

THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE MOVES TO GIVE 3 SPECIES "B" PEST RATINGS

by Hal M. Koontz

The A.F.A. Feral Exotic Retrieval Program learned in early June that the California Department of Food and Agriculture will move to rate the Indian Ringneck Parakeet, Nanday Conure and Canary Wing Parakeet as "B" pests. The A.F.A. has been diligently working to keep these birds from being given an "A" pest rating, which would have made possession of these birds unlawful and made the birds subject to confiscation. The "B" pest rating does not make possession of these birds unlawful nor does it make them priority items for the State to spend time to control. Instead, the "B" pest rating leaves all action on these birds to the discretion of the individual county departments of agriculture. Each county must decide for itself whether to attempt to eliminate the feral population of these birds in its county or whether to simply ignore their presence.

The Retrieval Program originated in June, 1975 to fight the prohibiting of these species of birds. The A.F.A. learned that there was a proposal to give these birds an "A" pest rating. The reason behind the State's action is that a number of these birds had escaped and/or were released into the California environment. Research on these species showed that they were destructive to agriculture in their native habitats and it was felt that by prohibiting possession of these birds, there would be a reduced chance that more birds would be added to the wild population through escapes and releases. The Retrieval Program was a compromise with the State; it gave us one year to demonstrate that we have the ability to capture these birds and thereby eliminate the potential risk to agriculture.

The A.F.A. Retrieval Program sees the "B" pest rating as a success. We were told that most certainly these birds would have been given an "A" pest rating if the A.F.A. had not intervened. We demonstrated to the State biologists our ability to organize and effectively capture some of the escaped birds. We also educated the State biologists that met with us as to the great extent that Ringnecks were being bred, the desires and concerns of breeders, and the difficulties in enforcing an outright ban on Ringnecks. Certainly one of the reasons the State decided not to give the birds an "A" pest rating was because they knew it would be almost impossible to enforce and that they would receive a great amount of resistance from breeders who raised these

species of birds.

It is clear that the individual counties have the authority to capture or kill any feral bird of these species. However, the important question to bird breeders and a question to which I have not received a satisfactory reply is whether the counties also have the power to prohibit possession of these birds in their respective counties. I have received contradictory answers to this question from the State biologists. One biologist told me that counties did not have such authority, whereas another biologist thought that counties did have this power, although he felt they would never use it. No bird has ever been given a "B" pest rating. Until now, it had been used only for weeds and insects, etc. Since no one possesses or breeds weeds or insects as a hobby, the question as to the counties' power to regulate private breeders has never arisen. All of the State biologists I have talked with believe that the counties will never attempt to prohibit possession of these birds. I tend to agree with them.

Since the writing of the last article one month ago, the Program has captured 7 more Indian Ringneck Parakeets in the Chino area by the same method by which many of the earlier ones were caught, that is, by luring the birds into an aviary. (See the June-July, 1976 article for details.) That brings the Program to a total of 42 Ringnecks caught from June 1975 to June 1976. In addition, the Program also caught 2 Amazon Parrots, 1 Canary Wing Parakeet and 1 Monk Parakeet.

The Retrieval Program will continue despite this reaching of our goal since it is always possible that the State will decide to re-evaluate these birds and give them an "A" pest rating. Should this occur, we will hear about it and take action again at that time. Meanwhile, the Program will operate, perhaps on a less vigorous scale, but will continue to receive sightings, make retrieval attempts and keep records of feral birds seen and caught. This will be the last regular news article by the Retrieval Program. When something new develops in a county or in the State Agricultural Department, the readers of the Watchbird will be kept informed. Please continue to report to the A.F.A. any feral exotic bird you may see or capture. If this is done, it will not take as long for us to mobilize as it did a year ago, if there is a next time.



WELCOME NEW CLUB MEMBERS

Arizona Avicultural Society

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All of the above clubs joined A.F.A. in the last two months. A.F.A. appreciates their support and welcomes them to the federation. Their addresses appear on page 3 for members wishing to contact them.



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