



The following article by Kelly Williams of Pennsylvania is a fine example of what a group of dedicated people can accomplish when they are faced with seemingly overwhelming odds.

In early January 2008 I received emails from several people that it appeared that there was trouble brewing in Pennsylvania. A rumor that had surfaced that there was a proposal to ban the possession of the Nanday Conure and existing Nandays would not be grandfathered. Obviously, if this rumor was true, there was a problem in Pennsylvania.

My investigation revealed that, indeed, the proposal had been made, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission staff was recommending to the Game Commission that it be adopted. The proposed ban was based on a claim that the Nanday posed a threat to "human health and safety" and "wildlife habitat" and neither of these claims was supported by facts. We understood that if the Nanday could be banned on such unsupported claims, so could any other parrot or other bird be banned. If such a ban could be imposed in Pennsylvania, it would be only a matter of time before such a ban would be enacted in other states. The "domino theory" was at work. Unless we worked fast, the possession of a Nanday Conure in Pennsylvania was soon to become illegal. The rumor had surfaced on January 7, 2008, and the hearing on the proposal was

to be held on January 26th—we had only 19 days to organize the troops!

As AFA Legislative Vice President, it is part of my job to ferret out the facts when we hear about these kinds of restrictive animal proposals. If I find a restrictive animal proposal that will negatively affect birds or birdkeepers, I then try to alert the people who are going to be directly impacted by restrictive proposal so they can address the proposal and educate their representatives about birds, birdkeeping, and the impact that the restrictive proposal will have on them. This process worked perfectly in Pennsylvania.

We were able to spread the word about the proposal and when people heard about it they were anxious to get involved to protect the Nanday Conure and other parrots. I issued an email alert on the proposal on January 12th to my email contacts, and they posted and cross-posted the alert to many other people to many online lists and websites. Thousands of people wrote, called, emailed and faxed the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pennsylvania legislators. More than 50 people took the time to attend the Game Commission meeting to oppose the ban. Thanks to the work of all involved, the proposal to ban the Nanday Conure in Pennsylvania was defeated. Kelly's article tells us, in excellent detail, how they successfully planned and executed their

strategy to protect their birds in Pennsylvania.

I want to give a personal "Thank You" to all the people from across the U.S., and even from outside the U.S., who worked so hard to protect the Nanday Conure in Pennsylvania. Each and every one of you who took the time to write, call, email and fax the Pennsylvania representatives and each of you who appeared at the hearing to testify, deserves our thanks. I know our Nanday Conures and all of our birds, thank you, too.

On a less jubilant note, I must remind our readers that while we were successful this year in Pennsylvania, our work to protect our birds is not over. Our work will never be over as long as there are animal activists who want to see the ownership of all exotic animals, including birds, come to an end. Those activists are very busy working at the local, state and federal levels of our governments to make the ownership and possession of exotic animals illegal. We need to be just as active as they are if we are to be able to continue to keep our birds. I invite any of our readers to contact me any time you have a legislative issue or question that you need help with—I will do whatever I can to help you and your birds.

Genny Wall  
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## It all happened so fast, we will see if we can piece it all together...

We received a warning email from Genny Wall, AFA Legislative Vice President, alerting us to the proposal being considered by the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) to ban the Nanday Conure in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This proposal would have made it illegal to import, possess, sell or release a Nanday Conure in Pennsylvania. Incidentally, we believe the original warning came in the form of an inquiry from Margie Jonnet in Pittsburgh, PA. Genny Wall then researched the proposed ban and sent us the infamous email. We all took a minute or two to run screaming through our houses like 9-year-old girls and then calmed down and began to follow Genny's excellent recommendations.

The first thing we needed to do was to inform everyone else, after all this was a statewide issue and we needed help. Apparently, informing everyone was quite simple...just tell Kristy Garcia! Kristy and Rick Rowland were invaluable assets to our cause. They left no person or organization out. Some of us received the same emails four and five times. Kristy and Rick, along with several others, posted the warning on message boards, chat groups, e-groups, as far as the end of the Internet and back again.

Margie informed us that she had contacted the International Conure Society, which has a list of over 200 Pennsylvania residents who own conures, Dr. Al Decoteau, the Society of Parrot Breeders and Exhibitors (SPBE) and the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC). The organizations agreed to post the warning on their web pages and send mass emails to their members. After everyone was informed, the influx of letters, emails and phone calls began at the Pennsylvania Game Commission in Harrisburg. The Game Commission had no idea what hit them.

I contacted Paul G. Miller, PhD, DVM, who works for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. He was in total agreement that the PA Game Commission should not ban the Nanday Conure. He prepared a statement and sent it to the PGC and joined forces with us.

It was evident after a few days of this crazed email frenzy that a "meeting of the minds" was in order. We needed a venue that would bring all local bird clubs, rescues and individuals together. We felt it was imperative to portray a united front to the PGC.

Time was of the essence; therefore, a teleconference was the way to go. We set up a teleconference, again using Kristy's magic email lists. But, as they say, things don't always go as planned—the first attempt was a flop! Due to technical issues, we had to cancel our first effort at a teleconference. The night wasn't a total waste, however, because the people who attended the meeting in person began to strategize our next steps. Jean Clark saw the need to organize and suggested creating a formal group. Thus, the birth of The Coalition of Pennsylvania Aviculturists (TCOPA) ensued. Rick Rowland set forth creating a new Yahoo group and, just a few short weeks after its creation, TCOPA was 162 members strong and still growing. The following were present the night TCOPA was created: Jean Clark, Kristy Garcia, Louise Gensemer, Erika Scarborough, Rich Heebner, Andrea Rowland, Rick Rowland and Kelly Williams.

We attempted yet another teleconference the next night, hoping our technical woes were behind us. Again, everyone was busy inviting all interested parties back to the table to discuss our strategy.

This time, the teleconference went off without a hitch and participants from across Pennsylvania and the rest of the nation banded together to share knowledge and consolidate facts to be presented to the PGC. We felt we were ready to go to Harrisburg and confront the PGC.

Barb Cassidy contacted many newspapers and television stations in an attempt to spread the word. WFMZ News, a local television station from the Reading/Allentown area, was interested in doing a story about the PGC's proposal to ban Nanday Conures. Andrea Rowland set about finding someone with a Nanday Conure because WFMZ was only interested in interviewing someone who owned one. It seemed impossible to find someone who owned one who was willing to admit it and appear on the television. But, this opportunity was too good to pass up, so we decided that I would adopt one for one night to facilitate spreading the word about our opposition to the PGC proposal. As luck would have it, Erika Scarborough knew one of the local bird rescues had a Nanday Conure in their care, aptly named, Lucky. Melissa Batulis, a reporter from WFMZ-TV contacted us that day and asked if they could interview my Nanday Conure and me. We agreed to do the interview at my house that evening. Again, I was reminded that things don't always go as planned. The reporter showed up early and the adopted bird showed up late. You can just imagine the look on my husband's face when he answered the door and invited the reporter in. I finally came clean with Melissa and told her that we really didn't own a Nanday Conure and it would be difficult to find someone willing to admit it at this point. She was very understanding and gracious regarding our little faux pas and we started the interview. Lucky arrived shortly thereafter and was definitely a big hit. Even the reporter wanted to adopt it. Lucky was very sweet and turned out to be the perfect "spokesman" for our television spot. I will also add that this bird only had one leg, but it didn't seem to bother anyone, least of all Lucky.

## On Sunday, 27 January, 2008, we were off to the Game Commission offices in Harrisburg...

The doors opened at noon for a meeting to begin at 1:00. We arrived at approximately 11:30 AM and there were already many people queued up to get the chance to speak to the Game Commission. Also present were newspaper and television reporters who were already busy interviewing people waiting in line. When everyone finished signing up, there were over 60 people registered to speak, 26 of whom were speaking on the proposed ban. Rick Rowland and several others were busy handing out Nanday Conure badges. The badges had a picture of a Nanday Conure and the words "My Parrot Votes" and The Coalition of Pennsylvania Aviculturists at the bottom. We were even successful in convincing some representatives from hunter organizations to wear a badge.

We entered the auditorium where the commissioners were getting ready to hear our testimony. The auditorium was packed and, when I looked at all the participants sitting in their chairs, it renewed my faith in aviculturists to see so many badges in support of our cause.

At the beginning of the meeting, an opening statement was made by

Carl Roe, PGC Executive Director, that any Nanday Conures already in the state would be “grandfathered” and they would not be showing up at our doors to take our birds, as if to say, “calm down everyone, everything is fine.”

One by one, we reached the podium and used our five minutes to tell the commissioners the facts about the conure in Pennsylvania. Every speaker made excellent points and did so with integrity, compassion and professionalism. There were a few that stood out and seemed to make the most impact.

First to speak was Carol Cipriano, AFA Pennsylvania State Coordinator. She read two statements, one from Aviculture Society of America and one from Dr. James Morissey of Cornell University Exotic Animal Department. The statements indicated Nanday Conures cannot survive PA winters and that, unlike colonizing birds, such as Quaker Parakeets, they require much more space between nesting pairs because of serious aggression that can occur. Carol also presented the Commissioners with a petition signed by 70 people protesting the ban. One of the commissioners asked pointed questions of Carol and she answered the questions she felt qualified to answer and deferred some to the experts who were to follow.

Paul Miller, DVM, a veterinarian for the PA Department of Agriculture, submitted a copy of his testimony along with his research findings to all of the commissioners. Dr. Miller spoke on behalf of himself and his clients, not as an official representative of the Department of Agriculture. He began by answering the question posed earlier to Carol Cipriano regarding Exotic Newcastle Disease.

Dr. Miller spoke eloquently and passionately about why the Nanday Conure does not pose a threat to native Pennsylvania wildlife or the environment and that no parrot species poses a significant threat to public health. He also made it clear that captive bred parrots are not “wildlife” but rather “domestic” pets and should not be regulated as “wildlife.” Dr. Miller’s speech refuted every point the Game Commission cited for proposing the ban.

John Hall, DVM, a veterinarian in Lancaster, PA, reiterated the points made by Dr. Miller and continued to speak passionately about the safety of aviculture in the Commonwealth. Dr. Hall further questioned the validity of spending tax dollars on useless legislation when there were many other important and immediate needs to be addressed. Commissioner Russell Schleiden informed us that the PGC receives no state funding originating from public taxes. They are completely funded by the fees generated from hunting licenses and the resources from state game lands.

A statement written by Genny Wall was submitted to each commissioner and read. Incidentally, Kristy Garcia, whom I have come to know as one of the most resourceful persons on the planet, was able to convince the PGC to let us use their copier to make last minute copies.

The commissioners seemed receptive to hear our arguments, especially those made by professionals, i.e., the vets and Ms. Wall, and appeared to hear and sometimes agree with our testimony. They asked pointed questions which were addressed by the speakers.

Thomas Boop, PGC President, repeatedly told us that while they

were interested in hearing from all of us and wanted to allow for each of us, if we were simply going to restate the points already made by previous speakers, perhaps we could shorten our testimony in the interest of time. The members of the avian community addressed the PGC with the utmost courtesy and dignity and this made a lasting positive impression.

## **Monday, 28 January, 2008, we’re back at the Game Commission offices in Harrisburg...**

On this day, there were 12 speakers, one of whom was there to speak on the Nanday issue.

Kristy Garcia spoke on a point not previously covered by the speakers before her concerning success rates of hand-reared parrots being released into the wild. She pointed out the difficulties seen when hand-reared Thick-billed Parrots were released in the 80s as well as the ongoing issues with attempts at reestablishing the Puerto Rican Amazon in the wild from captive bred programs. She gave the PGC a recent copy of Bird Talk Magazine with an interesting article regarding the Puerto Rican Amazons as reference. She also spoke on why hand-reared parrots do not have most of the survival skills that would be taught to them by their parents and members of a flock.

The Commissioners came out to speak to Kristy and Rick at breaks and questioned them regarding some of the points made earlier. As the day went on, Kristy and Rick felt that the Commissioners became more reassured that the right decision was to throw out the Nanday Conure verbiage and the overall feeling was more positive.

When the hearings were over, Stan Rice, a PGC lobbyist, stopped Kristy and Rick in the parking lot. He wanted to know how we were able to mobilize so many supporters so quickly! He was particularly interested in how we gained the support of state senators and representatives. Kristy and Rick have decided to work with him on an issue regarding an increase in PGC license fees. Stan further told Rick and Kristy the Commission was impressed with our organization and the way we presented the facts with professionalism.

## **Tuesday, 29 January 2008, is Voting Day at the Game Commission offices in Harrisburg...**

We found ourselves with a lot of time to kill waiting for the Commission to get to our portion of the agenda. With nothing better to do, we paced nervously back and forth in the lobby while watching the proceedings on the video screen. We must have been a sight, because Joseph J. Neville, Director PGC Information and Education, stopped to talk to us and was kind enough to distract us with a grand tour of the PGC building and grounds. He then presented us with one of their promotional teddy bears.

Finally, they have come to our part of the agenda—the vote on the proposal to amend 58 Pa. Code §137.1.



We walked into the auditorium and the three of us (Rick, Kristy and Kelly) stood in the back of the room and held our breath. So much work had gone into saving the Nanday Conure in PA and it could all be rewarded or washed away in the next few minutes.

The President asked if there were any comments. There were. The Commissioners addressed us by looking straight at us in the back of the room while they commended us for our professionalism, organization, politeness and fact finding. They went so far as to quote some of the testimony given by supporters in the previous two days. Commissioner Isabella went so far as to say he felt that after listening to our testimony, he should go out and buy a Nanday Conure. Commissioner Hill stated he wanted to see Kristy's bird ride on the back of the cat (this was something she mentioned in her speech). The Commissioners had decided to revise the verbiage of the proposal by removing all references to the Nanday Conure.

It was a victory! We graciously thanked the Commissioners, waved and left the room. After leaving the auditorium, we immediately started our phone calls. We first and most immediately called Genny Wall with the victory, for without her support, it might not have been a victory. We then called Dr. Miller and several others with the good news.

Robert Gill from WPMT TV Fox 43 in Harrisburg interviewed me regarding our success. I was so excited, that I don't remember a word I said. He also interviewed a spokesperson for the PGC who stated the removal of the conure verbiage was really just a clarification of a 1992 law which is already in effect and makes the bird illegal in PA. We still have no idea what this mysterious 1992 law is, but we will keep searching.

Days after the PGC ordeal, we realized we had started something that, simply put, couldn't be stopped. TCOPA had taken on a life of its own.

It turns out that there were aviculturists and pet owners all over the country just looking for an organization like TCOPA. We now realize the need for a group like it to offer an opposition to the many well-funded animal rights groups. Now, we have TCOPA in place and ready to mobilize in case some future problems arise. We need to stay vigilant on all fronts! 🐦

## TCOPA

Description of the organization from its home page on the Yahoo Groups site, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TCOPA/>:

"The Coalition of Pennsylvania Aviculturists (TCOPA) is a group of dedicated bird owners from all over the world that have banded together as one to monitor proposed legislation and to bring opposition where appropriate.

We encourage participation by all interested pet owners. Though our primary focus is on our companion birds, it is important to remember that what becomes the law in one state could very easily become law in YOUR state. What happens to dogs and cats today could very easily be amended to include our companion birds tomorrow!"



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