

# Every Wild-Caught African Grey Knows What Hell-on-Earth is Like: Stopping the Breeder Petition to Import 4000 African Greys

By Karen Windsor

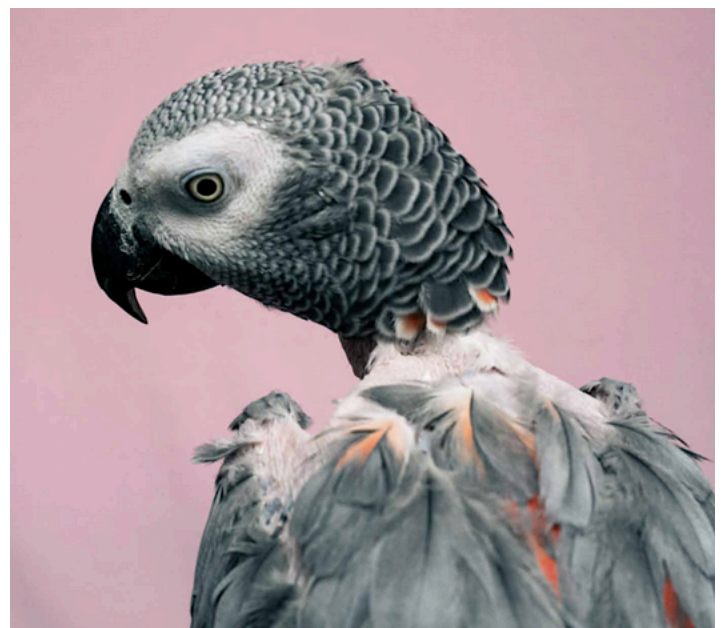


***Congo African Grey. Classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. A CITES Appendix I trade restricted species.  
Photo by Brian Jones***

In March of 2019, in an effort to establish a Cooperative Breeding Program (CBP) between aviculturists in the U.S. and in South Africa, Florida breeders Paul Marolf, Ray O’Neil and Jason Mitchell, submitted an application to U.S. Fish & Wildlife to allow the importation 4,000 African grey parrots from South Africa into the United States. The purpose, they claimed, was to revitalize U.S. breeding stock. The CBP would be established in partnership with the Parrot Breeders Association of South Africa, and would be overseen by the Organization of Professional Aviculturists, an international authority comprised of avicultural experts from both the U.S. and South Africa. The petition was met with enormous opposition from parrot rescue groups and animal welfare groups both here in the U.S. and internationally. Foster Parrots and many associate members of the Parrot Conservation Alliance drafted formal letters of opposition that were submitted to USFWS during the open public comment period. The status of the breeder petition is still pending.

The international trade in African grey parrots has resulted in the unsustainable extraction of an estimated 1.3 million of these birds from the wild over the last 20 years. The species has been virtually wiped out across Africa, with countries like Ghana reporting a loss of between 90 to 99 percent of African greys that were once abundant in Ghana’s forests. (Steyn, 2016) In 2016 this species was upgraded to “endangered” on the IUCN Red List, and is now listed as a CITES Appendix I restricted species, meaning that international commercial trade of African greys is now prohibited. Unfortunately, CITES restrictions can be circumvented through special permitting by government offices.

It is interesting that commercial breeders, who are largely responsible for the decimation of this species in the wild, are now petitioning USFWS for permits to import 4000 highly endangered African grey parrots from South Africa in order to revitalize the commercial industry that has been complicit in driving this species toward extinction.



***African greys are highly prone to plucking and other manifestations of psychological stress related to captivity.  
Photo by Christian Trippe***

On January 20, 2020, the Randburg SPCA in South Africa investigated the breeding facility owned by Antonie Meiring, the vice president of the Parrot Breeders Association of South Africa and a board member of the Organization of Professional Aviculturists. What they discovered was beyond abhorrent. A parasite ridden facility with parrot cages “infested with large rats”, and spider webs thick enough in some of the enclosures to impede flight. Inspector Shiven Bodasing of the Randburg SPCA stated, “The conditions which these animals are forced to endure is nothing short of deplorable. I was shocked to witness over 150 dead parrots on the property. One would expect that the Vice-Chairperson of the Parrot Breeders Association of South Africa would comply with his own Code of Conduct and Code of Practice. This is a crime, the

animals were found to be kept under offensive conditions, and we will be dealing with relevant role players, as people must be held accountable for the negligence observed at the premises, no person is above the law, and it is my job to remind perpetrators of that.”

If this is the kind of oversight one can expect from the OPA, then parrots in breeding facilities everywhere are in peril. We sure hope USFWS is paying attention, and that this horrific event will help them make the right decision regarding the Cooperative Breeding Program and the importation of 4,000 African grey parrots into the U.S.



## Update: Summer 2021



*Photo by Brian Jones*

Petition for the Importation of 4,000 African Grey Parrots  
In 2019, Florida breeder, Paul Marolf, and associates petitioned U.S. Fish & Wildlife to allow the importation of 4,000 African grey parrots from South Africa for the purpose of “revitalizing U.S. breeding stock. Animal and avian welfare organizations from around the globe mobilized to block the petition, which would represent a deadly blow to one of the world’s most highly endangered parrot species. Recently, the World Parrot Trust announced that, while Marolf’s Captive Breeding Program (CBP) application was unsuccessful in achieving approval for the acquisition of 4,000 greys, USFWS did approve the importation of 150 birds. Seventy-five males and seventy-five females, none of whom can be verified not to be wild-caught, will be transferred from egregious facilities in South Africa to spend the rest of their lives as breeder birds in a Florida bird mill. It can be said that where these birds are going is no worse than where they’re coming from, but it is tragic that USFWS would approve a CBP application from documented criminals and abusers.