

Animal dealers run rings around Council at illegal bird market

Wildlife protection groups, the Animal Protection Agency (APA) and BirdsFirst, are calling on Mendip District Council to prosecute the organisers, traders and the Bath & West Showground for the illegal animal dealing that took place at a bird market yesterday, Sunday, 24th April 2005. Although it was claimed that the event would be open only to members of the Severn Counties Foreign and British Bird Society, two undercover investigators gained access as non-members.

Mendip District Council, after ruling that the event was illegal, nevertheless gave the market the go-ahead. Organisers of the bird market had claimed that birds would not be sold as part of a business. The Pet Animals Act 1951 disallows the carrying on of a business of selling pet animals in public places or markets and various claims made by the organisers sought to convince the Council that the venue was 'private' and that they wouldn't be 'carrying on a business'.

However, commercial dealers who were recognised from other bird markets around the country were present. One dealer admitted on camera that traders had been told not to bring business cards as it would cause 'problems' and also boasted about selling recently trapped birds from all over the world. Another dealer could not identify species he had on sale, saying "your guess is as good as mine!"

Investigators found that conditions for the birds had not improved on previous years. Some birds were left without food or water and overcrowding in some cases was a severe problem.

Says Elaine Toland, Director of APA;

"Our investigators found a very clearly sick and dying bird on sale, with closed eyes, laboured breathing and drooping wings. The bird was captured on film desperately trying to remain on its perch by clinging to the cage bars with its beak. Unfortunately no vet or local authority inspector was available to complain to or to be shown the pitiful conditions for other birds at the event."

Campaigners remain baffled as to why the event was allowed but investigators were advised on film by a steward that the Council would take a percentage of the club membership fees.

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

* We have an ISDN line for broadcast quality interviews.