

# Parrot poachers striking while the market's hot

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Credit: Konservasi Kakatua Indonesia

"Pretty" parrots are more likely to be snatched up for Indonesia's illegal wildlife trade, a new study reveals.

The findings not only expose the key drivers behind the country's illegal trade in these birds, but offer lessons for the potential emergence and spread of infectious diseases that jump from animals to humans—like

COVID and avian flu.

The study, involving researchers from The Australian National University (ANU), analyzed two decades worth of data on the illegal trade of parrots in Southeast Asia.

The researchers found some key reasons parrots were at risk of being poached—with a bird's attractiveness and the ability to sell it on legal markets being two main motivations.

"High demand for parrots as pets, and their removal from the wild for the trade have significantly contributed to their severe decline worldwide," co-author Professor Rob Heinsohn from ANU said.

"One-third of the nearly 400 parrot [species](#) are threatened by extinction today.

"But while the trade is vast, not every parrot species is at equal risk of being traded."

The team used a popular criminological model to analyze the factors associated with traded parrots in Indonesia, the country shown to be most in need of parrot conservation.

They found several key factors were good indicators of trade variation: whether it was possible to legally export the parrot species; the attractiveness of the species, including its color, brightness, size and ability to mimic sounds; and whether the species lived in an area of high human population density.

"This suggests that demand and opportunity-based factors together can partially explain the illegal parrot trade in Indonesia," lead author, Professor Stephen Pires from Florida International University, said.

"It indicates people are targeting attractive species that are easier to sell in licit markets, and that there is a cross-cultural preference for particular parrot species, especially ones that have been historically overexploited."

The overlap between the domestic and international trade of certain Indonesian parrot species suggests a high number of wild-caught birds are mislabelled as 'captive-bred' so they can be legally exported.

"More efficient law enforcement is needed urgently," Professor Heinsohn said.

"Further strategies to reduce the [trade](#) of [parrots](#) could take the form of nest protection, as well as educational campaigns targeting children and consumers."

The study has been published in *Biological Conservation*.

**More information:** Stephen F. Pires et al, What drives the illegal parrot trade? Applying a criminological model to market and seizure data in Indonesia, *Biological Conservation* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.biocon.2021.109098](#)

Provided by Australian National University

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