

African Grey Parrots moved to CITES Appendix I

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The African Grey (*Psittacus erithacus*) parrot is probably one of the most commonly kept and bred of the larger parrot species. Along with its subspecies the “Timneh Grey parrot”, grey parrots are now commonly found in pet homes and aviculture across the World. Prized for its ability to mimic voice and sounds, these parrots have become one of the highest demand species in the international trade of live birds.

The proposal to move this species from CITES Appendix II to CITES Appendix I was controversial. Despite a huge amount of opposition, the proposal passed and the species will be listed on CITES Appendix I, the highest category of protection under the Convention. The amendments adopted at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties shall enter into force 90 days after that meeting, i.e. on January 2, 2017.

The controversy of the listing was mainly due to the increased difficulty for legitimate captive breeders to trade in a CITES I species on an international basis. Article VII, paragraph 4, of the Convention provides that specimens of Appendix-I animal species bred in captivity for commercial purposes shall be deemed to be specimens of species included in Appendix II. But, in defining definitions of “bred in captivity for commercial purposes”, somehow this “concept of a reduced bureaucracy” got twisted into a registration process that is difficult for many facilities to qualify under. The current restrictions under CITES for trading commercially in an Appendix I species require the facility to register with the CITES Secretariat and be approved as a commercial producer of the species by the Parties to CITES. Furthermore, the definition of “bred in captivity for commercial purposes” now adopted by CITES requires the facility to “prove legality” of its breeding stocks (not always possible to prove as historical CITES documents may not exist) and demonstrate that the facility has the means and expertise to produce the species to two generations without reliance on the wild for additional stock.

There are numerous large breeding facilities in South Africa and other countries that specialize in breeding the African Grey parrot, and the move to CITES I will definitely have an impact on their ability to qualify exports under the CITES definition of “bred in captivity for commercial purposes”. Currently South African breeders export more than 50,000



captive-bred Grey parrots annually into the worldwide pet and breeder market. This is an astounding number and certainly represents a huge positive impact on wild parrot conservation and reduces need to take more from the wild. But, as with anything, politics has its finger in the mix and legitimately documented, captive-bred birds may become hard to find in the near future. (The United States stopped the commercial import of parrots taken from the wild in 1992, with the passing of the Wild Bird Conservation Act – WBCA)

Statistics from the United States show that less than 20 Grey parrots were exported in 2014 and 2015. So an elevation to CITES Appendix I may not have a huge impact on international trade from the U.S. But this move may give anti-trade advocates more ammunition to propose this species for listing under our own internal Endangered Species Act (ESA). If the species is listed as “endangered” under the Act, interstate sales, and in some States, any sales or possession of the species, could be considered illegal. The AFA and other organizations are keeping a close eye on this situation as well as the status of many other species being proposed for internal regulation.