

Parrot Society-UK Position Statement: Positive Lists

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A positive list, i.e., a “whitelist” or permitted list of species that can be owned by private keepers, with other species being effectively banned, has been touted as a positive legislative step for animal welfare.^{1,2,3} The Parrot Society UK (referred to hereafter as “the society”) is a registered charity, with a mission statement that includes “providing help and expert advice on the welfare and conservation of all parrot species”.⁴ As such, the welfare of birds in captivity is of huge concern to the society. However, the society is strongly opposed to the implementation of a positive list in the UK.

In aviaries across the United Kingdom, there are thousands of individual birds, of hundreds of distinct species, kept by private hobbyist aviculturists. In times gone by, before there were heavy restrictions on the importation of birds, many avian species became established in captivity, with self-sustaining populations.^{5,6} The society believes that captive populations of healthy wildtype plants and animals, are a useful conservation resource, in case of disaster or disease in the home-range of a species, however unlikely that may seem. A good example of a species which has become well established in aviculture and subsequently become endangered in the wild is the swift parakeet.^{7,8} Provided the birds welfare is considered and upheld, the society believes that private keepers can (and have) contributed to maintaining an “invisible ark” of species, alongside zoos and bird parks.^{9,10,11} The society is in favour of increased disease screening, biosecurity and consideration of genetic resources in private aviculture, which may then lend itself to closer cooperation with the institutional sector in the future for captive breeding efforts. A recent closer focus on keeping and breeding wildtypes rather than mutations by many bird keepers is something strongly supported by the society, to preserve the natural form of many species.

While many zoos depend on drawing visitors to stay open, private aviculturists are in a unique position, in that their hobby is funded by them and they are able to dedicate space to species they are enthusiastic about, without any consideration to visitor numbers. This means that if an individual is enthusiastic about one family or genus of small, “plain green” parakeets for example, they can devote as much space as they are able to house such birds, whilst a zoo may have to prioritise other more charismatic species.¹² Similarly, birds housed by private keepers in their gardens or on their land may have the benefit of a lack of daily disturbance from the public than those on exhibit in public institutions. In some avian species, this has been shown to lead to improved welfare and potentially may contribute to better breeding success.¹³ The society strongly supports the efforts of private keepers, zoos, and bird parks & gardens, in maintaining populations of as diverse a range of species as possible, provided all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the welfare of the birds, as required by law under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.¹⁴

Specifically on the front of animal welfare, the society’s observation is that the more obscure/rare species of bird (birds which are therefore less likely to appear on a positive/permitted list) are typically housed in aviaries, by experienced enthusiast bird keepers, with other birds. Two of the most important welfare aspects for flighted, gregarious species like parrots are the ability to fly and having companions of the same species. The society does not believe that positive lists will necessarily have any impact on the long-term keeping of single pet gregarious bird species confined permanently in small cages, without being provided with any provisions for flight, even in the event that a positive list only permits the most easily kept species such as budgerigars, cockatiels, and green cheeked conures. Addressing issues such as this, are likely to have a more tangible and

beneficial impact on the overall welfare of birds in captivity in the UK in the society's view and focussing on specific, identified welfare issues and ways to combat those is the way forwards, rather than limiting the superb biodiversity that is present within aviculture.

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