

Press Release: for immediate release: 9 December 2004

## GROUPS URGE EU TO END WILD BIRD IMPORTS

More than 200 non-governmental organizations today called for a permanent ban on the importation of wild-caught birds into the European Union, stating that the trade imperils species, causes needless suffering, and subjects humans to risks of deadly disease. The *European Union Wild Bird Declaration* was delivered to Member States, EU Commissioners, and Members of the European Parliament.

The *Declaration* urges the EU to extend its current moratorium on bird imports from Asia, set to expire Wednesday, into a permanent ban covering all wild-caught birds. Signers of the *Declaration*, including the RSPCA, Defenders of Wildlife, Greenpeace, American Bird Conservancy, Pro Wildlife and the World Parrot Trust, warn that continued trade in wild birds exposes Europeans to potentially deadly outbreaks of infectious diseases like Asian bird flu, which has already killed 32 people in 2004.

The European Union is by far the world's largest consumer of wild-caught birds, accounting for more than 80% of imports worldwide—roughly a million birds each year. The health threat posed by this trade was underscored in October when wild eagles carried into Brussels from Thailand tested positive for a deadly strain of Asian bird flu. Health experts have identified this strain as among the most lethal viruses known, killing more than 70% of people infected. The World Health Organization has cautioned that Asian bird flu could give rise to a global pandemic like the one that killed an estimated 40-50 million people in 1918-1919. "The presence of infected birds in the aircraft cabin threatened hundreds of passengers with a deadly disease," said James Gilardi, Ph.D., Director of the World Parrot Trust. "We can no longer ignore the serious health risks posed by the wild bird trade. Eliminating imports of wild birds is a simple and effective way to contain the risk of future outbreaks."

"Nor can we afford the costly threats to the EU poultry industry," continued Gilardi. "Earlier this year, parrots imported to Italy from Pakistan tested positive for the deadly form of Exotic Newcastle Disease, yet the EU's early warning system failed and EU poultry vets were unable to take appropriate precautions." As asserted in the *Declaration*, outbreaks of this and other bird-borne diseases frequently cost industry and taxpayers hundreds of millions of Euros to contain.

In addition to its human and economic impacts, the signatories detail how the bird trade subjects millions of birds to inhumane treatment, threatens conservation efforts for hundreds of species, and puts many species at risk of extinction. Because of these impacts, many countries have already abandoned the trade, leaving the EU as world's largest remaining market.



International commercial trade in the Lilac-crowned Amazon was recently outlawed in response to widespread declines due to overharvest for the pet trade.

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African Greys are among the most heavily harvested of all parrots, with tens of thousands arriving in the EU each year. Many fail to survive the arduous journey due to disease and inhumane treatment. © Jan Rodts, Bird Protection Belgium

The *Declaration* points out the inconsistency of protecting native birds under the European Birds Directive while importing wild parrots and songbirds from developing countries by the millions. "As the largest consumer of wild caught birds globally, the EU must bear the responsibility of the welfare as well as conservation issues that lie behind this trade" said David Bowles, Head of External Affairs at the RSPCA. "Poor welfare at all stages from trapping to importation not only effects individual birds it also negatively impacts on conservation," added Bowles.

Current EU import rules have failed to control these impacts, allowing trade to continue long after it has proven

unsustainable. “Nearly one bird species in five is facing possible extinction and trade is a significant threat for many of these species. Existing protections simply can’t keep pace with this threat” says Carroll Muffett, Senior Director for International Conservation at Defenders of Wildlife.

The Declaration calls on the European Commission to adopt legislation to ban imports and bring Europe’s policies into line with other developed nations, like Australia and the United States. The track record of similar acts has been remarkably positive - infectious diseases drop off dramatically, legal and illegal imports decline, domestic bird production thrives, and poaching of wild birds plummets. “The USA’s Wild Bird Conservation Act is widely acknowledged by the conservation community, legislators, and bird breeders as one of the most effective pieces of conservation legislation ever passed in the United States,” said Michael J. Parr, Vice President for Program Development at the American Bird Conservancy.



For every live bird in an EU pet shop, several wild birds die during capture or transport, such as these bee eaters dead on arrival from Africa. Jan Rodts, Birdprotection Belgium

“Twelve years ago, the U.S. recognized its responsibility as a major market and effectively banned wild bird imports,” added Muffett. “It’s time the EU did the same.”

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The full text of the *Declaration* and a complete list of signatories is available at:  
<http://www.worldparrottrust.org/trade/eudeceng.htm>

Photographs are available at:  
<http://www.worldparrottrust.org/trade/eudecpicslow.htm>  
<http://www.worldparrottrust.org/trade/eudecpicshigh.htm>

Contacts:

**World Parrot Trust**

James D. Gilardi, Ph.D., Director (USA) Tel: +1-530-756-6340 E-mail: [gilardi@worldparrottrust.org](mailto:gilardi@worldparrottrust.org)  
Cristiana Senni, Trade Specialist (Italy) Tel: + 39-06-503-4575 E-mail: [senni@worldparrottrust.org](mailto:senni@worldparrottrust.org)  
Alison Hales, WPT Trustee (UK) Tel: + 44-1736-753-365 E-mail: [ali@paradisepark.org.uk](mailto:ali@paradisepark.org.uk)

**Defenders of Wildlife**

Carroll Muffett, Senior Director for International Conservation (USA)  
Tel: +1-202-682-9400 ext. 293 E-mail: [CMuffett@defenders.org](mailto:CMuffett@defenders.org)

**American Bird Conservancy**

Michael J. Parr, Vice President for Program Development (USA)  
Tel: +1-202-452-1535 ex 204 E-mail: [mparr@abcbirds.org](mailto:mparr@abcbirds.org)

**Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

David Bowles, Head of External Affairs (UK)  
Tel: +44-870-7540-272 E-mail: [dbowles@rspca.org.uk](mailto:dbowles@rspca.org.uk)

**ProWildlife**

Daniela Freyer (Germany)  
Wildlife Trade Campaigner  
Tel: +49-89-81299-507 E-mail: [daniela.freyer@prowildlife.de](mailto:daniela.freyer@prowildlife.de)

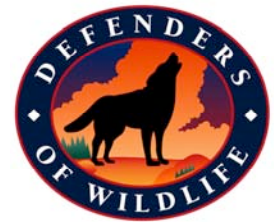
Initial fears that legislation to stop the import of wild birds into the USA would significantly increase illegal trade have proven unfounded. In fact the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 is widely acknowledged by the conservation community, legislators, and bird breeders as one of the most effective pieces of conservation legislation ever passed in the United States. That Europe has not yet passed similar legislation is both strange, and sadly for many birds that continue to die in transit, tragic. The bird trade has also affected populations of some of the world's rarest birds. As the world's largest importer, it is time to the EU to ban imports.



Michael J. Parr  
Vice President for Program Development  
American Bird Conservancy

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"Nearly one bird species in eight is facing possible extinction and trade is a significant threat for many of these species. International protections for parrots and other birds simply can't keep pace with the demand for them. Twelve years ago, the U.S. recognized its responsibility as a major market and banned wild bird imports," said Muffett. "It's time the EU did the same."



Carroll Muffett  
Senior Director for International Conservation  
Defenders of Wildlife

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"Between 1996 and 2002, the 25 States that now form the EU reported the importation of over 6 million birds, 86% of the global trade. In addition, thousands of specimens of unregulated bird species also enter the European pet trade each year. As the world's largest importer of wild birds, the European Union has a unique responsibility for their conservation.."



Daniela Freyer  
Pro Wildlife e.V.

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"The EU, as the largest consumer of wild caught birds globally must bear the responsibility of the welfare as well as conservation issues that lie behind this trade. Poor welfare at all stages from trapping to importation not only effects individual birds it also negatively impacts on conservation. Wild birds need more protection and we urge the EU to play its part by halting all further imports. "



David Bowles  
Head, External Affairs  
RSPCA

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Wild bird imports are a clear and recurring threat to the European poultry industry with massive and costly disease outbreaks. Earlier this year, parrots from Pakistan tested positive for the deadly form of Exotic Newcastle Disease in Italy, yet the EU's early warning system failed and the poultry industry was unable to take appropriate precautions. We can no longer ignore the health risks this trade poses and the costs it imposes on society, eliminating imports of wild birds is a simple and effective way to contain the risk of future outbreaks.



James D. Gilardi, Ph.D.  
Director, World Parrot Trust