

EU Bans Wild Bird Imports

New rules ban the importation of wild-caught birds

By Crystal Apilado

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In a move to protect animal health amid the continuing avian flu outbreak, the European Union's (EU) Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health announced January 11 that it will make its temporary ban on live bird imports permanent as of July 1, 2007.

"Birds caught in the wild will not be allowed to be imported into the EU," according to a press release by the EU. The rules will not apply to poultry, but to parrots which are a major import of EU nations.

Markos Kyprianou, EU commissioner for health and consumer products, said, "Such measures are crucial to maintaining the highest possible level of animal health protection in the EU. The devastation that the H5N1 avian influenza virus has caused globally serves as a reminder that we can take no chances in this are." Kyprianou said that the animal health measures set out in the new regulation are a positive step forward for the health of imported birds.

Conservation groups such as Bird Life and The World Parrot Trust have been pressuring the European Union (EU) to make the ban permanent for more than a year. Dr James Gilardi, director of the World Parrot Trust, said that the ban will improve the lives of captive-bred birds in Europe and help reduce the number of birds that are imported in as well as problems with disease.

"This will have hugely positive consequences to wild birds all around the world, and especially the parrots," Gilardi said. "The temporary ban has already spared more than four million wild birds, and the permanent ban will spare that many every year in the future."

Dr. Claire Papazoglou, head of European division at BirdLife International said that even though the ruling was made to limit the spread of disease and not to conserve species, they applaud the decision made by the EU committee.

"Banning the imports of birds caught in the wild is great news for bird conservation," Papazoglou said. "Only if laws are made on the basis of conservation can we have more confidence in protecting those species that are threatened by trade."

In addition to the ban on wild bird being imported, the new requirements of the regulation:

Apply strict conditions for importing live captive birds

The regulation does not include certain types of birds (poultry and pet birds accompanying their owners)

Only birds bred in captivity and in approved breeding establishments will be allowed to enter the EU.

All imported birds will be individually identified by a leg-ring and a micro chip.

A 30-day quarantine period in an officially approved facility will be required for all imported captive birds. They will only be released following a veterinary inspection.

EU nations must provide the European Commission with regular information on the import of captive birds and their quarantine conditions.

The regulation supports the first ban on importing captive live birds that was adopted in October 2005 as part of preventative measures against avian influenza. A second move associated with wild bird import was issued in October 2006 by the European Food Safety Authority.