

Move to save two iconic songbirds

Malaysia party to proposals to arrest decline of species numbers due to trade

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia is tabling two international proposals to save two iconic songbird species – the white-rumped sharma and the straw-headed bulbul – from further decline in numbers in the wild.

According to Perhilitan's Facebook, Malaysia has submitted the proposal to list the *Kittacincla malabarica* or white-rumped sharma under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

It also proposed for the *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* or straw-headed bulbul to be moved from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES.

Both the proposals were presented during the Conference of Parties – known as the COP 19 – currently meeting in Panama.

If the two proposals are adopted, this means that the commercial trade in white-rumped sharma will now be regulated while that for the critically endangered straw-headed bulbul will be banned.

Both species are currently widely trafficked for the songbird industry in parts of South-East Asia, particularly Indonesia.

The proposal on the white-rumped sharma is led by Malaysia

and Singapore while that on the straw-headed bulbul is led by both countries as well as the United States.

Malaysia is among 184 parties to CITES, which regulates the trade of wildlife and its parts.

In their joint proposal on the white-rumped sharma, Malaysia and Singapore had reported 615 seizures involving the species between January 2009 to May this year, with the highest number in Malaysia (309), followed by Thailand (223), Indonesia (71), Singapore (eight), Cambodia (three) and Vietnam (one).

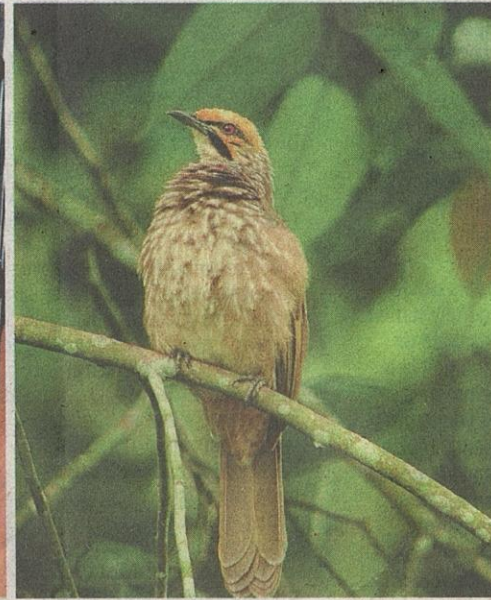
Overall, 32,018 birds were confiscated. Of these, at least 78 (13%) of the total seizure incidents involved international smuggling, involving more than 17,000 birds.

While the white-rumped sharma is listed as of Least Concern in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, it is protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act in Malaysia.

The straw-headed bulbul is currently listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Traffic, a wildlife trade monitoring group, said there was no silver bullet to solving the massive problem of songbird trafficking.

"It will take a suite of efforts to curb wild bird smuggling.



Endangered and in demand: (from left) The white-rumped sharma at a market in Indonesia, and the straw headed bulbul. — Photos by Traffic and Dr Chan Ah Lak respectively.

"For these two species, first, the proposals need to be accepted. Then, supporting national laws, monitoring, regulation and enforcement must follow.

"Finally, efforts must be made to address and reduce the incredible demand for these songbirds, not just in Indonesia but throughout South-East Asia," said Kanitha Krishnasamy, Traffic director in South-East Asia.

An Appendix I listing, said

Kanitha, for the straw-headed bulbul was crucial if there were to be any hope of saving this species.

"It is an extremely rare Critically Endangered species, caused in large part by the bird trade.

"It has a very small range and is highly desirable in the caged bird trade, which has driven it to the brink of extinction," she said in an e-mail interview from Panama.

Kanitha said it was important to remember that the proposal for the

white-rumped sharma's listing on Appendix II was not a trade ban.

"It would mean the mandatory recording of international trade, which will ensure that authorities can have a better sense of the scale of the trade, and the impact it may be having on the species.

"This, in turn, will enable authorities to make informed decisions about regulation and control to prevent the species becoming even more threatened," she said.