

Disease feared

Big bird raid garners 250 stuffed specimens

By MARY CONNELLY-SZCZESNY

Federal authorities claim to have seized more than 250 stuffed birds being sold illegally from a Franklin jewelry store.

The charges came after 10 months of undercover work by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which claims protected species were sold for \$90 to \$100 each at the Gold Anvil, 32716 Franklin Road.

Federal agents charge the protected and illegally obtained birds were bought by a variety of customers.

"Women customers were purchasing the mounted birds for use in interior decorating and as gifts and novelties," said a spokesman for the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The majority of birds sold by the

wildlife violators were 'raptors,' a name biologists use when referring to birds of prey like hawks and owls."

A May 7 raid at the Gold Anvil resulted in seizure of mounted hawks, owls, eagles, waterfowl, songbirds and "a number of exotic species," agents claim.

MARCUS SPOUTZ, 24, of Southfield, owner of the shop, and Wayne Miller of Waterford Township, a taxidermist, were arrested under federal warrants and face a series of felony charges relating to the illegal sale of birds.

Spoutz could face up to a 49-year prison sentence and \$54,000 in fines. Miller faces a maximum sentence of 31 years in prison and \$35,000 in fines.

A May 29 arraignment has been scheduled before a federal grand jury in Detroit.

Spoutz Monday denied that he knowingly sold protected species.

"I had no idea," he claimed. "I had no knowledge of what was going on. I was stupid in not looking into it better, but I never knew you could get in trouble for birds."

Spoutz maintained that had he known some of the species were protected "it would have been stupid to have them sitting there in full view of people."

"We weren't trying to hide anything," he claimed.

SPOUTZ SAID he has run the jewelry shop for three years and only began selling the birds in the last eight to nine months.

"The mounted birds started out as decoration," he claimed. "At the most, I've sold no more than two dozen birds and a lot of those were pheasants."

Many of the birds were purchased for decoration, Spoutz said.

Federal agents said the jewelry shop raid resulted from a tip from an informant.

Several undercover agents worked in the area for over 10 months and made "numerous purchases" at the shop, authorities claimed.

Wildlife agents claimed the birds were shot or captured by illegal methods from throughout the United States and a few foreign countries.

"A number of birds have been traced to their entry into the United States by smugglers who often hid the dried-

skinned birds in their luggage and clothing," a spokesman claimed. "A number of birds have been traced to Africa, their originating continent."

Federal authorities are also charging that one source for the illegal bird market has been traced to the University of Michigan orthology department where preliminary investigation indicates some 300 birds have been stolen.

The university is reportedly investigating to determine the exact number and species stolen. Federal agents have

recovered some of the birds.

AGENTS CHARGE that some of the hawks, owls, eagles and other birds seized were mounted at the Franklin store while others were prepared when brought there.

The jewelry shop raid has led to other alleged violators, agents claim.

An investigation is continuing in the Detroit area and other parts of the country. Authorities claim that a search warrant obtained in Colorado led to the seizure of 400 birds and resulted from the Franklin raid.

Ethics committee studied

Farmington School Board Trustee Michael Shpiece testified before the House Policy Committee in Lansing last week in favor of a conflict of interest bill that would require public officials to disclose financial information.

House Bill 4325-26, sponsored by Rep. Joseph Forbes, D-Oak Park, and co-sponsored by Rep. Wilbur Brotherton, R-Farmington, would establish a six-member political ethics committee to regulate the bill.

All local and state officials would be required to disclose sources of income over \$1,000 from organizations that do business with their elected legislative body, any real estate they own in the district they represent, and gifts more than \$100. The bill applies to members of school boards and city councils.

"There is a barrage of local officials saying it is unconstitutional and un-American," Shpiece said. "Financial

disclosure is at the heart of the dispute. But it's very limited, very conservative.

"I think this bill will help restore confidence in public officials. The bill would afford some protection from the attitude that all elected officials are crooks."

"Most public officials are aboveboard. This bill would protect against those who have taken advantage of their position."

Also testifying at the hearing last Thursday were Libby Maynard, vice chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party, Jim Ramey of the UAW, Robert Kelly, mayor pro tem of Birmingham, and Arthur Saltzman, board trustee at Oakland University.

Win Rowe, administrative assistant to Forbes, said the 58-page bill will be sent to the House Appropriations Com-

mittee following another public hearing next week.

"We hope it will go before the full House this spring," Rowe said. "This bill was worked on extensively last year."

Rowe said the six-member commission would investigate complaints against local officials regarding conflict of interest. The bill would outlaw bribery, prohibit using confidential information for personal financial gain, and prohibit misrepresentation.

The bill was originally part of the Political Reform Act of 1975 which was declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court in 1976 because it was too broad.

The Legislature has since adopted various portions of that bill individually, such as Public Finance for the Governor, Campaign Finance, Disclosure and Lobby Reform.

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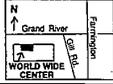
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