

## SECOND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN SONGBIRD CRISIS SUMMIT

**S**outh-east Asia is a hotspot for illegal and unsustainable trade in songbirds, leading to serious declines in many species. The vast majority of the songbirds in trade are taken from the wild, sought after for their attractive song, colourful plumage and their increasing rarity. Unfortunately, songbird conservation has not received the attention it deserves, and as a result, many species have slipped perilously close to extinction, all but unnoticed.

In September 2015, a group of concerned experts came together for the first Asian Songbird Trade Crisis Summit, held in Singapore, to begin the process of co-ordinating a response to the alarming numbers of songbirds trapped from the wild in South-east Asia for domestic and international trade (see *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 27(2):47). This unprecedented meeting in the region led to the development of the much-needed Conservation Strategy for Southeast Asian Songbirds in Trade.

In this strategy, four main themes of work were identified to reduce illegal and unsustainable bird trade in South-east Asia. These were: genetic and field research to fill in knowledge gaps on taxonomy, trends and status of wild populations; captive breeding and husbandry to establish and expand ex-situ assurance breeding colonies; community engagement, communication and education for a bottom-up approach involving trade actors and to raise awareness of the issues and key conservation efforts ultimately to reduce demand for songbirds; and trade legislation and increased monitoring of trade hubs and forums, and the lobbying for and support of increased enforcement actions at national and international levels.

Since the first meeting, TRAFFIC has greatly intensified efforts under the fourth theme in particular, to understand current levels of trade in markets throughout South-east Asia, looking at the species involved, numbers of each, and the levels of trade. This information has been published in a number of peer-reviewed papers and reports in an effort to make the information useful and accessible, and to influence others to join in the effort



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**Sharing the discussion outcomes following a break-out group activity on behaviour change.**

to end this crisis. The focus has also been on particular species in dire need of immediate conservation attention, including the Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufifrons*, which is now known from fewer than a dozen individuals, and others, such as the Sumatran Laughingthrush *G. bicolor* and the Greater Green Leafbird *Chloropsis sonnerati* (see pages 4–8 of this issue), all birds highly threatened by trade in Indonesia, the epicentre of the songbird trade crisis. These also contributed to the latest IUCN Red List update of 17 species threatened by the Indonesian cage bird trade—including the three aforementioned species—to reflect their current conservation status more accurately. While not all the species threatened by trade in Indonesia are protected by law, there is a zero quota for the harvest of any songbirds, which technically makes the trade in any of these species against Indonesian law and policy.

Other participating organizations and individuals have also made impressive progress on some actions over the past two years. For instance, a workshop convening trappers, traders and government officials to discuss issues and solutions to reduce unsustainable and illegal bird trade was organized in Kalimantan. Genetic research has yielded preliminary results elucidating the distinctiveness of sub-populations of priority species, ►



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**Participants at the second South-east Asian Songbird Crisis Summit, Jurong Bird Park, Singapore.**

► which is crucial to informing future conservation efforts. Assurance colonies have also grown for a number of priority species, with more breeding stock acquired and breeding facilities expanded.

From 19 to 21 February 2017, the second Asian Songbird Trade Crisis Summit, organized by Wildlife Reserves Singapore and TRAFFIC, took place at Jurong Bird Park, Singapore. Approximately 60 experts came together to discuss this progress and to look ahead to the implementation of the strategy. Participants discussed a variety of future actions ranging from advocating the closure of illegal markets, motivating enforcement actions, breeding highly threatened species in captivity for eventual release in the wild, and the need for further research and monitoring of trade and wild populations. Opportunities to raise global awareness of this crisis through campaigns by zoos were also discussed at length.

Other priority action areas included improving knowledge on wild populations, community-based interventions to reduce poaching and reduce demand for wild birds, supporting law enforcement successes along the trade chain and developing a plan for the rehabilitation and release of confiscated birds.

The Government of Indonesia is strongly encouraged to take immediate action to close down the markets facilitating the illegal and unsustainable trade in songbirds. It is also vital that the governments of other South-east Asian nations take stronger measures to protect songbirds from unsustainable over-exploitation and shut down pet shops and markets facilitating illegal trade.

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**Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*, one of the Tier 1 species identified in the first Summit, was recently uplisted from Vulnerable to Endangered.**

*Report by Serene C.L. Chng, James A. Eaton, and Adam E. Miller*

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that the greatest threats to Indonesia's avian species are illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade and habitat loss largely due to conversion of forest to agricultural production (Sodhi and Brook, 2006). Yet, our understanding of the nature and severity of these impacts on most species is limited, with basic information on the current population status of avian species in Indonesia lacking (Lee *et al.*, 2017). Over 169 avian species in Indonesia are now listed as globally threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and BirdLife International (2016a), with harvest and trade to meet national demand amongst the leading threats. A number of these species are in demand in Indonesia for the popular hobby of bird keeping, which is also seen as a sign of wealth, sophistication, and status (Jepson and Ladle, 2005; Jepson *et al.*, 2011), and it is this practice which is driving demand for the capture of wild birds.

# GREATER GREEN

## the trade in South-east Asia

Monitoring bird markets is an important tool to gain insights into the dynamics of the wild bird trade and to identify species of concern (Courchamp *et al.*, 2006; Wilcove *et al.*, 2013; Harris *et al.*, 2015). Of the over 300 species traded in Indonesia, the volume of trade in one species in particular has shown a rapid increase. The Greater Green Leafbird *Chloropsis sonnerati*, the largest of the leafbirds, is native to Sundaland, including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia (Sumatra, Borneo, Java and the outlying islands of Natuna, Riau archipelago, Nias, Bangka and Belitung), Malaysia, south Myanmar, Singapore and south Thailand (Wells, 2016). The race *zosterops* was previously considered to be common where habitat remains, in lowland forest and occasionally heavily wooded parkland and tree-shaded plantations, up to 1100 m (Wells, 2016), but both this and the race *sonnerati* are now thought to be uncommon, becoming scarce (Eaton *et al.*, 2016).

The capture of and trade in the Greater Green Leafbird is banned in parts of its native range (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand) but not others (Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar). Although the Greater Green Leafbird is currently not listed as a protected species in Indonesia, only species with a harvest quota are permitted to be harvested from the wild; as there is no harvest quota for the Greater Green Leafbird, in theory trapping is not permitted.

This species has been observed in trade for decades. Nash (1993) noted that the Greater Green Leafbird was the 19th most numerous bird on sale in Singapore in