

WILDLIFE TRAFFIC

This is a summary of a report presented by C. L. Boyle at the 6th Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Protection of Animals, held in London, May 6, 1971. The comments in italics at the end of the summary broadly set out the regulations which operate in Western Australia.

"It ought not to be allowed", follows any description, however objective, of the way in which wild animals are treated for gain. But the human attitude towards the traffic in wildlife is often one of both guilt and complacency and the palliative is the comforting self-assurance that "something is being done about it". In practice, our feelings are aroused to action only by what we see in front of us, usually the ill-treatment of a domestic animal or pet. It is harder to be actively concerned about the ill-treatment of wild animals in remote forests.

From a conservation standpoint attention has been focused on the trade in rare animals, and recent legislation makes it difficult to import some rare animals into Great Britain or the U.S.A. It is hoped that these restrictions are reducing the destruction of these rare animals in the wild, if not they are failing in their purpose.

But even when we combine the most optimistic views of the results of humanitarian and conservation efforts in the advanced countries, we are left with a great gap to fill if we are really to preserve the wildlife of the world. No major importing country places any restriction upon the great bulk of importation of wild animals. Among these large importers are Great Britain, the U.S.A.,

Japan and many countries in Europe. Moreover, these importers do not bother about the animals which pass through their territories in transit. All the while the remaining wild places of the world are being ruthlessly plundered to supply the demands of the animal trade—and, of course, the trade in skins. From the plundered countries the cry is always the same, "Stop the demand and the problem will be solved."

A case can be made out for the importation of exotic animals, for research and education; but such importation should be rigidly controlled. What justification is there for the keeping of exotic pets by private people at the cost of the destruction and cruelty which is caused in the wild by commercial exploitation? We have domestic rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, canaries and budgerigars, to say nothing of cats and dogs. What need is there for marmosets, tortoises and African Grey Parrots?

There are no records of total numbers of wild animals imported into Great Britain, or other large importing European countries, but some indication can be obtained by looking at the declared export figures from India alone. These totalled more than four million for the twelve months ending March, 1969. There is little doubt that the figures from the South American continent would be more than this. Who can tell how much destruction and what suffering the whole commercial traffic causes.

Complete control of all wildlife traffic and the total banning of commercial traffic is recommended. This means that the private keeping of wild-caught exotic animals should cease and that no living animal should be imported without a license given by the appropriate authority in the importing country. Under present conditions it would be difficult to control imports properly, but if the demand is drastically reduced the problem will become manageable.

The export of fauna from Western Australia is either prohibited or allowed only under license. Exportation for zoological purposes is allowed only if the recipient zoo is owned or managed by a Government Department or is a non-commercial organisation equipped to house Australian fauna under proper conditions and not engaging in trading in fauna.

The import of animals is strictly controlled by the Commonwealth under the Quarantine and Customs regulations. Licenses to bring fauna into Western Australia are only issued if the importer can satisfy the Chief Warden of Fauna that the other country or State approves the export. Imports are generally prohibited except for zoos, scientific institutions and for aviculture. The import of exotic birds into Australia is entirely prohibited.

In respect of the illegal export or import of fauna, the Fauna Conservation Act provides for a maximum penalty of \$400 for each breach.