

07/06/2019

## Synopsis of meeting with ACT office of Conservator of Flora and Fauna

Time: 2pm 4/6/19

Venue: Dame Pattie Menzies House, 16 Challis Street Dickson

### Background

The following two documents were publicly released on 20 May 2019 for public consultation until 10 July 2019 via the URL <https://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/managing-invasive-animals> and raised much concern throughout the avicultural community.

1. Changes to Licences for Keeping Non-native Animals under the Nature Conservation Act 2014. Information Paper. <https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.act-yoursay.files/5015/5833/2523/Non-Native-Animals-Information-Paper-ACCESS.pdf>
2. Proposed Amendments to the Pest Plants and Animals (Pest Animals) Declaration. Discussion Paper. May 2019. <https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.act-yoursay.files/3115/5807/4536/Proposed-Amendments-to-the-Pest-Plants-and-Animals-Declaration-ACCESS-3.pdf>

In summary, the first paper informs the public that 77 species of non-native birds, including numerous common avicultural species, have been removed from the exempt list such that a licence to keep these species is now required. The second paper is less onerous, it proposes addition of some avicultural species to the pest lists with no additional restrictions on keeping, although it is possible public submissions may promote prohibition.

### Synopsis

On Tuesday 4/6/19 Sam Davis (President CCBFA), Alan Southgate (Canberra Finch Club), Mick Logan (Canberra Bird Breeders Club, Canberra Walk-in Aviary) and Adam FitzGerald (Aviculturist) met in Canberra with representatives of the ACT government, Ian Walker (Conservator), Alison McInnes, Kathryn Tracy and Johannes Botha to begin discussions on the ACT government's concerning changes to licencing of birds.

We thank the office of the Conservator for scheduling a meeting at such short notice and we welcome the opportunity to consult and work through the issues.

The meeting commenced with introductions, including a brief overview of aviculture, it's extent, work with threatened species and conservation. Government officials outlined their roles and the legislation overseeing the two documents.

Those representing aviculture explained how current licensing is ineffective and may be counterproductive to achieving the main aim of the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* - to protect wild species, environments and ecosystems. A range of issues were presented including, non-compliance with no funding for monitoring/enforcement, ACT going against other states who are reducing regulation in favour of education, desire of aviculture to work with government, etc. It was pleasing to see all government officers engaged and understanding of our position.

Government officials confirmed that much of the evidence for removing the 77 avian species from the exempt declaration was based on the Vertebrate Pest Committee (VPC) 2007 listing, albeit with some additional and more local escapee evidence. Aviculture representatives distributed copies of the “Canberra Finch Club Initial Thoughts” (attached) which makes clear the trivial risk of aviary escapees establishing wild populations. Alan Southgate and Adam FitzGerald made the point that most aviary escapees succumb to predation within minutes or hours and the remainder are ill equipped to locate food so soon die of starvation.

Ian Walker, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, accepted that birds in aviaries are not the issue, it is preventing their escape and the establishment of wild populations that needs to be addressed. Some thought of a process for identifying and swiftly reacting to escaped birds was discussed. Sam Davis was pleased to hear from the Conservator, Ian Walker, that in the ACT rapid response to feral incursions by officials was indeed possible and does occur (unlike in other larger jurisdictions). Alison McInnes indicated an email to [EPSDInvasiveAnimals@act.gov.au](mailto:EPSDInvasiveAnimals@act.gov.au) is the best way to notify the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate of escaped birds. Aviculture is open to working with government to notify escapes, assist with recapture and report feral incursions from NSW. Education is key in this area.

Sam Davis presented his document on the misuse of “The Bomford Model” (attached), making it clear the evidence upon which the risk assessments that informed the removal of 77 species from the exempt list is erroneous due to these species being essentially domesticated since the cessation of wild avian imports in 1949. This argument has been accepted in a range of other jurisdictions in recent years. Alison McInnes will present a copy of Sam Davis’ article to the current National Environment and Invasives Committee (EIC) who are currently working on an update to the Vertebrate Pest Committee (VPC) 2007 document.

#### **Commitments**

1. The Conservator and other officials apologised for not identifying all avicultural clubs earlier as major stakeholders and committed to ensure continued consultation.
2. The Conservator has agreed to reassess the exempt list taking into consideration feedback from aviculture. He made it clear the *Nature Conservation (Exempt Animals) Declaration 2019* could certainly be amended in good time as a consequence.
3. Government officers have encouraged avicultural feedback on both documents and are also interested to consider proposals that may require changes to the Act.
4. Avicultural representatives will work together to produce an evidence-based submission that tables and recommends non-native avian species for the exempt list.

On behalf of all aviculturists in the ACT we thank the ACT government officers present for a very productive meeting and look forward to further engagement on these matters.

All present have approved this synopsis.

Regards,



Sam Davis  
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## Canberra Finch Club Initial Thoughts

Some points/notes from both our meeting on Tuesday and from the research and thoughts Bruce has put together. Hopefully they are useful for your meeting with ACT Parks and Conservation Service on Tuesday 4 June :

- Canberra Ornithological Group has confirmed that “Apart from the seven non-native established species, to our knowledge none of the 77 listed species have been reported or established within the local area the one exception being a report of Red-whiskered Bulbul some months ago in the Tuggeranong area which, despite active searches could not be confirmed.”
- The seven non-native species that have been established in the ACT are the Indian Myna, Common Starling, Eurasian Blackbird, Eurasian Skylark, Indian Peafowl, House Sparrow and Spotted Dove.
- The establishment of these species was not a result of aviary escapees.
- The evidence above shows that the 77 listed species was not founded on scientific evidence and to treat them as invasive is misguided.
- Canaries have been kept in the Canberra/ Goulburn region since European’s first settled in the region. There is no evidence of established wild populations as a result.
- Any finch or canary that escape dies because it can’t fend for itself and is predator unaware. They are quickly eaten by cats (which are an unregulated invasive species) or native birds such as Currawongs and Butcher birds.
- Escapees are usual singular in nature, scientific evidence has proven that a single bird will not produce offspring.
- The listed birds are expensive to purchase making owners/breeders reluctant to liberate them.
- Unlike cats/dogs, aviary birds are not left to roam outside their enclosure.
- We do have extremely environmentally dangerous species like the cat but these are not being licensed. This is a very too faced approach by government and one that puts the too hard problems into a separate pile and licks on the supposedly easier, less PR risky actions.
- With licences being introduced then the numbers who will keep birds (even if they can get a no cost license) will be very small and getting smaller so the available bird gene pool will become severely deformed.
- The use of a cane toad as a cover illustration is scare mongering, as are words like feral and invasive. Would the document have the same effect if a Cordon Bleu was used instead of a cane toad?
- If this is about raising more funds then call it what it is.
- If the government are so determined to licence exotic species then why not open up licences for native birds like the diamond, double bar and red browed finch to name a few. That way finch fanciers can move to these species and undertake breeding programs to assist native species.

## **The Bomford Model**

*By Sam Davis*

Attempts to assess the probability of feral avian populations establishing in the wild must include all parameters of significance. Currently the risk is routinely assessed based on the model developed by Mary Bomford – known as “The Bomford Model”. This model was never intended to assess establishment probability for escaped captive bred domestic species populations. This issue is specifically acknowledged by Bomford based on the work of Carrete and Tella (2008).

*“Carrete and Tella (2008) found that for pet bird species in Spain, wild-caught birds were highly significantly ( $p < 0.0001$ ) more likely to establish wild breeding populations than captive-reared birds, even though captive-reared birds are kept in far higher numbers.” Bomford (2008)*

“The Bomford Model” was developed based on statistically extrapolating from available data recording historical release events. This source data was largely collected by acclimatisation societies operating within Australia and New Zealand and subsequently detailed in Long (1981).

The introduction to Long (1981) describes the enormous number of wild caught birds moved internationally as part of the massive caged bird industry operating prior to the 1970s. Long (1981) makes the point that the number of avicultural escapees is unknown but was no doubt significant. The evidence in Long (1981) shows acclimatisation societies released large numbers of wild caught birds in multiple locations over many years. In addition, the wild birds were protected and provided with feed to encourage establishment. In Australia, species released by acclimatisation societies did in many cases establish, whilst avicultural species failed conclusively to establish. This despite Long’s reasonable presumption of significant avicultural escapes. Perhaps this apparent anomaly is in part explained by the relatively early (by international standards) 1949 cessation of exotic avian imports into Australia. That is, avicultural escapees in Australia post-1949 are entirely limited to captive bred individuals unable to survive wild conditions.

Scientific evidence supporting the low establishment risk of escaped captive bred birds in Australia is somewhat paradoxically present in the majority of threatened species recovery efforts detailing attempts to reintroduce captive bred species back into their native habitat. The extreme difficulties encountered during such captive breeding recovery and release efforts provides ample scientific evidence as to the low risk of captive birds establishing sustainable populations.

The continuing misuse of “The Bomford Model” to assess captive bred birds has led to and continues to lead to conclusions that unreasonably restrict the movement of avicultural species between Australian jurisdictions. All captive populations present in Australia are numerous generations distant from their wild cousins and should be considered domesticated.

## **References**

Bomford, M. (2008). Risk assessment models for establishment of exotic vertebrates in Australia and New Zealand. Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, Canberra. Pp 13

Carrete, M. and Tella, J. L. (2008). Wild-bird trade and exotic invasions: a new link of conservation concern? *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 6: 207–211.

Long, J. L. (1981). Introduced birds of the world. Agricultural Protection Board of Western Australia. Pp 10-13.