Bio Security Trial and Closed Leg Banding.

The poultry industry has come under threat from various exotic disease outbreaks over the past few years such as ILT, Avian Influenza and of course we have all heard of the Virus the pigeon fraternity has had to deal with recently and believe me, there will come a time when we will be forced to stop exhibiting, selling and transporting birds across this country of ours. How do we deal with this scenario when it raises its ugly head? Can you even begin to imagine the catastrophic circumstances if something like this happened, no more poultry shows, no more swapping birds, no more selling birds....we may as well just breed a few layers!!! What are we doing about all of this?

The answer to that question is sweet bugger all, and if we continue with that mindset then we can expect the worst as it will inevitably happen whether we like it or not!!!! So we keep thinking that we need to be proactive rather than reactive and try to get in front of the ball game, put some measures in place that will certainly go a long way in demonstrating, (to the powers to be), that we are no longer a bunch of country bumpkins but instead, we are a group of professional hobbyists who do care about these things. The MGPS will again lead the way by conducting a very pro-active trial of lifetime leg banding of our moderns and see if we can get a national breeders and movement register in place for all MGPS members.

We have put a lot of thought into this and this program will have a great deal of positive benefits attached to it for the breeders and not too many negatives. Just think about this simple scenario, one of my pet hates (and quite a few others) is that we have to remove all leg bands at some poultry shows (why I will never know) and then when the judging has been completed, we have to go around and put them all back on!!! That’s ok if you only have a few but we need to spare a thought for the exhibitors that actually show big teams and then it becomes a real pain in the neck (or the other end of the body for that matter). So wouldn't it be great if we, as a group, could come up with a standard leg band (the same for every exhibitor) for all poultry to wear and then they could stay on the bird, in fact birds that do not have a ring should be classed as a marked bird and should not be in the show pen.

I can hear the knockers already....if a bird has a leg band on it then you must be cheating....come on people, as you're fully aware, if a judge wants to be that way inclined then Jesus Christ won't stop him and besides, there are a myriad of ways for a judge to be dishonest and here are just a few. We all supply our own drinkers at some shows and I can assure you that I have seen all different shapes, sizes, colours and some even have the owners name written on them!!!! I have seen and heard of people who whistle and hum when the judge is at their bird, even opening the door for the judge on their own bird, putting camphor or some smelly dressing on their birds. Need I go on, at least with these rings we will all have exactly the same size, shape and colour and if one of our MGPS panel judges are reading rings to determine their awards, then they will not be on the panel for long!!!! Some of the show rules are prehistoric and do not fit with the modern day showmen and women...it is time to move forward and get into the 21st century and besides, the judges should be held accountable for their own actions, if  they're caught and proven to be cheating, then simply expel them from the panels and publicize this fact so that they don't  get anymore appointments!!!

Anyway, we think that we have made our point in the above paragraph, so let's move forward and discuss one way in which we think we can make an impression and that is to develop a national exhibition poultry breeder’s register which is strictly adhered to by all breeders and policed by the state controlling bodies. It would not be all that hard to do....you think about it. The cage bird societies (canaries, budgerigars, parrots) do it now and so do the pigeon breeders. They all have one thing in common and that is all birds bred on the property are closed rung and the birds are identified by the markings on the rings. These rings are issued to the breeders, a national register is kept of ring recipients and Walla, the birds, there owners and their movements can be traced.

I am almost positive that we can get government subsidies for a project like this...the same as the NLIS (national livestock identification scheme) program for cattle. This scheme works via the way of a readable tag inserted into the cattle’s ear, a declaration form is filled to reflect any movement between properties, sale yards and ultimately the abattoir. These tags are in the ear and cannot be removed unless you cut the cow’s ear off. They are read electronically via a special reader and the beasts movements can be tracked from the time it was born until the time it is dead, so why can't the same be done with exhibition poultry?

A lot of the MGPS members are participating in a trial by using closed, lifetime rings on this year's crop of young ones (the same as the picture below) and I know that they can be applied as I have seen it done in the past. The key to getting this to work is the timing; just like a canary...it has to be rung at around eight days of age so a modern game bantam would probably have to be rung around two to three months. Any birds that have obvious defects would not be rung; they would be destroyed before this time. The ring sizes should be reasonably standard with bantams using a 9 ml internal measurement for females and 11 ml for the males, So hopefully, you will see the results at the forthcoming show in South Australia.

Let us look at the positives from all of this.

(1) A national register will help all of us if there happens to be a disease outbreak,

(2) It will be harder to steal a bird,

(3)We will have automatic identification of our birds for the breeding pens,

(4) the inheritance of the birds will never be lost,

(5) all birds will be rung in the show pen with the same coloured ring,

(6) each year will be a different colour so we will know the age of the birds,

(7) we will finally have a true national register for all exhibition poultry.

Now let's look at the negatives,

(1) the cost will be twenty dollars per one hundred rings plus a bit for postage,

(2) the time and the effort to ring each bird,

(3) possible leg damage from poor ringing practices,

(4) rings falling off and getting lost,

(5) birds will have to be shown in there correct age groups and of course,

(6) the true breeders identity of the birds can be proven.

The above paragraphs sum up what we are trying to achieve here and we know that we will come under some scrutiny, it is human nature that people do not embrace change easily but we need to move forward to protect what we have and this is one positive step in achieving that goal. What we need from the controlling state bodies is your support. We envisage that they will have the power to steer this trial in a forward direction. We need you to sanction this as a trial and the other thing we're needing at the moment, is your support to allow the trial participants to show their birds with these leg bands in place. The age old rule of no leg bands has to be challenged for the sake of our industry. This letter will be distributed to as many poultry clubs that we can think of and if you can help us by distributing this to your affiliated clubs than that would be absolutely fantastic. A copy of  this letter will be put into the Australasian Poultry Magazine, our very own magazine, the chicken chat as well as our website. The only other thing that needs to be mentioned is can you please supply us with any feedback from your meeting.

The FCAQ held a seminar in QLD recently and we presented this concept to the participants and they have embraced the concept here in Queensland and we sincerely hope that all the other state bodies will follow suit and make this trial accepted Australia Wide. SAPA had a meeting on the 10th of October, they have endorsed the concept and pledged there support via the way of writing to all of there affiliated clubs asking them to allow birds to be shown with these leg-bands on at there shows for the purpose of the trial. This is a positive step as now, other breeders will be able to see our moderns (with these leg-bands on them) and discuss all the positives for them.

If anyone would like to participate in this trial please contact Graeme Rantall, myself or any other member of the executive committee, remembering the more members participating, the better the trials will be and then we can all supply feedback to each other and hopefully get something happening. If anyone has any views on this subject, please give us a call to discuss any concerns so that we can keep this trial positive. Don't run around whinging and whining to each other, help us (to help the fancy) because believe me it will be eventually forced onto us by government agencies, so we are far better off if we (as a group of professional poultry clubs) demonstrate that we have the ability to take control of  it by using our own chosen methods.