

THE GLOBAL SONGBIRD CRISIS: TRADE, IMPACTS, AND REGULATION



A Consortium of Concerned Organisations
2025.12.02 | Samarkand, Uzbekistan | CITES CoP20

Session Structure

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Asian Songbird Trade
- 3 Neotropical Songbird Trade
- 4 Europe / Africa Songbird Trade
- 5 Synthesis and Q&A



Who We Are

Moderator



Mark Gibson, PhD
Sustainable Innovation
Initiatives (SII)

Presenters



Jessica Lee
Mandai Nature



David Mahabir
Wildlife Biologist
Trinidad and Tobago



Simon Bruslund
Copenhagen Zoo /
EAZA Silent Forest



Ben Mirin, Ph.D.
Creative Conservation Lab

Who We Are

Friends of Songbirds Group



Who We Are

Neotropical Songbirds Collaborative Group



Guyana



Suriname



Trinidad & Tobago



A Global Crisis

The illegal and unsustainable songbird trade has intensified worldwide, emerging as one of the most pressing yet underrepresented challenges in global conservation.

- **Trade Increases & Population Declines**

- Intensive and unsustainable trapping and trade has decimated wild populations, pushing some species, such as the Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*) to the brink of extinction.
- Significant local extirpations suggest other species may be in a worse state than listed by the IUCN

- **Illegality, Mortality, and Disease**

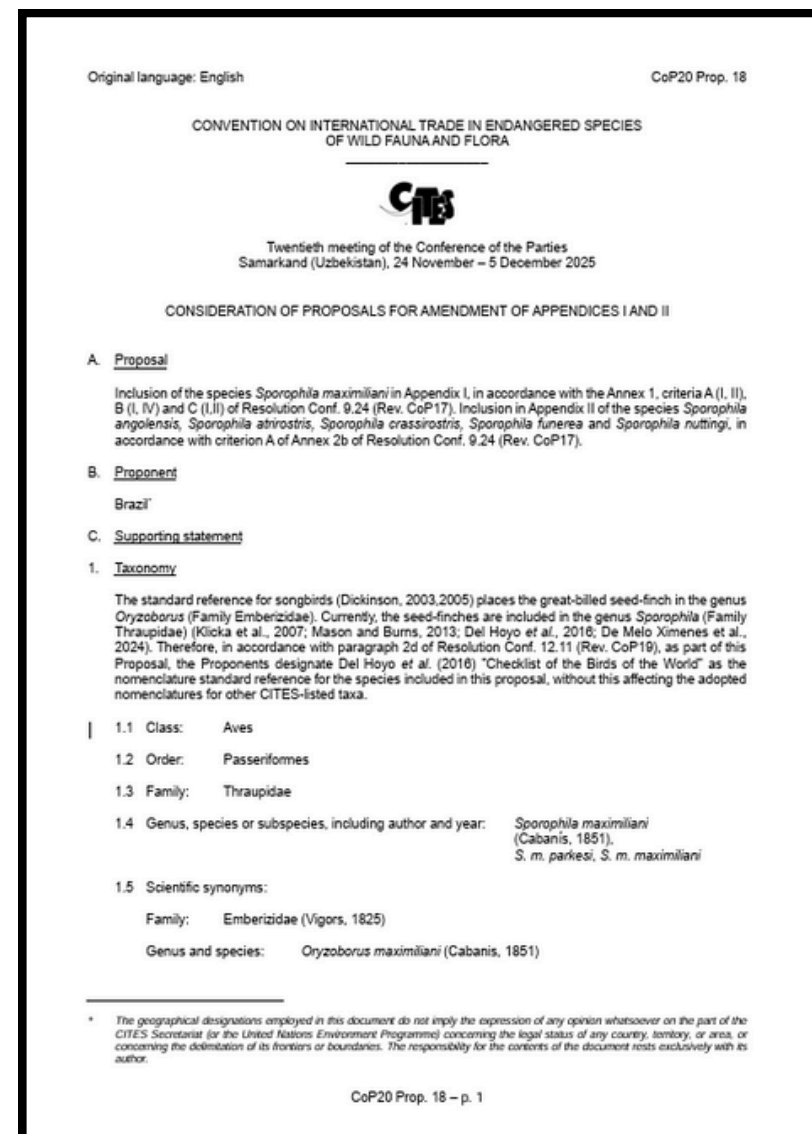
- Illicit trade dominates in most regions, with widespread noncompliance in sourcing, transport, and sale.
- Harsh capture and transport methods result in widespread injury and mortality. Unsanitary trade conditions amplify the potential for disease spread, affecting both wildlife and humans.

- **Varied Global Response**

- IUCN Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG): Established in 2016 to coordinate research, enforcement, and public awareness.
- CITES: Currently, only 91 of roughly 6,000 songbird species are listed (~1.4%), but growing recognition at CoP20 signals a critical step forward.



Songbirds at CoP20



- Information Document and Decisions
 - Brazil submitted an Information Document ([CoP20 Inf. 52](#)) calling for ongoing decisions in support for songbirds.
 - During discussion it was decided to form a drafting group for a combined decision text, leading to drafting language in support of songbirds ([CoP20 Com. I. 2](#)) with Colombia, New Zealand, EU, and Brazil .
- Proposal for *Sporophila maximiliani* and Look-alikes
 - Brazil's [Proposal 18](#) seeks to include the Great billed seed finch *S. maximiliani* in Appendix I and list five related seed finch species in Appendix II as look-alikes, in response to severe population declines driven by illegal songbird trade.
- Global Assessments and Workshop Outputs
 - Technical Workshop on Songbird Trade and Conservation Management ([Bangkok, 2023](#))
 - Global Assessment of Songbirds in Trade, Part 1: Overview of trade patterns and drivers ([CITES Secretariat, 2023a](#))
 - Global Assessment of Songbirds in Trade, Part 2: Prioritisation of heavily traded species for regulatory attention ([CITES Secretariat, 2023b](#))

Case Study Approach



- **Three Regional Case Studies**
 - Asian Songbird Trade
 - Neotropical Songbird Trade
 - European/African Songbird Trade
- **Case Study Dimensions**
 - Geography
 - History and Evolution
 - Behavioral Drivers
 - Species in Trade
 - Trade Dynamics
 - Governance & Legality
 - Conservation Impacts
 - Other Impacts
 - Solutions Underway
- **Bioacoustic Experience**

LISTEN



Image Credit: [Akobirolmasov Diplomat](#)

Special Remarks

We are honored to invite opening remarks from our distinguished guest(s).



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Directorate of Species
and Genetic
Conservation (KKH)
Indonesia



Dr. Latifa Sikli
Agence Nationale des
Eaux et Forêts (ANEF)
Morocco



Zuna Vrankova
CITES Scientific
Authority
Slovakia



Integration and Analysis

Common Themes



- **Geography**

- Mostly species of open or semi-open habitats, including savannas, river edges, forest margins, secondary growth, and agricultural areas,
- Asia includes additional forest-associated species.

- **History and Evolution**

- Each region has a long history of keeping and trapping that has intensified in modern times, especially with competitive events
- Asia has the oldest formal competitive traditions; the Neotropics and Mediterranean basin show hybrid Indigenous-colonial-modern histories.

- **Behavioral Drivers**

- Vocal performance and/or aesthetics, competitive territoriality, masculinity and prestige are all consistent drivers.
- Social bonding and identity formation within keeper communities reinforce these behaviors.

Common Themes

- **Species in Trade**

- Species differ, but functionally are small to medium passerines, many being seed-eater or edge insectivores filling similar ecological roles.

- **Trade Dynamics**

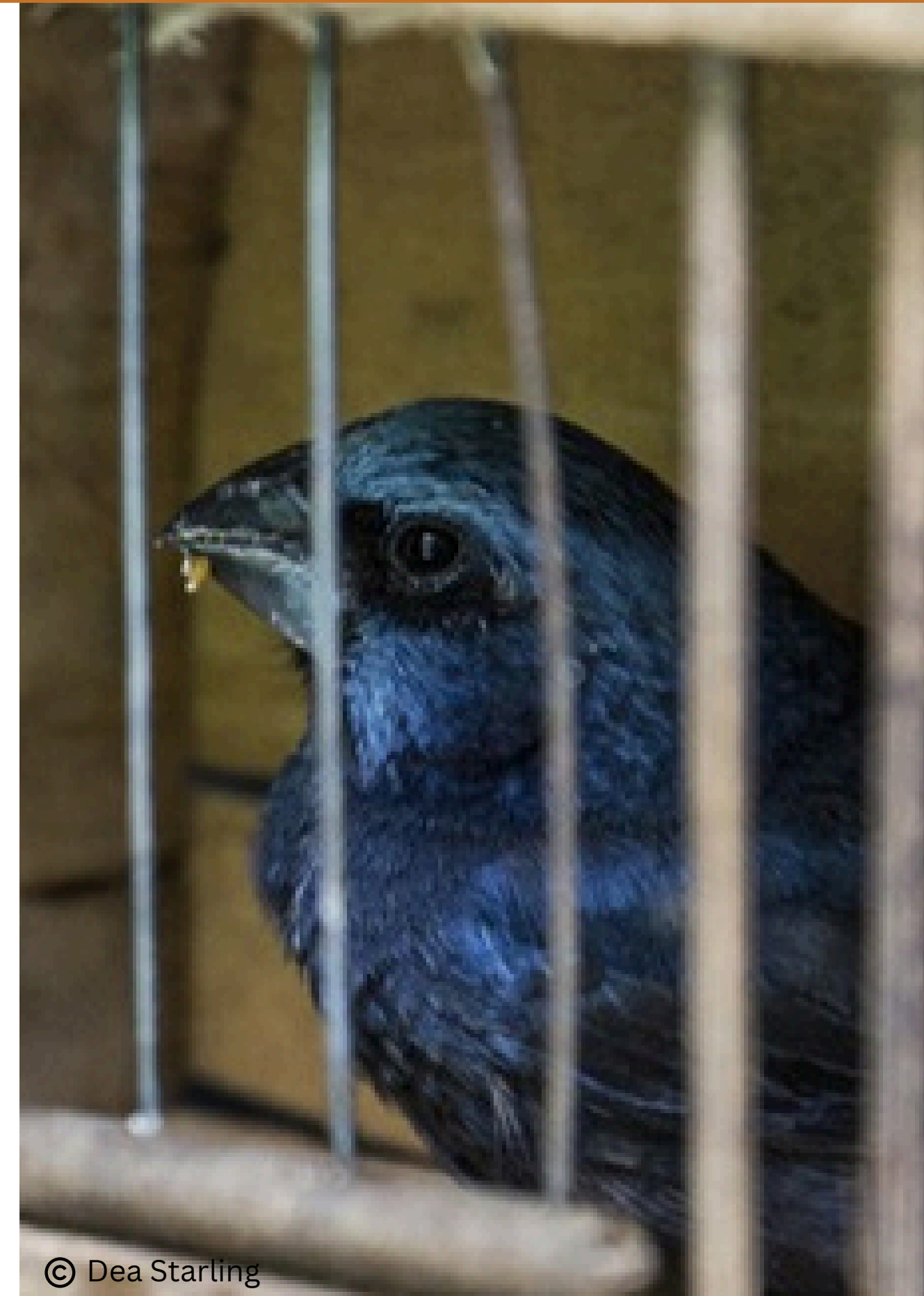
- Rural trappers → consolidators → urban markets/keepers → diaspora buyers
- Digital platforms increasingly mediate pricing, negotiation, cross-border movement, and community meetings.

- **Governance & Legality**

- On paper, national laws are extensive, but legality is mixed, enforcement is patchy and reactive, and high social acceptance undermines consistent application.

- **Conservation Impacts**

- Rapid local extirpations in many countries, with some regions experiencing significant declines



Common Themes




- **Other Impacts**

- Capture, transportation, and confinement mortality are broadly consistent across regions
- Unequal economic benefits appear consistent across supply chains.

- **Solutions Underway**

- Uneven efforts across regions include targeted enforcement actions, which are most developed in Brazil and parts of Southeast Asia.
- Emerging regional coordination mechanisms, limited community-engagement or demand-reduction projects, and growing attention to digital-trade monitoring.

A group of four people are seen from behind, standing on a balcony with a red railing, looking out over a large, green, grassy field. The field is dotted with numerous small, yellow bird cages, each containing a bird. In the background, there are trees, a road with parked cars, and some buildings. The text "Q&A" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Q&A



Thank You!