

MEETING OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR BIRDS AND MAMMALS

by Joseph G. Griffith

The Department of the Interior called for meetings of ad hoc committees for all of the major classes of animals, as a result of the comments received from publication of the Injurious Species Proposal of December 20, 1973.

The meeting for birds was called for Sept. 18, and for mammals on the following day, the 19th.

To begin with, there was a certain amount of reluctance to attend the meetings because we had been informed that discussion would be limited to six points. Three of these would have shot us down from the beginning. On the other hand, we had asked for the meetings, and could easily have placed ourselves in a position where we were unwilling to negotiate.

The organizations that were involved were administrative representatives of the Department of the Interior, members of the Fish and Wildlife Service (also under the USDI), a representative of the National Audubon Society, a member of the Smithsonian Institute, an ornithologist from the University of Miami, who was representing the American Ornithologists Union, and members of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council.

As would be expected, there was a certain amount of backing and filling early in the discussions, and the PIJAC members were opposed to including Hawaii and Puerto Rico in the talks, since they are specialized habitats and have rather stringent laws governing the importation of any animals.

Much of the discussion was centered around the more commonly imported birds, their ability to adapt to new environments, possible damage to agriculture, and possible competition with native species. Some were easily disposed of as candidates, for what I prefer to call zoological entry or conversely, for unlimited entry. There were some snags, and I think that we were pretty well agreed that it would be prudent to make further studies before coming to a final decision.

In the latter case, evidence will be presented by any or all members of the committee, and evidence is the operative word, whether for or against.

PIJAC was concerned about the proposed permit system. I was surprised to find general agreement that it is too cumbersome, and thus requires considerable revision. On the other hand, permits were to be issued for specialized purposes and were not flexible enough to include the needs and desires of interested individuals.

All of the members of the PIJAC group have, what I suppose are, selfish interests, i.e., each of us is interested in working with one or more species of animal. Extending our own interests to those who are of similar mind throughout the country, we became con-

cerned for the lack of provision for those who cannot qualify as zoos, scientific groups, or educational institutions, but who have a genuine interest in animals.

There was one area in which the entire committee was agreed, without discussion of any kind. We are opposed to the introduction of ANY species of animal at ANY time for ANY reason!

By the end of the day, I was having mixed feelings. I was delighted with the trend of the progress that we were making, but I was concerned that while we were working with birds for zoos and the like, and had made some progress for some birds to have unlimited entry, we had done nothing about the majority of birds that were likely to fall into a kind of "grey" area.

The others representing PIJAC were of like mind and during the evening we decided to push somewhat for this grey area and for four criteria:

1. Does it have a high reproductive rate and do the young have a high survival rate?
2. Is it venomous or noxious?
3. Is it proven injurious in its native environment?
4. Has it been introduced in another area, and what have been the effects?

The mammal committee that met the following morning had people for the USDI, Fish and Wildlife, the Smithsonian and PIJAC.

The discussion quickly got down to permits. What was decided was to classify all animals into one of three groups.

1. Unlimited entry.
2. Entry in limited numbers under a general permit;
3. Entry for zoological, scientific or educational purposes under a special permit.

The result here is that the vast majority of animals of any class would be under some kind of control and should the need arise to reclassify a given species or genus, their location would be known.

Before I get into the way that the permits are likely to be administered, I think it fair to warn the reader that this is still only an idea. It is subject to the legal authority of the USDI, and will need much discussion. Since the final result might be tighter or looser than our current thoughts, I will stay with birds for now.

Birds in class one would be permitted unlimited entry (subject to USDI approved quarantine).

Class three birds would be imported for what I will refer to as zoological purposes. Permits for such birds will be similar to class two permits, but they will cover birds that would otherwise be prohibited.

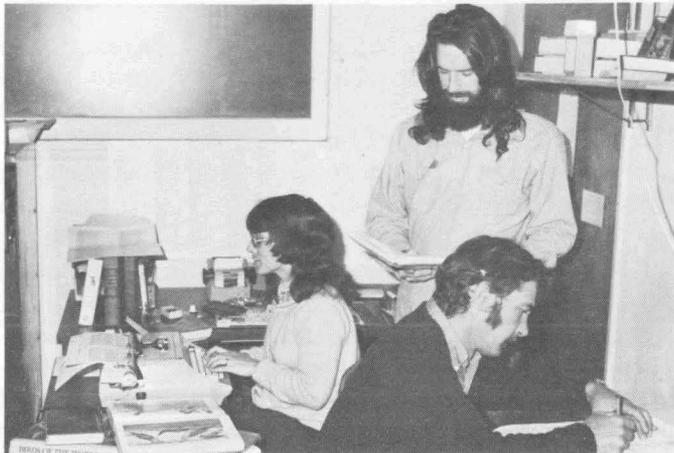
As I now see it, class two permits would be issued by a regional office. Fees would be nominal and permits would be good for one year. Requirements for

permits would be loose, but they would include conditions such as: holders of class two permits would be prohibited from selling such birds to individuals or organizations that do not hold either class two or three permits. The name and address and permit number of the buyer would be recorded at the time of sale. Permits would cover the birds and the eggs or progeny thereof. A yearly report of all sales, gifts, or transfers will have to be filed with the U.S.D.I.. ANYONE WHO BREAKS THE TERMS OF THE PERMIT WOULD BE SUBJECT TO A MINIMUM OF A \$1,000.00 FINE. This would include unauthorized release or sale of the birds.

This last point was unhesitatingly and unanimously agreed to by all of the members of the committee. The permits will be as easy as possible to obtain, but failure to comply ought to cost the miscreant dearly.

It is already a federal offense to release into the wild any exotic species of animal without the proper authorization. However, the classification of any animal is subject to change; albeit with due consideration and presentation of evidence. BE WARNED, I firmly believe that all the members of the committee will immediately reclassify any bird that someone releases in the mistaken belief that it would look cute flying around the yard.

For example; the Gouldian Finch is in class one (unlimited entry). Should someone attempt to establish Gouldians in this country, I believe that the committee would unanimously vote to move it to class three, WITHOUT ANY OTHER CONSIDERATION.



Joe Griffith, Kathy and Michael Cunningham hard at work producing the Annotated List of Birds of the World which they presented to the U.S.D.I. and private parties in hopes of exempting many species from the injurious category.

We have gone through the entire list of the birds of the world and made some provisional classifications. Many of the birds have been easy to classify, with little argument. Some whole families have been set aside for further investigation. Still others have been given temporary classifications, with the intention of reviewing them on a generic or species level. There is an enormous amount of work to be done, and I have every reason to believe that it will be done well.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the members of both the bird and mammal committees. I am overjoyed that we have been able to start as well as we have, and it is my fervent hope that we will be able to continue to the end in the same vein.

On the 1st of October, I received a call from Dr. Bern Levine, in Florida, chairman of Mammals and Birds Committee for PIJAC¹. Dr. Levine had been called by Mr. Lankford of the USDI, and had been told that the Legal Department claims that the Lacey Act would not allow us to proceed in the manner described above. The USDI attorneys claim that the Act does not allow us to list one kind of animal as more injurious than another. The Lacey Act does make this provision, since it states that certain animals are injurious and others are not. Also, the proposal claims that some are low risk and others are high risk. This is clearly claiming that some are more injurious than others. We were merely trying to divide animals into 3, rather than 2 categories, for a greater measure of control and flexibility. USDI will publish it's own high and low risk lists, and in all probability, they will give us most of the commonly imported birds in an attempt to mollify us. This is frankly not good enough, and PIJAC¹, AAZPA², and AAZV³, each intends to file separate injunctions, once the proposal becomes law.

I can not express the sorrow this turn of events gives me. I was filled with a great sense of purpose when I left the meeting and I am saddened to think that we may have to resort to the courts.

1. PIJAC - Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council.
2. AAZPA - American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria.
3. AAZV - American Association of Zoological Veterinarians.



THE WATCHBIRD LAUNCHING PARTY

Folding, collating: Kathy Cunningham, Jean Hessler, Chuck Noble, and Don Denning (represented by hand only).

Charlotte Bartke fell heir to Zip Code sorting.



Treasurer, Frank Kozeluh, and Staff Artist, Jean Hessler, go over expenses.



Hand addressing (l to r) Bob Whyte, Charlotte Bartke, Gary Aalfs, and Christie Dingle.