

Cooperative Breeding Programs

Legal Importation Under the Wild Bird Conservation Act

By Mary Ellen LePage

The Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992, restricts the importation of any species of parrot now listed on any appendix to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, even though some species are not endangered. This law was enacted to stop the mass capture and importation of wild-caught parrots destined for the U.S. pet trade. The law covers all parrots, and some other groups of birds although there is a short list of exempt parrot species now considered “domesticated” that can be legally imported without WBCA permits.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service International Affairs (Management Authority) is responsible for administering the CITES treaty for the United States. They issue permits to import and export species that are protected by CITES and by various other wildlife conservation laws, such as the Wild Bird Conservation Act. They administer the Cooperative Breeding Programs for importation of live exotic birds protected under the law.

Cooperative Breeding Programs

Cooperative Breeding Programs allow limited importations of certain listed species for use as breeding stock. The intent of the CBP is to import species of birds that are not well represented in the United States, and to import them in sufficient numbers of diverse genetic backgrounds to establish a self-sustaining, captive population, in the U.S.

A Cooperative Breeding Program consists of a leader/program manager, and two or more breeders (which may include the leader). Participants must

be willing to comply with the USFWS regulations, and the requirements of the oversight organization, ie: the AFA. The leader submits an application to USFWS for a Cooperative Breeding Program, specifying an avicultural organization that will oversee the CBP. AFA has been the overseer for the following past CBPs—Red Siskin, Blue-headed Macaw, Javan Hill Mynah, Pyrrhura Conure and Red-crested Cardinal, and is the current overseer for the Blue-eyed Cockatoo CBP, which has been extended to include most of the Black Cockatoos. The Pyrrhura Conure CBP has been extremely successful at populating the U.S. with several conure species, now available in aviculture without a special permit.

USFWS Approvals

The USFWS approves:

- the request for the program, as submitted by the Program Leader,
- an oversight organization for the program,
- each member in the program, and
- the importation permit for each bird or group of birds to be imported.

USFWS Requirements

Generally, under cooperative breeding programs, the USFWS requires that birds to be imported be domestically raised in a country other than their country of origin. There are some exceptions made where wild birds can be imported. The importation of CITES I species are only rarely allowed and require a special breeding facility. To prevent birds being imported and resold, the USFWS requires that the birds be imported for breeding purposes, and that they may only be moved (sold or transferred) to

other approved members of the program. When imported birds are to be transferred to a new owner for any reason, that owner should become a member of the CBP. USFWS also requires biannual updates from the program to include hatches, deaths, transfers, participant changes and more.

Pros and Cons of CBPs

The benefit of these CBPs is that aviculturists may be permitted to import a species that is underrepresented in U.S. aviculture, and thus increase the genetic pool of these species.

The problems have been the difficulty in identifying legitimate sources for birds to be imported, and the possibility of being scammed.

Current Ophthalmica (Blue-eyed) Cockatoo CBP

The Blue-eyed Cockatoo CBP, submitted by Susan Clubb DVM, was approved in 2005. Nine pairs of Blue-eyed Cockatoos have been imported since that time. Imports were young and are currently just reaching breeding age. Two pairs have laid eggs.

Upon submission of the renewal, a request was placed to expand the program to include all the black cockatoos. Under the renewal, participants can now import Gang-gang Cockatoos, Red-, White-, and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, and Glossy Cockatoos. Palm Cockatoos are CITES I, therefore importation is not allowed under this program.

New members are welcome under this CBP. If you want to join the CBP and import some of these magnificent birds, contact Mary Ellen LePage mail@birds2pet.com.