

Seventh C.I.T.E.S. Meeting

by Val Clear
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One of the most critical events for aviculturists world-wide is the biennial meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (C.I.T.E.S.). The parties to the convention met in Lausanne, Switzerland, for two long weeks of daily sessions in October, 1989. It is referred to as C.I.T.E.S. #7 because this is the seventh time the group has met.

And it was the first time that there has been a visible presence of aviculturists from North America. Previously, we had waited at home for word of what had happened, fearful and impotent. In C.I.T.E.S. #6, they placed all parrot-family birds in a controlled, limited-traffic status in our absence, and against the will of most aviculturists. This time we were a part of the discussion, had a noticeable presence, and we were spared any too-objectionable action.

The AFA appointed a committee to work on preparations for the meeting. Under the leadership of Lee Phillips as Chair, the committee researched the avian issues and came up with position statements that reflected the perceptions of the committee members and a number of specialists who were contacted by the committee. I am happy to report that the position of the AFA was presented verbally during the debates on several of the issues and that the final action taken in every case was consistent with the AFA position. We won this one.

The major issues for aviculture centered around the Madagascar Lovebird, the Illiger's Macaw, the Tucuman Parrot and the Moluccan Cockatoo.

It was proposed that the Madagascar Lovebird (*Agapornis cana*) be moved from Appendix II (the intermediate stage) to Appendix III (the least restrictive). At the last minute, the delegation withdrew the proposal because of an accident to the team working on the project. It remains on Appendix II.

There are three lists. Appendix I includes species genuinely endangered, where any removal of birds from the wild would likely be disastrous to the survival of the species in the wild. Absolutely no traffic is permitted in any Appendix I species. Not even a zoo is able to import such. Appendix II lists birds that are in trouble. Only if the exporting nation is willing may such species move across international lines, and the receiving nation is required to monitor imports carefully and cooperate with the exporting nation. Nearly all psittacines and all hummingbirds are on Appendix II. Species are added to the first two appendices only by the action of the entire C.I.T.E.S. convention. But any nation may add a species to Appendix III. This is a sort of

"waiting room" in which the species is being watched by everyone and evidence is being gathered to determine if it should go to Appendix I or II.

The Illiger's Macaw (*Ara maracana*) discussion was intensive but rather brief. The Secretariat of C.I.T.E.S. picked up a point that had been made by the AFA report to the effect that there is now virtually no international traffic in the Illiger's, and that moving it from Appendix II (where all hookbills are, except cockatiels, budgerigars and Indian Ring-neck Parakeets) might give it heightened visibility, make it more attractive because of its rare status, and encourage smuggling. But the argument by others that it is now in dire straits and cannot support trapping was given greater credence and the species was moved from II to I.

Spirited discussion of the Tucuman (*Amazonas tucumana*) took much longer. The debate centered around whether the decision should be made now or await further field studies. I was pleased with the position taken repeatedly by the delegation from the United States of America (always specified thus to distinguish from the United States of Mexico and the United States of Brazil). The Assistant Secretary of the Interior included it in her opening statement: no action on any species should be taken without having in hand reliable scientific field research that provides valid information on which to make a decision.

In the case of the Tucuman, such studies were missing. But there was anecdotal information presented and the plea of persons who had observed the situation was sufficiently convincing that the assembly finally opted to preserve the species two more years until studies currently projected could be completed and presented to C.I.T.E.S. #8. I had some uneasy feelings about the action, but it was rather convincing that if we waited two more years to decide, there might not be any field specimens to study. It appears to be extinct in Brazil and is rarely sighted in Bolivia.

The pre-convention research by the AFA committee had shown that the Tucuman is being bred rather freely in this country and that as far as aviculture is concerned, we could get along without added imports. Shortly after returning from the Lausanne meeting, I met with a central-Indiana bird club and asked if anyone present was having success with breeding Tucumans. Two persons said they had pairs that are prolific. And Indiana is hardly a psittacine mecca.

The most intense discussion of an avian species was of the Moluccan Cockatoo (*Cacatua moluccensis*). There are some statistics available and they were not

encouraging. One study of annual export figures showed that the government had authorized the catching of 5,000 birds but that 8,000 had been shipped out. That was through normal channels. There are, of course, no scientific figures for illegal shipments, of which there are presumed to be many. The main reason for disappearance of the species is destruction of habitat (this is the basic reason for reduction of numbers of most species), but this bird's roosting habits make it especially vulnerable in that it roosts in large concentrations and lends itself to capture in large numbers.

In support of continuing the Moluccan on Appendix II, Indonesia asserted that the species is a pest to agriculture, that the capture and export of the birds had significant economic value to residents of the area. It was suggested that final action be delayed if the government would agree not to issue export permits until adequate scientific studies could be completed, but the convention was reluctant to delay protection of the species, so it is now on Appendix I.

Hallway gossip prior to the discussion indicated that perhaps the compromise on the Tucuman would be for insertion of a microchip in each legally imported specimen so as to give positive identification of the bird. The main barrier seems to have been the cost, but the mere suggestion opens up a whole new field of avian technology.

The use of the microchip with salmon has been quite successful. It is a tiny, round tube about 1/32" by 1/2" that is inserted under the skin and remains there for the life of the fish. Each chip produces a unique number that will distinguish it from millions of other fish. The number appears on a scanning device similar to the hand-held electronic devices used at airports to detect metal on passengers. One of the distributors had demonstrations at the meeting. Although there are a few questions yet to be clarified, it does have definite promise for use with birds.

Inserted under the skin of a bird at the end of the quarantine period, it would be as certain identification as a closed band and would prove that the bird had entered the country legally. In addition, it would be absolute identification of that individual specimen.

The cost of the insert runs around \$7 each and the reading device costs about \$2,500. This would never work for the cheaper birds that come in by the thousands from Africa, but it has real possibilities with the big birds with a high enough price tag that another \$7 would not be noticed.

The C.I.T.E.S. structure makes room for a special captive breeding arrangement that would permit certain breeders of Appendix I to ship them in international trade. Among other considerations, the original breeding stock must have been acquired legally (i.e., to have been in the country before the C.I.T.E.S. listing on Appendix I), and to have been bred

beyond the second generation in captivity. The applicant has to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Secretariat adequate plans for responsible management of the operation, including provisions to reduce the risk of illegitimate trade in the species. The fear — and a very real one — is that any trade permitted in Appendix I will make illegal trade easier because it will make laundering possible.

The original agreement in setting up the captive breeding program provision included the understanding that the first applicant would be reviewed by the entire assembly instead of by just the Secretariat. The purpose of this was to expose the arrangement to the skeptical minds of 108 national delegations. There are so many pitfalls to be feared that it seemed wise to have the first application examined by the committee of the whole.

There are two operating businesses interested in the official designation. Both of them prepared a formal application and one was ready to pursue it at Lausanne, but there is a rule that the application must have been presented to C.I.T.E.S. 150 days prior to consideration, and that deadline had not been met. It was not considered by the convention in Lausanne but it will be offered to the nations by mail.

That application was made by Parrot Jungle, Florida. Recently this famous and long-term tourist attraction, one of the first commercial parks to allow visitors to handle the live stock instead of putting them in distant cages, was purchased by Richard Schubot and Bernard Levine. Schubot is the owner of a highly sophisticated hookbill breeding operation in Florida and the donor who has established the only avian research facility at a veterinary school in the country at Texas A & M University. Levine is well known in bird circles as the owner of Pet Farm (which he sold recently). He is a veterinarian as well as a businessman and a skilled aviculturist. Both men are active in the AFA.

If Parrot Jungle does achieve status as a captive breeding licensee, it will be able to ship Scarlet Macaws (which it has bred to the sixth generation) throughout the world. The prestige factor is significant, but more than that would be the satisfaction of knowing that the most skeptical people in the world — hundreds of them — have looked at you in detail and have approved of what you are doing.

The overwhelming issue at C.I.T.E.S. this year was, as any reader of the world press would know, the African elephant. At least 90% of the time went into that discussion. One would think that it would be simple to solve the question of what to do with a disappearing mammal of that size, but it was highly complicated and required unending hours of negotiation between the national delegations.

The issue was the extent of the ban and the timing. Most of the delegations, including the U.S.A., wanted to have a

total and immediate ban on the species, putting it on Appendix I. There are three nations, however, where the management of their elephant herds is so well done that they actually have to shoot some each year in order to keep the herds healthy. These are poor nations and they want to be able to market the warehouses of ivory and elephant skins that they have. If the elephant were placed on Appendix I, this would not be possible; the tusks and skins could not move across international lines. Even tourists would not be able to buy the products and take them home. For instance, no U.S. customs agent will permit an ivory chess set to enter the U.S. today.

There is a device called "taking reservation" that theoretically allows a nation to sit out an Appendix I prohibition. If at the time the assembly votes a species onto Appendix I a nation takes a reservation, it is not subject to the rule. But this becomes rather meaningless to a producer nation if all the consumer nations are bound by the regulation and prohibit imports. So for the southern African nations to take a reservation would be a rather hollow victory. In the end, they lost. The African elephant was placed on Appendix I.

The structure of C.I.T.E.S. is surprisingly democratic. It is organized as a dependent of the United Nations but has a separate home office in Lausanne, Switzerland. During this meeting the 108th nation joined. Rule is by one-nation-one-vote, although a nation's delegation may consist of many persons. The larger nations have about a dozen persons in the staff. The dynamics are found more in the hall than on the floor of the assembly. As soon as the general meeting adjourns, there are special caucuses to discuss items of special interest. Liaisons and swapping of votes take place quietly and behind the scenes. Most of the decisions are influenced by a political consideration of some sort.

In addition to the official delegations, there is provision for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to be present, have a seat assigned in the hall, and to participate in the debate fully, although the NGO has no vote. But the organization has to be approved by its government. In the U.S.A., this is done by the Department of the Interior. The AFA delegation had that formal endorsement, along with about twenty other bodies ranging from the Audubon Society to the National Rifle Association. Conveniently, because the AFA had the good fortune of being at the top of the alphabet, we had the third space in the front row of tables, a choice vantage point to watch what was going on.

The AFA had two particular support groups at the meeting, the Avicultural Advancement Council of Canada (AACC), with Mr. Roak Citroen, vice-president, as the key figure, and the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC), headed by

Marshall Meyers. Dr. Susan Clubb, who is on the staff of Parrot Jungle and is a very active member of the AFA, was a part of both the PIJAC and AFA groups.

There were a number of active NGOs from around the world, but the ones most visible, the ones that had display tables in the lobby, were all from English-speaking countries. The majority of these were animal-rights groups. One of them had a video showing the capture and torture of birds in northern Africa, which it showed constantly for two weeks. I learned later that it was completely staged by a reporter, that the person shown as a bird trapper was not, and that the scenes were set for the purpose of producing the film.

In general, there was excellent rapport between the animal-rights groups and the AFA and AACC. There were two that had the ear of the assembly because of long-term service to the body. TRAFFIC (of the World Wild Life Fund) was one, with unusually valuable and cordial service by Teresa Mulliken; and the other was the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), Trade Specialist Group, headed by Amy Brautigam. These two organizations have earned the confidence of the delegations.

On any issue it was not uncommon for some nation to ask for an opinion by either of these NGOs before a vote was taken. Their steady involvement over the years has paid off in confidence. They are trusted and treated with special deference.

This demonstrates the importance of having an AFA presence at all future C.I.T.E.S. meetings. If there should be a time when there is a serious proposal to ban international trade in birds of all kinds, we need to have a little money in the bank in the form of good will and trust. We made an excellent start this time with the production of the special issue of *Watchbird*. It made a tremendous impact on the delegates. AFA is now known and the ground work is laid. But we must continue to have a representation of at least two persons (there are sometimes two simultaneous meetings that require monitoring) and we must continue to produce impressive materials.

There was a turn-around at this C.I.T.E.S. in that the importance of captive populations was recognized. It occurred in discussions frequently, and even from the mouths of previously reluctant sources. The animal-rights groups are now conceding that aviculturists have something to offer and are beginning to recognize the legitimacy of our claim that aviculture is conservation, too. We need to keep that momentum going. ●

Editor's Note: Lee Phillips is Chair of the C.I.T.E.S. Committee, whose other members are Val Clear, Susan Clubb, Jack Clinton-Eitniece, Jonathon Fink, Jerry Jennings, Davis Koffron, Tom Marshall, Stephen McNabb, Richard Schubot, Dale Thompson.

Because of illness in the family, Lee Phillips was unable to attend and Val Clear was appointed Acting Chair. Susan Clubb attended as joint observer for AFA and PIJAC. Richard Schubot also attended the meetings.

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