

The sprawling Indonesian archipelago is home to thousands of land-based species, many of them endemic to each of the islands. The area was once almost completely forested, with tropical moist and dry broadleaf forest blanketing the hills and valleys. The higher mountains are home to montane and sub-alpine forests, and mangroves are common in coastal areas.

The islands are secluded too: their scattered and enigmatic nature makes Indonesia an ideal place for piracy and smuggling.



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BY DESI MILPACHER

Slowing Parrot Trafficking in Indonesia

NORTH SULAWESI AND NORTH MALUKU (MOLUCCAS) feature most prominently as areas for trafficking in all manner of wildlife, especially parrots. The World Parrot Trust has become increasingly concerned about accelerating numbers of lorries, parrots and cockatoos being trafficked throughout Wallacea, an area that comprises Sulawesi, Lombok, Sumbawa, Flores, Sumba, Timor, Halmahera, Buru, Seram and a number of smaller islands. The area boasts dozens of species of parrots and cockatoos, some of which are commonly found in trade.

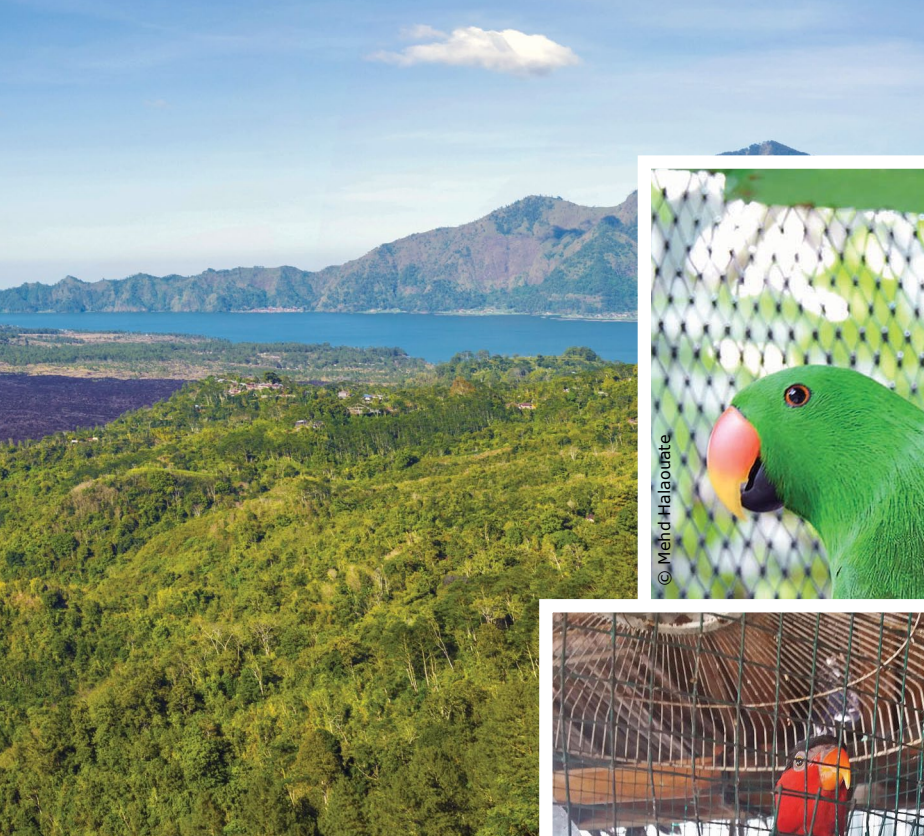


Chattering Lorries in particular are under extreme pressure from heavy trapping to supply the bird markets in Java and Bali. Not surprisingly, this has had devastating effects on wild parrot populations, as evidenced by trappers not finding any birds to capture on many of the islands. And the reasons for concern go beyond the decline in numbers and welfare issues of the birds: officials are also worried that increasing trade is bringing zoonotic (animal to human) diseases into contact with more people.

A new era of partnership and cooperation

Now, thankfully, there is a renewed counter-effort to quash it. The region was recently the focus of a series of meetings involving local and international NGOs, local zoos, a newly-minted government, host Tasikoki Rescue Centre, and sponsor World Parrot Trust.

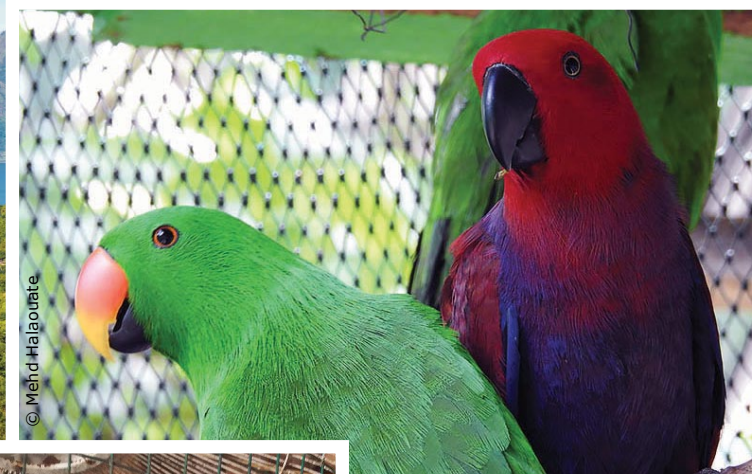
The Wallacea Regional Wildlife Trafficking conference was held in June 2017, and marked a fresh start in the fight to end illegal trapping of indigenous wildlife. It was the first meeting ever to bring forestry law enforcement officials from Maluku and Sulawesi together to discuss the



Far left: Rescued White Cockatoos seek comfort with each other.

Above: Slash and burn is a common method of agriculture in Indonesia.

Upper and lower right: Eclectus Parrots and Black-capped Lorikeets regain their strength after rescue.



region's trafficking issues, the bulk of which focused on bird trade. Since 2016 a new directorate, civil and marine police, and navy units have been taking stronger measures in tackling wildlife smuggling issues in different parts of the country. Various NGOs have done fieldwork in the region recently, gathering new data on wildlife populations and trade impacts, adding important heft to this brand-new collaboration.

Addressing the issues will take no small amount of planning, as the number of islands, governments, and square kilometers involved in the trade in this area is staggering. Meeting attendees have already accomplished much by making contact with

each other and narrowing down key actions to focus on: monitoring the source, route and destination of trade, encouraging border control and detection, empowering law enforcement, and most crucially, housing and caring for the vast array of confiscated wildlife.

In the midst of this are the local people. Many have already had their lives severely affected by the loss of their natural resources to outsiders. To make up for it, many have turned to trapping to earn a meagre living. Because of this development, in order for anti-trade efforts to work it is imperative that local people have a say in the use of their country's natural bounty and benefit from its protection.

Concerning Confiscations

Since the meetings took place, officials in Ternate have confiscated birds which had been advertised on the Internet: twenty Red-flanked Lorikeets (*Chamosyna placentis*) and five Violet-necked Lorikeets (*Eos squamata*).

Another seizure, with seven Black-capped Lorikeets (*Lorius lory*), three Chattering Lorikeets (*Lorius garrulus*), one Ornate Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus ornatus*), one Yellow-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua sulphurea*), and one Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*), took place in Sulawesi province Gorontalo, when someone tried to sell some of them through Facebook. They are now recovering at Tasikoki Wildlife Rescue Centre in northern Sulawesi.

The latest confiscation took place in November 2017, when 125 parrots (White Cockatoos *Cacatua alba*, and Eclectus Parrots *Eclectus roratus*) were seized from four smugglers in four regions on Halmahera Island.

The World Parrot Trust is on site assisting in the rehabilitation of the birds, and has provided funding for nutritious food, and training for proper care. WPT will continue to support these birds in their recovery, with the hope that some can be returned to their historical ranges.



Upper left: The careful cleaning of damaged feathers begins.

Upper right: Transporting confiscated birds to Tasikoki.

Lower left: Nutritious foods help feed hungry birds and promote their recovery.

Lower right: WPT's Mehd Halaouate with Tasikoki staff and government workers.

Encouraging community engagement through education and awareness outreach and endorsing sustainable and alternative livelihoods for all is paramount.

The hard work begins

Mehd Halaouate, World Parrot Trust's Indonesia Program Manager, and Angela D'Alessio from Tasikoki Wildlife Rescue, have begun leading the charge. They recently took an ambitious number of trips around Wallacea to provide wildlife management training and to collaborate with officials, spending two weeks in the field in Ternate, Halmahera, Bacan and Obi islands. Together, they are encouraging authorities to work together to coordinate confiscations, urgent care and rehabilitation efforts. On Ternate Island in particular, forestry workers are faced with an influx of birds – White Cockatoos, Eclactus and Great-billed Parrots, Violet-necked, Red-flanked,

Yellow and Green, and Chattering Lorries – from neighbouring islands. Outside of the region brings bBack-capped Lorries, Sulphur-crested and Palm Cockatoos, and various Racquet-tailed species. Bait birds, which are used to attract wild birds for capture, are being seized in an effort to slow the trappers down. The situation is sometimes overwhelming.

Valuable skills are being taught; these include the delicate art of handfeeding chicks, instructions in housing, husbandry and enrichment, and preparation of suitable birds for eventual release. Hands-on learning occasionally happens: a recently confiscated White Cockatoo chick still begging for food proved to be the perfect teacher in one of the sessions.

Forestry staff have received guidance on species and subspecies identification as all too often, but with the best of intentions, birds are released into the

wild in the wrong areas. Still to come is training and the dispersal of educational materials for the local people so they can begin to lead birders into the forest, and then benefit from the parrots being there. Educational banners and other materials will be dispersed, bringing the word about parrots and their plight in the wild to as many people as possible.

This is just the beginning in what will be a relentless effort on many levels, all in a bid to untangle the complicated and seedy world of the wild bird trade in Wallacea. It will not be easy, but with regional and international cooperation, and determination, it's hoped that wild parrots will begin to fly free without fear of capture in Indonesia again. □

Many thanks to these NGOs: Tasikoki Wildlife Rescue Centre, ProFauna Indonesia, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, WCS-Indonesia, Burung Indonesia, Indonesia Parrot Project, Haribon Foundation, Wildlife Reserves Singapore.