

BirdLife International's position on proposal 11 to transfer Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea* from Appendix II to Appendix I

CITES CoP13, 2–14 October, Bangkok, Thailand

Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea*



Background: Yellow-crested Cockatoo (a large parrot found only in Indonesia and Timor-Leste) is classified by BirdLife International and IUCN as Critically Endangered¹. This means that it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. The species has undergone a dramatic population decline of more than 80% since the 1970s and is now reduced to a small wild population estimated at fewer than 10,000 mature individuals. Habitat loss has been a factor in this bird's decline, but the main reason is unsustainable exploitation for trade. CITES data record 96,785 birds exported from Indonesia in the period 1981–1992.

In 1989 and 1992, the two (then) major overseas markets for this species, the EU and US, banned imports of wild specimens. In 1994, a zero quota for wild-caught birds was established in Indonesia. Meanwhile, there has been a huge increase of international trade in supposedly captive-bred birds: 900 alone in 2000 according to CITES permits. Unfortunately, neither the zero quota nor the EU and US import bans for wild specimens appear to be effective. There is substantial evidence that birds are still being taken from the wild, with some then passed off as captive-bred birds for international trade.

This species clearly meets the criteria for inclusion in CITES Appendix I. BirdLife International believes that such a listing would strengthen the ability of the Indonesian Government and other governments to reduce the illegal trade that is so damaging to this highly threatened species.

BirdLife International therefore recommends that Parties ADOPT this proposal.

Some questions answered ...

Wasn't there an attempt to uplist this species before?

A possible Appendix I listing was discussed as long ago as 1994. At that stage, it was considered preferable to put in place a range of other conservation measures. In Indonesia, these have included the establishment of a zero quota for wild caught birds since 1994; protection since 1999; and the establishment of protected areas holding important populations of the species. Despite this considerable effort by the Indonesian Government, BirdLife Indonesia and others, the threat status of this species continues to get worse. It is therefore timely to consider an Appendix I listing again, while continuing to strengthen and implement other measures.

Is international trade the real issue?

Trade was identified as the main reason for this species' decline through a detailed

Red Data Book review by the BirdLife Asian Partnership². While the scale of domestic trade has proved difficult to assess, much evidence suggests that international demand has driven the development of trapping networks that have 'effectively eliminated' the species. Habitat loss has historically played a part in this species' decline, and habitat availability may be limiting populations in some areas; in many other places, however, suitable habitat exists but the cockatoos are now scarce or absent.

What's the evidence for illegal international trade?

The difficulty in distinguishing captive-bred birds from wild ones is giving scope for both illegal capture from the wild, and illegal international trading of the captured birds. Wild-caught birds have been found in many Indonesian markets. For example, during 2001–2003, 100–300

birds were found in bird markets in Java and Bali, with two shipments from Sumba of 50 birds each, in 2002 and 2003³. Many of these birds may be destined for domestic markets. However, there is also strong circumstantial evidence that wild-caught birds are illegally transferred from Indonesia to other countries in South-East Asia, and then passed off as captive-bred birds in international trade. For example, in the three years after 1993 (when exports of wild-caught birds became illegal from Indonesia), over 1,000 birds may have been smuggled onto the global market via Singapore in this way⁴. Wild-caught birds were found in a pet shop in Singapore in both 2002 and 2003⁵.

In 2001, BirdLife obtained strong evidence that an Indonesian-based company, selling 'captive-bred' Yellow-crested Cockatoos on the international market, was engaged in the illegal purchase of this species from

the wild. Evidence was obtained of wild caught cockatoos being purchased from suppliers in Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara, with possibly as many as 120 birds involved. According to an informant, the company was exporting these cockatoos to destinations in Europe and elsewhere as captive-bred birds. BirdLife was informed that the species had never been captive-bred by the company, although it did possess captive-breeding facilities and to the untrained eye might have appeared to be breeding cockatoos.

Will an Appendix I listing be any more effective than the current Appendix II listing with a zero quota?

Banning all international trade will have several important effects. First, it will eliminate the opportunity for wild-caught birds to be sold on as captive-bred – which is the central problem at the moment. Second, it will send a strong signal of Indonesia's commitment to the conservation of the Yellow-crested Cockatoo. Third, it will provide a new basis for the Indonesian Government and NGOs to develop relations in strengthening the enforcement authorities and enforcing the law (e.g. through increased penalties), both in relation to international and domestic trade.

What about developing captive-breeding and ranching?

Although a good idea in principle, in practice it has not been possible to advance captive-breeding and ranching

on any substantial scale in Indonesia. These approaches therefore cannot provide any substitute for wild-caught birds. In the Philippines there is one commercial breeding centre (which produced fewer than 60 young per year between 1996 and 2001) and, in Singapore, there are at least two. It is very unlikely that captive-breeding outside of Indonesia is currently meeting the international demand for this species. This situation may change with time, though it is unlikely to improve in the near future.

What's the situation on Timor-Leste?

Although Timor-Leste is not currently a signatory to CITES, there is strong interest from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Environment Directorate. Currently it is illegal to capture, hold or trade any bird species on Timor-Leste. There is a risk that trade routes might open up as trade (in general) and security improve. An Appendix I listing would pre-empt this problem by rendering import and trade of cockatoos much more difficult.

Are there any look-alike issues?

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *C. galerita* regularly appears in trade in the region. Traders could try to get round an Appendix I listing of Yellow-crested Cockatoo by passing the species off as Sulphur-crested. Extra vigilance would be needed if Yellow-crested is transferred to Appendix I.

- ¹ BirdLife International (2004) *Threatened birds of the world 2004*. CD-ROM. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. IUCN (2004) IUCN Red List of threatened species. www.redlist.org
- ² BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.
- ³ Data collected by an investigation team of NGOs, including BirdLife Indonesia.
- ⁴ PHPA/LIPI/BirdLife International-IP (1998) *Yellow-crested Cockatoo Recovery Plan*. Bogor: Indonesia: PHPA/LIPI/BirdLife International Indonesia Programme.
- ⁵ 8 birds in 2002 and 10 in 2003: unpublished data from ProFauna, an NGO based in East Java.



If you would like to find out more about Yellow-crested Cockatoo and/or would like to discuss the issues above, please contact the following BirdLife staff who are attending CITES COP13: Nigel Collar (BirdLife Secretariat), Belinda de la Paz, Corina Bernabe (Haribon Foundation, Philippines), Charoenwitt Hankaew (Bird Conservation Society of Thailand). Alternatively if you would like to speak to someone on the Indonesian Government delegation, please contact: Ani Mardiatuti or Ria Saryanthi.

BirdLife International is a partnership of people for birds and the environment. Together we are the leading authority on the status of birds and their habitats. Over ten million people support the BirdLife Partnership of national non-governmental conservation organisations and local networks. Partners work together on shared priorities, programmes and policies, learning from each other to achieve real conservation results. The BirdLife Partnership promotes sustainable living as a means of conserving birds and all other forms of biodiversity. The BirdLife Secretariat acts as the Red List Authority for birds for the IUCN Red List and coordinates input to annual updates on the status of the world's birds.

For more information, please contact:
BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK
Tel. +44 (0)1223 277318 fax +44 (0)1223 277200 email birdlife@birdlife.org



www.birdlife.org