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## Smuggler Goes to Jail

*Office of the United States Attorney  
Southern District of California  
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In San Diego today, the Honorable Earl B. Gilliam sentenced Virginia Vidrio to a 30-month term of imprisonment for her role in a scheme to smuggle over \$25,000 worth of exotic psittacine birds into the United States from Mexico.

United States Attorney Peter K. Nunez stated that Virginia Vidrio, the owner and operator of Vicky's Pet Shop in Bell, California, a shop which specializes in exotic birds, was found guilty after a jury trial. Vidrio was convicted of one count of conspiracy to smuggle baby yellow-naped Amazon parrots and military macaws; one count of aiding and abetting the smuggling of twenty baby yellow-naped Amazon parrots; and one count of aiding and abetting the smuggling of three military macaws.

According to the evidence introduced by the Government at the trial, Vidrio would order the exotic parrots from suppliers in Tijuana and then pay "runners" to smuggle the birds across the border. Vidrio herself was apprehended at the Port of Entry, San Ysidro, California, on April 1981 after seven yellow-naped parrots were found to be concealed underneath the rear seat of the automobile which she was driving.

Yellow-naped Amazon parrots, commonly referred to as "yellow-napes," are typically found along the Pacific slope of Central America from Eastern Oaxaca, Southern Mexico, and South to Northwestern Costa Rica. The birds are highly valued as domestic pets because of their high intelligence and the ease with which they can learn to mimic human sounds. The retail commercial value of even a single yellow-nape can equal or exceed \$1,000. However, both military macaws and yellow-napes are also protected from commercial exploitation under an international treaty due to their rapidly declining numbers in the wild.

This treaty, known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or "CITES," is an international treaty whose purpose is to monitor the trade of and to protect exotic wildlife from commercial activities that might diminish the capability of any species to survive in the wild. Species are protected according to a classification system within CITES known

as appendices. Under Appendix II of CITES a species may be imported into the United States from a foreign country only if, prior to importation, the importer possesses a valid foreign export permit issued by the country of origin or a valid foreign re-exporter certificate issued by the country of re-export.

Baby yellow-napes are also carefully monitored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture because they are prone to carry Exotic Newcastle disease. Exotic Newcastle disease (also known as Velogenic Viscerotropic Newcastle Disease or "VVND") is a destructive avian disease caused by a virus which, according to the Department of Agriculture, is not found in domestic bird populations. A very high incidence of Exotic Newcastle disease is found in baby Amazon parrots. Domestic poultry, particularly chickens, are highly susceptible to this disease, and no known medical cure exists. This disease can spread rapidly among poultry populations (within hours) and, therefore, requires drastic preventative action by authorities when detected. For instance, entire poultry populations in the diseased area must be eradicated to prevent further contamination. In fact, the nationwide Department of Agriculture bird quarantine system is based upon protecting the domestic poultry industry from the potentially devastating effects of Exotic Newcastle disease. Therefore, birds such as military macaws and yellow-napes (which are prone to carry Exotic Newcastle disease) must be quarantined before their entry into and commercial distribution within this country.

In addition to Exotic Newcastle disease, Mr. Nunez also noted that both military macaws and yellow-napes may carry psittacosis or "parrot fever" which attacks humans with pneumonia-like symptoms and can, if untreated, prove fatal.

Mr. Nunez praised both the United States Customs Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service for their support in the successful prosecution of this case. He reiterated that persons face stiff penalties including five years' imprisonment and/or \$250,000 fines for attempting to smuggle any wildlife into the United States. ●