



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington, D.C. 20240

March 30, 2001

Ref: Approved Cooperative Breeding Programs under the Wild Bird Conservation Act

Dear Cooperative Breeding Program Coordinators and Members:

Since the publication of the permit regulations of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 (WBCA), many of you have requested additional guidance regarding the establishment, administration, and amendment of cooperative breeding programs and the importation of birds under approved programs. The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance to resolve some of these issues.

When the regulations were drafted, the intent was to provide flexibility so that the program coordinators could operate programs as they see fit provided the criteria for program approval are met. This has resulted in substantial variation among programs in terms of their organization and internal management. We hope that the following suggestions will assist program coordinators and members to comply with the legislation while allowing us to retain flexibility in the regulations.

I. Establishing a new program or amending an existing one:

When a new program is established or an existing one amended, clear policies and procedures should be established. The program coordinators may want to provide a fact sheet to prospective members providing background information and policies for the program. Coordinators may require members to sign an agreement to abide by the policies. Policies may include requiring members to contact the coordinator for pre-approval of an import, provide annual reports, keep certain records, and/or contribute to expenses of the program. All importations by members count towards the total number of animals approved for the program, to establish a genetically viable and self-sustaining captive population. Additionally, a letter of endorsement from the program coordinator submitted with any member's import application will help us expedite the application review process. In fact, this would help prevent imports by program members that are not consistent with the program's management goals and would help ensure that approval conditions are not violated.

2. Withdrawing from a cooperative breeding program:

If a member withdraws from a cooperative breeding program, any birds imported for the program, either directly by that member or another participant, must stay with the program as this was the purpose for which the permit was issued.

This prevents people from joining programs to collect birds, withdraw from the program, and engage in commercial activities with the birds. It would be advantageous for the breeding program to develop clear guidelines on how birds should be returned to the program, as well as any financial ramifications, if a member withdraws from the program or is no longer able to maintain the specimens.

3.      Loaning birds from a cooperative breeding program:

Birds imported as part of a cooperative breeding program cannot be loaned or sold to a nonmember. In exceptional circumstances, birds may be disposed of outside the program if they are determined to be no longer needed for the program because they are well represented genetically by offspring retained by the program. However, approval must be obtained from the Division of Management Authority before any birds can be transferred or sold outside of the cooperative breeding program.

The key to a cooperative breeding program is cooperation. We expect that birds imported for a program will be shared among members and not simply collected by a single member. The objective of cooperative breeding programs under the WBCA is to establish a genetically viable and self-sustaining captive population in the United States. A single facility cannot protect all individuals of the species from threats to the breeding stock (i.e. disease, extreme weather conditions). Program coordinators are requested to provide us records of cooperation among members, breeding records, and other information when the program is reviewed for renewal or amendment. Failure of a coordinator to demonstrate cooperation among members could result in additional evaluation on our part, and could result in revocation of approval of the program. Non-cooperating members can also expect their actions to be taken into consideration by the Service when applying for future permits of any kind (WBCA, Endangered Species Act, etc.).

The cooperative breeding program is intended as a tool for conservation of wild populations. By encouraging the U.S. avicultural community to establish self-sustaining captive populations, we hope to decrease collection pressure on wild populations. The information provided here is intended to serve as guidelines; however, it is meant to ensure compliance with the regulations of the WBCA. Please feel free to contact us if you have any comments or questions.

Sincerely:

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