

Media release

Britain's Biggest Bird Market - an Open Invitation for Bird Flu



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Plans for a sale of tens of thousands of exotic birds has come under fire from the Animal Protection Agency (APA), which claims that a proposed bird market on 9th October 2005 at the Staffordshire Agricultural Showground could provide a back door for avian flu to reach the UK. Birds imported from all areas of the globe would be on sale along with, possibly, illegally imported wild birds from South East Asia.

The view of APA is that the proposed event is unlawful and could easily have been disallowed by the local authority. Stafford Borough Council is one of only two local authorities in the country that still issue licences for pet markets, and its decision to licence this event is currently the subject of a legal challenge. Malcolm Haynes, co-founder of a local animal rescue charity, has started proceedings in the High Court challenging the lawfulness of the licence that the Council has issued. Malcolm's claim cleared the first legal hurdle yesterday when permission to apply for judicial review was granted, but the case will not be decided until after the 9 October fair has already taken place.

Avian influenza is now sweeping Indonesia and is already claiming human lives. Most fatalities are linked to exposure to poultry but attention now is focused on pet birds as a carrier of the virus.

It is estimated that approximately half of the trade in wild animals is illegal and widely acknowledged that wild bird markets in the UK are a dumping ground for illegally obtained birds. Experts in infection control now believe that bird/wildlife markets such the one proposed at Stafford are likely to introduce Avian Influenza into the UK.

The number of these dangerous events has fortunately been contained thanks to the vast majority of local authorities, which regard pet markets as illegal. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) however, to the shock and dismay of many animal protection organisations and health experts, has proposed to lift the current ban on pet/wildlife markets in the forthcoming Animal Welfare Bill. The Animal Protection Agency is spearheading a campaign to block this proposal in Parliament.

Says Elaine Toland, Director of the Animal Protection Agency;

“At the previous bird market, held at the Staffordshire Showground in March 2005, species from South-East Asia were on sale and judging by their offer price, they could not have been captive-bred. It is dangerously ironic that while Asian authorities are closing down wildlife markets to protect agricultural animals and human life, DEFRA plans to open wildlife markets in the UK. Through its sheer incompetence and complacency the Government could be endangering the lives of British people. It has been warned!”

For more information, contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253

We have an ISDN line for broadcast quality interviews.

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