

## **The Illegal Parrot Trade At The Mexican-American Border: Result Of Political Failure Or Unavoidable Suffering?**



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## **1. Introduction**

“The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk?  
but, *Can they suffer?*”

Jeremy Bentham

Jeremy Bentham was a British philosopher and one of the earliest proponents of animal rights. (cf. wikipedia.org<sup>1</sup>) In 1798 he published “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” where the quotation above is taken from. (ocolib.org) Bentham demands the increase of animal rights, arguing that not its intelligence, but its ability to suffer is significant for how any creature should be treated.

What Bentham says about every kind of animal in my opinion applies especially for parrots. They are considered one of the most intelligent animals, their mind can - depending on the source and the exact species it refers to – be compared to a 4- to 6-year-old child. (cf. africangreys.com, papageien-center.de, papageienstation.de) So their brain is better shaped than the human one in its first years.

The question “Can they talk?” is not that easy to answer. Depending on what you consider as speaking you could either say they can or they cannot speak. According to a definition I have found speech is “the vocalized form of human communication”. (wikipedia.org<sup>2</sup>) But parrots are not human and they cannot communicate by what in common sense is considered as a parrot’s “speaking”. They just imitate the words and are not able to understand the human language, (cf. papageien.ws) so in my opinion the parrots’ ability to “speak” is just another proof of their intelligence.

The most important question Bentham is asking is, whether they can suffer. Without hesitating I would answer yes. Asking myself what they can suffer from, I firstly thought of loneliness, not having in mind that there are many more obvious causes.

I have decided to write my research paper about illegal parrot trade for several reasons. Searching the Internet for an applicable topic I found an article about illegal parrot trade describing the conditions of transport and the unbelievably large number of birds dying even before they have reached their destination. I told a few friends about what I had read, they were as surprised and shocked as I had been, so I researched a little bit more on this topic. Soon the Mexican-American border attracted my attention. Firstly, it is the only overland way connecting the South American countries and the USA. The USA is the central importer and also exporter worldwide of wildlife; Mexico is one of the five nations with the largest diversity of wildlife species, what makes it attractive for trading those species. (cf. profepa.gob<sup>1</sup>) Secondly, this border is special because of its strict protective actions against illegal immigration from Mexico that have even

been enforced after 9/11. We have talked about how difficult it is to enter the USA illegally from Mexico as well in English as in Spanish class, so I really wondered how such a large number of birds could be brought across the border with hardly any problems from official quarters while illegal immigrants have to risk their lives trying to cross the desert and to swim through the Rio Grande, because the strict protection systems do not give them another choice. Thirdly, many changes have taken place in the last few years in the Mexican legislation concerning the protection of endangered species, so that there is also space left to value the current situation and the effectiveness of the different laws.

Therefore, I think “The Illegal Parrot Trade At The Mexican-American Border: Result Of Political Failure Or Unavoidable Suffering?” is a very diverse topic that also allows own conclusions due to the fact that the illegal parrot trade is not a terminated problem, but is going on every day.

## **2. Short Overview Of The Current Situation At The Mexican-American Border**

Annually between 65,000 and 78,000 parrots are captured within Mexico illegally. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, pp.34/35) But this does not mean, that 65,000 to 78,000 parrots are sold every year. **77% of these birds die even before they reach the customers,** (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.60) **that is to say, between 50,000 and 60,000 parrots are dying for no reason just in Mexico every year.**

Most of the smuggled parrots stay within the country, so that the percentage of captured Mexican parrots being smuggled into the USA is comparatively small. Between 4% and 14% of the parrots captured in Mexico were smuggled into the USA between 1995 and 2005. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.57) The range of 10 percentage points is due to the difficulties estimating a number on the basis of other already estimated numbers. Numerically this means that between 1,331 and 9,400 parrots were smuggled into the USA each year. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.57) But this number is already decreasing. According to agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement division in Texas, New Mexico and California interviewed in 2006 parrot smuggling had decreased since 2000 or 2001 by at least 50% to 60%. This trend was especially visible over the last two to four years, that is to say, since 2002 or 2004. As possible reasons for this development the agents name the improvement of border security due to the terrorist attack of 9/11, the increase of penalties and the decrease of the Mexican parrot populations. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.58)



Coming back to the parrots that are actually smuggled: There are not only Mexican parrots smuggled into the USA. In addition to the 1,331 to 9,400 parrots (numbers of 1995 to 2005) from Mexico also parrots from Central America are smuggled through Mexico into the USA. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.40) They enter the country through the border to Guatemala, a border that “is so open as to be practically non-existent”. (Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.40) Their journey continues on the coastal highways, either they enter the USA crossing the border in Texas or in Arizona and California. Parrot trappers usually stay at the main highways and use side roads just if it is really necessary. So you could think that it could not be difficult to seize them. But although the inspectors of PROFEPA, the Federal Attorney Office for the Protection of the Environment in Mexico, know which roads the traffickers use they cannot preclude them from smuggling due to lack of manpower and time. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.40) Parrots captured in Mexico are usually smuggled on the same routes by car, but sometimes they are also brought directly into the USA by plane. More frequently parrots from Southern America and some Caribbean countries are brought in the USA by airplane. Firstly they are brought to Cancún in Mexico, then they continue their journey to Miami in Florida. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.41)



(Source: Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.42)

The graphic shows the main routes of parrot smuggling in Mexico. Mexico is dyed in yellow, Guatemala in the South and the USA in the North in brown. The violet arrows describe the routes the smugglers take. The route at the right side of the map, that touches Mexico just at the headland, describes the airway from Southern America to the USA. The cities at the Mexican-American Border in chronological order: San Diego (California), Nogales (Arizona), El Paso (Texas), Eagle Pass (Texas), Laredo (Texas), McAllen (Texas), Brownsville (Texas).

I will focus on the capture in Mexico because it is the beginning of the whole smuggling and as I have already pointed out, just a very small part of the parrots is actually destined for the USA.

### **3. Actions Against Illegal Parrot Trade**

#### **3.1. Progress Of Legislation**

As I have already said in the introduction, the legislation concerning the protection of endangered species has changed a lot in Mexico over the past years.

The first law having influence on parrot trade was the Federal Law of Hunting of 1951. Among other regulations this law prohibited to destroy or to appropriate nests or eggs of wild birds, while trapping of every species of birds was still allowed. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.24)

In 1988 the General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and the Protection of the Environment (LGEEPA) became effective. It prevented the issue of authorizations to capture “threatened and endangered species except for the purpose of controlled breeding and development of the populations of the species in question”. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.24) For the first time a federal law differentiated “threatened wildlife” from “wildlife”, although the statuses of the different species were not clear. This was caught up three years later in 1991 when the Ecological Criteria, a list showing the actual status of every species, was published for the first time. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.24) Now there were two laws regulating the capture of parrots. To make sure that the requirements of both laws were observed, the Agreement for Capture, Transportation and Use of Ornate and Singing Birds laid down annually, which species could be captured, the season and the state of capture. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.24) Also general capture quotas were established, but they did not say exactly how many parrots of each species could be trapped. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.24)

In 2000 the General Law of Wildlife replaced the Federal Law of Hunting finally. It allowed the capture of parrots on following conditions:

- It was only allowed to use wild life through “Management Units for the Conservation of the Wildlife”. Despite its impressive name this could be any piece of land registered with the Environment Ministry for using or protecting wildlife.
- An accredited management plan had to be administrated containing control of the status of wildlife population.
- It had to be ensured that less parrots are captured than the nature can compensate on its own.
- There were no negative effects concerning the parrot populations.

If the species of parrot that was supposed to be captured was rated as being at risk (endangered, threatened or under special protection) the conditions for an authorization were stricter. In addition to the requirements listed above, the following had to be fulfilled too:

- The priority had to be restoration, repopulation and reintroduction of the

respective species.

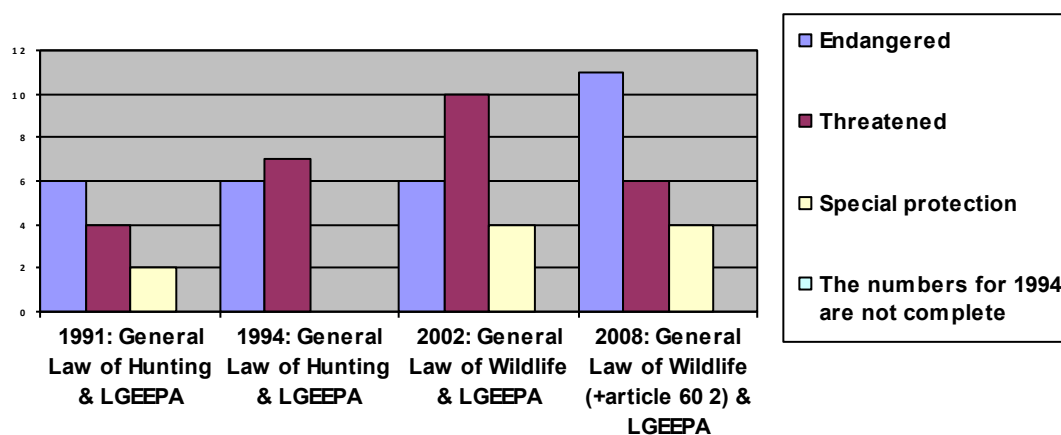
- Actions for controlled breeding and the development of the population had to be elements of the management plan.
- Actions for compensating the factors affecting the decrease in the parrot species' population and the damage of its habitat had to be taken.
- A statistic about mortality and natality had to be administrated.

If the species was classified as endangered or threatened the management plan and the population study had to be certificated by an expert at the respective place. In case of an endangered species it had to be licensed by a National Consultative Committee.

**Despite all the conditions listed up above it was not essential to fulfil them to receive an authorization. They were given out routinely without any of these requirements met.** (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.25)

On 22 April 2008 a new law to ban capture, import and export of Mexican wild parrots was passed nearly concordantly in the Mexican Senate. (cf. defenders.org1) Article 60 2 of the General Law of Wildlife prohibits the import, capture and export of the 22 parrot species living in Mexico. Authorizations are only given for aims of nature conservation or for scientific research and they are only given to accredited academic institutions. (cf. animallaw.info)

In 1991 the Ecological Criteria, a list showing the actual status of every species, was published for the first time. It was updated in 1994, 2002 and 2008. The following chart shows the numbers of parrot species in each status. In total there are 22 parrot species living in Mexico.



The Development Of The Different Stages Of Risk, 1991-2008

(numbers: cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.24, pericosmexico.org, planetaazul.com1)

Unfortunately I have not found every number for every year, but nevertheless the chart shows clearly the increase of endangered and threatened species and the ones under special protection. **The list of 2008 contains eleven species listed as endangered. That is 50% of the parrot species living in Mexico.** (cf. [pericosmexico.org1](http://pericosmexico.org1))

“2.2 Categorías de riesgo

2.2.1 Probablemente extinta en el medio silvestre (E)

Aquella especie nativa de México cuyos ejemplares en vida libre dentro del Territorio Nacional han desaparecido, hasta donde la documentación y los estudios realizados lo prueban, y de la cual se conoce la existencia de ejemplares vivos, en confinamiento o fuera del Territorio Mexicano.

2.2.2 En peligro de extinción (P)

Aquellas cuyas áreas de distribución o tamaño de sus poblaciones en el Territorio Nacional han disminuido drásticamente poniendo en riesgo su viabilidad biológica en todo su hábitat natural, debido a factores tales como la destrucción o modificación drástica del hábitat, aprovechamiento no sustentable, enfermedades o depredación, entre otros.

2.2.3 Amenazadas (A)

Aquellas que podrían llegar a encontrarse en peligro de desaparecer a corto o mediano plazo, si siguen operando los factores que inciden negativamente en su viabilidad, al ocasionar el deterioro o modificación de su hábitat o disminuir directamente el tamaño de sus poblaciones.

2.2.4 Sujetas a protección especial (Pr)

Aquellas que podrían llegar a encontrarse amenazadas por factores que inciden negativamente en su viabilidad, por lo que se determina la necesidad de propiciar su recuperación y conservación o la recuperación y conservación de poblaciones de especies asociadas.”

(Norm 059 of December 30, 2010)

(Email: Juan Carlos Cantú, 22.02.2011; see appendix)

En peligro de extinción – endangered

Amenazadas – threatened

Sujeta a protección especial – under special protection

### 3.2. Valuation Of The Laws

You can easily recognize the increase of the number of parrot species classified in the different stages of risk.

The situation is easy to summarize especially till 2002: The number of threatened species remained consistent, while the number of endangered species was growing steadily. In this period of time the laws being in force concerning parrot trapping were the Federal Law of Hunting of 1951, the General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and the Protection of the Environment of 1988 and for the last two years also the General Law of Wildlife while the Federal Law of Hunting was not effective anymore. I will not consider these last two years from 2000 to 2002 because I do not think that they are that crucial, having in mind that they are just two years out of eleven. In addition the numbers of the different stages of risk have developed in these eight years from 1994 to 2002 just as in the previous period of time, whereas in the following period of time from 2002 to 2008 there was an elementary change in the numbers. So I think that these two years with a different legislation did not change the data notably, if at all they distorted them slightly. Therefore, I will not elaborate on them any further.

So from 1991 to 2000 it was prohibited to destroy or to appropriate eggs or nests of parrots but it was allowed to capture any species of parrot that was not classified as threatened or endangered. Since the number of threatened species increased steadily. Of course there might be other reasons than parrot trapping, however, considering the small numbers of inspectors in charge of controlling these laws (cf. [profepa.gob1](http://profepa.gob1)) they were obviously not observed.

The situation changed when in 2002 the General Law of Wildlife became effective. From now on it was allowed to capture any species of parrots under certain conditions depending on the particular species, respectively its status of risk. The main requirement was to capture the parrots within so-called Management Units for the Conservation of the Wildlife, that is to say, any piece of land registered for using wildlife. The data show that eight years after this law became effective the number of endangered species has increased by nearly 50%, whereas the number of threatened species has decreased by almost the same number. It seems obvious that the five species now classified as endangered had been classified as threatened beforehand. They were probably captured despite the new regulations until their status of risk was raised by one stage. But since it was not necessary to fulfil the requirements to receive an authorization in practice (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.25) the General Law of Wildlife had the same effect a general permission of parrot trapping would have had.

In 2008 the law was changed for the last time. Now it is prohibited to capture, to import and export any Mexican parrot species. (cf. [animallaw.info](http://animallaw.info)) In 2010 PROFEPA has just seized 566 Mexican parrots; that is the smallest number in nearly the last ten years. (cf. [planetaazul.com](http://planetaazul.com)) So a positive change is taking place caused by the new legislation.

Also Juan Carlos Cantú, manager of the Mexico programs of “Defenders of Wildlife”, a national organization “dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities”(defenders.org2) is positive about an improvement of the situation. “We have just finished analyzing the seizure data for 2010 and the Environmental Enforcement Agency seized the least number of Mexican parrots in almost 10 years, a third less than in 2009. So illegal trade has decreased after only two years of the ban.” (Email: Juan Carlos Cantú, 22.02.2011; see appendix)

### 3.3. Penal Code

In 1996 environmental crimes were established in the Mexican penal code for the first time. Persons capturing wildlife using prohibited methods, threatening any species of extinction, using species of wildlife classified into any status of risk for commercial purpose without authorization or harming them maliciously could be sentenced to six months to six years in prison. But convicted persons could buy their way out of prison by paying monetary and bail. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.25)

Six years later, in 2002, the penal code was upgraded. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.25) Now the sale of wild living animals is classified as criminal offence and can be punished with up to twelve years in jail. The capture of any species of wildlife with prohibited methods, the endangering of the viability of any species of wildlife, the trade, capture, import and export of any species of wildlife rated as in any status of risk or its products or harming any species of wildlife can be punished with one to nine years in jail. If the criminal offences listed above are committed for a commercial purpose or have effects on a nature protection area, the prison term can be up to three years longer. (cf. pericosmexico.org, mexico.justicia.com)

Comparing the sentences given to parrot trappers and other persons violating the law concerning the protection of species I consider the Mexican penal code as very strict. In Germany some murderers are sentenced to 9 years in prison, (cf. e.g. blog.zeit.de) that is the maximum penalty for someone violating the General Law of Wildlife for non-commercial purposes. In England convicts imprisoned for life are released on average after the same period of time. (cf. wikipedia.org<sup>3</sup>) Thus, a commercial parrot trapper in Mexico can be jailed for three years more than a murderer having received life sentence actually is serving in England.

But why do you violate a law if a twelve-year prison stay might follow as a consequence?

The answer is simple; the number of trappers captured is insufficient so that there are no deterrent examples preventing others from the illegal capture.

The exact number of captured parrots is unknown due to the fact that only the trappers themselves know how many parrots they capture. Based on official estimations from different U.S. authorities concerning smuggled parrots from Mexico entering the USA, from PROFEPA and TRAFFIC, a worldwide operating wildlife trade monitoring network, and especially on interviews with leaders of the two most important unions of bird trappers and with individual trappers Juan Carlos Cantú (et al.) estimates the

number of parrots captured in Mexico between 65,000 and 78,000. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, pp. 34/35) The estimation was very difficult because of the to a great extent very different numbers. For example: In the 1980s the U.S. Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service assumed a total of 25 000 birds entering the USA crossing the Mexican border (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.34), while in the late 1980s the U. S. Department of Justice estimated that 150,000 birds (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.34). That was just a few years later but nevertheless, caused an increase of 125 000 birds per year. Considering this large range of numbers I think the estimation of 65,000 to 78,000 parrots being captured in Mexico is very exact and due to the questionings of the only persons who are able to know what is going on in the illegal capture and trade – the trappers – themselves, I think it is reliable, too.

PROFEPA, the Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente, is the agency in charge of controlling environmental laws. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.45) There are seizures by other agencies, too, for example PRG, the General Attorney of the Republic, or the Army, but they do concentrate on other crimes especially the drug traffic. Therefore their seizure numbers are comparatively small. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.50) I will not consider them in the following. **Between 1995 and 2005 PROFEPA seized on average 1,331 parrots each year, which is 2,05% of the total, based on the smallest possible entire amount of 65,000 parrots per year.** (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.50)

I should add that the data given by PROFEPA were partially contradictory or do not match with other numbers given by the same agency, (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.46) but I do not think that any authority or organization would publish data showing its work in a worse light than it actually is, so I assume that these 2,05% are reliable. If they are not correct, the correction will even decrease the number.

To come back to the question about why the strict legislation does not prevent from illegal capturing and trading with parrots: **From 1990 to 2006 only 11 persons were sentenced for illegal trade of parrots.** (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.51) To be exact, they were all sentenced in the years 2002, 2003 and 2005. Thus, twelve years in series there was no single person sentenced although just from 1995 to 2001, that is just one year more than half of this period, 9,756 parrots were seized. (single numbers: cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.50)

But what are the reasons for this low number?

PROFEPA's staff is minimized. According to Juan Carlos Cantú's (Juan Carlos Cantú et al.) study from 2007 PROFEPA has 513 inspectors for the whole country including

them who are not in charge with parrots but with industrial pollution, forestry, marine, etc. Therefore, in reality the number of inspectors controlling the observation of laws concerning wildlife is much smaller. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p. 45)

Furthermore, PROFEPA's budget was cut by 2,5% in 2006 and once more by 5% one year later. (cf. Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007 p.45)

PROFEPA itself says on its homepage that it has 29 "personas puestas a disposición del Ministerio Público de la Federación". (profepa.gob) Despite the fact that this number is already very small we have to consider that it refers to all species of Mexican wildlife, not only to parrots.

### **3.4. Non-Governmental Actions**

Despite official actions like laws there are also non-governmental organizations taking an active part in the protection of wild living parrots. Due to space restriction I will not list all of them, but nevertheless I think it is important to give a short overview of how environmental organizations work.

Defenders of Wildlife is a "national, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities" (defenders.org2) and one of the "leaders in science-based, results-oriented wildlife conservation" in the USA. (defenders.org2) Therefore its main domain is the USA but nevertheless it is also internationally active. (cf. Mark Cheater 2009, p.3). Primary it was founded in 1947 as Defenders of Fur Bearers. The organisation consisted of one employee and 1,500 members; its goal was to protect coyotes and other animals from foothold traps and poisons. (cf. defenders.org3) By now the organization has expanded its actions on the protection of every kind of wild animals and of the wildlife habitat and biodiversity. (cf. defenders.org4) In 2009 Defenders of Wildlife employed more than 150 persons and had over 500,000 members only in the USA. (cf. defenders.org3) Concerning the protection of Mexican parrots Defenders of Wildlife has achieved a great deal. In 2007 Juan Carlos Cantú, Director of Defenders of Wildlife's Mexico office, (et al.) published "The Illegal Parrot Trade In Mexico – A Comprehensive Assessment". Based on this report an article was added to the Mexican General Law of Wildlife prohibiting the import, export and the capture of parrots. (cf. animallaw.info) Moreover the organization supports this new law with a public awareness campaign. If the number of persons buying parrots is increasing, the number of parrots offered and thus, captured will follow. (cf. news.mongabay.com) The organization has created a

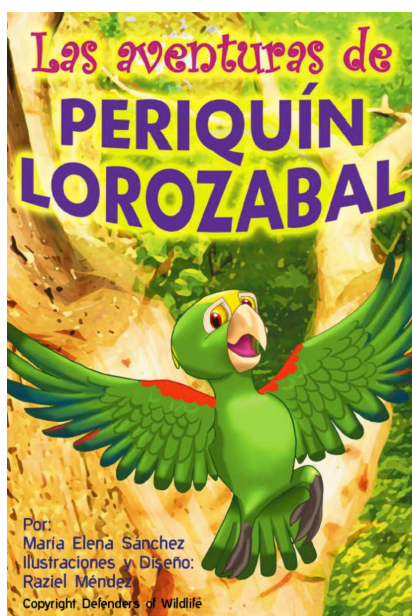


website - [www.pericosmexico.org](http://www.pericosmexico.org) - to inform about the different Mexican parrot species and to call attention to the fact that these animals have to be protected. (cf. [news.mogabay.com](http://news.mogabay.com)) It also informs about the current legislation concerning parrot trade and encourages pressing charges against persons who do not observe the law. (cf. [pericosmexico.org2](http://pericosmexico.org2))

Also beyond the Internet Defenders of Wildlife is taking an active part in awareness training.

The organization has printed more than 40,000 posters on this subject, that are distributed in whole Mexico, created children's books, painting books, story books, comic books, stickers and also a teacher's kit to call the population's attention to this theme. (cf. Mark Cheater 2009, p.18, [news.mongabay.com](http://news.mongabay.com)) I will give a few examples:

### ***Las aventuras de Periquín Lorozabal***



The children's book "Las aventuras de Periquín Lorozabal" written by Elena Sanchez and illustrated by Raziel Méndez (Copyright Defenders of Wildlife) is one of these books to educate children about the importance of the protection of wild living parrots.

The book tells the story of the parrot family Lorozabal. When his father does not come home Periquín starts searching him. On his journey the little parrot experiences the cruelty of the business of parrot trapping. He talks with captured birds, which are confined in small cages and are physically as well as psychically in a very bad condition. Finally he finds his father in a pet store and liberates him. (cf. [pericosmexico.org\\_pic](http://pericosmexico.org_pic))

Elena Sanchez, "Las aventuras de Periquín Lorozabal")

I think "Las aventuras de Periquín Lorozabal" is very convenient to explain the danger of parrot trapping to little children. Every page is illustrated with a large, colourful picture, so it is easy for the children to put themselves into Periquín's situation. The pictures themselves are very well chosen to underline what is written in the story. They show clearly what is going on in the business of parrot trapping, but due to the fact that the whole story is made up very suitable for children and due to its happy end, it does not evoke unnecessary fear.

**Posters: ¡NO COMPRES PERICOS SILVESTRES!**



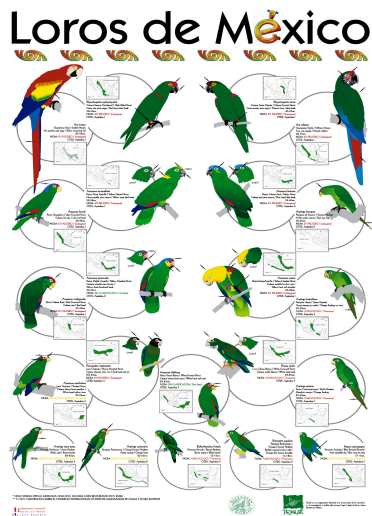
These posters are part of the public awareness campaign of Defenders of Wildlife. Their message is clear: It is not allowed to sell nor to buy Mexican parrots, everyone who does not observe these rules renders himself or herself liable to prosecution. Thus, ¡NO COMPRES PERICOS MEXICOS! (cf. Pericosmexico.org5)

(pericosmexico.org\_pic)



(pericosmexico.org\_pic)

**Posters: Mexican parrots**



These posters show the different parrot species living in Mexico. It is part of the public awareness campaign to let the population know about the different parrot species living in Mexico, so that they are informed if someone wants to sell them a Mexican parrot. (cf. pericosmexico.org4)

(pericosmexico.org\_pic)



(pericosmexico.org\_pic)

Obviously the project is successful. The number of complaints lodged with PROFEPA concerning illegal parrot trade quintupled from 2007 in 2008, when the addition to the General Law of Wildlife became effective. Before 2007 the amount of complaints ranged between 16 and 30, whereas it has not been less than 152 since 2008. (cf. pericosmexico.org3) I think it is important to highlight that the Papageienstation Arche Noah in Hoope pursues the same strategy for calling attention to the protection of

parrots. Especially pupils and kindergarten children are the target group of the Papageinstation.

While Defenders of Wildlife focuses on public awareness its sister organization Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund concentrates on the political domain: lobbying, issue advocacy and political campaigns. (cf. [defendersactionfund.org](http://defendersactionfund.org))

"[...] They help keep tabs on where our elected officials really stand on crucial conservation issues - and hold them accountable for their actions." says Ed Asner, an American actor, about the organization. ([defendersactionfund.org](http://defendersactionfund.org))

## **4. Consequences Of Illegal Parrot Trade**

### **4.1. For The Respective Parrot**

The following part of this essay is a special one. The consequences of parrot trapping for the respective trapped parrot are not presentable in numbers, charts or with other scientific methods. Actually they are not presentable at all. How can you present something authentically you have not experienced? I do not think that there is any way to convey the message that is behind this theme by giving results of some study of some famous parrot ethologist. It would just make this part to what the rest of this essay is: A societal-biological based reflection. I want this part to loosen from the totally scientific point of view and let it appear in a more human light. Of course no one can ask a parrot directly what it feels, but one can ask persons who are in very close contact to such birds that were captured and misused as pets. The following text is written on the basis of an interview I conducted with Margrit Reinhardt who takes an active part in the protection of parrots for more than 30 years. In November 1992 she founded the "Papageienstation Arche Noah", an officially recognised sanctuary for parrots, together with Ralf Reinhardt. Today it is resident in Hoope near Bremen. Although this essay deals with the problem of the capture of parrots in Mexico I have chosen a German institution for practical reasons. I am sure that there are no differences between how a parrot feels for different countries, so I think you can convey the conclusions from my interview with Margrit Reinhardt directly to the original subject.

Parrots do never forget. Their mind is as well developed as the mind of a six-year-old child. A captured parrot will never handle the stress of capture and transport; it will be traumatised for its life time. Some parrots living in the Papageienstation Arche Noah panic when they see men, gloves or hands. All these things remind them of the capture. Parrot trappers are without any exceptions male, therefore the loathing of men. Hands

and gloves are connected directly with the act of capture respectively with being grabbed by the trapper. Parrots are able to recognize specific details about their trappers, for example a beard, and accordingly react with fear. Over the years this fear fades into the background but it will never disappear completely.

In addition parrots are animals used to fly. In nature they have no limits, being captured and confined in little cages they are deprived of their destination – flying. Mostly the parrots develop conduct disorders such as swinging or spinning around. It is hardly possible to get a parrot out of a habit like this. A more familiar habit concerning parrots is the plugging of its own feathers. This can develop into biting itself and can end in suicide. The birds bite in their own flesh, tear through their crop. Margrit Reinhardt had to experience this herself.

Due to the problems these parrots have their owners are often overextended by their pets so that these parrots are passed on frequently. They are “Wandervögel”, as Margrit Reinhardt calls them.

Considering the facts described above I think it is easy to see that a captured parrot will never overcome what the trappers have done to it.

But why do people buy parrots taken from nature if there are such drastic consequences for the parrot – their prospective pet?

Mostly they just do not think about what they are doing. Parrots are colourful, intelligent, can fly and “speak”. For many people it is a childhood dream to have a tame, speaking parrot. The decision to buy a parrot taken from nature is a decision made by the price. In Germany a grey parrot from a breeder costs about 3000 €, a captured bird of the same species costs 500€ to 700€. These birds are of course terrified of persons as I have already pointed out above, so that I could not think that anyone would buy such an animal. But the buyers get tricked easily. For example they are told that the parrot is just irritated because it does not know them. Compassionateness is also an important element of these buys. But Margrit Reinhardt recommends not to buy any parrot even if it triggers compassion, since every sold parrot is replaced by a new one immediately. To “ransom” a parrot would just seal another parrot’s fate – a vicious circle.

But the current situation is not hopeless at all. Over the last two or three years Margrit Reinhardt has noticed a slight change in people’s awareness. Also due to the information shown by the media people begin to rethink their actions; the number of parrots kept as pets is declining.

In Germany it is subject to registration to keep a parrot, but there are not enough officials to make sure that every parrot is registered with the authorities. Of course no one visits every house checking if there is a parrot kept as pet illegally. But that does not mean that there are no controls at all. Every salesman offering parrots has to administrate a statutory register showing which parrot was sold to whom and when the sale took place. The parrots themselves must be ringed and have documents and their new owner has to register them with the authorities. (cf. Interview with Margrit Reinhardt; see appendix (notes))

#### **4.2. For The Mexican Parrot Populations**

The consequences of the illegal parrot trade for the parrot populations in Mexico are fatal. Several parrot species will be exterminated in 10 to 20 years if the illegal parrot trade continues the way it has in the past. (cf. news.mongabay.com)

#### **5. The Parrot Trappers**

From a statutory point of view parrot trapping in Mexico is illegal and I am sure that no one will contradict if I say that it is also wrong from someone's point of view, who is not involved in this business. Nevertheless I think it is important to dedicate a few lines to the parrot trappers. The parrot trappers themselves do not think that trapping parrots is wrong. (cf. newsmongabay.com) Some started trapping as children and see it as "a way of life". (Juan Carlos Cantú et al. 2007, p.18) I will not go into details concerning parrot trappers, but I think it is important to know how the trappers feel about their work to value the situation adequately.

Furthermore they are working together with the environmentalists. (cf. newsmongabay.com) Some of them start to breed exotic birds or work in their actual occupation throughout the whole year, since most of them just trap parrots in the off-seasons. Defenders of Wildlife also promotes bird watching and encourages former trappers to work as guides. (cf. Email: Juan Carlos Cantú, 22.02.2011; see appendix)

## **6. Conclusion**

“The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk?  
but, *Can they suffer?*”

Jeremy Bentham

I have already said in the introduction what I think about these questions. The central question of my research paper was “Result of political failure or unavoidable suffering?” I cannot answer this question clearly. Referring to the past I would say that it was - at least to some extent – caused by the political failure to enact applicable laws. But the legislation has changed. After decades of standing on the sideline the government is doing its best to curb the trade with Mexican parrots. The new legislation of 2008 banning the import and export of Mexican Parrots as well as the trade with these species is the first step of a change, even if there are not enough officers to control the law. But I do not think that anything is unavoidable; least of all suffering. If everyone involved will show as much enthusiasm in the future as they are already and legislation and non-governmental organizations continue working hand in hand, I am sure that there is a good chance to win the fight against illegal parrot trade; especially because there is no real enemy, since most of the parrot trappers have decided to work together with the environmentalists.

Having finished this research paper I think it is time to reflect on how the situation in Mexico will develop, and therefore, also when, or rather if, this suffering will end. I think there is a pretty good chance that the situation will turn out positive for the parrots. Things are already changing and the first results of this change are visible. Assuming that this change will continue, the business of illegal parrot trade will decrease more and more. Although I do not think that it will disappear totally.

Parrots will always be able to suffer, that is not the question, the question is:

*When will there be no reason for them to suffer anymore?*

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