive. Yet this is about the only practical way available at present to send birds any distance.

Even before deregulation by CAB and the elimination of the requirement for airlines to publish and abide by tariffs, costs of air shipments had jumped tremen-

dously (over 90% in the past 18 months). All indications are that rates will continue to increase and that the airlines' disregard for services will worsen.

The American Federation of Aviculture is concerned by these developments and has established a committee to study just what actions can be taken to counteract them. Should our response take the form of written protests to Congress and to the CAB? How should A.F.A. react? We need a show of concern, a display of interest and an inpouring of recommendations from you, the membership, on just how this committee should proceed with this problem.

The committee has received an innovative suggestion of another possible way of shipping birds which I would like to bring to your attention. This is via the U.S. Postal Service "Express Mail". In express mail, the USPS **guarantees** that shipments sent from one post office before 5:00 PM one day will be ready for pick-up at the destination post office by 10:00 AM the following day. For a special delivery fee the shipment can be delivered expediently direct to a residence.

The service is good and does work as guaranteed. The only hitch is that USPS does not consider birds as "mailable" (although they do ship day old chicks, ducklings, goslings, guineas, turkey poults and pheasants, all of which the poultry industry got classified as "mailable" many years ago). The cost of this "express mail" service is quite reasonable — about one-third the cost of air freight. I am told that, using this service, a single bird (i.e., a pigeon), well packaged (weight = 4 lbs.), could be sent, if permitted, from St. Louis, MO., to Los Angeles (17 hours overnight transit) for a cost of only \$7.35; or from San Diego, CA., all the way to Portland, ME., in the same delivery time for a cost of only fifty cents more! Rates are according to zones. Anyone who has traveled to shows with birds knows that they have endured longer periods than this without

showing any stress. Could this be an alternative way of shipping birds — direct, without restriction, low cost? It has already been done, perhaps not in accordance with present postal regulations, and in each case the birds arrived in good shape. Present postal regulations can be changed. How should A.F.A. proceed? A.F.A. can make an effective challenge on this issue, I am sure if membership wished it to do so. This may be a breakthrough, another manner in which to ship birds. The committee would like members to approach their postmasters in various states on this possibility and report to it the responses received. Written replies from the postmasters are preferred.

These are the problems. **These are your problems:** What do we do about airline deregulation, increased shipping rates, airlines' disregard for services, the possibilities of "express mail" services? The committee needs guidance **from you**. Please send your comments and recommendations to: Mrs. Donna Flye, Chairman, Avian Transportation Committee, 8509 S.E. Tolman St., Portland, OR., 97266. I would appreciate copies of your correspondence.

Sincerely,
Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.
President, A.F.A.

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