

Industry organisation for the trade in birds, hobby and zoo animals

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The current state of affairs regarding the import stop on wild-caught birds and their breeding

Import stop

In October 2005, the ban on the imports was announced due to the outbreak of Avian Influenza (bird flu) in Europe. In spite of the fact that the import of birds was already being regulated through strict quarantine regulations, effective 1 July 2007, the import ban was converted to a final stop on the import of all wild birds. One exception to this law is the possibility of importing birds bred in captivity from breeding stations, and the import of birds from certain countries designated by the EU (the U.S., Canada, Chile, Tunisia, Israel, Australia and New Zealand). Worldwide, there are only seven recognised breeding stations, which means that the import possibilities according to this option are practically non-existent.

Illegal import

One of the consequences of the import stop is that the illegal import, negligible prior to the import ban, has only increased substantially. At the same time, the regulation for companion animals, which provides that private individuals may take no more than five birds with them during a move or when emigrating, is being abused on a massive scale. In practice, it has been observed that 90-95% of these animals are sold, usually by order. In addition, some zoos almost appear to be fulfilling a trading function when it comes to the import and export of animals.

The European Association of Importers and Exporters of Birds and Live Animals is willing to brainstorm to come up with a solution acceptable to all of the parties involved. At its own initiative, it submitted a proposal to the European Union in 2006, but this was cast aside. At the time, the Association warned the European Union about the consequences to the public and animal health as well as animal welfare. The EU however had a different opinion. The European Association of Importers and Exporters of Birds and Live Animals is also of the opinion that the final import stop violates WTO agreements. The organisation hopes that the EU will examine the current state of affairs and consider a reopening, albeit a modified one, of the import for wild birds.

Breeding of caged and aviary birds

As a result of the import stop, the breeding of caged and aviary birds has become a more current industry. Many hobbyists have become serious about the breeding of birds. The results are improving since people are paying more attention to the housing, care and feeding of these birds. In principle, it is possible to breed nearly all bird species in captivity. In the last several years, there has been a clear growth in the types of species being bred that are offered for sale. Good breeding results confirm that the health and welfare of the animals are good. However, without fresh (imported) bloodlines, inbreeding problems such as weakening of the animals will quickly arise.



In order to promote good breeding practices, it would seem desirable to set up European-wide accredited breeding centres. In the long run, this will bear fruit in various areas. Parrots and finches have always been known to be good for breeding, and the breeding of fruit-eating birds and insectivores is getting better each year. The proper breeding of the various species promotes the image of the hobby and reduces the need to import.

Bird feed

In order to elevate animal well-being and breeding to a higher level, the bird feed manufacturers will also have to assume their responsibility. A good feed helps to determine life expectancy, and increases the level of resistance. Unlike the feed manufacturers for the commercial livestock industry, there is too little attention among the bird feed manufacturers for the optimum formulas for feed.

A reopening of imports of wild-caught birds via regulation is desirable for the following reasons:

- The importation of fresh bloodlines is important for setting up a good population
- It increases animal welfare throughout the entire trading chain. Illegal birds are brought in under appalling circumstances and this is accompanied by high death rates (often more than 50%)
- It reduces the veterinary risks to public health and the commercial livestock industry. The quarantine regulation in effect since 1 December 2001 has proven its worth. ■