

the Vet's Corner

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SICK BIRD, DEAD BIRD WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Until recently, there were essentially three options open to the average bird fancier:

1. Take it in stride as simply bad luck.
2. Try to identify the problem with the help of experience, reading and friendly advice.
3. If the bird was sufficiently valuable either monetarily or sentimentally, you might present it to your local veterinarian, if you could find one who was interested in birds and had enough experience to help you. If the bird died, he might make a post-mortem examination, applying those diagnostic techniques which were available to him.

Now, however, as a direct result of the outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease in Southern California, in 1971, the California Department of Food and Agriculture was authorized to accept pet and exotic birds from owners and veterinarians on the same basis as had been applied to animals and poultry of agricultural importance over the years. This was in recognition of the fact that the health of pet and exotic birds has a close and often profound impact on the health of the agriculturally important species and thus on the food supply of the nation.

WARNING

TO RELEASE ANY BIRD INTO
THE WILD WHERE IT IS NOT
NATIVE IS A FEDERAL AND
STATE OFFENSE.

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Thus, the comprehensive diagnostic capability of the State Laboratories was made available to owners and veterinarians alike at a very modest fee. There was no change in the official policy, which decreed that the care and treatment of the sick bird was properly the province of the owner or his veterinarian. In fact, policy requires that any live bird or animal which entered the laboratory must ultimately be killed and disposed of in a suitable manner, to insure that no diseases might be spread into the community.

How then can you decide how to utilize this service? Perhaps the most direct way might be to give us a call. This may be done at the time a problem appears, but preferably should be done before trouble strikes. By way of clarification, let me re-create for you a composite of telephone calls which we received week after week.

Q. *One of my birds has died all of a sudden and I am worried that my other birds may get sick and die, too. Can you help me?*

A. Probably we can. At least, if you can get the dead bird to us, we can determine whether it died of an infectious disease which may pose a threat to the rest of your birds, or rather of an injury or other condition which is unique to that bird. We can also get some idea as to the general health of the flock, as for example, whether they are parasitized or not.

Q. *Well, that sounds helpful, but the bird may have been dead for a day or two. Do you still want to see it?*

A. We prefer a terminally ill or freshly dead bird for our purposes because the decomposition of the carcass destroys some of the evidence which we may require for a diagnosis. We may still find the answer, but the odds are reduced. Also, let me mention that freezing the carcass tends to obscure certain features which may be important in making the diagnosis, so if you can't get it to us for several days, keep it refrigerated but not frozen.

Q. *Do you want to see any of the well birds?*

A. Not necessarily. Because of the possibility of spreading disease from the laboratory to your flock or others, no bird which enters the laboratory may be returned to its owner. If you have a number of birds at risk, you may wish to submit an ill bird for observation or postmortem examination, but we may well find the answer in a fresh dead bird. If you have a sick bird which you want to treat and save, you should take it to your private veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.

Q. *Is there a charge for your services?*

A. Yes. Each case will cost you \$7.50, regardless of whether it involves one bird or 30 birds, as long as they are all from one group. Birds from different cages, or with other problems, which deserve to be handled separately, will be treated as separate cases and will cost \$7.50 each. Incidentally, \$7.50 represents only a part of the real cost. Traditionally, the cost of laboratory services to the agricultural community, and ultimately to the consumers of the State, has been partially covered by an allocation of general tax funds. Only recently has the \$7.50 been imposed to help defray the actual costs.

Q. *What happens if you find that my birds have Exotic Newcastle Disease or some other terrible disease?*

A. In California, certain diseases, including Exotic Newcastle and Ornithosis (Psittacosis) are termed reportable and as such both State and Federal disease control authorities must be notified. In the case of Ornithosis, your premises will be quarantined by local public health officials and you will be directed to treat the entire flock in an approved manner. Following completion of the treatment, the flock will be released and you may be reasonably sure that you have a clean flock. In the case of Exotic Newcastle Disease, the premises will be placed under quarantine by State Animal Health officials. In short order, the flock will be destroyed and you will usually be indemnified by either Federal or joint State-Federal action. The premises will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and after a suitable waiting period, you may begin to rebuild your collection. Clearly this represents a severe impact on your own operation, but must be done in order to prevent a recurrence of widespread Exotic Newcastle Disease, which would be disastrous.

Q. *My birds seem to be fine right now, but I wonder how I can protect them against disease in the future.*

A. Admittedly, this is a complex question and deserves a detailed and comprehensive answer which can't be given during a short phone call. Briefly though, I would start by making these points.

1. Always try to buy only healthy birds. Any suggestion of illness must be viewed with great suspicion and alarm. If you have any doubts as to the health of a bird which you particularly want to add to your collection, you might arrange to have your veterinarian examine it and express his opinion as to its status.

2. Even if it appears to be healthy, never, never introduce it immediately

into your collection. I can't recall how many times I have heard the same, sad story from someone who purchased a new bird, placed it immediately into contact with his old birds, and then watched it and them sicken and die within a week or so. Always arrange to quarantine the bird for at least one month before allowing it to contact your permanent collection. Most, although not all diseases, will manifest themselves in a new bird within 30 days after it is acquired. If it remains in apparent good health throughout the quarantine period, it may then be introduced into the collection with minimal hazard. It is during this quarantine period that an examination of the bird's droppings might be advisable, in order to determine its status with respect to parasites.

As you may imagine, each caller has certain problems which are unique to his situation and which can't be answered in generalities. For that reason, I invite all interested California residents to contact the laboratory in their vicinity for specific answers to their questions. (A list of the five State Laboratories may be found at the end of this article.) Residents of other states may wish to search about to ascertain whether or not a similar service may be available to them, or may be made available. Such laboratories may be

operated by Federal, State or County agencies, or may be a function of the State agricultural college.

I think you will be pleasantly surprised at our interest in your problems and our desire to help you solve them.

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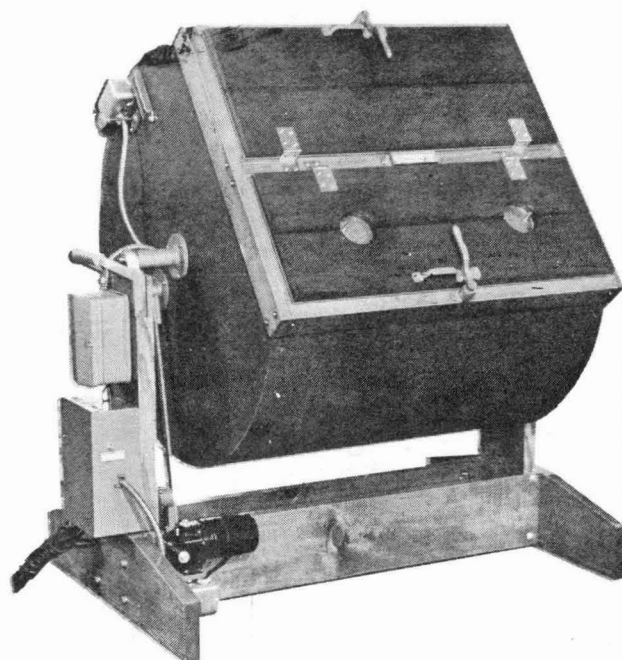
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