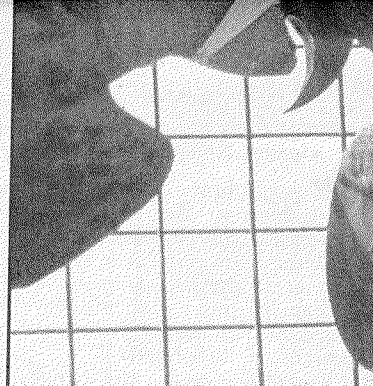
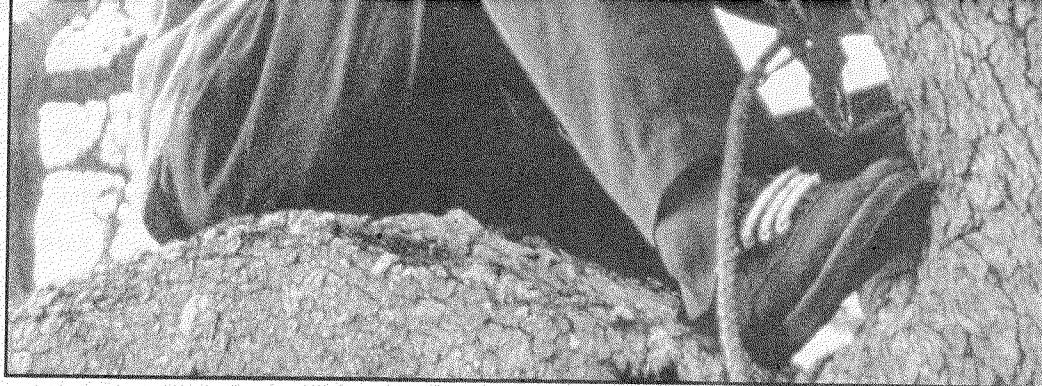




Moves to outlaw wild bird trade

Polly Ghazi

BRITAIN is to press for a European ban on imports of exotic wild birds, thousands of which suffer horrific deaths during transport every year.

Agriculture Minister John Gummer and Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine will ask the European Commission next month to investigate the banning of shipments of wild birds trapped in the jungles of Africa and South America. The EC is the world's largest consumer of wild birds, importing 1.5 million every year to satisfy the demand for exotic caged pets.

Environment Minister Tony Baldry told *The Observer*: 'With 1992 coming up, it is important that action is taken at a Community level. We are keen to find a solution to the welfare problems of the bird trade, and we believe we need to consider the implications and operation of an import ban.'

In 1989, of 184,600 birds imported into Britain, 4,000 were dead on arrival and a further 19,500 died in quarantine. Ministers are worried that many more birds are known to die *en route* for Britain, during capture in the wild or during airline transportation.

Last month, British Airways pulled out of the trade after pressure from campaign groups, including the RSPCA and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Last year, 76,498 wild caught birds were carried on BA flights, 968 dying in transit. Several other major airlines, including KLM and United, have stopped transporting them.

A Government-commissioned inquiry into the effects on conservation of the international trade in wild plants and birds will also urge the EC to tackle the issue of deaths in transit. The report, to be published in September, also recommends that rare bird species whose survival is threatened by high death rates during transport should be banned from

trading. The Government is to urge that they be given endangered status at the next meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites).

The British initiative was welcomed this weekend by animal welfare and conservation groups. 'We are delighted that the Government is responding so quickly,' said Peter Knights of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA). 'Britain is traditionally in the forefront of animal welfare issues so it is appropriate that we should take this up in Europe.'

A recent EIA investigation in the illegal bird trade centres of Argentina and Senegal has uncovered widespread abuse of regulations governing the trade.

Abuses include false Cites trade documents and export licences claiming that rare birds were caught in countries where the species does not occur. Protected endangered species which are being illegally shipped to Europe include hyacinth macaws, of which only 5,000 remain in the wild, caninde and military macaws, golden conures and purple-bellied parrots.

EIA investigators uncovered illegal trade routes by road and rail from Paraguay and Bolivia into Argentina. The team followed one illegal shipment of rare blue-fronted Amazon parrots from capture in the wild in Argentina's Corrientes province to shipment to the US.

The chicks were pulled from their nests in hollow Quebracho trees, force-fed maize mixed with water, and then packed into cramped wire cages for the long, arduous journey to Buenos Aires. Of 425 which were captured, only 375 reached Buenos Aires alive and several more died in quarantine.

'Every regulation in the book was being broken,' said Knights. 'We've been trying to regulate the trade for 35 years and it just hasn't worked. If birds are to stop suffering and dying, an international trade ban is the only solution.'

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