

Global trade in exotic pets threatens endangered parrots through the spread of a virus

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Juvenile CITES Endangered Mauritius 'Echo' Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) displaying severe symptoms of PBFD including feather dystrophy. Credit: Deborah Fogell

Beak and feather disease virus (BFDV) in wild parrot populations has been detected in eight new countries, raising concerns for threatened species.

The new countries where BFDV was found are Bangladesh, Pakistan, Japan, Nigeria, Seychelles, Vietnam, Senegal and The Gambia and were identified in a study led by Deborah Fogell in the University of Kent's Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) in collaboration with The World Parrot Trust, Zoological Society of London, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Seychelles Island Foundation and Vinh University.

The study highlights the need for greater awareness of the risks of the spread of infectious disease associated with the [international trade](#) in live [parrots](#).

Parrots are among the most threatened bird groups and are susceptible to a number of [infectious diseases](#). They are also among the most frequently traded birds listed by the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the illegal trade has already driven the cross-border movement of over 19 million parrots since 1975.

This movement has aided the establishment of numerous parrot populations outside of their native distributions, most notably the highly invasive Rose-ringed parakeet which is now known to have breeding populations in over 35 countries across five continents.

BFDV, believed to have originated in Australasia, is a well-known cause of infectious disease in captive parrots. Affected birds can develop feather abnormalities, claw and beak deformities and the disease may lead to eventual death, particularly in juveniles.

The first detection of BFDV in wild parrots native to southern and Southeast Asia and western Africa in this study highlights the need for

further research in these regions and may have implications for the conservation of vulnerable [species](#) that also exist there.

This study indicates that there are very close relationships between genetic sequences from wild populations across globally distinct regions and that there have been multiple introduction events to western Africa.

Deborah Fogell said: 'The successful establishment of invasive species like Rose-ringed parakeets can be devastating to small island populations or threatened species. Not only through competition for resources, but by exposing them to a virus like BFDV which may pose an important additional threat to species that are already suffering the pressures of low genetic diversity and habitat loss'.

More information: Deborah J. Fogell et al, Trade and conservation implications of new beak and feather disease virus detection in native and introduced parrots, *Conservation Biology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/cobi.13214](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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