

## NOTES ON THE LIVE BIRD TRADE IN NORTHERN PERU

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### INTRODUCTION

Native birds, especially parrots (Psittacidae), are extremely popular as pets in Peru and are also easily accessible targets by rural people in search of a means of generating income. Although laws are in place to regulate the wild-life trade in Peru, these laws appear to be both little-known and poorly enforced. The trade in native, wild-caught birds appears to be ubiquitous and thriving both in remote, rural areas, and in urban centers. Wild parrot nestlings are commonly collected and removed for sale, and mist nets used to trap live birds are available to the public. The collective impact of the live bird trade has a potentially substantial impact on the conservation of wild bird populations, but remains unquantified in Peru. There are moreover obvious, negative impacts on the welfare of individual birds captured for the trade. Here, I make a brief contribution to the public record of the pet trade in Peru using descriptive evidence based on incidental observations of the live bird trade I made in the departments of Amazonas, Loreto, and San Martín, northern Peru, between 2003 and 2005.

### METHODS

I made a number of incidental observations of wild-caught birds being offered for sale and kept as pets while conducting fieldwork on birds in Amazonas and Loreto for a project unrelated to the pet trade.

### RESULTS

Large numbers of individuals and species appear to be traded despite the laws controlling or prohibiting the capture of wild birds for trade in Peru. Wild-caught birds observed in captivity and/or for sale included a number of species of Columbidae, Psittacidae, and Ramphastidae, as well as passerines and raptors; a partial list of

birds identified to species, including all scientific names of birds mentioned in the text, is presented in Table 1. The most frequently observed traded species was White-winged Parakeet. Species being kept as pets by rural Peruvians included some not traditionally considered to be targeted for the pet trade, such as Yellow-tufted Woodpecker and Shiny Cowbird.

Trapping of birds for the pet trade occurs within the protected Allpahuayo-Mishana National Reserve where wildlife is ostensibly protected by law from any commercial exploitation. When I arrived to commence fieldwork in the reserve, a young girl approached me to try to sell me a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl she had caught and was keeping on a leash. A part-time park ranger with whom I worked in the reserve told me that one individual had spent multiple days in the reserve using canopy nets to capture 60 Paradise Tanagers, killing and discarding many non-target species caught in his nets. Although the park ranger observed this individual's activities, he apparently did nothing to deter him.

I observed trade in live birds less frequently in indigenous-controlled areas of northern Peru than in other areas. I observed wild-caught birds for sale on river boats and at bus stops as well as in markets at urban centers. Local prices ranged from 0.33 USD for a White-winged Parakeet in Bagazan (Loreto) to 100 USD for an Orange-winged Parakeet in Santa Maria de Nieva (Amazonas). Birds kept as pets and offered for sale were typically placed in cages too small to allow free movement, and were also transported in boxes, plastic tubs, and duffel bags. Birds in markets frequently showed signs of stress such as feather-plucking (Fig. 1).

Sources of birds most frequently appeared to be cash-poor colonist villagers based in Amazonia who trapped birds to sell to travelers and market-goers for small amounts of money. However, in two cases, indigenous Aguaruna-Jívaro men were also observed to have captured

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TABLE 1. NATIVE LIVE BIRDS OBSERVED OFFERED FOR SALE OR KEPT AS PETS IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF AMAZONAS, LORETO, AND SAN MARTÍN, NORTHERN PERU, 2003–2005.

Common name	Scientific name	Location(s) observed
Blue-and-yellow Macaw	<i>Ara ararauna</i>	Bagua Chica (Amazonas)
Scarlet Macaw	<i>Ara macao</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Dusky-headed Parakeet	<i>Aratinga weddelli</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Wavy-breasted Parakeet	<i>Pyrrhura peruviana</i>	Wichim (Amazonas)
White-winged Parakeet	<i>Brotogeris versicolurus</i>	Bagazan, Iquitos, Lagunas (Loreto); Tarapoto (San Martín); Bagua Chica (Amazonas)
Cobalt-winged Parakeet	<i>Brotogeris cyanoptera</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Tui Parakeet	<i>Brotogeris sanctithomae</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Blue-winged Parrotlet	<i>Forpus xanthopterygius</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Black-headed Parrot	<i>Pionites melanocephalus</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Short-tailed Parrot	<i>Graydidascalus brachyurus</i>	Iquitos (Loreto)
Festive Parrot	<i>Amazona festiva</i>	Nuevo Jerusalem (Loreto)
Orange-winged Parrot	<i>Amazona amazonica</i>	Santa Maria de Nieva (Amazonas)
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium brasilianum</i>	Nueva Esperanza (Loreto)
White-throated Toucan	<i>Ramphastos tucanus</i>	Arena Blanca (Loreto); Imazita (Amazonas)
Yellow-tufted Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes cruentatus</i>	Imazita (Amazonas)
Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>	Bagua Chica (Amazonas)



FIGURE 1. Live birds offered for sale in the illegal live animal market, Iquitos, Peru, 2005. This cage contains at least four species of parrots, including a partially-plucked Dusky-headed Parakeet (*Aratinga weddelli*) in the right foreground.

birds to keep as pets for themselves or to give as gifts. Birds were most frequently trapped by raiding nests before nestlings had developed flight capability, but one adult wild bird, a Wavy-breasted Parakeet, was reported to have been trapped at a clay lick in Sukutín, Amazonas (an Aguaruna community).

Birds were transported by traders on large and small river boats on the Ucayali and Huallaga rivers with no apparent intervention by customs

officials on boats or on docks. Customs officers at road checkpoints appeared to have knowledge of a Peruvian law prohibiting a single individual from owning more than three individual birds. On the road from Yurimaguas to Tarapoto (San Martín), I was traveling in a group including a bird trader who was transporting more than 10 parrot nestlings who was delayed at several customs checks; presumably these delays were resolved by bribes of unknown amounts, as the trader successfully passed through the checkpoints following brief private meetings with the customs officers.

Reportedly, wildlife authorities apparently rarely, if ever, inspect the large live animal market that exists in Iquitos (Loreto). Mist nets both for small and large birds for sale to the public at low prices in Lima facilitate capturing birds for the pet trade and are also used to protect agricultural crops from depredation by wildlife (potentially resulting in mortality of all animals captured). Lima, which is situated on Peru's arid coastline, is also host to groups of parrots native to Amazonia, which presumably came to be there via live bird trade.

## DISCUSSION

The illegal trade in wild birds and other wildlife constitutes an appalling waste of life, causes inestimable damage to animal welfare, and potentially represents a serious conservation concern in Peru and other countries where many populations of birds are targeted for the pet trade. Unfortunately, this trade has not

received adequate attention from scientists, conservationists, or animal welfare advocates, due in part due to its complexity and the largely underground aspects that make it difficult to quantify, understand, or interpret. Much of the trade in wild-caught birds in northern Peru occurs as a result of a failure of law enforcement due to lack of political will and funding to this purpose. Corruption, rural poverty, and lack of community awareness of the benefits of protecting wildlife no doubt contribute to the problem.

Possible approaches that could contribute to mitigating the harvest of birds for the pet trade include the following: (1) enforcing existing laws designed to protect birds and other wildlife from being harvested for the pet trade; (2) conducting national pride campaigns focused on birds targeted for the pet trade, as has been done by the non-governmental organization (NGO) RARE (<http://www.rareconservation.org/>); (3) providing bird trappers alternative sources of income, and providing confiscated birds with expert care and sanctuary so that they may survive and recover and potentially be safely released back to the wild, as has been done by the NGO Indonesian Parrot Project (<http://www.indonesian-parrot-project.org/>); (4) discouraging members of the public from keeping parrots as pets, as has been done by the NGO PETA (<http://www.petaindia.com/campaigns/entertainment-birds.asp>); and (5)

educating children on bird conservation and welfare issues and the links between them, for example with books and webpages such as those by journalist Mira Tweti: (<http://www.parrotstory.com/aboutparot.htm>).

Quantifying the results of comprehensive studies of illegal trade in Peru should also elucidate the scale, scope, implications, and consequences of this problem. The results of such studies should be used to inform the development of policies, laws, and public awareness campaigns to mitigate the serious conservation and animal welfare issues caused by an effectively unregulated trade in wild-caught birds.

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