

Paving the way to regional cooperation for African Grey and Timneh Parrots

Title

A major breakthrough for the conservation and management of the **African Grey** and **Timneh Parrots** (*Psittacus erithacus* and *P. timneh*) was made recently, when representatives of five of the species' range states gathered to discuss how to safeguard the future of the species.

In Monrovia, Liberia, participants representing the governments and BirdLife Partner and collaborating organisations of Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Sierra Leone came together as part of the project *Strengthening Capacity for Monitoring and Regulation of International Trade in African Grey Parrot*. This is the first move towards regional cooperation on the species since far-reaching **CITES recommendations made in 2007** halved the export quota of DRC and placed a moratorium on exports from the other four countries. In the case of Cameroon the moratorium has since been lifted in 2012).

Popular in the international pet trade, African Grey and Timneh parrots are two of the most widely-traded species of bird in the world. The large number of individuals harvested from the wild is **thought to threaten the long-term future of the species**.



One of the main obstacles to a sustainable

trade is the lack of a scientific basis on which to make management decisions, including the setting of export quotas. This workshop made an important step in addressing this need, by bringing these countries together to agree on how to monitor their parrot populations, and initiating the process of developing national management plans.

The workshop presented a new framework of methods for rapidly assessing wild African Grey Parrot populations, which was designed and tested for this project. Discussions followed on how these can be applied in practice in each of the countries, to improve understanding of the species' status and trends, and in turn inform their conservation and management. The framework of methods was designed by Dr Stuart Marsden, Reader in Conservation Ecology at Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK, who specialises in parrots and other tropical birds.

"These birds are particularly hard to survey in the wild, due to their flocking behaviour and preference for forest habitat. What we have done is to develop a standardised set of methods that can be put in place anywhere that African Greys are found, to monitor them in a reliable, easy, cost-effective way", says Dr Marsden.

BirdLife partners and a collaborator tested out the various survey methods in the field in each of the five countries, simultaneously gathering valuable baseline data on population status, and laying the foundations for long-term monitoring efforts. The results highlighted a great variation in distribution, from relative local abundance in Cameroon's Lobéké and Campo Ma'an National Parks, to almost complete absence in all surveyed sites in Côte d'Ivoire.

The [Lukuru Foundation](#), operating out of their field sites in central DRC, joined the project as BirdLife's collaborator on the ground in that country. Lukuru's investigations point to a very large and almost entirely unregulated trade in parrots from Orientale Province. Read more on Lukuru's work [here](#).

Each country's national delegates drew up a draft national management plan: identifying, prioritising and assigning responsibilities for the key projects to be implemented. Monitoring plans were also developed, detailing how survey methods will be employed at the national scale. "Any quota for exports of African Grey Parrots must be determined by an estimated population size of the birds at all times, in any country of origin", commented John Woods, Dean of the Department of Forestry at the University of Liberia.

Immediately following the workshop, a team of researchers from among the participants led a

four-day training exercise in Gola Forest, training 15 rangers and Site Support Group members in parrot monitoring methods. “The response was very positive” said Emmanuel Loqueh, project focal point for [SCNL](#), “and we will be following up with the group so that this monitoring becomes part of their regular activities”.