

The Zimbabwe Eight

New CITES Appendix Listings

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Part I

It didn't use to matter terribly what got designated Appendix II at CITES conferences. Appendix I, though, meant the organism in question could not be commercially imported into this country. It usually followed that such taxa were in genuine danger of extinction. Appendix II status, however, often did not have any bearing on whether something was endangered or not, but instead served as a regulatory mechanism insuring documentation of international shipments and the maintenance of records for such transactions. Though there was considerable consternation following the classification of almost all parrot species as Appendix II some years ago, this did not prevent the arrival of enormous numbers of Indonesian psittacines (some of which really were gravely endangered), nor birds from Guyana, Mali, and other countries.

It was only the passage of the 1992 Wild Bird Conservation Act that gave Appendix II status real clout, as far as American aviculturists were concerned. By terminating the importation of birds on *any* CITES appendix, the Act not only ended the American wild parrot trade, but reduced the shipment of finches from Africa to a fraction as well. The bread-and-butter species in the West African bird trade had all been declared Appendix III for Ghana in 1976—which meant that such birds could not leave Ghana without documents. Since few finches came from Ghana, such a listing was neither here nor there—until the Wild Bird Conservation Act.

Since then, the meetings of the

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, held every four years, have garnered a greater degree of attention than they used to receive from American aviculturists. The results of the last one, in Harare, Zimbabwe, in June, 1997, certainly cannot be ignored. Eight species of birds, with no previous CITES listings, were added to Appendix II. Thus, under the provisions of the U.S. Wild Bird Conservation Act, their commercial importation ceased 30 days later

on 18 September, 1997.

It is timely to herein briefly examine these eight species, all, as it happens, Passerines. Four species will be considered in this segment and the other four in the next issue of *Watchbird*.

Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylonicus*)

It is ironic, that the one species of Bulbul, out of the 125 species in that family, chosen by the AZA Passerine Taxon Advisory Group as a candidate for a future self-sustaining population (PACT TAG, 1997) should become commercially unavailable shortly after this recommendation was published. As of 30 June, 1997, ISIS listed a total of six birds in American public collections: a male and two females at the Cleveland Zoo, and two males and a female at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh. All of these are wild-caught. The only U.S. breeding of which I am aware took place at the Miami Metrozoo in 1986 (Lindholm, 1996). While it is likely there remain a number in U.S. private collections,



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probably the only real hope of establishing a viable U.S. population would be through a special non-commercial shipping, perhaps through an Indonesian or Malaysian zoo. At any rate, this is one species that has certainly suffered from the bird trade.

Unfortunately, international regulations won't have that much of an effect. The major volume of trade in this species is within Indonesia. Because of its magnificent song, the Straw-headed Bulbul has been trapped nearly to extinction on Java, and large numbers are now shipped there from Sumatra and Borneo, causing a noticeable decrease in those populations (MacKinnon & Phillipps, 1993).

Silver-eared Mesia (*Leiothrix argentauris*)

This was a well-known if rather uncommon aviary bird in the 1960s (Bates & Busenbark, 1963), but by the late 1970's it was probably non-existent in American aviculture. When it began appearing again in the mid-1980's it was imported in such quanti-

ties that it could be purchased in pet stores, and was considered a rather basic softbill. The first U.S. zoo breeding was not until 1984, at the Brookfield Zoo, but by the end of 1993, 15 U.S. public collections had hatched a total of 139 chicks. However, only 52 of these were successfully reared (Zoological Society of London, 1986-97). This problem of high juvenile mortality was recognized by the AZA Passerine Tag when it designated this bird, in 1995, as one to be maintained in U.S. zoos as an established population. Written protocols for husbandry are recommended (PACT TAS, 1997). Robert Webster (1997) found that, as of 31 December, 1996, the Silver-eared Mesia tied at tenth place with the Royal Starling (*Cosmopsarus regius*) among the most abundant passerines in American ISIS-listed collections, both having populations of 97. These Mesias were distributed among 30 institutions (ISIS, 1997). However, only Kansas City and Fresno are listed as having hatched any in 1996, producing one and two, respectively. ISIS (1997)

indicates these survived, but gives a year-end inventory of only two males for Kansas City, and one male for Fresno. This is in disturbing contrast to 1993, when 39 were hatched among five U.S. zoos (Lindholm, 1996, Table II.). It goes without saying, at this point, that collaboration with private aviculturists would be very wise, while large numbers remain in the private sector. One problem that must be addressed is the subspecies question. While most of the birds arriving in the U.S. in recent years came from the People's Republic of China, I believe a number of Sumatran specimens arrived as well. In both sexes, the Sumatran *L. a. laurinae* have distinctly bright reddish-orange lores, throats and necks, as opposed to yellow-gold shade in the Chinese *L. a. argentauris*.

Pekin Robin (*Leiothrix lutea*)

This, of course, was the beginner's softbill, the only one regularly met with in pet stores. It was first bred in France in 1876 (Hopkinson, 1926). The Avicultural Society of America awarded a medal to C. C. Broadwater, of Piedmont, California, for rearing this bird in 1932 (Anon. 1933). However, breeding successes are not what one would hope for. I can find no U.S. zoo breedings prior to 1978, when Brookfield, Detroit, and the Bronx zoo hatched a total of 10. Through 1994, a total of 158 were hatched among 19 institutions, but only 52 were fully reared (Zoological Society of London, 1980-97).

This most likely reflects the general state of mixed aviaries as can be imagined, zoos did not usually devote a single exhibit to a "pet store Bird." In fact, in zoos, Pekin Robins functioned as sort of a "filler." One hopes that this will no longer be the case. At any rate, at its 1995 Seattle Master Planning session, the AZA Passerine Taxon Advisory Group had already recommended establishing a stable captive population through developing husbandry protocols and setting up birds for breeding (PACT TAG, 1497).

As of 31 December, 1996, Robert Webster (1997) found that the Pekin Robin held third place among populations of passerines in American zoos, with 183 specimens. These were dis-

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The orange-yellow throat and neck of this Silver-eared Mesia identify it as the nominate subspecies exported from the Peoples' Republic of China.



A Pekin Robin at the Dallas Zoo.

Photo by John Wise

tributed among 26 collections (ISIS, 1997a). Only the zoos in Bloomington, Illinois and Wichita, Kansas bred any in 1996, hatching one and two, respectively. Of course, there are still a great many in the private sector. Eduard Hamilton tells me there was a rush by importers as the 18 September, 1997 deadline approached. It remains to be seen what public and private aviculture will do with this species, but I think the title of "beginner's softbill" is likely to go to captive-bred Touracos, Kookaburras, *Tockus* Hornbills, or Superb Starlings.

**Emei Shan Liocichla
(*Liocichla omissis*)**

This is one case where there really shouldn't have been any trade at all. This little-known babbler occurs only in an extremely restricted range in China's Sichuan province where it appeared to be "fairly common" (Collar & Andrew, 1988). This, however, is not a situation where one wants to see trapping on a commercial scale. At any rate, this was one of a number of Chinese birds, previously unknown in aviculture, that began showing up at dealers in the late 1980s. As of 30 June, 1997, ISIS lists a pair at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle as the only ones in public hands in the U.S. I do not know if any remain in American private aviculture, and am aware of no captive breedings.

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Continued in the next issue of *Watchbird*.