

the Aviculturist, the State & the Birds

by Rae V. Anderson

You are possibly aware by now that the California Dept. of Agriculture has drafted a rule which, if approved, will classify some additional species of birds as Agricultural pests, and as such, make importation, transportation, or possession of them illegal. This is the same procedure which, as of May 1974, made the Quaker (Monk) Parakeet an illegal bird in the State of California. The birds involved in this new "Pest Evaluation" proposal are: Ring-necked Parakeets, Canary-winged Conures (Bee bees), Nanday Conures, Double Yellow-headed Amazon and Green-cheeked (Mexican Red-headed) Amazon Parrots.

This rule is being proposed because at least a few of each of these species are living in the wild in California and are either known or believed to have bred, on at least one occasion, at liberty in this state. Members of the Dept. of Agriculture's Exclusion and Detection Division, last year, removed three baby Indian Ring-necked Parakeets from a nest in a tree in Pomona, Los Angeles County. The parent birds escaped them. At the present time the status of these "Pomona Ring-necks" is unknown. Another group of 14 liberty Ring-necks is known to exist in the Los Gatos-Santa Cruz area, and there are a few scattered individuals or groups in places such as Pasadena and other parts of Los Angeles. The Canary-winged Conures are known to have been breeding at liberty in the Point Fermin (City of L.A.) area and now amount to a flock estimated at between 100 and 200 birds.

The Dept. of Agriculture has documentation of Nanday Conures liberty breeding at least once in California and the Quaker Parakeets, in addition to the New York experience which was admittedly blown out of proportion by the news media, exist in small liberty flocks and are reportedly breeding in various parts of California.

There are individuals, pairs and small flocks of Amazon Parrots in several areas of L.A. County as

well as other parts of the state. Some of these birds are possibly escapees from cages and aviaries and some are believed to have been liberated by smugglers when they believed that their apprehension was imminent. It is of course also possible that a very few birds may have been deliberately liberated by uninformed or misguided individuals who simply thought it would be nice to see these birds flying at liberty or who believed that nothing should be caged.

Whatever the reason, it is absolutely illegal to liberate non-native birds in this state. In addition to that, in most instances, there is very little likelihood that the liberated birds will be able to survive in this environment which is in every way foreign to that from which they are native. Also, after a couple of generations in captivity the birds further lose their ability to adapt and compete even in a favorable environment. The few (in all probability wild caught) which do make it may proliferate due to lack of natural controls such as disease, parasites, predators, etc. These species which do manage to become established are of course exceptional cases.

While some individual aviculturists may not see these birds as a problem (and admittedly they are not a problem as long as their numbers remain small) the Dept. of Agriculture does see them as potential pests because once the birds prove that they can adapt to the environment and breed successfully they pose a potential threat to agriculture.

In their minds this ability is established by one successful liberty breeding. The Dept. of Agriculture people feel that they cannot afford to take chances. They see, or fear, potential proliferation as has occurred with the English Sparrow, Starling and Rock Dove or Street Pigeon which also were not pests when they were in small numbers. The Dept. also knows the type and extent of damage that these birds do to agriculture in their native habitat. This automatically creates a problem for us as aviculturists.

It would be foolish to assume or believe that prohibitions would be limited to the above mentioned species. Apathy may very well result, if we discover that birds in our aviaries are suddenly illegal and subject to seizure.

How do we get around this? There is a possible way!

The Dept. of Agriculture's Exclusion and Detection Division tells us that the problem only exists if these non-native birds are able to survive and breed at liberty. If we, as interested aviculturalists, can recover these birds by trapping or whatever means necessary to get them out of the wild environment, then the Dept. of Agriculture will not see a need for the pro-

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hibitive laws. This appears to be an area of common ground where aviculturists can work with the Dept. of Agriculture for our respective benefits.

To accomplish this we need all aviculturists within the State of California to report definite liberty sightings of non-native birds of all species (including parrot family, finches, doves, soft bills, etc.) with details of the sightings. Desired information should include the specie and number of birds sighted; exact location; whether the birds were roosting, feeding, nesting, or just flying by; what they were eating; date and hour of sighting and whether or not it is known if the reported birds are regular inhabitants of the area; whether or not they were breeding in the area.

In addition to such reports, we need names, addresses and telephone numbers of aviculturists who will be willing to go to the areas of reported sightings which are closest to their homes and observe the birds in an effort to confirm the sightings, to fill in missing details and report this information to a central location. Also, we need a list of people who will be willing to try to recover these birds. Once recovered, these birds may be disposed of in any way that is desired by the party into whose possession they have fallen. They may go into your aviary, be sold, etc., as you wish. The State Dept. of Agriculture representatives indicate that they have no interest in the means of disposition – only the fact that they are removed from the liberty environment.

It would also be beneficial to launch a campaign to try to educate the public to the reasons why these non-native species should not be permitted in liberty state, and in fact, that they should be retrieved. Consequently, we need people who have contacts or a good rapport with the news media, who can get these stories aired. This should also help reduce possible criticism of our efforts to recover these birds.

If we are all willing to work together to realistically solve this problem, common to all aviculturists in this State, we can hopefully insure that we will be able to keep our birds without State interference.

Please send all your sightings as well as your names, addresses, telephone numbers and the kind of help you are able to provide (OR CALL) to:

American Federation of Aviculture
P.O. Box 1125, Garden Grove, California 92642

Rae Anderson (San Gabriel Valley area)
288 Churchill Rd., Sierra Madre, Calif. 92024
weekdays (213) 621-3675 weekends and evenings (213) 355-1020

Francis Billie (San Gabriel Valley area)
4935 Doreen Ave., Temple City, Calif. 91780 (213) 444-0253

Bernard Teunissen (Riverside County)
16650 Washington St., Riverside, Calif. 92504 (714) 689-8590

Dave West (East L.A. county area)
209 N. 18th St., Montebello, Calif. 90640 Evenings (213) 721-2247

Ralph Shields (Sacramento area)
2703 50th Ave., Sacramento, Calif. 95822 (916) 422-2385

Jerry Jennings (Santa Monica-San Fernando Valley)
1803 Pontius Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90025 (213) 884-5476

Gary Aalfs (Mid. Orange County area)
3009 S. Pacific Ave., Santa Ana, Calif. 92704 (714) 546-8495

Mike Cunningham (North East L.A. County area)
11847 Rio Hondo Parkway, El Monte, Calif. 91732 (213) 443-3423

Dr. Lawrence W. Swan (San Francisco, San Jose)
1032 Wilmington Way, Redwood City, Calif. 94032 (415) 368-3512

Russ Sutton (North Orange County)
12672 Lorna St., Garden Grove, Calif. 92641 (714) 539-9933

Frank Kozeluh (San Diego area)
6171 Amarillo, La Mesa, Calif. 92041 (714) 469-4724

Gene Hall (North San Diego county)
3141 Twin Oaks Valley Rd., San Marcus, Calif. 92069 (714) 744-4835

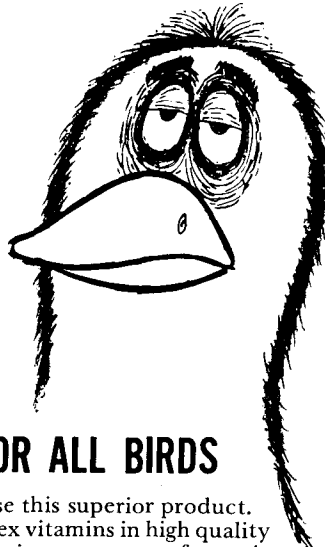
Lee Horton (North San Diego county)
2376 Bella Vista, Vista, Calif. 92083 (714) 727-1486

It may be necessary to start this project just in the Los Angeles area or Southern California, depending upon the level of aviculturists participation. However, we would like this activity to be expanded statewide as soon as we can obtain people in other parts of the state who are willing and able to coordinate it in their areas.

We would very much like to have something of a positive nature to report at the forthcoming meeting of the Prohibited Species Committee meeting in Sacramento where the current Pest Evaluation report will be presented.

In addition we would like to hear of any other solutions to this problem which you believe would be workable. ■

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