

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Sixty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 27 November -1 December 2017

Interpretation and implementation matters

General compliance and enforcement

Compliance matters

ILLEGAL TRADE IN SPECIES:
GREY PARROT (*PSITTACUS ERITHACUS*)

This document has been submitted by the Republic of the Congo.*

Introduction to the document

1. The aim of this document is to inform the members of the Standing Committee of the situation regarding the poaching and illegal trade of African grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) in the Republic of the Congo, which involves neighbouring countries, including Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Another goal is to make the corresponding recommendations to combat the difficulties linked to international trade and the extent of such trade.

Background and rationale

2. *Psittacus erithacus* has been heavily traded since 1975 because of its popularity as a pet and the fact that it is easy to capture large numbers of individuals. In fact, more than 1.3 million wild-caught individuals have been declared by exporters from 18 range States, which makes it the most heavily traded bird species among those included in the CITES Appendices¹. Because of this, the species was included in CITES Appendix II in 1981². Given that trade is one of the main causes of the decline of the populations of *P. erithacus*, the species has been the subject of the Review of Significant Trade four times in the framework of CITES, specifically in 1988, 1992, 2006 and 2014³.
3. Cameroon developed a National Management Plan for the species and had an export quota of 3,000 specimens per year between 2012 and 2016⁴.
4. Since 2009, the DRC has had an annual export quota of 5,000 live specimens of *Psittacus erithacus*. However, the quota was exceeded at the discretion of the authorities with no real scientific basis, management plan for the species or controls regarding the legal sourcing of the specimens or their transport conditions. As a result, several measures were taken by the CITES Standing Committee.
5. At its 66th meeting (January 2016), the Standing Committee recommended that all the Parties immediately suspend trade in specimens of the species *Psittacus erithacus* from the DRC, except for an export of 1,600 specimens already collected and ready for export, but subject to confirmation of authenticity of export permits by the Secretariat, until the DRC: i) develops a scientifically-based field survey to establish the population

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status of the species in the country; ii) develops a National Management Plan for the species and commences implementation of the Plan; and iii) provides a copy of the survey and Management Plan to the Secretariat⁵.

6. At its 67th meeting, the Standing Committee requested the DRC to investigate, prosecute and judge the perpetrators involved in the illegal trade of African grey parrots and other CITES-listed species and submit detailed information on the concrete results of its enforcement activities to the Secretariat. The Standing Committee also requested the DRC to complete the field study on *Psittacus erithacus* by 30 April 2017 and submit it to the 29th meeting of the Animals Committee together with a National Management Plan, including a proposed quota, subject to any decision of the Conference of the Parties in relation to this species⁶.
7. In October 2016, at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17), the species *Psittacus erithacus* was transferred to Appendix I. In a secret ballot, the proposal was supported by a majority of votes (95 Member States in favour, 35 against and 5 abstentions). On this occasion, several decisions were adopted with the goal of conserving African grey parrots⁷. In particular, Decision 17.256 was approved as follows:

Directed to range States of Psittacus erithacus

The range States should, with the support of the CITES Secretariat, relevant experts, relevant CITES Parties, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, develop National Action Plans, with timeframes, deliverables, and milestones, for the conservation of the species. The following key issues should be addressed:

- a) *actions to undertake a scientifically based field survey to establish the population status of the species in the range States;*
 - b) *the establishment and maintenance of information systems or databases relating to the populations;*
 - c) *the development and implementation of relevant long-term monitoring systems to enable range States to monitor trends in the populations;*
 - d) *the development and implementation of national management plans, where required. These plans should provide for regional cooperation, where appropriate;*
 - e) *actions to implement law enforcement programmes to combat poaching and illegal trade (both national and international) and report on the results of the programmes in terms of enforcement efforts, seizures and prosecutions;*
 - f) *the investigation of the possibility of establishing in situ captive-breeding facilities for the species, in collaboration with States with breeding facilities.*
8. This decision was followed by the uplisting of the species in the IUCN Red List. Indeed, considering that “the extent of the annual harvest for international trade, in combination with the rate of ongoing habitat loss, means it is now suspected to be undergoing rapid declines over three generations (47 years)”, the species is now classified as Endangered⁸.
 9. Four Member States of CITES have entered reservations about the transfer of the species *Psittacus erithacus* to Appendix I (in accordance with Article XV, paragraph 3, of the Convention). Reservations were entered by Saudi Arabia on 21 November 2016, the DRC on 9 December 2016, and the United Arab Emirates on 29 December 2016⁹. All these reservations became effective on 2 January 2017, the date on which the amendments to the CITES Appendices adopted at CoP17 entered into force (except for the reservation entered by Kuwait on 12 January 2017, which was declared invalid following an objection from one of the Parties to CITES)¹⁰.
 10. Through Notification No. 2017/013 of 2 February 2017, the CITES Secretariat reminded the Parties that the recommendation made by the Standing Committee on January 2016 regarding the suspension of trade in African grey parrots from the DRC was still valid. Therefore, this recommendation to suspend trade is still in force despite both the inclusion of the species in CITES Appendix I and the subsequent reservation entered by the DRC¹¹.

11. At the 29th meeting of the Animals Committee (Geneva, 18-22 July 2017), the Democratic Republic of the Congo did not submit any documents regarding the scientifically-based field survey or the National Management Plan for *Psittacus erithacus*. The Animals Committee agreed to refer the problem of trade in *Psittacus erithacus* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Standing Committee for consideration and decided that no experimental export quotas should be included in any scientific studies on the species in the Democratic Republic of the Congo¹².

Findings on poaching and illegal trade in African grey parrots in the Republic of the Congo: Observation and assessment mission by the Ministry of Forest Economy, Sustainable Development and Environment (MEFDDE)

13. For several months, particularly since the species *Psittacus erithacus* was included in CITES Appendix I, the authorities of the Republic of the Congo have observed a significant increase in the illegal capture of African grey parrots in the north of the country. Most illegal activities take place within and near Odzala-Kokoua and Nouabale-Ndoki national parks, two sites where large groups of African grey parrots can still be observed in natural clearings.
14. As an example, only in 2016 and 2017, a total of seven operations led to the seizure of African 828 African grey parrots by the authorities in the north of the Republic of the Congo. In January 2017, a major seizure led to the arrest of poachers from Cameroon who carried a shipment of 350 specimens north of Ouessou.
15. Following a heated debate in the plenary at CoP17, the Republic of the Congo, which had advocated the inclusion of the species in Appendix I, reported the numerous seizures made and the problem of citizens from the DRC who cross the border to illegally obtain African grey parrots. The DRC denied all accusations at that time and asked the Republic of the Congo to provide evidence of its allegations¹³.
16. In view of this, the Ministry of Forest Economy, Sustainable Development and Environment (MEFDDE) of the Republic of the Congo undertook an observation and assessment mission in March 2017 to measure the extent of the poaching and illegal trade of African grey parrots in the country in order to document major seizures, identify the profiles of poachers and also understand the networks and cross-border routes used by them.
17. The mission focused on Sangha Department, specifically the towns of Ouessou and Kabo and the downstream stretch of the Sangha river until Pikounda District and was aimed at collecting information from public authorities and raise awareness among the neighbouring population about the poaching of African grey parrots.

Poaching and illegal trade

18. The reports of infringements drawn up since 2016 document considerable seizures made in the Republic of the Congo. The price increase of African grey parrots on the illegal market is aligned with this new trend. Until 2016, the average price of a specimen in a first transaction in the north of the Congo was 10,000 CFA (15 USD), but today the price can reach up to 50,000 CFA (85 USD), and eventually 180,000 CFA (300 USD) when the specimen is finally traded in Brazzaville.
19. The profile of poachers has also considerably evolved in recent months and currently corresponds to individuals mostly from the DRC and Cameroon who are heavily armed and buy off the local population to capture these birds for just a few CFA francs.
20. The DRC has long shown an interest to export African grey parrots and is one of the key countries of Central Africa regarding international trade. It is one of the main exporters of wild-caught African grey parrots, while Turkey and Singapore seem to be the main countries of destination¹⁴.
21. It is very likely that the decline in the populations of African grey parrots in the DRC is pushing illegal traders to cross the border to obtain the parrots in the Republic of the Congo, where the species is still relatively abundant.
22. The mission conducted in March 2017 revealed several problems that obstruct the control measures implemented by the authorities of the Republic of the Congo.
23. Between 2012 and 2016, Cameroon had an export quota of 3,000 African grey parrots per year. On 12 July 2016, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon granted a quota of 2,000 specimens to an individual, who authorised another individual on 2 December 2016 to collect African grey parrots on his/her behalf in the Boumba and Ngoko departments in Cameroon.

24. The Republic of the Congo wishes to underline that, in 2016, numerous hunters from Cameroon presented that same and only permit to justify the capture of parrots in the controls conducted by the authorities of the Republic of the Congo. Most hunters from Cameroon are in fact apprehended on the Sangha river, a natural border area separating Cameroon from the Republic of the Congo. They take advantage of the confusion at the border to pretend that they are capturing parrots in Cameroon, but numerous reports of infringements show that the places of capture used by hunters from Cameroon are within the Republic of the Congo, precisely in the neighbouring forests of Kabo and Kounda (in the boundary between Bouma and Ndoko departments).
25. Although Cameroon is the only range country that has drawn up a National Management Plan for the species, the scientific basis of the current quotas has been strongly criticized in the past and no specific measures have been established yet to implement the management plan¹⁵.

Techniques used for capture

26. To obtain African grey parrots, poachers do not hesitate to climb on trees to attach to the treetops wooden sticks impregnated with glue (industrial glue or natural glue obtained among others from the sap of the rubber tree *Funtumia elastica*).
27. Decoys and live parrots are subsequently placed and tethered to branches in order to lure wild parrots. Attracted in groups, parrots covered in glue are unable to fly and crash on the ground, where they are easily collected by poachers.
28. A long journey follows, in which the parrots travel to the borders in disparate cages and in very precarious conditions, and many birds die during transport. The mortality rate among African grey parrots after their capture and before export has been estimated to range from 30% to 60% or even from 70% to 90% in certain cases¹⁶. According to mortality estimates obtained from parrot hunters in the DRC, a volume of 800 birds traded from Kisangani every month may well represent a harvest of 1,000 to 1,500 birds per month, that is, a harvest of 12,000 to 18,000 birds per year¹⁷.
29. These methods of capture do not make any distinction between young parrots and older parrots or between males and females with offspring, which strongly compromises the long-term reproduction of the species.



Wooden sticks impregnated with glue and decoys used by poachers to capture African grey parrots



Gathering of the parrots after they have fallen from the trees to transport them beyond the borders of the Republic of the Congo



Seizure of a shipment of 48 African grey parrots bound for the DRC, made in December 2016 by the public authorities of the Republic of the Congo on the Sangha river

Measures taken to combat the poaching and trafficking of African grey parrots in the Republic of the Congo

30. The assessment mission conducted in April 2017 was part of a broader three-pronged strategy for the coming year aimed at globally combating the cross-border trafficking of African grey parrots and reducing the threat for the wild populations of the Republic of the Congo. The strategy has the following objectives:
- Adopt urgent technical and sanitary measures to address the growing number of seized birds with the goal of rehabilitating them and releasing them whenever possible;
 - Take all the possible legislative and regulatory measures to strengthen the protection status of African grey parrots in the Republic of the Congo;
 - Support a sustainable management policy by establishing a management plan for the species and conduct investigations on the cross-border networks that operate between the Republic of the Congo, Cameroon and the DRC.

Technical and sanitary measures

31. Over 870 parrots were seized between 2016 and 2017 by the local authorities in the north of the Republic of the Congo. The specimens seized rapidly exceeded the holding capacity of the quarantine unit managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society and made available to the public authorities.
32. The post-capture and pre-export mortality rate is very high and the methods of capture with glue expose the birds to a long recovery process. Of the specimens seized between 2016 and 2017 in the Republic of the Congo, one third died while the others are still being rehabilitated.
33. To address the growing number of seizures, the quarantine facility was enlarged thanks to the emergency funding provided by the Rapid Response Facility in March 2017 and can presently hold up to 400 individuals. A second facility with the same capacity is being built in order to receive the parrots seized within and near Nouabale Ndoki National Park with the goal of reducing the mortality of birds after their capture and seizure.

Legislative measures

34. The species *Psittacus erithacus* is partially protected in the Republic of the Congo under Order no. 6075 of 9 April 2011 that lists the animal species that are fully or partially protected. As a result, this species can only be captured, held, killed or traded with an animal harvest permit issued by the Water and Forestry Department.
35. A Ministerial Technical Commission was created on 22 May 2017 to finalize the implementing legislation for Act 37/2008 of 28 November 2008 on protected areas and wildlife as well as the order listing the protected species (which will take into account the new considerations of CITES and the IUCN and will classify *Psittacus erithacus* as a fully protected species).
36. Pending the revision and adoption of these legal texts, the Ministry of Forest Economy, Sustainable Development and Environment (MEFFDE) issued a circular letter on 11 May 2017 reminding public authorities that it is prohibited to capture, hold and circulate African grey parrots for international trade (Circular letter no. 00268/MEFFDE/DGEF/DFAP-SCGF).
37. The circular letter by the MEFFDE was broadly disseminated among public and judicial authorities and led to the first convictions by the courts from June 2017.

Requests addressed to the Standing Committee

RECOGNIZING that the recommendation to suspend exports of *Psittacus erithacus* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo adopted by the Standing Committee at its 66th meeting (CITES Notification No. 2016-021) is still in force and that the principle of this suspension is still valid;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that *Psittacus erithacus* was transferred to Appendix I at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, we request the Standing Committee to agree to do the following:

- a) REMIND all the Parties that a recommendation to suspend exports of *Psittacus erithacus* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo is still in force and that they should not accept any import permits for this species from the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

- b) REMIND the two non-range Parties for the species *Psittacus erithacus* that entered reservations about the inclusion of *Psittacus erithacus* in Appendix I that the abovementioned recommendation to suspend trade is still valid and that they should not accept any imports of this species from the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- c) URGE all the Parties to be extremely vigilant when accepting re-exports of *Psittacus erithacus* originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to consult the Secretariat in order to verify all permits;
- d) URGE all the Parties to be extremely vigilant when accepting re-exports of *Psittacus erithacus* originating from any Party that has entered a reservation on the inclusion of the species in Appendix I;
- e) REMIND all the range States that there should not be any export quotas for trade in *Psittacus erithacus*;
- f) REMIND all the Parties that wish to apply paragraph 4 of Article VII of the Convention (according to which specimens of an animal species included in Appendix I bred in captivity for commercial purposes shall be deemed to be specimens of species included in Appendix II) that trade in Appendix-I animals bred in captivity, including *Psittacus erithacus*, must fully comply with the provisions of Resolution 12.10 (Rev. CoP 15).

The Republic of the Congo particularly wishes to thank the technical partners involved in conservation activities, namely the Wildlife Conservation Society, for their commitment and their efforts on the ground and is also very grateful for the emergency funding provided by the Rapid Response Facility, which made it possible to enlarge the cages in order to house the growing number of seized parrots.

References

1. CoP17 Prop. 19, paragraph 2 / Proposal to transfer *Psittacus erithacus* from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I, in accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16), Annex 1.
2. Species Plus website: https://www.speciesplus.net/#/taxon_concepts/9644/legal
3. Review of Significant Trade – Animals Committee: <http://sigtrade.unep-wcmc.org/AddReview/ListAll?page=1>
4. Species Plus website: https://www.speciesplus.net/#/taxon_concepts/9644/legal
5. Notification No. 2016/021 of 16 March 2016: Recommendation to suspend trade in African grey parrots from the DRC [CITES Notification No. 2016-021].
6. Sixty-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee, Johannesburg (South Africa), 23 September 2016, summary record [Doc SC67-SR]
7. Decisions of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in force after the 16th meeting [Decisions 17.253 to 17.258]
8. IUCN Red List on the status of *Psittacus erithacus* [IUCN Red List]
9. Notification on Reservations on Appendices I and II of 26 January 2017 [Notification No. 2017-010]
10. Notification on Reservations on Appendices I and II of 6 April 2017 [Notification No. 2017-029]
11. List of valid notifications [Notification -017-013-A 0]
12. Twenty-ninth meeting of the Animals Committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 18-22 July 2017. Executive summary, paragraph 30 [Animals Committee AC29 Sum. 3 (Rev. 1)]
13. Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Johannesburg, South Africa, 24 September-5 October 2016. Summary record of the tenth session of Committee I [CoP17 Com. I Rec. 10 (Rev. 1)]

14. *Standing Committee document SC66 Doc. 28 – p. 7 (48.)*
15. *Fotso, 1998a), Hart, 2013c), McGowan, 2001, (Clemmons, 2003), (Fotso, 1998b), (F. Dowsett-Lemaire in litt. to BirdLife International, 2012)*
16. *McGowan, 2001, CITES Review of Significant Trade 2006, CITES, 2013, Birdlife international, 2015*
17. *CITES, 2013*