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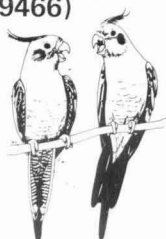
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AND THE IMPORTATION OF BIRDS

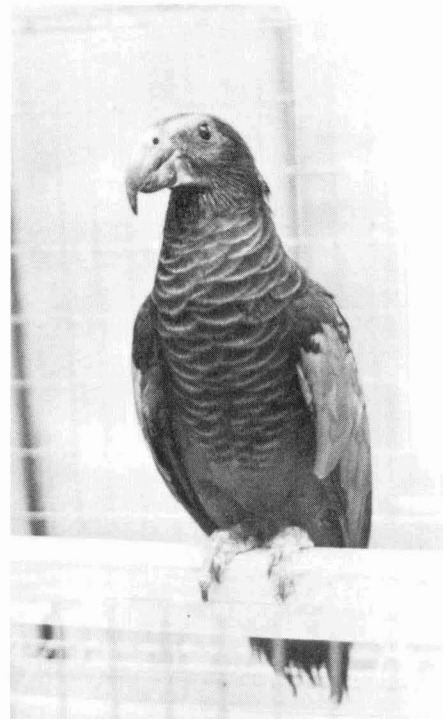
by Jerry Jennings

To the average breeder the quarantine station program has remained much of a mystery. Scuttlebutt overheard at bird clubs bears witness that too much misinformation and not enough factual

knowledge is dispensed concerning the history, purpose, operation, and reliability of quarantine stations. This article attempts to shed some light into these dark corners.

HISTORY

In the Fall of 1971 and Spring of 1972 the U.S. Department of Agriculture was alerted to the appearance of an "exotic" and viral strain of Newcastle Disease (VVND) in the U.S. poultry industry. In a short period of time a number of poultry ranches in southern California and in several other states were found to have infected flocks. Infected flocks or flocks under suspicion were quickly quarantined and examined. If VVND (Velogenic Visotropic Newcastle Disease) was isolated from a flock, the flock was destroyed. Ultimately, all eight southern California counties were quarantined and roadchecks into and out of the area were established to search vehicles and seize birds or eggs entering or leaving, to prevent the further spread of the disease. During this "emergency eradication program" both poultry and exotic bird flocks were destroyed and the owners were reimbursed from a special federal fund.



Pesquet's Parrot (Male)

Photos by Jerry Jennings



General view of Pacific Bird Supply quarantine station.

At the time of the Newcastle outbreak, the U.S. permitted the unrestricted importation of exotic birds. The U.S.D.A. felt these exotic birds were the source of the epidemic, therefore they ordered the embargo of all further importation on August 24, 1972. At the same time recent importers, identified from customs records, were interviewed and their premises were inspected in an effort to detect further cases of VVND.

During the height of bureaucratic activity little concern was given to the thousands, perhaps millions, of birds that were moving freely across our borders. Credible people reasoned aloud, "why, all of a sudden, do we have a Newcastle outbreak, when in all the previous years of unrestrained importing we had none?" Others, in retrospect, have suggested that the Newcastle Eradication Program was, in part, politically motivated since the poultry market was severely depressed due to an oversupply of eggs and poultry products (eggs were 36 cents per dozen, chicken was 29 cents per pound). The program was viewed as an over-reaction and a simultaneous attempt to bail out marginal producers through the program's reimbursement feature. In any event, the problem was real and most of the actions taken were necessary.

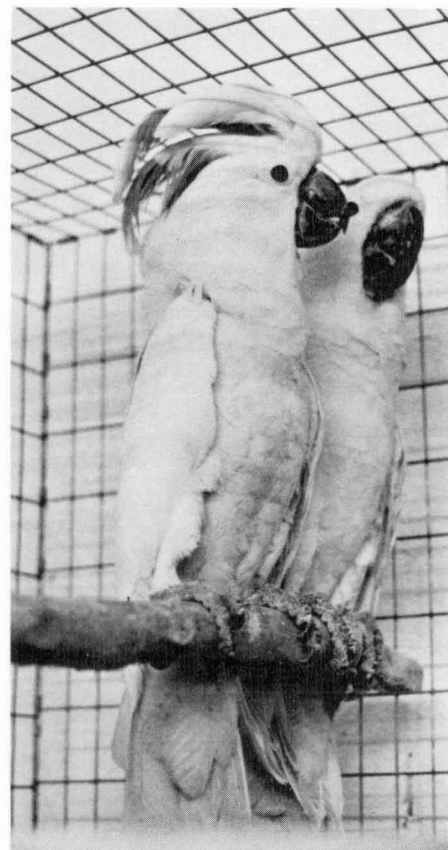
PURPOSE

Nearly a year after the August '72 embargo, the U.S.D.A. proposed rules for the establishment of federally supervised, privately owned quarantine stations.

Since the 1930s federally operated quarantine stations had been in existence for the purpose of importing poultry and poultry products (to this day all doves, pheasants, quail, etc., must come through the federally operated stations, and were coming in during the embargo). It was reasoned somewhere, perhaps a divine revelation, at U.S.D.A. that exotic birds could safely be imported since that was the case with poultry.

The privately owned stations would permit the close monitoring of birds for VVND and Fowl Cholera. Infected birds could be destroyed and the introduction of VVND and Fowl Cholera prevented. It should be noted that the U.S.D.A. apparently holds the belief that it is far costlier to monitor importations than to vaccinate chickens and turkeys, as is done in other countries. At the same time U.S. poultrymen routinely vaccinate their birds for "domestic" strains of Newcastle Disease, with which they have lived for years. Whatever the argument, it can never be discounted that the U.S. enjoys the lowest priced poultry and poultry products of any industrialized nation.

Although the U.S.D.A. is legally responsible for the administration of quarantine regulations, the U.S. Public Health Service requires the feeding of a Chlortetracycline treated feed to all Psittacine birds for 30 days as a precaution against Psittacosis. This program replaces the former requirement that all Psittacines be treated in holding facilities outside the country.



Moluccan or Salmon-crested Cockatoo.

OPERATION

The construction and operation of a U.S.D.A. approved quarantine facility can be an expensive undertaking. The holding area must be separated from the office space by a shower area. Persons working directly with the birds must shower in and out of the holding area. Special disposal equipment, heating arrangements, and an area for veterinary examination (necropsy room) must be available. Floors must be impermeable and access must be limited. Few buildings exist in a readily suitable condition, therefore, the services of a carpenter, plumber, and electrician must be obtained.

Once the U.S.D.A. has approved the prospective facilities, operations may begin. Birds must be obtained from foreign dealers in sufficient quantities — a process that is becoming increasingly



Chattering Lorikeets

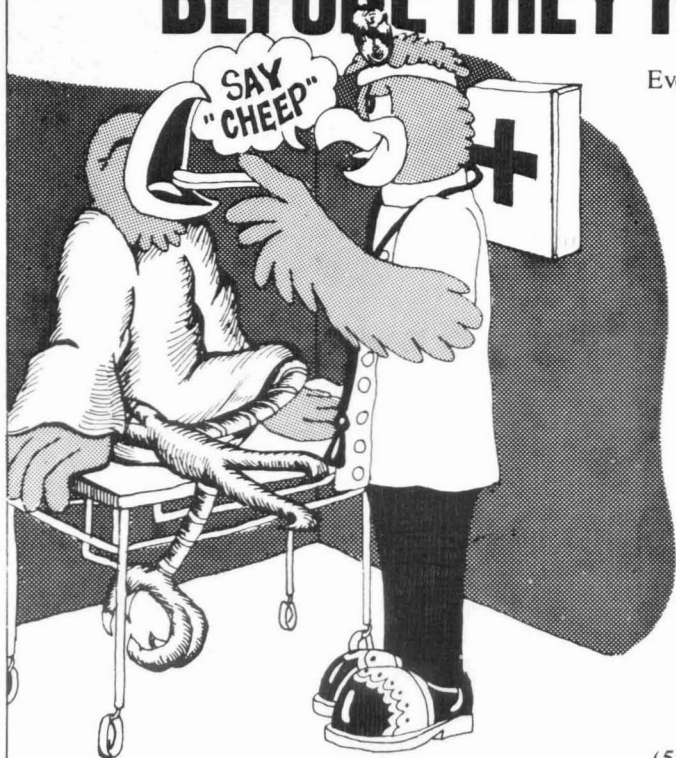
*Great Billed
Parrot*



difficult with the increase in stations and the growing number of foreign governments limiting the export of their native birds.

Birds are obtained from dealers who, in turn, obtain them from breeders, other dealers, or trappers. Many of the birds entering the U.S. come via European dealers. All canaries and birds native to Australia come from European or Asian breeders as Australia has prohibited the export of its birds since 1959. Other birds are generally wild caught.

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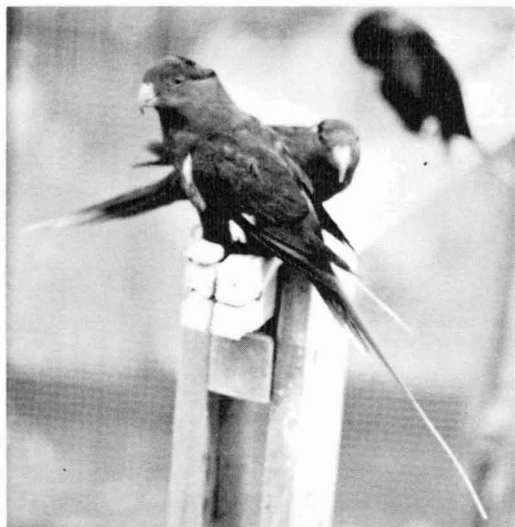
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After a source of supply has been located, the importer must complete several steps. First, he must apply for an import permit from the U.S.D.A.'s Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service in Hyattsville, Maryland. Approval can take several weeks. Second, he must require the foreign dealer to band each bird with a numbered legband, and third, the veterinarian of the government of export must sign a health certificate stating he has examined the birds to be shipped under the permit and found them to be free of infectious disease.

Once the birds arrive at their destination, they are met at the airplane by a U.S.D.A. veterinarian, who removes them from the cargo hold and then disinfects the hold. The birds are taken immediately to the intended quarantine station, where they are placed in aviaries or cages. Any birds dead on arrival are posted as are all birds dying during the first two weeks of quarantine, which begins after arrival of the last shipment to be received. If another shipment arrives several days after quarantine begins, then the period starts back at zero days. Tissue samples of all dead birds are submitted to the Federal Laboratory at Ames, Iowa, on the 7th and 15th days, where they undergo viral isolation tests in search of any hemagglutinating viruses. If VVND, Fowl Plague, or other hemagglutinating viruses are discovered, the birds may be retested and/or destroyed without compensation.

Once quarantine has begun it continues for a minimum 30 days. Usually, the period actually runs longer, sometimes as long as 45-60 days. Such a situation would happen, for example, when a virus is isolated on the 25th day and the decision is made to retest. More samples would have to be submitted, requiring more time before a final determination as to the nature of the virus is made. If

Steller's Lory



VVND or Fowl Plague are identified, the birds would be destroyed.

Once the birds in quarantine have been certified free of the above diseases, they may be released and sold. Most quarantine stations sell to dealers only, as they must quickly empty their stations so they may prepare for the arrival of the next shipments. Each station has its own method for the distribution of its birds and therefore should be contacted individually.

RELIABILITY

Most of the quarantine station owner/operators are reliable business people, whose reputations depend on the quality of service they provide. They deal honestly with their customers and work hard to provide as healthy birds as is possible. Despite this effort birds coming from quarantine stations must be treated just as if they came from a private collection. That is, they should not be thrown in with other birds in the breeder's flock. On the contrary, they should be isolated for a period of 30 days just as a bird from the next door neighbor's flight would be. It is reasonable to assume nothing in the way of good health of newly acquired birds. The U.S.D.A. does not concern itself with parasites or bacteria.

Imported birds offer several advantages. First, they provide "new blood" especially important in areas where the species have been thoroughly domesticated. Second, they serve as a source of species either non-existent or in very short supply in American aviculture.

Some breeders have suggested that further importations will only serve to drive the price of U.S. bred birds down. This belief is disproved by the reality that prices of all birds have continually risen during the entire time the quarantine program has been in effect.

The pressures of the market place have been eased by the quarantine program only to the extent that the incidence of smuggling has declined from its peak during the embargo period. A cessation of imports would only increase smuggling and proportionally increase the potentiality of introducing diseases that could cause irreparable harm to both aviculture and the poultry industry — an event none of us would care to see.

The photographs in this article were taken with the permission of Dave Mohilef's Pacific Bird Supply and give an idea of what a station looks like on the inside. These pictures were taken a day after the birds were certified for release. Our thanks to Mr. Mohilef for his courtesy.

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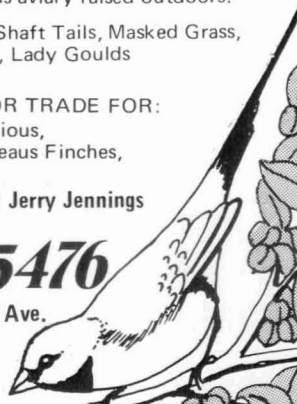
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