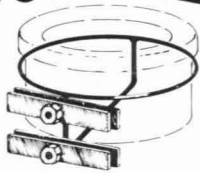


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Proposals and Changes Affect Bird Keeping

Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.
AFA's Past President and
Current Special Advisor

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please do not dismiss the following article as long-winded political smoke. Dr. Baer's report contains data that is extremely crucial. Understanding it thoroughly will determine what action the A.F.A. i.e., all of you in concert, will take. To ignore the activities of the government is to roll over in defeat by default. One of the primary purposes of the A.F.A. is to inform aviculturists regarding governmental attitudes toward aviculture. Read and understand. It is your responsibility to the rest of us.



Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.

Proposals were made and changes were announced at the last annual meeting of the United States Animal Health Association in October, 1983, which directly affect aviculturists and should be of concern to them:

1. A recommendation was adopted that ALL velogenic Newcastle diseases without differentiation be considered exotic to the USA and eradicated.
2. A report was made on research being conducted by the State of California on contraband exotic birds which calls for reconsideration of the whole smuggling problem. It also devaluated the danger of VVND smuggled birds to the poultry industry.
3. It was announced by the Center of Disease Control (U.S. Public Health) that their requirement for the antibiotic treatment of exotic birds imported into this country to control psitticosis would be dropped and
4. A report was given on the progress of the proposed National Cage and Aviary Bird Improvement Plan (NCABIP or Model State Program for Pet Birds).

The recommendation that all velogenic Newcastle diseases, both VVND and VND, be considered exotic to the USA and eradicated, if detected, is based on the premises that:

1. Existing evidence suggests that velogenic types of Newcastle disease virus, whether viserotropic (VVND) or non-viserotropic (VND) are not enzootic in domestic poultry in the United States.
2. Velogenic non-viserotropic Newcastle Disease (VND) may be as destructive as VVND if introduced into domestic poultry and cage and aviary birds, and,
3. The present regulations which restrict action to VVND can delay depopulation (sic. of exotic birds) or other appropriate action when VND types of virus are isolated and this may increase the risk of spread and cause embarrassment to regulatory agencies.

Based on the above it was recommended that

1. Birds or populations of birds known to harbor ANY Newcastle disease virus that produces lethal infection in chickens should not be imported into the United States.
2. The feasibility of classifying all velogenic Newcastle diseases as exotic diseases should be assessed. Assessment should include identification of possible remaining foci or velogenic NDV infection in domestic poultry, and estimation of eradication costs. If economically feasible ALL velogenic NDV should be considered exotic to the USA and eradicated if detected.

Since it is believed that velogenic types of Newcastle disease viruses are not enzootic to domestic poultry in the USA, the proposed regulation change would primarily be a control measure directed at cage and aviary birds to prevent possible disease spread of VND to poultry.

The use of ALL VND infections as criteria for the depopulation of birds will result in the destruction of many more birds than are now destroyed for VVND, especially if the present control measures of killing all exposed as well as infected birds are still followed.

While there may be no quarrel with the prohibition of the importation into this country of birds or populations of birds known to harbor any Newcastle disease virus that is destructive to domestic poultry or cage and aviary birds, nor with the extermination of VND KNOWN infected birds; the necessity for the killing of perhaps hundreds or thousands of additional birds because of exposure now to VND can be questioned.

The latter measure is unnecessary, overly costly and wasteful. This is consistent with the findings of the research report on smuggling which points out that no significant interface exists between cage and aviary birds and poultry populations.

It should be brought to notice, too, that for VND to be used as a criterium for eradication, it must FIRST be found to be an exotic disease in this country; and ONCE SO CLASSIFIED, the eradication measures must be applied equally to ALL avian species including poultry. This could very well result in the complete destruction of large poultry operations once infection is found.

Until such time that all VND is recognized as an exotic disease in this country, it cannot legally be used as a criterium to destroy cage and aviary birds.

Consideration of the report on the smuggling of birds into California and the facts it brings out warrants a complete reappraisal of not only how VVND control should be carried out in cage and aviary birds, but also, on how such birds should be imported.

In another presentation at the annual meeting it was reported that some 803,000 birds were legally imported into the United States in fy. 1983. The smuggling report estimated that over 500,000 birds came into this country illegally during that same period of time and that of this number approximately 1% were infected with VVND. This would mean that approximately 5,000 VVND infected or carrier birds entered the country during fy. 1983. Yet, in 1983 there were no reported outbreaks of exotic Newcastle Disease (VVND) in commercial poultry flocks. Nor were there any in 1982, 1981, 1980, 1979, or 1978. In fact there has been no reported outbreak of VVND in commercial poultry flocks SINCE 1972.

With no outbreak of VVND in poultry for more than ten years in spite of the estimated illegal entrance of thousands of VVND infected or carrier birds each year over this more than ten year period, it appears that there must be very little, if any, interfacing between poultry flocks and these infected or carrier birds.

The smuggling report bore out this same conclusion. It stated that most smuggled

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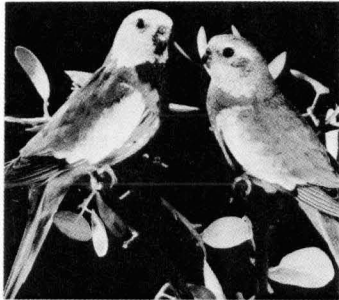
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AFA's Aviculturist's Calendar for 1984



JANUARY 1984							FEBRUARY 1984						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31					29	30	31				

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birds go directly into private homes as pets. These homes are located mostly in urban areas where there is little or no contact with poultry. Relatively few end up in aviaries, in the hands of dishonest wholesalers, or in retail pet shops. Custom authorities intercept relatively very few of these illegally entering birds, therefore, such enforcement programs do little to control smuggling.

A USDA official stated at the meeting that the legal importation of birds at present is confined mainly to only about twenty importers; that it is a highly competitive but most profitable business for a few; a case in which, according to this official, "the rich get richer," resulting in many potential buyers turning to the more affordable smuggled birds.

The California report brought out the fact that the average smuggler does not consider himself as breaking the law, but rather as "beating the system."

The conclusion of the writer of the report was that any reduction in smuggling was contingent upon eliminating the span between the high cost of legally imported birds and the price of a bird brought in surreptitiously. One way of doing this, he recommended, was for the government authorities to devise safe means whereby small lots of birds could be brought into the country legally by smaller importers, i.e., give the illegal purveyor of birds a law abiding way of dealing in birds.

With the lack of any significant interface between cage and aviary birds and poultry, a safe, economical practical way of bringing birds into the country that would greatly curtail the smuggling problem would be for the government to, perhaps, adopt the British way of private importations of small lots of exotic birds with permits and quarantine upon private premises. This would be especially applicable to domestically-bred-in-foreign-country birds. USDA would do well to find a practical way to reduce the burden on quarantine and its costs.

In any event, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture needs to reconsider its whole VVND control program, especially if it wishes to add VND to such control and expects aviculture to support it.

CDC's announcement that U.S. Public Health is dropping the regulation requiring the feeding of antibiotics as a preventative treatment for psittacosis in imported birds will be published in the Federal Register and there will be a commentary period during which those interested may respond.

USDA has indicated that at this time it will continue the feeding of medicated pellets or mash at the import stations.

A.F.A. is on record as favoring that USDA officially take over this psittacosis

control program in the quarantine stations. The Federation should review its official position on this at this time.

C.D.C. questions the efficacy of the antibiotic feeding for the 30 day period (or for even a 45 day period) and states that it is finding more psittacosis in domestically bred psittacines (budgerigars and cockatiels) than in imported birds. C.D.C. requested help from aviculture in resolving this latter problem.

It was reported at the USAHA annual meeting that the promotion of the National Cage and Aviary Bird Improvement Plan is now beyond the letter-of-support writing stage. Proponents of the Plan are now pressing for a minor amendment to an existing Federal Statute (7 U.S.C. 429) to implement it.

The creation of NCABIP has been endorsed by the following organizations:

American Association of Avian Pathologists
American Federation of Aviculture
Association of Avian Veterinarians
National Poultry Improvement Plan
Pacific Egg and Poultry Association
Pennsylvania Association of Avian Veterinarians
Pennsylvania Poultry Association
Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council
Southeastern Poultry Association
United States Animal Health Association

The support that we, the aviculturists, both as individuals and through our organizations, give the Improvement Plan may have a deciding influencing upon its success.

The choice is between an opportunity for aviculturists to regulate themselves from within the structure of aviculture; or by default, to continue to be regulated without voice by bureaucracies on all levels (federal, state and local), each pressured by strong lobbies which are adverse to the interests of the bird keeper.

The recommended consideration of VND as a criterium for the eradication of birds and a recently proposed bill in the State of Ohio to ban the ownership or possession of any exotic animal are but two examples of vested interests trying to impose their will on the aviculturist.

How can the aviculturist even consider otherwise than to strongly support the need to explore the possibilities of the proposed Improvement Plan? Failure of the implementation of the Plan will mean a lost opportunity for the cage and aviary bird industry (for all bird breeders) to regulate themselves. Self regulation would be a lost cause. Regulation of the bird industry would continue to be made by others in their own interests, not ours. ●