
PHILIPPINE COCKATOO HEADING FOR EXTINCTION?

by Rosemary Low

Field work carried out in November and December of last year in the Philippines confirms the worst fears regarding the status of the Red-vented or Philippine Cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*). Its decline has been so rapid that Roland Wirth (of the Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Populations) informed me in February "...*EVEN THE SHORT TERM SURVIVAL OF THE SPECIES IS IN QUESTION.*"

Deforestation in the Philippine Islands has been among the most

extensive in the tropics, in recent years. This was the original cause of the species' decline. Now it is trapping which threatens its existence. Roland Wirth states: "The few remnant populations are now mostly located in areas not immediately threatened by massive destruction (though logging remains a problem to some extent). However, Frank Lambert, who looked for the cockatoo on behalf of IUCN in November/December 1991 clearly confirms Blas Tabaranza's view that trapping for the bird trade is now the main threat.

"Every single nest located by Frank was already guarded by a



Captive-bred Phillipine Red-vented cockatoo. Photo: Rosemary Low.

trapper to remove nestlings. In fact, due to the rarity of the species the trappers now also usually remove one of the adults (which they did not do formerly) by placing a sack in front of the nest entrance during the night. Some of the trapped birds go to Japan illegally on freight and fishing boats, others are traded in Manila, and some have come to Europe in recent years, before the EC banned importation of this species.

“With an estimated population of just 1,000 to 4,000 birds (and the high chick mortality after removal from the nest) even fairly small scale trade can now wipe out the species. There is also the fear that we now have an ageing breeding

population, as nearly all chicks seem to have been removed for the last one or two decades.”

The wild population is now critically endangered. Alas, the captive population has not fared well. Attempting to establish this species has been beset by problems because of the species' susceptibility to aspergillosis and psittacine beak and feather disease. Losses with females have been especially high. (It has been stated that aspergillus spores have been found in nests in the wild.)

Large consignments of Red-vented Cockatoos did not reach Europe where this species has always been rare in collections. I believe it is being bred in few

collections. This is surely a species for which a STUDBOOK IS URGENTLY NEEDED. It is extremely important that single birds are identified and paired up, where possible. Fortunately, this species is very easy to sex as the iris is black in males and red-brown in adult females.

Inevitably, in Europe and the USA there must be Red-vented Cockatoos kept as pets, perhaps by people who are not even aware of the name of the species in their possession. Aviculturists could help to get these birds into breeding situations by offering to exchange those which are not tame for hand-reared young of another species. Understandably, many people are

reluctant to part with their pet birds—but it is vitally important that as many wild-caught birds as possible should be identified now, to strengthen the small gene pool. None of these birds will have been recently imported thus their long-term survival and breeding prospects should be good.

If it is possible to pair up some of these genetically precious Red-vented Cockatoos, it goes without saying that they should be in the hands of aviculturists or zoos who are interested in the preservation of the species. This means obtaining parent-reared young, if possible, and ensuring that they remain in the hands of breeders.