

# **AFA in action...**

# **NEWS and VIEWS**

JULY 1994

## **Orange County Bird Breeders Strong AFA Supporter**

On Saturday, 11, '94, Aletta M. Long, southern California regional vice president, was asked to attend the Orange County Bird Breeders' annual fund raiser and picnic. OCBB President Donna Reynolds had a special donation of \$1,000 to present to Aletta for AFA Small Grants programs. The OCBB had worked all year selling raffle tickets for a much desired bird. The winner was delighted, and so are much appreciated AFA Small Grant programs. This is not the first time this club has rallied to AFA support. This is the kind of dedication that enables AFA to continue its very important work. ●

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## **AIM Established to Improve Aviculture**

Avian Information Management (AIM) was established to provide a stable system for improving aviculture. There are many volunteer organizations that have done much for aviculture but, because of burn-out and other problems associated with volunteer organizations, their service to the avian community can be inefficient and inconsistent. AIM supports these organizations by performing services that are often duplicated by others and giving them the best possible access to publicity opportunities.

AIM has three major goals: Education (only through education can we solve many of aviculture's problems), Responsibility (only through responsible avian management will these birds be available for future generations to enjoy) and Service (AIM must provide good service to its customers and clients just like any other business to survive).

AIM's vehicle for providing its many services to manufacturers, distributors, pet and feed stores, breeders, clubs, exhibitors, pet owners, researchers, veterinarians and other aviculturists is through the Bird Bank News (BBN), the only newspaper devoted exclusively to captive birds. BBN keeps subscribers informed about AIM services, prints timely news items, lists events and has a classified ad section for breeders organized by species. Subscriptions are \$16 for 12 monthly issues and BBN has some fund-raising opportunities for you, your club or bird program of your choice.

For more information write or call Ron McMurtry, manager, AIM, 1115 Fern Ave., Felton, CA 95018-9515, phone (800) 246-5577. ●

## **Parrots and Their World — Educational Effort for Rural Mexico**

The ultimate fate of animals and plants on our planet rests with the attitudes and values of those humans who share their environments. The old saying, "we will save what we know, we know what we are taught" should not be taken lightly when designing comprehensive conservation strategies.

It should not be surprising that most successful field-based conservation efforts involving birds have a strong educational component. Unfortunately, scientists often feel ill equipped to deal with these aspects due to their lack of training in elementary and secondary education. Recall, however, that all is often lost if the people do not value the resource. Incorporating an educational element into the parrot conservation strategy called PROYECTO LORO has not been easy. Funds are difficult to locate for educational purposes. Additionally, educational materials have to be developed specifically for the region and topic. With some limited financial support from the World Nature Association, British Council and the World Wildlife Fund, a pilot program has been developed targeting 10 villages (ejidoes) in northeastern Mexico. The villages are all within the known range of the Yellow-headed Amazon *Amazona oratrix* and the Green-cheeked Amazon *Amazona viridigenalis*, both IUCN/ICBP Red Data Book listed species.

Due to the popularity of these birds as pets and their close proximity to the U.S. border, smuggling is a major factor in the species' decline. To address this issue, a coloring book was produced titled, "Los Loros y Su Mundo" translated as parrots and their world. The book is based on an ecosystem approach depicting "the various kinds of parrots," "Animals that also nest in tree cavities," "animals with the same diet as parrots," "predators of parrots" and the "habitats of parrots." Included also is a "connect the dots," "follow the parrot to its nest" and parrot crossword puzzle.

In addition to the coloring book, which includes a short text with each drawing, is a giant 3' x 4' coloring poster drafted from the coloring book's drawings. Augmented with a video on Proyecto Loro, the materials will be presented this summer. While we are certain the effort will be a big hit, a great need exists to take it to additional villages. Bird clubs wishing to "adopt" a village and provide the materials are encouraged to do so and contact Proyecto Loro by writing 218 Conway Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78209. For your tax deductible donation, a slide set, taken at "your" village, and a short commentary will be provided so your club members can see first hand the difference their involvement has made in conserving parrots in the wild. ●

# Six Charged in Smuggling of Bird Eggs

*Exotic species hatched in U.S., bring high price*

by Carmen Ramos Chandler  
Daily News Staff Writer

Six people are facing federal charges for smuggling fragile cockatoo eggs from the Australian outback into the United States, where the birds were hatched and sold at prices up to \$12,500.

Believed to be part of a smuggling ring operating on three continents, the six made more than \$1 million since 1983 selling the birds at pet shops from Malibu to upstate New York, according to an indictment unsealed last week in U.S. District Court.

"People don't realize that the United States is the largest consumer of wild-caught birds in the world," said A.B. Wade, spokeswoman for the Department of Interior, which oversees the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"There is a significant illegal market out there that could threaten the survival of some of these birds, and we're trying to do something about it," Wade said.

So far, 17 people in Australia, New Zealand and the United States have been convicted on charges arising from the federal investigation. More arrests are expected, officials said.

Charged with conspiracy and violating federal fish and wildlife protection laws are William Wegner, Brian Bradley, John Barth, David Freda and Mark Skillman, all of New York state; and Theodora Swanson of Memphis, Tenn.

Wegner, formerly of Woodland Hills, and Barth were arrested in the past two weeks.

Barth pleaded not guilty to charges during his arraignment last Monday. He is being held in lieu of bail at the Metropolitan Detention Center downtown. Wegner is free on bond and is scheduled to be arraigned May 23.

In addition to the smuggling charges, Wegner is also charged with money laundering and filing false income tax returns.

Wade said authorities believe Wegner is one of the coordinators of the smuggling operation, while Barth used his connections with pet stores to sell the birds.

"He had owned pet stores and had been a successful bird breeder who raised legitimate birds," Wade said. "Therefore, he was able to sell the birds under the guise of legitimacy and the people who bought them would have no reason to suspect that they were smuggled into the country and bred illegally."

According to the indictment, prices for the birds ranged from \$1,500 to \$12,500 each, depending on the species.

Among the smuggled species were Rose-breasted, Major Mitchell, Red-tailed Black, White-tailed Black, Greater Sulphur-crested and Slender-billed Cockatoos.

Wade said that among the birds smuggled into the United States, the rarest are the black cockatoos.

"They are highly valued by collectors because it is difficult to breed them successfully in the United States," she said.

Australian cockatoos are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora.

Wade added that Australia strictly prohibits commercial exportation of eggs from its native cockatoo species.

Since 1983, according to the indictment, the suspects flew to Australia in September and October — when the native cockatoos lay their eggs, and raided nests built in the wilds of the Australian outback.

Wade said the eggs were immediately put into special elasticized vests that keep the eggs close to the wearer's body to ensure the incubation of the fragile eggs is not interrupted.

"A vest for a man could carry anywhere from 20 to 40 eggs," Wade said.

Federal officials contend the suspected smugglers wore the vests full of eggs on the 14-hour flights to Los Angeles.

Mike Cunningham, associate curator for birds for the Los Angeles Zoo, said the vest would not be conspicuous on people settled into their seats for flights back to the United States, mostly to Los Angeles International Airport.

"After all, you're talking about eggs that are about the size of pigeon eggs, half the size of chicken eggs," Cunningham said. "The vests put all the eggs up front so all a person has to do is wear a baggy sweater and make sure they're not someone who rolls over on their sides in their sleep on the plane."

One suspect, Skillman, arrived at LAX with 49 eggs hidden on his body on one September day in 1990, according to the indictment.

Wade said that after the eggs were smuggled in, they were transferred to an incubator and hatched. The birds would be hand raised and sold to collectors through businesses set up to conceal the illegal origins of the birds.

Among the businesses were Malibu Exotics in Malibu and Planned Parrothood in Paltz, New York, officials said.

Wade said the three-year under-cover investigation of cockatoo smuggling is part of a larger investigation the Fish and Wildlife Service is conducting of the international wildlife trade, which is estimated at \$5 billion annually.

In 1992, 17 people were arrested and later convicted on three continents — Australia, New Zealand and United States, for illicit trade in exotic birds. At that time, the smugglers were dealing in parrots.

Cunningham of the L.A. Zoo said the illegal smuggling of exotic birds like parrots and cockatoos can threaten the species by not only taking them away from their native habitats but by also limiting their abilities to reproduce.

"So many of the birds are put in cages individually instead of breeding programs," he said. "No matter how many birds you bring in, if they are kept in cages by themselves, they are not going to reproduce."

Cunningham said people who smuggle exotic birds don't care about the animals.

"All they care about is the money, and the only reason they treat the eggs and birds so carefully is because they can bring in a lot of money," he said.

"I don't think people think that bird smuggling is as serious a crime as something like auto theft, but it is," Cunningham said. "Both involve big money, but smuggling animals can threaten an entire species."

*Reprinted from the Daily News, May 18, 1994.●*

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## Eric Peake Donates Hyacinth Macaw Art Print

World class bird artist Eric Peake has donated a framed, signed/numbered print of "Hyacinth Macaws" to the AFA. This beautiful limited edition art print will be auctioned at the national AFA convention in Knoxville, Tennessee, August 4-6, 1994. Eric Peake will be in attendance at this convention with his entire collection of prints, plus a few originals for sale. We are pleased to welcome Eric Peake after a three-year absence.●