

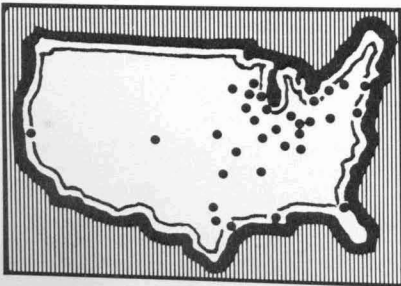
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Aviculture's Continued Problems— Newcastle Disease and Smuggling

Photo by Larry McPhail



by Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.
Groveport, Ohio

Special Advisor to AFA

Dr. Richard E. Baer addressing the record breaking crowd that attended the 1981 AFA convention.

"In the report on the status of Velogenic Viserotropic Newcastle Disease (VVND) presented to the Committee on the Transmissible Diseases of Poultry of the United States Animal Health Association, it was recounted that there were thirty-seven confirmed cases of VVND diagnosed so far this year (1981) in exotic birds. A few thousand birds were destroyed.

"The implicated causes of this year's outbreaks of Exotic Newcastle Disease were smuggled birds. The cause each year, year after year, is usually always the same, the contraband bird. Each year hundreds to thousands of exotic birds exposed to these infected smuggled birds are destroyed as a result. The annual cost varies from many thousands to millions of dollars. Every year we find ourselves faced with the same dilemma all over again. The annual recurrences of Exotic Newcastle Disease introduced by smuggled birds are so regular that they can almost be forecast. One such yearly occurrence is so predictable that it has become known as "The Yellow Nape Season." Each year when yellow naped baby parrots are harvested from the nest south of the border, it is followed by young contraband Yellow Napes causing outbreaks of VVND north of the border. The VVND control program and all of the combined efforts of the Departments of Agriculture and of Customs Services do little to affect this cycle of disease introduction.

"The proposed regulations by Veterinary Services to require leg banding and records of transactions for cage birds legally entering the United States will distinguish the licit birds from the illicit, and facilitate tracebacks on the former group in case of disease outbreaks. It may also help in the control of smuggled birds entering the market chain of the cage bird industry, but it will not effectively affect illegal birds from being

brought into this country.

"Smuggled birds are clandestinely brought into the United States the year around, at all border points, and into all states. Many of these birds sicken and die and are never reported to authorities. They are buried. It would be self-delusion for U.S.D.A. to presume that they are locating all of the illegal diseased birds that come through. Their efforts are comparable to those of a menaced blind man flailing with his knife at his unseen foe who can be anywhere. The traffic in contraband sick birds that are never reported and are not discovered brings up some interesting questions: Why haven't they caused outbreaks of Exotic Newcastle Disease? Has it just been good fortune that they haven't? Has U.S.D.A.'s efforts to date ALL been successful stabs in the dark? When will its luck run out? When will we again face a major outbreak? A costly outbreak with no funds to cover it?

"Even the conscientious bird keeper is oft times hesitant to report his legitimate losses because he is afraid that the consequences of his action might be the destruction of his flock.

"He is just as fearful of Exotic Newcastle Disease and as much aware of the damage it can do as is the poultryman. He has the added dread that purchased sick birds may not only bring him VVND, but also other destructive infections such as psittacosis, pox, and the deadly Pacheco's disease—diseases which the Dept. of Agriculture does not protect him from even in legally quarantined imports.

"He must realize that he should report all suspected sick birds, but there is his lack of trust because present eradication policies afford him little consideration or protection. Wouldn't it be better to strive for more confidence on the part of the bird owner and have him report his losses rather than having him

fearful and distrustful and not report them? Perhaps, some needed changes in the VVND control methods would accomplish just this.

"Today there is a consensus that changes in the VVND control methods are long overdue; that modifications can be made which will prove beneficial to all interests concerned with the problem.

"The U.S.A.H.A. recognized this a year ago when this committee passed its resolution that: 'The Committee supports the establishment of the mechanism for a formal dialogue between poultry and pet bird industries and regulatory and research people on the problem of VVND eradication.'

"Thanks, perhaps, in part to this resolution; to written criticism of VVND control methods by the American Veterinary Medical Association (A.V.M.A. Journal); and to a petition by the American Federation of Aviculture calling for a national symposium to find better and more practical ways of protecting both the poultry and bird industries from VVND, a national conference is being planned for the spring of 1982.

"This search for change can best be made by full consultation with all who are involved and who are affected, together with specialists in disease control and research. So far, the American Association of Avian Pathologists, The Association of Avian Veterinarians, the American Federation of Aviculture and the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council have responded by designating delegates to represent their organizations on the Steering Committee which is organizing the Symposium.

"The United States Department of Agriculture, Veterinary Services, has consented to take part in the conference and has committed itself to provide consultants as necessary."

The preceding paragraphs are from a report presented before the Committee on Transmissible Diseases of Poultry and Other Avian Species at the eighty-fifth annual meeting of the U.S.A.H.A.

As stated in the report, a national symposium on the problems of VVND is projected to be held in the year 1982. The location for this meeting will most likely be in the Washington, D.C. area and attendance will be by invitation. (It is felt that unrestricted attendance would impede orderly consideration of the problems.)

Suggested topics for discussion at the symposium include: The Cost of Control Methods. Quarantine and Testing of Populations Within Populations in In-

fecting Flocks. Recognition of Low Risk vs. High Risk Exotic Birds. A Policy for Outbreaks in Low Risk Areas (not close to poultry concentrations) as Apart from One for Those in High Risk Areas (close to large poultry concentrations). Differentiation of Eradication Procedures for Private Premises as Opposed to Infected and/or Exposed Commercial Premises (Private Owner or Breeder vs. Dealer). Quarantine Considerations for Infected and/or Exposed Pet Shops (to facilitate keeping them in business). Evaluation of Efficacy of Present Laboratory Testing Procedures (Representative Sampling. Interpretations.) Possible Modification of Individual Pet Bird Regulations. Criteria for Determining Date of Infection. Preventive Vaccination, and, The Smuggling Problem.

A recommendation was made that importation policies be discussed considering all possibilities from a closed door (complete restriction) policy at one extreme to that of an open door (no restrictions, whatsoever) at the other.

Cost of Control Methods

Under the current Federal budgetary restraints, funds to carry out present VVND control methods in some possibly large outbreak in the future just may not be made available and the whole control program would have to be abandoned.

Aviculturists want continued control of VVND, but not under these present methods.

In 1971-1974, VVND cost the Federal government \$56,000,000.00. In 1974-1975, \$3,195,000.00 was spent. In 1975-1976, \$2,842,000.00. 1977, \$2,816,000.00. 1977-1978, \$704,000.00. 1979, \$2,738,000.00. 1980-1981, \$3,500,000.00 and: 1981 (thru June) \$360,000.00. This makes a total of \$72,155,000.00 spent on VVND in LESS than ten years! (From USDA Emergency Disease Outbreaks Memo., dated 9/15/81). Additional millions of dollars in administrative expenses (salaries, travel, etc.) must be added to this.

With the Office of Management and Budget wanting to take food off the plates of needy American school children and telling our elderly and our poor that they must do with less to balance the Federal budget by 1984, how can Veterinary Services hope for additional millions of dollars to pay for more killing of pet birds?

At the U.S.A.H.A. meeting, tight Federal budgeting was recognized as a reality and several programs important to the poultry industry had to be disregarded: The consideration of even modest funding which would result in the complete final eradication of Infectious Larengo

Tracheitis had to be passed over. Reference to funding on the Fowl Typhoid resolution was deleted, and delegates were discouraged from hoping for funds to carry forward the Avian Mycoplasmosis program. All of these important economic programs are stalled while millions of dollars are still thrown out on destroying pet birds unnecessarily.

There are many who are convinced that the spending of all of this money for the indemnification of depopulated pet birds fosters abuse. It is common opinion that there are pet bird dealers who actually welcome the needless destruction of their birds in order to collect the indemnity.

Critical of the present Veterinary Services VVND control measures are many V.S. field employees, themselves, who are charged with the carrying out of these distasteful tasks. They consider present methods inhumane, needless, and wasteful.

Quarantine & Testing of Populations Within Populations. Low Risk vs. High Risk Birds.

Present VVND control and eradication policies dictate that if even *one* VVND infected bird is found in a flock, *all* of the birds in that flock must be destroyed and allows for no extenuating circumstances to alter this action. Such a policy which does not consider any factor that could moderate the course of complete eradication is wrong and must be changed.

In 1977 in the Colton area of California, a large aviary was completely depopulated because *one* infected (?) bird was found. This one purportedly infected bird, a toucanet, was reported positive only after intensive sampling of the 1,500 birds in the flock over a period of almost four weeks. Because one bird, and one bird only, was said by government officials to be infected without any further confirmation, one thousand five hundred other birds were destroyed. The virus supposedly isolated from this one bird, and one bird only, in a flock of 1,500 tested, was characterized by V.S. officials as "a virus that apparently was not spreading rapidly." At a meeting called by Veterinary Services in Washington, D.C., at the time, Veterinarians in Charge from the different states and various State Veterinarians attending were informed that the particular virus was so weak that it took several egg passages to pick it up (U.S.D.A. Memo). Here, a virus supposedly isolated from one bird out of 1,500 after almost four weeks of intensive sampling, apparently not spreading, and so weak that it took repeated egg passages before it was purportedly picked up, resulted in the loss of 1,500 apparently healthy birds none of which showed

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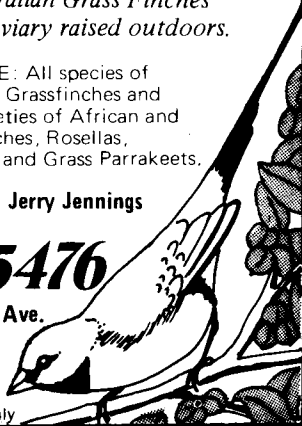
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positive for VVND.

This policy is still in effect. The number of birds destroyed could have been 15,000 or 150,000!

No consideration was given to the facts that the virus was slow spreading, a weak one, and that none of the other birds in the flock tested positive on repeated sampling. How many of the 1,500 non-positive birds were actually low risk birds? (Rumor has it that the government was really "out to get" this owner.)

Low Risk vs. High Risk Areas. Private Owner or Breeder vs. Dealer.

In addition to the above considerations, any scientific control and eradication measures must take into account the circumstances as to where the infected flock is located and those of the kind of collection involved. Are the infected and/or exposed birds in an area close to poultry operations or far removed? Are they the property of a private owner or breeder or those of a wholesale or retail dealer?

The potential for disease spread from quarantined cage birds to poultry is remote in almost all cases except in exceptional locations where they are close to poultry concentrations. Isolated pet birds in someone's home in the city or quarantined birds in a private urban aviary far from any poultry are not going to spread infection by any stretch of the imagination. Even infected and/or exposed birds in a city pet shop often behind glass partitions if quarantined pose no cause for alarm.

There is no reason, whatsoever, why birds in the above categories cannot be subjected to long term quarantine and proper testing instead of expensive extermination.

The pet bird of a private owner or the cage birds in a private aviary do not pose the same problem as birds in the market chain of the cage bird industry and should be evaluated differently.

Considerations for Pet Shop Owners.

Even those having birds in the market chain of industry deserve more consideration than that given them under present control and eradication methods.

The pet shop owner, for example, who innocently purchased birds possibly exposed to infection, under present regulations finds his business placed under quarantine pending outcome of the tests on the purchased birds. These quarantines in the past often extended over long periods, hampering the shop's business, damaging credibility and sometimes bringing the owner close to financial ruin. A quarantine of a business is a severe restriction that obstructs normal operation.

In the 1977 VVND outbreak, a

Veterinary Services inspector in one state permitted a pet store manager to remove his quarantined birds from the store and isolate them safely in another place, and to carry on business as usual while awaiting the laboratory test results. This made sense.

A manager for the same chain of stores in an adjacent state, however, was denied such a privilege by another inspector. That was lack of consideration.

This article touches only on a few of the changes that, hopefully, will be addressed by the symposium.

One problem which the symposium cannot affect is the recurring threat to both the bird and poultry industries of the introduction of Exotic Newcastle Disease by smuggled birds.

It will take more than rhetoric or policy changes to remove this danger. The aviculturist more than anyone else can help restrict smuggling by reporting anyone offering birds of questionable origin for sale. Birds sold off the back of a truck or at yard sales, or suspicious vendors at bird fairs and swap meets should be reported by name or by recording their vehicle license plate numbers. The encouragement of such vigilance should become an organized project of bird clubs.

Unfortunately, there are aviculturists, themselves, who do not hesitate to buy a bird of unknown origin from someone unknown if they think they are getting a "bargain." The purchaser of such a possibly diseased bird may do more harm to aviculture than did the person who actually smuggled it across the border. How many good (?) aviculturists would be reluctant to say where they acquired some birds now in their aviaries? The receiver of an illegal bird is as guilty as the seller and should be prosecuted just as severely. Aviaries infected with VVND as the result of the introduction of a smuggled bird should be ineligible for indemnity payments.

The final solution of the smuggled bird problem will rest upon domestic captive propagation to meet the needs for birds.

Of importance to aviculture is the change, at the eighty-fifth annual meeting of U.S.A.H.A., of The Committee on Transmissible Diseases of Poultry to The Committee of Transmissible Diseases of Poultry and Other Avian Species.

This timely inclusion of all avian species for consideration by the Committee should animate organizations whose interests lie with birds (including game birds and exotics) to join and taken an active part in U.S.A.H.A. and attend its annual meetings. Active participation in

U.S.A.H.A. by avicultural associations, avian orientated veterinary groups and the pet bird industry will serve to protect their own interests. The U.S.A.H.A. provides a forum (see A.F.A. Watchbird, Vol. VI, No. 1, Feb.-Mar. '79) at which are worked out many animal health problems.

Of interest to aviculturists is the new Veterinary Services Exotic Newcastle Disease Guideline for Eradication (1981) which was presented at the annual meeting. The part on cage and aviary birds was not presented; only the part on poultry was offered for consideration. This part of the guideline makes provision for the preservation of valuable poultry genetic stock in flocks infected and/or exposed to VVND. Will provision, too, be made in the guidelines for the preservation of valuable genetic stock in cage and aviary birds?

On the agenda for the U.S.A.H.A. Committee meeting was the subject: A Model State Program for Pet Birds.

A resolution was passed to establish a sub-committee to prepare such a model program.

A good constructive model state program for pet birds would be welcomed by all interested in cage and aviary birds. To be constructive, such a model program should promote the domestic propagation and improvement of this class of birds. Improvement would include safeguards against the introduction and spread of diseases affecting birds. Birds other than poultry are the only class of livestock which The Department of Agriculture knowingly allows to enter this country when infected with dangerous and contagious diseases. At present, Veterinary Services does nothing to protect the bird breeder from destructive infectious diseases, such as Pacheco's disease and pox, even in legally quarantined imports. In fact, they have been reported as lax in enforcing proper sanitary measures and humane standards in the commercial quarantine stations which they supervise.

It should be inconceivable that any sub-committee given the responsibility to prepare a model state plan for pet birds would not include in its membership persons who are knowledgeable in cage and aviary bird husbandry, those who are experienced in the pet bird industry, and others who have expertise in avian medicine. It is important that those who are concerned and who would be affected by the proposed model plan take a part in U.S.A.H.A. and in its committees.

A good model state program, if adopted by the different states, could improve the prosperity of aviculture; a bad one would cause problems and strife. ●



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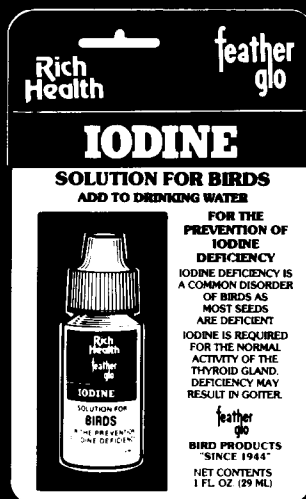
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