

Media release

The 'carry on' council farce over illegal bird market

The Animal Protection Agency (APA), a national organisation campaigning against the trade in wild animals for pets, has slammed Mendip District Council for proposing to allow an exotic bird market at the Royal Bath and West Showground on 24 April 2005. Instead of taking firm action to stop illegal bird selling at the 'Festival of Birds', the Council has instead decided to allow business as usual. APA now intends to seek legal action in order to see the Council's decision overturned.

APA investigators attended a previous event by the same organiser on 26 September 2004 and were shocked by the atrocious conditions in which the birds were kept. The APA vet likened the 'Festival of Birds' to markets that she had encountered in Indonesia. Many birds on sale were wild-captured from other countries and some showed clear signs of illness. Council inspectors, however, described the event as 'fine' but later admitted that they had not carried out checks on the welfare of the birds.

In an attempt to avoid the requirements of the Pet Animals Act 1951, which outlaws commercial sales of pets in markets or public places, the organisers had re-presented their event as private and 'members-only' - although the proposed April event is not advertised as such. APA believes that this latest effort has already shown itself to be a façade for illegal, commercial trading.

At a meeting of the Council's Scrutiny Board on 20 December, representatives from APA and BirdsFirst were appalled by the ill-informed debate that preceded the Board's decision. It was clear that none of the councillors around the table had bothered to appraise themselves of the contents of the literature in front of them before commencing their discussion.

Says Elaine Toland, Director of APA;
"The Scrutiny Board meeting could almost have been described as a comedy of errors. Firstly, with no legal basis whatsoever the Board assumed that the unlicensed event could legally proceed as a members-only sale. Then the slow realisation dawned that because they could not legally license the event, they also had greatly reduced powers to ensure that animal welfare was safeguarded. It was agreed that they would like to inspect it anyway but feared that they wouldn't gain access to the market without first applying for membership of a bird club!"

APA is due to meet with its lawyers early in the New Year and will be writing to Mendip District Council with the outcome.

- For more information, please contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253

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