

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

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**Department of the Interior
News Release dated October 31, 1988**

Federal Agents Uncover Illegal Trade in Rare Parrots

Wildlife law enforcement officers of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have concluded a two-year investigation that documented extensive illegal trade in protected parrots, Interior Secretary Don Hodel announced today.

Thirty-six people in six states — Indiana, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Texas and California — will be prosecuted for felony violations of U.S. smuggling statutes and the Lacey Act, a federal law aimed at preventing illegal trade in protected wildlife. One defendant, already prosecuted, is serving 18 months in jail.

Hodel said, "Operation Psittacine documented large-scale trade in smuggled parrots from Mexico and Central and South America into the United States. Information gathered during the investigation indicates as many as 26,000 birds a year are smuggled across the Mexican border near Brownsville, Texas, alone."

Smuggled parrots valued at an estimated \$468,000 along with aircraft and vehicles valued at \$93,000 were seized during the investigation. Species seized include thick-billed parrots, scarlet macaws, black palm cockatoos, double yellow-headed Amazon parrots, yellow-naped parrots, red-lored parrots, and Mexican red-headed parrots. The birds are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. The thick-billed parrot is listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Frank Dunkle said, "Agents ran a 'sting' operation in Dayton, Ohio, with the cooperation of the owners of a local chain of pet stores. The owners permitted the agents to represent themselves as bird buyers for the pet stores in order to document the activities of illegal dealers in parrots."

Dunkle noted that the existence of illegal trade in parrots has been known for years. "Special agents nationwide have received complaints regarding people dealing in illegal parrots for a number of years," Dunkle said. "The problem has been that violators claimed the illegal birds were bred in captivity in the United States and, therefore, not subject to laws protecting wild parrots."

"The illegal dealers commonly believed that once they got the smuggled birds away from the border they would not be caught. Operation Psittacine is the first major covert effort by the Fish and Wildlife Service to target illegal parrot dealers operating away from the borders."

The smuggling of parrots not only threatens wild parrot populations but also is a threat to agriculture in the United States. Smuggled parrots are not put through normal quarantine procedures and can carry the highly contagious Newcastle's disease. This viral disease can infect poultry and other bird species.

Agents from six districts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Division and U.S. Customs Service worked on

the investigation. U.S. attorneys in 10 judicial districts and the Lands and Natural Resources Division of the Justice Department are prosecuting the cases.

Frank Dunkle, Director
United States Fish & Wildlife Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C.
RE: Operation Psittacine

December 5, 1988

Dear Director Dunkle:

I am writing to you on behalf of the American Federation of Aviculture ("AFA") and its members who are concerned with the aviculture of exotic birds in the United States with respect to what AFA has learned of the recent action by the Service in connection with Operation Psittacine.

Interestingly enough, AFA was advised some time ago of an operation being conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service (the "Service"). AFA's initial reaction to this was concern that such an operation might involve action against unsuspecting and otherwise responsible aviculturists purchasing exotic birds without knowing or being able to ascertain their origin or their legality. As you know, AFA has, in the past, been concerned that individual aviculturists acquiring what they believe to be legitimate birds and intending to act legally in every way could technically and unknowingly be the recipient of a smuggled bird. While AFA has always stood steadfastly against smuggling, we are equally committed to protection of unwary, legitimate aviculturists and the birds which they acquire from sweeping laws which we do not believe were or are intended to punish or prosecute either of them.

Along with these concerns went our great fear that due to one state's passage and efforts of individuals in other states to pass laws which would ban the sale of legally-imported birds, smuggling into these states, many of which are represented in Operation Psittacine, would increase.

To the contrary, what AFA is informed has happened is that the very smugglers who illegally traffic in species which are the subject of our avicultural pursuits have been arrested and are being prosecuted and their activities stopped at the source. AFA applauds this process and remains committed to these type efforts to halt smuggling. As we have stated in past correspondence to the Service, and we are pleased to see this in the Service's Press Release of October 31, 1988, we know that smuggling is the aviculturist's greatest enemy in that it involves the risk of spreading deadly diseases through aviaries throughout the United States as well as promoting the inhumane treatment of the birds which are the subject of the smuggling. As always, AFA stands ready to assist the Service in its efforts to halt this smuggling so as to stop the spread of such diseases and the inhumane treatment of smuggled birds through the proper and intelligent enforcement of appropriate regulations and emphasis on the need for legitimate trade.

Additionally, we wish to express our concern and desire that

any birds which were seized in connection with the operation be properly cared for and eventually disbursed throughout the avicultural community in a manner in their best interests and in the best interests of aviculture. AFA is also ready and committed to assist the Service in this endeavor.

As evidence of our commitment to continuing cooperation with the Service in connection with such action, a copy of your news release of October 31, 1988 is being forwarded to the AFA *Watchbird*, our bi-monthly news publication, for publication and distribution to our membership. As you can see from the enclosed, notice of this action has already been released to AFA member clubs through our monthly newsletter.

We hope and trust that AFA and the Service will continue to work together so as to enhance and enrich aviculture and the avicultural community in the United States and to bring the spread of disease and inhumane treatment of birds which are smuggled to an end.

If we can be of assistance in these efforts, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Very truly yours,

American Federation of Aviculture

Gary P. Lilienthal, Vice President and Legal Counsel ●

Parrot Specialist Group of the ICBP Holds Meeting on Neotropical Parrots

by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, California

The Parrot Specialist Group of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) met in Curitiba, Brazil, October 13 through 18, 1988 to discuss the conservation of neo-tropical parrots, many species of which are in serious decline and threatened with extinction.

Noting with sadness and despair the extinction of the Spix's macaw (*Cyanopsitta spixii*) in the wild this year (there are 15 known specimens in captivity), the conference attendees discussed ways to prevent additional species' disappearance. Other species perilously close to the abyss include the Lear's macaw (less than 100 in the wild), golden conure, and numerous endemic island Amazon species including the Bahama parrot, vinaceous Amazon, imperial Amazon, Cayman Brac parrot, and several others.

Several causes were cited as contributing to the declines in neo-tropical parrots including habitat loss, hunting, and capture for the pet trade. Whereas these factors usually work together to bring on precipitous declines, frequently only one factor may be almost entirely responsible, such as habitat loss in the case of the golden conure, or capture for the pet trade in the case of the hyacinth macaw.

The hyacinth macaw is a particularly interesting case in that it is one of the few species almost entirely affected by the trade in neo-tropical parrots. Since it was listed on Appendix I of CITES in 1987, only fifteen months ago, nearly 1,000 specimens have been illegally captured and smuggled out of Brazil. This figure represents approximately 25% of the estimated wild population at the time of its listing on Appendix I. At the same time, the hyacinth's habitat has remained relatively intact and protected. Most of the poached hyacinths wind up in Singapore and Japan, though a few have found their way to Europe and the U.S., according to TRAFFIC.

Action plans for the conservation of neo-tropical parrots were discussed, elements of which included tougher enforcement of laws protecting wild birds, stronger efforts in preserving habitat,

education programs at the local level to encourage appreciation of and protection for parrot species, and the implementation of captive breeding programs for critically endangered species. In fact, private aviculturists were provided the forum for presentation of several papers on the current and prospective contributions private aviculture has made and can make to the conservation of these parrots.

The AFA was represented at the conference by Jerry Jennings, past president and member of the AFA Conservation Committee. AFA would like to express its appreciation to Opsail Travel of New York and Opsail's president, Nancy Neil, for their generous donation of the airfare to AFA, thus allowing AFA's participation in this important meeting. ●

The Role of AFA's State Coordinators

by Amy Worell, D.V.M.
State Coordinator Chairman
Woodland Hills, California

Have you ever wondered about becoming a state coordinator for the AFA or what exactly these individuals contribute to the organization? Have you considered applying for the position in your state but have been unsure as to what might be expected of you? These questions are often asked, and hence the purpose of this article.

The position of state coordinator in the AFA is a volunteer role with a large responsibility. State coordinators must be members of the organization for at least one year, so as to familiarize themselves with the inner workings of the group. The appointed state coordinator serves for one year, and will be reappointed for a second one-year term upon adequate completion of the first term. State coordinators are selected by the state coordinator chairman, approved by the executive committee, and then voted on for final approval by the board members at either the winter or spring meeting.

The state coordinator is responsible for promotion and solicitation of members in his or her state. This, of course, can be delegated responsibility, with the state coordinator appointing or finding individuals to represent AFA at bird-related events, rather than the individual surmounting this task unaided.

The state coordinator is also responsible for monitoring legislative activities in his state. This involves pertinent activities occurring at both the state and local level. In the event of legislation being introduced that is deleterious to the interests of aviculturists and pet bird owners, the state coordinator should coordinate AFA members to represent and protect the interests of bird owners.

It is recommended that state coordinators hold an annual state AFA event in their state. This event serves several purposes for the organization. Membership will, of course, be promoted and the organization can be introduced to the bird-owning public which are not currently members of AFA. This should serve as the main impetus for the event. Additionally, an annual event serves to unify and strengthen bonds between existing members and to promote the virtues that membership affords its members.

Presently, a number of states are without state coordinators. If you are interested in the position for your state, either presently if a vacancy exists, or in the future when the current state coordinator's term has expired, please contact the state coordinator chairman.

States in need of a state coordinator are: Arkansas, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas (northern section), Texas (southern section), Vermont, Wisconsin and Wyoming. ●