

EDITORIAL PAGE

It Seems to Me...

by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

American aviculture has been seriously impugned. We have taken a very heavy blow to our credibility, and our sincerity is in grave doubt. Do we or do we not have a healthy regard for the earth's environment and its wild flora and fauna? Do we *really* have a reverence for birds? Is aviculture driven by our love and concern for the birds — or by profit without regard for the birds? There may be some doubts.

A strong case for the profit-only motive is making news even as I write these words. By now most of you have heard or read in various newspapers that bird expert and avicultural guru Tony Silva has been indicted on 15 counts for alleged violations of the U.S. Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, Federal quarantine regulations, as well as certain provisions of CITES. There are also alleged violations of various wildlife protection laws of several other countries.

These latest indictments result out of Operation Renegade, an international undercover investigation that has already *convicted* 30 individuals for involvement in parrot smuggling and other related crimes. On 13 December 1994 (Surprise!! Merry Christmas!!), James Burns, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Chief, John Doggett III, announced the return of the indictments against Tony Silva, his mother, Gila Daoud and co-conspirators Gisela Caseres (aka Ann Koopman) of Asuncion, Paraguay, and Hector Ugalde of Miami, Beach, Florida.

Silva and Daoud are charged with conspiring to smuggle at least 186 endangered Hyacinth Macaws into the U.S.A. in addition to a few other species of protected birds, including Vinaceous Amazons and Crimson-bellied Conures. Counts 3 through 10, 14 and 15 also

charge them with facilitating the transportation of, concealing, and possession of protected parrots, knowing the birds were smuggled. Caseres is alleged to have supplied most of the birds for Silva and Daoud, and Ugalde to have arranged the smuggling of 50 Hyacinth Macaws from Mexico to the U.S.

Gila Daoud is alleged to have run the family smuggling business under the direction of her son, Silva, while he was serving the avicultural and zoo communities as Curator of Birds at Loro Park, Tenerife, Canary Islands. When search warrants were executed at Daoud's home, contraband ivory and a parrot-feather headdress were confiscated, and

charges were filed alleging the smuggling of those items also.

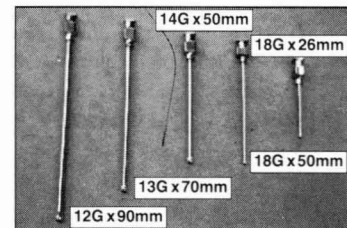
If convicted, Daoud could receive a maximum prison sentence of 50 years and a fine of \$2.75 million. Silva could be sentenced to 45 years in prison and be fined \$2.5 million. Caseres and Ugalde could get up to five years in prison with a possible total of fines amounting to \$250,000. Happy New Year, guys.

Please keep in mind that indictments are not convictions. In the United States all persons are considered innocent until *proven* guilty. In my heart of hearts, I really hope Silva is innocent. I hate to think that any aviculturist in this day and age would become involved in an activity that is harmful to the world's population of birds. Our mission is to enhance the well-being of the birds. If Silva is guilty, I hope that he gets pounded.

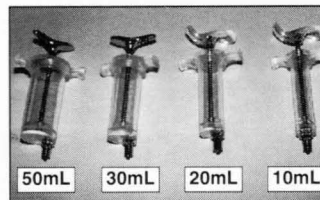
So, what are the ramifications of these charges? Well, for one thing, they support my earlier editorial wherein I said that the times are changing. I can go to almost any important meeting of old time aviculturists and point out in my mind quite a number of highly respected aviculturists whom I personally

STACEY'S CROP NEEDLES

Straight, Curved &
Custom-made Needles
available. All reusable.



PLEXJ SYRINGES



Bonivet Plexi Syringe
* Unbreakable
* Sterilisable to
160 degrees C
* Exchangeable Luer
Lock Adaptor
* Spare Washers
Available

BIRD COLLARS



An easy & economical solution to a recurrent problem in bird treatment

Available in various sizes & quantities.



Local & Overseas Agents and Distributors required

KEVIN GOBBY

117 Goollelal Dr, Kingsley, WA 6026 AUSTRALIA
INTERNATIONAL PH/FAX +61 9 309 9321 ABK ©

know to have violated a few wildlife rules years ago. Thirty years ago, moving birds across borders and beating the I.R.S. on bird profits was an acceptable game one could play. Even the more honorable folks could participate without impugning their character. Also during that time there were numerous forms of racial discrimination (segregated schools, separate drinking fountains, etc.), there was blatant gender discrimination, there was rampant exploitation of the world's resources, and even zoo animals were often kept under conditions unacceptable by today's standards. And these situations were OK to most reasonable and righteous folks of that time. *But that way of life is gone forever. Times have changed.*

Fortunately, the vast majority of aviculturists have also changed with the times and are now enthusiastic environmentalists and supporters of reasonable wildlife regulations. And even when a few unreasonable or ridiculous laws get on the books, today's average aviculturist does not blithely violate them but, rather, attempts to change the laws through the political process.

In this day and age, those who smuggle birds and violate other wildlife laws and fail to report bird profits to the I.R.S. are crooks, plain and simple. If Silva is convicted, I hope none of you bird shuffling, tax cheating miserable excuses for worthy human beings has the gall to point your finger at him in blame. You deserve the same fate and, with a little luck, will get it.

But where does this leave the majority of us? Our philosophical opponents paint us all with the same damaging brush. Silva was a respected leader in *-world* aviculture and he seems to have violated his trust absolutely. If such a leader cannot be trusted, how much less the average obscure backyard breeder. We have *all* been damaged just at a time when our credibility is extremely important. We are in political and philosophical disagreement with a cadre of hard core animal rights fanatics whose ultimate goal is *no use of any animal whatsoever for any reason*. The fanatic leadership of several powerful animal rights organizations wants to stop all medical research on animals, eliminate meat from your diet and outlaw all animal farming. They want to eliminate all zoos, rodeos, circuses, pony rides and any other entertaining use of animals no matter how humane and gentle the use may be. Indeed, some of the most radi-

cal have even voiced plans for phasing out cats and dogs as pets. Of course these folks have not forgotten birds.

There is now and will be increasingly more pressure brought to bear against bird keeping. Every illicit act done by any bird keeper is ammunition that will be grossly exaggerated and used to tighten the noose around the throats of all aviculturists. And, sad to say, this attitude seems to be "politically correct" in some branches of government. It sometimes seems to me that several government agencies display a bias favoring ideas that approach too closely the radical ideas of the whacko animal rights groups. We surely don't want anyone to get railroaded by an over-zealous enforcement team promoting its own agenda.

So what to do? It seems to me that, first and foremost, each aviculturist has to become completely legitimate and keep proper books on their bird operation be it a small bird room hobby or a major commercial breeding farm. If you need a business license, get one. If you make a little profit after all the expenses, declare it and pay your taxes. I am willing to predict for the record that within five or six years every one of you will be contacted by an agent of the I.R.S. Aviculture is not invisible any longer. You had better be aboveboard and legal.

There are a couple of things that I feel are essential to confirming your aviaries as legitimate. Number one is to get involved in the AFA Exotic Bird Registry. And the Registry, it seems to me, ought to have as one of its primary benefits some sort of identification procedure. When you register a bird you also mark it (leg bands, micro-chips, tattoos, DNA samples, or something as yet unknown to me). As I write, at this very moment, there is a study under way to connect the Registry to an identification program. I'm for whatever works and satisfies the federal provisions. Personally, I'm betting on the DNA system as it seems the most foolproof; but perhaps other methods can serve well also. We'll see. When the marking system is in place (whichever one prevails), the birds registered will also have an ID card, so to speak, and will be identifiable and, believe me, no one can claim to be a competent aviculturist if unable to identify his or her birds. At the very least, you should register those birds in your possession that are commonly found in the illicit bird trade.

All birds on the Endangered Species list should also be registered and have biological samples archived. The only way to know with certainty how closely or distantly two birds are related is to compare their DNA "fingerprints". This method of breeding management is already being used by ratite breeders to their great satisfaction and increased production. Most species of captive endangered birds are seriously inbred and the DNA evidence allows the wisest use of the birds in the gene pool. These birds deserve the best management available. I should hope that most responsible aviculturists will choose to take advantage of this remarkable tool — DNA identification.

Secondly, although the small backyard hobbyist may abstain, I feel it is very advantageous for the professional aviculturists to become certified under the Model Aviculture Program (MAP). MAP provides reasonable management guidelines that are designed to enhance the well-being of captive birds. We all like that. MAP can certify that your aviaries and techniques comply. MAP also (through a neutral third party) certifies that your record keeping is up to a certain level of competency. Again, any responsible animal breeder understands the value of knowing each animal's family tree. Even the brightest among you will dim out when all your bird matings are committed to memory. *"As I recall, Matilda was mated to Filbert and had Jimmy, Joe and Murgatrude back in '91. Then Jimmy chewed through the wire and mated with Charlotte---or was that Charlotte who chewed through and mated with Murgatrude? I thought Murgatrude was a female. Etc., etc., etc."*

How do you like them genetics? Also, I'd like to be there when you explain to the I.R.S. your old method of left front pocket for retail, right front pocket for wholesale sales — cash only. Believe me, dear friend, it won't work any longer. Professional operations keep records.

It seems to me that American aviculture is to the point where it must get its house in order. I don't mean we should wimp out and kiss off our basic freedoms. We shouldn't roll over for every bureaucrat that wants to impose outrageous taxes, controls and conditions to birdkeeping. But we ought to embrace a little more discipline and *self* control in our industry lest it be imposed from without. I'd like to know what you think. ➤

Opinions

Is There A Future For Me In Raising Parrots?

Editor-In-Chief,

Mr. Thompson, I have read with much interest all of the articles on regulation and conservation of birds in your last two issues. Since joining your organization in October, these articles have heightened my concern in several areas, as follows:

1. Conservation of a species in its natural habitat is surely the best way to insure it will survive — it is also the least likely to work because of human greed. People will not spend the money and time needed for this to succeed if they see no personal benefit. Without hunting and fishing money in the United States, most of our wildlife would disappear. Hunters and fishermen wouldn't spend the money without seeing benefits. Already licenses are declining as hunting and fishing land is used for development.

Another problem is how to channel money and effort to the birds without mankind siphoning off the majority of the funds. We can't even do this successfully for people very often. Unless very stringent controls are taken, I project that at least 90% of funds raised and sent to foreign countries will never help any birds and will only raise prices of birds in our own country! My concern is that we may shoot ourselves in both feet by throwing our money away on one hand and raising prices on parrots to the point they are no longer affordable to raise or buy in our own country. This will insure that species will disappear as countries develop. Until mankind can control his own population, wildlife will continue to disappear at astronomical levels. Drive through any part of our country, and see the development of our rural areas. It's scary, and the same thing is happening in most places that parrots live.

2. It seems the solution is to evaluate habitat and parrot numbers. Where parrots can multiply, there should be no exports. Where parrot numbers are at the point where their numbers cannot in-

crease because of habitat, exports should be allowed.

3. Control of birds through a registration process will discourage illegal activity. I like your approach to this, but I'd like to know what the rules are before I band my unbanded birds. I'd like to stress them just once instead of several identification change stresses.

I applaud your efforts to comply with the new regulations voluntarily. We certainly don't want to support a government bureaucracy that drives up the price of birds and causes the average citizen to lose interest in parrots because of economics.

It also seems prudent for our organization to spearhead efforts to control im-

portation of exceedingly rare parrots in a way that discourages illegal activity. Again, greed is the problem. When parrots sell for thousands of dollars apiece, illegal activity will occur. Should limits on the price of parrots be considered when wild habitat will support larger populations? This seems more practical than the stupidity of raising the prices on all parrots to support controlling them and in the end, making them even more attractive to smugglers. This is a worldwide problem that can't be solved in the United States. Parrot species will disappear despite our efforts because of population explosion of mankind. Let's explore something besides raising prices to control illegal activity. Price control is the only answer I see — anything else eliminates parrots. Increased

AFA Watchbird advertisers represent some of the best in the business. When you buy from these fine sources, be sure to tell them you saw their ad in *Watchbird*!

The Perfect Gift



AFA presents an outstanding collection of full-color 16 x 12 inch prints illustrating some of Australia's most spectacular birds. For a limited time, AFA will offer this set of four prints (Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorries, Kookaburras and Galahs) at the reduced price of \$25.00. These beautiful prints represent some of Australian artist Michael Piper's finest work.

Remit \$25.00 to:

AFA, P.O. Box 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079
For MasterCard or VISA orders, call 1 - 602 - 484 - 0931

prices decrease market, eliminates breeders, eliminates buyers, eliminates species of parrots, and only helps illegal activity in the short run while parrots last.

I have been involved in aviculture for 3 years now, and have 16 pairs of parrots. I retired 3 years ago after 28 years in management at the age of 52. Hopefully, there will be a future for me in raising parrots. I certainly enjoy the parrots, but I sure don't like the future potential for price increases in a market that declined this past year. I don't plan to expand until the controls are in place, and working.

Carl Beutelschies
Cabot, Arkansas

Legitimate or Not?

Dear AFA:

I must take exception to the editorial written by Mr. Sheldon Dingle, "It Seems to Me..." in the January/February 1995 *Watchbird*. I do enjoy Mr. Dingle's articles, however, his statement "... to be legitimate even your dog must be registered, and to be legal the dog must have a license."

This is not the case. Having bred show Beagles for over 30 years, registration is *not* necessary for the pet owner. Only if you plan to compete in a show or trial of any kind does registration become important. Also, if you *never* license your dog it could count for you if the government should try to fine or otherwise penalize you. There is a case in California where a person never licensed their dog and it was argued in court that by never complying with the voluntary act, the dog owner could not be held for not obeying.

Although this is about dogs, it does have a follow-through for birds. Since *no* animal bred for the pet market has any federal laws regulating the care and keeping of such animal, why should the bird fancy rush to be the first?

Although I am new to the breeding of birds, I find myself alternating between anger and depression that I will not be able to comply with the new "provisions." And I keep asking, "Whyus?"

We, as dog breeders, have faced the animal rights folks for some time now, and we have learned that where we tried to work with them we now have "no breeding" zones. Please be on guard — there is no compromising with these people.

I realize that as a novice bird breeder I may not know all the ins and outs regarding the new Wild Bird Conservation Act. Maybe the AFA could try to explain it to people such as me.

Donna Somers
Oakview, California

Dear Ms. Somers:

Thank you for the excellent letter. You touch on some very important points. First, it depends, I suppose, upon where you live as to whether or not your dog is required to have a license. In the City of Los Angeles, where I and my dog Igor (pronounced Eyegore) live, it is absolutely mandatory that all dogs be licensed. This is not a voluntary matter. The City regulations are very clear — if you have a dog you pay \$20 and get a license. Period. And you should know that the various City employees (meter readers, etc.) who have occasion to be on your property spot suspicious dogs and report their location to the animal control office. Dog owners often receive in the mail memos saying, "A brown and white dog has been reported on your property. Cough up the 20 bucks," or words to that effect. In a month or two, another memo appears adding fines to the original cost of the license. In L.A., at any rate, Igor is not legal without his dog tags. You, obviously, live in a happier town or one not as strapped for money.

Since Igor (a pit bull cross of some sort) was retrieved from a Jack-in-the-Box parking lot, he is obviously not registered. (He is talented, however, and easily kept the parking lot cleared of all foot traffic.) Registered dogs are legitimate — their parentage is known. I'm old fashioned, perhaps, but when one's parentage is unknown or has not the blessing of a legal union, one is illegitimate. This status goes as far back in antiquity as the written word. Igor is well qualified for this classification since his ancestry is unknown, indeed, almost unguessable. Another fact that impresses his illegitimacy upon me is the number of times my friends (becoming fewer by the moment) scream, "Keep that bastard dog away from me." It's obvious.

I stand by my disputed statements. Igor is illegal without a license and he is illegitimate in view of his being engendered by an unsanctioned, unwitnessed union of two strays passing in the night. Forgive my stubbornness.

On a more serious note, though, I

don't think you can equate breeding domesticated cats and dogs for the pet market with breeding birds. Rules that apply are very different. There is no easy answer but maybe a simplistic sketch will give you, as a newcomer, an overview. Many birds in the pet trade are also viable wild species that are protected under various regulations and international treaties. This, of course, applies to snakes, fish, mammals and any other creatures that occur in the wild and are also bred in captivity.

When the critters are threatened or endangered or otherwise controlled by their country of origin, the U.S. is bound by treaty and our own internal regulations to also control those critters. All of a sudden, we find many of the animals we breed for the pet market already under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. The Feds don't care what size cage your parrot lives in. They do care where you got the bird. Through regulation, the federal government can put into place whatever devices or methods it feels are necessary to exercise the control of wildlife (foreign or domestic) demanded by Congress.

Of course, there are many conservation groups pushing for legitimate protection for the world's diminishing wildlife. And justifiably so. At the same time, a number of radical animal rights groups have joined the battle and exert a very strong influence on the regulations adopted by the government. Their aim is to regulate the birds out of existence.

Right now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is examining aviculture to learn whether or not the industry has any built-in controls. If there are none, you can be sure the controls will be imposed by the government. My call for participation in MAP and in the AFA Exotic Bird Registry is to install a form of self regulation that makes sense and that we can live with. I, like you, would prefer there be no regulations at all. But no regulations plus no discipline equals a bird trade out of control. We can no longer get away with that.

Hang in there. I'm sure you can comply with the gentle but effective self-imposed controls that MAP and the Registry call for. For a quick refresher course on some of the laws affecting aviculture, I refer you to Rick Jordan's excellent article "These Laws Are For The Birds" on page 14 of the Jan/Feb 1995 issue of this journal. We'll have periodic updates.

S.L.D., Editor ➤