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CAGED BIRD REGULATIONS

by Dr. E.T. Mallinson
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(The following paper was presented at a Pet Bird Breeders and Retailers Seminar at Penn State University a few months ago. Dr. E.T. Mallinson of the Pennsylvania Dept. of Agriculture was addressing bird breeders and retailers in the State of Pennsylvania but his comments and suggestions are pertinent to all bird breeders and dealers in the country. Editor)

Veterinarians and businessmen should discuss their shared goals. One of these goals, of course, is the safeguarding of bird health. Veterinarians in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry work in many different ways, to protect the pets that so many families enjoy, and to protect the income and investments of businessmen in the pet and livestock industries.

State veterinarians share your concern with safeguarding the public from psittacosis and salmonellosis which may be spread by pet birds. We share your concerns in safeguarding the birds themselves from the discomforting and life robbing effects of disease. We share your concern for a business climate and image that enables your enterprise to survive and flourish. And we share your concern in preventing transmission of diseases from caged bird flocks to food production flocks and vice versa.

INTERNATIONAL SHIPMENTS

Movements of birds into the United States from other nations are not directly covered by state laws. The agencies of the federal government most concerned with international movements of birds are the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Health and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior. These agencies are working to prevent unwanted livestock, human diseases and pest species from import into the United States. Customs agents are also involved in the import picture, working to prevent jeopardizing the national security by illegal entry of any kind of product, dead or alive.

The Federal Department of Health has given USDA the responsibility for supervision of a 30-day Aureomycin treatment of imported birds to prevent psittacosis. For this purpose, USDA maintains and supervises a number of both federal and private quarantine stations where foreign birds must spend a 30-day quarantine and observation period. Some pet importers

are now maintaining their own quarantine stations overseas to screen out undesirable shipments before import into the United States. The 30-day period may be extended if laboratory results suggest the possibility of Newcastle disease.

Should Newcastle disease be found, the entire shipment is rejected. During calendar year 1976, 154 shipments were offered to private quarantine facilities, the most used facilities for pet birds. Of these shipments, 32 were refused, 21 percent of the total. Half of the refused shipments were killed and the other half were returned for distribution in nations with less stringent requirements.

Birds subjected to good veterinary supervision in their country of origin have low rejection rates when shipped into U.S. quarantine stations. Unfortunately, birds from nations with weak programs have a less favorable chance of entry when submitted to private or federal quarantine stations. The resulting supply and demand situation has made bird smuggling sufficiently profitable to be attractive to criminal elements in the United States and other countries.

Millions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent correcting the activities of smugglers, whose hunger for the dollar outweighs their concern for a healthy food supply and their own family's health. Smugglers seem to have the interests of dealers at heart in providing desirable species at a lower cost. But the net result of smugglers and people riding their coattails is that the business of reputable pet shops are put in jeopardy by disease and tarnished images. The U.S. Customs Service and USDA are increasing their efforts with some success in the identification, apprehension and prosecution of smugglers. In the final analysis, only the pet bird industry itself can solve the smuggling problem.

Following recent discussions with representatives of the pet bird industry, the USDA designated a telephone number to which anyone with information relating to the smuggling of birds could anonymously call and report. Although this activity is a regular function of the U.S. Customs Service, this USDA number provides an alternative to persons who might be reluctant to call the Customs Service. Information on bird smuggling can be reported by calling 301-436-8061 during regular working hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Eastern Standard Time).

Bits and pieces of information that you could forward are valuable even if

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piecemeal. Your information may fit in with other information already received. This system keeps the caller's identity unknown, providing USDA with information while being safe, effective and convenient for the caller.

INTERSTATE, INTRASTATE SHIPMENTS

On the national scale, interstate regulations deal with shipments of birds and other products into one state from any of the other 49. Each state has its own interstate regulations, which creates considerable variation among the states. These variations exist not only in the exact regulations and requirements, but also in the degree to which they are enforced. Currently, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Maine and Pennsylvania have specific requirements for the importation of caged birds and many other states are expected to follow with their own requirements.

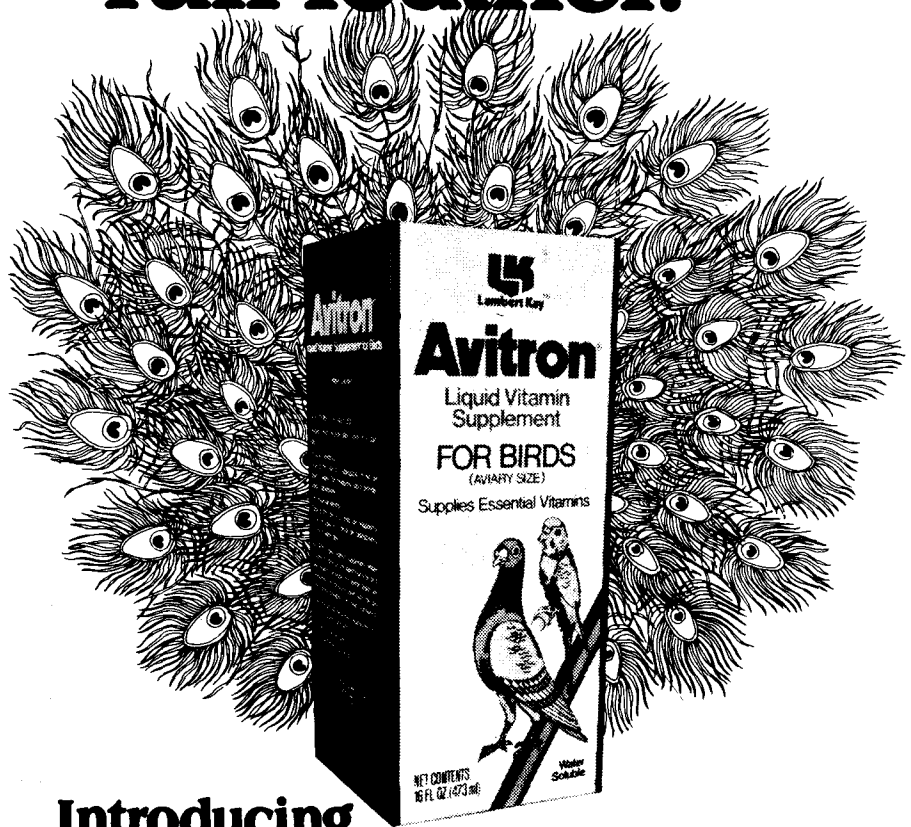
Each state veterinarian's office has a copy of the interstate requirements of all states, and are continually updated on changes. Contact these offices when you have questions!

Both the government and businessmen are interested in the development of voluntary caged bird programs. While development of such programs will take time and persistence, greater consistency of industry requirements would be welcome to all concerned. As an industry, I would encourage your various organizations to work vigorously toward model programs and uniform good business practices. You will be the chief benefactor.

A major step toward this would be your involvement with the activities of the U.S. Animal Health Association (USAHA) and its various committees which are working in this area with other livestock and poultry groups, and pet interests. The USAHA is extremely influential with state veterinarians' offices and the USDA. Your representation within USAHA would have a significant and desirable impact. The association has helped other groups and industries many times. It can also help you.

Pennsylvania's Bureau of Animal Industry officially adopted regulations which govern interstate movement of poultry, birds, game and water fowl and their hatching eggs in April 1975. The specifics of these regulations can be found in Title 7, Sections 3.111 through 3.119 of the PA-BAI Code. We are presently engaged in implementing the pet bird requirements and the response of pet bird dealers has been most gratifying.

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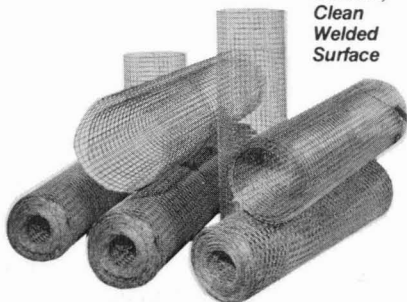
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The major areas of implementation applying to pet birds are as follows: all known pet shops have been contacted by letter and are required to keep records of shipments received from out-of-state sources (our early reports indicate that this is being done); the major chain store outlets shipping birds into Pennsylvania have been informed to report their Pennsylvania outlets for inclusion in our visitation information programs. Cooperation from out-of-state chain stores has been excellent.

We want to improve Pennsylvania's pet bird import requirements to assure reasonable safety with a minimum of paperwork for you, your out-of-state suppliers, and for us. Your suggestions and comments on improvement of our program are appreciated and will receive careful consideration. We want to hear from you!

Intrastate regulations, which affect shipments within the same state, were adopted in Pennsylvania in April of 1975. These regulations can be found in Title 7, Sections 3.191 through 3.198 of PA-BAI Code. Pet bird regulations for intrastate shipments require: that all shipments, wholesale or retail transactions, of birds or poultry be recorded and saved by the seller; and that all bird show secretaries are to accept only those birds accompanied by an Official Owner Endorsed Health Certificate. Cooperation has been good and is continuing to improve.

Pennsylvania's interstate and intrastate regulations both require that shipments be made in new or cleaned and disinfected containers. Birds in the shipment must be free of evidence or exposure to such dangerous and transmissible diseases as Newcastle, pox and psittacosis. In addition, unusual losses of pet birds from intrastate or interstate shipment must be reported to one of the six regional diagnostic laboratories or to a regional office of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

STATE FEDERAL NEWCASTLE PROGRAMS

One of our major activities in Pennsylvania is our program of education and surveillance of the exotic Newcastle disease hazard. Our aim is to alert caged bird dealers, provide them with pointers on minimizing risks and encourage them to use our laboratory services whenever unusual losses are encountered. This is accomplished through over 1,000 shop visits each year. These visits have also led to the discovery of various disease problems. In several instances our agents,

working with state diagnostic laboratories, have been able to pinpoint the problem and suggest practical solutions.

To date, exotic Newcastle disease has not been found in Pennsylvania. But our luck could change any day. We want to be ready to discover an outbreak of exotic Newcastle before the disease manages to spread.

If a suspicion or a positive diagnosis of exotic Newcastle disease exists, state and federal veterinarians must contain and eliminate the problem, by law. In the past, this has been accomplished by quarantines, depopulation and indemnification for positive and exposed birds. A federal indemnity is paid for birds and equipment that is taken. We believe that the USDA indemnity payment is reasonable and fair.

In early 1977, the depopulation policy was modified for exposed birds shipped from positive shops. Now these birds are quarantined and monitored by virus isolation studies for two to three weeks rather than being depopulated immediately. If the birds were negative during the monitoring and observation period, quarantine is released.

This new approach is an advantage in saving valuable breeding strains and foundation stock. Years of effort and selection are not wasted if the level of exposure is low and the birds are free of infection.

Depopulation of positive flocks is a drastic measure, but it is the same proven approach which has kept the United States free of other drastic maladies, while foot and mouth disease and other plagues of livestock, poultry and birds ravage most other nations. Our citizens are richer because of our vigorous policies toward foreign diseases.

This article is an update to provide you with information on the activities of state and federal veterinarians dealing with problems and responsibilities that we all share. The recent measures that are described are not perfect, and perhaps never can be so. Government and the industry are constantly re-evaluating and reshaping policy to meet new situations and take advantage of new opportunities. As we develop better communication and understanding, we will come closer to finding more perfect solutions to our shared concerns.

Articles and seminars stimulate that understanding and are steps in the right direction. The development of a much closer working relationship with both USDA and your official state veterinarians would be one of the most powerful steps you could take to advance the health needs of the bird industry. ■