

Not just parrots

# Many exotic birds carry Newcastle disease

WASHINGTON, DC — Parrots aren't the only birds capable of bringing exotic Newcastle disease into the United States.

Many families of exotic birds have been refused entry because they were infected with viruses that kill domestic poultry and other cage and aviary birds. The infections showed up during U.S. Department of Agriculture supervised quarantine.

"More than 70 percent of the

221,600 birds refused entry into the United States from 1973 to 1981 because of disease were Psittaciformes — parrots, cockatoos, parakeets, conures, macaws, cockatiels and parrotlets," said Dennis Senne, of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. "We expected that. However, we didn't expect to find members of ten other bird families infected.

Senne is a diagnostician at

USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories, Ames, Iowa.

"We found infection in the Fringillidae family — the finches and canaries; Sturnidae — mynah and starling; Cotingidae — cock of the rock; Corvidae — Magpie; Turdidae — Pekin robin; Ploceidae — silver bill; Columbidae — pigeon; Musophagidae — tuoraco; Gruidae — crane; and Phasianidae — pheasant and

francolin.

"USDA veterinarians isolated less virulent strains of Newcastle disease virus from 26 groups of birds," Senne said. "We allowed these birds to enter the country because those strains of the virus already exist here."

The 221,600 birds, which USDA refused entry, made up 147 lots of 2,274 offered for importation, Senne said. Lots varied from 10 to 36,800 birds.

"Of these, USDA refused 141 lots because they had velogenic viscerotropic — exotic — Newcastle disease and 6 lots had velogenic Newcastle disease," Senne said.

USDA veterinarians isolated many other viruses from the imported birds — paramyxovirus 2 and 3; influenza; psittacine herpes — Pacheco's; pox; reovirus and adenovirus, Senne said. USDA veterinarians allow birds carrying these viruses entry because federal regulations are designed to detect and exclude only viruses that kill domestic poultry.

"USDA refused entry to the highest number of birds during 1973 — the first year of the import program — when almost 32 percent of the lots and more than 40 percent of the birds were denied entry," Senne said. "Since then, we haven't refused nearly as many lots of birds."

The reduction may be due to these factors, Senne said:

—Importers may have become more cautious in the types of birds they import and the countries from which they import them;

—The USDA 90-day ban on imports from countries when exotic Newcastle disease is isolated in birds from that country;

—The large number of birds imported from some countries may have reduced populations to the point where there is little disease left;

—Some importers may quarantine birds in the country of origin to eliminate lots with clinical disease.

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