

Debunking Animal Rights Claims

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Aviculture has been under attack from the Animal Rights movement for many years, but these attacks have increased dramatically in the last few years. An Animal Rights propaganda war against pet bird keeping and breeding has created an atmosphere ripe for the passage of legislation that will restrict or remove the right to keep and breed birds.

The following are some recent examples of legislation promoted by Animal Rights groups or put forth by well-meaning legislators who are misinformed by A.R. lobbyists.

- **Airline Restrictions** — Attempts to place overly burdensome requirements for Airlines to carry live animal shipments, thereby stopping the interstate shipment of birds and other pet animals.

- **Guardianship Laws** — Replacing the term “owner” with “guardian” is one of the most dangerous Animal Rights strategies. It removes your property rights and will lead to the confiscation of birds, the prohibiting of the transfer of breeding stock, and the skyrocketing of veterinary costs.

- **“Parrots defined as Wild Animals”** — This will place birds under the same restrictions as big cats such as lions.

- **Inclusion of Birds in the Animal Welfare Act** — will lead to U.S.D.A. inspection and licensing of bird breeding facilities.

- **Texas HB 2328 (pending)** — Requires all Texas facilities to be licensed by the State of Texas and includes regular inspections and fees in addition to U.S.D.A. inspections and fees.

- **California AB 202 (pending)** — Original version would have prohibited the possession of unweaned birds, thus making bird breeding illegal in California.

It is important to understand the difference between Animal Rights and Animal Welfare. Animal Welfare philosophy holds that animals should be treated with the care and compassion which will lead to a healthy and positive result for animals and humans.

People who subscribe to Animal Rights philosophy believe that animals should not be used by humans at all. Any use of animals is exploitive and cruel. They believe that animals should be equal (or superior) to humans. In this philosophy, teaching your dog to sit and stay is comparable to slavery, and the ownership of animals is immoral and evil.

The Animal Rights movement is also intent on forcing their beliefs on the general public through the legislative process. Legislation is introduced at the urgings of Animal Rights groups who promote their bills with false claims and bogus data from convincing sounding sources. Animal Rights groups are well known by legislators who view their supporters as a signifi-

cant voting block. Legislators believe they are supporting worthy causes and in so doing are getting the support of a well defined block of voters.

Because of their familiarity with legislation, Animal Rights groups will also exploit existing, often obscure, laws to harass those who keep or use animals. A current example of this tactic is happening in California where an Animal Rights sympathizer is threatening to arrest officers of bird clubs who have raffles for live birds at their meetings. In this case, an obsolete law is being used. The law was originally enacted to stop merchants from giving away chicks or ducklings, particularly around Easter, as prizes to entice customers into their stores. But as it is written, it could be misapplied to include vital fund-raising raffles of that include birds at local bird club meetings. Whether it is through existing obscure laws or passing new restrictive laws, the Animal Rights movement will progress in small increments to slowly take away our ability to keep birds, or other animals.

To further their agenda, the Animal Rights movement has instituted a propaganda war to negatively affect the public's perception as well as our legislators' perceptions regarding bird keeping. Below are a few recent claims promoted by Animal Rights individuals followed by the truth of the matter:

Propaganda

“The wild flocks of parrots living

in the Los Angeles area are the result of disgruntled pet owners who discarded their birds during the 'pet bird boom' of the 1990s."

Truth

In reality, the wild flocks of parrots have been established here since the 1960s. They are the result of escaped wild-caught birds that were still being imported at the time. Because these birds escaped from dealers, few if any of the founding members of these free-living flocks were ever household pets. These escaped birds found suitable habitat amongst the exotic tree species used in urban and suburban landscaping. As evidenced in research by Kimball Garrett of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, some species of parrots have found this exotic landscape so suitable that they are successfully reproducing and are steadily increasing in numbers. Because the founders of these wild flocks became established over 40 years ago, they have nothing to

do with the trade in pet parrots from the 1990s.

Propaganda

"Shelters are overrun with unwanted birds."

Truth

A survey conducted in 2003 of over 100 public animal shelters in California found zero parrots available for adoption. When asked how many parrots they handle in a year, many public shelters laughed at the question. Nearly all responded that they rarely get any unwanted parrots. So, where are these overrun shelters? The fact is that they are private shelters that are run by individuals who are sympathetic to the Animal Rights agenda. Not all private shelters fit this category. These are the shelters that are eager to accept birds from concerned owners, but then refuse to place them in new homes because of overly restrictive adoption requirements. This results in a self-fulfilling prophesy of shelters and sanctuar-

ies that are full and cannot accommodate any more birds. If the shelters who refuse to adopt out birds for political reasons would allow birds to be adopted out, there would be plenty of room at the inn for any birds who need a temporary home. Instead, these shelter operators create a false statistic that is not paralleled in public shelters or pounds.

Propaganda

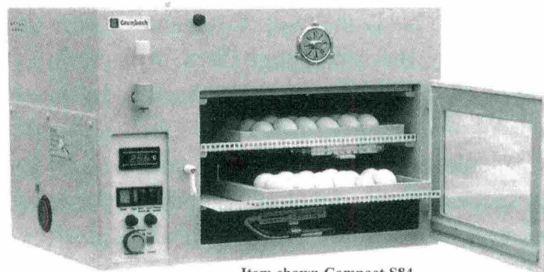
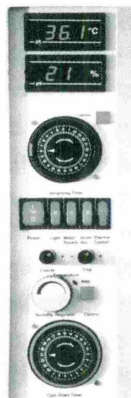
"An epidemic is underway where hundreds of baby birds are harmed and killed each year by unprepared consumers who purchase unweaned baby birds and, because of their inexperience, inadvertently injure them."

Truth

In reality, a check of a veterinary pathologist database showed that out of more than 8000 avian patient accessions over the past several years only 0.1% were cases of hand-feeding related injuries. In other words, 99.9% were cases not involving hand-feeding related injuries — hardly an epidemic. This

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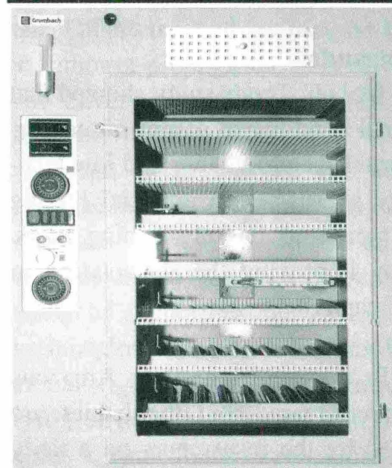


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statistic shows how successful we actually are at hand-rearing baby birds.

Propaganda

"Captive breeding is bad for the well-being of birds. The tremendous increase in behavioral problems [seen by vets] exemplified by screaming, biting, neurotic/phobic behaviors, and feather plucking have paralleled the increase in captive breeding."

Truth

A very simple and more accurate explanation of this anecdotal statistic is that today's pet bird owners are much more likely to take their hand-raised parrot to the vet than the owners of wild-caught pet birds were in the past. In the days when wild-caught birds were the norm for pet birds, few avian vets were available and few people took their birds to the vet for these types of problems. With the increase in the number of avian vets and the improvement of avian veterinary medicine over the past two decades, it stands to reason that more people will visit a vet for these types of problems. The statistic does not indicate an increase in problem birds. Rather, it indicates a greater tendency for today's pet bird owners to utilize veterinary services. It would then follow that this statistic shows an improvement in the care of the pet birds of today.

Propaganda

"A U.C. Davis study showed that neonatal handling of parent-raised parrots provides a low-labor and low technology alternative to artificial rearing as a means of initially taming birds, thereby improving their adaptation to life in captivity."

Truth

In this study, nestling Amazons are parent-reared, but the babies are handled by the researchers on a daily basis. This technique is termed "co-parenting." Although co-parenting may be useful in some situations, it is not the panacea claimed by its supporters. Most breeding parrots would so resent the daily intrusions into their nest boxes

that they would be much more likely to kill their own babies. (Not to mention the damage they would do to the intruding human if they ever got a chance.) This is supported by the actual data of the U.C. Davis study wherein one baby Amazon was killed by a bite to the head from its own mother who was enraged by the attempts of the researchers to gain access to the nest. When the data of the U.C. Davis study is analyzed, it also shows that due to the extensive time required for socialization of each chick, co-parenting is actually more labor intensive than hand-feeding.

Propaganda

"Millions of 'pet' birds are annually thrown into the marketplace where only a small percentage will survive the grueling shipping process from breeder to retailer. And for those birds that survive this first stage, it is just the beginning of a shaky, uncertain future."

Truth

If only a small percentage survive then we would all be out of business. The overwhelming majority of parrots raised in captivity live without the traumatic incidents cited by Animal Rights fanatics. Instead, the overwhelming majority of pet birds go to happy, healthy homes and live with delighted owners. These birds make up the great silent majority that are never cited in anecdotal stories perpetuated by those who are opposed to pet ownership.

Aviculturists have been increasingly successful at developing techniques to reproduce and care for these amazing and wonderful creatures. Advances in aviculture have allowed for domestically-raised parrots to replace wild-caught birds in the pet trade. Advances in aviculture have also greatly improved the nutritional, psychological, and medical care that pet parrots receive today.

Hand-feeding of baby birds is the latest avicultural target of the Animal Rights movement. Hand-feeding is being blamed for any and all negative behaviors seen in pet parrots from screaming and biting to feather picking,

and that is only if the chicks survive the onslaught of burned crops, nutritional deficiencies, and microbial infections that the Animal Rights people claim to be typical of the process. The claims of casualties are so outrageous that if they were true there would be no pet parrots left and all breeders would be out of business. Hand-feeding will remain a key target for the Animal Rights movement so expect to see more outrageous claims and additional legislation proposed to stop it.

Conclusion

Animal Rights groups will continue to make false claims in an effort to besmirch aviculture and convince those not familiar with birds that they should not be kept as pets. Animal Rights activists try to capitalize on any potential to create a negative public image of bird keeping. They will attempt to create the illusion that pet parrot overpopulation, neglect, and abuse is rampant and epidemic, yet nothing could be further from the truth.

As with any activity, there are occasional problems, but aviculturists care deeply about the health and welfare of all birds, and we strive to educate bird owners on proper care and treatment of their pets. These efforts have dramatically improved the standard of care provided to birds in captivity so that pet bird owners can enjoy and more fully appreciate the unique characteristics of their pet birds. By forming close relationships with pet parrots, pet bird owners gain an increased compassion for all birds, resulting in a greater desire to protect parrots in the wild.

Aviculture is a worthwhile and noble endeavor. We must not sit back and let our enemies spread lies and ruin our ability to enjoy our passion for bird keeping. We must become more organized, more vocal, and more protective of our public image or we will allow the Animal Rights fanatics to slowly destroy aviculture. ♦