Importing or Exporting Birds (United States)

**General Information:** The legal importation of most pet-trade-type-birds came to a halt in late 1991 when a moratorium to the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 (WBCA) was placed into effect by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). At that time, the WBCA only covered certain families of birds, and only those listed on CITES I and CITES II appendices (CITES is the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered and Threatened Species). But, shortly after its passing, several anti-trade groups came together and sued the USFWS to add all birds listed on CITES appendix III as well; Making the WBCA a virtual “ban” on the importation of specific families of birds, and certainly for the family known as parrots (Psittacines). Information sheets are available on this website explaining each of the above laws in more detail.

**Importing under a Cooperative Breeding Program:** The WBCA allows for limited importation of “qualified” species under two exceptions available to breeders in the United States. The first exception is called a “Cooperative Breeding Program” or CBP. Under these programs clubs or aviculturists can come together and design their own breeding program aimed at the establishment or conservation of a species. The participants of this program may be authorized to import certain numbers of the target species under the program to be used as breeding stock to meet the stated objectives of an approved CBP. These imported birds, even if captive-bred in another country, cannot be imported solely for the purpose of resale. The manager of the CBP must file a report with the USFWS every two years giving the status of all imported birds, and the disposition of all offspring produced under the CBP. At that time the USFWS will decide if goals are being met and will either extend the program, or discontinue it. Usually there are quotas set by USFWS under all CBPs so that it is not used as an import mechanism to supply the pet trade with imported birds.

**Importing “Exempted” Species under the WBCA:** The WBCA also has a second mechanism allowing the importation of certain species of parrots and pet-trade birds. During the drafting of the law, key avicultural groups showed great concern over the effects that the WBCA might have on the pet trade in the United States. An exception for qualified “captive bred” species was built into the law. This is not to say that any captive-bred bird can be imported into the United States, but instead, the drafters of the law came up with a short list of species that are available in aviculture around the world, and where that species is not being exploited or traded from the wild, and where it is well documented that the species is being bred successfully in aviculture throughout the world. Aviculturists can petition the USFWS to add or remove species based on the listing criteria. But no species that is currently being removed from the wild for trade anywhere in the world would qualify for this list. The current list of species permitted for import as “captive bred” is contained in Title 50: Part 15, Subsection 15.33. You can view the list [here](#). Remember, there are some pet-trade species of passerines or even a few parrot species, that are not listed on any CITES appendices, and therefore can be imported into the United States.

**Exporting birds from the United States:** Breeders, or even pet-owners in other countries, may contact a U.S. breeder and ask if they can export a bird for them. Exportation of birds from the United States is
controlled by resolutions and rules under the CITES treaty. Exporting species listed on either Appendix II or Appendix III, is possible but the exporter must follow certain guidelines and make sure they apply for, and receive, all the necessary permits and licenses. For those species listed on Appendix I, CITES has a very specific qualifying process whereas the originating breeding facility must be registered with the CITES Secretariat before any of these species enter into “commercial” trade from one country to another. To date there are only a handful of registered breeding facilities around the world producing specimens of a CITES Appendix I species, qualified for legal export. There are no CITES registered or qualified parrot breeding facilities located in the United States at the time of this bulletin.

A Note about the term “Commercial” as it pertains to imports and exports: The argument over whether a breeder or pet owner is a commercial entity comes up often. This is probably because Miriam Webster and the CITES Treaty have two different definitions for such activities. Nationally, we might only consider ourselves as commercial breeders if we sell baby birds or broker birds for money. But as it pertains to any international movement of birds under the CITES Convention, the term commercial means ANY movement or transaction that is not “non-commercial”. For the sale, trade, movement, or export of any animal listed under any CITES Appendices to qualify as non-commercial, the end disposition of that animal or bird must be to directly enhance the survival of the species in the wild. In other words, if it is not being sent to a conservation project that has direct ties to the conservation of the species in the wild, it is a commercial transaction. Yes, even the loan or gift of a bird from one breeder to another, where neither breeder is involved with the in situ conservation of the species in the native habitat, can be considered a commercial activity.

Exporting Continued: So, if the bird to be exported from the United States qualifies for export under CITES and the USFWS, a permit can be issued by USFWS. But this is only the beginning of the process! Within the United States there are several agencies that have permits or inspection requirements for an animal to leave the country legally. In addition to the CITES permit for the actual bird to be exported, USFWS also requires that the exporter have an “exporter’s license”. This is often obtainable by applying to the local field office of the USFWS closest to the exporter’s home. Be aware you will be probably be applying for a “commercial exporter’s license” as explained above.

In addition to the CITES permit and an exporter’s license, U.S. Customs also requires a declaration to be filled out and signed designating the export into one of several Customs categories of export. Also, an International Health Certificate is required by USDA and must be signed and sealed by the State of export no more than 10 days before the scheduled airline flight that will carry the bird out of the country. Each importing country also has its own requirements for this health certificate and certain words must appear on the certificate and/or specific tests must be accomplished before they will allow the bird entrance into the importing country.

As if this is not enough, an appointment is required with the local USFWS inspection station where the wildlife can be inspected before it is placed onto the airplane. The inspector will sign an inspection form, and the original CITES permit, which must accompany the shipment. The USFWS only does inspections at certain “designated ports”. Be sure to check for the one closest to you and contact them about an inspection on the day of export.
The legal exportation of a bird from the United States can be frustrating and expensive. Each and every step along the way has administrative costs associated with it. From permit costs, to license fees, to inspection fees, the cost of exporting a single bird can be high. Sometimes it is just best to tell your foreign friends to find a pet bird locally.