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IMPORTATION OF WILDLIFE

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ABSTRACT: The importation of live birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and amphibians into the United States is a growing problem to law enforcement agencies of the Federal and State governments.

Importation of the above types of animals into the United States is supervised by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, of the U. S. Department of the Interior.

The function is of a regulatory nature:

1. to insure that no prohibited species enter the United States
2. to enforce compliance with certain Federal Acts such as
 - (a) the Migratory Bird Treaty Act
 - (b) the Lacey Act, Title 18 USC, Sec. 42, 43 and 44
 - (c) the Bald and Golden Eagle Act
3. to assist in the enforcement of State laws and regulations concerned with entry of undesirable species of wildlife not afforded Federal prohibition

Restricted species of birds and mammals prohibited entry into the United States by Federal laws are:

Birds: Java Sparrow, Padda oryzivora; Sudan Dioch, Quelea quelea; Rosy Pastor, Sturnus roseus; and the Red-Whiskered Bulbul, Pycnonotus jocosus

Mammals: Mongoose, any species of the genera Atilax, Cynictis, Helogale, Herpestes, Ichneumia, Mungos and Suricata; Bats of the genus Pteropus; Multimammate Rat of the genus Mastomys; the East Indian Wild Dog of the genus Cuon.

The above named birds and mammals were declared undesirable for entry into the United States because of their destructive habits to agriculture and our native wildlife.

I am sure that all of you assembled here today are aware of the growing importation of exotic wildlife into the United States, but I doubt that very many of you are fully aware of the magnitude of this importation, or of its exploding rate of growth. The numbers of live vertebrate animals imported annually into the United States fairly boggles the imagination.

For example, let us examine the importation figures for 1969 alone. Now, it must be remembered that these are live animals! There were (in round figures) 573,000 wild birds (other than canaries or parrots), 116,000 mammals, 74,000,000 fish, 339,000 amphibians and 1,394,000 reptiles imported into the United States in 1969.

Now, what do the people of the United States do with all of these live creatures? Some of them, of course, go to research laboratories. This is especially true in the case of mammals, where we find that 99,000 of the 116,000 consist of primates, such as monkeys and apes.

Some of these creatures find their way into the collections of zoological parks, but most of them are destined for the so-called "pet shop trade," and I use the term "pet" very loosely! Those of us involved in the control of this importation have long ago come to the conclusion that the American public will purchase any live animal for a "pet" if someone offers it for sale. This could range from black widow spiders, king cobras or a man-eating tiger--if the price is right!

Now let us examine the factors responsible for this exploding importation rate during the past few years. This explosion can be traced directly to two reasons.

First, our expanding affluent society has put the necessary money into the hands of the public to enable them to pay the cost of obtaining these creatures from every corner of the

earth. This demand and ready cash has made the live animal importation business into big business.

The second factor is the development of the pressurized cargo jet aircraft. In past years, it required long sea voyages to bring these animals from the far corners of the earth, and only the hardy species were able to survive. Consequently, the number and kind of creatures imported was limited. Early aircraft improved importation conditions somewhat, but the cold non-pressurized cargo compartments still limited the species that could be shipped. With the advent of the fast jet aircraft, with warm pressurized cargo facilities, the barriers were broken and the explosion began. Today the source of supply and the market are no more than 24 hours apart. A king cobra in Bangkok can reach a dealer in Los Angeles or New York in this short space of time.

It immediately becomes obvious that when this flood of animals hit our shores, there must be regulatory laws and agencies to handle the traffic, not only at the port of entry into the United States, but its movement within the country as well.

At the port of entry into the United States, which is of course the Federal level, live animals first come under the scrutiny of the U. S. Customs, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (which I represent), the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the U. S. Public Health Service.

The next point of concern is on the State level, where it becomes a problem of the various State Departments of Fish and Game. Now, the Federal government may permit the entry of a particular species into the United States, but one or more of the 50 states may have laws prohibiting its importation. Likewise, a state may permit entry, but counties and cities within the state may have ordinances prohibiting possession.

Let us return to the port of entry level and examine one great problem that immediately presents itself when these live creatures arrive at our gates. That problem is one of identification. Who sorts out all of these creatures to determine which species are prohibited entry and which ones are permissible? Now, theoretically speaking, it is possible that 8600 different species of birds, 3500 species of mammals, 7000 species of reptiles, 5000 species of amphibians and 25,000 species of fish could arrive at our ports of entry with importers seeking their importation.

Obviously, U. S. customs officers can not be expected to have the expertise necessary to identify all of these thousands of animals, so it falls to us of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. At the present time, there are three full time U. S. Game Management agents designated as Importation Inspectors. There is one at the Port of New York, one at the Port of Miami and I hold that position at the Port of Los Angeles. It is our duty to identify and regulate this animal traffic in accord with the Federal laws governing this traffic, but we can and do assist the State law enforcement officers.

For example, Federal law permits the entry of birds known as starlings or mynahs (with one exception) but the State of California prohibits entry of all such species, except for the talking hill mynah. If a shipment of prohibited starlings or mynahs arrive at the Port of Los Angeles, consigned to an importer within the state, I immediately prohibit entry of the shipment. If, however, the shipment is destined to an importer in some other state, the shipment will be passed and allowed to be transshipped to that destination. On the other hand, if a shipment of starlings enter via the Port of New York and moves to a dealer in Chicago, who in turn ships the birds to a customer in California via a domestic air carrier, inspection and prohibition of entry must be made by California Department of Fish and Game officers upon its arrival in California.

It is also obvious that we Federal and State officers can not be expected to identify all of the possible species of animals that may pass through our hands, and we in turn must seek help from the professional biologists, such as ornithologists, mammalogists, herpetologists and ichthyologists. At the Port of Los Angeles, we depend heavily upon the assistance of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, its professional staff and vast reference collections.

Let us now look at some of the tools at our disposal for the control of this flood of animal life. These tools are the various Federal and State laws regulating the importation of wildlife. Since 1900, some 22 or more Federal Acts for the protection of wildlife have been passed. Of these twenty-odd Federal Laws, five are most important with regard to traffic in wildlife.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended, results from a treaty between Canada, the United States of America and Mexico, affording protection to North American birds that move back and forth across the common borders of these three countries. Explained concisely, this law prohibits the capture, transport or sale of any migratory bird (certain migratory game birds, such as ducks and geese excepted) common to any of the three countries. For example, a native species of bird in the United States that migrates to Central America can not be captured there and then legally imported into the United States as a cage bird. Exceptions, of course, are made for importation of these species by recognized zoological parks and educational institutions.

The next and probably the most important regulatory act of all is the Lacey Act of 1900, as amended. This is the big one, with real teeth in it. The Lacey Act spells out what wildlife can and can not be imported into the United States. It lays down the rules for importation and prescribes the exact procedures for importation.

Our principal concern in the inspection and identification of imported wildlife is to prevent entry of prohibited species. The species prohibited entry by Federal laws and regulations were selected, after consultation with scientists knowledgeable in the field, for these reasons. The species are gregarious, migratory and destructive in habit; if released in the wild, they would have an excellent chance for survival in sufficient numbers to establish new populations which would be detrimental to our native wildlife, and destructive to our agriculture and/or horticulture.

The following list are mammals, birds and fishes prohibited entry by Federal law. In the family viverridae, civits and mongoose, the genera Atilax, Cynictis, Helogale, Herpestes, Ichneumia, Mongos and Suricata. Bats or flying foxes of the genus Pteropus; the multimammate rat of the genus Mastomys; and Indian Wild Dog or Dhole of the genus Cuon.

Birds prohibited entry are the Rosy Pastor or Pink Starling (Sturnus roseus), the Java Sparrow (Padda oryzivora) also called the Java Rice Bird or Java Temple Bird, the Sudan Dioch (Quelea quelea) also called the Red-Billed Dioch and the Red-Whiskered Bulbul (Pycnonotus jocosus).

Time does not permit detailed accounts of the undesirable habits of each of the prohibited species. However, we may touch lightly on the subject of introduction of foreign species and their impact on our everyday lives and that of our native wildlife.

Of the non-game bird introductions, the majority can be classed as undesirables, such as the Starling (Sturnus vulgaris), the English Sparrow (Passer domesticus) and the lesser known Tree Sparrow (Passer montanus), which has become established around St. Louis and parts of Illinois. This bird is prohibited in California. Around Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia, there is a small but well established population of the Sky Lark (Alauda arvensis), and the Crested Mynah (Acridotheres cristatellus), the Red-Whiskered Bulbul (Pycnonotus jocosus) and the Blue-Gray Tanager (Thraupis virens) have established small populations in Florida around Miami. There may be another wild population of the Red-Whiskered Bulbuls started in the eastern part of Pasadena, near the Los Angeles County Arboretum, as several were shot in that area in 1968 and 1969.

Other foreign introductions which have taken hold in California, whether for good or bad, are the Rock Dove (Columba livia), the Cattle Egret (Ardeola ibis) and the European Starling (Sturnus vulgaris). The latter has spread at a phenomenal rate. Introduction of the mongoose to Puerto Rico and Hawaii for snake and rat control has proven to be a terrible mistake because of the enormous damage now caused to native wildlife species, especially indigenous bird life.

The latest species to make the prohibited list is the walking catfish of the fish family Clariidae, and is a good example of what happens when an undesirable species is released in the wild. No natural enemies results in a population explosion before anyone is aware of the fact that we are now confronted with another pest which will cost millions of dollars to control. One wonders, after observing the volume and variety of species being imported each year, what undesirable species will be next to crop up in a well established population before anyone realizes that we now have another species added to the North American fauna.

Up to 1966, the Bureau had little authentic information on numbers and kinds of wildlife being imported into this country. With the new regulations which became effective on January 1, 1966, we had, for the first time, a regulatory requirement which would tell us what live

wildlife was being imported. Title 50CFR-Part 13.12 requires wildlife importers to declare numbers and species being imported by common and scientific name. Declaration for importation of wildlife (form 3-177) is available at customs at the various ports of entry. Manpower shortage prevented reliable reporting for 1966, but the 1967 figures provided the first authentic tabulations.

Other Federal Acts that assist us in wildlife control are the Black Bass Act, as amended, that regulates interstate shipments of fish; the Tariff Act of 1940, as amended, imposes import duties on waterfowl and regulates the importation of certain birds feathers and skins; the Bald Eagle Act of 1940, as amended, provides Federal protection for our national bird, the Bald Eagle and our other native eagle, the Golden Eagle. In protecting these two species, the Act also prohibits the importation of Bald and Golden Eagles from any foreign country where they occur.

These five acts, then, are our most important laws aiding us in our efforts to control this rising flood of exotic wildlife.

Let us take a tour and see what occurs during an inspection of a wildlife shipment. Identification of all species contained is the first order. If violations are found, they are dealt with in the following manner. Species prohibited entry by Section 42 of the Lacey Act are immediately denied entry and the importer must either destroy or export at his expense. This rule would also apply to species prohibited entry by another government agency or state agency. If species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are found, they are usually confiscated and donated to a zoo. If psittacine birds are found in the shipment, the U. S. Public Health Service would be notified and their instructions regarding disposal would be followed. If gallinaceous birds, cloven hooved mammals, ducks or geese are found in the shipment, the U. S. Animal Health Division of the Department of Agriculture would be notified and appropriate action would be taken by that agency. Any violation of State law is usually handled directly by the Bureau inspector, because he is also appointed as a State Game Warden and would act in that capacity. If the shipment meets all the legal requirements for entry, the custom inspector is then advised that entry of the shipment is permitted, and, after completion of form 3-177, the shipment is then cleared through customs.

So far we have more or less confined our discourse to the inspection of live wildlife shipments and live prohibited species. However, that function is only part of the importation activity. The importation inspector must also inspect all shipments containing parts of wildlife, such as feathers, eggs, skins, etc. Problems connected with the importation of these items are not of prime concern to our discussion today however, except in the case of live eggs of birds, reptiles and amphibians. Items such as these might well be of concern to you gentlemen in the course of pest control work and to Federal and State governments in prevention of the introduction of undesirable species.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to examine some of the residual effects resulting from this acquisition of imported wildlife.

Being the owner of an exotic species of wildlife is, in many instances, regarded as a status symbol; but the care and control of a wild species is frequently more than the owner bargained for, so the next step is how to dispose of it. In most cases the owner has developed a sort of loving attachment to whatever he purchased, and he can not dispose of it himself. Also he may not be able to bear the thought of taking it to the Humane Society for proper disposal, so the kind soul that he is takes it to the woods, desert or water (whichever is the most suitable to the situation). Contrary to existing Federal and State laws he releases the creature in the wild thinking he has really performed a humane deed, never realizing or giving it a second thought that his so-called "humane" act may in due time cost the American tax payers millions of dollars in pest control.

Although many of these imported animals are deliberately and illegally liberated in our environment, large numbers manage to escape on their own. Take for example the problems encountered by the Bureau of Animal Regulation of the City of Los Angeles. In 1969, the Bureau was involved with no less than 5000 live animals, other than cats and dogs. Of this 5000, one half, or 2500, were indigenous forms, such as deer, raccoons, opossums, birds, etc. Of these, it was possible to relocate 1700 of them in suitable habitat away from the city. The other half, or 2500, however, were exotic escapees or liberated animals ranging from king cobras, rattlesnakes, pythons, coati mundis, kinkajous, monkeys, toucans, parrots, hornbills and eagles.

We have yet to see the crest of this importation flood, and where it will end can only be speculated upon. It is bound to get worse before it gets better. This human phobia of wanting to possess other fellow creatures not only endangers the wildlife of the world but could well have disastrous effects upon our own economy and our own wildlife if the wrong species is free to establish itself in the wrong area at the right time.

I trust that I have touched upon some of the aspects of this wildlife importation problem as it relates to pest control problems confronting you gentlemen; and if you have any questions relative to this matter, I shall do my best to answer them.