

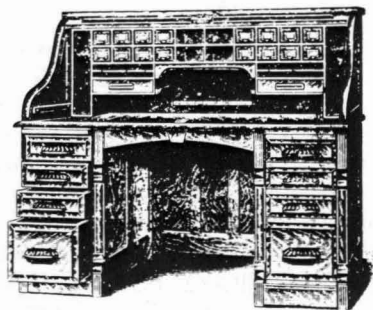
NOTICE

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

Sheldon Dingle
P.O. Box 340
Norco, CA 91760

From The Editor's Desk

by Sheldon Dingle



Dear Editor:

I have watched and read the letters and articles which you have published during the last few months regarding the New York Bird Ban as it is called. I am pleased to see the interchange of ideas and gratified to hear from people like Ken Graham and Connie Stone of Phoenix, Arizona (*AFA Watchbird* XII, 4, 1985) as well as Dr. Dominique G. Homburger and Ronald Brodell (*AFA Watchbird* XII, 6, 1985).

Let me begin by explaining how I became embroiled in the New York law. In August, 1984 when the law suddenly appeared and was passed by the State Legislature, the New York Zoological Society (for whom I work as Curator of Birds) went on record in opposition to the law and asked the Governor to veto it since we did not feel it had been carefully reviewed or considered or was enforceable as it stood at that time. The law was signed and turned over to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for the development of regulations to implement the law.

We at the New York Zoological Society asked if we and other interested and affected parties could have input into regulations as they were being drawn up. The DEC set up a special advisory committee which met monthly to help advise on the regulations. I attended all of the meetings between November, 1984 and June, 1985. I firmly believe that great progress was made during that time and that, although not perfect in every detail, the regulations implementing the new law are not only fair but hold the potential for helping protect the world's birdlife. I believe that the regulations recognize zoos and aviculturists within reason (based on the original intent of the bill to ban all importation of birds) even try to encourage the aviculturist. The New York regulations allow aviculturists to continue to import breeding stock and sell and trade this breeding stock with each other. The aviculturist should get additional encouragement, as he will not have to compete with the "cheap imports" when he goes to sell the birds he has worked hard to rear.

Here is where I believe Dr. Homburger's example of the Australian parrots is very appropriate. What happened when Australia put a ban on exports? First, the price rose dramatically, but people who held these birds carefully and diligently bred and managed these species. As a result the price has slowly dropped until now many Australian parrots that are rare or endangered in the wild are readily available at a relatively low price. Now the captive supply and demand determines the price without having a significant impact on any wild population.

I believe this same principle will apply where a ban on wild imports for sale as pets is imposed. Actually I hope it does encourage the large scale breeding which I know is possible and is even beginning to occur with a few species in a few places. We still need a lot more breeding facilities for many other groups of birds.

Dr. Homburger also presents a very strong case for the argument that the New York ban will reduce demand. How could a ban do anything other than reduce demand? Even if there is only one honest law-abiding citizen who decides against buying a bird, it has reduced demand. I believe demand will be reduced but supply will be short so prices will rise, further lowering demand for the now more expensive birds. This will continue until a few wise breeders get their acts together and start breeding the now more valuable birds. Then, like the Australian parrots, prices will go down as the supply of captive bred birds increases. There will be some time of fluctuation back and forth, but eventually a balance should develop between captive bred birds and the demand for them, as has occurred with many of the Australian parrots.

Importers have argued that the New York law would encourage smuggling. While the initial price increase might encourage some smuggling I believe that this will not be significant as there are currently significant differences in retail prices depending on which section of the country you live in. More importantly, for the first time state

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authorities will have some jurisdiction over smuggled birds. Under the new law any birds without bands or documents to prove their captive bred status, including smuggled birds, can be seized by the state. If enforced, this would allow the state to actually assist in stopping bird smuggling.

Dr. Homberger also correctly points out that without any question habitat destruction is the major cause of decline in most species. However, the capture for the pet trade is yet another drain on any population. Regardless of how many are shot by farmers or poisoned or collected for feathers the fact remains that collection for pets is another drain on the population. In many cases the techniques used and lack of concern for the individual birds is utterly appalling.

I believe the bottom line for anyone who really cares about the world's birds hits home when one looks at the official USDI and USDA importation figures for the United States. In 1984 over 900,000 birds were imported to the U.S. Over 44,000 were dead on arrival, over 112,000 died in quarantine and over 14,000 were refused entry to the U.S. A total of 19% (or over 171,000) didn't make it. Unfortunately that isn't even the majority of the losses of birds, as most losses occur in capture and holding in the country of origin. Professional collectors and scientists estimate that, depending on the species involved, somewhere between one and fifty birds die in the process for each bird that reaches the pet store. The total birds removed from the wild is staggering when one considers that in just five years, 1980-1984, the U.S. alone imported nearly four million birds, of which three quarters of a million died or were refused entry. This obviously means that the world's population of birds in the wild was reduced in just five years by over eight million birds minimally to supply the U.S. pet trade. How can anyone say that has no impact on wild populations?

Another question is also of grave concern. How many of last year's 900,000 imports were ever sold? How many are alive today? What about the four million imports in the last five years? I shudder to think of how many birds died in transit, in pet stores and in the hands of inappropriate people.

With these awful figures in mind I realize that someone has to speak up for the birds and I commend Ronald Brodell for doing just that in his letter to the A.F.A. Watchbird in the December-January issue when he said "I side with

the birds."

I firmly believe and urge that aviculturists get on with their work at hand, namely developing the techniques and expertise to breed birds, working together on breeding and conservation programs and, yes, working with conservation organizations to develop ways to help protect the world's birds and their habitats. This can be done in ways that encourage aviculture. But as many are saying now and as I urged all of you at your Washington, D.C. convention in 1982, it is time to get our acts together and fight for the world's birds. We as aviculturists must not let the smuggler or unscrupulous dealer drag us all down, because unless we are careful and act soon that is exactly where we are headed. If we don't act now we are likely to find a rash of more and more restrictive laws and regulations.

I, along with Ronald Brodell, want to "side with the birds."

Sincerely,
Donald Bruning, Ph.D., Curator
Department of Ornithology
New York Zoological Society

Dear Sheldon,

I am writing in response to Dr. Donald Bruning's "letter to the editor," a copy of which he was kind enough to send to me in advance of its publication.

Along with Dr. Bruning and many others, I, too, have been a follower of the evolutionary events in the development of the New York wild bird ban. Unlike Dr. Bruning, however, I have a far less sanguine view of the future that law envisions.

At the outset, let me reassure you that I am personally very concerned for the welfare of wildlife both in the wild and in captivity and feel "I side with the birds." Where I differ with Dr. Bruning is that I believe there is an acceptable and justifiable level of importation of wild caught birds.

Let me explain why.

First, Dr. Bruning rightly notes that habitat destruction is the overwhelming cause of the decline of tropical bird populations. When part of a forest is cleared, however, the carrying capacity of that remaining is stretched beyond its limits by the arrival of recently displaced birds. Ultimately, many of these displaced birds will perish as they cannot dislodge birds from existing territories. I believe these birds, whose homes have been destroyed, should not have to die and could be recovered for captive propagation, and yes, for the pet trade.

In an undisturbed environment,

animal populations will increase to an optimum size consistent with the carrying capacity of the habitat, then will cease to increase. Remove individuals from that habitat and it will shortly return to that optimum level, which would thus allow for a reasonable harvest. After all, our own national game laws operate on that theory in establishing hunting quotas.

The real issue addressed by Dr. Bruning is the alarm we all should feel for the rapidly declining tropical forests and ways we can deter this catastrophe. Bird ban laws contribute very little to the grand resolution of the problem of conservation of wildlife and are impotent responses to the frustration we all feel at having to apparently stand by helplessly, while our international neighbors heedlessly destroy our global heritage.

The environmental community needs to address preservation of habitat and devise ways in which developing countries may be encouraged to preserve their forests as sources of renewable resources, whose wise use will ensure them an enduring productivity. People do not destroy that which will benefit them, if educated properly. There are many ways to approach the problem, one of which is the Nature Conservancy's program of land acquisition. There has been a very successful program in the U.S. and one is currently enjoying success in Costa Rica.

I would now like to point out some problems I see in Dr. Bruning's arguments in favor of the wild bird ban.

First, Dr. Bruning claims the ban will reduce the demand for birds, and I assume he also means the pressure on wild populations. The demand for birds, wild or otherwise, will not be reduced. Only the source of supply will be altered. The reduced supply will contribute to dramatically inflated prices and the breeder fortunate enough to have the breeding stock will reap great profits. These great profits will provide new incentives to both the bird smuggler and the bird thief. Dr. Bruning states that, "While the initial price increase might encourage some smuggling I believe that this will not be significant. . . ." However, in the Summer 1985 issue of the *Living Bird Quarterly* published by the Laboratory of Ornithology of Cornell University, Dr. Bruning writes in his article, "Parrots for Sale," "As long as the market remains lucrative, exporters will find loopholes in the laws or ways to smuggle birds out of the country." Certainly when prices increase, the market will be more

lucrative. Dr. Bruning further states that, "A key to the protection of exotic birds is curbing the demand for them. The huge profits ensure that trade will continue until the American people insist that it be stopped" and he ends the article with the statement that pet owners could save the lives of birds if they restricted their purchase to "captive bred cockatiels, lovebirds and parakeets, instead of exotic birds."

The death and suffering of birds during capture, transport, and quarantine is a facet of the bird trade we all deplore and often it is unnecessary. We should work to reduce this loss and we can accomplish that goal without banning wild caught birds (Domestically reared birds die, too!).

The magnitude of the losses described by Dr. Bruning appears grossly exaggerated. In his letter, for example, he states that "between one and fifty birds dies in the process for each bird that reaches the pet store." In his article in the *Living Bird Quarterly* he claims "between one and one hundred dies? Which is it? The fact is that there are no statistics on the subject, and Dr. Bruning's estimates are wild speculation. If fifty birds died for each one surviving quarantine, a total of 45 million birds were lost just supplying the U.S. market. If you accept the figure of 100 birds dead per live bird in the pet shop, that is 90 million. Hard to swallow.

The only data available on losses occurring during the capture phase has been published in the book, *The Bird Business*, by Greta Nilsson. In chapter two, authored by Tim Inskip and based upon a study he conducted in India, less than 2.5% of the birds captured died prior to export.

The losses occurring during transport and quarantine can and must be reduced. This can be accomplished by enforcing existing humane standards of care, by enacting new standards based upon current understanding, and by introducing penalties for violations.

I believe that wildlife trade needs enforced regulation, not elimination. Regulations and laws are never ending. The argument for new laws has always been and continues to be that the old laws don't work, yet proponents pay little attention to enforcement.

We need to find more effective methods of conservation of our natural heritage that will allow everyone to enjoy them in whatever capacity.

Sincerely yours,
Jerry Jennings, President
American Federation of Aviculture



Dear Editor,

I am renewing my membership in the A.F.A. and at the same time want to pose a question.

With all the problems we're having with psittacosis, why isn't quarantine for wild caught birds extended to 45 days? Why aren't blood tests taken prior to birds being released?

The average Joe on the street who buys a wild caught parrot is really in trouble as he probably doesn't know why Polly died or the dealer would only guarantee the bird to the car.

If these additional steps were taken the price of the birds would increase but perhaps it would save a lot of heart-break.

Dolly Adams

The above question was diverted to Dr. Susan S. Clubb, a veterinarian who works closely with quarantine stations and imported birds. Dr. Clubb's answer is more knowledgeable and authoritative than any I could devise myself. Dr. Clubb's answer follows.
Ed.

Dear Dolly,

Psittacosis is a very complex disease and, unfortunately, we don't have an easy answer to control this disease. The quarantine system was not set up for control of psittacosis but rather for the detection of Newcastle disease in imported birds. The thirty day time period is the amount of time needed to test the birds for Newcastle disease. While birds are required to be treated for psittacosis during this time, this regulation is not enforced. Many importers give additional tetracycline before and after quarantine, not only to provide the consumer with a clean bird but also to prevent problems in their own stock. You must realize, however, that simply feeding a bird tetracycline for 30 or 45 or 60 days will not eliminate the psittacosis problem. There are many reasons for treatment failure with psittacosis, but suffice it to say that as we treat birds today it is very difficult to be assured that that bird is free of psittacosis. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the bird does not become immune to the disease following infection and recovery. It can become reinfected at any time. Tetracyclines do not kill the chlamydial (psittacosis) organism but merely inhibit its growth and reproduction so the bird has to eliminate the organism itself. This is

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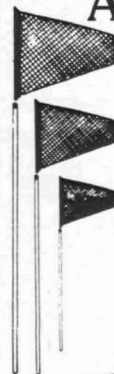
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difficult with an organism that the bird does not mount a strong immune response against. For this same reason, vaccines are of little use when dealing with chlamydia. To compound the problem, we still don't have a simple, highly reliable test for the diagnosis of psittacosis. As more research is done perhaps we will be able to overcome some of these problems, until then we must all be aware of the problem. With early detection the disease can be treated and while elimination is difficult, it can be kept to low levels.

Sincerely,
Susan S. Clubb, D.V.M.



The Watchbird deadlines and schedules (working two to four months ahead of what you read) make instant responses difficult. Many letters are received so late in the production schedule that they are no longer current or pertinent. Indeed, should you want to respond to something you read in Watchbird please do it the moment you put the magazine down.

The following letter is about three issues behind the item that stimulated it but it contains so many points to ponder that it deserves to be read, nay, studied, by all serious aviculturists. Aviculture is at a point where some difficult decisions have to be made. We may as well get on with it.
Ed.

Dear Editor:

This is a reply to the editor's response to our letter in the August/September issue, concerning legislation and the role of aviculture in the conservation of bird species. In his response, the editor invited us to clarify our position on the relationship between aviculture and conservation. We will do so, following a few brief comments on his response.

In our letter, we argued that laws and regulations are sometimes necessary for the protection of rare and endangered species. Examples are the CITES treaty and the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The editor mistakenly implied that we consider the New York importation ban to be an act of conservation. We explicitly stated our opposition to that law, although we did not totally reject the concept of rational, protective legislation drafted in other forms.

We also criticized an approach to conservation offered by the editor in an earlier editorial. This approach involved the sustained production and export of parrots as a source of income for underdeveloped countries. We questioned the

effectiveness of this proposal. It seemed that aviculturists could make better arguments for more workable conservation measures. However, the editor did not address this criticism. Much of his response seemed not to relate directly to our letter. Indeed, we found ourselves in agreement with many of his points.

The editor suggested that we were "confused" about the relationship between conservation and aviculture. Conservation is a more complex subject than the editor implies. Conflicting views exist as to how best to achieve conservation goals. We believe that efforts should involve self-regulation by aviculturists and the rejection of wasteful practices that perpetuate the demand for imported birds. We hope that aviculturists will cooperate with other groups to develop innovative solutions, rather than to take a reactionary, "don't tread on me," stance.

We know that habitat destruction, resulting from human population growth, economic development, and natural resource exploitation, is the main threat to many species. However, in some cases, capture and trade can contribute to their decimation. Habitat destruction is unlikely to cease, and thus aviculturists can make a valuable contribution through the establishment of successful captive breeding programs. Other measures can include public education to gain support for conservation, as well as support for habitat protection and wildlife preserves in areas native to rare birds.

The importation of wild birds is an issue that has been addressed by Rosemary Low. Her new book, *Endangered Parrots*, was reviewed by Tom Marshall in the June/July issue of *Watchbird*. We agree with Low's contention that "the number of parrots raised in captivity must be increased so that eventually captive bred specimens will totally replace imported ones." Low argues that sufficient numbers of many species of cockatoos and Amazons now exist in captivity and that those species need not be imported. She also contends that there is no justification for taking the larger macaws from the wild.

The editor argued that restrictions on importation would increase smuggling because, as the restricted species became rarer in captivity, they would bring higher prices. He has a good point. However, his economic argument could also be construed as an argument favoring the limitation of imports. According to this argument, import re-

strictions should increase the value of captive bred birds. Since these birds would then bring higher prices, they would receive the best possible care and breeding conditions. The result should be an increase in the population of birds in captivity, which would reduce the incentive for smuggling, as well as an increase in the knowledge required for successful captive breeding. Smuggling is a serious problem contributing to the tragic threat of Newcastle disease. The problem will not be solved simply by allowing unrestricted legal importation. Other measures, admittedly difficult to devise, must be taken. The existence of smuggling shows that a market exists for illegal, non-quarantined birds. Aviculturists should avoid trade in suspected smuggled birds. Unusually low prices for rare species, or unusually large clutches of "captive bred" babies, should be suspect. Specific measures could include smuggling alerts and closed banding of captive bred birds of frequently smuggled species.

Importation should ideally involve the assessment and evaluation of cases on a species by species basis. Scientific field studies would provide the best data for such assessments. Alternative actions could include the following: (1) adherence to trade bans on listed endangered species; (2) limitations on the importation of species imminently threatened in their natural habitats by capture for trade; (3) the importation of species not now established in aviculture, "without jeopardizing the wild populations," as the editor suggested; the ultimate goal being the establishment of viable captive breeding programs; and (4) organized, emergency importation of populations imminently threatened by total habitat destruction as a result of such activities as logging or mining. In the last case, private aviculturists who obtain rare birds should be required to participate in an information-sharing breeding consortium.

In this country, it is important that we not waste birds by diverting too many potential breeders to the pet trade. We are not against keeping parrots as pets. Nor do we reject the sale of birds for profit. Such business sustains aviculture and provides incentives for producing healthy birds. However, it seems that most domestically bred large parrots are hand fed and sold as pets. These are the birds most valuable to breeders, because they inherit some of the characteristics which allowed their parents to breed in captivity. Aviculturists should keep a percentage of each clutch of rarer

species for captive breeding, even if they have to wait a few years for production.

There are many other measures that aviculturists can take to further conservation. Specialization should be encouraged, since it can lead to a better understanding of the breeding and care requirements of particular families and species. The collector mentality which encourages every aviculturist to have an example of every large or rare species only promotes birds as status symbols and objects of display. Aviculturists should support both laboratory and field research, including experiments in artificial insemination of parrots. They should fight legislation that would restrict trade among bird breeders within this country. Awards should be given, not just for first breedings, but also for sustained breeding success with species that are threatened in the wild. We trust that A.F.A. and *Watchbird* are already involved in such endeavors. We hope that in the future, diverse groups will join forces to achieve conservation goals.

We should note that we received the latest issue of *Watchbird* after completing this letter. That issue contains the keynote address delivered by Lee Phillips at the recent A.F.A. convention. It turns out that our letter echoes many of her major points. We urge others to read the text of that excellent speech. Sincerely,
Connie Stone and Ken Graham
Phoenix, AZ



Dear Sheldon:

The *Watchbird* is a great help to anyone wanting to breed birds because, more and more, it publishes articles with *specific* information on housing, diet, environmental conditions, etc. Such case histories are the closest a person can get to first-hand experience. I particularly enjoyed the humor and detail in H.D. Brawley's article in the Dec/Jan 1986 issue.

Since my goal is to breed Green-cheeked Amazons, Jack Clinton-Eitnien's update on their status was very interesting. I hope he will continue to share his findings. Kevin Schneider's article on feather use in Indian ceremonies was the necessary shock to make me send him the molted feathers I have been saving for years.

Last, I am more than happy to see my work included in such a magazine!
Sincerely,
Sherry Rind
Redmond, Washington

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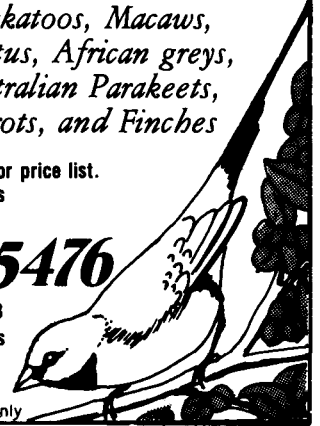
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