



NEWS

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SMUGGLING BIRDS EQUALS JAIL TIME FOR
"OPERATION RENEGADE'S" 38TH CONVICTION

A Florida bird importer arrested as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's highly successful "Operation Renegade" has been sentenced to a year and a day in prison for illegally smuggling more than 4,000 "Congo" African grey parrots into the United States and filing false importation documents.

Federal Judge Edward B. Davis also ordered Adolph "Buzz" Pare, 63, of Miami, Florida, to pay \$300,000 in fines and restitution, the largest sum ever levied against a defendant in a federal wildlife smuggling case.

Pare conspired to smuggle African grey parrots, listed as a protected species under the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species on Fauna and Flora (CITES) from Zaire to Senegal and then on to the United States. The CITES export permits falsely stated that the parrots originated in Guinea or the Ivory Coast, countries where the "Congo" African grey parrot does not occur in the wild.

Pare is the 38th person to be convicted as a result of "Operation Renegade," a three-year undercover investigation by Service law enforcement agents into smuggling rings that brought exotic birds, such as parrots or macaws, or their eggs into the United States. Twenty-three of these defendants have received prison sentences totaling more than 47 years and fines totaling more than a half a million dollars.

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Most prominently, a federal court in Chicago sentenced Tony Silva to 7 years in jail without parole and \$100,000 in fines in November 1996. Silva, an internationally recognized expert and outspoken protector of exotic birds, was convicted of conspiring to smuggle into the country some of the world's most endangered, beautiful and protected wild birds.

In another case, William Wegner of La Jolla, California, is serving a 5-year prison term after being convicted of smuggling 800 cockatoo eggs worth \$1.5 million into the country from Australia over an 8 year period.

Smugglers known as "mules" collected viable cockatoo eggs from nest trees then smuggled them into the United States in home-made vests worn underneath their outer clothing. The vests held up to 40 eggs in individual pockets next to the smuggler's body allowing the eggs to continue to incubate and even hatch during the flight. Chicks from the eggs that hatched en route were destroyed by the smugglers, while offspring from eggs successfully smuggled into the states were sold as if legally raised by breeders in the United States.

"Working undercover in Operation Renegade, the Service's law enforcement agents put a real hurt on these bird smuggling operations," said Acting Service Director John Rogers. "The 38 convictions stand as a warning to anyone else who would jeopardize the future of parrots, macaws or other birds for personal profit."

Other successful prosecutions, achieved in cooperation with the Division of Law Enforcement in the Service's Southwest Region, included 10 individuals convicted of being part of a decade-long conspiracy to smuggle various species of parrots found in Mexico and Central and South America into the United States for resale to aviculturists and bird wholesalers and retailers. These defendants, convicted in Corpus Christi and Austin, Texas, received a total of 17 years incarceration for their crimes.

In Miami, three other commercial bird importers were convicted in addition to Pare. One, Richard Furzer, smuggled thousands of African grey parrots into the country using falsified permits. He pled guilty to additional offenses in Los Angeles and was sentenced to 18 months in jail and ordered to pay \$75,000 restitution.

Another commercial bird importer, Louie Mantas, is a fugitive from justice who faces both smuggling charges and an additional charge for flight from prosecution. Mantas fled after posting bond.

Smuggling parrots and other exotic birds into the United States poses a serious threat to wild populations in their native habitats in Africa, Australia, and Central and South America. Consequently, all parrots have been protected by trade restrictions imposed by CITES and some under the Endangered Species Act.

For some species, very few birds remain in the wild. The hyacinth macaw, found primarily in Brazil, for example, has a wild population of only 2,000 to 5,000 birds.

In 1993, Congress passed the Wild Bird Conservation Act, banning trade in virtually all wild, exotic birds. The U.S. trade in exotic birds today is limited to those species commonly bred by aviculturists in captivity.

Service law enforcement agents were assisted in "Operation Renegade" by the U.S. Customs Service, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, local police in Austin, Texas, and officials from many foreign countries.