



Illegal Wildlife Trade

The EAZA Conservation Campaign 2017-2019 'The Silent Forest'

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Hundreds of Asian songbird species are affected by unsustainable and mostly illegal trade.

Several Indonesian markets frequently hold up to 190 native species of songbirds at any one time, not counting other bird groups, domestic species and the increasing number of exotic songbird species imported from East Africa to meet market demand.

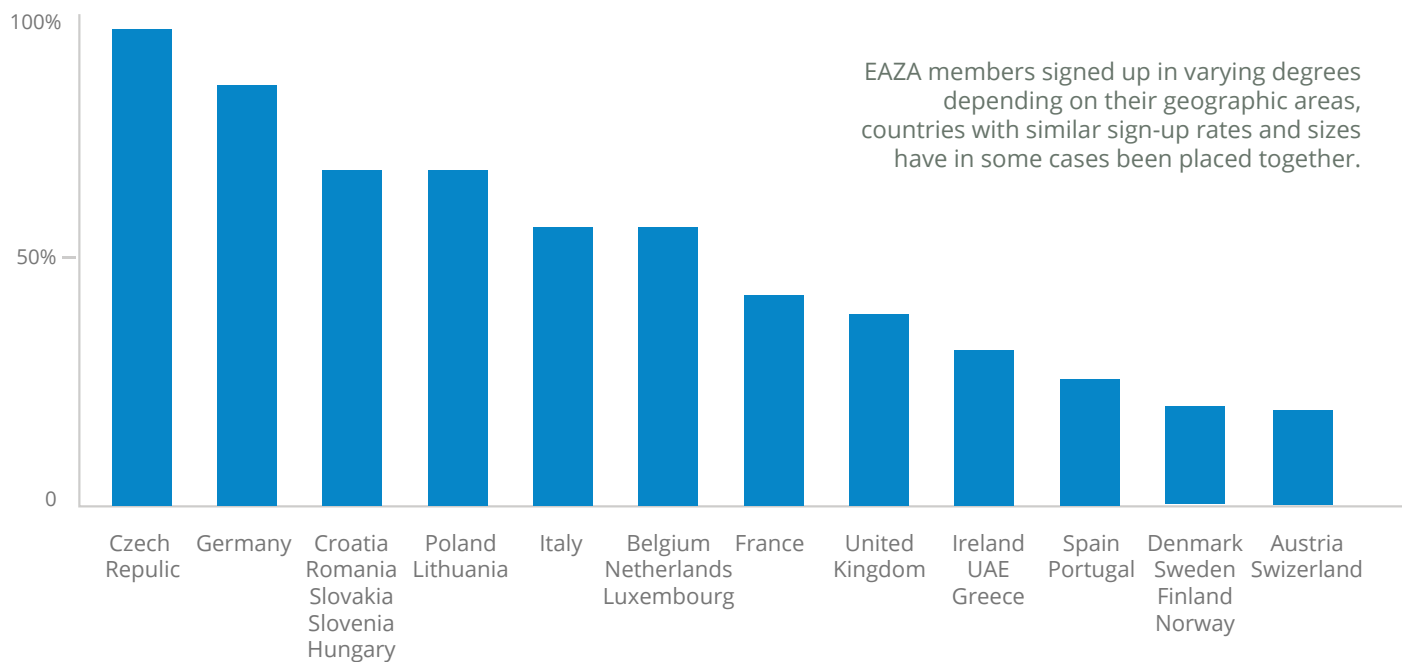
For about 20 species the situation is so critical that *ex situ* measures are now being considered in order to prevent their total extinction until other conservation activities can take effect. In response to this, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) launched the Silent Forest Campaign in September 2017, selecting six species and six different projects which are representative of all Asian songbirds with dwindling populations due to trade.

The Silent Forest Campaign is the first EAZA conservation campaign to focus exclusively on birds. Altogether 242 institutions, from 32 nations have signed up which demonstrates

that there is broad support for coordinated zoo-and-aquaria-based conservation activities. Institutions can sign-up to the campaign to demonstrate their solidarity with the cause and they are not obligated to provide funding or undertake large activities. By signing up they are able to access downloadable educational materials from the campaign website www.silentforest.eu and receive the quarterly newsletter Forest Grapevine.

36% of the institutions who have signed-up to the campaign proactively pledged a financial contribution. Our funding target for the duration of the two-year period was an ambitious 400,000 euro, made up of participants' pledges of 250,000 euro and other contributions including grants and merchandise of 150,000 euro. Calculations are not yet complete, but as of 30 August 2019, we are currently looking at the following projections: pledges amounting to 274,966 euro while direct donations, grants and merchandise currently stand at 183,333 euro, giving a total of over 458,000 euro raised for Asian songbird conservation.

Percentage of EAZA member sign-up by country (top 12)



Some of this funding has already been transferred to the campaign accounts overseen by the EAZA Executive Office and subsequently been forwarded to the pre-selected conservation projects in Southeast Asia. Major grant funding was awarded to the projects by the Segré Foundation, Beauval Nature and the WAZA Nature Connect Grants.

It was rewarding to see zoos which are not members of EAZA but are members of a national zoo association and/or WAZA taking the decision to support the campaign. Institutions from the European Union, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Russia, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America participated in the campaign and this additional support resulted in funding being available to increase the campaign activities.

Campaign participants came up with many fun and innovative fundraising activities and personal challenges to encourage support for the campaign, including Dutch colleagues participating in bicycle races in the French mountains and zookeepers committing to cutting off their life-long-growth of

dreadlocks for sponsorship. Zookeeper associations in the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark have dedicated their annual gathering events to songbirds and as a result raised impressive funds.

Artists connected with the zoos in Copenhagen, Erfurt and Newquay produced wonderful paintings auctioned for the benefit of the campaign. Many zoos have gone out of their way to dedicate money-spinners and allocate advertising space for further fundraising efforts. The merchandise activities proved to be very time-consuming and were only made possible as a result of the efforts made by Zoo Liberec. These merchandise efforts alone contributed 26,219 euro towards the fundraising goal.

Six projects were preselected by the campaign team and a wider group including the EAZA Passeriformes Taxon Advisory Group, BirdLife International, IUCN Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group and TRAFFIC, who all signed on as campaign partners. These six projects represent different pertinent issues (e.g. survey, breeding facilities, educational activities) which need to be addressed as part of a broad-spectrum

conservation effort and are all either ongoing or poised to start once the funding has been received. Once the pledged funding has been received additional projects can be supported based on the recommendations of the newly formed IUCN Species Survival Commission Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG).

The dedicated Silent Forest Campaign accounts will remain active for at least five years beyond the campaign. Thereafter, we will have to evaluate how to proceed with ongoing EAZA commitment.

The preselected projects are linked to the six campaigns, each of which has a flagship species representing the types of threats they encounter through trade. These include the status symbol of Bali mynas, the entertainment function of hill mynas, collectors' desire for the near-extinct Javan green magpies, the master bird function of Sumatran laughingthrushes and the development of the songs of prime singing species such as white-rumped shamas and straw-headed bulbuls.

An additional and different kind of conservation support was made in cooperation with the Green Books initiative in Indonesia. The NGO offers children and families the opportunity to experience and explore songbirds in the wild rather than in cages, giving guided tours with second-hand binoculars donated by zoos. Not only is this an exciting opportunity to engage people but for some, it is also a chance to pursue an alternative income working with birds in tourism.

Legislation and regulations as well as ensuring their implementation and enforcement are essential for the future safety of songbirds. The campaign team engaged with the Indonesian government to help influence the development of the updated list of protected species so as to

include many more songbird species. This process has highlighted the importance of the role-model function our own countries play. The ongoing illegal songbird trade in the EU and our inability to cope with it is duly noted within some of the most affected countries. If we are to commit to helping find solutions on enforcement abroad, we also need to address these issues within our home countries.

Best Practice Guidelines for Sumatran laughingthrush and Javan green magpies are now available on the EAZA website and several more are in the pipeline. These are immensely important for optimised husbandry in European zoos as well as for our partners in-region, and were therefore a major target of the campaign.



Photo: Sumatran laughingthrush at Bristol Zoo.

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Captive breeding programmes for a number of critically endangered species where *ex situ* management has been strongly recommended (and which before the campaign were not held by zoos anywhere in the world) have now been initiated.

The core campaign team is coordinated by Tomas Ouhel and Simon Bruslund. The communication and merchandise aspects are mainly managed by Barbara Tesarova and Matyas Adam. Education activities have been organised by Lucia Schröder supported by Constanze Mager. Technical support for species, projects and husbandry have been supplied by Roland Wirth, Andrew Owen, Nigel Collar and David Jeggo. Colleagues from the EAZA Executive Office, in particular William van Lint, Mirko Marseille, Lauren Florisson and Sandrine Camus, have been indispensable especially for media communications and accounting.

Overall, the campaign has been run on a zero-operating budget. Staff expenses have been entirely covered by the main hosting institutions: Zoo Liberec, Heidelberg Zoo, Cologne Zoo, Burger's Zoo, Chester Zoo and Marwell Wildlife. Additional necessary expenses such as the website creation were sponsored independently of the campaign by Chester Zoo, Cologne Zoo, Görlitz Zoo, Zoo Landau, Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Populations (ZGAP), Copenhagen Zoo and Zoo Liberec. As a result, 100% of the donations to the projects are channelled towards the conservation projects. Many individuals have supported the core campaign team with their time and ideas, and their contributions have made the campaign a success.

In terms of conservation status of the affected Asian songbirds, it is difficult to claim that the campaign has been a success. For most species the situation has not improved and for some it has even worsened since the campaign was initiated two years ago. But we were always aware of the long uphill path ahead of us, and we can report with real confidence and pride that EAZA's Silent Forest Campaign has been vital in putting the plight of Asian songbirds in the spotlight and providing a solid start for their conservation. The activities the campaign has promoted are promising, so there is much to be optimistic about.

The work of the Silent Forest Campaign is by no means complete and it is clear that a long-term commitment is necessary. In the future the working group of the Passeriformes TAG, which has worked on the issue of Asian songbird trade intensively since 2008, will change its name from Threatened Asian Songbird Alliance (TASA) to the Silent Forest Working Group and, in close cooperation with the ASTSG, continue to maintain the website and accounts and pursue funds for projects aimed at saving threatened songbirds.