



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

Pest Species of Native Birds - to Export or Not

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The subject of exporting pest species of birds, notably Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Galahs, has received considerable exposure in the press, radio and television in the last few months. There is considerable pressure being put on the Federal Government to allow export of these birds. At the June meeting the issue was discussed at length. It is a very complex issue and arguments for and against can be very emotional, making it hard to achieve a rational decision in a short space of time. As a result it was moved by Brian Healey and seconded by Lance Ruting, that "The Avicultural Review be used as a forum for discussion by members on the Export of Pest Species of Native Birds and a postal vote be conducted to get the members opinion and hence formulate the clubs policy". It is essential that the Society has a democratically derived policy for this important subject so that our delegates on the Avicultural Council can give a true impression of the views of this Society.

As a result it is suggested that four issues of the review be used for discussion by members and that a postal vote be conducted in the October Review. There are advantages in having the issue finalised by election time especially since I will not be standing as President for next year.

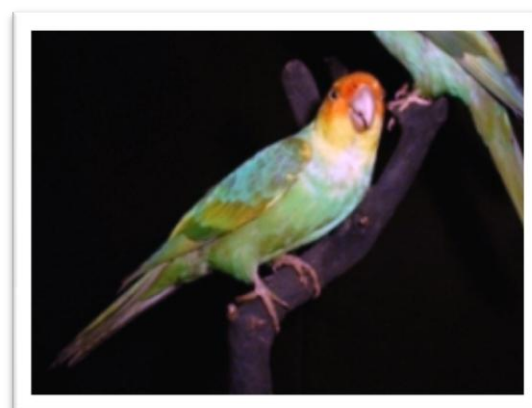
I will take this opportunity to open the discussion and will attempt to provide an overview of the subject.

It is widely known that Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Galahs are highly sought after in North America and Europe and can fetch very high prices. At the same time these very birds are destroying millions of dollars worth of grain crops in Australia and are being killed using various means by farmers. Therefore it has been suggested that exporting large numbers of these birds would be preferable to killing them, and at the same time undermine the illegal export of these birds and create revenue in the form of royalties for wildlife research.

However, it is probably naive to think that we could export enough birds to have a significant effect on the pest damage caused by Galahs and Cockatoos. The major problem is that we don't know how many birds can be harvested without adversely affecting the wild population adversely. It may well be that the number of birds that would have to be exported to control the pestilence would significantly harm the wild population as a whole. Unless this basic question is answered it would be dangerous to export hundreds of thousands or millions of Cockatoos and Galahs. Remember the [Carolina Parrot](#) and [Passenger Pigeon](#) declined from flocks of hundreds of thousands to extinction in the space of twenty to thirty years.

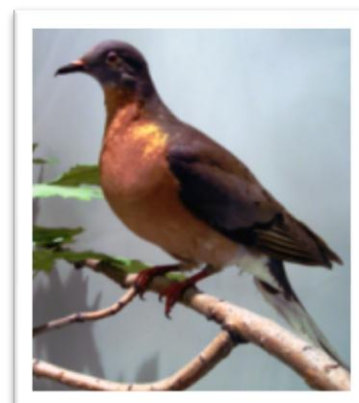


Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and a pair of Galahs feed together on a seed tray



Mounted specimen of the [Carolina Parrot](#), [Museum Wiesbaden](#), Germany.

This file is from [Wikipedia](#)



Mounted specimen of [Passenger Pigeon](#), Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

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At the same time there is a limit to the number of birds that the markets of North America and Europe could absorb. The current high prices that Galahs and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos fetch on the overseas markets is purely a function of their rarity. Once they become readily available their price would plummet and there would be no economic advantage for Australia to export them.

The legal exportation of birds would control the smuggling and the associated cruelty and mortality of those birds.

George Smith (a leading UK Avian Veterinarian and Aviculturist) and Greg Harrison (a leading US Avian Veterinarian) estimate that 80% of wild caught imported birds die within twelve months of entering the US or Europe. This is a function of the birds cheap purchase cost and easy replace-ability by another wild caught bird. In many cases these birds die a slow death due to malnutrition and misarrangements.

It is thought that the importation of wild caught birds into Europe and the US will be banned in the next 5 to 10 years.

Controlled export of small numbers (1 to 2,000 per annum) of pest species to overseas markets would have many advantages:

1. It would stop a lot of the smuggling and the associated cruelty.
2. By maintaining a high price for the birds the end purchaser would be encouraged to maintain good husbandry.
3. The Australian government could collect a high royalty per bird and the money be utilised for wildlife research.
4. Small numbers of birds going through Australian approved quarantine stations overseas would result in a reduce mortality and generally improve the health of the birds during quarantine and shortly afterwards.
5. Create a good example of how exporting wildlife can be done and give third world countries a model to work on.

This alternative may be better than an open slather approach to exportation, or the complete prohibition of trade in wildlife which is fast approaching at an international level.

Another scheme has been suggested based on the fact that adult wild caught Cockatoos and Galahs rarely make good pets. Young aviary bred birds are a far more desirable product for the pet market and it should be possible to export bona fide aviary bred native birds. This would encourage the development of better aviary bred Australian birds.

In conclusion we have several alternatives available to us and the voting in a later issue of the review will be based on the following example.

1. Do you support exportation? Yes or No.
2. If yes do you support (answer yes to one only) :
 - a. Exportation of unlimited numbers as pest species? Yes/No
 - b. Exportation of strictly limited numbers of pest species? Yes/No
 - c. Exportation of bona fide aviary bred pest species? Yes/No

This can be modified based on members' suggestions. It would also be wise due to limitation on time and club meetings if the majority of the discussion takes place in the Review rather than at the meeting.

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