

PRESS RELEASE

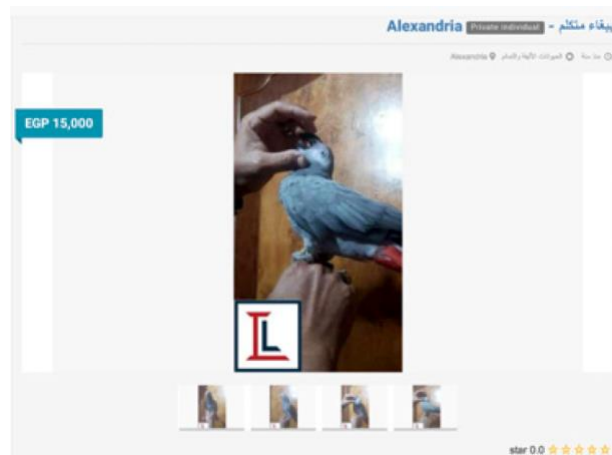
ONLINE TRADE OF NATIVE WILDLIFE FOR THE EXOTIC PET MARKET HAS GROWN IN AFRICA

Research from the GI-TOC and WPT suggests a growing illegal trade online for endangered birds as pets in Africa, in particular, African grey parrots.

GENEVA, 12 OCTOBER 2021: Research identifying hundreds of online advertisements selling exotic wildlife as pets suggests a rise in illegal trading of endangered animals in Africa.

A total of 782 online advertisements on classified websites in six countries were identified by automated methods over a six-month period in 2021 by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and the World Parrot Trust (WPT).

The highest number and frequency of ads were found in Kenya (455) and Nigeria (264), but ads in Benin, Ghana and Angola were recorded as “early-warning signs” of nascent markets in these countries. Manual searches found evidence in numerous other countries indicating the problem is widespread. Analysis also suggests illegal trade across borders and within countries.



The online wildlife and exotic pet trades in Africa have received relatively little attention to date, but GI-TOC and WPT's research indicates that a burgeoning middle class is fueling demand for exotic species as pets, while lenient legal frameworks and an increasing level of internet penetration contribute to growth in cyber-enabled wildlife crime.

“The broad challenge in combatting this crime is that criminals are on the web, but the police are not. Within this broader crisis, the online trade in endangered species is easily overlooked,” says **Simone Haysom**, Senior Analyst at GI-TOC and co-author of the report. “This gap in the global response allows wildlife traders to openly seek customers online, market goods, conduct transactions and stimulate demand.”

“Given the grave situation facing wild parrots, which have disappeared altogether from many areas, the scale of trade we detected online is deeply concerning,” says **Dr. Rowan Martin**, Director of the World Parrot Trust's Africa Programme. “It's vital that coordinated action is taken to end illegal trade in endangered wildlife before it's too late”.

GI-TOC hopes its investigation will contribute to the innovative responses needed to combat this type of crime. It recommends some simple steps to tackle the problem, including:

- Online advertising platforms should educate staff and customers on the issue to help with the detection and removal of ads for wildlife;
- Platforms must assert and uphold international and national laws relating to these wildlife ads and proactively search for and remove illegal material;
- Online platforms should have dedicated policies that guide their response to preventing and responding to their use of their platforms for illegal wildlife trade.

Advertisements were found on 'classifieds' type e-commerce platforms, where traders openly advertised parrots for sale, falsely touting them as good pets. This study also found advertisements for a broad range of non-native Appendix 1 and 2 birds for sale, which requires further study.

Jumia, one of the classified platform's identified in the report, has responded to the findings by removing all the offending posts, introducing new filters, and undertaking to revise its wildlife policies.

The MMFU and WPT both support international efforts to combat the sale of illegal wildlife products online. More information about the online trade of endangered bird species will follow as the unit's investigations evolve.

About GI-TOC's Market Monitoring and Friction Unit (MMFU)

The Market Monitoring and Friction Unit (MMFU) is a team dedicated to monitoring online markets for endangered wildlife species and working towards innovative and effective strategies for disrupting these markets. Its work combines machine-learning technology, open-source intelligence, and political-economy analysis to understand online illicit markets and how to curb them. The unit collaborates with civil society organizations and mandated authorities to push the illegal wildlife trade off the open web.

About GI-TOC

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of professionals working on the frontlines of the fight against the illicit economy and criminal actors. Through a network of global civil society observatories on the illicit economy, we monitor evolving trends and work to build the evidence basis for policy action, disseminate the expertise of our Network and catalyze multisectoral and holistic responses across a range of crime types. With the Global Initiative's Resilience Fund, we support community activists and local NGOs working in areas where crime governance is critically undermining people's safety, security and life chances.

About WPT

The World Parrot Trust (WPT) is an internationally recognized parrot conservation non-profit, founded in 1989, whose work covers 80 species of parrot in 43 countries. WPT's strategy aims to end harmful trade in parrots through a range of integrated actions, including working with communities to protect key populations, supporting law enforcement agencies in dismantling trafficking networks and care for seized parrots, and working with governments and corporations to ensure parrots get the protection they need.

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