

Illegal Wild Bird Trade



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About us:

Elsa Foundation is a non-profit charitable trust that focuses on the conservation of biodiversity, prevention of cruelty to animals, and animal rights issues of both domestic and wild animals. It opposes keeping wild animals in captivity.

We have travelled to several countries to study best practices and implement them in India.

The foundation supports various government bodies in informed policy-making and decision-making on critical issues impacting biodiversity and the rights of animals.

Our work areas are research, advocacy, awareness, publication, support in policy and decision making.

Website: www.elsafoundationcharity.org

Cover photo:

Exotic birds squeezed inside plastic bottles and transported to pet traders in various countries. Several thousands of birds die in this ordeal.

Illegal Wildlife Trade

Wildlife trade poses the second-biggest direct threat to the survival of species after habitat destruction.

The global illegal trade in wildlife is worth up to US\$ 19 billion annually and is the fourth largest illicit market after drugs, counterfeit, and human trafficking. India is among the top 20 countries for the illegal wildlife trade, according to data analysed by **TRAFFIC** (global charity for preventing wildlife trade).

Birds are the second most trafficked animals after reptiles. The illegal trade of birds is estimated to affect between 2 to 5 million birds per year worldwide.

It is not just exotic species like macaws and cockatoos that are illegally traded, species that are native to India and are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, of 1972 are also sold heavily in the black market.

According to the surveys conducted by WWF (World Wildlife Fund) in 2015, it reveals that the illegal trade of at least 250 bird species, including 70 exotic species, continues in northern India. Smuggling of munia and parakeets account for 80 per cent of this trade. The birds are mostly routed clandestinely through Nepal and Pakistan.

India has 12 native species of parakeets, eight of which are heavily in trade. They include Alexandrine, Rose-ringed, Plum-headed, Red-breasted, Malabar, Himalayan and Finsch's Parakeets and Vernal Hanging-parrot.

The majority of the buyers are oblivious to the horrific conditions these birds are transported in. Snatched from the wild, stolen from nests and left to die while smuggling, a staggering number of exotic birds that are sold in the Indian market are illegally brought in by traders.

With their beaks taped shut, exotic birds are stuffed and suffocated in plastic bottles, shoes, PVC pipes and in the piping of suitcases.

These birds are usually left without food or water for days. It is a given that approximately 60 percent of the birds will die in the process, but the ones that survive cover-up up costs within a few sales.

Most often, sellers are just looking to make a quick buck. Young boys also catch birds and sell them in the market for a small amount.

Despite the blanket ban since 1990-91 on trade in all Indian bird species, hundreds of parrots are collected and traded annually.







WIND BENEATH WINGS COLUMNS

Biodiversity: Unloved love birds

Maneka Gandhi

MAY 18, 2013 16:18 IST

UPDATED: MAY 18, 2013 17:13 IST

Budgerigars are social creatures. The cage isn't the place for them

I was in Nagpur last week. I was told of an illegal bird market and so I went on Sunday morning. I saw hundreds of small cages with budgerigars and pigeons in them. Of course the team of People for Animals, Nagpur, took the birds and went to the police station. The police helped them – even though they had been mute spectators of this market every week. But as usual the forest department people, who are illiterate and wicked most of the time, refused to take the birds as they were foreign – obviously they had never heard of the Gujarat judgment which says that no birds can be sold – specially not love birds or budgerigars.

But what broke my heart was this: I was looking at the bird cages and I saw a budgie crouching in the corner. She looked unwell so I put my hand in and took her out. She had no legs at all; obviously the result of inbreeding and over-breeding. As I held her in my palm, she flew off to a tree in front. This brave little creature could not sit on the branch because

she had no legs so she clung with her mouth to a leaf till her grasp weakened and she fell down on the road. We picked her up and she tried weakly to fly again but she went back into a special cage and I do not think she lasted the day.

Do not buy love birds and budgerigars. Both originally came from Australia and Africa but they are now grown by dealers in Kolkata and sent illegally through the railways, in packed cardboard boxes with little holes for breathing, all over India. Many of them die from the lack of oxygen.

Lovebirds are social and affectionate small parrots. They live, in nature, in small flocks and are monogamous. They pair for life, sitting only with their mates. They do not live very long when separated: like humans they pine. But the dealers and you the buyer, encourage this terrible hardship on them.

In nature, they live up to 15 years. In captivity, one to two at the most. They are bred by dealers for their colours. If blue is the fashion or the order placed, then all the babies that are not blue are killed by the breeder.

Many lovebirds are captured and brought into India by smuggling them through the Kolkata port. Captured wild lovebirds don't last very long and they die mourning the loss of a mate or a flock.

Many people keep lovebirds without understanding their needs. Single-sex birds are bought because they look pretty together. They can't mate, don't interact and die of loneliness. Determining a lovebird's sex is difficult. After it is a year old it may show behavioural signs – females rip paper and males vomit. But this is mainly hearsay and is not a reliable indicator. The only sure method is DNA testing. No seller knows anything at all and he will say anything to get the bird off his hands.

Birds kept individually or brought up hand-fed require frequent attention to stay happy, and if the owner has limited time to spend daily with a single lovebird, they wilt. Since they are social birds, they require companionship the entire day. No one who keeps a bird spends any time at all with it except to call its name while passing by and occasionally poke a finger into its cage.

Lovebirds require large cages of more than a metre each way per bird. Their beaks are made of keratin, which grows continuously. Chewing and destroying wood toys and perches help to keep beaks trim. They need cuttlefish bones to help provide for beak-trimming, calcium and other necessary minerals.

They require plenty of toys, such as branches, swings, tunnels, boxes and safe things to chew on and play with. Lack of toys, keeping the birdcage covered too many hours, and lack of companionship or social stimulation leads to boredom, stress and psychological or behavioural problems (nervousness, aggression, feather-plucking, screaming, depression, illness).

Lovebirds are intelligent, enjoy baths and like to sun themselves daily. No buyer knows this or cares. He simply wants a noisy pretty bird to keep his children amused – till it dies.

Lovebirds are vegetarian. A fresh mix of various seeds, grains and nuts: millets, canary seeds, peeled oats, safflower, barley, amaranth, uncooked rice, linseed, hempseed, buckwheat, wholegrain bread, cereals, fruits, lentils, weeds, pulses and vegetables, peas, beans, cauliflower leaves, cabbage leaves, chicory, collard greens, dandelion leaves, endives, mustard leaves, wild grass, sprouted beans, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds – are to be given everyday. How many owners do this? They eat flowers: carnations, chives, herbs' blossoms, hibiscus, honeysuckle, impatiens, lilac, nasturtiums, pansies, passion flowers, roses, sunflowers. Many lovebirds die of malnutrition.

Many of the lovebirds are children of different species. They are sterile hybrids – and the breeder deliberately does this so that no more are born to the buyer. People are so strange that when their bird dies, they immediately want to buy more – because otherwise the cage will go waste – and the breeder needs that to happen.

Everything I have said so far applies to the budgerigar, also commonly sold in illegal pet shops and bazaars. It is a small, long-tailed, seed-eating parrot which is captured from Australia and brought here where it is grown in the slums of Kolkata.

Budgerigars are naturally green and yellow with black markings on the nape, back, and wings, but have been bred in captivity to become blue, white, yellow, grey – more than 32 different shades. They are the most mutilated birds and, like dogs, those that are not exactly as the breeder wants them to be are killed immediately. You will see them with crests and mixes of strange colours – all of this is unnatural. So many have now eyes that are bigger than normal and squashed faces and tiny legs.

Budgerigars in their natural habitat in Australia are noticeably smaller than those that have been bred. Since these are bred to be bigger and fatter with puffier head feathers, their legs can hardly hold them up and the eyes and beak are sometimes completely obscured by the feathers. In the wild they live 20 years. In captivity, under the best conditions of diet and exercise, two to four years. They do not produce children without a nest box.

These birds will be eaten by kites and other large predators if you release them. So they are condemned to a life in captivity. It is your desire for a live toy that keeps breeders in business.

Please don't buy lovebirds or budgies, and inform me about any markets where they are sold.

To join the animal welfare movement, contact gandhim@nic.in

>www.peopleforanimalsindia.org

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Chennai: 500 exotic, local birds meant for pet trade rescued from Central station

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CHENNAI: Nearly 500 birds meant for pet trade were rescued from Central railway station by the city police on Tuesday. The birds were handed over to wildlife officials.

Wildlife headquarters ranger Mohan said the birds, both exotic and local species, were brought by a goods train as a parcel from Howrah on Monday.

On Tuesday morning, three men picked up the parcel from the station. When the vehicle was intercepted by police, the van driver and his two accomplices didn't have the necessary documents.

The parcel contained red-breasted parakeets found in West Bengal. The parakeets are protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act and anyone indulging in their trade are fined.

Officials said a pair of squirrel monkeys was also found in the parcel. An exotic species, squirrel monkeys are found in the Amazon forest. The parcel also had love birds, cockatiels and finches.

Cockatiels are one of the most common parrots sold by pet traders. Endemic to Australia, these birds are found all over the

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Illegal trade of animals and birds colours weekly pet market in Chennai

Jun 2, 2014, 08:19 PM IST



CHENNAI: Long before the first grey of dawn, the narrow stretch of Amman Koil Street is bustling with activity. Hawkers are settling down to sell their wares. Amid the steady trickle of visitors are muffled whines, anguished tweets and incessant squeaks. It is the weekly pet market at Maskan Chavady in Broadway where animals and birds, often smuggled, stolen and unethically bred are on display for customers.

Traders pull birds and animals from gunny bags, cartons and baskets.

Rabbits and pigeons are extricated from bags riddled with holes to provide oxygen. Small cages for love birds and large ones for pups are carelessly stacked. The rabbits in cardboard boxes peer, their red eyes glowing like embers in the early morning sun.

Some of the creatures can be sold legally, a large number not, but the conditions in which all of them are kept are heart-wrenching. “Rs 100 for a pair. The pigeon won't fly. It is a domestic one,” says a hawker pulling a pair from his pocket and tying their legs.

At the end of the lane are roosters tied to pegs. “Very strong. Will win a fight. After discount, Rs 6, 000,” says another vendor.

“All pet shops require a licence from the corporation. Individuals hawking pets on the road is illegal,” says animal activist Muralidharan.

A vendor brings a bicycle weighed down with baskets. He empties the contents into a large box. More than 300 chicks dyed in synthetic colours swarm inside. “Each one is `5. It's a toy for children,” he says, squashing a handful into a plastic bag.

An hour later the lane is buzzing with customers. More sellers have arrived. Now the pets range from pedigreed pups to jungle fowls. Bargains are struck and birds and animals shoved in cloth bags. A rose-ringed parakeet is sold for Rs 3,000. “I have many exotic birds. I show them to customers on my WhatsApp group,” says a vendor showing a picture of macaw. “This is Rs 22,000 a pair,” he says.



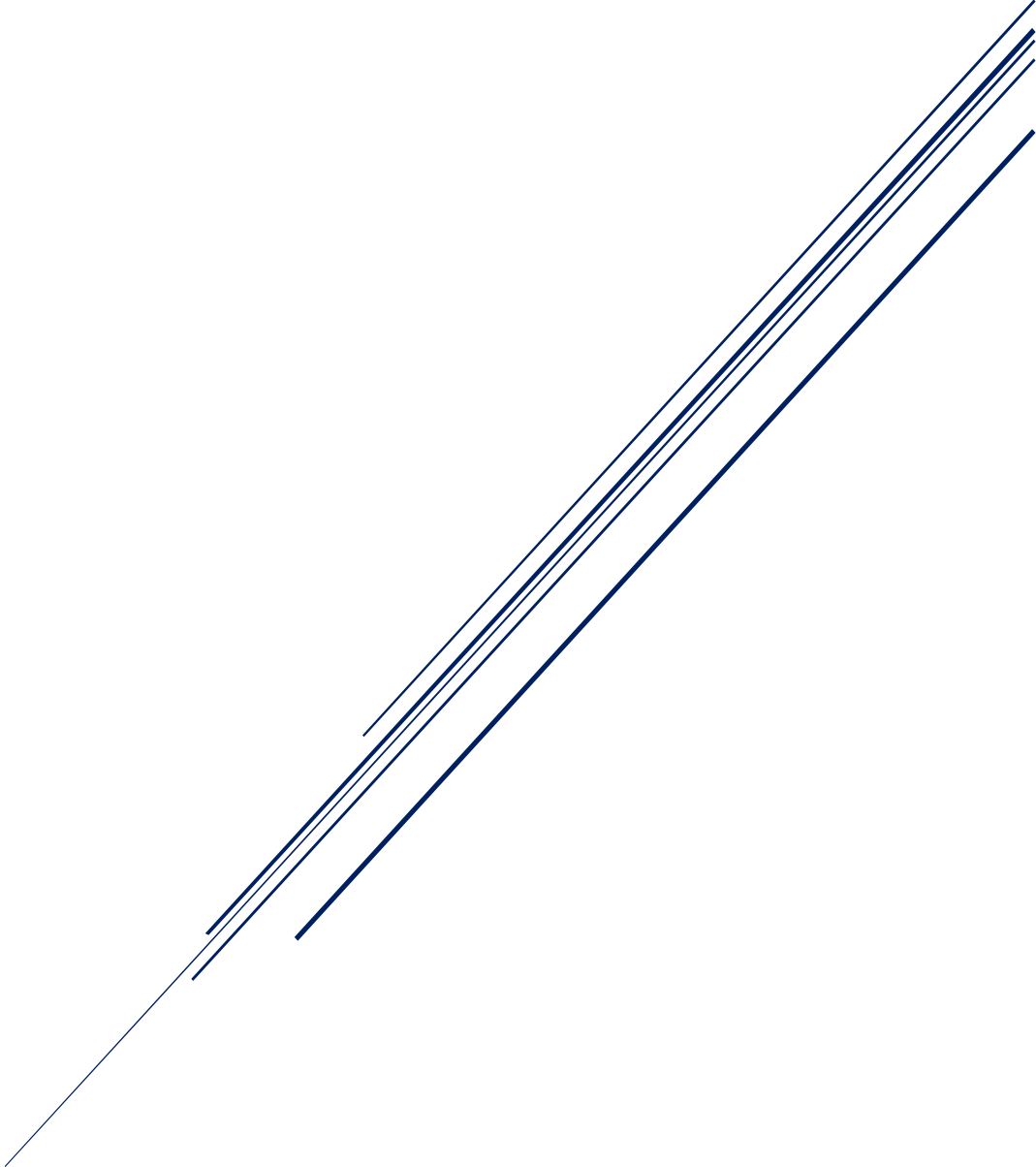
Most markets sell banned foreign birds such as Australian lovebirds, African parrots and finches. The Wildlife Protection Act

prohibits capture and trade of all 1,200 species of indigenous birds. “Around 300 species are openly sold. Mynas and parrots are commonly found in markets,” says Poorva Joshipura of PETA India.

“Some of the creatures like roosters can be sold legally but the lack of a law to define the pet trade means they are subjected to much cruelty,” says Dawn Williams of Blue Cross.

People who dye animals and keep them in cramped places can be punished under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. Keeping or confining “any animal in any cage or other receptacle which does not measure sufficiently in height, length and breadth to permit the animal a reasonable opportunity for movement is an offence as per the act,” says Joshipura.

ILLEGAL WILD BIRD TRADE



Elsa Foundation