

Taking Pet Birds To Mexico

Guide to forms and permits needed for moving to Mexico with your birds.

By Sunny Snow

Mexico calls its siren song of warm climates, friendly people and affordable prices to retiring baby boomers. Many retirees have pet birds as their immediate family members. Their first question is, "Can I take my pet bird to Mexico with me?" After all, it is unthinkable to leave this important family member behind in the United States.

It's better to have more paperwork than necessary, than not enough once you've crossed the border.

We bought our home on the Yucatan's Gulf coast in a little fishing village with the intention of retiring there. Then I started researching how to bring our pet birds — an umbrella cockatoo, a sun conure and a bronze-winged pionus — to our Mexican home. Everyone I talked to said it could not be done, and if you did bring birds into Mexico, they could never return to the United States. Being a stubborn, yet optimistic, person, I jumped on finding the solution to bring our entire family to Mexico, which was a two-year effort.

Birds can be imported to Mexico and, yes, they can return to the United States. It requires a tremendous pile of paperwork and enormous patience. It also requires the idea that even though all the paperwork — plus some — has been properly completed, there will probably be something missing — just because. The key is to remain extremely flexible, cooperative and smile in the face of adversity.

Once we set our projected move date (to be adjusted several times over the summer due to non-receipt of paperwork), I started the hardcore paperwork. This was about six months prior to our departure date.

Research Your Bird Species

The first step is to find the bird's scientific name and endangered species Appendice Category according to the Convention On International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Web searching the bird's common name on the Internet or checking the encyclopedia are methods to find out the scientific name. The appendice lists are on the CITES website where by typing the scientific name of the bird on their species database, it lists the Appendice. If there is a problem finding out the Appendice Category or if there are additional questions, the email for CITES is info@cites.org.

Appendice II is for lesser-endangered species. Appendice I is for species in greater danger of extinction. If the bird is on the Appendice I list, it might require additional paperwork and the authorities will give it greater scrutiny than if it is on the Appendice II list.

The first paperwork to complete is the CITES export papers with the United States. The Management Authority for the United States is U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS). Its email is managementauthority@fws.gov. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service customer service phone number is 1-800-344-WILD and the phone to the management authority is 1-800-358-2104. The people are helpful and pleasant.

Form 3-200-46 Import/Export of Personal Pets (CITES and/or Wild Bird Conservation Act) is the form required to receive the CITES Export permit from the U.S. The fee is \$50 and the form and instructions can be printed out [here](#). Approval of this request takes a minimum of 60 days and can take more than 90 days. Our permit took more than 60 days.

Provide as much information as possible about your bird, how it will travel and in what size and type of cage/carrier, etc. on this form. The more information provided, the better chance the paperwork will be completed without requiring additional information.

When USFWS receives a request and fee, it sends a letter with the file number and verification that the papers arrived in its office. Once the request has been given for someone to review and process, that person will call or e-mail the applicant to tell them their request is being processed. Depending upon the complexity of the request, once the paperwork is under review, it takes about 1 to 2 weeks to issue the permit.

To speed everything up, I recommend sending the papers to USFWS via FEDEX and include a pre-paid return envelope

for FEDEX overnight so the permit will be tracked back to the applicant. Once the permit is completed, the person reviewing the request will fax a copy of the permit to the applicant, if needed.

For permits for an Appendice I bird, the paperwork must be sent to the Management Authority in Mexico concurrently because USFWS will not issue an export permit without the import permit from Mexico. Likewise, Mexico will not issue an import permit without the export permit from the U.S. How's that for a Catch-22? What happens is they call each other on the phone and do a simultaneous permit issue. (Note: since USFWS has a huge backup of permit requests, the website recommends waiting four weeks after sending the paperwork to USFWS before sending the import request papers to Mexico. This is only for an Appendice I bird.)

For exporting Appendice II birds, the U.S. doesn't require the import permit from Mexico so it is not necessary to send the paperwork to Mexico simultaneously. (Note: wait until receipt of the U.S. CITES export permit before sending papers to Mexico.)

With receipt of the CITES Export Permit from the United States, it is now time to send for the CITES Import Permit from Mexico. People might say that it is not necessary to have a CITES Import Permit from Mexico. Every time authorities in Mexico stopped us, they asked for this permit, so it is necessary. It is better to have more paperwork than necessary rather than insufficient paperwork once across the border. Again, I recommend all paperwork be sent via FEDEX with an enclosed, pre-paid return FEDEX envelope so the permit will be returned quickly and it can be tracked.