SENEGAL'S TRADE IN CAGE BIRDS

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ABSTRACT

Senegal is one of the world's principal exporters of cage birds. The estimated value to Senegal of this trade is equivalent to U.S. $500,000 annually. Between 1979 and 1981, over one million birds were exported annually to at least 26 countries. During this period, the Government of Senegal proposed policy guidelines and legislative changes to rationally manage this important industry.

INTRODUCTION

The cage bird trade in general, and its relationship to potential agricultural problems, certainly is interesting. Many of you might be surprised by the magnitude of this industry, particularly the role played by the small West African country of Senegal. The information I am presenting was obtained between 1974 and 1979 when I lived in Senegal and from the official exportation records since that time. Documents describing this bird exportation industry from Senegal are unusual in that they examine the cage bird trade from the viewpoint of the exporting country.

Senegal, although a small West African country, is one of the world's principal exporters of birds for the cage bird trade. Since 1955, over 32 million birds, an average of 1.2 million/year, have been exported to over 42 different countries (Table 1). The estimated annual value of this trade to Senegal is $500,000.

Table 1 Maximum No. Birds Exported Annually from Senegal Between 1974 and 1981

Species	World	USA
Golden Sparrow	34,000	8,000
Ploceus spp.	38,000	6,000
Yellow-crowned Bishop	20,000	2,000
Red Bishop	120,000	20,000
Red-billed Quelea	36,000	0
Starlings	10,000	300

Between six and nine exporters, employing as many as 300 trappers, operate in Senegal. Most birds are trapped using decoy birds and clap nets. Birds are returned to Dakar, the capital, in holding cages (Fig. 1), where they are kept in indoor cages or outdoor flight pens until shipping. Between 150 and 250 birds generally are shipped in cages measuring about 30 x 60 x 15 cm. The European countries of Spain, Belgium, Holland, Italy, West Germany, and particularly France generally import over 75% of the birds annually. During both 1980 and 1981, the U.S. replaced France as the principal importer of Senegal's birds, importing about 204,000 birds, or 23% of the trade. Fringillidae, Ploceidae, and Estrildidae account for more than 95% of the birds.

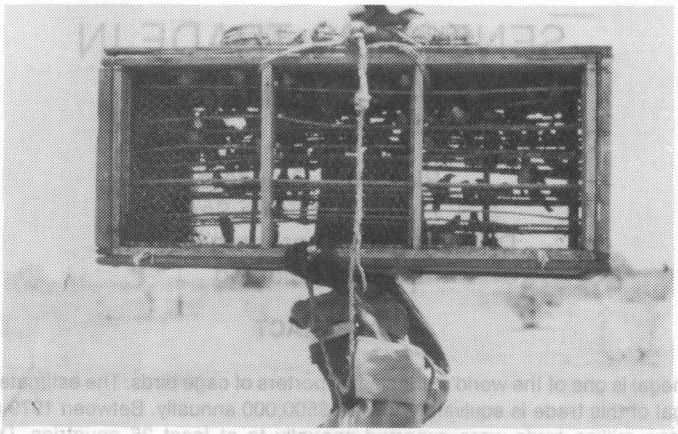

FIGURE 1. Trappers take birds to collection centres where they are picked up by the exporter or sent to Dakar by train or taxi.

Many birds that are pests to agriculture in Africa are exported. The family Ploceidae comprises most of these species. In 1978, red-billed quelea, weavers of the genus *Ploceus*, bishops, and sparrows amounted to 150,000 birds, or 13% of the total for all birds exported that year. More red bishops, 8,000-20,000/year, are exported than any of the other ploceids. West Germany with 32,000, France with 24,000, and the U.S. with 22,000 birds were the principal recipients of all these ploceid species.

About 475,000 birds were imported into the U.S. from all countries during 1979, 50% directly from Africa (mostly Senegal) and the remainder from Latin America, Europe, and Asia (Table 2). Discrepancies exist between the Senegal exportation records and the U.S. importation records, but six species of ploceid weavers and rose-ringed parakeets are listed as being exported from Senegal into the U.S. About 25,000 individuals of these species were exported to the United States during 1980 (Table 3). Fortunately, none of these species is listed as having become established in the continental United States or Canada.

Table 2 No. Birds Imported to USA, 1979

Africa	216,376
(Senegal	113,314)
Latin America and Caribbean	136,529
Europe	69,798
Asia and Pacific	51,594
Canada	1,316
Australia and New Zealand	268
TOTAL	475,881

Village weavers were introduced into Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the late 1700's and now are the most important bird pest to rice. The Haitian Government estimates that losses of 20-35% to rice are caused by these species.

Golden sparrows also are receiving increasing attention in West Africa as a bird pest. In Senegal they apparently have even replaced quelea as the main pest to millet. However, the red-billed quelea, perhaps the most numerous bird species in the world and certainly the most destructive, is the main pest in Africa. It affects the economy of 25 African nations by damaging sorghum, millet, wheat, and rice. Minimum estimates of losses range from more than $1 million to $6.3 million. Losses in Senegal are estimated at $4.5 million, or 27,000 tons of grain annually.

Table 3 No. "Pest Birds" to USA

Species	1979 Exp	1979 Imp	1980 Exp	1980 Imp
Golden Sparrows	0	1,200	4,136	1,345
Red Bishops	0	240	0	840
Yellow Bishops	0	340	11,110	0
Ploceus spp.	6,000	3,299	5,620	517
Rose-ringed Parakeets	250	600	5,378	1,887

Because of their pest status, quelea have been the subject of extensive research — particularly into their biology, movement patterns, and methods of reducing their damage — by a number of international bilateral and multilateral assistance organizations. Because they are gregarious and form dense nesting colonies, quelea are susceptible to the destructive methods used by national and regional control organizations. More than 1 billion birds are reportedly destroyed annually by explosives or avicides in these control campaigns.

Quelea occasionally show up in pet shops — most recently in Denver. The federal government and some individual states are particularly sensitive to the possible adverse effects to the poultry industry, agriculture, and resident bird populations of diseased, escaped, or released exotic species and have developed detection and exclusion procedures for prohibiting the entry of potentially undesirable species. These species can only be imported with special permits and cannot be traded, sold, loaned, or transported to anyone without a permit. California restricts many other species and has developed its own, even more stringent regulations.

There also are a number of international organizations and treaties that restrict or regulate trade in cage birds (particularly those captured in the wild) and preserve wildlife. These are voluntary organizations, and some of the countries important to the bird trade are not members.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are no easy solutions to the problems presented by the trade in cage birds. This trade presents some problems which, from an ornithological and ecological standpoint, are sometimes difficult to accept. The implications of the trade and the adverse effects of escaped exotic species on agriculture or resident bird populations are relevant to the Senegal trade. However, it is unlikely that the industry can be stopped. None of the birds exported from Senegal is presently on an endangered or threatened species list, nor are they subject to the reportedly deplorable conditions described for birds in the Asian export centers of Singapore, Hong Kong, and Bangkok. The exportation industry in Senegal is regulated by the Government's *Eaux, Forêts et Chasses* of the Ministere du Development Rural et l'Hydraulique, Daker, to the extent of its available personnel.

These Government officials have met on several occasions with exporters and international scientists to establish policy guidelines. As a result, a major effort is being made to improve conditions of capture, transport, storage, and exportation. This objective has led to more stringent proposed legislation and to establishing exportation quotas for certain species. However, for the time being it rests with the individual exporters and importers and the participating countries to try and manage themselves and the industry in a rational manner.

Note: The contents of this paper have been drawn from the following two publications:

Bruggers, R. L. 1982. The exportation of cage birds from Senegal. Wildlife Trade Monitoring Unit, IUCN Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, U.K. Traffic Bulletin 4(2):12-22.

Ruelle, Philippe and Richard L. Bruggers. 1983. Senegal's trade in cage birds, 1979-81. USDI, FWS Wildlife Leaflet 515:1-11.