

# The realities of parrot CONSERVATION



"Babylon & Sammy" (Moluccan Cockatoos) by Jeannie White

Captive-bred and raised parrots are not domesticated animals. They are wild creatures — often only one or two generations removed from their native habitats. Even though the U.S. banned importation of most species of captured birds with the 1992 Wild Bird Conservation Act, most other countries continue to allow trapping and export or import of wild-caught birds, and a significant number of the captive parrots now in homes and rescue programs are wild-caught. As a result, parrot species have suffered devastating and irrevocable depletion of populations. Habitat destruction, encroachment of human development, and consumption of natural resources are partly responsible for the numerous species at risk of extinction. However, recent studies have proven that poaching for the legal and illegal wild bird trade plays a far greater role in the global decline of parrot populations in the wild.

While aviculturists argue that captive breeding will conserve parrot species by preserving the gene pool, the reality is quite the opposite. Domestic or captive rearing of exotic birds contributes nothing to save species in the wild. The vast majority of captive breeding occurs outside of official conservation programs and is not based on natural selection. Since parrot survival skills and social behavior are determined by generations of evolution and interaction with parents, the flock, and the environment, the probability of successfully releasing captive-bred birds into a species' habitat of origin — assuming that habitat is still intact — is extremely minimal. Moreover, the marketing of captive-bred birds increases the demand for birds as pets, thus increasing the incentive for legal and illegal trapping of wild birds for sale to private individuals who wish keep them as pets, dealers seeking cheap "inventory," collectors, and aviculturists seeking genetic diversity for breeding stock.



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