

Media Release

For immediate release



Emergency Funds Sent To Aid Confiscated Congo Parrots

International groups rally to aid 500 African Grey parrots seized by government officials in first crackdown of illegal parrot trade.

KAVUMU, DRC. Sept. 27, 2010 –

On September 18, 523 African Grey Parrots were confiscated by authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in central Africa and sent to the Lwiro Primate Sanctuary. Funding from international wildlife groups is being urgently summoned to assist the sanctuary in dealing with the birds. The first of its kind in the DRC, this confiscation represents an important step towards permanently ending the wildlife trade for this imperiled species, threatened by decades of unsustainable levels of trade.

The shipment of Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) was bound for Singapore and seized by government officials at a regional airport in Kavumu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The birds were taken to Lwiro Sanctuary, which is run by three partners : Intitut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature ICCN, Centre de Recherches en Sciences Naturelles, CRSN and a team of international NGOs led by Coopera. Lwiro is a primate rescue center which houses over 100 orphaned chimpanzees and monkeys, with no existing facilities for birds. The arrival of these parrots to the rescue has caused tremendous strain on staff and reserves, necessitating an appeal for help. “We cannot do this alone,” said Carmen Vidal, manager of Lwiro Sanctuary. “We didn’t have much warning. We were just told these parrots are coming on Saturday and then they were here. We are doing the best we can. The government institutions, ICCN and CRSN, are doing a great job on law enforcement and the efforts of the DRC government authorities are commendable; we are very pleased that they are taking this strong stand on behalf of wildlife!”

The confiscation came too late for twenty-six of the Greys: the birds were found dead in their crates or died afterward. Some of the nearly 500 remaining birds were found to be tied to one another by one wing. They also had no food or water for an unknown period of time. Their situation requires immediate stabilization.

In response to this emergency the World Parrot Trust (WPT) is providing technical guidance and initial funding to support the birds’ first aid needs and coordinating activities with the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) to get further support to Lwiro Sanctuary as quickly as possible.

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"We're thrilled that the authorities seized this illegal shipment of grey parrots," stated Dr. James Gilardi, Executive Director of WPT. "This effort sends a powerful signal that they are serious about protecting these birds from trapping. With adequate support, our partners in the DRC should be able to successfully release these birds back to the wild where they belong."

The initial aid will cover the short-term needs of the parrots, and in the coming weeks the birds will need intensive rehabilitation to ready them for release back into the wild. Many of the birds had their wings damaged by being tied to one another to prevent them flying, and as a result they will require assistance to re-grow lost feathers. Other support will be needed including veterinary assistance, proper nutrition, and the construction of large flights to encourage exercise.

Although this is the first such confiscation in the DRC, in recent years, similar illegal shipments have been confiscated several times in West Africa. Over a three-year period over 2796 Grey Parrots have been taken from traders, rehabilitated at the Limbe Wildlife Centre in Cameroon, and most of them released back to the wild. Grey Parrot shipments have also been seized recently in Kenya and Bulgaria.

The trade in great apes and parrots is seen by some experts as linked to one another: parrot traders selling apes and vice versa, dealers using established ape trading routes – which adds to the urgency that the trade must be stopped. According to CITES (the international convention monitoring global trade in endangered species), the DRC allows for the legal exportation of 5000 Grey Parrots each year. However, recent figures by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimate that almost one-quarter of existing Grey Parrot populations are being trapped for the trade each year – making Greys one of the most heavily traded parrots on the international market (1).

The trade for the wild-caught birds is driven by demand from international pet markets, principally in Asia and the Middle East. Although commonly bred in captivity, wild-caught birds are often sought as a cheaper alternative by bird traders. Population declines have been noted in Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda and parts of Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2)

In an effort to further understand the impact of the wild parrot trade WPT is supporting a survey of bais (clearings) in the DRC, the TL2 Project, by Drs. John and Terese Hart. The study will address the usage of these types of areas by Grey Parrot populations and will determine how much local trapping of these parrots is occurring, working toward long-term protection of these sites in Africa.

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Sources:

- (1) BirdLife International: **2010 IUCN Red List**
<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index.html?action=SpcHTMDetails.asp&sid=1496&m=0>
- (2) Pilgrim *et al.* (in prep.)

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About the World Parrot Trust:

Founded in 1989, the World Parrot Trust (WPT) works to conserve wild parrots and aid the welfare of captive parrots worldwide. Through field research and direct conservation, advocacy, education, and awareness programs, the WPT has aided 47 species of parrots in 30 countries.

More information:

1. World Parrot Trust: <http://www.parrots.org>
2. Pan African Sanctuary Alliance: <http://pasaprimates.org>
3. Lwiro Primate Sanctuary: <http://www.lwiro.blogspot.com/>
4. TL2 Project: <http://www.bonoboincongo.com/2010/05/20/cleaning-congo's-parrots-out-of-congo/>
5. International wild-caught bird trade information: <http://www.parrots.org/flyfree/about-the-wild-bird-trade.html>