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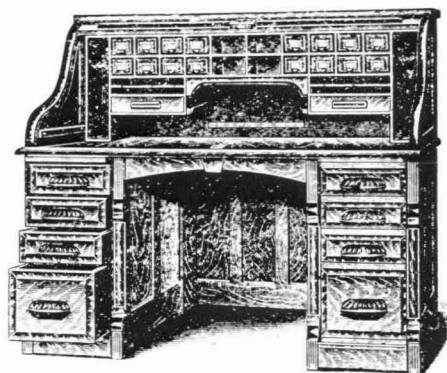
NOTICE

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



Dear Editor:

Everywhere today in aviculture you hear people talking about exotic birds becoming endangered due to man's encroachment into their native habitats. This is a problem and we aviculturists should be concerned. But why are we concerned with only the foreign birds? What about our own native American birds? Why aren't we doing something to protect their future in this country? Already the blue bird population is considerably smaller than it was and the many beautiful buntings are decreasing in numbers also. What are we waiting for?

Are we all just sitting back waiting to say of another bird, "Well, we did have it but it has gone to be with the Carolina parakeet. What happened?" If so, I think it is time for the A.F.A., the strongest avicultural group in the nation, to start doing something about it before it is too late.

Some years ago a program was initiated in England that allowed any aviculturist who chose to do so to keep two pairs of each species of native birds. The babies had to be closed banded to distinguish them from the wild caught birds. Many of the captive raised birds are released into the wild and, of course, it is illegal to buy or sell them. This system allows the truly dedicated aviculturist to engage in an altruistic activity that benefits the native birds.

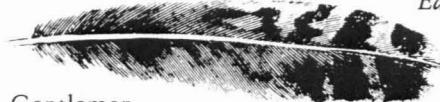
Why couldn't the A.F.A. Conservation Committee study this idea and make some recommendations to the federal government? I recently visited Missouri and in two weeks didn't see one bluebird. They used to be so plentiful there. Wake up, people! I'd hate to hear someone say, "There used to be a beautiful red bird in this area but now I don't see it anymore. Where has the Virginia cardinal gone?" Remember, extinction is forever.

John Agrella
Lakeside, California

My dear fellow, having grown up in England you probably don't realize how callously the Americans have traditionally treated all native American species. After all, those cowboy and Indian games were not for fun—they were for keeps. If the Americans could endorse a policy that nearly exterminated the native American humans, how much hope do you hold for the birds?

I like your ideas and your deep concern for our native birds and endorse wholeheartedly your thought that the A.F.A. Conservation Committee address the problems. I should like to see Frank Todd (or another equally radical and knowledgeable person—if there is one) chair the Conservation Committee. That would guarantee some action for sure. A strong, active Conservation Committee could be one of the A.F.A.'s most important contributions to the world.

Ed.



Gentlemen,

I just received a year's subscription to your splendid and most colorful A.F.A. magazine by an anonymous individual. Please print my gratitude and sincere thanks to this anonymous person in your next issue.

Cordially yours, Calvin D. Wilson
Salt Lake City, Utah

Thanks, anonymous person. And if you send ten thousand more anonymous memberships in the A.F.A., we won't complain.

Ed.



Dear Sheldon,

As we are all surely aware, there is a very serious epidemic in this country. The highly infected areas seem to be Southern California and Texas. However, this disease isn't confined to one or two states for long. Overnight it can be transmitted to Maine or Washington.

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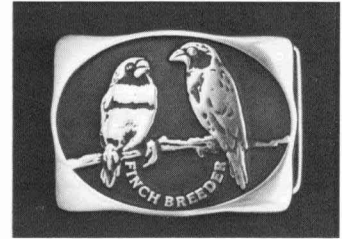
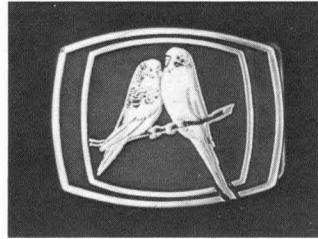
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Unfortunately, there isn't just one "Mary Mallon" involved, as was the case in New York in 1938. With hundreds of thousands spreading this disease, how can it be stopped or at least controlled?

This epidemic, of course, is illegal birds. Most are smuggled over the Mighty Rio Grande or through Southern California. These smugglers are not all illegal aliens trying to subsidize their income. Many are doctors, lawyers and candlestick makers.

Smuggling or buying known smuggled birds is a crime. What will deter one from committing this crime? I believe the answer to be severe punishment and public awareness. Why should one not break the law if they know there is no punishment? Granted, some steps have been taken, but they are too small and too slow. If action isn't taken soon, there may be no birds.

The American Federation of Aviculture has been very active and vocal on many issues involving our birds. A great job was done dealing with the U.S.D.A. Task Force. The A.F.A.'s voice was heard on the importation ruling of birds. All are jobs well done. Now let's let our voice be heard on the illegal bird issue. If the roar is loud enough, maybe USDA and Customs will listen.

To make a point of how some smuggled birds are handled, this recently happened here in the Metro Plex area. A local bird "jockey" had 12 to 15 baby Double Yellow Heads, all in the down or pin feather stage. One does not have to be a J. Edgar Hoover to know where they came from. USDA in Washington was called and a report of suspected illegal birds made.

USDA did act, they sent a vet, a customs agent and a member of USDI to check. They only found three baby birds left at the location. The three were swabbed and found to be free of VVND. Well, that's great, a job well done to that point. The other 9 to 12 birds were already sold, and no follow up was made. The "bird jockey" stated all the baby birds were bought at a border town flea market. This bird "buyer" in question has been buying and selling birds for 20 years. No way can I believe that he thought these to be legal birds.

In any case, USDA did not check or swab all the birds reported. They also did not confiscate any of the birds. With this type of action by our government, how are illegal birds going to be controlled? If one can buy smuggled birds with no fear of jail or, at least, confiscation, many will.

If I was stupid enough to buy a stolen car, I may not go to jail but I surely

would not be allowed to keep the car. Why should illegal birds not be treated in the same manner? Illegal birds are stolen birds.

Regards, Tom Squyres
Ft. Worth, Texas

Your point is well taken, Tom, but in your example there are a few difficulties. First, how can the government prove the three baby birds were smuggled? Cars are registered—birds are not. A government agency could have some liability if they confiscated birds without some proof that they were illegally imported. Even though Customs might "know" the birds are smuggled, it would have to prove it to a judge to get a conviction. Even crooks are presumed innocent until they are proven guilty.

And a follow up on the sold birds was probably impossible. Most birds are sold over the counter for cash and no follow up is possible. The government men probably did all they could do under the circumstances. For the government to gain better control on bird traffic, it would be necessary to devise a system of registering and marking all legal exotic birds—and the ramifications of that sort of system are not really clear. Most bird people are against that kind of control.

At present, I think that government agents just about have to catch smugglers red-handed crossing the border with contraband birds to make a case stick. Of course, all honest people should continue to report such cases as the one you described. Eventually a statistical record may pile up enough circumstantial evidence to warrant an in-depth surveillance or other investigation of the potentially guilty person.

The smuggling problems you point out are very serious, indeed, but as long as there are crooks and greedy people willing to make a quick buck there is no simple solution—or is there? How many smugglers do you suppose could swim the river with a broken arm?



Ed.

Dear Editor,

My wife and I are new to aviculture and have heard again and again, "You must buy from private breeders; you'll get happier and healthier birds." We also were told to buy from advertisers in the various bird journals—these advertisers were all legitimate, honest people.

Well, let me share a recent experience we had with an advertised private

breeder. On our way to Puerto Rico we stopped off in Florida to see some mutation peach-faced lovebirds we had seen advertised. We flew and drove hours out of our way to visit these two fellows who raise nothing but lovebirds. They told us that *their* birds were the best—all banded and complete with an extensive genetic history. In a word, birds of fine pedigree.

As we were out-bound we bought nothing at the moment but when we arrived back home we phoned and ordered two blue peach-faced lovebirds and two split-to-blue. We arranged for a friend to pick them up on his way by the breeder's location. When we called the breeder to explain the pick-up procedure he said he had already put our selected birds aside—there would be no problem.

Our friend picked up the birds on schedule and arrived at our place with our choice, home-bred stock. We opened the shipping box and our hearts sank as one of the blue birds wobbled out aimlessly and tried to perch with his single toe. Two of the four birds were not banded. We had asked and paid for breeders but two of the birds had black beaks and were obviously infants.

When we called to complain, we were told that at the pick-up day it was raining and the breeder didn't notice the defective foot. He also overlooked the lack of bands. While we had him on the phone he mentioned that the "split" birds might not be split—he wasn't sure. He was hassled and under pressure. Finally, under our pressure, he irritably said he would refund the price of the defective bird which he eventually did.

But we have some birds we did not really want. Of course, we'll keep and love them but we did not get what we wanted and we had difficult and unhappy negotiations to boot.

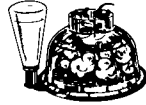
We bought four lovebirds at a local pet store, on the other hand, and have been rewarded with two happy, healthy clutches of babies.

Now who says, "Buy from breeders and get the best birds"? These two Florida lovebird specialists were, at best, careless, and probably slightly unethical. It will be a long time before we take advertising at face value again and I feel better for having said it.

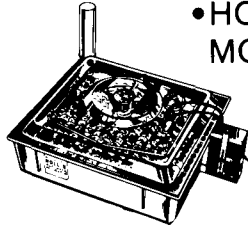
Ronald L. Moloff
Scarsdale, New York

First off, let me state Dingle's Law of Commerce: "All old-timers were skinned when they were greenhorns and must do a little skinning just to get their books back in balance."

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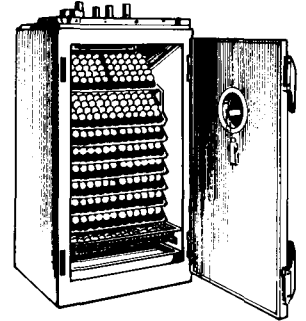


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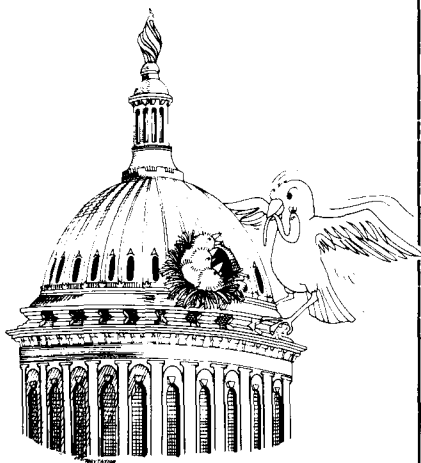
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With that in mind it makes no difference if you walk into a pet store, a breeder's back yard, or respond to an advertisement. Consider all categories the same. The novice or greenhorn does have a few options, though.

The best method is to examine the bird personally and carefully and if you like it and the price, pay for it and take it home.

Next best is to buy from a seller that is highly recommended by your trusted friend who has had good experiences with him.

Third, I suppose, is to buy from a seller who has a generally good reputation even though you can't find a specific sponsor for him.

And last is to send money to someone you don't know and hope for the bird you want.

Now, for you loyal readers who have struggled through this treatise on economics I have a valuable tip. Try to buy from some geezer 80 years old or more. If his books are not balanced by now he is obviously too dumb to skin you and you will make a good deal.



Ed.

Dear Sheldon:

I am sure (at least I hope) that I am not the only one to write you on this subject, so you can add this letter to the pile of complaints.

I could not believe my eyes when I opened the last issue of *The Watchbird* to the article "Birdman With Soul" by Dr. Richard D. Tkachuck (vol. VIII (4):7-9) and found two of the five paintings by James McClelland, incorrectly identified (and not just switched titles as printers are prone to do).

The Black and White Warbler (p. 8) is obviously a Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) masquerading under an assumed name. The Mourning Dove (p. 8) depicted is certainly not our native North American species (*Zenaida macroura*). It could be claimed that it represents the African Mourning Dove (*Streptopelia decipiens*) but the painting shows the bird with a dark eye (not yellow/orange as in *S. decipiens*) and a long pointed tail (as in *Z. macroura*).

The quality of *The Watchbird* has so improved over the years, since its meager beginnings, that it has to be now rated as one of the top aviculture periodicals. However, you need to find someone willing to take the time to check copy for scientific authenticity and accuracy. As it is now, you are competing with the Los Angeles Times for the Most incorrectly

labeled illustrations and photographs, and in the use of scientific names.

Sincerely yours, James R. Northern
Senior Museum Scientist
Bird and Mammal Collection

My dear Mr. Northern, just because you are a senior scientist you don't have to get grouchy. Have you never heard of artistic license? Maybe the real bird did not conform to the artist's sense of color or form. Maybe the artist doesn't speak Latin. Maybe the birds were mongrels and don't have a formal family name. There could be a thousand reasons why the caption names seem a little off. Not to worry.

Now that I've got my grouching out of the way, I'll explain what really happened. The material came to me without captions. Then, before I could catch him, Dr. Tkachuck flew off to a mad-scientist's convention in Transylvania or some other European center (most of these fellows don't need planes to fly) and the caption problem was left in my lap. I tried to get in touch with the artist himself but you know how artists are. He was off on some mountain top pondering the beauties of nature so, again, I was stuck with the problem.

Regarding the sparrow, I looked in one of my books and found a black and white bird. All right, so he warbles. What do I know about vespers? And the dove is obviously a dove. How should I know if he is from Africa or the U.S.? With birds it's not so easy to tell.

*I, S.L. Dingle, your humble servant, freely accept the responsibility for these errors but you may recall that in the last issue of *The Watchbird* my burning bush was thoroughly doused and I'm struggling under a serious handicap. And (although my wife loves it) it is no easy thing sitting here in a pile of wet ashes.*

*Now, however, I want all you good readers to know that my scientific name problems are at an end. James R. Northern, a senior, if grouchy, museum scientist has most graciously lifted the burden from my back. He has agreed to serve *The Watchbird* in an advisory capacity regarding the use of scientific names. If any of you detect an error, be it ever so slight, in the use of scientific names, please address a very grouchy letter to the A.F.A. home office in care of James R. Northern.*

*And, James, my good friend, please don't take offense. I and all of our readers greatly appreciate your diligent efforts to keep me honest and to keep *The Watchbird* accurate. It's just that under the recent hammering I've taken I am a little grouchy myself.*