

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



Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Colombo (Sri Lanka), 23 May – 3 June 2019

Species specific matters

SONGBIRD TRADE AND CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT (PASSERIFORMES)

1. This document has been submitted by Sri Lanka and the United States of America.*

Overview

2. Passeriformes (otherwise known as passerines) are by far the largest order of birds with approximately 6,000 species represented. Known commonly as “perching birds,” its members differ from other orders in various anatomical details, and are themselves divided into suborders. In simple terms, however, and with few exceptions, passerines can be described as small birds that sing¹. Passerine species are distributed throughout terrestrial habitats around the world, with diversity especially dense in the tropics of Asia, Latin America and Africa. Songbirds are chiefly threatened by habitat and resource loss, and illegal and unsustainable legal trade. As a result, songbird populations are declining globally, many at dramatically rapid rates (Butchart *et al.* 2004).
3. Many songbirds are taken from the wild and sought after for food, for their song, colorful plumage, and for the trade in live birds for pets, with the increasing rarity of many species creating an upward drive in demand and prices (FAO 2011). The trend to use singing birds in competitions is resulting in targeted poaching for specific species coveted for their song. In the 1990s, it was estimated that the informal markets for singing birds among China and other East Asian countries involved approximately 1 to 3 million specimens a year (Inskipp 1990). Outside of competitions, keeping songbirds in cages as pets is embedded in cultural norms, particularly in Asia and Latin America, with increased social status associated with higher valued and rarer bird species (Eaton *et al.* 2017; Harris *et al.* 2016 Lee *et al.* 2016). This is a trend that does not appear to be slowing, particularly as many countries experience economic growth and expansion of the middle class such as in East and Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, more than 1,000 species are sold (Harris *et al.* 2016). In Vietnam, the increase in popularity of keeping songbirds as pets has been attributed to both their increased availability at markets (Eaton *et al.* 2017; Brooks-Moizer *et al.* 2008) and a rise in the number of younger people trapping, trading and keeping birds (Le and Craik 2016). Research in Java and Bali’s six principal cities found that 35.7% of households kept a bird and that 57.6% had done so in the last 10 years. The data suggests that a projected 584,000 households within these cities keep almost two million songbirds, of which over half are wild-caught (BirdLife International 2010; Jepson and Ladle 2009). Songbirds are also threatened by hunting for consumption. The Yellow-breasted bunting (*Emberiza aureola*), once Eurasia’s most abundant bird species, has declined by 90% since 1980 from land contraction and hunting, and is now Critically Endangered according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Although officially banned in China, hunting continues with an estimated one million buntings consumed in Guangdong province alone (BirdLife International 2018a). Across the Mediterranean, Northern and Central Europe and the Caucasus, an estimated 12 - 38 million birds may be killed or taken illegally every year, many of them during migration; an estimated 20 million of these are songbirds. Italy,

* The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

¹ Most songbirds are passerines. However, not all passerines are songsters (e.g. broadbills, flycatchers), and some birds kept for their songs are not passerines (e.g. doves, barbets).

Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus were recorded with the highest number of birds killed per year (BirdLife International 2018a).

4. Songbirds have been recorded in trade in high numbers for many decades. The total number of live wild-caught birds traded internationally is unknown, but may have peaked in the 1970's when it was estimated that 7.5 million birds were traded annually (Inskipp 1990). After this point, trade declined as countries that had been important suppliers of wild-caught birds on a global scale banned exports (e.g. India, Columbia, Bolivia), and other countries developed strong trade controls following implementation of CITES (Leader-Williams and Tibanyenda 1996). During the 1990's, international trade for live birds was estimated between 2 and 5 million specimens a year, mainly ornamental and singing birds (Inskipp 1990). Europe and the United States were historically the largest importers of wild birds under international trade. However, following trade restrictions on wild bird imports into the United States (the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992), Europe became the largest market. Between 2000 and 2003, the European Union (EU) imported 2.8 million CITES-listed and non-listed wild bird species. According to a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, this represented 93% of imports registered worldwide for the period (FAO 2011). In 2005, the EU banned the trade of wild birds and the number of CITES-listed birds traded annually declined significantly. Prior to the EU ban, West African countries (Guinea, Mali, and Senegal) were responsible for more than 70% of bird exports to Europe, almost 80% of which were passerines (Reino *et al.* 2017). With the ban in place, remaining trade flows have been redirected toward developing countries, particularly in the tropics, where biodiversity is high but resources to manage species are limited (Reino *et al.* 2017). In China, the number of live birds exported between 1981 and 2010 exceeded one million individual birds, while more than 80,000 birds were imported into China during the same period (Li and Jiang 2014). Nearly 90 bird species were exported from China during this period, with parrots and passerines as the most common birds in trade; other birds only accounted for less than 0.3% of the total volume of the bird trade (Li and Jiang 2014). The most common passerine species exported were Red-billed leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*), Java sparrow (*Lonchura oryzivora*), Common hill myna (*Gracula religiosa*), Silver-eared mesia (*Leiothrix argenteauris*) and Black-and-white munia (*Lonchura bicolor*) (Li and Jiang 2014). However, since 2003, exports of live birds from China have decreased due to disease risks posed by avian influenza (Li and Jiang 2014).
5. Southeast Asia in particular is known for high levels of illegal and unsustainable trade affecting hundreds of species and involving millions of individual birds, annually. The region has over 2,600 recorded species of birds, over 850 of which are endemic to specific countries. Endemism and declining population numbers are resulting in increased value for the pet trade; thus, it has been recognized as a primary threat for many species in Southeast Asia, particularly the Greater Sunda region² (BirdLife International 2018b; Nash 1994). Southeast Asia also has the highest relative rate of deforestation of any major tropical region, further exacerbating threats posed to songbirds (Sodhi *et al.* 2004).
6. In 2016, a suite of songbird species were proposed for uplisting to higher threat categories in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as a result of recent information regarding the potential impacts of this trade on their extinction risk (Martin 2018; IUCN 2016). Of the approximately 850 species of birds native to Southeast Asia, 52 are currently assessed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and 251 are considered to be globally threatened (BirdLife International 2018b). Indonesia has the second highest number of globally threatened bird species (155 as of 2017), second only to Brazil, and is recognized as the largest hotspot for unsustainable bird trade (Rentschlar *et al.* 2018; IUCN 2017; Lee *et al.* 2016; Capotosto and Shepherd 2015). Approximately 19 Indonesian bird species affected by trade were uplisted to Critically Endangered in 2016 (Lowen 2016). At the current rates of over-harvesting and habitat conversion, it has been estimated that one-third of Southeast Asia's bird species will be extinct by 2100, with at least 50% of these representing global extinctions (Sodhi *et al.* 2004; Sodhi *et al.* 2010).
7. Two exemplary Asian species impacted by trade include the Straw-headed bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylandicus*) and Black-winged myna (*Acridotheres melanopterus*, *A. tricolor*, *A. tertius*). The Straw-headed bulbul, captured by traders for its unique song, has been extirpated from much of its range including Myanmar, Thailand and Java, with no records from Sumatra since 2009, and is now only found in Malaysia, Singapore and remote areas of Kalimantan (Chng and Eaton 2016; Harris *et al.* 2016; Shepherd *et al.* 2013). Nash (1994) raised concerns for the species in the early 1990's, yet the species was given little conservation focus (Chng *et al.* 2015). Populations are currently estimated at 1,000 - 2,500 individuals (BirdLife International 2018d). Black-winged mynas are endemic to Indonesia and have also become critically endangered due to high levels of trapping and are now represented by fewer than 500 individuals in the wild (Nijman *et al.* 2018). Both international and domestic trade is threatening Indonesian species, but as populations decline,

² The Greater Sunda region is comprised of Brunei, western Indonesia (Bali, Java, Kalimantan and Sumatra), Singapore, Malaysia, southern Myanmar and southern Thailand.

songbirds are increasingly poached from neighboring Asian countries for import into Indonesia (Shepherd *et al.* 2004).

8. In a 2014 survey, more than 19,000 birds were found in Jakarta's three biggest markets with 184 species present which were harvested outside the national harvest quota system or in direct violation of their laws (Conservation Act (No. 5) of 1990) (Chng *et al.* 2015). Although Indonesia has adequate legislation to regulate trade, the country also has some of the largest open wildlife markets in Asia (Chng *et al.* 2015). In 2017, additional surveys were conducted in four major cities in Sumatra (Jambi, Medan, Palembang and Pekanbaru). Among the 7,279 birds recorded, 130 species were represented. Two species recorded, the Black-winged myna and the Javan pied starling (*Gracupica jalla*), are on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and are classified as Critically Endangered (IUCN 2017). In addition to these species, 50 other birds covering 12 species are protected under Indonesian law (KSDAE 2015). Another study in West Kalimantan in 2015-2016, identified 25,298 specimens from 153 identified species for sale in 201 shops (Rentschlar *et al.* 2018).
9. While it is recognized that many Indonesian species are bred in captivity for commercial purposes, it is not known whether captive breeders source founder stock from the wild thereby further exacerbating the illegal trade, and traders are often not forthcoming on how their birds are sourced (Chng *et al.* 2015). For instance, Rentschlar *et al.* (2018) reported that only five captive breeding permits have ever been issued in West Kalimantan despite the large number of birds sold as captive-bred in markets.
10. In response to high trade volume of songbirds in Indonesia, the First Asian Songbird Trade Crisis Summit was held in September 2015 in Singapore. The meeting was organized by Wildlife Reserves Singapore, TRAFFIC, and Cikananga Wildlife Center, along with other local and international stakeholders from government agencies, zoological institutions, conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and bird tour companies (Lee *et al.* 2016). The summit produced a series of recommendations including a list of priority species for conservation (see Annex 1). In addition, the IUCN Species Survival Commission Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG) was established in 2017 and provides best practices and conservation breeding recommendations for specific species threatened by trade (IUCN Species Specialist Group 2017).
11. There are fewer studies and surveys to understand the trade of songbirds in other parts of the world. In Latin America, attention for the live bird trade has primarily focused on psittacines (parrots), although, the trade in songbirds is also pronounced. According to a Mongabay report, birds, including songbirds, represent 80% of the total quantity of all trafficked animals in Latin America harvested for the pet trade (Neme 2015). The international trade from Latin America also appears to be fueled by singing competitions held in many Latin American countries including Guyana, Suriname and Brazil (Reuter and O'Regan 2016; Daut *et al.* 2015; Licarião *et al.* 2013; Nóbrega Alves *et al.* 2013). There is also a long tradition of keeping birds as pets in countries such as Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Mexico although prices are often substantially lower when sold in-country, increasing incentive for export to external markets. Wild-caught finches fetch a small price on local markets such as in Guyana, but prices can range from \$500 - \$10,000 in the United States (Reuter *et al.* 2018; Neme 2015).
12. A survey in Brazil showed at least 295 bird species belonging to 177 genera and 56 families are illegally sold as pets, estimating that as many as 400 bird species are likely in trade (23% of the extant species in the country). The family with the largest number of species was the Emberzidae (e.g. buntings; 16.3%), followed by Psittacidae (parrots; 15%), Thraupidae (tanagers; 8.6%), and Icteridae (e.g. meadowlarks and orioles; 6.7%) (Alves *et al.* 2012).
13. A bird trade study in Peru found a large illegal domestic market with 35,279 birds of 130 native species offered for sale in more than 40 markets over a 4-year period. Although parrots were the most abundant taxa sold, passerines were also represented (Daut *et al.* 2015).
14. Trade within and from Africa appears the least well understood on a continental scale. However, a recent study in North Africa found that trade of European goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) has had severe consequences on wild populations in western North Africa, and has the potential to also be impacting other local and Afro-Palearctic migratory songbirds (Khelifa *et al.* 2017). This study estimated the loss of range distribution for the European goldfinch to be nearly 57% across the region in the last 26 years. Due to the extinction of natural populations in Tunisia and Algeria, poachers have started to illegally export species from Morocco to Algeria and Tunisia (Khelifa *et al.* 2017).

15. In a study examining the risks of birds that are traded for African traditional medicine, Passeriformes was the most represented order (107 species), representing 56% of Africa's bird species. Within this group, Sturnidae (starlings) was the most prevalent family (Williams *et al.* 2014).

Conservation Implications

16. Increasing human populations and growing middle classes with increasing disposable incomes, weak governance and corruption, and cultures where keeping wild and rare birds does not carry a social stigma, can all act to hamper effective bird conservation. In addition, there is an increased demand in prized passerine species, particularly those that are increasing in rarity. As populations of individual species are depleted from one country, trappers are developing trade networks to source the same species from other countries.
17. Nash (1994) noted that trade in passerines has led to the extirpation of species such as the Javanese lapwing (*Vanellus macropterus*), and more recent studies have shown trade as the direct cause for the decline of numerous other species such as the Straw-headed bulbul and Black-winged myna (Chng *et al.* 2015; Chng and Eaton 2016; Shepherd 2006; Nijman *et al.* 2018; BirdLife International 2018c). However, the vast majority of songbirds are not listed in the CITES Appendices and the songbird trade is poorly documented outside of CITES-listed species. Additionally, the conservation status of many species is poorly known and therefore, declining populations due to harvest from the wild may go undetected.
18. Passerines captured from the wild often suffer a high level of mortality in the first few days (Alves *et al.* 2012; Shepherd *et al.* 2004). Therefore, attempts to estimate the number of birds in trade through market surveys are under-representing the true volume of specimens captured from the wild.
19. Commercial breeding of birds has been suggested as a solution to over-harvesting from the wild, yet, such commercial activity is unregulated in many countries and there is evidence that breeders supplement their stock from wild populations.
20. Capture of songbirds from the wild is likely skewing the demographics of wild populations as usually only the males of the main singing species are in demand and the capture of and trade in singing birds is heavily biased towards the one sex (Eaton *et al.* 2017).

Recommendations

21. Sri Lanka believes that an examination of the conservation implications of the songbird trade is warranted. We recommend that the CITES Animals Committee establish a working group to consider the biological, implementation, and enforcement issues related to the trade. Given the variety of issues involved, we believe the working group could prepare a report that would inform recommendations of the Standing and Animals Committees to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19). Therefore, Sri Lanka recommends the Conference of the Parties adopt the following Decisions:

Directed to the Animals Committee

- 18.AA The Animals Committee shall examine the information in CoP18 Doc. 79 at its 31st meeting. Using this information as a starting point, and dependent upon the availability of external funding, the Animals Committee shall gather information on songbird trade, consider the conservation priorities, management needs, and enforcement needs related to the trade, and prepare a report with findings and recommendations for consideration at the 32nd meeting of the Animals Committee.
- 18.BB Based on the findings and recommendations of the report prepared under Decision 18.AA, the Animals Committee shall make recommendations, as appropriate, to the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee, or the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, or both.
- 18.CC Subject to external funding, the Animals Committee, in consultation with songbird experts, shall develop and provide guidance to make non-detriment findings for CITES-listed passerines, to address the sustainable trade in wild-harvested songbirds, as well as develop best practices and guidance regarding captive-bred songbirds. The Animals Committee shall work with the Secretariat to make the best practices and guidance documents available to the Parties.

Directed to the Standing Committee

- 18.DD The Standing Committee shall consider the recommendations directed to it by the Animals Committee and make its own recommendations to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARIAT

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RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIRST ASIAN SONGBIRD TRADE CRISIS SUMMIT: TOP 28
PRIORITY SPECIES AND THEIR IUCN RED LIST STAUS IN SEPTEMBER 2015

(Tier 1 = highest priority and in need of immediate action (blue); Tier 2 = high conservation concern but requiring further research (grey))

Species	Scientific Name	IUCN	CITES	Range States in Greater Sunda
Black-winged Myna	<i>Acridotheres melanopterus</i>	CR (2015)	NA	ID: Java and Bali
Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	LC (2012)	II	BN, ID, MY, MM, SG, TH
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>	LC (2012)	NA	ssp <i>jalla</i> : ID only but probably extinct in wild, only in breeding facilities
White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	LC (2013)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, SG, TH
Javan White-eye	<i>Zosterops flavus</i>	NT (2012)	NA	ID: Java, Kalimantan
Java Sparrow	<i>Lonchura oryzivora</i>	VU (2012)	II	ID: Java, Bali
Silver-eared Mesia	<i>Leiothrix argentauris</i>	LC (2012)	II	ID: Sumatra, MY
Straw-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>	VU (2012)	II	BN, ID, MM, MY, SG, TH
Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax rufifrons</i>	EN (2013)	NA	ID: Java
Bali Myna	<i>Leucopsar rothschildi</i>	CR (2015)	I	ID: Bali
Sumatran Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax bicolor</i>	VU (2013)	NA	ID: Sumatra
Javan Green Magpie	<i>Cissa thalassina</i>	CR (2015)	NA	ID: Java
Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, SG, TH
Sumatran Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis media</i>	LC (2012)	NA	ID: Sumatra
Sunda Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax palliatus</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY
Ruby-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus dispar</i>	LC (2012, as <i>P. melanicterus</i>)	NA	ID: Java, Sumatra
Greater Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MM, MY, SG, TH
Orange-spotted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus bimaculatus</i>	LC (2012)	NA	ID: Java, Sumatra
Chestnut-capped Thrush	<i>Geokichla interpres</i>	NT (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY, TH
Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>	LC (2012)	NA	ID, MY, MM, SG, TH
Chestnut-backed Thrush	<i>Geokichla dohertyi</i>	NT (2012)	NA	ID
Javan Myna	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>	LC (2012; as <i>A. grandis</i>)	NA	ID: Java, Bali
Pin-tailed Parrotfinch	<i>Erythrura prasina</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, TH
Grey-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus bres</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, TH
Zosterops group (including Oriental White-eye)	<i>Zosterops spp.</i>	LC (2012, for <i>Z. palpebrosus</i>)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, SG, TH
Hill Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis banyumas</i>	LC (2013)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, TH
Asian Fairy Bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, SG, TH
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	LC (2012)	NA	BN, ID, MY, MM, SG, TH

LC: Least Concern, NT: Near Threatened, VU: Vulnerable, EN: Endangered, CR: Critically Endangered
CITES = Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. NA: Not Applicable, I: Appendix I listed, II: Appendix II listed
BN: Brunei, ID: Indonesia, MM: Myanmar, MY: Malaysia, SG: Singapore, TH: Thailand.

Table from: Lee, J.G.H., Chng, S.C.L. and Eaton, J.A. (eds). (2016). Conservation strategy for Southeast Asian songbirds in trade. Recommendations from the first Asian Songbird Trade Crisis Summit 2015 held in Jurong Bird Park, Singapore, 27–29 September 2015.

TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP16) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding. The authors of this document propose the following tentative budget and source of funding.

The tasks allocated to the Animals Committee in the draft decisions might require intersessional work by the Committee and time during its meetings. However, Sri Lanka believes that the work can be accommodated within the regular work program of the Committee and without additional funding.