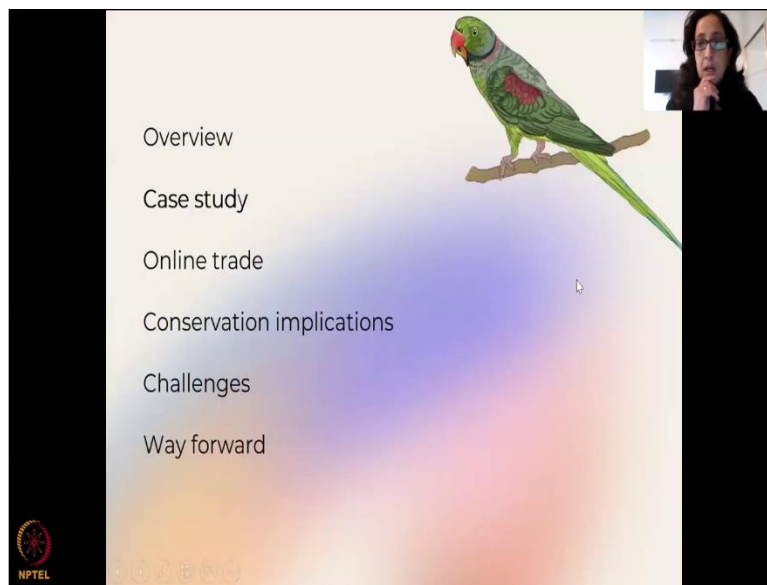


Basic Course in Ornithology
Dr. Uttara Mendiratta
Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Lecture 35
Avian Conservation Case study 4

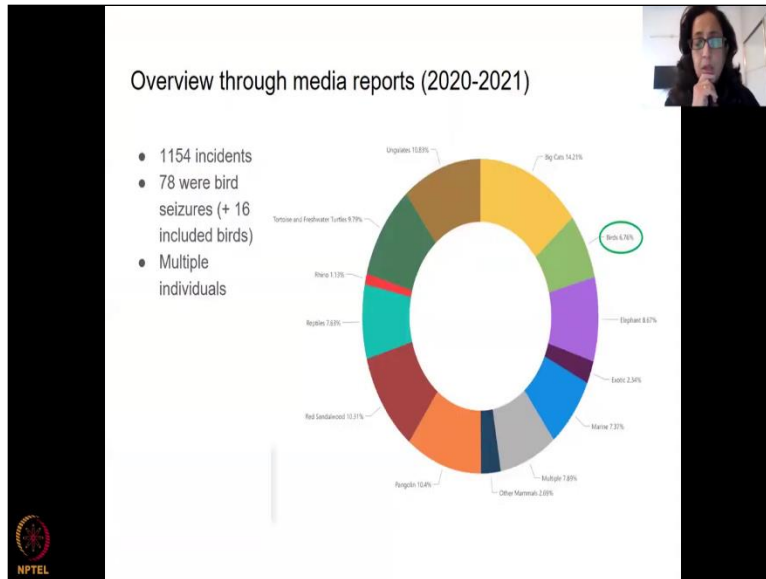
Hi! I am Uttara Mendiratta. I have the counter wildlife trafficking program at WCS India. And I am here today to talk to you about Illegal Bird Trade in India.

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I will start with the overview of the illegal trade as in the number, the scope of it, the scale of it and of course the species that involved. We will go into a bit of a case study after that and following which I will briefly cover online trade and birds, conservation implications of the trade, the challenges we face in trying to stop this and of course the way forward.

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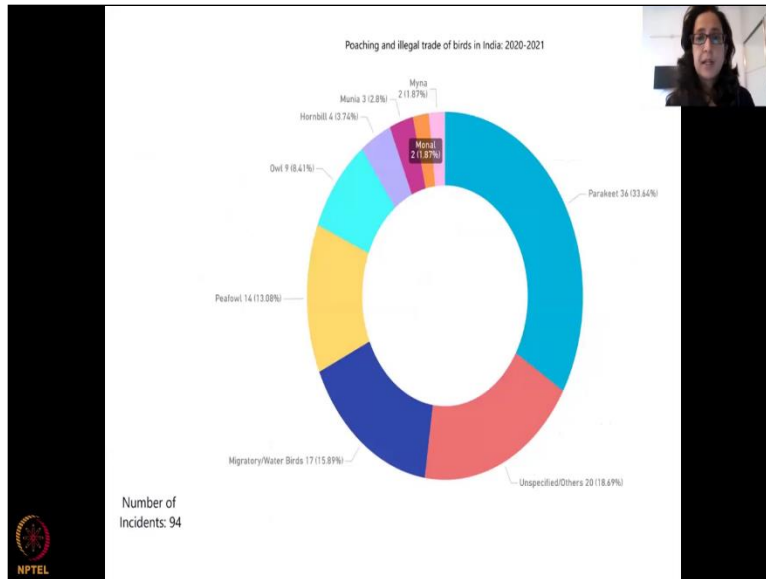


So, getting data on any illegal activity as you can imagine is very difficult but the way we do it for illegal wildlife trade is through enforcement reports. So, basically if there is been a seizure there is been an arrest. We look at the data there to try and understand what is going on in the illegal trade of wildlife. So, this is the data from 2020 and 21, this has been collected through media articles.

And we have come across 1154 instances of seizure of the arrest that were made in relation to wildlife crime. Of these, 78 were bird seizures which means they were just you know different species of birds seized at different locations and of course there were multiple individuals in each of these seizures. In addition to the 78 seizures that were just per, there were another 16 seizures that included birds and some other wildlife as well it could be another taxa, it could be turtles or you know primates.

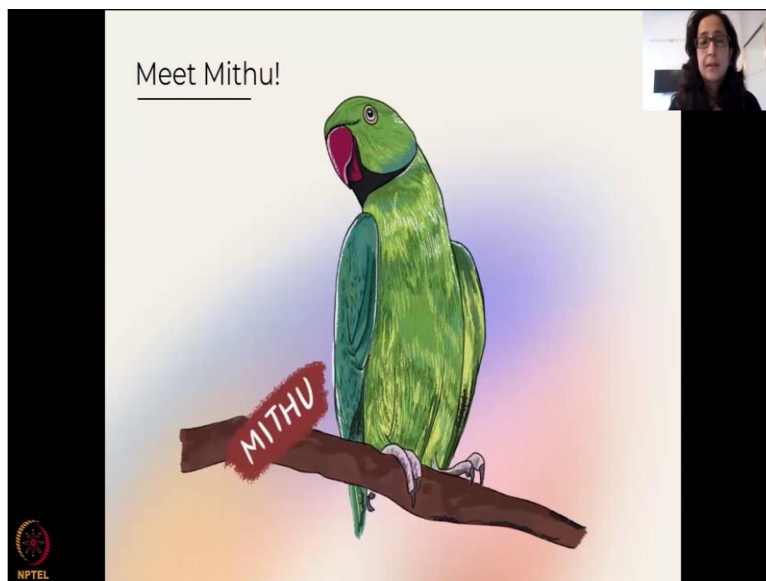
So, this is the overall a picture of the trade that we put together from media articles and as you can see around almost 7% of seizures were just bird species.

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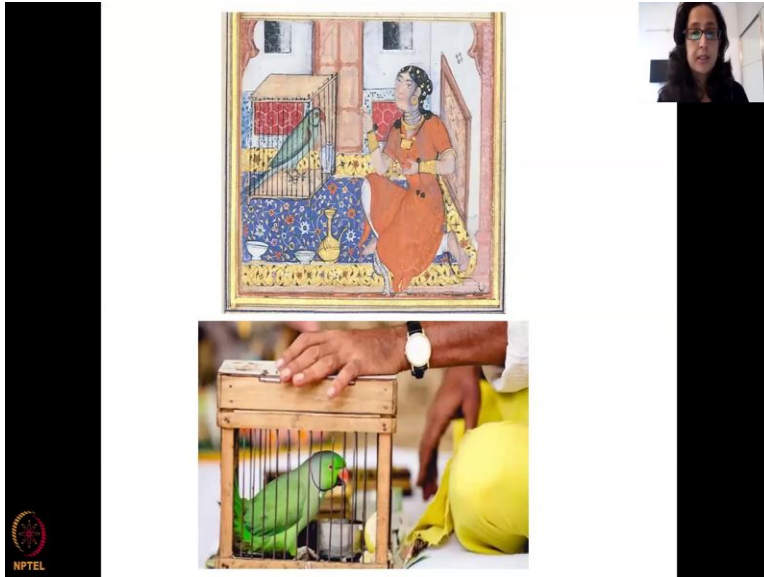
And if you look into this 7% to try and understand what were the species that were being traded you will see there is a large amount of parakeets. There are migratory birds especially waterfowl that are hunted for meat, they are peafowl, owls, hornbills and we will go into some of this in a bit, we will start with the largest section of that try which is the parakeets.

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And I can imagine that a lot of you have seen parakeets in captivity there is a commonly traded pet species commonly seen pet species very often in India called Mithu.

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And you would have meet Mithu surely either at somebody's house in the cage or at a fortune tellers on the street corner where they come and put out little cards and tell you your fortune. So, this is a trade that has gone on for centuries and it has been a part of Indian culture.


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And the way it operates from the beginning to the end is that there is a collection of parakeet chicks and the other Rose-ringed, Alexandria sometimes even Plum-headed parakeets. The collection happens in the breeding season just off the breeding season around April to July. The collectors go collect the chicks sell them to a middleman who carries them to another you know trader who will then sell these in markets.


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How was Mithu transported?



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Jogbani Express is known to be the most frequently used train by the carriers which passes through burdwan while heading to Kolkata (Chitpur) station
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Netaji Express (Howrah-Kalka) train which passes through Durgapur, Asansol via Jharkhand is also frequently used.
- 

Another common mode of transportation are inter state buses which runs between Uttar Pradesh/Bihar/Jharkhand via Durgapur/Asansol/Burdwan to Kolkata.

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And this is not always a very localized trade. We know that parakeets are transported on buses very often across large distances. There are few trains that we have identified as you know commonly used trains to transport parakeets. And this is like the Jogbani express and the Netaji express and this is in the northern belt what I am really talking about. And the birds are you know being moved across hundreds of kilometers.

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Photo Credit: Sudip Ghosh, WCCB



Photo: Sudip Ghosh, WCCB

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The way they are transported is just they're packed into small or medium-sized cages and as you can imagine this is a high mortality for the chicks. So, we think that there is mortality anything between 30 to 70% of the consignment would die during the transport and you know if it is 30%

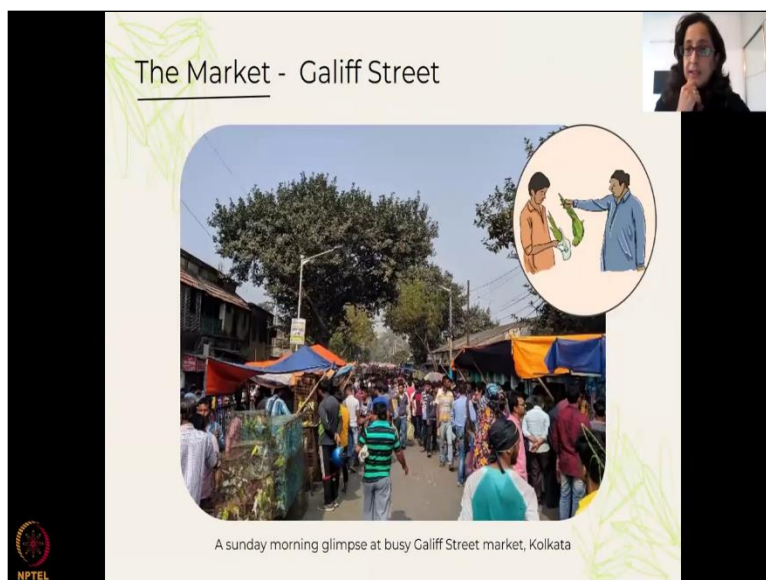
you are a very good trader if you can manage that a very experienced trader. But the some of the new traders and the inexperienced one would have losses of up to 70%.

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The experienced traders are obviously also the ones who know how to do it better. So, you will have see these consignments where you will have these chicks with little cloth bags put on their heads. So, that they have you know they are less panic during the thing and more during the transport and more likely to survive.

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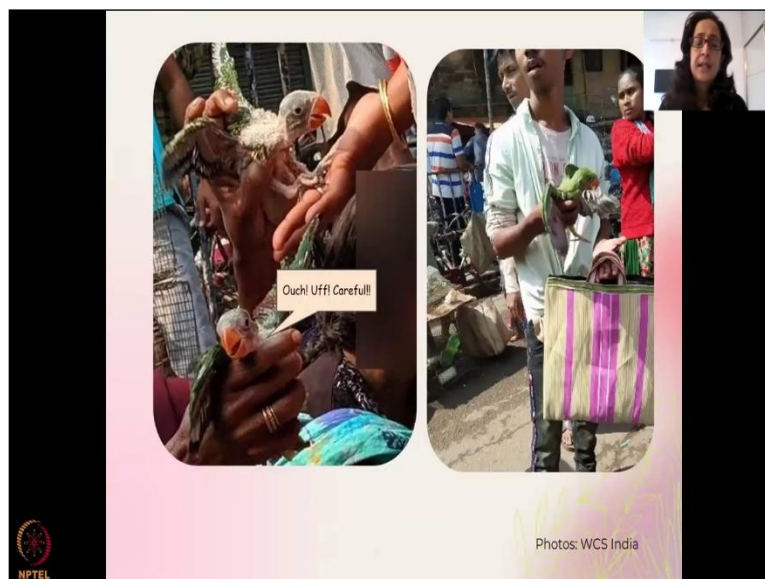


And at the end of this journey, they reach markets like the Galiff street which is in Kolkata and this is a market that we have studied over many years. So, I can tell you a little bit more about this. So, this is our closest market to what is the Chatuchak market in Bangkok for those who might be familiar with it. It is a huge space with that opens in the morning till the you know afternoon.

The weekly footfall can be anything between 40000 to 60000 people and it mostly concentrates on selling pets and these could be pugs, it could be fish, it could be a lot of exotic species and occasionally you would also have Indian species there. It is probably one of the oldest markets in this region. It was earlier in a place called Hatibagan and then it is moved to the city within the city a few times.

And over the years there has been a lot of enforcement action here and the trade of course has changed over the years.

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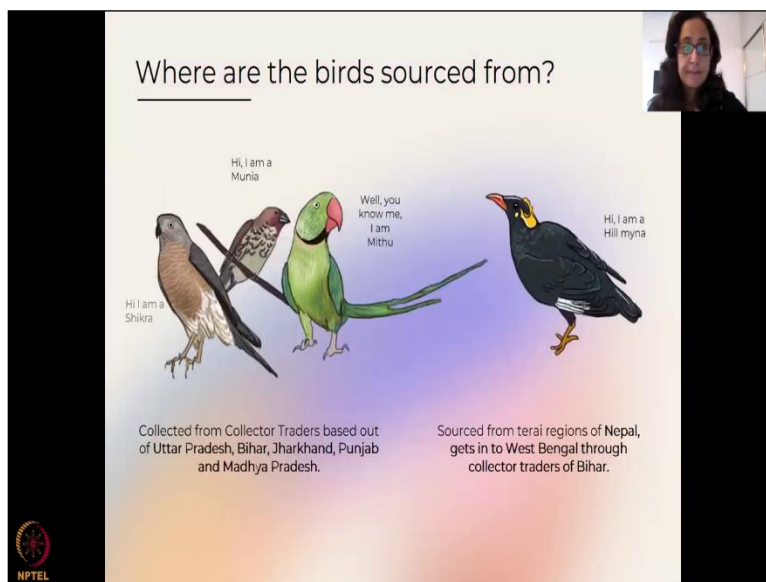
But even in recent surveys, we have found evidence of parakeet's chicks being sold here openly and we believe that there is more trade that is going underground during you know the peak season. So, you would find of course, parakeets,

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but you would also find some other species like finches (they are very often); they are Munias and even Shikras, there is very often a Common Hill Myna being sold around, there are Brahminy Starlings, Oriols and occasionally we would also have birds like Bee-eaters and we know that those Bee-eaters will not survive in captivity but they are sold anywhere. So, that is the list of species but of course like we mentioned earlier these are not all coming from the local vicinity.

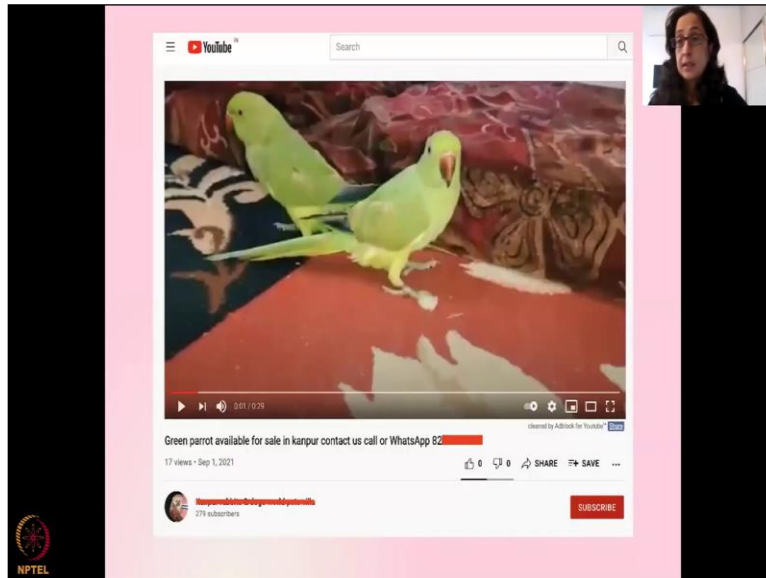
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So, we believe that the Shikras, the Munias and the Parakeets are being sourced from across north India including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Punjab and you know even central India parts

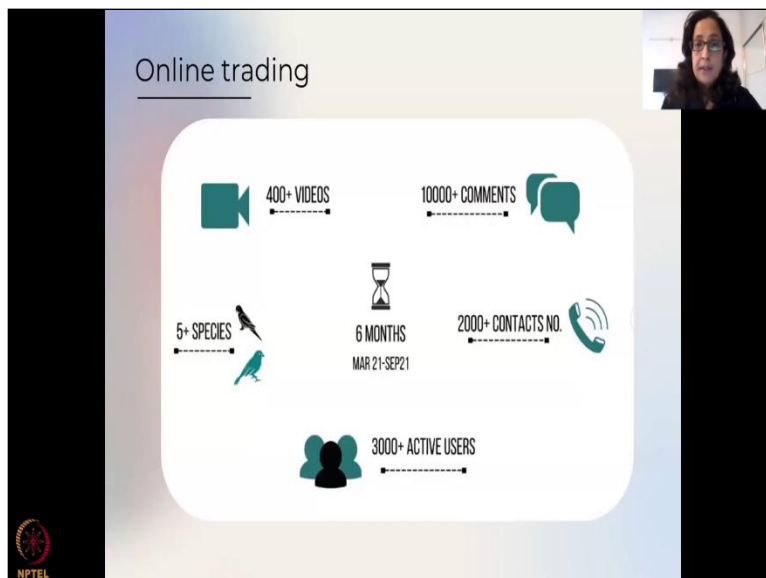
of Madhya Pradesh. The Hill Myna, we are told are coming from mostly Nepal and it is a community of traders and they had that operate this trade.

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But dollar street and other markets like that are not the only place you can go buy these birds they are available online. And which has been a major concern for us because it is much harder to follow this trade and understand this trade and you would find you know sales of Parakeets like this online.

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Over a six-month period when we did an intensive survey, we found 400 videos of birds Indian birds being sold or which of course had a lot of you know five species in them. A lot of activity of you know buyers and sellers who were contacting each other and going through with the trade. So, it is been hard to follow but we know it is happening and we are trying to find ways to deal with this.

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Challenges

- Cultural affinity towards keeping birds
- Lack of awareness on laws that forbids keeping such birds
- Demands is catered by an organised supply chain.
- Lack of enforcement
- No follow up on cases, results in acquittal or leaves cases pending in court
- Socio-political reasons

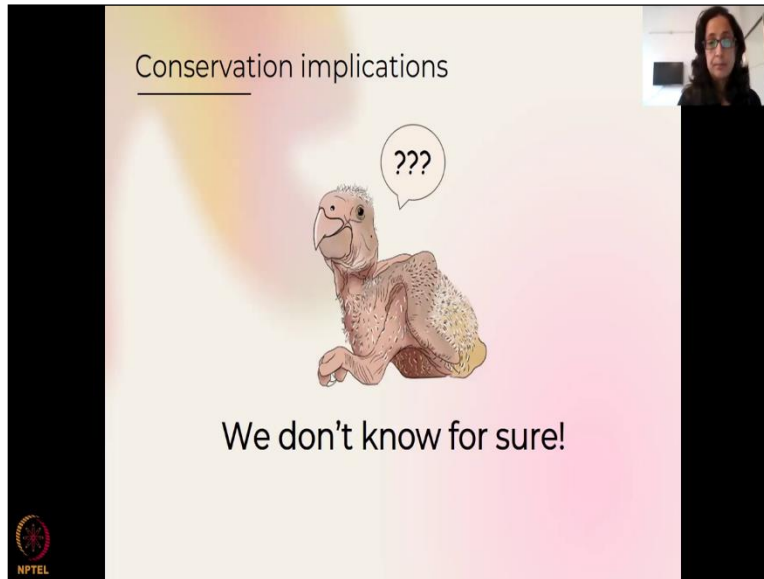
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So, the challenges that we face when we look at you know bird trade and especially Parakeet trade in India is that there is a strong cultural affinity towards having these birds in cages and that is something that is just we have all grown up with it and we think it is okay. And there is a lack of awareness that it is illegal and that that is been a major challenge. And of course, there is an entire system network of traders and buyers and collectors that is now feeding this market.

And this can this is a profit driven market obviously. It thrives as long as there is customers buying it. There is lack of enforcement and there is various reasons for that it could be lack of manpower it is just you know the way we this species are listed in schedules. Also, because once you do the enforcement and take it to court if the chances of getting convictions are so, low that the it is not really incentivized.

In that sense that enforcement is not really willing to put in that effort first you know cases that will fall through in the court anyway and the reason why all of this is happening is of course social political reasons that drive all trade.

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Conservation implications


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We don't know for sure!

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So, what are the conservation implications of you know the bird trade for instance. To be honest we do not know we do not know we understand it. So, limited our understanding is. So, limited that it is really hard to say how the birds populations are getting affected.

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Original Research Article

Wildlife trade, captive breeding and the imminent extinction of a songbird

Vincent Nijman^{1,3}, Abdullahi Langgeng³, Hélène Birat³, Muhammad Ali Imron^{1,2,4}, K.A.L. Nekasi^{4,5}

A Silent Morning: The Songbird Trade in Kalimantan, Indonesia

Katherine A. Remschauer¹, Adam E. Miller^{1,2}, Katherine S. Lusk^{1,2,6}, Muhammad Ridiaryani¹, Bobby¹, Muhiyadi¹, and Kartikawati^{1,7}

The European trade ban on wild birds reduced invasion risks

Laura Cardador¹ | José L. Teller² | José D. Anadón^{1,4} | Pedro Abellán⁵ | Martina Carrete^{2,6}

Flying into extinction: Understanding the role of Singapore's international parrot trade in growing domestic demand

Published online by Cambridge University Press: 14 June 2019

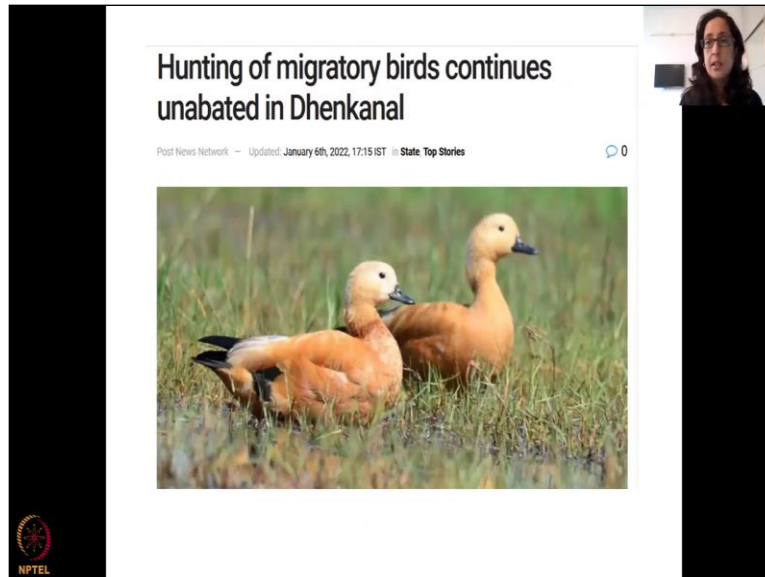
Opportunistic exploitation: an overlooked pathway to extinction

Trevor A. Branch¹, Aaron S. Lobo², and Steven W. Purcell³

NPTEL

But we know from literature across the world that bird species especially those which are restricted in range or have you know specialized habitats. These species can get very seriously affected by trade and it is important that we try and understand there is also those problem of invasives, there is a problem of not having enough data to understand.

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And this is not just true for pet trade species I think we have constantly seen hunting of waterfowl especially migratory waterfowl that comes into India every winter and this is from of course Vinala in Orissa there is also Chilika which we get regular reports and across the country. I think every water body across the country faces some threat of poaching. There is also not just the big birds that are getting.

So, there was one report I think last year where hundred Short toed Larks were seized from an individual who had caught it in a field and was going to sell it for consumption.

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There is also species like the owl which are there not for consumption not for pet trade, but for black magic. And this is something that has been documented and repeatedly looked into but we do not have a clear idea about the markets or the sources and there is surely this trait that is constantly happening in the background and we do not truly understand it.

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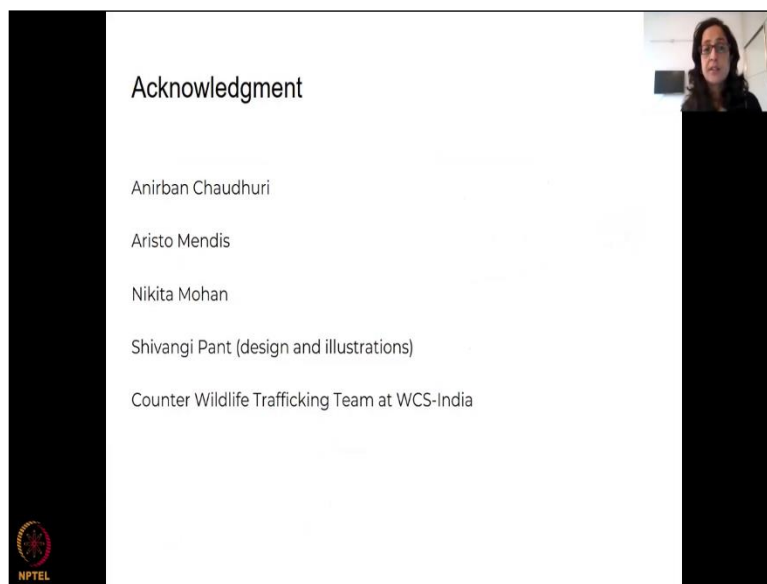


So, of course I think it is easy to come to the conclusion that we surely need more research to try and understand what is happening to these species. How much of this trade is happening? Where it is happening? and how we can stop it if we need to stop it. And of course, there is a need for

awareness because you know we do not know how these species are getting affected and in the meantime, it is good to try and control our markets.

So, that we are not driving anything to extinction without even knowing about it. And of course, there is better enforcement we have the laws to restrict you know trade and all Indian species but it has been hard for enforcement agencies to do that and this is becoming harder with online trade coming in. So, I think there is a lot of capacity building, a lot of you knows new technologies that need to be brought in to help not just understand but also try and regulate this trade.

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I like to acknowledge my team members Anirban, Aristo, Nikita, Shivangi and others in my team who help me put this together, thank you.