

Brazil cracks down on lucrative wild animal trade

May 1 2012, by Claire de Oliveira



A macaw rescued from traffickers in a cage at Cetas, a recovery center for wild animals, near Rio de Janeiro. According to non-governmental organization Renctas, 38 million wild animals are poached from the forest every year in Brazil.

Blue-and-yellow macaws from Amazonia, green parrots, monkeys, turtles, anacondas and pumas: wild animal trafficking is a very lucrative business that spares no species in Brazil, including those facing extinction.

"According to our estimates, 38 million [wild animals](#), 80 percent of them birds, are poached from the forest every year in Brazil and nearly 90 percent died during transport," said Rauff Lima, a spokesman for the non-governmental organization Renctas (National Network to Fight Trafficking of Wild Animals).

But Renctas says the traffickers don't worry about the losses as the sale of a single specimen can earn them a profit in an industry now worth nearly \$2 billion a year, the most profitable illegal trade after arms and drugs.

In 2001, the organization released the first national report on wildlife trafficking.

In that year, the last wild Little Blue Macaw -- considered one of the world's most endangered species -- disappeared from the northeastern state of Bahia and today only 70 others remain in captivity around the world.

"They are held by private collectors who acquired them illegally," Lima told AFP.

On average, federal police seize 250,000 wild animals per year and the Brazilian environmental agency Ibama captures another 45,000 during controls that have been significantly stepped up in recent years.



Two Brazilian black-tufted marmosets rescued from traffickers in a cage at Cetas, a recovery center for wild animals, near Rio de Janeiro. On average, federal police seize 250,000 wild animals per year.

At Cetas, the Rio Wildlife Screening Center, which is linked to Ibama, veterinarian Daniel Neves cares for 1,600 animals, many of which were rescued in starving or sick conditions from Brazilian [poachers](#).

Located in a wooded area some 75 kilometers (45 miles) from downtown Rio, Cetas resembles a zoo. Macaws are homed in a vast cage, or "flight corridor," where they can move relatively freely ahead of their future release.

Nearby, some 700 bird cages are stacked up precariously on top of each other.

The animals "remain in quarantine until their health improves,"

explained Neves. "The aim is to release them into the wild but we succeed for only 20 to 30 percent of them."

The macaws could be sent to zoos but these are already overcrowded, according to the veterinarian, who says Brazil should pass legislation to make animal adoption easier.

"It's a real problem because they (the macaws) are no longer able to fend for themselves in the wild," Neves told AFP.

Brazil, Latin America's largest country with a land area of 8.5 million square kilometers (3.2 million square miles), is considered to have the greatest biodiversity on the planet.

It has 530 species of mammal, 1,800 bird species, 680 different kinds of reptiles, 800 amphibian species and 3,000 varieties of fish.

According to the environment ministry, 627 species now face extinction, a threefold increase in 15 years.

Hunting animals is banned in [Brazil](#), as is holding any wild animal in captivity except in the rare cases of authorized breeding.

With increasing help from Brazil's intelligence services, police have succeeded in tightening the noose on the traffickers, choking off some of the profits from their [illegal trade](#).

To buy a green parrot on the black market or a tucan poached from the wild costs less than 100 dollars while it is worth ten times more in a legal store.

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