

Keeping Indonesia's Parrots in the Wild



Pet Triton Cockatoo,
Batanta Island
Photo by Stewart Metz

Indonesia has some of the world's most breath-taking parrots and cockatoos. Almost all of these are found in the Eastern (and much poorer) half of the 17000-plus islands of the Indonesian Archipelago. The richest areas for cockatoos are Maluku (formerly called the Moluccas, and before that, the "Spice Islands"); West Papua (the Eastern half of this land mass is New Guinea); and Nusa Tenggara (a thin line of islands extending East from, but not including, Bali).

However, many of these parrots are endangered by a combination of illegal trapping for the pet bird trade, and loss of their habitat due to logging, much of that also illegal. The poaching of thousands of these jewels of nature continues despite a high degree of legal protection - both internally (some, albeit not all of the endangered birds are protected by Indonesian law) and externally (all Indonesian parrots are protected under the aegis of the global watchdog CITES--the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).



Smuggled Salmon-crested Cockatoo, Seram Island
Photo: ProFauna Indonesia, with permission

The former reflects the fact that many of the smuggled birds (not only parrots, but others such as Birds of Paradise) remain within Indonesia. Those that are sold end up mostly in the cities of the West—in the houses of the rich as symbols of wealth and prestige. Some remain as pets where they were trapped. Those that are exported feed the seemingly-unquenchable global demand for parrots.

The illegal exports pass through Singapore, China, Taiwan, and Malaysia; it has been suggested that Thailand has now become the major importer. To turn the tide on illegal trade in Indonesia requires access to closely guarded inside information. The non-governmental organization ProFauna Indonesia has carried out two significant undercover investigations of the illegal bird trade, one in West Papua and Northern Maluku, Indonesia, and one on Seram Island, the sole remaining home of *Cacatua moluccensis* (the Salmon-crested cockatoo). These provided specific names and locations of smugglers to the Forestry Service to take action.

However, until recently, Indonesian authorities have not vigorously enforced their own wildlife protection laws. This may be changing. A dramatic example occurred in September of 2004 on Seram.

National park officers arrested a long-term bird buyer named Samsudin and confiscated nine Moluccan cockatoos, two Eclectus parrots (*Eclectus roratus roratus*), and five Red-cheeked Parrots (*Geoffroyus geoffroyi rhodops*). Samsudin was convicted and received a jail sentence of over two months and a fine. Such an aggressive 'sting' and relatively stiff sentence would have been very unusual in the past and sets a strong precedent.

But what is the fate of parrots or cockatoos after they are confiscated? Previously, there had been no good answer, but one may now lie in the "PPS" Network. "PPS" stands for Pusat Penyelamatan Satwa or Wildlife Rescue Centers. This network works in concert with the Forestry Department, the Police, and the Conservation Department, from whom they receive confiscated or surrendered animals for quarantine, treatment, and re-socialization with others of their species.

Currently, Project Bird Watch is collaborating with Jaringan PPS to build a Rehabilitation and Release Center on the North shore of Seram. Cockatoos, parrots, and other birds from Seram will be rehabilitated and (if they meet rigid Guidelines) released back into the wild. The Salmon-crested cockatoos confiscated during the 'sting' on Seram (see above) are now awaiting release there.



The Greater Bird of Paradise in Bali Wildlife Rescue Centre
Photo: Tex Hankey, with permission

BirdLife Indonesia has been working to rehabilitate and release confiscated Citron-crested cockatoos (*C. sulphurea citronocristata*) on Sumba Island, their only home in the wild. Several have been successfully released. Since only about 2000 Citron-crested cockatoos exist now in the wild, the return of each poached bird is significant.

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Female Eclectus parrot, West Papua, Indonesia
Photo: Stewart Metz

