

NOTICE

All correspondence intended for the editor of the Watchbird should be mailed directly to his address.

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From The Editor's Desk

by Sheldon Dingle
Norco, California

At this writing I don't know who has been elected president of the AFA—and I don't really care. I have faith. Each president so far has been the very person to fill the AFA's needs of the moment. And I expect that trend to continue.

Something to remember, though, is that each president of the AFA voluntarily shouldered an overwhelming burden and carried its huge weight through at least two years of service. Do not be quick to criticize. Rather, lend a hand to support the president and the other elected officers of the AFA. Our voice has been heard in the land and I expect it to become increasingly more important as crucial events close in around us. With a good president and good, unified support the AFA will continue to be the voice of aviculture and bird conservation.

Stony silence is my traditional reaction to the retirement of an AFA president—not out of spite or ill will but due to a preoccupation with the future. In the case of Lee Phillips I want to break tradition and pay her homage.

From my standpoint as editor I can state with full conviction that Lee Phillips has been very good to work with. True, she has, at times, delivered righteous blows of chastisement to the chops of your humble servant but only when they were called for and with no malice or vindictiveness. Her calm, methodical iron fist was clothed with class and dignity. She took her office with an open mind and was the president who best heard and understood the needs of the Publications Committee which is my only concern. Although it took almost two years, I feel that Phillips has provided the necessary impetus that will vastly im-

prove the Watchbird's production schedule as well as its contents. The fruits of Phillips' efforts will be enjoyed by the next AFA president. Hats off to Lee Phillips. We'll miss her around here.



The last few months have been times of turmoil. Various legislative pressures have posed hard questions for aviculturists and at present each aviculturist has some soul-searching to do. Some of you, without having thought deeply on the matter, have erroneously concluded that there is conflict between aviculture and conservation. Consider the following letter which demonstrates the point perfectly:

Dear Editor:

This letter comments on the editorial by Mattice and Dingle in the February 1985 issue of Watchbird. The editorial expressed concern about the effects on aviculture of legislation banning the sale of wild caught birds. As hobbyist breeders, we also share this concern. However, we disagree with some of the arguments as well as the overall tone of the editorial.

Mr. Mattice and Mr. Dingle attempt to guess the motives of Mr. Seymour and others involved in pushing through the New York legislation. This attempt contributes nothing to the arguments against the legislation, is sarcastic in tone, and is demeaning to the dignity of Watchbird.

The authors advocate "free enterprise and the possibility of making a profit" as a defense against conservation legislation. One doesn't have to look far for examples of clashes of interest between free enterprise and the conservation of wildlife. When these interests collide, our society repeatedly and with increasing consistency regulates free enterprise to protect rare species. This is a trend which seems to be gaining in strength throughout the industrialized world. We support this trend and would wish to expand it to include a recognition that, not only rare species deserve to be protected, but all species should be cherished and conserved. This is not an attack on free enterprise but is a pragmatic recognition that unregulated enterprise has a history of destroying that which is irreplaceable.

The argument that some imported birds are "pest" species in their native countries and, therefore, do not require the help of protective legislation is a poor one. Pest status is often the prior step to endangered species status. The fate of the Carolina Parakeet should remind us that even "pest" species can be rapidly exterminated by a combination of slaughter and habitat destruction. That Mr. Mattice and Mr. Dingle should mention that the Monk parakeet has become a pest in New York is ironic. What better example could be cited by the enemies of aviculture for the dangers of importing exotic birds.

The most naive argument in the editorial, however, is that the future of wildlife conservation lies in getting the poorer countries of the world to manage their wildlife to produce sustained yields for export. The authors state "no one wants to kill the goose which lays the golden eggs," but, in fact, mankind is everywhere killing off geese that lay golden eggs. Of course, there are a handful of small scale demonstration projects in Third World countries which manage wildlife, and efforts like these are to be applauded. However, conservation is a low priority in countries where hunger and lack of shelter are primary concerns, and where official corruption obstructs even the best efforts at conservation. The potential profits from exporting wildlife will rarely compensate for the high costs of effective wildlife management. The contention that natives only catch the most common birds for export is not supported by facts. Some species imported into this country, Scarlet macaws for example, are suffering a restriction in their range in part because of capture for export. The argument fails to consider the higher returns natives can receive from the capture of rarer species. Many rare species are worth the considerable effort to capture because they bring very high prices.

Our main objection to the editorial by Mr. Mattice and Mr. Dingle is that they make weak arguments for aviculture, given the threat of further overly restrictive legislation. We believe that private aviculture can have an important role in the conservation of birds, but its role will be enhanced by self regulation by aviculturists and by enlightened legislation. Private aviculturists must face their responsibility by assuring that rare imported birds are given the best possible condi-

tions for breeding in sufficient numbers to eventually make importation unnecessary. We disapprove of the heavy handed and poorly conceived New York legislation. However, we would prefer that, instead of simply rejecting all attempts at regulation, the A.F.A. would take the lead in proposing reasonable legislation which will help protect wild species while allowing for the keeping of many species by private aviculturists. We would like to see A.F.A. take positive action to protect wild birds, instead of always taking a reactive approach to legislation. We believe that aviculturists and conservationists can join hands on many common interests. To do otherwise is to strengthen the hand of the most extreme regulators.

Sincerely,
Ken Graham and Connie Stone
Phoenix, Arizona

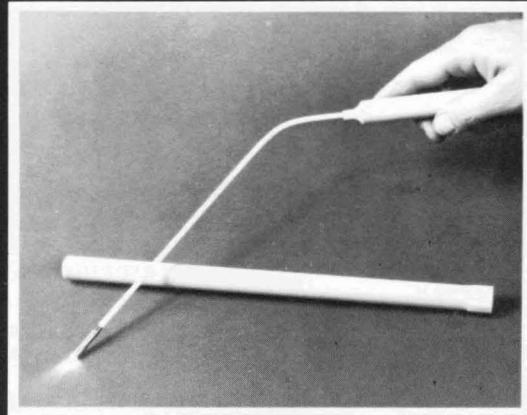


Now it is obvious that Graham and Stone are intelligent, sincere, caring aviculturists. And they make some excellent points but there is, nevertheless, some obvious confusion. Their first and most damaging error, upon which their whole thesis swings, is that the New York wild bird ban is an act of conservation. It simply is not. Let us consider things more deeply.

Mattice and Dingle nowhere pitted free enterprise against conservation. Indeed, quite the contrary. We suggested that free enterprise and the profit motive is the very best friend of conservation. What happens when a bird is banned by legislation? Two things, as I see it. First, the dollar value of the bird goes sky high and those in captivity are given the very best no-expense-spared care because when they produce babies the babies bring big bucks. Professor Dominique Homberger once pointed to the Australian parrots as a prime example of this economic law. When Australia banned fauna export the Australian parrots became super valuable overnight and profit seekers concentrated on them to the point that now after 40 or so years these very parrots are so plentiful in captivity as to be rather cheap. A key factor, however, is that Australian birds have always been very difficult to smuggle out of that well civilized, modern island.

Continued on page 18

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The second thing that happens also binges on the huge overnight price hike of banned birds. The profit-motivated smugglers have a field day. Common birds that have been worth ten dollars through legal commercial channels suddenly become worth hundreds of dollars on the black market.

What do you think the trappers and smugglers will do? How do you think the wild (now very expensive) birds will fare?

At present, the majority of bird traffic originates in Latin America and to a lesser extent in Indonesia. Both areas are definitely Third World in nature and are prime targets for illegal exploiters.

Thus, when the legal flow of birds is cut off and the price goes up we have two effects. The birds already in captivity are taken better care of and those birds that are smuggleable are heavily exploited. Given the extent of smuggling going on at today's low prices, I have no doubt what will happen at tomorrow's high prices.

These economic factors make the New York bird ban a joke rather than a tool of conservation. And if one studies the existing conservational legislation it becomes evident that almost all of the world's threatened or endangered birds are already banned in commercial traffic. The New York law is banning rare birds that are already banned and is also banning and increasing the black market prices on plentiful birds that don't need it.

My personal objection to blanket banning of birds is that there are many common, plentiful species of birds that are not established in modern aviculture. I should like to see more of these common and abundant birds breeding in our aviaries and developing their own self-sustaining populations as so many Australian people have done.

Grabam and Stone brought up the plight of the Carolina parakeet (and I'll add the passenger pigeon) and suggest that even plentiful birds can be exterminated. Quite so. But when American pioneers were fighting for survival as many Third World peoples are doing today, there was no time or money for aviculture. Now, on the other hand, in 1985 America there are billions of dollars spent on aviculture. Now is the very time to get into our aviaries as many species and specimens of the world's wild birds as we can without jeopardizing the wild populations. If there were wild Carolina parakeets existing today in, say, Mexico, have you any doubts about our being able to keep and breed them in American aviculture?

A few years ago there was a great controversy regarding the California condor. A few people thought it would

be wise to establish a captive breeding program. A great hue and cry arose and the radical fringe drowned out the quiet voice of reason. Nothing was done. A few years later it became obvious that the condors were doomed and a great effort was mounted in favor of captive breeding. You all know the results. Dr. Art Risser, the San Diego Zoo and the Wild Animal Park are working miracles with a handful of baby condors. But the bird is doomed. Last year there were five wild breeding pairs. The Ornithological Newsletter number 46 reports that this year there seems to be only two pairs of breeding condors in the wild and it has been suggested that the whole population be taken into captivity for captive breeding.

I agree with Grabam and Stone that private aviculture can have an important role in the conservation of birds. I also agree that aviculture can be enhanced by self-regulation and enlightened legislation. The AFA endorsed unanimously the principles espoused by the National Cage and Aviary Bird Improvement Plan. And the AFA has been an ardent supporter of the conservation laws on the books. The AFA has been an implacable foe to those who violate the laws regarding conservation and humane care of birds.

But on the other hand, I, for one, cannot consider the ridiculous New York ban enlightened legislation. And I'm not willing to throw up my hands and say that aviculture is doing everything possible for every species of bird possible and let it go at that. There are many abundant species that are not established in aviculture that should be. There are many species, plentiful at present, that in a few years will have no habitat. I should like to offer them sanctuary now while there are enough numbers to make a viable population. Let not the dark lesson of the condors be lost.

And now, finally, we come full circle. In the beginning I suggested there is some confusion in the minds of many aviculturists regarding aviculture's relationship to conservation. In the final paragraph of Grabam and Stone's letter they lay arguments for aviculture. Perhaps we share some of the rampant confusion. I should like Grabam and Stone to provide some strong arguments for aviculture and we shall all profit.

Ed. ●

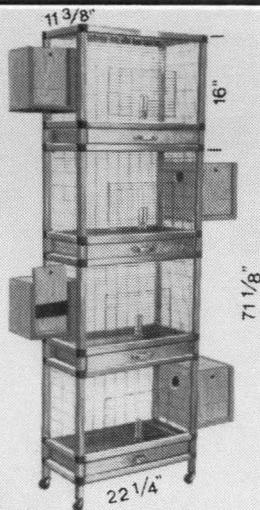
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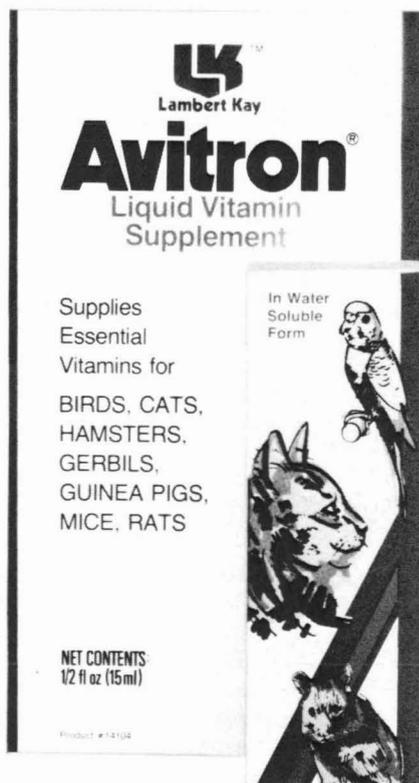
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