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Illegal wild bird trade found thriving in Nicaragua

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Conservationists in Nicaragua are calling for urgent measures to help control the country's illegal capture and trade in wild birds.

The call comes after a BBC journalist, posing as an interested foreign buyer, was offered a number of parrot species, many for sale on the roadside. The same journalist was later offered a Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguous*, listed by BirdLife and IUCN as Endangered, meaning that it faces a very high risk of extinction in the wild.

"In the capital of Nicaragua, any tourist can buy all kinds of threatened species, in particular those from the Psittacid [parrot] family," said Jose Manuel Zolotoff of Fundacion Cocibolca (BirdLife's project partner in Nicaragua). "You can get a sense of how profitable the trade is when a Great Green Macaw and Scarlet Macaw can be sold in a buffer zone for an average of \$200-\$400 [USD], being sold in the US for up to \$2,000 [USD]."

In 2004, a national monitoring study in Nicaragua found parrot numbers had decreased by 69%, compared to previous monitoring exercises in 1999. The decline was put down to habitat loss and exportation for trade. As a result of the study, CITES, the convention governing international trade in species, recommended a ban on all parrot exportations in Nicaragua.

Since the ban though, illegal capture and trade has become a critical issue facing the country's birds.

"..these are problems that we must address if we are to save many of these species from a near certain extinction." —Jose Manuel Zolotoff, Fundacion Cocibolca

In a BBC News article, Nicaragua's Environment Minister, Cristobal Sequiera, expressed frustration in controlling the problem, citing economic pressure and lack of awareness as factors driving the illegal trade.

"These people are poor. They don't understand that we are trying to attract eco-tourists and that those tourists want to see Nicaragua's beauty." Mr Sequiera is quoted as saying.

"When we tell the poachers they could get real jobs in the tourism industry, they don't see it's in their interests to leave the birds alone."

"The other problem is the lack of financial resources of MARENA [Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources/Ministerio del Ambiente y Recursos Naturales] to hire rangers to cover extensive amount of protected areas and buffer zones." said Zolotoff.

"But these are problems that we must address if we are to save many of these species from a near certain extinction."

Fundacion Cocibolca are currently putting together Nicaragua's first directory of Important Bird Areas, alongside another organisation, Alianza para las Areas Silvestres (ALAS, Alliance for Natural Areas).

Using BirdLife's IBA programme, the organisations are working to form a foundation for site monitoring and protection – both of which will become crucial components in future efforts to control the country's illegal wild bird



Martin Lezama

Great Green Macaw: threatened by illegal trade in Nicaragua.

[Zoom In](#)



Martin Lezama

Parrots are particularly threatened by the international trade in wild birds.

[Zoom In](#)

trade.

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