

Trapped and traded - An insight of field realities of live bird trade in Uttar Pradesh, India



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Trapped and traded-An insight of field realities of live bird trade in Uttar Pradesh, India

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Introduction:

India is home to some 1,200 different species of birds. Despite measures designed to protect this rich array of bird life by banning the capture and trade of wild birds in 1991 under Wildlife Protection Act (1972) of India, records indicate that as many as 300 of these species are caught and traded with impunity (Bagla, P. 2002). The birds are caught and traded for a variety of reasons like as pets, for food consumption and even for black magic, horoscope etc.

A complete ban in trade of Indian birds in 1991, spreading of awareness and stricter implementation of wildlife laws has led to the decrease of birds in the local market. Although the birds trade is affected by the destruction and alteration of wildlife habitat, over trapping of birds but it is still prevalent in the interiors of the State. It is been observed that due to shortage of birds and persecution for dealing in indigenous species, traders have evolved various strategies to dupe buyers as well

as enforcement authorities (Ahmed A. 1999). The current paper is an attempt to uncover the field realities regarding the illegal trade of bird and its magnitude in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Study Area & methodology:

The team visited 8 districts in the Uttar Pradesh viz. Aligarh, Merrut, Lucknow, Moradabad, Gorakhpur, Allahabad, Sidharthnagar and Varanasi. A thorough survey was planned to visit the settlements of community inhabitants who were involved in bird trade. Beheliya community (Chidimar) members were interview to collect information on bird trade and their perception on live bird trade. The information provided here is through the personal communication with the informants (ex traders/poachers) and community people involved in the trade. In some cases team approached traders as buyers.

S.no	District	Market	Number of shops	Trapping Areas
1	Aligarh	3	3	-
2	Meerut	2	5	-
3	Lucknow	3	25	1
4	Moradabad	1	8	-
5	Gorakhpur	1	2	3
6	Allahabad	2	8	4
7	Sidharthnagar	1	1	1
8	Varanasi	1	12	2

Table 1: Live Bird Trade survey localities

Results:

Trade centers:

We identified five major trade centers in the state; these are Moradabad, Merrut, Lucknow, Allahabad and Varanasi. Traders at these places are also big supplier of different bird species to different districts within the state as well as outside the state. We met trader one trader in one remote location in Hazimastan Bazar in Allahabad. After a short discussion with him he produced a small bird book and informed us he could get us pretty much anything from the book; species included many rare Indian species as well as exotic birds. Birds discussed included, various owls, great pied hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), large grey hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*), yellow bill blue magpie (*Urocissa flavirostris*), munia, yellow footed green pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*) and saheen falcon. On entering his back room we were confronted with an array of species in cages filling the room from floor to ceiling, including a number of plum-headed parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), a rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), chakoor and a number of exotic birds. What species he did not have on the premises, he would obtain the birds by placing an order with the Bhelia community and, according to demand, would be transported in wooden baskets covered in jute bags by train or bus.



Plate 1 Trapped Rose ringed Parakete

Bird Trapping:

Team also travelled to some remote locations in Moradabad and Gorakhpur district to collect information on bird trapping methods. Different methods are used for different species; but in most of the cases nets are suspended between two trees or at ground especially in cropped paddy field as it attracts more birds.

In case of partridges two separate methods are being used, both involving using other already trapped partridges to lure in more birds. The first method involved a long thin net being spread out along the ground attaching itself to the short rough grass; in this instance a cotton field. One edge of the net was slightly raised to create a sort of 'net cave'.

The already trapped partridge would then call out and entice other birds to come by and land next to the partridge. At this point the trappers chase the bird in the direction of the net in the hope that it would enter under the raised edge and become entangled.

The second method involved a long thin wire with multiple noose type loops also made of wire, running all the way along it; from end to end,. The wire is hung a few inches above ground with small wooden stakes dug into the ground. The 'bait'



Plate 2 Bird trapper setting up nets in outskirts of Moradabad District in Uttar Pradesh

partridge would again call and entice other partridges to home in and, as with the first method, the birds are herded in the direction of the wire. With 'luck' the bird would then either gets its head or leg caught in one of the loops and when pulled at, the loop gets small and tighter until the bird is restrained.

Market Survey:

Market survey in Moradabad was carried out in October, 2009. On arriving at the settlement, Kumahar, Mohalla, Moradabad we came across 6 shops taking part in the trading of Indian birds. The settlement consisted of 10 houses of Baheliya tribe and the birds were openly on display on the road side in front of the shops. Species included Rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), Alexandriain parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*), and Plum-headed parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Black Partridges (*Melanoperdix nigra*) & Grey partridge (*Perdix perdix*) and Bateir we were told were also available. Persons involved in the trade varied from 12 years to 60 years of age. Prices varied for the birds depending on the species. The average cost of a Rose-ringed parakeet was 40-50 INR per pair; the average cost for a plum-headed parakeet was 80-100 INR per pair; Alexandrian parakeet fetched anything from 100 – 150 INR for each individual bird.

Trade routes:

The investigator has spent considerable time with traders and poachers to understand the live bird trade. It was found that most of the trade is not restricted within the state of Uttar Pradesh, it is spread all over north and central India. It was found that this is the one of the most organised illegal wildlife trade happening in India. The traders and

poachers are well connected, demands are placed over mobile phones and money transaction is through banks and ATMs.

The birds which are trapped from rural areas and forest areas near Gorakhpur, Moradabad and Lucknow are transferred through railways or by road to Allahabad. Subsequently from Allahabad it is transferred to Kolkata. Kolkata holds a weekly market for bird trade in *Hathibagan*. Apart from Indian species the exotic species are also being traded through such routes. Railways and trucks are preferred for transferring the birds. Rose ring parakeets are most common species for trade. Apart from this owls are used for black magic depending on demand, Several species of Munia such as Black Headed Munia (*Lonchura atricapilla*), Scaly Breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), White Throated Munia (*Lonchura malabarica*) are also being traded for pets. According to traders winter season is the best time for trapping Munias. The customers mainly hail from Kolkata, Mumbai, Ahamadabad etc large number of birds is being



Figure 1 Bird trade routes in the State of Uttar Pradesh

transported from different places to small traders through public transports (train and buses) without any person accompanying the consignment.

Discussion:

The study reveals that bird trade is prevalent in Uttar Pradesh. This study is although not an exhaustive research on bird trade but certainly provides a comprehensive dynamics of the existing bird trade in the State. It can be concluded easily that lack of implementation of wildlife law and its ignorance is the main factor for the thriving bird trade in Uttar Pradesh.

The present research explores that there is a gradual shift in the bird trade and local communities are desisting themselves from the trade due to stricter law. This gradual shift is too slow to observe.



Plate 3 Bird seller in Moradabad District

The biggest reason for thriving bird trade is the huge demand in the local as well as in the international market. It was observed that the community people who

are indulged in the hunting and poaching of the birds remains in a woeful state. In spite of knowing the fact that the act they are doing is illegal, they continue doing it because they do not have any other options. It is extremely difficult for them to leave the activities instantly which have been their mode for survival for them since ages.

To curb trade completely it is imperative to change the attitude of the local people. They are the deprived society of our population and they require incentives to leave this work. So far there is no such serious effort made to rehabilitate these people which can prevent them from indulging into such kind of act.

This report concludes that in order to curb live bird trade a sincere effort should be made to finish the market demand internationally and to identify the people involved in hunting and trapping of birds and then rehabilitate them. If these people can be resettled with some other occupation the hunting will decrease considerably. Although hunting is a traditional art but it requires being finished in-order to save our avian species.

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