



## *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

*PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia*

# Vote "No" to Export of Wild-Caught Birds

*(The Avicultural Review July 1985 Vol 7 No 7)*

**By Graeme Phipps**

Throughout the world public opinion is swinging against the large scale trapping and export of wild-caught birds. Within five years it is anticipated that it will be illegal for any wild-caught birds in numbers to be imported into the United States. This situation already exists in some countries in other parts of the world.

I preface my comments about cockatoos with this information because as aviculturists I think we should not be dragged by our heels kicking, screaming and biting into the twenty-first century, but for once see how public opinion is going and get to the head of the parade, so to speak.

We are told that there is a pest problem with cockatoos in Australia and that a reasonable solution to that problem is to export large numbers of these birds to the United States for use as pets and that the money derived from the traffic should go into conservation programmes in this country. A further humanitarian point is usually made that it is preferable that birds should be kept alive in cages than be shot or poisoned in farmer's paddocks. To be frank, I have never been impressed by the credibility of this last point and consider it to be a convenient red-herring. I would like to present the following thoughts.

As we all know, wild-caught adult cockatoos simply do not make good pets. It is important if a cockatoo is desired as a pet that it is acquired in the first year of its life. Birds after about a year of age do not tame down satisfactorily. In fact, parent-raised cockatoos, even year-olds, can be difficult and the most desirable birds are those which are hand-reared from a very early age. It is fraudulent for wild-caught adult birds to be marketed as potential pet birds. The consumer is simply not getting what he expects and this can eventually lead to neglect and mistreatment of birds. Information is mounting throughout the world to show that there is a very high death rate in wild-caught birds supposedly to be used as pets, with George Smith of the UK quoting figures around 80% as being the death rate among [African Grey Parrots](#) in the first year of their captivity. Perhaps it occurs soon after the new owner realises that the bird he has bought is inappropriate as a pet, and then doesn't know what to do with it.

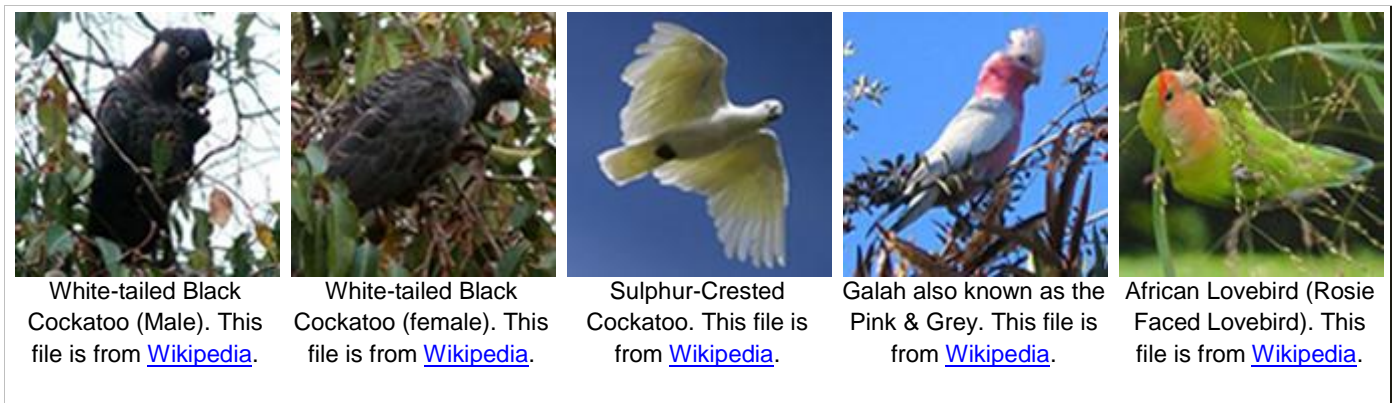


Congo African Grey Parrot in a bird park. This file is from [Wikipedia](#)

Remembering that these birds are not going into avicultural situations, but into inappropriate cages in very cold regions of the world, I think we can expect a similar death rate with wild-caught cockatoos.

It has been presented that the American market would be able to cope with two million cockatoos per annum. This astounding figure should prompt us all to demand that some studies be done on the wild populations from which these birds are supposed to be drawn. There are indications that things are not all that well with cockatoos. In studies done in Western Australia on [White-tailed Black Cockatoos](#)' nest sites were found to be a limited resource. There is an increasing incidence of feather problems in [Sulphur-crested Cockatoos](#) and [Galahs](#) that are coming into the market. It would appear from work done by people who breed [African Lovebirds](#) in captivity that if they destroy used nest boxes at the end of the breeding season and replace them with fresh ones, there is a reduced incidence of feather problems. If we think about the White-tailed Black Cockatoo information from Western Australia and combine it with the African Lovebird information taken from aviaries, there is the suggestion that nesting sites may be limited for the Sulphur-crested and Galahs and that possible overuse of a nest site may be causal to this particular feather problem.

It should also be remembered that for a nest site to be large enough to be useful for a cockatoo, a tree needs to be probably 200 years old before it is large enough and over mature enough to give rise to suitable hollows. We all know of the large amount of land clearance that has gone on for our grain industries to occur and it could be that there has been very little recruitment of new trees over the last 150 years; so that if you think about it, the future for cockatoos in so far as nest sites are concerned could be bad and getting worse.



The other thing that I feel uncomfortable about is the so-called pest status of these birds. Perhaps cockatoos are just one more problem facing a grain grower in the same way as rainfall, soil fertility, arability of the land and other factors which have to be taken into account when crops are grown and I find it hard to believe that people as hard-headed as farmers would go around planting grain crops if they thought that despite all of these variables (including cockatoo damage), they were not going to come out economically in front. However, the question that may be asked is whether the shooting or export of the birds is really going to have any lasting effect on the problem for these farmers. Poisoning is not a management option, because it is no selective.

It has been presented that, in fact, certain species of ants may take as many seeds from oil seed crops as cockatoos; yet nobody seems to be unduly worried about the ants. The question should be looked at in a very hard-headed way.

As an aviculturist, I am interested in the breeding of cockatoos for the pet trade and opposed to wild-caught adult ones being kept as pets. The way in which cockatoos are currently being kept as pets in small cages is reprehensible and it would concern a lot of Australians to think that their birds would be exported to eke out their lives - as one conservationist once put it to me - in the equivalent conditions of us living our lives out in a toilet. In other words, in a very confined area with very little in that area of any interest to the bird; a pathetically inadequate diet and when we consider the intelligence of the birds in question, it seems to me to be a gross act. "Cockatoo liberations" can't be far down the track.

I find little to object to in the argument that it should be possible for people in Australia to acquire studs of wild-caught white cockatoos, breed them and try to sell the aviary bred, closed rung, hand-reared progeny as pets to the American market but I think that people would then be surprised how limited that market really is and you would be talking in terms of hundreds of birds per year and certainly not thousands or millions if the exercise was to be economically worthwhile.

I do not think the options are appropriate put by Jim (in the Review of June 1985, Page 5). The issue is not "Do You Support Exportation?", it should simply be –

**Do you support exportation of wild-caught native birds? Yes/No**

I urge you all to answer a clear resounding "NO" on this one.

Then we can bring the question into an avicultural context and make it clear that we don't object to the export of CLOSED-RUNG NATIVE BIRDS, if done in a CAREFULLY CONTROLLED WAY (if the members think that way).

I feel the reality of this last opinion would be some years away yet, but at least we would be promoting the issues aviculturally.

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