

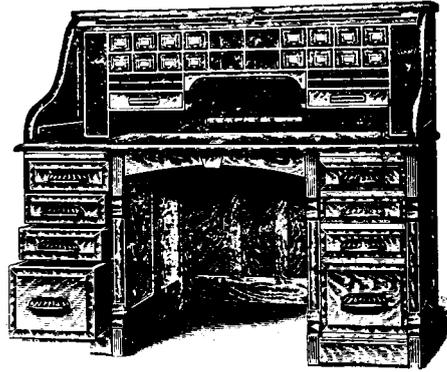
## NOTICE

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



Dear Editor,

It was with great interest that I read the recent exchange of opinions between you and Ken Graham and Connie Stone of Phoenix, Arizona (A.F.A. Watchbird, XII, 4, 1985). The ideas expressed in this exchange prompted me to contribute some personal thoughts that will, as I hope, help in clarifying some problems.

I saw that you quoted me in support of free enterprise being "the best friend of conservation." I would like to somewhat qualify this statement. It is correct to say that one of the reasons for Australian parrots being most plentiful in aviaries today is free enterprise. When Australia banned all exportation of any of its wildlife, the few parrots living in aviaries outside Australia became extremely valuable, and breeding programs of Australian parrots became profitable, which contributed to a considerable increase of Australian parrots bred in captivity. Nevertheless, the first step in this for the Australian parrots favorable development was Australia's passing of a law that prohibits wildlife export and that impresses extremely harsh punishments on smugglers and on those who circumvent the law in any way. Only because of the rigorous enforcement of the Australian law could the free enterprise system of our economy bring about a development that is consistent with modern conservationist aims.

When discussing the relationship between free enterprise and conservation, it is important to remember the

basic tenets of trade economics under the free enterprise system. On the one side, there is the supply of goods (e.g., wild parrots caught in and exported from Third World countries); on the other side, there is the demand for these goods (e.g., aviculturists and pet lovers wanting to buy parrots). Changes in the supply side or demand side of the economy will affect the volume and value of trading. If the supply is reduced (e.g., by banning exportation of parrots from Third World countries), but the demand for the goods remains the same, the price of the goods will rise. If the supply of the goods increases (e.g., by not regulating exportation of parrots) and the demand for the goods remains the same, the price of the goods will remain the same or even fall. Now let's look what happens when the demand side of trading is changed. If the supply of the goods remains the same, but the demand for these goods increases, the price of the goods will increase. This is what happened to the parrot trade during the last years. If, however, the supply of the goods remains the same, but the demand for these goods decreases, the price of these goods will also decrease. If the demand for these goods decreases to such a degree as to completely stop, the trade with these goods will collapse. For example, consider the hypothetical case that the U.S. would want to export poison ivy; we certainly have enough of it; and why not make some money out of it? But we cannot do this, because there is, under-

standably, absolutely no demand for poison ivy anywhere in the world!

After this simplified exposé of trade mechanisms under the free enterprise system, let me return to the problem of parrot trade. Nobody can seriously dispute the fact that the catching and exportation of wild parrots depletes the wild populations. This fact can be illustrated by simple mathematics: If one takes away a certain number of parrots from a wild population, the remaining population consists of fewer individuals. That wild parrot populations are also diminished and threatened because of habitat loss, does not negate this fact, it only *compounds* it. Since both habitat loss and catching of wild birds for the pet trade affects the population size of parrots in the wild, but because we cannot realistically try to directly prevent habitat loss in foreign countries, it makes sense, from the conservationists' point of view, to at least regulate and eventually reduce the volume of trade with wild parrots. Until recently, legislation tried to reach this goal by imposing restrictions on the exportation of wild birds, in other words by reducing the supply side of the parrot trade. Unfortunately, we know too well that this approach has not been very successful. However, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, trading in goods can also be reduced by curbing the demand for these goods. This is exactly what the controversial New York law banning the selling of wild birds tries to achieve. For anybody who clearly understands the mechanisms of a free enterprise economy and the need for protecting the ever shrinking natural resources of our world, this New York law is neither a "joke" nor "ridiculous." Since we have not been able to reduce the volume of trading with parrots caught from the wild by regulating the supply side of the trade, we must now try to affect it by regulating the demand side of the trade. By making it illegal to sell parrots caught from the wild in New York, the demand for wild parrots will drop (assuming that aviculturists and pet lovers are law-abiding citizens).

Personally, I would also prefer not to have the need for any laws, such as the controversial one in New York, implemented. But I doubt that this is a viable solution today, unless aviculturists are ready to acknowledge that they themselves bear a great responsibility for the protection and conservation of parrots. The words here are self-regulation and integrity. Self-regulation would mean that aviculturists would limit them-

selves to a reasonable number of breeding pairs of a few selected parrot species, instead of trying to assemble an ever larger collection of ever rarer and more expensive species. Integrity means that we cannot continue to reject legislations by claiming that it would encourage smuggling of birds and at the same time not recognize that any smuggler would be immediately out of business if aviculturists simply refused to buy smuggled birds. As aviculturists we stand now at a cross-road where we must make a choice: Either self-regulation and integrity or an escalating "arms race" with legislations. For me, the choice seems clear.

I hope you will be able to publish my letter.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Dominique G. Homberger  
Dept. of Zoology & Physiology  
Louisiana State University  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

*My Dear Dr. Homberger,*

*Your opinions are always well thought out and clearly expressed. I'm sure our readers enjoy and respect your communications as much as I do. A subject as complex as commercial traffic in animals will always be controversial with high emotions on all sides. But compromise comes only through communication so all such efforts on these pages have some value.*

*I agree with your supply and demand formula that seems to regulate trade in most commodities, parrots included. Your conclusion that the supply side of the bird trade cannot be controlled seems well founded. Your conclusions regarding the demand side of the bird trade, however, raise questions in my mind.*

*Do you honestly believe that New York's ban on selling wild caught birds will really, truly lessen the demand for exotic birds in New York? Did the prohibition of liquor lessen the demand? Does the ban on marijuana lessen the demand? Do the laws banning the sale of cocaine lessen the demand for that commodity? Does the 55 m.p.h. law keep you from driving 65? No, my dear doctor, I'm afraid not. Human nature being what it is, no ordinary law will curb a natural demand. The bird collectors in New York will continue, nay, probably increase, their demand for exotic birds and they'll find ways to buy them. As a long-time enforcer of rules and regulations, I have absolutely no hope that aviculturists or other human beings are*

*law-abiding citizens. I hope that prejudice is peculiar to me.*

*Another point in your letter that I don't accept out of hand is that catching and exporting wild parrots depletes the wild population. In a technical sense you are correct—if there are 100 birds in a wild population and ten are removed then a depletion has occurred. But what if those ten were all males and of the 90 left only 30 were female? That means ten excess males are no longer competing with the 60 possible breeder pairs for food. Had the ten remained in the population they would have contributed nothing to its growth or future.*

*The above example is hypothetical but not impossible. A scientist once told me that it may be possible that a radical imbalance in the sex ratio of certain wild populations may be a natural mechanism to control the size of the population. And most of us are familiar with certain species in captivity that always seem to be short on females. What we need are more field studies so we know the dynamics of various wild populations and can make intelligent decisions regarding their management. It would be totally immoral, however, to waste and devastate the wild birds while we're waiting for field studies. Your words "self-regulation" and "integrity" are becoming ever more important. We should all rejoice if someone—anyone—would come up with powerful enough incentives to bring out the self-regulation and integrity that lies ever so deep under the surface of the average human being.*

Ed.



Dear Sheldon,

I breed Lady Gouldian finches and own three other birds in the large exotic class and I'm still of mixed feelings about the "N.Y. WILD bird ban."

It seems to me that, so far, in all my reading on the subject, the bird ban wins my support. And that tears me apart because without having the import of wild birds all of my birds here would simply not exist. And perhaps that is the aim of certain groups of individuals.

I'm beginning to believe that all of us who love, and collect, and breed, and import, and sell birds, are to blame for the existence of this "bird ban" and if it spreads it is due to our neglect.

My reason for leaning towards support of the N.Y. law goes a lot deeper than some N.Y. legislator's pet bird dying. Page 44 of the Apr/May Watchbird lists over 100 thousand dead birds, all imported.

In mercy to these birds and the hundreds of thousands that will die in misery during the next few years I would sacrifice my desire to own birds and would give them up if it would relieve that situation. Birds will always die, farmers will shoot them and poison them to protect crops, natives will use feathers. And we will do what we can to limit this. But offering a choice of gunshot, poison, arrow or slow death in a shipping cage, personally I'd choose one of the first three. Was it our Patrick Henry who said "Give me liberty or give me death"? If I were a bird in the wild born free, I'd say the same. We are a great, free country and I see no reason why we cannot breed all of our own birds right here.

Weighing all of this in my mind it seems that the avian group most to be harmed by a wild bird ban would be the avian importer. And perhaps the pocket book of the new bird owner. There is nothing I would rather see eliminated than the "Cheap Bird." They suffer and die just like the expensive ones. In bigger numbers.

For me, what all this "N.Y. bird ban" means is that someone with power is sympathetic to the death and misery we aviculturists tolerate. I believe we should not tolerate the death and misery either. We should be ashamed to call ourselves bird lovers. Except for Kevin Schneider who is actually trying to help the right way.

The aviculturists' countermeasure to the N.Y. ban on wild birds should be to encourage domestic breeding and own up to the awful situation importers make us live with. For me it's time to take sides and I side with the birds, that's for sure.

Sincerely,  
Ronald Brodell  
Farmingdale, New York

*Dear Mr. Brodell,*

*Most of us share your tender feelings toward birds and other animals. Those who feel the New York law will actually benefit birds should support the law wholeheartedly. Those of us who doubt it will watch and see. If, over the years, the law proves demonstrably good for birds I'm sure the true bird lovers will convert and support the legislation also. Time will tell.*

Ed. ●