

EDITORIAL PAGE

It Seems to Me...

by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

Virtually everyone reading these words drove an automobile within the last day or two. I hope you had your driver's license in your possession. To drive without it is a criminal offense. Come to think of it, medical doctors must be licensed, veterinarians are licensed, teachers must have a credential, most businesses are licensed, the contractor working on your home should be licensed, the very store to which you drove your licensed car has a license to sell groceries. If you go fishing you need a license, hunters need licenses, tournament participants in my own sport of Judo are registered with a black belt association. Think of it, dear friends, to be legitimate even your dog must be registered, and to be legal the dog must have a license.

How in the world can you believe the government will overlook the multi-billion dollar bird industry?

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Indeed, the zoological parks, aviculture and the pet trade have long been in the mind of government, from the local level up to state and federal agencies. With the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 (WBCA), the Federal Government has gotten serious. The AFA (and many others, some of whom are not our friends) received the following letter:

United States Department of the Interior FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Wild Bird Conservation Act Co-operator:

As you know, the Wild Bird Conservation Act (Act) which was enacted October 23, 1992, requires that "the Secretary, on consultation with appropriate representatives of industry, the conservation community, the Secretariat of the Convention, and other national and international bodies, shall -

(1) review opportunities for a voluntary program of labeling exotic birds, certification of exotic bird breeding facilities and retail outlets' and provision of privately organized on funded technical assistance to other nations; and

(2) report to the Congress the results of this review within 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act."

That date is fast approaching. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is currently very occupied with preparations for the upcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Numerous U.S. avicultural, conservation, animal welfare, and trade organizations will participate in that meeting as Observers. The Service has also been very involved with promulgation of regulations implementing the provisions of the Act. In fact, the final rule listing approved captive-bred species will be published soon.

In accordance with the Act, and in an attempt to comply with the intent of Congress that we review the aforementioned opportunities, the Service would like to initiate a discussion of this topic and invites your review and input. Would you be interested in participating in a working meeting to discuss the above and exchange ideas? What are your thoughts on these issues? Such a meeting would serve as a working session to be used by the Service to initiate a discussion of the opportunities for a voluntary program of labeling exotic birds,

certification of exotic bird breeding facilities and retail outlets, and technical assistance. We recognize from some comments that we received on regulations implementing the Act, that an interest exists on the above topics.

There will be several discussions at the COP pertaining to the marking of live wildlife, and other aspects of wild bird conservation. Therefore, we think it appropriate to open up this dialogue after the CITES meeting. The Service would probably schedule a meeting of interested groups for early next year.

The Service appreciates your interest in the conservation of exotic birds and looks forward to working with you on this topic. We have sent this letter to the enclosed list of organizations. Please feel free to distribute it to others that might be interested. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Susan Lieberman, Chief, Branch of Operations, in this office. Sincerely,

Marshall Jones, Chief

Office of Management Authority

It seems to me that the letter says two things that are of critical importance. First, birds must be marked ("labeled" in the letter); aviaries and pet stores must be certified; and the private sector must fund some technical assistance to other nations.

Second, the Fish and Wildlife Service must find out if the private sector is willing and able to do these things through voluntary programs or not and then report their findings to Congress.

You can be absolutely sure that if we don't have appropriate voluntary programs, the government will install the programs for us--on a mandatory basis and to their own ends. We cannot let this happen.

Laurella Desborough, AFA president, is in the process of mobilizing a number of AFA experts to attend the meeting and to present the AFA's plan. But she and the AFA will also need the back up of all AFA members and, indeed, all persons interested in keeping American aviculture alive.

Let me present my opinion, that is, what I'd like to see happen, indeed, what I feel must happen. First off, these are not my ideas alone. They arose independently in the minds of numerous individuals and were somewhat refined in mutual conversation. These ideas are still forming and building but this is how I understand them at the moment. It is understood, as I said in my last editorial, that the AFA has to take the lead in pull-

ing the private sector together to meet the present challenges. No other entity can do it.

Then, from an undisputed position of leadership, the AFA has to put together a voluntary program that will provide for the most scientifically valid marking method available, provide for certification of aviaries and pet shops and arrange some funding for other nations. Fortunately, the AFA leadership has anticipated most of these situations and has not been idle.

The voluntary marking and certification programs are actually a reality. For several years a few good people have been working day and night while most of us kept our heads in the sand. Due to their efforts, the Model Aviculture Program (MAP) is in place and has hundreds of aviaries that have been certified. It is a most excellent program that satisfies, I believe, the certification requirements of the WBCA.

Also, while many of us slept, the AFA developed the AFA Exotic Bird Registry. It is a new program just recently available to aviculturists. Now is the time to get involved in it. Register your birds---at least some of them. Get started.

I and several others feel that MAP and the AFA Exotic Bird Registry are absolutely key to the continued existence of modern aviculture. And the key ingredient in the Registry is the marking capability connected to it. Right now regular bird bands are recommended but this definitely will not be enough to protect those who produce species that continue to be illegally imported. For those species the Registry must include a method for DNA identification of birds. Identification is a great deal different and more complex than DNA sexing. Quite a lot of effort, however, has already gone into this sort of DNA identification and it has been applied with great success to part of the bird industry. Now, under a mandate, the rest of the birds in aviculture must be included. Detailed information on DNA marking will be provided in a future issue.

MAP and the AFA Exotic Bird Registry, of course, are two separate entities. MAP is an independent entity that stands alone. The registry belongs to and is a part of the AFA. A simple way to connect these two programs without either one losing its identity is for the Registry to require MAP certification as a condition of registration. To register your birds, get MAP certified. There may be better ways of hooking these pro-

grams together and there are smart people working on it as I write. One thing I know for sure, though, the Wild Bird Conservation Act is in place and legitimate aviaries and retail outlets will be certified and their birds will be registered and marked.

My dear friends, this is not intended as a doom and gloom message. Quite the contrary, I feel very enthusiastic about the future. We do have to recognize, though, that the old days are gone. The stringent regulations have been passed by Congress and there are many groups and individuals that are anxious to

see them enforced. Only quick and concentrated action on our part will soften the blow and leave us some autonomy.

Congress has asked the Fish and Wildlife Service to find out whether or not there are any opportunities for voluntary programs to be put in place. The opportunity *does* exist and the machinery is in place. All that is needed is your participation. You and the AFA can do it. We have been given a chance to work under voluntary programs created and administered by aviculturists. If we don't do it, the Feds will and we won't even have a legitimate complaint. That would be a shame. ➤

OPINIONS

Let's Get Offensive

It is my opinion that we as a Federation have not been very effective at defending ourselves against the Animal Rights Activists assaults. Indeed, that is exactly the case. We have been defending instead of taking the offensive.

It is not hard to understand why the Animal Rights Activists (A.R.A.) have been successful. They have a good program of assaulting us and we have been complacent.

1. The ARA have developed a very large membership base.

2. They have leaders that give all they have to accomplish their goals.

3. They have developed effective assault plans.

4. They manage their membership to work their plans.

5. They give freely of their money to fund the plans.

Guess what! All of the above 1 through 5 will work for us to place us in an offensive position.

I would like to make some suggestions as to how we might start to build a much more effective Federation.

I. Expand Our Membership Base

I feel that this can most effectively be accomplished through the state or area coordinator by redefining the job description and placing rigid requirements for one who would hold that position.

II. Develop a Strong Financial Base

Guess what! If you increase the membership base you will automatically increase our money base. We can't implement our programs or defend ourselves against our enemies if we don't

have the money to do it. There are probably a lot of our members who would be able and willing to donate small amounts of money on a regular basis; say \$10 a month. This would be an easy load for most of us. Just think, if we could do this we would increase our support from that member by 600%. Boy, what we could do with that kind of money is very exciting. Here is how we could accomplish this. We could set up an automatic monthly bank draft or credit card debit for those wishing to support this program. If we set up this type of collection system we would have a regular reliable source of income that the contributor would hardly miss. Let's try it! If you will set up the program, I will be the first to donate \$10 per month on a monthly basis. AFA leadership, the ball is now in your court!

Fellow Aviculturist

W.D. Brown

Ragley, Louisiana •

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service To License Bird Breeders

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service announced plans in October 30 initiate a "voluntary" registration and certification of all bird breeders and pet shops engaged in the selling of birds. Coupled with the registration of bird breeders is a requirement that all birds, yes ALL birds, be marked as required by the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 (WBCA).

Under the WBCA, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized by Congress to

implement a marking system to keep track of all cage and aviary birds. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service was given two years to review procedures for the implementation of this requirement, and has finally announced plans to do so. As recently as this past August, Dr. Susan Lieberman, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, stated at the annual conference of the American Federation of Aviculture, that the service was NOT considering any plans to implement the marking requirement. Just two months latter, the plan is under way.

Sometime in early 1995, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will conduct meetings with "interested" groups to establish guidelines under which bird owners will be asked to voluntarily comply with marking of all birds, and to become certified and registered to insure they know how to properly care for their birds. While the plan is initially voluntary, it will be required of everyone at a later date.

During the last weekend in October, the AFA board of directors met in Phoenix, Arizona to discuss this issue and work out a response. Among other plans, the AFA will encourage member breeders to participate in the Model Aviculture Plan (MAP) and to join the AFA Bird Registry as alternative to the government program.

While it is clear that the marking requirements and certification program have little to do with conservation, the government nevertheless intends to closely regulate the bird trade in the U.S. Birds will not be allowed to be sold without compliance with the government program, which should go a long way towards eliminating a large number of private aviculturists.

Jerry Jennings
Fallbrook, California ●

Wild Bird Conservation Act Of 1992

The effects of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 (the "Act") and the regulations being promulgated under the Act upon aviculture (the keeping and breeding of exotic birds) in the United States have only started to be realized, but this effect could be devastating on both aviculture and conservation worldwide if steps to correct the trend are not promptly taken. The Act was dubbed by the United States Congress as the "Breeders' Bill" and was intended to use sustainable trade as an incentive for conservation in countries of origin and promote captive breeding to re-

duce or eliminate reliance on trade by the United States. This is not happening. Instead, a shutdown in trade with the United States in CITES species has occurred.

Finch breeders have already started to see the effect of the Act's virtual shutdown of importation of some finch species created by the Act. Potential long-term detrimental effects of the Act upon aviculture are more quickly and readily visible in finches, which, due to their short life cycle, act as a sentinel bird of the potential negative effects of the Act.

As time passes and the highly restrictive provisions of the Act continue to keep all CITES-listed birds (including CITES III) from entering the United States, other species will be affected. The inability of breeders to obtain stock from the wild will eventually cause a dilution of gene pools, inbreeding and prices which will prohibit all but the wealthiest from breeding birds and will act as a disincentive to and reduction in captive breeding.

Additionally, the Regulations being promulgated under the Act have been so technically and restrictively structured that honest, motivated aviculturists will be discouraged from participating in those programs which were intended to be promoted under the Act. This will lead to a reduction of the numbers of aviculturists participating in captive breeding programs and fewer captive-bred birds. There is also a perceived intimidation factor created by intrusive and highly technical governmental regulation of exotic bird activities under the Act. While one may argue the reality of this perception, its perception alone discourages aviculturists from continuing or starting exotic bird breeding activities in the United States.

Another detrimental effect of the Act upon aviculture relates to the resulting destruction by the Act of the infrastructure of the exotic bird distribution network within the United States. The American Federation of Aviculture ("AFA") supported the controlled cessation of the unrestricted importation of exotic avian species for the pet trade. However, the network for distribution of exotic birds among aviculturists and of companion birds within the pet trade in the United States were all but destroyed when regulations were issued under the Act in such a restrictive form as to create a ban on importation of CITES birds. In addition to this is the fact

that almost a full two years after the passage of the Act, some regulations, notably those for the importation of captive-bred species, have yet to be adopted.

The unfortunate effects of the Act are not only being seen in U.S. aviculture as outlined in this article, but its long-term effects on aviculture will be more considerably felt by virtue of failure of the Act to have its intended positive conservation effect in countries of origin. The spirit of the Act, supported by AFA, was to use trade in exotic birds as a sustainable, renewable natural resource to encourage the implementation of CITES and conservation management programs in countries of origin. However, the Act and, especially, the Regulations being promulgated under the Act have imposed the restrictive ethics and standards of the United States, the wealthiest and most industrialized nation in the world, on nations which in many cases can hardly afford to care for their children, let alone protect and manage their avian species and their habitat. Unless reasonable and practical standards are promptly adopted to allow trade with the United States in exotic avian species as incentive for implementation of practical conservation management programs and reasonable compliance with the spirit of CITES in countries of origin, unrestricted trade with other consumer nations will increase, conservation programs and CITES compliance will be disregarded and the result will be the continuing reduction in wild avian populations and their habitats and the thwarting of captive breeding efforts. This will leave forward-thinking captive breeding programs in the United States with no future resources for some of the exotic avian species most desperately in need of captive breeding. Without that option, some of those birds will be left in jeopardy of extinction.

If one truly believes that the purpose of the Act was to use trade with the United States and increasing U.S. and foreign captive breeding programs as an incentive to promoting avian conservation through implementation of CITES and management programs, then thus far the Act has failed. CITES and the United States must work swiftly to form practical and realistic solutions to address this.

To date, the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 isn't.

Gary P. Lilienthal
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