

Trapping and smuggling of Salmon-crested Cockatoos

an undercover investigation in Seram, Indonesian

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Background

In theory, the trapping of cockatoos in the forests of Indonesia should have been reduced to a trickle. Three of Indonesia's cockatoos - the Moluccan, Palm and Goffin's - are listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The others are on Appendix II and *C. sulphurea* has just been included on Appendix I at last month's CITES meeting in Bangkok (see Psittanews, this issue). Presidential decrees have been issued giving some of these cockatoos "no-take" status, and Indonesia currently has no export quotas for wild caught birds. As discussed in *PsittaScene* (Vol. 15 No 2: May, 2003, pp. 6-7) much of the pressure to halt illegal bird trapping came from the all-volunteer, non-governmental group ProFauna Indonesia (formerly KSBK, www.profauna.or.id). In their first undercover investigation, they documented widespread cockatoo and parrot smuggling. That investigation focused on trapping in the Northern Moluccas (and therefore, *Cacatua alba*) and West Papua (and therefore, *C. galerita triton*).

Trapping on Seram

Little is known about the southern parts of the Moluccas (now usually called Maluku), especially Seram, which is the last remaining natural home of the magnificent

Seram (or Salmon-crested) cockatoo, *Cacatua moluccensis* (Fig.1) Therefore, Project Bird Watch (www.indonesian-parrot-project.org) commissioned ProFauna Indonesia to carry out an undercover study on Seram and the neighboring island



Fig 1. This magnificent Seram cockatoo was photographed during the undercover investigation.

Ambon, and follow any smuggled birds to the Jakarta markets. This study was carried out between December of 2003 and May of 2004.

Trapping on Seram was observed in Manusela National Park at the center of the island (ironic since 'manu sela' means "Bird of Freedom"); it also was found to occur in towns more on the periphery of the island. Most of the trapping on Seram employs a snare shot into a cockatoo sleeping tree at night using a sling shot (Fig. 2). This is in contrast to the method most often used in West Papua or North Maluku, where the cries of a 'decoy' bird attract a second bird to a tree where it becomes stuck in sticky gum from a breadfruit tree mixed with coconut oil. There are several bird collectors on Seram, the largest being Madame Kartini who has been in business for ten years. In a given month, she might receive 20-50 Seram cockatoos, 200 Red Lories (*Eos bornea*), and 350 Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haemotodus*). Nineteen cockatoos were seen there by the investigators on a single occasion (Fig. 3). Currently, she pays the trappers less than US\$10 per cockatoo.



Fig 2. Seram cockatoo caught in snare.



Photo: ProFauna Indonesia

Fig 3. Cockatoos at the middleman Kartini's house

Each trapper can catch as many as 16 cockatoos per month. Birds are taken by motorboat to Ambon, the small island to the southwest of Seram, where trappers board boats after readily obtaining illegal permits for less than \$5 per bird. By this point in their journey to market, the price of the cockatoos has risen to \$40-80 each

Smuggling out illegally taken Salmon-crested Cockatoos

Those cockatoos which are part of large shipments going to the Jakarta Bird Markets are placed, ten at a time, in the

center compartment of a crate 100 x 60 cm wide x 60 cm. high. On either side of this hidden compartment, are two exterior compartments which are packed with hundreds of lorries and lorikeets acting essentially as decoys to divert attention from the illegally-shipped Seram cockatoos deep inside the crate (Fig 4). In actual fact, the lorries and lorikeets were also illegally trapped, but were not questioned due to the presence of a dubious trapping permit for violet-naped lorries. The fate of cockatoos bought and sold individually is often just as tragic. In order to smuggle a cockatoo on board a ship leaving Ambon harbor, these individuals are often stuffed inside a large thermos bottle, with a hole cut at the top for air (Fig 5).

For the birds in the large commercial shipments, most are flown to Jakarta, where some actually received a police escort to the market. Some of these birds are confiscated and are delivered to a network of wildlife rehabilitation centers which have recently sprung up at several sites in Indonesia (see www.JaringanPPS.org).

Photo: ProFauna Indonesia

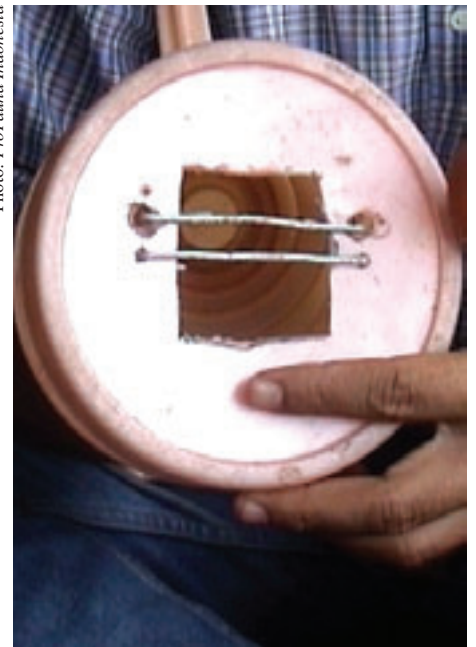


Fig 5. Hole cut in the top of a thermos bottle typical of those often used to smuggle cockatoos onboard a boat

Photo: ProFauna Indonesia



Fig 4. Crate used to ship Seram Cockatoos (not visible) inside outer compartments containing Lorries and Lorikeets

However, some of the confiscated birds actually ended up with wildlife exporters, police, or other government officials after their initial confiscation. For those cockatoos or parrots lucky enough to reach a rehabilitation center, medical care, food, and rest are provided. The complex issues of their subsequent fate, and their outlook for a chance at a successful return to life in the wild, are currently being broached by Project Bird Watch in collaboration with Jaringan PPS.

