

# In Search of a Solution

## TO THE NEWCASTLE DISEASE PROBLEM

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When the Newcastle disease (VVND) eradication program was inaugurated in 1971, it was with the poultry industry in mind. Aviculture, as such, was only a consideration insofar as a possible source of infection and spread of the virus to poultry was concerned.

Even in the recent outbreaks of VVND in exotic birds, this concept still prevailed in the policies of Veterinary Services.

Veterinary Services was soon to learn, however, that VVND eradication in exotic or cage birds is entirely different from eradication of the disease as it affects poultry. VVND eradication and control in the poultry industry is primarily an economic problem: VVND eradication and control in aviculture, while being also very much an economic problem, is in addition a sociological problem of great importance.

The solutions to the two problems in the two groups, the poultry industry as opposed to aviculture, requires two distinct policies. The methods that are applied to poultry will not work in the eradication of the disease from cage birds.

The domestic fowl is an inexpensive unit easily replaced, while the exotic or cage bird is usually costly and quite often most difficult or impossible to replace at any cost.

In the eradication of VVND from exotic and cage birds, Veterinary Services is dealing largely with the urbanite and suburbanite, with the professional and the businessman, rather than with farmers. It is dealing with people whose birds have a sociological value far in excess of their pecuniary values. Aviculture is one of the fastest growing avocations in America, especially with young Americans and the educated American in areas of high population density.

Since our inception only about three years ago, the American Federation of Aviculture has come to represent over twenty thousand aviculturists organized as bird clubs and individuals throughout the United States. With the impetus of our present concern over the VVND problem, new applications for memberships are coming in by the thousands. A.F.A. has a forum in its national magazine and its new national weekly newspaper, and through its organization of state coordinators and delegates in every member club can disseminate information and instructions down to its more than 20,000 members and their friends and sympathizers in a matter of hours when necessary if it feels that our interests are being threatened or our rights violated.

Although we are not a multi-billion dollar industry like the poultry industry, we have an involvement of a much larger number of people — people for whom the destruction of their birds has a tremendous social impact. By the very fact of our large numbers, and with our dedication, we can mount a powerful campaign of protest, as we have demonstrated, when our rights are being violated. This far out-weighs the economic muscle of the poultry industry and is a force Veterinary Services must reckon with.

However, we have no desire for a confrontation with Veterinary Services. We wish to cooperate with this government agency and with them establish sound procedures for the eradication and control of VVND and any other avian diseases from our birds — procedures which are not arbitrary and which will protect our rights and interests.

Probably one of the biggest misconceptions of an aviculturist is that he is someone who keeps and raises a few pet

birds. Aviculture is actually much broader in scope than this and much more complex. It extends from the keeper of a few pet birds (the pet owner); to the collector-breeder (the authentic aviculturist) who collects and in addition, through captive breeding, endeavors to domesticate the various species, perfect standards, establish new mutations, and conserve endangered species; to the dealer both wholesale and retail (the pet shop owner) who buy and sell; on to the commercial importer (the quarantine station operator); and includes also the zoos and other public collections.

The categories of birds in aviculture range from the most common cage birds through the exotic to the game birds; from pigeons to fancy poultry; and covers everything from the common to the rare, the endangered and the irreplaceable.

Any procedure for eradication and control must necessarily take into account all of these different classes of aviculturists and diverse categories of aviculture.

In further complication of any consideration is the fact that the different classes and diverse categories are not always clear cut in their distinctions but one class may somewhat merge into another and collections may include different categories of birds. Many pet owners become collector-breeders and a few collector-breeders become dealers.

The pet owner is generally a “one-way street” insofar as disease eradication and control is concerned. Pet owners usually keep their birds until they die and chances of disease spread from this class of aviculture is practically nil. Their birds as part of the family have perhaps the strongest sentimental value to them and this should be a point of special consideration.

The collector-breeder must dispose of his surplus birds through trade or sale — the more desirable to other breeders, the less desirable to the pet shop — but sales are not his primary interest, rather an outlet for surplus stock. His birds except in the southernmost states are usually confined indoors in urban or suburban communities and the number of birds he moves is proportionally small. Quarantine presents no great problem.

This class of aviculturist has an intense personal interest in his birds. His collection may represent years (up to most of a lifetime) of careful selective breeding for improved strains, or the laborious establishment of new and rare mutations. It may include the captive breeding and conservation of endangered species.

This class of aviculture is one which tends to the rare and the irreplaceable and any destruction of such birds without

proof of infection would cause irreparable damage which no amount of money could compensate.

The dealer buys and sells. His birds are usually held on a short term basis only. His interest in them is generally not a personal one but one of financial concern. Most of his stock is replaceable.

This is the class with the greatest and most far reaching movements. The one with the greatest possibility of exposure and spread.

Sometimes depopulation as a result of infection or exposure to infection even works to the advantage of this class of aviculturist in that he receives equitable or better than retail value for his birds and may even get rid of old inventory stock that he has been unable to move. This is perhaps the easiest class for which to write regulations.

The zoos and the public collections as a rule contain many birds that are rare, endangered and irreplaceable. Like the collector-breeder, they also sell their surplus, but this is not their primary interest. Like the collector-breeder, these institutions need special consideration in any policy that is drawn up.

Policies need to be tailored to meet the special requirements of each of the above different types of operations and

in most instances full use of epidemiology surveys and individual case studies should be utilized for the most intelligent approach to solutions. Each class of aviculture should be defined separately in any procedure.

Any procedure involving the endangered species, whether on suspicion of exposure or even infection, must comply with the law as set forth by the Congress under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. (I understand that the Task Force in California disregarded the provisions of this Act when endangered species were destroyed there in the recent outbreak).

I believe that Veterinary Services can sit down with knowledgeable aviculturists and work out a solution to this problem.

I view with alarm the observation of Dr. Allen R. Magie that humans (task force personnel) may be the primary method of virus transmission (from flock to flock) during a VVND epidemic.

In case of another outbreak of this disease I would consult my lawyer, and urge other members to do the same, with the purpose of prohibiting any government inspector from visiting my aviary unless he can furnish me with an affidavit that he has not been in contact with any poultry or other birds for at least 90 days prior to his proposed visit to my premises.

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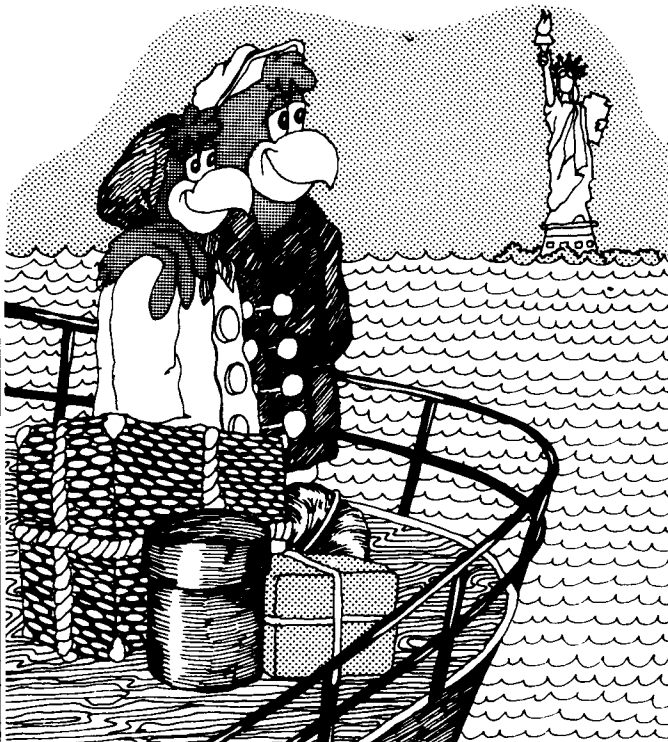
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