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(TRADE RECORDS ANALYSIS OF FLORA
AND FAUNA IN COMMERCE)

The TRAFFIC Network is the world’s
largest wildlife trade monitoring programme
with offices covering most parts of the world.
TRAFFIC is a joint programme of WWF
(World Wide Fund for Nature) and IUCN (The
World Conservation Union) to monitor trade
in wild plants and animals. It works in close
co-operation with the CITES (Convention on
International Trade in Endangered Species
of wild fauna and flora) secretariat.

TRAFFIC-India is a programme division
of World Wide Fund for Nature-India
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Afrac Ahmed

Wild Blackheaded Munia Lonchura malacca
(white and brown belliéd form) feeding on paddy.

FRAUDULENCE
IN
INDIAN LIVE BIRD TRADE
An Identification Monograph
For Control of Illegal Trade

Dyed Blackheaded Munia

WWF
TRAFFIC
INDIA

Ministry of Environment and Forests
Government of India
About WWF-India

The World Wide Fund for Nature India (WWF-India) has been working to promote harmony between humankind and nature for almost three decades. Today, it is recognized as a premier conservation NGO in the country dealing with conservation and development issues.

At a time when the Web of Life has come under increasing threats, WWF-India’s attempts have been to find and implement solutions so that human beings can live in harmony with nature, and leave a world rich in natural resources and natural wonders for future generations.

Formerly known as the World Wildlife Fund, WWF-India was established as a Charitable Trust in 1969. With its network of State/Divisional and Field Offices spread across the country to implement its programmes, WWF-India is the largest and one of the most experienced conservation organisation in the country. WWF-India’s Secretariat functions from New Delhi. The organisation is part of the WWF family with 27 independent National Organisations. The coordinating body, the WWF International, is located at Gland in Switzerland.

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Cover picture: Captive Blackheaded Munia (Lonchura malaccana) dyed in three different colours. Inset Dyed Blackthroated Weaver bird.


FRAUDULENCE IN INDIAN LIVE BIRD TRADE
AN IDENTIFICATION MONOGRAPH FOR CONTROL OF ILLEGAL TRADE

A Abrar Ahmed

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Dr. Asad R. Rahmani

Project Coordinator
Manoj Kumar Misra

Ministry of Environment and Forests
Government of India

TRAFFIC -- INDIA --
Foreword

TRAFFIC -India, the wildlife trade monitoring division of WWF-India, has been studying and documenting trade in wild fauna and flora since its inception in 1992. One major work undertaken is monitoring and documentation of the live bird trade in the country, the first report of which titled "Live Bird Trade in Northern India" was published in 1997. Since then it was felt that an identification guide for the enforcement staff, which could aid differentiation between exotic birds and indigenous birds in trade, would be a valuable tool. Fortunately, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, readily came forward to support such an endeavour and this publication is the outcome. WWF-India is thankful to the Ministry for its support.

It is hoped that this monograph will be useful to the various enforcement agencies in the country.

15 September, 1999
New Delhi

Samar Singh
Secretary General
WWF-India

Preface

While researching and conducting field investigations for the TRAFFIC India's publication entitled "Live Bird Trade in India", I often came across instances where either a trader was found offering a potential buyer, cleverly dyed common bird as a rare and popular pet or an enforcement official misidentifying a bird in trade.

Although there are a number of books on birds available in the market, none of them are comprehensive enough to meet the requirements of the enforcement staff. To fill the need I decided to work on a publication on common fraudulent practices in live bird trade in India.

Consequent to some seizures, specially in the state of Uttar Pradesh in North India - where exotic birds alongwith indigenous birds were also seized - the traders tried to embarrass the Government in Court. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), Government of India, contacted TRAFFIC India to prepare an identification poster and a booklet for the benefit of the enforcement staff and public at large. This booklet is a result of that assignment.

It is hoped that this booklet will be useful in its own right and read alongwith the identification poster, published earlier by MOEF and supported by TRAFFIC India, would ensure better enforcement of law.

Abrar Ahmed
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Introduction

Little known facts about the bird trade

For centuries birds have been trapped and kept as pets and served as food and sustenance for the rich as well as the poor. Various parts of birds have been used in traditional medicines and some of these winged creatures have been used in black magic. Well-trained birds are still used as fortune tellers in rural India and in the by-lanes of the big cities. In fact birds are used in myriad ways, leading to a flourishing trade in live birds in India and abroad.

About 250 wild-caught and 70 exotic species have been recorded in the Indian live bird trade (Ahmed 1997). However, some species of birds are more popular than others and there is a specific demand for them. There is extensive trapping of these popular birds.

Since 1990-91 there is a total ban on trade in Indian birds, though there is no restriction on the domestic sale of captive-bred exotic (domesticated) species. With the spreading awareness and stricter enforcement of wildlife laws, the availability of preferred birds in the open market has decreased.

Bird trade has also been affected by the destruction and alteration of wildlife habitats and, to some extent, due to over-trapping in earlier years. Faced with a recurrent problem of shortage of wild birds and also persecution for dealing in indigenous species, traders have evolved various strategies to dupe buyers as well as enforcement authorities.

Very often the demand for a ‘rare’, not easily accessible species, is met by either providing a common bird, cleverly camouflaged (dyed) in the true colours of the rare counterparts or, by providing substitutes. Substitutes are also provided for preferred species, which may have legal, import or transportation restrictions. For example, the demand for Horned Owl (Bubo spp), used for black magic, is met by creating false ‘horns’ on the head of a Spotted Owlet (Athene brama), which is more easily available. The Hill Myna (Gracula religiosa) is also an extremely popular species, but it is not readily available in the domestic markets, and a buyer is often duped into accepting Bank Mynas (Acridotheris g mpgtianus) or Common Mynas (A. tristis) carefully coloured to look like their hill brethren!

Protected species listed in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and CITES are often traded locally or exported out of India under false names or by camouflaging them with dyes. Till a few years ago, Green Munias or Avadavats (Amandava formosa) were exported mixed with a flock of dyed female Red Munias (Amandava amandava) or were declared as exotic ‘Tiger Finch’ (Ahmed 1998, Ahmed et al in press). During a survey in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, the author was offered a wild caught male Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos) with its flight feathers clipped, as a captive-bred individual. However, the head injuries and the torn plumage were evidences enough of it being caught in the wild. In another survey in Bihar, a Redcrested Pochard (Netta rufina) was shown to the author as an exotic duck.

Described in this booklet are some of the commonly traded birds found to have been coloured or wrongly declared. An interesting example is that of common Black Kite (Milvus migrans) getting wrongly identified or sold as Falcons (such as Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus, Saker Falcon F. cherrug and Lagger Falcon F. biarmicus) and vice versa (Ahmed et al 1997).
In most parts of India the large owls *Bubo* spp. including Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*) are the most popular birds used for black magic and superstitions (Ali & Ripley 1983, Ahmed 1997), but they are not easily available and are quite expensive. Therefore, the trader often dyes the Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) with tea leaf water and few feathers are stuck with latex on the head of the Spotted Owlet giving it the appearance of a miniature horned owl.

**Identification**

Horned owls are quite big in size (50-60 cms) as compared to the small size of Spotted Owlets (21 cms).
Parakeets: Katha (*Acacia catechu*) is used to colour the shoulders of juvenile Roseringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) so that they can be sold as Alexandrine Parakeet (*P. eupatria*) chicks, which fetch a higher price. The head of Roseringed Parakeets are coloured orange and they are sold either as exotics in Bihar and West Bengal or as Malabar Parakeet, *P. columboides* (New English name for Bluewinged Parakeets).

Roseringed and Alexandrine Parakeets are sometimes coloured jet black and sold as black mutations, which fetch a higher price.

**IDENTIFICATION**

Fake parakeets are easy to identify. Though their colour may not come out easily, but if a feather (coloured) is plucked, the under shaft would still be white.

The Malabar Parakeet and the Redbreasted Parakeet *P. alexandri* (also called Moustached Parakeet) are often declared as exotic birds or rare mutations of the Roseringed Parakeet.

At times buyers are duped by showing them pictures of Redbreasted Parakeets in foreign books and passing them off as exotics.
Blossomheaded Parakeet (Psittacula cyanocephala) are often sold or declared as Peachfaced Lovebirds (Agapornis roseicollis) misdeclared as legal, captive bred exotics.

Indian Lorikeet or Vernal Hanging Parrot (Loriculus verinalis) is often sold as Abyssinian Lovebird (Agapornis taranta), a species uncommon in Indian bird markets or as a juvenile of other lovebirds such as the Peachfaced or Rosy-Faced Lovebird (Agapornis roseicollis) from Africa or as a captive-bred exotic species, to fetch a higher price.

Green Munia (Amandava formosa) a rare bird, found only in India, was never allowed for trade by the Indian Government but has been illegally traded in many areas. Females of Red Munia dyed in light green and pale yellow colour are sold as Green Munia. True Green Munia were also found exported mixed with the green coloured Red Munia females when the trade was legally allowed for Red Munia.

MODUS OPERANDI
The Green Munia has a red bill and red iris and a black tail, features that it shares with the Red Munia. The dyed (female) Red Munias provided an excellent cover for smuggling of Green Munias in the (trade) name of "Tiger Finch".

when the export of Red Munia was legal. By mixing Green and Red Munias there were less chances of detection. "Tiger Finch" in local markets may fetch ten times the price of a Red Munia.

IDENTIFICATION
The zebra stripes on the sides of the Green Munia is a major identification mark. The marking has given it the trade name - 'Tiger Finch'. The red colour on the back of the Red Munia is prominent, although sometimes the red tail feathers are plumbed to make it appear like a Green Munia. However, it would still lack the zebra stripes on the sides.
Dyed Whitethroated Munia or Indian Silverbill (*Lonchura malabarica*) in orangish-red colour (vegetable based dye) are offered as Red Munia (*Amandava amandava*). Some times Whitethroated Munia are palmed off as juvenile females of the Zebra Finch (*Taeniopygia guttata*) or Red Munia.

**IDENTIFICATION**
Except for the Green Munia, the reddish black beak of the Red Munia is not present in other Indian Munias. It also has a small red ring in the eye. Red Munia juveniles have a black beak but the eye colour is reddish brown and they are smaller in size. The beak of juvenile Zebra Finch is pale orangish-black.

**MODUS OPERANDI**
The majority of Munias (except the male of Red Munia in breeding plumage) are dyed in Red, Green and Yellow colours to make them look attractive and exotic to the buyer e.g. dyed Spotted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*).
**Munias**

**Bengalese Finch** or **Society Finch** (*Lonchura domesticus*) is a domesticated variety of Munia with various colour morphs (white, fawn etc). Wild caught **Whitebacked Munia** (*Lonchura striata*) are sometimes sold as Bengalese Finches.

**MODUS OPERANDI**
Since the Bengalese Finch and **Zebra Finch**, being domesticated varieties are not banned, there have been instances where juveniles of **Blackheaded Munia**, **Spotted Munia**, **Red Munia** and the **Whitethroated Munia**, caught from the wild, are sold / smuggled in the garb of the Bengalese Finch or Zebra Finch.

**Munias**

**IDENTIFICATION**
Bengalese Finch do not have a pure white rump and the symmetrical colouration of the Whitebacked Munia. But white patches are common on the forehead, tail and flight feathers of Bengalese Finch.

The chocolate colour variety of the Bengalese Finch, which is quite similar to the Whitebacked Munia, generally has a small white forehead and lacks the regular colour pattern prominent in a Whitebacked Munia.

The juvenile of the Bengalese Finch is similar in colouration to the adult bird, but is paler overall. In no way does it represent the juvenile Indian Munias, as claimed by traders.
Canaries (Serinus spp) are exotic (domesticated) birds, found in many varieties in the bird markets. The lizard variety of the Canary, (closely resembling the Canary in the wild) are quite similar to the Himalayan GreenFinch (Carduelis spinoides).

MODUS OPERANDI
In international and domestic markets, wild caught Himalayan GreenFinches or Siskin are commonly sold / declared as domesticated Canaries under the name 'Belgium Canary', one of the most popular variety of the domestic Canary.

IDENTIFICATION
The distinguishing character in domesticated Canaries is the long tail, like that of a bunting. The Himalayan Greenfinch’s tail is comparatively short and forked. Domesticated Canaries are much more colourful, in single shades of yellow, white and red, while GreenFinches generally have a drab and streaked greenish-yellow plumage.

Blackheaded Bunting (Emberiza melanocephala) and Redheaded Bunting (Emberiza bruniceps) males are sold as male and female Canaries respectively. The male of Redheaded Bunting is some times coloured orange and sold as a red variety of Canary.

IDENTIFICATION
The rufous colour of the crown in the dyed Redheaded Bunting remains prominent even after colouring.
**Weaver Birds**

**MODUS OPERANDI**
Before the ban on live bird trade in 1991, the Finn’s baya (*Ploceus megarhynchus*), a rare and endangered bird, was smuggled in large numbers mixed with the commonly found (often dyed) Weaver birds like Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*), Blackthroated Weaver (*Ploceus manyar*) and Streaked Weaver (*P. bengalensis*). In local markets Finn’s baya males in breeding plumage are also often sold as Canaries.

**IDENTIFICATION**
Finn’s Baya is comparatively larger than other Weaver birds. All the male Weaver birds in breeding plumage have a blackish-brown throat which is absent in the Finn’s Baya.

**Softbills**

**MODUS OPERANDI**
Chloropsis or leaf birds (*Chloropsis spp*) are often misdeclared as exotic species. Redwhiskered Bulbul (a fruit eating bird) (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) is shown pecking at grain placed in a dish whenever a potential customer approaches and then sold as an exotic Finch. The Redbilled Leothrix (*Leothrix lutea*), a species high in demand internationally, is also called Pekin Robin.

*Orangebellied Chloropsis (Male)*

*Redwhiskered Bulbul*

*Redbilled Leothrix or Pekin Robin*
Softbills

by aviculturists is sold as
an exotic bird as it is also
found in China. Very often
softbill bird species such
as Laughing Thrushes
(Garrulax spp.) are also
misdeclared as exotic.
This is generally done by
showing prospective
buyers and enforcement
authorities pictures of
these birds in foreign pet
or reference books.
Similarly Golden Orioles
(Oriolus oriolus) are often
sold as foreign birds.

MODUS OPERANDI

Green Magpie (Cissa chinensis)
is one of India's sought after
softbills in the international bird
markets. In captivity its colour
changes to blue either due to
inadequate diet or due to
excessive sunlight (as believed
by bird traders) or due to some
unknown factors (Ahmed 1997).
These are then sold as rare, cap-
tive-bred or wild blue mutations.
They are also declared as
captive bred exotics as the blue
colouring is quite different from
that of their wild counterparts.

White-crested
Laughing Thrush

Miscellaneous Information
In the international markets Green
Magpie are sold in the name of
Hunting Chissa. The name Green
Magpie is not suitable, as the bird
kept in captivity does not have any
green colour. The name is probably
changed in the international
markets because the Magpie (Pica
pica) is otherwise considered a
dowdy, common bird like the Crow.
(Corvus spp.). (Magpie has a
Common Crow (Corvus splendens)
like bird habits, and thus is not
preferred as a cage-bird).
**Hill Myna**  
Gracula religiosa
is one of the most popular birds for keeping as a pet.

There is an extremely high demand for the Hill Myna in international and domestic markets. Most of the Indian demand is met with 'substitutes' as described below:

Lamp black and mustard oil is mixed and then used for colouring Bank, Common, Pied and Jungle Mynas (Sturnus spp). The feathery portion above the supercilium (eyebrow) is shaved and coloured red (Ahmed 1997). Some times a yellow balloon is cut and pasted to the naked skin to give the appearance of a Hill Myna. The tail of the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) is cut, to about 2 cm. Often, the flight feathers are also clipped. The trimmed Black Drongo is then sold as 'Hill Myna' to gullible customers.

**Starling** (Sturnus vulgaris) is also often sold as myna or as an exotic bird.

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**MODUS OPERANDI**

When the seller sees a customer, he starts sprinkling water on the dyed myna pretending that the bird is being given a bath. A slightly suspicious customer would think it is a genuine Hill Myna because if it had been a dyed bird than the colour would have run while it was being bathed. Sudden bathing activity also saves the seller from being asked the inconvenient question, “Why are the myna feathers so sticky?” (due to the oil based colour). Hill Mynas were also earlier exported mixed with Common, Bank and Pied Mynas (assorted).

**IDENTIFICATION**

The yellow skin patch on the head, the bigger size and the glossy black colour are the typical features of a Hill Myna.
Indian GoldFinches (Carduelis carduelis) are declared and sold as exotic Eurasian GoldFinches, a closely related species.

House Sparrow (Passer domesticus): Female House Sparrows and Yellowthroated Sparrows (Petronia xanthocolis) are marked with lamp black or soot on the throat and sold as male House Sparrows as only the male House Sparrow are used for medicinal purposes.

Chicks of Indian Peafowl (Pavo cristatus) are reported to be sold / transported mixed with chicks of domestic fowl. Sometimes the developing crest is cut off to make them look like domestic fowl chicks.

Wild caught Quails (Coturnix & Turnix spp) are sometimes declared as captive-bred Japanese Quail and vice versa.

Common Bustard Quail

Japanese Quail (Female)

Demand for a Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) for Black magic, release and medicinal use is sometimes met by colouring a House Crow (Corvus splendens).

Wild caught Bronzewinged or the Emerald Dove (Chalcophaps indica) also found in South-East Asia is sold as exotic captive-bred dove in India.

Miscellaneous Information

Some private professional taxidermists in Calcutta make stuffed specimens by joining parts from different birds, thus giving such specimens a new appearance and selling them at exorbitant prices to collectors as rare bird trophies.
Conclusion

With such a rich variety of birds in this country, the bird trade in India cannot be fully stopped irrespective of the warning sounded by this booklet. The knowledge of fraudulent practices described here may, however, facilitate better enforcement of ban and ease the pressure on protected species. The large number of pictorial illustrations would help differentiate the true from the disguised look-alikes. The book could also be a handy tool for enforcement officials who need to upgrade their own knowledge about bird trade in general, and the difference between true indigenous wild species and captive-bred, (domesticated) or wild caught exotic species, in trade.

References


### How the Species are Traded

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<th>Trade Name</th>
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<td>Horned Owl</td>
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<td>Dyed Roseringed Parakeet (p - 6)</td>
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<td>Dyed Whitethroated Munia (p - 11)</td>
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<td>Exotic Finch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dyed Munia (except Red Munia male in breeding plumage) (p - 11)</td>
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<td>Exotic Finch</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hill Myna</td>
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<td>Starling (p - 21)</td>
<td>Myna</td>
<td>Myna</td>
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</table>

### Topography of a Bird

[Diagram of bird parts: Supercillium, Forehead, Bill, Throat, Breast, Flank, Nape, Back, Rump, Primaries, Tail, Crown, Vent]