



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

All Party Group for Animal Welfare

An All Party Group for Members of the National Assembly for Wales formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare, by all means available, in Wales

Welsh Assembly All Party Group for Animal Welfare 29.01.08

In Attendance:

Lorraine Barrett AM (Lab, Cardiff South & Penarth)
John Campbell – Protect Our Wild Animals
Suzanne Campbell – Protect Our Wild Animals
Karen Davies – BVA
Greg Glendell – Birds First
Sgt Ian Guildford – CCW/South Wales Police
Claire Lawson – Public Affairs Manager for Wales, RSPCA
Rachel Lewis – Birds First
Eleri Lloyd – Morgan Allen Moore
Lucy Merredy – Researcher to Lorraine Barrett AM
Roy Peckham – Pit Pony Sanctuary
Tina Reece – RSPCA
Aeron Williams – Parrot Society UK

Item 1: Chair's Welcome and Introduction

Lorraine Barrett AM opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and invited Greg Glendell, of Birds First, to give his presentation.

Item 2: Topic for Discussion: The Welfare of Pet Birds

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Told the meeting he was a pet bird behaviourist, and that he also volunteered for the Birds First organisation which concentrates on captive birds.
- Explained his talk would focus on the process which birds go through in the pet trade.
- Said that, since 1999, Birds First has worked with the Animal Protection Agency on a campaign to end the itinerant pet trade.
- Explained that the Pet Animals Act 1951, as amended in 1983, makes clear that it is a criminal offence to sell animals as pets, *'in any part of a street or public place, or at a stall or barrow in a market'*.
- Added that, in 2006, they had supported a judicial review into the Act, because people were obtaining short one day licenses to trade in pets.
- Said that the judicial review had supported their case and that, furthermore, Secretary of State Ben Bradshaw had suggested that the Animal Welfare Act would reinforce these restrictions.
- Stated that, even after these events, some local authorities were failing to enforce the Act, and were allowing one-day-sales.

The speaker was asked whether it was permitted to merely exhibit birds.



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Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Confirmed that exhibitions were not subject to the same restrictions.

The speaker was asked whether there was any surreptitious selling at such exhibitions.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Confirmed that such selling did indeed take place at some exhibitions, and that the two events were often mixed.
- Stated that one-day-sales take place all over the UK, and sometimes thousands of people attend, although events also take place locally in village halls etc.
- Said it was important to make a distinction between domestic and wild animals.
- Argued that, whereas a domesticated dog such as a Chihuahua had had its wilder characteristics largely bred out of it, most birds are wild creatures which are less able to adapt to a domestic environment.

Commercial Breeding Operations

- Highlighted that wild birds used for breeding can suffer distressing living conditions, depending on the level of commercial activity.
- Explained that, in commercial and semi-commercial operations, sometimes birds are kept in cages only 4 feet squared, with only occasional access outside.
- Added that parrots live for 35-70 years, and that some birds might spend decades in such cages if breeding on a commercial level.
- Stated that, in the commercial market, breeding parrots' eggs were usually removed from them because it induced them to lay more eggs.
- Noted that production methods vary, but that in most commercial operations the birds were hand-reared, suffered from parental deprivation, and became "imprinted" onto humans – developing an unnatural relationship with people rather than birds.
- Said that in commercial breeding operations the birds were often kept in isolation, and their "imprinting" onto humans – which could be almost impossible to change – meant that the parrots came to believe themselves to be human.
- Said the birds became submissive towards humans, in order to encourage easy-handling, and that if the birds were left with their parents they would be more cautious of humans.
- Continued by saying that, in some commercial operations, the birds are syringe fed or even force-fed with the use of a crop tube.
- Told the meeting that in some cases baby birds have their wings clipped.

How Birds Are Sold

- Showed the meeting a photograph of a semi-commercial trader, operating from the back of a truck in a fair in Usk.
- Explained that such traders often move around from location to location, travelling with the birds in the truck until they have either been sold or have died.
- Noted that such operations were distinct from licensed pet shops – often garden centres – which use a license in order to sell birds.

Effect on Birds

- Showed the meeting a picture of a hand-reared bird, currently in his care, which displayed typical symptoms of its former treatment.
- Explained that the bird had had four owners in six years.



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- Argued that such birds were in that state because of the process they went through, and that if their conditions were more similar to the wild, they could be kept reasonably well.
- Added that the more artificial a bird's surroundings, the more problems it is likely to experience.
- Said that a lot of birds display signs of insanity such as self harm and self plucking.
- Stated that young birds could be "behavioural time bombs": their problems might not be detectable until adulthood, and their owners did not know how to care for them.
- Said that hand-reared birds may have an exaggerated fear response.
- Argued that the level of advice for owners is poor, and that not many people understood why these problems had occurred in the animal.
- Added that, as a result of this ignorance, owners tended to have the birds rehomed.

Possible Improvements

- Suggested that the situation did not have to remain as it was.
- Told the meeting that it was possible to make behavioural improvements with damaged birds, sometimes in a matter of days – quicker than cats and dogs.
- Argued that if no changes were made, using the Animal Welfare Act, then such neglect would continue.
- Suggested that the Animal Welfare Act offered an opportunity to make major improvements, and that Scotland and Wales had the power to make a difference.
- Pointed to the animal welfare needs set out in the Animal Welfare Act:
 - ❖ For a suitable environment
 - ❖ For a suitable diet
 - ❖ To exhibit normal behaviour patterns
 - ❖ To be housed with, or apart from, other animals (if applicable)
 - ❖ To be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease
- Argued that it was important not to allow the itinerant trading of pets: that such enterprises should have licenses, and adhere to strict rules.
- Suggested that there was a case to be made for restricting the species of birds for sale, because there was some consensus that certain breeds – such as cockatoos and macaws – were not suitable for homes, although the rule would not have to be applied retrospectively and would rather be built into the licensing limits.
- Called for an end to wing-clipping, hand-rearing and the use of small cages.
- Argued that pet shops should be required to comply with the Animal Welfare Act's five freedoms.

Item 3: Discussion and Q&A

It was stated that, in the Parrot Society bird shows held in Stafford, the birds were sold to members only, for breeding purposes.

The meeting was informed that the next Parrot Society show was being held on 29th June, and people were invited to attend and see for themselves the conditions.

It was noted that the Parrot Society was co-operating with Plantasia in Swansea, where they had some birds flying free which could be visited by children.

It was clarified that all parrots imported from the EU, unless smuggled, were captive bred and not wild.



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It was noted that one of the Parrot Society's council members was in fact an avian vet.

It was stated that one consequence of selling birds illegally was the lack of control over the spread of avian flu.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Replied that trading had been restricted for this reason.
- Noted that, in the itinerant trade, it was not possible to know where the other birds had been.

The question of internet trading was raised.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Described internet trading as a "nightmare", since different people from different countries were operating without licenses.

There was discussion about a person who had tried to excuse themselves for internet trading through a loophole, by arguing that they had never operated from his premises.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Suggested that such practices would have to be covered by secondary legislation.
- Stated that he would like the legislation to be as broad as possible.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Said they would need to think about matters, and that she would speak to Claire Lawson after the meeting and to her counterparts at Westminster.

It was stated that Defra was not going to take action, but that the Scottish Government was pushing ahead.

It was agreed that it would be desirable for the legislation to be as broad as possible.

The meeting was asked to consider if they thought birds should not be kept at all as pets.

A delegate at the meeting likened caged birds to prisoners.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Suggested that the most important thing was *how* the birds were kept, and that they should live in conditions that – as far as possible – recreated their natural environment.
- Noted that people could buy birds in shops, as with other animals, but that looking after a macaw was very different to looking after a guinea pig or budgie.
- Said it was difficult to convey this difference to officials in Defra.

It was stated that keeping parrots was similar to the keeping of reptiles as pets.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Stated that in Norway there was a ban on the importing of reptiles.
- Suggested that a training system was needed for buyers and sellers.

A delegate wished to state that there was not adequate flying space in houses.



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It was stated that Defra did not welcome the Animal Welfare Act because they considered their responsibilities to be focused on livestock and agriculture issues, and had thought they would be stretched.

A delegate added that taking action could prove difficult, because even once legislation had been passed the resources must be found to enforce it.

It was stated that private vets had a conflict of interest with regard to making legal statements.

Greg Glendell (Birds First):

- Stated that Defra still had a hangover from its past as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF).
- Suggested that Defra could contract out some of the necessary work, and did not have to employ relevant staff full-time.

It was noted that there might be a change of policy when unsympathetic people moved away from the department.

A delegate suggested that legislation nonetheless sets a precedent.

It was suggested that larger parrots should not be sold at all.

It was noted that an African Grey Parrot has the intelligence of a 3 ½ year-old child.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Thanked Mr Glendell for his presentation, and said the information would be available through the website to other members.

Item 4: Dates of Future Meetings

It was said there had been plans to hold a meeting on codes of practice.

It was noted that the equine consultation had closed the previous week, and that March 21st was the deadline for the consultation on the codes of practice for cats and dogs.

The next meeting would be held on 8th April.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Added that there were plans to look into silent fireworks, as several constituents had written to her about the distress their animals felt due to loud explosions.



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Appendix: Speaker notes

Aviculture: sick as a parrot?

Presentation by Greg Glendell of BirdsFirst, to W APGAW, Cardiff, 29th January 2008.

Introduction.

This presentation is intended to explain the methods commonly used to produce birds for the pet trade and the effects that these 'accepted' practices have on the welfare of the birds. The presentation suggests ways in which the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) can be used to make major improvements in the way birds are raised, bought and sold to the public.

Background

Since 1999 BirdsFirst (and from 2005 the Animal Protection Agency) have been working to close down the illegal itinerant trade in pet animals. The RSPCA also supports measures to ensure these sales remain illegal. This trade in pets operates by semi-commercial 'hobbyists' and commercial animal dealers organising one-day public sales of pets. The larger sales are often held at agricultural showgrounds; smaller sales take place in village halls, council-owned venues, scout huts, horse sales etc. Animals most commonly sold are birds, including canaries, budgerigars, finches, British birds, many parrot-like species and quails. Small mammals are also sold, along with dogs and cats. Pet sales, sometime mischievously called 'shows' are often advertised openly in the bird keeping press and local Free-Ads papers.

In 1983, the Pet Animals Act 1951 (P A Act) was amended and made these sales illegal.
"If any person carries on a business of selling animals as pets in any part of a street or public place, or at a stall or barrow in a market, he shall be guilty of an offence." P A Act 1951.

Local authorities have the responsibility to enforce the above legislation, which remains in force and has not been repealed by the AWA. Despite this, some local authorities fail to enforce these measures. BirdsFirst have a good understanding of the distress inflicted on birds when being sold at one-day sales. Birds may be handled repeatedly and transported from one venue to another until they are either sold or dead. Where pets are to be sold, we are of the view that this should be done within the law, from licensed, fixed premises, not itinerants' stalls or barrows at a one-day event.

In the 1990s an increasing number of animal dealers and bird-keeping societies (including some registered charities) organised one-day sale of pets, mainly birds. BirdsFirst, APA and others supported a judicial review of the P A Act to show that such trading was an offence. Mr Justice Walker agreed with our case and his judgement confirmed that such sales were a criminal offence under the PAA. (See *Haynes vs. Stafford BC 2006*). The minister for animal welfare (Ben Bradshaw) confirmed that such powers would be retained in the AWA when its secondary measures came into force.

Non-domesticated species.

Many 'pets' are domesticated animals and have been associated with humans for countless generations: they have adapted reasonably well to a captive lifestyle. Conversely, most species of birds remain essentially 'wild' animals even where they are bred in captivity. These non-



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domesticated species retain all their wild-type behaviours and behavioural needs. Since conditions for them as a 'pet' animal are so different from their natural habitat, they experience a range of severe behavioural frustrations when kept in a cage in the living room. Parrots are highly intelligent and rather nervous animals with degree of intelligence similar to or exceeding higher primates (See Pepperberg 1999). They are also long-lived species with a similar lifespan to humans of 45 to 70 years.

How birds are produced for the pet trade.

Most birds are produced by commercial breeders or semi-commercial 'hobbyist' breeders. The more commercially oriented, the more intensive the breeding system used. Breeding pairs are kept in breeding cages; cages small enough to deny them flight. These cages are largely barren except for a couple of perches, feeding bowls and a nesting box. Any eggs laid are usually removed and incubated artificially. The purpose of this is to stimulate the female to re-lay her 'lost' clutch. So artificial incubation ensures more eggs can be produced each year by each pair. On hatching, the birds are 'hand-reared' and essentially, force-fed. Feeding may be by syringe or crop tube. Crop tube feeding employs a method where a tube is forced into the bird's crop and it is fed by pumping food down this tube; the birds do not even have the freedom to swallow their own food.

While hand-fed birds are parentally deprived, they may also be raised in isolation from any siblings, so they may start life through a process of solitary confinement. Such an event would never occur in the wild and baby birds have no behavioural repertoire to cope with this form of treatment. Hand-reared birds may also be subjected to bright lights, even before their eyes have developed properly and have opened. Again, as hole-nesting species, such events would never happen to wild parrots.

In addition to parental deprivation, force-feeding and a bright-light environment, the birds may be wing-clipped before they have learnt to fly. All of these practices, which the bird-breeding community accepts without question are used routinely when producing baby birds for the pet trade. The hand-rearing process causes birds to be imprinted onto humans; the birds favour human contact over contact with their own kind. As baby birds, this process results in them showing submissive behaviours to humans, but as adults they become difficult to manage due to many behavioural frustrations whose cause is rooted in the effects of human imprinting.

How birds are sold.

Smaller 'hobbyist' breeders may sell via private adverts in the bird-keeping press, local press or if a member of the Parrot Society, in their monthly magazine. The larger commercial or semi-commercial breeders concentrate on selling directly through pet shops or pet stores in garden centres. Here, the birds are faced with a further severe housing condition, since most are caged on their own with little or no contact with other birds of their own kind. Again, such solitary confinement is utterly alien to social animals who would never experience solitude and have no behavioural repertoire to cope with such treatment. As a result, it is common to see even very young birds showing signs of behavioural frustrations even before they have been sold as pets. Many pet shop birds show stereotypical behaviours, including repetitive movements (route tracing) within the cage. Some also start to self-pluck their feathers as immature birds.

Some birds, even immature ones, are sold at one-day pet sales. Many of the larger pet sales are illegal under the Pet Animals Act, but some local authorities fail to enforce this hard-won animal welfare legislation. Vendors attempt to avoid prosecution by claiming that they are either not 'operating a business' or that the birds they are selling are not 'pets' but 'surplus breeding stock'.



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In order to sell many species of parrots as companion animals suitable for keeping in one's living room, the pet trade takes advantage of buyer-ignorance. Many, perhaps most parrots, are bought at the 'cuddle tame' stage as a baby bird: the buyer is not told of how that bird's behaviour is likely to alter as it becomes an adult. But it is only as the bird begins to mature that many behavioural problems likely to appear; long after the time at which the bird was bought.

Effects on the birds.

Hand-rearing results in human-imprinted birds. As adults, these birds are more vulnerable to behavioural problems than birds which have been raised by their own parents. This effect appears to be common in many animals. Where, for example, dogs have had to be hand-reared, due to the death of the lactating mother, problems often arise with the puppies when they begin to mature. These problems centre around behavioural frustrations which the young animal fails to cope with. In parrots, the most common issues are self-plucking, aggressive biting, nervousness, or problems of excessive noise. The latter can lead to disputes between neighbours.

Since the quality of advice on matters of behavioural problems is often of such a poor nature, (vets have little or no training in bird behaviour) the outcome for the birds is equally as poor. Many are sold or given away or treated cruelly as their frustrated owners never find any way of solving the behavioural problems. Many people do not keep a parrot for more than 4 or 5 years, despite the fact that the birds can live for 40 to 70 years, so birds may be passed from one unenlightened owner to another for decades. The 'lucky' ones end up in good rescue centres.

Opportunities for action

We should use the secondary powers of the A W Act to secure the following measures for birds:

- a) prevent itinerant trading in all pets
- b) restrict the species which can be sold as pets, particularly the large cockatoos and macaws;
- c) end cruel practices including hand-rearing, wing clipping and small cages.

We should ensure pet shop licences under the A W Act comply with the Act's "Five Freedoms". The Act requires that an animal should be provided with the following needs:

- d) its need for a suitable environment,
- e) its need for a suitable diet,
- f) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
- g) any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- h) its need to be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease.



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