

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EU PERMANENTLY BANS IMPORTS OF WILD BIRDS

Conservation Groups Hail Ban that Will Save Millions of Birds a Year

January 12, 2007, Washington, D.C. - The EU decided unanimously yesterday to prohibit the import of wild birds in order to prevent the introduction of infectious diseases including avian influenza. As a result, as many as four million birds a year will remain in the wild, spared from the international pet trade.

The EU passed a temporary ban on the import of wild birds in 2005 when a bird infected with the highly pathogenic strain of avian flu was found in a quarantine facility in the United Kingdom. Yesterday's decision makes that ban permanent. Prior to 2005, the EU constituted 90 percent of the world's market for wild birds, importing some two million birds annually. Bird conservation experts estimate that roughly half of the birds harvested for sale in the EU died during capture and transport. Many of these birds, such as the African gray parrot and the scarlet macaw, are rare and endangered species.

"This measure is a huge step forward for bird conservation and welfare, and much needed protection for public health and agriculture," said Dr. James Gilardi, director of the World Parrot Trust.

Over the last two years, a coalition of some 240 conservation and animal welfare groups urged the EU to end all such imports because of infectious diseases, wild bird conservation and animal welfare concerns. World Parrot Trust, Defenders of Wildlife and American Bird Conservancy, along with partners in the Bird Conservation Alliance and groups in the EU led this effort.

Markos Kyprianou, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer protection, responded to the coalition's pressure by requesting an independent scientific review of the trade by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in May 2005. These EFSA findings published eight weeks ago provided the scientific foundation for yesterday's decision, documenting the substantial risks to biosecurity and animal welfare created by this trade.

"Our coalition sounded the alarm in December 2004, warning the EU that the most likely route for the introduction of avian flu was the pet trade," said Kristen Genovese, associate international counsel at Defenders of Wildlife. "Commissioner Kyprianou heard our message and took decisive action, which led to this permanent ban. For that he deserves much recognition."

The regulation approved yesterday sets out a new and restrictive regimen whereby any exotic birds imported to Europe must be bred in captivity in approved facilities. These birds may only be exported by countries which are already deemed safe by the EU for poultry exports, including the United States, Australia, Canada and a few other major trading partners.

"Europe has crossed an important threshold by banning this archaic trade. The bird trade has killed millions more wild birds than the bird flu this ban seeks to stem. Congratulations to the commissioners on this decision which will certainly have a positive impact on rare bird species throughout the world," said Mike Parr, vice president at American Bird Conservancy.

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The EFSA press release and reports are available at
www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/ahaw/ahaw_opinions/ahaw_op_ej410_captive_birds.html.

High resolution photos of birds popular in the pet trade are available at
www.birdsareforwatching.org/press/.

The World Parrot Trust works for the conservation and welfare of parrots, worldwide. Founded in 1989, the Trust has regional branches North America, Asia, Australia and Europe; together they have aided the conservation of 37 species of parrots in 22 countries.

Defenders of Wildlife is recognized as one of the nation's most progressive advocates for wildlife and its habitat. With more than 500,000 members and supporters, Defenders of Wildlife is an effective leader on endangered species issues.

American Bird Conservancy works to conserve wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. See www.abcbirds.org for more information.