

TO
CATCH
A
CROOK
OR



NOT ALL AMERICAN
CUSTOMS ARE BAD

by Sheldon Dingle

Woe is the poor aviculturist. His troubles are multitudinous. His enemies abound and his foes prosper. To whom can he look for help? If he has too many birds, zoning people attack. If he sells a bird, I.R.S. plunders. If a bird dies the Health Department quarantines. If two birds die, the Federal depopulators mobilize. Fish and Game confiscate the Quakers, and Interior bans the "injurious" Oh! Glum and Gloom!! Woe is the aviculturist. His enemies abound.

Chiefest among the enemies, you might think, is the government. It does seem to stumble artwart our most progressive plans for expansion, and it does wreck occasional havoc in our flocks, but government, dear reader, is not avicultures worst enemy. Disease is. More birds are lost to disease than to any other factor. In fact, if we're honest about it, even the governments most radical activities have been in response to disease in our flocks. Think of it - no disease, no depopulation. If we could only eliminate avian disease we could do much to eliminate government - well, at least get them off our backs.

Paradoxically, virtually every agency of our government concurs with our wish to prevent disease. There are numerous Federal, State, and local procedures designed to preclude outbreaks of avian disease. Unfortunately, many of these procedures are bypassed by a species of skunk called smuggler. Although smuggled birds are not the only source of disease they are a most dangerous source and pose an immense threat to aviculture. Everything we do to eliminate the smuggling of birds will work in our favor on several fronts.

Again paradoxically, there is a branch of government that is our great friend

when it comes to squashing the smuggler. It is the U.S. Customs Service. Many aviculturists are unaware of what Customs is or what it does and consequently have an instinctive fear of it. Perhaps a better understanding will dispel the fear.

The major responsibility of the U.S. Customs Service is to administer the Tariff Act of 1930, as amended. Its primary duties include the assessment and collection of all duties, taxes, and fees on imported merchandise, the enforcement of customs and related laws, and the administration of certain navigation laws and treaties. Customs agents are stationed at over three hundred ports of entry throughout the United States where they are called upon to enforce their own as well as some two hundred other Federal laws on behalf of over forty Federal agencies.

Because Customs officers are stationed at the frontiers of the United States they have an ongoing program with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assist them (U.S.D.A.) in the control of imported birds. According to U.S.D.A., smuggled or illegally introduced birds create a potential health hazard and a serious economic threat to the six billion dollar poultry industry. We are all familiar with the damage and destruction to poultry and to exotic birds that VVND causes when it is smuggled in.

Since smuggled birds do not meet U.S.D.A. importation requirements (they lack proper documentation) they are not allowed to enter approved quarantine stations and cannot be tested for VVND. Therefore, the general policy has been to destroy all smuggled birds. Now, however, according to an official source in U.S. Customs, plans are under way to provide special quarantine facilities for confiscated birds and if the birds are healthy they will be auctioned off. This new policy may be in full operation by the first of the coming year. Already, in fact, a group of very rare Tahitian Blue Lories have been confiscated, quarantined and consigned to the San Diego Zoo. The new system may just work.

In any event, the fewer smuggled birds that enter this country the healthier and safer American aviculture will be. Despite our many differences with government, despite the steamroller attitude of government, we do have a few friends on the Federal payroll. Cooperate with Customs regarding any birds you feel might be smuggled. Tariff, shmeriff - don't worry about that. Just remember that customs catches crooks.

Maybe things are not as bad as the first paragraph sounded.

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