

Trade surveys of the African Grey Parrot in the border towns of Kenya: Busia Town.

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Abstract

Interviews were conducted with the state security personnel at the Kenya-Uganda border town, Busia in the government offices like the Immigration Office-Kenya-Uganda Border, Jomo Kenyatta International Airport Office, Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Office and hotels that had been sighted as having caged birds.

The interviews aimed to document the presence of the Grey Parrots in possible trade situations and any actions taken. Lack of adequate knowledge and few personnel was paramount as facts emerged that the border was very porous and that much awareness on what animals or plants are viable for trade should be emphasized by relevant government agencies. Education on what is precious to the country needs to be done not only at the grassroots but also for the personnel who interact with those going in and out of the country. A lot of cooperation and collaboration is needed if wildlife trade is to be managed and controlled sustainably.

Introduction

The overriding goal of parrot conservation should be the maintenance of viable wild populations of all species within their native ranges and natural ecosystems. By retaining a strong focus on wild populations at all stages of the conservation process, the chances of simultaneously sustaining the species and preserving essential habitat are maximized. Reduction of fundamental causes of endangerment in the wild must remain the primary goal of conservation efforts. (Snyder et al 2000).

Two widespread threats for which education and legal action are frequently crucial components of conservation are illegal bird trade and hunting.

While laws prohibiting such activities are easy to pass and are on the books in most all countries, enforcement often proves difficult, especially where the illegal activities remain socially acceptable at the local level. Bird trade, both international and domestic, continues to be a pressing threat for many species (Collar and Juniper 1992) despite legal efforts to curtail and regulate it [e.g., the 1992 Exotic Wild Bird Conservation Act of the USA and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)]. CITES lists all parrot species on its appendices. But, while it has evidently been an important force in controlling and curtailing legal trade in threatened parrots (judging from recent substantial declines in the overall volume of reported international parrot trade), it has not been uniformly successful in curbing illegal international trade in some highly valued species. Since 1995 the African Grey Parrot has been listed on CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Appendix II as a species that may be threatened with extinction unless trade is subject to strict regulation (Peet and Atkinson 1994). Worldwide, the African Grey Parrot is the third

most commonly traded wild bird species (RSPB 1991 cited in Dändliker 1992) and is perhaps the most popular Psittacid imported into the United States (Dr. Rosmarie Gnam, pers. comm.). This popularity may be attributed to the African Grey Parrot's intelligence and extraordinary mimetic abilities (del Hoyo YEAR?).

Objectives and methods

These surveys are a topping of a research that was carried out in 2007-2008 and seeks to fill in gaps that are needed to establish the population of the African Grey Parrot in Kenya.

The aim of this study was to conduct interviews with the state security at the Kenya-Uganda border town, Busia and sought to document the records and actions of relevant security personnel on wildlife impounded at the border.

The study also aimed to document the presence of the Grey Parrots in possible places of display like hotels and how the pets were acquired.

Site: Kenya-Uganda Border, Busia Town.

- Jomo Kenyatta International Airport Office
- Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Office
- Hotels in Busia town
- Veterinary Department, Busia Town

Three offices and a hotel were visited at the border of Kenya and Uganda in a bid to document any records of any birds that could have been impounded or traded legally across the border. Of special mention was whether there had been any records of the African Grey Parrot being moved from Kenya or from Uganda. Informal interviews were carried out by the principal investigator and a field naturalist from Kakamega Forest engaging the personnel officers of the offices visited in non-confrontational discussions on trade across the border and awareness levels on wildlife trade.

Results

Jomo Kenyatta International Airport Office

The JKIA immigration officers reported that they had not encountered any birds or animals being transported from either country (Kenya or Uganda). There were thus no records showing any impoundments.

Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Office

The KEPHIS office reported that they only checked big trucks that due to congestion of heavy traffic that is typical of the border roads. They also reported that they only checked farm produce and other foodstuffs. The officers reported that in case of any encounter with plants that they were not sure of, they called the main office in Nairobi to clarify issues of transportation and conservation. They however had no records whatsoever. They had not heard of or seen any birds impounded at the border.

Veterinary Department, Busia Town

The personnel in the Veterinary Department at the border office were not aware of any bird trade that could be taking place. They reported that they had only been alerted in times of illnesses encumbering both wild and domesticated poultry and had been involved in treating a wild bird once, though they could not identify which one. They reported that they had been involved in avian flu campaigns but had not been aware that bird trade could be happening across the border.

Officers from KEPHIS and the Veterinary Department reported that it was impossible to man the border as it was extremely porous and the local community on both sides moved across frequently and traded goods and services that were applicable on both the Kenyan and the Ugandan side.

Hotels in Busia town-Hotel International, Busia

An informant had reported the sighting of two parrots at a hotel frequented by domestic and international visitors in Busia town. The PI and field assistant visited the hotel under the pretext of traveling to Uganda. An interview then commenced and photographs were taken of the two parrots that were being held in a cage that was about (dimensions). The workers at the hotel reported that a good friend of the hotel owner had sold one parrot to them at about 10,000 KSh and had given the second one free. The PI took photos of and with the African Grey Parrots(attached in appendix).

Discussion

It was rather discouraging that the main entry points in the country are the most porous and have the least personnel to do the manning. Lack of enough information on what was precious to the country seemed to be the biggest problem, whether plants or animals. There were very few personnel and they had too many vehicles to clear from either country. It was even challenging for them to start checking each and every luggage that passed under their guard. The personnel at the border would have to know what species are defined as protected and how to identify them. This would then enable them to know what is illegal or not.

Acquiring of bird species for display and tourist attraction in places like hotels can be done with proper advice and legislations. Advice on the feeding and space requirements was lacking in the premises visited since the 75cm by 50 cm cage was put on a tower of beer crates near the roof where rats were observed running around! One wonders if the birds would not get infected by some disease. Lack of knowledge on how to care for pet birds was also observed now that the parrots were being fed on bread and water that were on the cage floor. Awareness, trade policies, information on population status are all basics that need to be addressed by the policy makers, the law-enforcers and the research scientists as a bloc.

Conclusion

With quite a huge task of manning a border with few personnel, advocacy and awareness campaigns need to be reinforced so that as the population addresses the major concern of food security,; sale of precious wildlife which endangers the country's income is not jeopardized. This is education for all, from the local community to the policy-makers to the law-enforcers.

Recommendations

Involve the local community at Kakamega Forest and the border towns in species conservation and broadly, environmental education.

Establish populations of the Grey Parrot in the wild with an emphasis of developing reintroduction of confiscated birds at Kakamega Forest or sighting of another place that has less threats but similar ecological provisions. *Ongoing monitoring of this Important Bird Area is being done by the KEEP (Kakamega Environmental Education Programme) members in conjunction with the Nature Kenya, the National Museums of Kenya, the Kenya Forest Service and the Kenya Wildlife Service. Discussions are underway on possibilities of reintroduction of species and management.*

Ensure enforcement of the law prohibiting trapping, trade and transport of parrots. More personnel could be posted at the borders. Ultra-modern equipment that can scan and show what goods are being transported could help in addressing the check-ups whilst minimizing the amount of time spent checking and clearing luggage or goods both for private public vehicles. *Communications with the wildlife managers concerned with entry points in the country have been contacted for relevant action.*

References

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