AT LAST: DEFRA sees sense on vet requirement

'The fancy is indebted to Robb Brown and the Cage Bird Group for their negotiations with DEFRA.' **ROB INNES** brings news of a significant breakthrough

DEFRA has altered its General Licence (GL) on bird gatherings to make it more workable for show and sales organisers.

The changes, announced on August 5, relate to the "vet requirement", which event organisers found effectively impossible to fulfil to the letter. Led by NCA chairman Robb Brown, the association's Cage Bird Group had put the case for a more realistic provision – and DEFRA has largely adopted it.

Before the changes, item 12 of the licence said:

The licensee must have the contact details for a veterinary surgeon (or veterinary practice) who is otherwise on call in the local area. They must be willing to attend during the whole time that birds are present at the gathering, in case any veterinary emergency occurs.

In *Cage & Aviary Birds* July 29, Robb Brown wrote: "I have stated that, as they know full well, the vets are simply not available or willing to attend events, and by stating 'must' the GL implies that we have to make prior contact to ensure that they could do this – and you cannot find anyone."

He added: "Discussions are taking place between myself and the DEFRA team on this specific point. I have stated that requiring us to call for advice or even take a sick bird to the vet practice is much more realistic."

What the General Licence says now

The new text of the GL reads: *12) (i)The licensee must have available the contact details for a veterinary surgeon (or veterinary practice) who is otherwise on call in the local area. The licensee must consult the veterinary surgeon if birds show signs of ill-health or welfare problems.*

(ii) There must be arrangements in place for veterinary examination of the birds if required. Either:

a) the vet visits the gathering premises to examine the bird (preferred) or

b) following consultation with the vet, the bird visits the vet or practice

After the change was announced, Robb Brown told *Cage & Aviary Birds*: "What can I say? I am delighted that DEFRA have listened, considered and reworded the condition. It makes a MASSIVE difference to a club organising a show or sale now – that is much more achievable!"

● *Editor Rob Innes adds:* We should note that the GL still includes a requirement that "the licensee must ensure the veterinarian or practice is available during the whole time that birds are present at the gathering in case any veterinary emergency occurs."

Effectively, however, that has been in the GL for a while, and the consensus is that event organisers should not be deterred by it.

The fancy is indebted to Robb Brown and the Cage Bird Group for their patient and credible negotiations with DEFRA. And we should acknowledge, also, that credit is due to DEFRA for listening and responding to a reasoned argument from our hobby's representatives.

Now I believe that organisers of sales and shows can forge ahead with their event applications with much more confidence. ■