



Position Statement by EU BirdLife Partners on the importation of wild birds into the European Union

Position: To ban the import into the EU of all birds caught in the wild. Only if conservation benefits can be demonstrated for the species concerned, exceptions may be considered.

Position: EU BirdLife Partners consider that the international trade in all birds caught in the wild should not harm bird species and should only take place if it can be shown to contribute conservation benefits to the species concerned. We believe that for the EU to accept the import of wild-caught birds it should be clearly demonstrated, on a case-by-case basis, that strict criteria are met to ensure that the birds originate from science-based management programmes, guaranteeing conservation benefits for the species concerned. Furthermore, additional criteria should be met which would ensure that: (i) native biodiversity will not be put at risk by the accidental introduction of the imported species; (ii) the health of wildlife, humans or livestock will not be put at risk by their accidental introduction; (iii) the welfare of the birds traded is ensured and the risk of mortality minimised. In addition, measures should be put in place to prevent wild-caught birds from being laundered into trade as 'captive bred' birds. EU BirdLife Partners recognise the theoretical benefits to bird conservation from sustainable use and the potential economic benefits to local communities and developing countries from trade. However, we also believe that these criteria must be met if use is to be sustainable and the well-being of humans, livestock and wildlife in Europe is to be protected. Without these criteria in place, we believe imports of wild caught birds into the EU should be banned. The evidence for the criteria mentioned should be provided by the exporting country. EU BirdLife Partners recognise that there may be exemptions under strict regulation, for the import of a small number of wild-caught birds for approved scientific research, conservation or education purposes. Notwithstanding any of the above, EU BirdLife Partners fully support the strong implementation and enforcement of CITES both within the EU and globally.

Justification: The international wild bird trade involves millions of birds and the EU is the world's major importer. The trade is a contributory factor in the globally threatened status of some species and is implicated in population declines of others.

Trade in some 1,500 bird species is regulated under CITES by exporting countries (who are parties to CITES): trade in species listed on Appendix 1 (161 species) is strictly regulated and excludes commercial activities; trade in species listed on Appendix II is only allowed under a system of permits with a requirement that quotas be based on non-detriment findings. CITES itself can impose sanction or quotas on countries that ignore recommendations resulting from reviews of significant trade. However, most species fall outside the protection of CITES, including most globally threatened species. There are little data available on the numbers or variety of these non-CITES species in trade. During 2000-2003, over 3 million wild CITES-listed birds were traded globally, with over 90% imported to the EU. The EU has

implemented stricter measures for CITES species by implementing the Wildlife Trade Regulations (Council Regulation 338/97). This allows the EU to impose quotas or restrict imports for species of conservation concern. Despite these regulations, many species are still traded into the EU in large numbers with apparently little knowledge of their population status or biology. Some species, such as the grey parrot, have continued to decline across much of their range, largely as a result of over-exploitation, in spite of numerous quotas and restrictions imposed by CITES.

The USA has taken a more restrictive route by banning the import of CITES-listed bird species since 1992 unless US-determined sustainability and conservation criteria can be explicitly met by exporting countries. To prevent the circumvention of these provisions the US has also determined a set of criteria for the import of captive bred birds. This type of approach would seem to be more in line with BirdLife International's policy on the bird trade which states that importing countries should only permit trade originating from sustainable use or national management programmes. Since 1992, no plan for the capture of wild birds has been approved under the US criteria whereas, at the same time, the EU has continued to import the same species.

Many other countries have also opted out of the wild bird trade by prohibiting exports of their native species and/or imports from other parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Kenya, and India.

It is sometimes argued that the wild bird trade is a valuable resource that potentially provides important income for the rural poor in exporting countries and incentives for conservation. However, there would appear to be no/little published evidence to show that habitats have been conserved to provide a 'sustainable harvest' of birds, whilst there is substantive evidence to show that the trade has been implicated in population declines of a number of species. Whilst any income from the trade may be significant to poor farmers, studies have shown that the trade provides only seasonal and meagre wages with most profits taken by middlemen and importers outside developing countries.

A further important point is that the current EU policy of importing millions of wild birds is at odds with the strict protection afforded to EU native birds through the Birds Directive and national legislation. In addition, there are issues associated with welfare (with perhaps 60% of birds dying between capture and the pet shop); the introduction of disease such as avian flu with its consequences for the health of native wildlife, humans and their livestock; and the introduction of invasive alien species.

There are concerns that imposing an import ban will lead to the trade being driven underground with an increase in smuggling. However, the only available scientific evidence supports the opposite view. Studies on South American parrots showed that when the USA banned imports of CITES-listed birds in 1992, illegal nest take and trade also declined. If the EU were to follow the US example, illegal activity could decline still further.

In conclusion:

- There is little evidence that the bird trade is sustainable and significant evidence that it results in biodiversity loss and deterioration of the conservation status of the species concerned.
- There is little evidence that the bird trade provides incentives for conservation and rarely provides a fair income to the rural poor.

After consideration of the issues above, the BirdLife EU Partnership calls for ban on imports of wild birds into the EU. Only in cases where certain specific EU-determined criteria are met could exceptions be considered. These criteria would be non-detrimental and demonstrate clear benefits for the species concerned, similar to the US Wild Bird Conservation Act model. Exceptions could include education, research or conservation (zoos) purposes. Furthermore, limited trade that has clearly demonstrable conservation benefits for the population of the species concerned and which also benefits local communities could also be considered. The supporting evidence for such exceptions will have to come from the exporting country, and will have to be assessed at EU level, in order to ensure a coherence of standards across the Community.

The system described would ensure that, in line with BirdLife policy, it would be for exporting countries to demonstrate non detrimental effects and clear conservation benefits for the species concerned rather than conservation organisations having to prove otherwise. This policy statement covers all wild birds, and not only CITES listed species.

The proposed position is not anti-trade, anti-sustainability nor anti-poverty alleviation and anticipates any World Trade Organisation (WTO) challenge that an EU ban would be an arbitrary and unjustifiable decision. The interests of bird conservation, and the potential import of disease and alien invasive species permit the introduction of strict controls on the bird trade under the WTO rules, which include provisions to protect animal life and to restrict the spread of disease. A ban on the import of all wild caught birds into the EU, with the exceptions described above, can be promoted as a measure to support the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and encourage exporting countries to enact fully its terms.

For further information

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