



## HORNBILLS: WILD SPECIMENS IN TRADE DECLARED AS CAPTIVE-BRED

Globally, there are approximately 60 species of hornbills, all of which are restricted largely to forest habitats in Africa and Asia (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2013). These large birds play an essential role as seed dispensers in the various ecosystems they inhabit.

Many hornbills are threatened, usually by the loss of forest and large nesting trees, but in many cases by subsistence and commercial hunting and capture for trade. Hornbill meat is consumed in some parts of the birds' range, their tail feathers used as ornamental objects or in traditional dress, and the ivory-like casques unique to one species—the Helmeted Hornbill *Rhinoplax vigil*—are carved and traded for decorative purposes. Live hornbills are also traded for pets and display.

Some species are of urgent conservation priority, such as the Sulu Hornbill *Anthracoceros montani* which is endemic to a few small islands in the Philippines, and which is now thought to number as few as 40 in the wild due to loss of habitat, hunting for local consumption and trade (BirdLife International, 2012).

On 24 to 26 April 2013, experts from around the world gathered in Manila, Philippines, for the 6th International Hornbill Conference. The meeting, entitled *Hornbills and caring communities: helping forests to thrive*, provided a platform for the sharing of research findings and knowledge on in situ and ex situ conservation efforts and needs.

The Philippines was an ideal location for hosting the conference, having six species of hornbill, all of which are endemic to the archipelago nation. TRAFFIC gave a presentation on the international trade in Papuan Hornbills *Rhyticeros plicatus* from the Solomon Islands in a paper entitled *Trade of 'captive-bred' birds from the Solomon Islands: a closer look at the global trade in hornbills*. This was a follow-up to the TRAFFIC report *The export and re-export of CITES-listed birds from the Solomon Islands* (Shepherd *et al.*, 2012), launched in July 2012 ([http://www.traffic.org/species-reports/traffic\\_species\\_birds17.pdf](http://www.traffic.org/species-reports/traffic_species_birds17.pdf)), which highlighted the large-scale laundering of wild-caught CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered

Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) listed birds from the Solomon Islands, fraudulently declared as being captive-bred. Among the birds imported from the Solomon Islands between 2002 and 2010 were 940 Papuan Hornbills. Of these, 660 were declared as being captive-bred despite the Solomon Islands having no commercial breeding facilities for birds. In all, 890 of the 940 Papuan Hornbills exported from the Solomon Islands were imported by Singapore, including 460 declared as being captive-bred, illustrating the major role played by Singapore in the global bird trade.

The TRAFFIC paper presented at the 6th International Hornbill Conference called for governments of importing countries to be far more prudent and cautious when processing imports of birds that are declared as captive-bred, such as hornbills. Hornbills mature late in life and reproduce slowly, making commercial captive-breeding, especially in large numbers, an unlikely prospect.

The Solomon Islands has been the most significant source of hornbills for the international market. Between 1995 (the first record of the Solomon Islands exporting hornbills) and 2011 (the last year for which records are available, albeit incomplete) a total of 1080 Papuan Hornbills were recorded by other countries as having been imported from the Solomon Islands. To put this in context, over that period the entire international trade in CITES-listed hornbills (18 species exported from 22 countries) amounted to 1498 individuals. Thus for almost two decades, the Solomon Islands dominated the global trade in hornbills, accounting for over 70% of total exports.

Apart from wild-caught hornbills, the Solomon Islands also exported captive-bred hornbills—688 birds in total. This amounts to almost 70% of all captive-bred hornbill exports globally, greatly exceeding all other countries. Singapore stands out as an important importer, exporter and re-exporter of hornbills. The EU countries were an important importer of captive-bred hornbills, although no single country stands out. The United Arab Emirates, however, has also imported a significant number of hornbills. Most of their imports were from Singapore, although in 2009 they imported 15 captive-bred *Aceros* hornbills (species not known)

from Bahrain. Given the unlikelihood that hornbills are being bred in captivity, the relatively high proportion of trade in purportedly captive bred hornbills should have sent warning signs, and led individual CITES authorities from importing countries to question this trade (Nijman and Shepherd, in press). TRAFFIC encourages Parties engaged in trade in hornbills to increase co-operative efforts and to enhance implementation of national regulations to ensure wild-caught hornbills are not being laundered into the international market falsely declared as captive-bred.

TRAFFIC congratulates the organizers and the Government of the Philippines as the host country of the 6th International Hornbill Conference and encourages all range States to put measures in place that will ensure hunting and trade is not a threat to the conservation of hornbills.

The 7th International Hornbill Conference is likely to be held in Malaysia, in the State of Sarawak. The emblem of Sarawak is the magnificent Rhinoceros Hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros*, making this State, which is also home to seven other hornbill species, a suitable host for the meeting.

## Protection urgently needed for the endemic Sumatran Laughingthrush

The illegal and unsustainable cage bird trade in Indonesia is a serious threat to many birds in that country, with some species now close to extinction. According to BirdLife International (2013), Indonesia has 122 Globally Threatened bird species—more than any other country in South-east Asia—with trade a critical threat to many. The Sumatran Laughingthrush *Garrulax bicolor* is one of these.

Until recently, the Sumatran Laughingthrush was considered a subspecies of the White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*, but was recently elevated to a full species (Collar, 2006). The White-crested Laughingthrush is native to the north and north-eastern Indian subcontinent, south-eastern Tibet Autonomous Region and south-western China, Myanmar, Thailand and parts of Indochina, while the Sumatran Laughingthrush is endemic to the Indonesian island of Sumatra, where it is found in the mountainous regions (van Marle and Voous, 1988; BirdLife International, 2012). It is seriously threatened by capture for the domestic trade in cage birds (Shepherd, 2007; Shepherd, 2010; BirdLife International, 2012; Collar *et al.*, 2012). The Sumatran Laughingthrush moves about in groups and is attracted to decoys, making it easy to trap (Collar *et al.*, 2012). Recent evidence suggests that this species has undergone a considerable decline and is now known to be present at only a small number of sites (BirdLife International, 2012). While it is not included in the list of protected species in Indonesia, there is no quota for this species and therefore harvest and trade is not permitted (Shepherd, 2010). Currently, the Sumatran Laughingthrush is assessed as being Vulnerable by the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (BirdLife International, 2012).

## References

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## Market surveys in Medan and Jakarta

During the course of 65 surveys carried out by TRAFFIC between 1997 and 2008 in Medan and Jakarta, trade in Sumatran Laughingthrushes was observed being carried out at alarming levels (Shepherd, 2006; Shepherd, 2007; Shepherd, 2010). Some 82 individuals were observed during two spot checks in 2008. In June 2012, TRAFFIC visited the three largest bird markets in Jakarta, and noted a total of seven Sumatran Laughingthrushes being offered for sale for IDR500 000–750 000 (USD50–75 each). In 2013, a reliable source reported to TRAFFIC observing a combined total of approximately 80 specimens on four occasions at Pramuka Bird Market during January to March. Jatinegara and Barito bird markets in Jakarta were visited on 29 March but no Sumatran Laughingthrushes were observed. While turnover was not measured, bird dealers indicated that sales were brisk.

## Regulatory framework needed to monitor trade

In March 2013, TRAFFIC received a report, complete with photographs, of two Sumatran Laughingthrushes in a zoo in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, representing the first documented evidence of this species being displayed in a South-east Asian country outside Indonesia. As there is no quota for the capture of this species, it is likely these birds were illegally trapped in Sumatra and exported in violation of Indonesia's regulations.

While it is well documented (BirdLife International, 2012) that the Sumatran Laughingthrush is seriously threatened by unregulated harvest for commercial trade, too little is being done to address such practices. Efforts to close down the illegal bird trade in Indonesia have been minimal, as exemplified by the presence of vast numbers of birds, often illegally obtained and fully protected by