

Alarm calls:

Illegal, Unsustainable
Songbird Trade for
Singing Competitions
in the Americas



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Combating Wildlife Trafficking Program



- Financial assistance program
- Mandate to reduce illegal, unsustainable international wildlife trade and enable *legal, sustainable* trade
- Run by CWT Branch of USFWS International Affairs (separate from U.S. CITES Authorities)



Dr. Jen Miller (R) & Dr. Emily Horton (L) searching for songbirds in Guyana

USFWS Attention on Songbird Trade for Singing Competitions

- Involves American people and laws
 - International trade fueled by U.S. demand
 - Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Lacey Act
- Contributing to species declines
 - U.S. native migratory birds
 - Non-native birds
- Demands government resources
 - High frequency of live & injured birds seized requires high response and care by USFWS Office of Law Enforcement and partners country-wide

Songbird trade for singing competitions is a USFWS priority



Songbird Singing Competitions



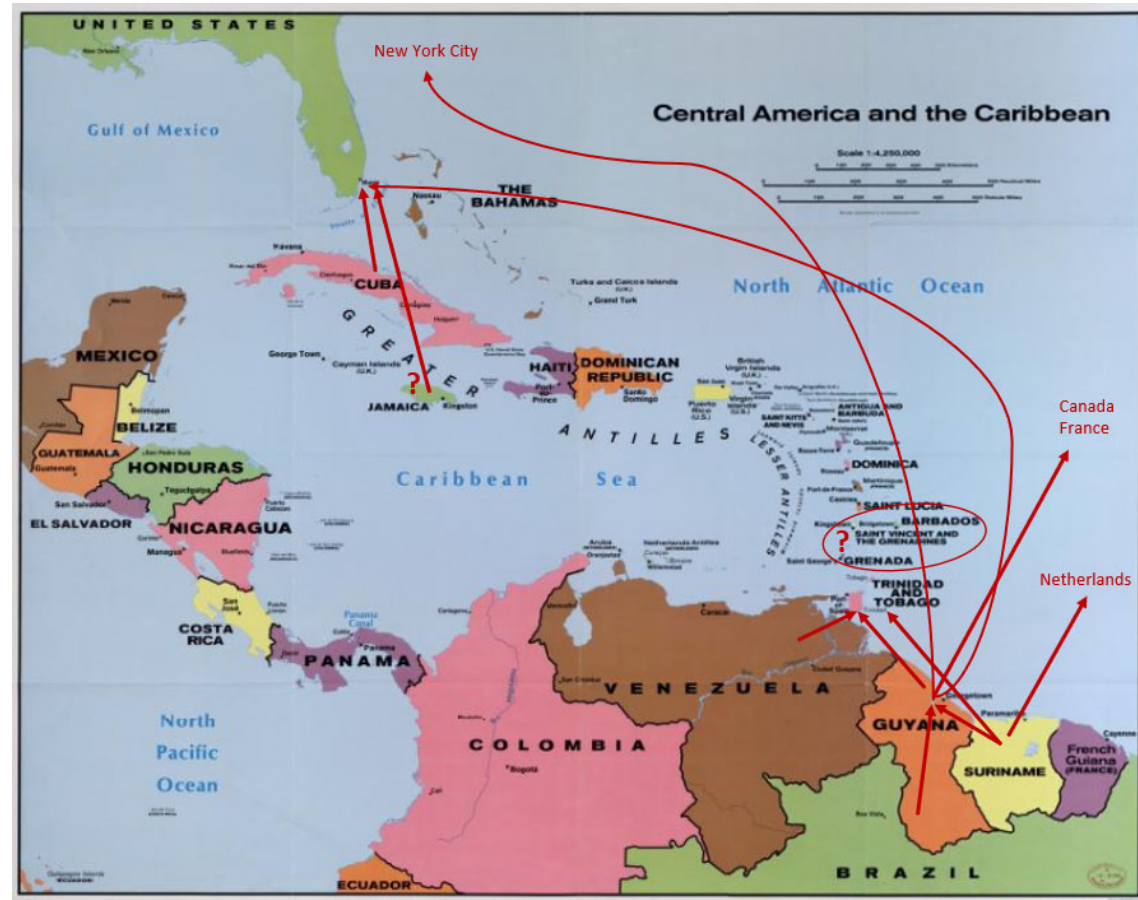
Jen Miller, USFWS



Weekend singing competition organized by a bird club in Georgetown, Guyana. Such “races” are legal year-round, and trapping and selling songbirds is legal during the open season. Trade shifts from legal to illegal when birds are traded internationally without required permits.

Songbird Singing Competition Trade Chain

- **Value:** Strong socio-cultural and economic value and high financial stakes (\$10K/bird)
- **Flow:** Domestic, regional and inter-continental trade
- **Demand:** Participants in singing competition (mostly adult men) in Guiana Shield, Caribbean and global diaspora
- **Source:** Trappers, often located in rural communities
- **Transit:** From rural areas to major cities via road, sea and air
- **Biodiversity:** Our preliminary evidence suggests driving declines



USFWS Approach

- Catalyze work on solutions, especially human dimensions
- Strengthen the network of partners
- Attract more attention and investment



The USFWS Combating Wildlife Trafficking Program's

Species Conservation Catalyst Fund



Navinder Singh

Saiga antelope

Trafficking of horns from Central Asia and Mongolia for use in traditional medicine across Asia



Tambako The Jaguar

Cheetah

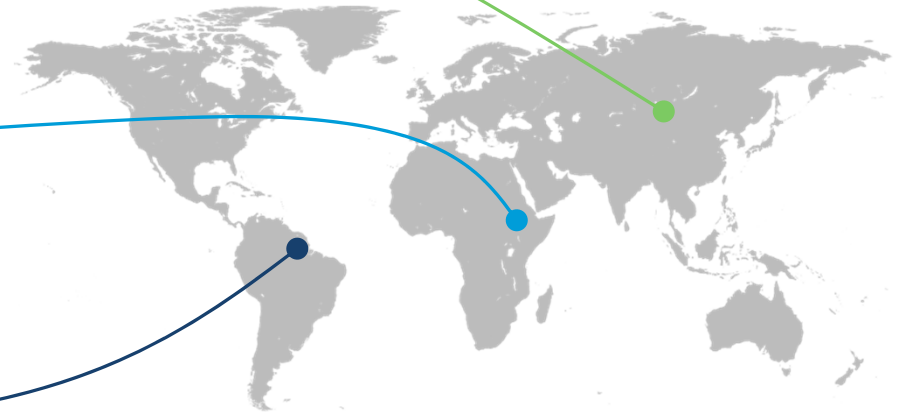
Trafficking of wild cubs and adults from the Horn of Africa for the pet trade in the Middle East



Rodrigo Conte, Flickr

Songbirds

Trafficking of Passeri species from Caribbean and Guiana Shield for singing competitions in North America and Europe



www.fws.gov/service/species-conservation-catalyst-fund



15 Songbird Species in Current or Potential Decline due to Singing Competition Trade

IUCN Red
List:

Endangered

Near
Threatened

Least
Concerned

CITES
Songbird
Report:
Priority
Species:

Watchlist of
International
Trade (N=162)

Long-listed
Species in Trade
(N=548)

Not included

Caribbean Native Species



Cuban bullfinch
(*Melopyrrha nigra*)



Painted bunting
(*Passerina ciris*)



Rose-breasted grosbeak
(*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)

Guiana Shield Native Species →



Great-billed seed finch
(*Sporophila maximiliani*)



Wing-barred seedeater
(*Sporophila americana*)



Grey seedeater
(*Sporophila intermedia*)



Large-billed seed finch
(*Sporophila crassirostris*)



Lined seedeater
(*Sporophila lineola*)



Plumbeous seedeater
(*Sporophila plumbea*)



Chestnut-bellied seed finch
(*Sporophila angolensis*)



Chestnut-bellied seedeater
(*Sporophila castaneiventris*)



Yellow-bellied seedeater
(*Sporophila nigricollis*)



Ruddy-breasted seedeater
(*Sporophila minuta*)



Slate-colored seedeater
(*Sporophila schistacea*)



Red siskin
(*Spinus cucullatus*)

*Potential declines if substitute species

Chestnut-bellied seed-finch



Rodrigo Conte, Flickr

SCCF on Songbird Trade

Approach:

- Focus on native songbirds from Guiana Shield & Caribbean threatened by singing competition trade
- Reducing illegal/unsustainable & enabling legal/sustainable trade
- Addresses social and ecological drivers
- Inclusive and culturally appropriate
- Enhances coordination between actors

Supported actions include:

- Research on trade chains and impact on species & people
- Species recovery
- Sustainable livelihoods and sourcing of birds
- Strengthened laws and authority capacity
- Sustainable and traceable consumer demand

Investment:

- \$5M total funding over 10 years
- In 2024, \$1.5 million to be invested in 7-10 projects
- Next funding available likely in 2025

Successes to Date

- \$1.5M in project awards by June 2024 from SCCF Songbird
- Increased coordination across NGOs, universities and government agencies in at least 6 source and demand countries
- Projects committed to fill critical gaps in knowledge and data



Take-home Messages

- Illegal, unsustainable singing competition trade appears to be threatening native songbirds in the Americas
- United States invested in this issue
- Species Conservation Catalyst Fund on Songbird Trade is a new resource



Allan Hopkins, Creative Commons

Cuban bullfinch

Great-billed seed-finch



Join us!

We are seeking...

Partners

- Groups to implement projects
- Donors for investment coordination
- CITES Parties to discuss species proposals

Information

- Social science research & approaches
- Export/import numbers
- Transit and destination countries

CHO

Thank you!

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