

Editorial

It Seems to Me...

by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

Things are changing so quickly that I'm having trouble keeping up in these bimonthly editorials. For several years now, the Federal Government has been intent on heaping more and more burdensome regulations onto the backs of an already overburdened populace. This "Big Brother" attitude has been prevalent in every aspect of life from taxes and health care to the merest keeping of a few birds in one's backyard aviary. There are a few powerful persons in high places who feel they know what is best for us "little folk" whether we like it or not. To say nothing of all the other problems in the world, there are those dedicated ARFs (Animal Rights Fanatics) who have their own agenda that they wish to impose upon the rest of us. (Indeed, I have a dear misguided vegetarian friend who is appalled at the high-fat high-fried ethnic diet that prevails in our neighborhood. She'd force health food upon the neighbors *for their own good* if she knew how.) The ARFs have had a pretty good show lately because so many elected officials in government have had the same feeling that they "know what's best" for us.

Now, it seems to me, the worm has turned. We little folk have spoken out against big government cradle-to-grave control of our lives. Why in the world, when such control has proven a failure in every other country, do some of our leaders feel it would work here in the U.S.A.? I don't know just where the new Congress will take us, and we'll have to keep an eye on them just as we did the previous Congress, but I get the feeling that the current Congress wants to lighten the number

of dumb, restrictive regulations that now harass the ordinary folks.

We have long been in a damage control mode with regards to legislation affecting our birds. Some of you may not know it but the AFA has *always* been opposed to additional unnecessary and burdensome regulations. Perhaps you don't remember when (in the early 1970's) the U.S. Department of Agriculture was invading local California aviaries and ruthlessly putting *all* birds, exotic, pet and even endangered species into the mobile gas chambers. News photos showed piles of rare birds that had been gassed and heaped up. The government's policy of total depopulation was devastating emotionally and economically. The Exotic Newcastle's disease that touched off the murderous frenzy was eventually controlled without such drastic measures.

But it was the AFA's lawsuit against USDA that finally resulted in the making of a better policy. What? You didn't know the AFA sued the Feds? And prevailed? It was the beginning of a 20 year relationship that has had its ups and downs. The past few years have been downers. It seems to me, though, that the time is now ripe for some improvement. The Feds now seem more inclined to listen to the people rather than to a few special interest groups (ARFs, if you will).

One major concern right now is that the avicultural community remain united and uniform in the effort to ameliorate or eliminate lousy legislation. There are many facets of the bird fancy that may seem to be independent from one another or unconcerned about bad laws that seem to affect just the other person. There are bird fanciers who have just a few backyard birds for aesthetic pleasure; commercial breeders with huge farms who raise birds specifically to sell at a profit; pet stores that carry birds; veterinarians who have large avian practices; canary breeders; pigeon breeders and racers; ratite farmers; zoos, large and small; growers of bird seed and manufacturers of other commercial bird food; cage, wire and equipment manufacturers; the list is almost endless. All of these peo-

ple depend to a degree upon a healthy bird fancy. What affects the breeder will, somewhere down the line, affect all the others involved. In truth, we are all united in the wish to see a strong, healthy bird fancy that is as prosperous for the birds as it is for the bird keepers.

I know that there are a few small items of disagreement among various contingents of the fancy. What I suggest here is that we rise above these petty differences and unite in our efforts to get rid of bad legislation but also to promote professional standards within our own industry. Simple items like to hybridize or not or whether a cage is six feet long or eight should not put us at one another's throats. (Within your own club, I suppose, it is still OK to backstab and throatcut over important things like whether donuts or chocolate cakes were served, but lets keep that stuff in-house.) As far as I know, every aviculturist still has the right to operate their facility as they choose, providing they don't violate the basic humane and smuggling laws already on the books.

Because the AFA has a long and productive track record fighting for and protecting the individual's rights to keep and breed birds, it has gained the prominent position in this effort. The AFA is the major grass roots avicultural organization recognized by the government as representing the interests of the bird fancy. Like it or not, the AFA has that distinction and, I might add, has earned it—often before many of you possessed even one bird. There are a number of additional clubs and societies that also represent large portions of aviculture. The wisest course suggests that these groups communicate and harmonize on the best actions to take in the effort to promote good aviculture and to get rid of the dumb, counter-productive regulations that work to the detriment of the world's birds.

Take my word for it, the ARFs are reading these very words. Their aim is to divide and conquer us. If we keep a united front, we'll prevail. If we fragment, we'll fail. ➔

Opinions

Follow the will...

On October 23, 1992 President Clinton signed into law the Wild Bird Conservation Act following a passing vote by the majority of the members of Congress. Since that law is now the law of the land, what can we as private citizens do about it?

All the members of Congress who voted for that law were voted into office to follow the wishes of the majority of their constituents, *not to act according to their own agenda*. If the politicians follow the will of the people they may remain in office. If they follow their own agendas they stand a good chance of being replaced.

If each of us who feels that our wishes were ignored by our Congress person would send even \$5.00 to candidates who oppose them, there will be a change. The last election proved the axiom "follow the will of the majority—not your own conscience or agenda."

I have used the term "the will of the majority" and regarding the issue at hand (Federal control of all animals in the U.S.A. and, perhaps, the world) I define the majority as all U.S. citizens who own a dog, cat, fish, reptile or bird. And by "owns" I mean "is responsible for." We are the ones who must make our will be known.

Donald Hudson
Abbeville, Louisiana •

It's PC

It has become politically correct to be classified as a conservationist, preservationist, or environmentalist. To not be one of these is to be looked down on in today's

society as a uncaring and selfish individual.

While the cause is just, the words, when used by persons such as bird breeders to classify themselves, will destroy any hopes we have of building public perception of birds as domestic pets equal to or better than dogs and cats. As long as the public is torn between its desire to be politically correct or to have a beautiful, entertaining and fun companion, we cannot hope for a truly consistent and viable market.

We have let people who want to see all birds set free or regulated to such an extent that we all operate like zoos or research facilities, put a burden of guilt on us so that we have come to use the politically correct words of conservation, preservation, and environmentalist as a definition and in defense of what we are doing. This is not right.

Exactly what is conservation? It boils down to a JUDICIOUS use of natural resources, not a preservation (i.e. no change) of the world as we know it today. The word preservationist in itself implies a godlike attitude on the part of those who use it since nature and the universe itself is ever-changing. To be an environmentalist is to be a person who



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cares about clean air and other things that make our planet a clean and healthy place to live. None of these definitions relate to owning and breeding birds, especially since birds are no longer captured for import and birds that have been domesticated have little or no chance of survival in the wild.

NO—to relate conservation or preservation to domestic bird breeding is a disservice to our efforts to create a marketplace for our birds and a disservice to the birds who would most likely perish if left to their own resources.

In the 70's and early 80's when it was not politically incorrect to own birds, breeders flocked to quarantine stations to purchase stock. No one felt guilty about what they were doing and in fact, the attitude of most was that the birds in their care were getting a much better break than their counterparts in the wild who had to compete for survival. A prime example of the logic in this thinking is the success in breeding experienced by many, as opposed to a low hatch and survival rate in the wild. Of course, part of the problem with existence in the wild is that truly feral and unpopulated areas are becoming scarcer and scarcer. The truth is that until the species homo-sapien learns to control its pro-creative urges, natural resources will continue to dwindle in order to make room for, feed, clothe and house the resulting progeny

The fact of the matter is that birds in captivity are here to stay. Most of them are content, if treated well, enjoy being around humans, and would find themselves up against odds they couldn't cope with if released to the wild (much as we would be if suddenly transported back to the western frontier of 100 years ago). Although some breeders have the misconception that at some point in time the offspring of their stock could be set free, the truth is that unless the offspring have been raised in an environment set up to resemble their natural habitat with no human contact, they probably would not survive. How many breeders have such a facility?

There is also a misconception that the government will buy babies for acclimation and release. Make no mistake—the government will not BUY your stock. If you are claiming to be a conservationist, it will be perceived to be your moral duty to donate the efforts of your labor for the good of the environment. Think about that.

Since birds are kept in captivity, then it is up to us as breeders to see that they are perceived as pets and that concerns about their proper care and maintenance are alleviated through education. That should be our primary concern as keepers and breeders of these delightful creatures. We cannot play into the hands of animal rights groups by claiming to be conservationists when in truth we are not. Support conservation efforts in the wild with all your heart, but if we, as breeders, conserve anything on a domestic level, it must be our right to maintain our birds without undue interference from persons who are using our conservation claims against us.

Pat Heere

Monmouth, Oregon ●

Dear Ms. Heere,

Your letter is full of excellent points and very well said. The case you put forward seems to reflect the legitimate feelings of many commercial parrot breeders who are producing birds especially for the pet market. If you choose to focus on the pet trade and the commercial market, that is perfectly all right. And if you prefer not to think of yourself as a conservationist or preservationist, that too is absolutely OK. You are providing an excellent product and service that makes millions of pet owners very happy. You are involved in legitimate and worthwhile aviculture.

But I hope you don't think that's all there is to aviculture. What about the people who raise finches, pheasants, hummingbirds, toucans, doves and quail? None of these birds make it as pets. There are hundreds of species in aviculture that are never going to be on the pet market.

And those aviculturists who breed these birds often do so at a loss rather than a profit. This is legitimate aviculture too. And it often does have conservational or preservational overtones. To me, one definition of preservation is the act of preserving a species' gene pool in captivity when it may be dwindling or extinct in the wild. A number of species come to mind; the California Condor—virtually extinct in its habitat; the Hawaiian Crow, by 1993 reduced to about 11 wild birds; the Bali Mynah, almost eliminated in nature but now thriving so well in captivity that there is a release program under way; Swinhoe's Pheasant, Chatham Island Sparrow, NeNe Goose, all brought back from the brink by aviculture. There are many more species that have been "preserved," if you will, by dedicated aviculturists who do indeed consider their efforts one form of conservation or preservation.

I agree with you completely that commercial parrot breeding is valid and worthy aviculture. You are not obligated to feel like a conservationist. I disagree, however, if you feel that's all there is to aviculture. Please allow the conservational aviculturists to exist.

Aviculture is commercial breeding of pet birds. Aviculture is breeding rare and endangered species with the aim of preserving their gene pools for the future. I think there is need for both Why not?

SLD, Ed. ➤

NOTICE

These OP/ED pages contain editorials, opinions and letters that reflect the opinions and viewpoints of the writers. These are personal opinions and do not necessarily reflect the official view of the AFA. The intent is to have an open dialogue on any subject of interest to aviculturists. Letters should be brief and to the point and are subject to editing for length and clarity. Address letters to OP/ED PAGE, PO Box 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079.