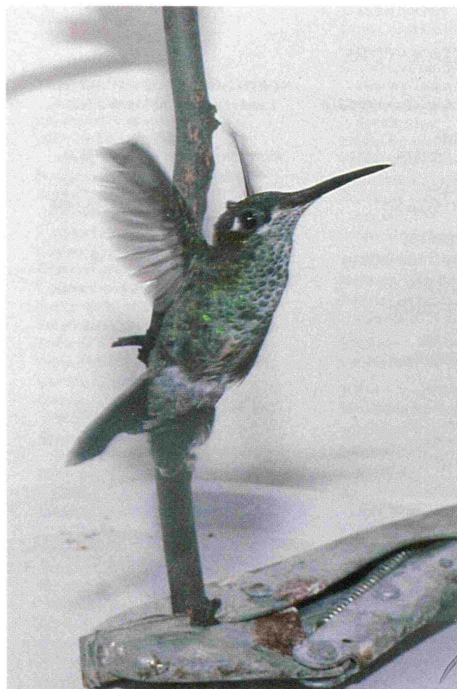


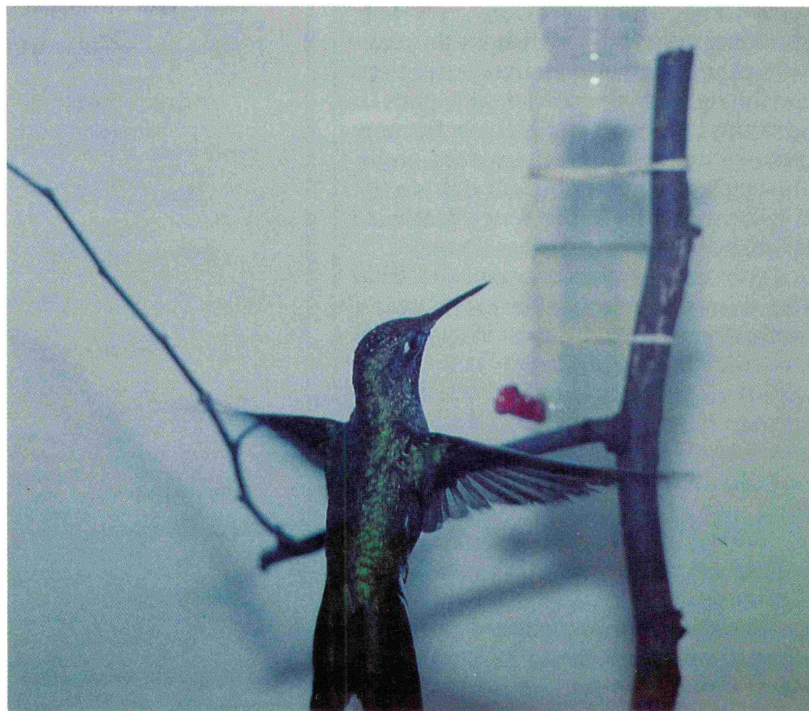
Even under artificial lights the hummingbird's iridescence is striking.



This species is *Aglaectis cupripennis*.



Hummingbirds are so active it's unusual to see one perched, as it were.



A *Polyonomus caroli* hovers near the nectar feeder.

Aglaectis amazilia resting near the waterer.

Thinking of Importing?

by Val Clear, Ph.D.
Anderson, Indiana

Travelers to distant and exotic places often see birds in market places that would make any aviculturist drool, and sell for a very few dollars. I have seen hyacinth macaws selling for \$25 and cock-of-the-rock for about \$20. That, however, is only the prelude to the story. Why are not more rare birds imported?

There are a few built-in obstacles, and a few less difficult barriers to be negotiated. Among the former are prohibitions against exporting that several foreign countries have set, and, until recently, barriers in the United States that prevent importation from certain "dirty" countries where there has been recent history of Newcastle disease or other infections affecting poultry. From that list of countries, absolutely no feathered creature could be imported legally. But this left a lot of other countries that were potential sources of rare

birds. What about them?

Current federal regulations permit a family to bring in two birds as family pets. Space must be reserved in advance, then the birds are placed in isolettes, which are pressure-controlled, plastic cubicles that isolate the bird totally from the environment. If at the end of thirty days there has been no indication of a disease communicable to poultry, your birds will be released to you. There is a charge of about \$100.00 for this service. Up-to-date details can be learned by phoning (301) 436-8172.

There are two other ways of bringing birds in. One is through a privately operated quarantine station, either to rent the entire operation for a month, which is frightfully expensive (\$10,000 or more, probably), or to find a friendly owner of a quarantine station who will permit you to bring in a smaller number of birds as a part of his operation. This has a number of awkward scheduling aspects, since he has to get all of his birds in at the same time, then remain in his station for thirty days. It requires careful calibration of shipping schedules to do this, and very few importers are willing to do it because they know what they are getting from their own birds, but they do not know what diseases your birds have been exposed to. If one of yours carries a forbidden germ, the importer loses his entire shipment, which is probably worth \$100,000 or more. You can see the reason why this is a difficult approach.

However, United States Department of Agriculture last year opened up a new quarantine facility in Newburg, New York, which is available for persons such as the members of American Federation of Aviculture. It is a modern, well constructed and well managed facility and will prove to be an extremely important adjunct to aviculture, I'm sure.

Quarantine regulations are, as they should be, extremely strict and any deviation from the regulations is not tolerated. The safety of all of our own birds depends upon a diligent quarantine system calculated to keep the diseases outside the United States. This

is in the interest of every one of us, and we should be pleased that the U.S.D.A. is administering the regulations in a diligent manner even though it may prove inconvenient at times.

Last winter I brought in an experimental shipment of hummingbirds from Peru and learned how well and how aggravating the new system can operate. It has its problems, but it also has its victories. Readers of Watchbird will be interested in the story.

The first step was to find somebody to supply the birds. I used to live in Peru and that seemed the logical place to start, since I wanted some hummingbirds. I arranged to spend a couple of weeks in the country and began to search out contacts. It helps, of course, if you can speak the language. I found a gentleman who had been in birds most of his life and he actually had on hand at the time I talked with him a collection of hummingbirds which he was about to ship to Europe. I met another very impressive collector who dealt in everything except hummingbirds but told me there would be no reason why he would not be able to provide me with what I wanted. With that as the beginning, I gained a little confidence that the project might work out.

It became necessary to convince the first contact that I could be trusted. He had had an experience with a North American herpetologist who had sent him an order for a large number of serpents, then refused to accept them after they were collected, which was a considerable loss because they died before they could be resold. So he was not trusting anybody with a U.S. passport. I finally persuaded him that I would send him a cashier's check in full before he collected the birds and that seemed to reassure him.

The next stage in the process I did not witness but I know from having lived in Latin America many years of my life what was involved. My supplier trotted from ministry to ministry, office to office, desk to desk, securing signatures on a stack of papers a yard high, each time having to come back next week to pick it up. This is a time-consuming



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process and one that normally requires a number of monetary deposits folded inside the application to encourage prompt action (prompt, meaning next week). In the meantime he had his staff up in the mountains catching the birds.

At this end the process was moving along a bit more smoothly. The first requirement is an import date, since the quarantine station operates by reservation three months in advance. I called the proper office and got a very pleasant person who talked with me about the kinds of birds and the quantity and then gave me the date, which consists of a bracket of a week. All birds must come in within that "window," or you lose your reservation and your deposit. Once the date is identified, you then have to send a check for one fourth the anticipated bill, and that is not refundable. The reason for this is that once the facility has reserved a space for you, it is not usable by anybody else and if your birds do not arrive at that time, the overhead expenses continue anyway.

Once I had the date established, I sent this to my supplier and he tried to make reservations on the airline. We had known in advance that no airplane flies between the United States and Peru. Due to international frictions, both countries have terminated landing rights for airplanes from each other's country, so there was no way to ship the birds directly from Peru to the United States. This meant not one but two airlines, and working out a schedule that would minimize the risks to the birds of being left at the airport or missing a connection. Ultimately that arrangement was formalized and I had a date for the birds to arrive in New York.

One wants the plane to arrive in New York during traditional working hours to avoid an overtime bill, necessitated by requiring U. S. Customs, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and broker personnel to work at overtime rates. Since my birds were arriving late on Saturday, I had a sizable bill to pay, in addition to having to pay overtime for the quarantine facility personnel to receive the birds quite late Saturday night. There is no satisfactory way of avoiding a problem of this kind. You certainly want the birds to have immediate attention, not to wait until 9:00 Monday morning.

The hummingbirds went into quarantine on the last day of the "window" and had a good experience in quarantine. This was the first shipment of hummingbirds they had had, and there were a number of precedents to be set. For

instance, how much per day should the charge be? Since the scale is based on size, there wasn't much question that they would be the smallest category, but how much care does a hummingbird require? And food is hard to price.

We solved the latter problem by my supplying the food myself in order to be sure that they did not have to adjust to a different diet. I knew what they had been fed in Peru, Nekton, and secured a supply from Ed Weinberg, who stocks it in Florida.

Because of the delicacy of the birds and the newness of the experience, I called the station weekly and got a progress report on the birds. They did quite well. One would not expect hummingbirds to be bringing in poultry-related diseases, so there was not too much risk anticipated. They were placed in a room, however, that had two other shipments in it. One of them was my own — a shipment of Timbrados that I brought from Spain the same week — and the third group, I was pleased to discover quite by accident, was a shipment of English Budgies brought in by a well known aviculturist. I was relieved when I knew what the other shipment was because of the disastrous possibility. Had there been Newcastle in one of the two other shipments in the room, I would have lost all of my hummingbirds, with no reimbursement whatever. That is one of the very great risks involved in importing. If by pure chance your birds are in the same room with birds that test positive for Newcastle disease or Ornithosis, your entire shipment will be either destroyed or returned to the country of origin.

Before the birds could be received in New York it was necessary for me to arrange for a broker to meet the shipment at the plane and process it through customs and U.S.D.A. inspection. Only a few persons are licensed by the U.S.D.A. for this function, and the list is available upon request from a U.S.D.A. office. These brokers have highly specialized equipment for transporting the birds from the airport in bond and in isolation, sealed, to the quarantine station, which is about sixty miles north of New York City. Upon arrival there the seal is broken by U.S.D.A. and the birds placed in quarantine. For this service the broker has to charge an ambitious figure.

Because of the very delicate nature of the birds, I felt, when quarantine was over, that I did not want to entrust them to another airline to be shipped from JFK to Indianapolis, so I made the 600 mile trip myself to get them, then

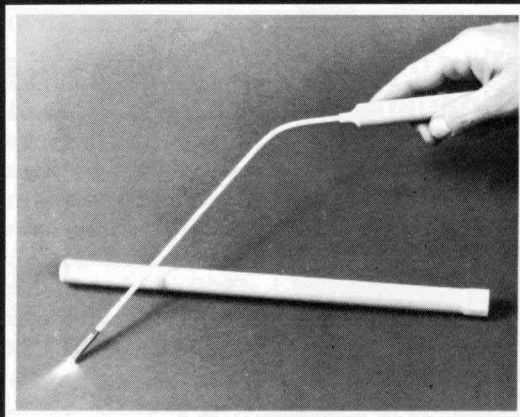
brought them back with me. That was an endless trip made in three days, but probably worthwhile because the weather at that time of the year (it was Thanksgiving week) can be a serious problem and I did not want to expose the birds to more stress than necessary. They made the trip back very nicely.

Anyone interested in bringing birds into the country under this system needs first of all to get in touch with the quarantine station by calling (914) 564-2950. Upon discussing what you have in mind with the veterinarian, if it still seems like a good idea, you will receive Form 17-129, which you complete very simply and return to them. Upon approval of that application you will be assigned a date a few months in the future. This consists of one week during which you have to get your birds in without fail. Missing a date means a forfeit of not only the date but also the 25% deposit which is required on the total bill, which will probably run \$1,000.

There are various charges to be paid at the airport and this is done by the broker, who bills you later. As a ballpark figure, estimate this at \$200. My broker's fee for transporting the birds from the airport to Newburg and back was \$420. The quarantine station charges a minimum of \$.59 per day per bird while they are in quarantine, and this ranges up to several dollars for the largest birds. This means that the smallest bird which clears quarantine in the minimum period of time will cost \$18 for quarantine. Special services can be billed in addition to that. On the basis of my experience, I would suggest that one figure an additional \$100 for telephone calls and special messages to the country of origin. There may be a veterinary fee at that end as well. For a very approximate figure, I would estimate that it costs \$2,000 to bring in a shipment, in addition to the cost of the birds themselves. This means that nobody should bring in inexpensive birds; it does not pay.

Incidentally, the hummingbirds are doing magnificently. They are fascinating creatures, not nearly as delicate as they appear, and really quite easy to care for. Though I would not recommend them for novices, to anyone who has some experience with softbills or nectarines, they are extremely satisfying birds to have. Not many species have been bred in the United States, I believe, so there are a number of gold medals waiting to be won by diligent and skilled managers. I'm standing somewhere in that waiting line. ●

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