

Ban Of Capturing And Exporting Of Mexican Wild Parrots Passed As Law

New bill aimed to help repopulate Mexico's native wild parrot species

By Angela Pham

Posted: October 31, 2008, 3:00 a.m. EDT

Courtesy of Environmental Enforcement Agency (PROFEPA)
Birds captured in the wild are stuffed into a cage to be sold at a later date.

Introduced a year ago to the Mexican Senate, a bill that bans the capture and export of Mexican wild parrots was signed into law Oct. 14, 2008, giving environmentalists hope that endangered Mexican parrot species populations will recover from years of illegal trade.

After the Defenders of Wildlife and Teyeliz, A.C., presented a report in 2007 that discussed the damaging extent of the illegal parrot trade in Mexico, Congress took note.

Titled "The Illegal Parrot Trade in Mexico: A Comprehensive Assessment," the report shared statistics that startled the Mexican government and inspired the Senate to pass the new bill unanimously. It declared that an estimated 65,000 to 78,500 wild parrots and macaws are captured illegally each year, with more than 75 percent of the birds dying before reaching a purchaser.

Juan Carlos Cantu Guzman, director of Mexican programs for Defenders of Wildlife, said he estimates that at least 50 to 60 percent of all illegal parrot trading will stop immediately once the bill takes effect. Over time, he expects the illegal activity to decline even further.

Those who continue dealing with the illegal bird trade and are caught with birds that inhabit natural protected areas of Mexico will face a jail sentence of up to 12 years. Already, the threat of government intervention has stopped some illegal. After word of the bill was first distributed to the Mexican public in newspapers, television and radio, Guzman noted a visible decline in wild parrots sold on the streets. Now that the bill is officially published, he hopes the effect will become even greater.

But while deterring the practice of illegal parrot trade is the primary goal of the bill, educating the public on the significance of the ban is also essential.

Parrots have been part of Mexican culture as far back as the Aztecs and Mayans; initially as a food source to use of parrot feathers in art. Keeping an exotic, wild parrot as a pet in the household is not uncommon among Mexican families, and trying to turn this culture around will be no simple task.

Guzman said that although keeping captive-bred and legally imported parrot species will remain legal for Mexican citizens, owning a wild native parrot will no longer be an option.

"It's something that is going to take a long time for people to realize," he said. "Most of the species are threatened with extinction. If they keep demanding more Mexican parrots, illegal trade is going to continue, and most of the species will no longer be in the wild."

Such species include orange-fronted parakeets, white-fronted parrots, yellow-cheeked parrots and the military macaw, which are the most often trapped species.

To keep citizens informed and persuaded of the new ban, a bi-national public education campaign is set to begin soon to coincide with the passing of the new law and to help discourage the purchasing of illegal parrots on the streets.

The campaign will be vast, said Peter Jenkins, director of international programs for Defenders of Wildlife. Hundreds of bus shelter ads will be placed at bus stops in major Mexican cities, and thousands of posters will also be distributed, along with comic books designed to educate children and resource guides for teachers. Videos will also be prepared for bus companies and taxis, and Guzman will also speak on the topic on his radio show.



Based on a past outreach project led by Guzman that dealt with educating the public about sea turtles, the campaign has a good model to build on, Jenkins said.

"We think that the law in combination with our major outreach in public education campaign will have a good effect," he said.