

AFA in action... **NEWS and VIEWS**

APRIL 1988

Ricebird (Spice Finch) A Prohibited Species in California

Lonchura punctulata

by Jim Hitchcock
Riverside, California

Prepared for the American Federation of Aviculturists Meeting, 15-17 February, 1988, San Diego, California.

Due to taxonomic synonymy, a nomenclatorial mix-up, the Hawaiian rice bird, *Munia nitoria* (Temminck), a significant rice pest and prohibited species is, in fact, *Lonchura punctulata* (Linnaeus), a relatively common pet shop bird in California, where it is usually called the spice finch. The species consists of 12 recognized subspecies with most of our birds the nominate subspecies from India, *L. punctulata punctulata* (Linnaeus).

The species has many common names including: common munia, nutmeg finch, nutmeg mannikin, ricebird (rice bird), scaly-breasted munia, spice bird (spice bird), spice finch, spice mannikin, spotted munia, spotted nun. There are also geographic names like our "Hawaiian rice bird" such as: Indian, Malay, Javan, Philippine ricebird, spice finch, etc.

Knowledge of this mix-up was first noticed and brought to the attention of CDEA when the bird was recognized in a San Bernardino County pet shop as our prohibited species, just prior to Christmas 1987.

The synonymy was then worked out and several approaches to alleviate the problem are now being discussed and should be implemented soon. Guidelines will then be made available by the State of California as to options and time frame.

This opportunity is being taken to inform exotic bird fanciers that due to an oversight on the part of the State of California, the current problem exists. It is important to note and stress that the present problem developed through no fault of the exotic bird industry. In this light, it is essential and a good faith gesture, that both adequate time and various options be given to exotic bird dealers at all levels to divest themselves of their stock on hand, preferably without having to exercise the option of sacrificing the birds in question.

Your suggestions and comments are most welcome. Please address them to: Jim C. Hitchcock, Sc.D. Associate, Agricultural Biologist, Pest Detection/Emergency Projects, California Department of Food and Agriculture, 1643 Columbus Ave., Riverside, CA 92504. ●

Travnicek to Speak At British Spring Symposium

It was announced in London that Dr. Robert G. Travnicek of Wilber, Nebraska has been invited to give the principal lectures at the prestigious London and Southern Counties Budgerigar Society's Annual Spring Symposium.

London and Southern Counties is the largest of the British Budgerigar Societies' "area societies." It includes approximately 1,100 members. The annual spring symposium is attended by an average 300 fanciers from all over England. It has become one of the single largest educational efforts for budgerigar fanciers in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Travnicek will concentrate on the technical aspects of stud management in his first hour including the use of the computer, building and maintenance of the "suspended cage system" and automatic watering of budgerigars. The second hour will be devoted to more philosophic topics concerning the upgrading of studs and production of exhibition-quality budgerigars.

In the afternoon Dr. Travnicek will participate with several of the better known budgerigar fanciers in the United Kingdom in a roundtable discussion of topics selected from the audience.

Dr. Travnicek considers it a singular honor to be the first foreigner to be invited to give the central program at this prestigious event. "I have always enjoyed breaking new ground with budgerigars and especially when it comes to educational endeavors either in writing or lecturing. I am intent on and eager to produce an outstanding program." ●

Federal Shipping Rules May Shut Down Bird Importation

by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, California

On February 8, 1988 new federal regulations went into effect that will forever change the way live birds may be transported from foreign countries into the United States. Under changes to the Lacey Act signed by President Reagan in 1981, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service was assigned the task of drafting and enforcing minimum standards for the humane transportation of live wild animals. Although the standards apply only to international shipments arriving in the United States, its impact on the bird industry will be profoundly felt.

Under the Lacey Act amendments of 1981, the USFWS drafted sweeping new standards which were published in the Federal Register on December 4, 1985. Many organiza-

tions responded, including the AFA; however, little changes were made and the final rulemaking was published November 10, 1987.

Under the new regulations all live bird shipments must be examined by a veterinarian ten days prior to shipment, and delivered to the air carrier six to ten hours before departure. All wild birds must be held and conditioned for 14 days prior to shipment. Regulations require space bars to keep crates separate from one another in cargo holds, or slanted ventilation walls, to provide adequate ventilation. Adequate perches for perching birds must be provided, and each bird must have enough space to be able to stretch its wings without touching another bird. Ambient air temperatures around the bird must be maintained at a range of not lower than 55° F or higher than 85° F.

Other parts of the regulation cover handling of cargo, including protection from heat, sunlight, and drafts, procedures for emergency treatment, and any supplemental feeding and watering that may become necessary. Most of the rules are reasonable, and many are currently common practice in the industry.

The major shortcoming of the new regulations lies in the space requirements permitting each bird to stretch its wings without touching another bird. If such spacing is required, the necessary box size would be enormous for larger birds, making it prohibitive to ship such birds as macaws, cranes and flamingos.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service intends to rigorously enforce the new regulations, the burden for which will fall both on the importer and on the carrier. While the shipper and the purchaser may be reasonably expected to comply with most of the regulations, it is counterproductive to enforce the rules against the carriers. Carriers will be penalized if they accept shipments of non-conforming animals. With the regulations as complicated as they are, it is unreasonable to expect carriers to be liable for their inadvertent violation. Rather than risk heavy penalties and fines, most international carriers have already indicated their intentions to discontinue accepting further shipments of live birds after February 8, 1988. If that transpires, we will witness the effective end of the importation of birds. ●

AFA's Response To Federal Shipping Rules

January 13, 1988

Dr. Richard L. Jachowski, Acting Chief
Federal Wildlife Permit Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1000 North Glebe Road
Room 620
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: 50 CFR Part 14
Implementation of Humane and Healthful Transport of
Wild Mammals and Birds into the United States
February 8, 1988

Dear Dr. Jachowski:

The American Federation of Aviculture ("AFA") has asked me to inform the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the "Service") of AFA's position with respect to the implementation of the Regulations Pertaining to the Humane and Healthful Transport of Wild Mammals and Birds into the United States published in Volume 52, No. 217 of the *Federal Register*, November 10, 1987 (the "Regulations").

As the national organization of aviculturists, hobbyists and owners of exotic avian species, AFA is opposed and strenuously objects to the implementation of the Regulations in the form as published.

During the comment period for the proposed Regulations, AFA corresponded with the Service in order to inform the Service of our concerns with respect to the Regulations as proposed. It appears that the Service, despite AFA's position and advice to the contrary, adopted Regulations which would, in many respects, be in and of themselves inhumane to the birds which they allegedly propose to protect. The shipping container requirements are contrary to all good avicultural sense in that they will allow birds in transport to become injured as a result of the excessive space required for shipping containers. While AFA has other concerns with respect to the direct effect of the Regulations on the avian species with whose welfare we are so concerned, that is our major objection.

If AFA was not so acutely aware of your, the Director's and the Service's commitment to improving and enhancing aviculture in the United States, we would sincerely and with just cause believe that these Regulations were being adopted to halt the importation and shipping of exotic avian species. We certainly hope and trust that this intent is not present; however, we are extremely concerned that in any event the cessation of avian importation will be the result. We feel that compliance with the Regulations is, as a practical matter, impossible and that in any event the international transportation industry will not want to risk the result of non-compliance with such technical regulations. The Regulations are patently excessive and unreasonable. As you are aware, we are diametrically opposed to any such result for many reasons, not the least of which is that we are firmly committed to the principle that only through aviculture will we be able to conserve numerous avian species in controlled environments even though they may become extinct in the wild due to habitat destruction.

We know that you understand that aviculturists, too, are dedicated to the humane care and treatment of the avian species which we seek to bring into our aviaries and make our companions. However, in light of the emergency which would be created by implementation of the Regulations, AFA hereby respectfully requests that the implementation of the Regulations be indefinitely postponed while a panel including the Service, the transportation industry, pet industry, zoological professional and avicultural community, among others, be convened to review and revise the Regulations.

AFA is so sincerely committed to its position concerning these Regulations that our membership has asked the Executive Board to explore an unprecedented alliance with the pet industry and the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, among others, to consider taking decisive action to insure that these Regulations are not implemented and imposed upon the international community.

I hope and trust that this letter will be received in the spirit in which it is sent, that is to improve, clarify and make practical the Regulations, rather than to place obstacles in the path of the Service in its effort to improve humane treatment and shipment of avian species.

I look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,
American Federation of Aviculture
Gary P. Lilienthal, Vice President and Legal Counsel ●