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From Jungle to Jumble

NATIONAL CAGE & AVIARY BIRDS EXHIBITION 2003
Evidence, findings and recommendations



An Animal Aid Investigation
www.animalaid.org.uk

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(Published March 2004)

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Blue fronted amazon parrots in crates for export, Argentina 1991

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Introduction

The National Cage & Aviary Birds Exhibition – dubbed the ‘Giant Wild Bird Market’ took place on 6th and 7th December 2003 at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham. Organised by IPC Media through its publication *Cage & Aviary Birds*, the event went ahead despite a high level of controversy regarding its illegal status and public opposition to the sale of wild birds in particular. The event was closely monitored by several animal protection groups.



The ‘exhibition’ was licensed by councillors of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, on 31 March 2003, to sell up to 100,000 birds. The licensing process itself was subject to severe criticism. Although the decision to license the event was based on an opinion of an independent barrister, this opinion, and even the instructions given to the barrister, were formally hidden from public scrutiny under the 1972 Local Government Act.

Present, and manning a stall at the illegal event, were officials from DEFRA – including a CITES officer (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species), John Hounslow.

The Law

Section 2 of the Pet Animals Act 1951 was amended in 1983 to read:

“If any person carries on the 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.”

This amendment was implemented to prevent the level of suffering associated with selling animals in a makeshift environment.

The Pet Animals Act does not itself define a public place, but other statutes do. For example, the Licensing Act 1902 states:

“Any place to which the public have access whether on payment or otherwise.”

The Indecent Displays (Controls) Act 1981 states a public place as:

“Any place to which the public have, or are permitted to have access whether on payment or otherwise.”

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 states:

“Any highway and any other place to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access.”

Substantial legal and enforcement opinion has concluded that venues such as the NEC are without doubt ‘public places’ as defined under numerous Acts and legal precedents.

The case of *Richard Keith Rogers v. Teignbridge District Council [Appeal against refusal by the local authority to grant a licence]* in November 2000, supports this opinion that venues used to hold these events are public places. Furthermore, by granting a licence under the Pet Animals Act the local authority would be committing an offence. In this case, the magistrates dismissed the appeal by Mr Rogers who was questioning a decision made by the local authority. Therefore, the magistrates ruled that if Teignbridge District Council did grant a licence it would be unlawful, so Mr Roger’s appeal was dismissed.



The more recent case of *Richard Brook v. Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council* [Appeal against refusal by the local authority to grant a licence for a reptile market on 26th October 2003] outlines another legal argument against pet markets. The appeal was refused simply on the basis that the event would not have been just one business but an extension of the individual businesses of those attending to whom profits from sales would go. It was believed that the event would not come within the definition of what would constitute a pet shop.



One must also consider the spirit and intention behind the Pet Animals Act as amended in 1983. Whilst it is accepted that such events may not amount to a pet shop in the same sense as a high street pet shop, it is clear that the Pet Animals Act was enacted to prevent the sale of pet animals from makeshift and itinerant venues. Therefore, by allowing such an event to take place, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is allowing the very mischief that the 1983 Amendment was specifically designed to prevent.

In addition, the event manifestly involved the selling of pets to the public at stalls within a concourse of buyers and sellers and these criteria define the NEC has a marketplace.

In August 2001, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) issued guidance notes to all local authority licensing departments advising them not to licence such events as '*given that they are illegal in concept, the CIEH urges local authorities to take enforcement action against vendors at such events*'.

The licensing process

The licence application from IPC contained no independent legal or scientific evidence. Indeed, the content of all of the documentation presented to the Council on behalf of the applicant appeared only to contain contributions from trade-related interests and in-house opinion. Otherwise it was independently and scientifically unsupported.

Substantially greater material, both visual and written, was provided by those opposed to the application. Reports were submitted by Animal Aid, Mr Peter Robinson (Consultant Ornithologist), Birds First in Bird Keeping, the Captive Animals' Protection Society, the RSPCA and the BioVeterinary Group. A film produced by Animal Aid was also provided which incorporated established, specialist consultants and qualified information sources.

The conclusions reached by those who opposed the licence as well as the conclusions reached by all independent, legal and scientific consultants were essentially that animal welfare could not be adequately safeguarded under conditions typical to the NEC event and that the event could not lawfully be licensed by virtue of Section 2 of the 1983 amendment.

In addition, Solihull MBC was forewarned of potential contraventions to the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the Protection of Animals Act 1911. As well as this, numerous problems concerning Trading Standards and poor practices were made clear. The organisation, Birdfirst in Birdkeeping, for example, warned that most traders would not issue receipts for livestock purchased and birds would be sold with no guarantees. On considering the backgrounds of those in favour of the licence being issued and those opposed to it, it would appear that there were financial incentives involved in the 'for licence' sector whereas few or no financial incentives were apparent in the 'against licence' sector.

The BioVeterinary Group – a biological, veterinary and behavioural consultancy – advised the Council that:-

... "there are burdens of responsibility on the local authority as regards animal welfare, public health and safety and the administration of the law. These responsibilities also fall to individual Councillors personally. It is our view that should this event proceed then the Licensing Sub-Committee (and all Solihull councillors) and IPC Media would have acted in a manner contraindicated by scientific evidence and opinion, and also prohibited by law."

Each member of the full Council was sent a video produced by Animal Aid that contained interviews with experts in veterinary medicine, public health, ornithology, animal welfare and the law. It also contained graphic images of trapping in third world countries. One member of the licensing committee commented at the hearing on the distressing footage but then pointed out that there was nothing that people in Britain could do about it!

Councillors of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council proceeded to grant a licence, with no legal authority, for the event. We believe not only that the Council did not have the power to grant such a licence but indeed that the granting of the licence should itself be construed as a criminal act.

Evidence presented

To follow is a detailed description of how the 'licence' conditions were violated. The accompanying dvd gives selected examples of each contravention but does not feature all examples. Testimonials from investigators will further reinforce our claims should any of these issues proceed to court.

Whilst this report pertains mainly to the Pet Animals Act 1951, other evidence has been submitted to the police, Inland Revenue and the local Trading Standards office.



Contraventions to Pet Animals Act 1951

Section 1 (3) of the Pet Animals Act, with regard to whether a licence should be granted states that the local authority must:

"have regard for the need for securing -

- a) *that animals will at all times be kept in accommodation suitable as respects size, temperature, lighting, ventilation and cleanliness;*
- b) *that animals will be adequately supplied with suitable food and drink and (so far as necessary) visited at suitable intervals;*
- d) *that all reasonable precautions will be taken to prevent the spread among animals of infectious diseases;*
- e) *that appropriate steps will be taken in case of fire or other emergency;*

It is often difficult to secure these conditions even in a 'conventional' pet shop. As revealed below, and substantiated by visual evidence, none of the above conditions were met at the National Cage & Aviary Birds Exhibition 2003.

- a) ***that animals will at all times be kept in accommodation suitable as respects size, temperature, lighting, ventilation and cleanliness;***

Filmed evidence shows that birds were routinely kept in unsuitable cages as regards size. To confine a bird in a cage not large enough to allow the birds to stretch their wings also contravenes the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which states that:



'it is illegal to keep any bird, excluding poultry, in a cage or other receptacle which is not of sufficient size to permit the bird to stretch its wings freely in all directions'.

Virtually all stalls that had larger parrots on sale contravened the Wildlife & Countryside Act. These stalls include:

Pegasus Birds
Safari Select
Sign of the Owl Birds
Phoenix Birds
B&T Parrots and Pet Supplies
Mill Lane Aviaries
North Cornwall Aviaries
Sluis UK
D&G Birds
Winterton Aviaries
Vogelpuk Belgium



Also, many birds such as finches and budgerigars were kept in severely overcrowded cages that did not afford enough space for each bird to perch.

Dirty cages were also noted. On Sun 7th Dec the newspaper on the floor of some of the cages on the T Murray Birds stand appeared not to have been changed from the previous day. Some birds appeared dirty as a result.

b) that animals will be adequately supplied with suitable food and drink and (so far as necessary) visited at suitable intervals;

Some stalls such as P J Dixon and D&G Birds had cages in which food was scattered on the floor of the cage rather than in food bowls. This meant that food was quickly covered in faeces, which denies the above condition.

On Saturday, some cages were noted with no water;

Squires Bird Products – broadwing
white eye cage

Ost Belgium – no water in 7 cages when checked on 2 occasions during Saturday. Water was available when checked at end of day.

d) that all reasonable precautions will be taken to prevent the spread among animals of infectious diseases;

The Council received expert advice prior to the event which indicated that the above legal requirement was impossible to ensure. Regardless of expert opinion, common sense would dictate that housing thousands of stressed, immunodeficient birds all together in the same airspace for 2 to 3 days would provide ample opportunity for the spread of infection.

Also, the condition was not enforceable given the unavailability of both sufficient numbers of veterinary personnel and also the impracticable level of laboratory analysis that would be required to 'screen' birds prior to the event. Further, the important issue of 'latency' – where birds may discretely harbour pathogenic microorganisms – cannot be fully addressed through basic screening. In addition, stresses endemic to the NEC event are capable of precipitating and manifesting latent 'infection' and resulting in epidemics of threat to birds and to the public.

Although it is not difficult for a qualified person to identify signs of possible disease in (especially small numbers of) birds, it is impossible to certify birds as being healthy from remote, rather than clinical and laboratory microbiological, investigation. Given the substantial number of animals expected to be present at the event as well as the event's general organisational structure it is arguable that the organisers, traders and Solihull Council already knew that it was simply not possible to conduct essential health checks on birds or to reasonably monitor for potential epidemiological problems.

Also, the event was allowed to proceed amidst fears of a new outbreak of a suspected reovirus that fatally affected budgerigars and other closely related species. The Budgerigar Society website 25 November 2003, urged its members 'caution with the movement of birds at this time'.





'Birds First in Birdkeeping' purchased five birds from event (three parrots and two finches) on Saturday 6 December 2003. These were namely two Senegal parrots (*Poicephalus senegalus*) purchased from North Cornwall Aviaries and one black capped conure (*Pyrrhura rupicola*) and two green finches (????) from Sign of the Own Birds. The birds were taken immediately for examination to a specialist avian veterinary surgeon at the Clockhouse Veterinary Hospital in Gloucestershire.



Although, outwardly the birds showed no signs of ill health, one of the Senegal parrots was found to have a very high white blood cell count. This indicated a severe infection, which had been present for a period of time in excess of one week. In the opinion the expert avian vet, the bird was suffering from an active infection of '*Chlamydophila psittaci*' – more commonly known as psittacosis or parrot fever. This infection is not only potentially fatal to birds but is also a potentially fatal bird to human zoonotic infection. The expert vet commented that:



"...not only was this bird unfit to be offered for sale at this time, but more importantly its presence at the show not only endangered its own health, but also that of all other birds and all members of the public who attended the show. Humans older than 45 years and any who might have been pregnant would be at greater risk of suffering severe disease. Indeed it can be argued that unless the show organisers made all members of the public attending the show, aware of the zoonotic risks they would be exposed to by visiting the show that they would be legally responsible for any subsequent illness that any such visitor subsequently suffered.

'There is also potential concern about pathogens such as these being taken into an extensive public area such as the NEC, where effective elimination of pathogens from the air space following the show might well prove impossible, such that subsequent users of the facility might also be put at risk.'

Animal Aid acted immediately in reporting this finding to the media and urged anyone who visited the event and was suffering mild or severe flu-like symptoms (typically within a few days to two weeks) to report immediately to their GP and explain that they had visited the wild bird market at the NEC. The BioVeterinary Group, specialists in exotic animal care and public health, recommended that all buyers of birds at the NEC market take birds to their vets immediately for a full check up and test for psittacosis and other infections, as the risk of infection to both birds and people must be taken very seriously.

e) that appropriate steps will be taken in case of fire or other emergency;

In the event of emergencies it would certainly not be possible to ensure the safe evacuation of most of the birds; they would be left in the hall to perish.

Conditions attached to the licence

1. Animals shall at all times be kept in accommodation that is adequate in construction, size, amenities and position in the premises.
2. Where animals are kept in cages, hutches, boxes or other receptacles which are placed on top of other cages, hutches, boxes or other receptacles, effective means should be provided for preventing water, food or other droppings falling onto or contaminating the animals food or other surroundings which are underneath.
3. Animals shall be adequately supplied with suitable food and drink and shall be visited at suitable intervals. All accommodation shall be cleaned daily or as often as is necessary.
4. No mammal shall be sold unweaned or, if weaned at an age at which it should not have been weaned.
5. No animal shall be displayed in a cage, hutch, box or other receptacle in such a position that it be interfered with by other animals or unauthorised persons.
6. Animals shall not be displayed for sale outside the premises during unsuitable weather.
7. All excreta and soiled bedding shall be stored in suitably covered metal or other impervious containers until removed from the premises as soon as practicable and disposed of to the satisfaction of this Council. All refuse containers shall be maintained in a clean condition.
8. All necessary precautions shall be taken to prevent the introduction or harbourage of rodents, insects and any other pests to the premises.
9. All animal food shall be stored in suitable covered metal or other impervious closed containers so that the quality of the food can be preserved. These containers should be of such design as to allow easy cleaning.
10. Animals shall not be handed to customers in unsuitable containers.
11. The licensee shall ensure that a responsible person shall at all times be in, or within, reasonable distance from the premises for the purpose of giving warning and taking other necessary steps in the event of fire or other emergency. In case of absence of the responsible resident, the licensee shall appoint a responsible person residing within a reasonable distance of the premises to have custody of a duplicate key. The name, address and telephone number of such persons shall be displayed in legible characters on the front door or window of the premises and shall be notified to the local fire brigade and police.





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Blue fronted amazon parrots in export cages, Argentina 1991

12. Animals and stock shall not be placed or kept in or outside the shop so as to obstruct entrance to or exit from the shop in the case of fire or other emergency.
13. Fire fighting equipment, including extinguishers, shall be provided as approved by the Chief Fire Officer and shall be sited as so directed by him. The licensee shall ensure that the fire appliances remain accessible and maintained in a good condition.
14. No animal which is suffering from or could reasonably be suspected of having come into contact with any other animal suffering from, any infectious or contagious disease or which is infested with parasites shall be brought into or kept on the premises unless effectively isolated.
15. The maximum numbers of animals permitted to be kept on the premises to which the licence refers are as set out above and shall not be exceeded.
16. The numbers of animals, which may be kept on the premises, must be displayed on the premises.
17. Animals should not be sold as pets in any part of the street or public place, or at a stall or barrow in a market.
18. No animals shall be directly imported except by licensees who have satisfied the Local Authority as to their ability to quarantine or handle consignments of animals under suitable conditions.
19. The licensee shall ensure that each exhibitor, trader and/or owner shall keep a register of animals, which must contain details of the species and the purchaser.
20. Authorised representatives of the nominated animal welfare organisations and local authority shall be given immediate access to all animals/birds and relevant documentation upon request. If such access is denied, the licensee, exhibitor, trader and/or owner must withdraw the relevant animals/birds from display or sale with immediate effect.

21. Animals should not be sold to children believed to be under the age of 12 years.
22. The licensee shall be responsible for the welfare of all animals/birds within the confines of the licensed building for the duration of the event.
23. All animals/birds shall be housed at least 0.61 metres (2 feet) above ground level.
24. Before any exhibitor, trader and/or owner brings any animal/bird to the event he/she must agree by personally signing a copy of this licence, specifically to abide by the conditions of the said licence. The licensee shall retain a copy of this and ensure that is available at the premises for inspection by an authorised officer.
25. No smoking shall be permitted in the premises.
26. All exhibitors or traders must display their name and contact details at all times in an appropriate manner at the point of sale or display.

Contraventions to conditions attached to the licence

1. ***Animals shall at all times be kept in accommodation that is adequate in construction, size, amenities and position in the premises.***

See Reference to Section 1(3)a) of Pet Animals Act 1951 on page 4.

The positioning of cages in the aisle would have subjected the birds to considerable levels of stress, as is indicated by their behaviour. These birds were not given the opportunity to retreat to the back of the cage to 'hide' and were therefore exposed from all angles.

An Animal Aid investigator was present at the D & G stall when a precariously positioned cage containing two birds was interfered with by a member of the public and then fell to the ground. The stall holder continued to attend to his sale, leaving a member of the public to re-stack the fallen cage.



Parrot chokes to death from force-feeding, Argentina, 1991

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- 2. Where animals are kept in cages, hutches, boxes or other receptacles which are placed on top of other cages, hutches, boxes or other receptacles, effective means should be provided for preventing water, food or other droppings falling onto or contaminating the animals food or other surroundings which are underneath.**

Several contraventions were recorded, notably D&G Birds.

- 3. Animals shall be adequately supplied with suitable food and drink and shall be visited at suitable intervals. All accommodation shall be cleaned daily or as often as is necessary.**

See Reference to Section 1(3)b) of Pet Animals Act 1951 on page 5.

- 5. No animal shall be displayed in a cage, hutch, box or other receptacle in such a position that it be interfered with by other animals or unauthorised persons.**

Cages containing parrot species were routinely interfered with by members of the public. Some cages were positioned in such a way that cages could easily be knocked to the floor by members of the public – see reference to D&G Birds on page 9.

- 10. Animals shall not be handed to customers in unsuitable containers.**

Flimsy, crushable, cardboard boxes were routinely handed to customers to transport budgerigars, finches and other small birds.

On the Barker Birds stall, cartons containing live birds were stacked inside a plastic carrier bag, which exposed the birds to risk of suffocation.

- 14. No animal which is suffering from or could reasonably be suspected of having come into contact with any other animal suffering from, any infectious or contagious disease or which is infested with parasites shall be brought into or kept on the premises unless effectively isolated.**

See Reference to Section 1(3)d) of Pet Animals Act 1951 on page 5.

- 17. Animals should not be sold as pets in any part of the street or public place, or at a stall or barrow in a market.**

See page 1.



Amazon parrots being force-fed a mixture of maize and water

- 19. The licensee shall ensure that each exhibitor, trader and/or owner shall keep a register of animals, which must contain details of the species and the purchaser.**

Whilst the inclusion of this condition is commendable, there was no evidence of its enforcement over the two days. Such a register would have been advantageous in the event of a disease outbreak, in birds or humans, or to trace illegally obtained wildlife.

Throughout the day, while observing transactions between buyers and sellers, none of the investigators noted such registers being filled out. Captured on film are many transactions carried without any details of the purchaser being taken.



Parrots awaiting packing on plane, Argentina 1991

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23. All animals/birds shall be housed at least 0.61 metres (2 feet) above ground level.

This condition was flouted by numerous dealers including;

- Alpha Pets – budgerigars, canaries, conures
- Pegasus Birds Ltd – at one end of their stand
- Sluis UK – had African grey parrots in bottom cages on Saturday
- Phoenix Birds – empty on Sunday but had birds on Saturday
- Mill Lane Aviaries – quail
- Dave Campbell – various birds
- Winterton Aviaries – various birds

25. No smoking shall be permitted in the premises.

Several people were noted smoking whilst walking around trade stalls, exhibition stalls and in the restaurant area. Tobacco smoke is detrimental to bird health and smoking also poses an unnecessary fire risk.

26. All exhibitors or traders must display their name and contact details at all times in an appropriate manner at the point of sale or display.

Not all traders were listed in the official catalogue and guide – eg. Sluis UK and D & G Birds (both listed on map but not Trade Stands listings) Ost Belgium (no listings under that name in catalogue, no name sign on stand could be seen), Safari Select not listed on map or trade stands list in catalogue.

Noticeable absences present at last year's event were;

Bruce Berry, New Forest Owl Sanctuary – last year had otters on display. Exposed in June 2003 on BBC's 'Inside Out' for conditions at 'sanctuary'/zoo and for alleged cruelty. He is now currently awaiting trial and has denied seven charges of theft, unlawful sale and unlawful release of birds, and falsifying documents.

Sanbob Aviaries – had stand last year. Was exposed on BBC's Worst Pet Shops for appalling conditions.



Scarlet macaws (*Appendix 1 species*) in dealer's premises in Georgetown

Summary of problems relating to animal welfare

In the opinion of expert ornithologist, Peter Robinson, around half of the 50,000 to 70,000 birds on sale would have been wild-caught from elsewhere in the world.

Capture methods are crude and brutal, and the additional stresses associated with confinement and transportation result in significant loss of life. According to research by the Environmental Investigation Agency, 1992 three out of four birds destined for the pet trade do not survive the capture process and the arduous journey to developed countries.

Birds who survived to reach the National Cage & Aviary Bird Sale would therefore have already been subjected to callous treatment, which could have lasted for months. Their levels of stress and their susceptibility to disease will inevitably reflect this.

Generally, dealers who import birds into the UK, usually via another port of entry into the EU, will travel from one pet market to another to dispose of their sick and stressed animals. Although some dealers also run pet shops that are licensed and inspected, others do not. Little is known about the temporary accommodation used by non pet shop-owning dealers to house birds between pet markets. Technically these premises should also be licensed but generally are not.

Parrots are known to be neophobic or fearful of new situations. The constantly changing environment and replacement or removal of cage mates adds greatly to stress endured by parrots traded at pet markets.

The poor standards of animal husbandry such as badly positioned, overcrowded or diminutive cages, the lack of adequate perch space and hiding places resulted in the widespread manifestation of behavioural problems. Frustrated escape reactions were more common with wild-caught finches - repeatedly flying in panic against the bars and walls of the cage.

A sound made by wild-caught parrots and macaws, known as 'growling' was common throughout the event on both days. Growling is an extreme fear response exhibited by birds who are trapped.

Stalls with African grey parrots who were growling:

Sluis UK – had four rows of African greys. All cages had birds either huddled in corners or growling. The stallholder himself described them as stressed.

D&G Birds

Orchard Birds Ltd – several cages of African greys growling. The stallholder said they were stressed.

Numerous birds with other behavioural problems were captured on film:

Stereotypic behaviour was noted in an emerald starling on North Cornwall Aviaries. Moving from floor to perch in same repetitive movement.

Stalls at which birds were seen huddling at the back of or in the corners of cages, include;

Mill Lane Aviaries, Orange Pennants

Pegasus Birds Ltd – various including macaws, Amazons, emerald starlings

Sign of the Owl Birds – various, including mask lovebirds, painted conures.

Pheonix Birds – ringnecks.

Alpha Pets – lovebirds

Winterton Aviaries – macaws

Sluis UK – African greys

Toco toucans – opposite Mill Lane Aviaries stand but probably owned by Pegasus Birds Ltd – two Toucans in small cage. One was repeatedly throwing itself against cage bars.

Captured on film are two examples of African grey parrots that appear to be exhausted but expert advice indicates that they are more likely to be ill and possibly dying. These birds were prominently displayed and should have come to the attention of an on-site veterinary inspector. We maintain that veterinary cover is not sufficient to assess bird welfare for an event on this scale.

Abusive mishandling of birds would have resulted at best in extreme fear for the birds and at worst in painful injury and shock. The standard flimsy cardboard packaging adds further risk of injury and, in some cases, suffocation.

The insanitary conditions and neglect will have resulted in increased disease risk for the birds. The fate of the birds that were test-purchased demonstrates the high incidence of disease in birds and the associated level of suffering.

Summary of problems relating to public health & safety

Evidence shows that events such as the National Cage & Aviary Birds market are hazardous to public health and safety. Bird-to-human zoonoses are a major concern. Up to 100,000 birds were offered for sale at the market. Of these, five birds were randomly test-purchased by under-cover officers and three were tested for *Chlamydia psittacci* infection - psittacosis. One proved positive for the Chlamydia infection, and within three months, another died. Further results are pending based on tissue samples taken from the bird's corpse. The test purchases at the NEC market confirm that disease was present amongst birds on sale.

Psittacosis, like other avian infections, is capable of being transmitted from bird-to-bird and bird-to-human via, for instance, liquid droplets such as sneezes and cage detritus such as dust. The pathogens can be carried in air or through direct contact between birds and humans, or indeed on intermediary surfaces.

Birds of highly uncertain origin and health state, and in the case of the National Cage & Aviary Birds market, birds of established ill-health confined in an enclosed arena with humans, presents the serious threat of cross

infection between animals and people. Young children, the elderly and those in existing poor health are especially vulnerable - and all were observed at the market.

The failure of the organisers, Solihull MBC as the local authority and the venue managers to act on prior advice from public health specialists and prohibit the market raises serious and enduring questions of maladministration and negligence among the supposed overseers of the event.

Following notification of the psittacosis infection, Animal Aid responsibly issued a media release. During the event itself, no attempt was made by the organisers or the council to alert visitors to the health risk they were exposed to in attending the event. It is debatable how much regard would be paid to notices posted around the venue when even 'no smoking' signs were routinely and openly ignored.

Traders worsened the 'health and hygiene' situation by setting bad examples and eating whilst continuing to sell birds - even an official steward is captured on film whilst eating at a stall.

Stallholders were seen eating and drinking at Sluis UK (eating sandwich/burger) and at North Cornwall Aviaries -(two workers behind stall, one worker near stall and one steward at stall were all eating burgers and hotdogs). On this stall, there was a tray containing several boxes of potato chips. In the exhibition hall lots of people (many stewards) were sitting down or walking around eating and drinking.

At the Macaws Direct area, where visitors were encouraged to interact with the birds, it was noted that they were routinely left unsupervised with macaws. These birds are capable of inflicting severe wounds, particularly to the face.

Summary of problems relating to trading standards

An investigator from the Captive Animals' Protection Society spoke to two separate traders. These conversations were recorded during the two-day investigation and they reveal the type of misleading and inaccurate advice that was imparted to customers by dealers.

The first trader, on the Sluis UK stall, described wild-caught African grey parrots (that were actually frightened and growling) as 'an ideal pet'.

Another trader, on the Orchard Birds Ltd stall, described wild-caught African grey parrots (that were again in a state of extreme fear) as 'tamed down' and went further to state that 'they won't stop talking normally'.

Wild-caught African grey parrots are more likely to be purchased by inexperienced bird keepers or people who have never kept birds before. The new bird-keepers will therefore need to seek the advice of an expert behaviourist to deal with the numerous behavioural problems that the bird will exhibit - and that may be symptomatic of its fear of humans. Additionally, wild-caught birds are more likely to succumb to disease, leaving the purchaser also likely to have to cover the cost of expensive veterinary fees. The parrots are also more likely to die prematurely and, with no receipt, the customer has no clear recourse or mode of complaint.

Transactions routinely took place without receipts being issued. As well as the obvious problem of trader accountability, poor record-keeping may indicate that trading activity is not properly declared to Inland Revenue and HM Customs & Excise. Accordingly, evidence gathered on specific traders at this event has been forwarded to both of these tax-collecting agencies.

Throughout the two days, none of the investigators noted the keeping by traders, of transaction and purchaser registers. Captured on film are many transactions carried without any details of the purchaser being taken.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on filmed evidence, backed up by testimonials, we recommend that Solihull MBC commence prosecutions against the traders, organisers, the venue managers and the Council itself for violations of the Pet Animals Act.

Solihull MBC acted against overwhelming independent expert advice and in breach of its legal obligations by facilitating the event. IPC Media claimed that it 'takes every necessary step to ensure the welfare of the birds at the show', but predictably, the ignorant standards of animal husbandry at the event as well as the breaches of law did not reflect this. The Council should have been familiar with the true nature of the event having overseen many others in previous years. Their failure to prevent this bird market sets a poor standard for law enforcement and animal welfare.

Solihull MBC failed in its duty to protect public health - threats were demonstrably significant given the positive psittacosis test result of the Senegal parrot purchased by Birds First. In the absence of a survey of visitors who attended last year's event, there is no way of knowing how many people may have become sick as a result of their attendance. It is clear from the footage that visitors did not appreciate the seriousness of the threat to which they were exposed through their direct and indirect contact with the birds.

Finally, the Pet Animals Act 1951 was amended in 1983 to disallow the carrying on of a business of selling pets in a public place. Each sale of an animal in contravention of this Act potentially incurs a fine and a maximum term of three month's imprisonment. Further, we believe that the spirit of the amendment was to disallow the sale of animals in a makeshift environment, which causes suffering on the level that we encountered.

The requirements of the Pet Animals Act and the conditions attached to the licence were not met. Therefore, even if one hypothetically accepted that the licence could have been lawfully issued, then the firm conclusion can still be drawn that the event manifested abundant and diverse illegalities.



Trapper with young Blue Fronted Amazon Parrots taken from nest, Argentina 1991



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African Grey parrots in Amadou Diallo's premises in Senegal

**Animal Aid exposes and campaigns peacefully
against all animal abuse, and promotes
a cruelty-free lifestyle.**



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