

# THE INDONESIA NINE

## Mehd Halaouate, of the World Parrot Trust, gives an account of one of the most appalling smuggling cases he has ever seen

This is the story of 24 cockatoos, *Cacatua galerita eleonora*, inserted into empty mineral bottles that were rescued when illegally smuggled into the Port of Tanjung Perak Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, and even *Time* magazine wouldn't let this go unnoticed. I have travelled to many places around the globe and have seen smuggling attempts conducted in many ways, but never with this level of cruelty.

I travelled to Maharani Zoo in East Java to the place where the birds were received after the confiscation. The manager was awaiting my arrival and took me straight to the birds and it was overwhelming for me to see eight beautiful cockatoos happy and alert. Two of them were even showing off by raising their crests and doing their distinctive cockatoo walk. Then I realised these birds were not Yellow-crested cockatoos (*Cacatua sulphurea* sp.) as was originally reported, but Medium Sulphur-crested cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita eleonora*).

To see these birds in good health and active after all they went through just made it more certain that I would do all that I could to help give them the best care possible. Deep down, I just wanted to stay close to them and make sure that they were well cared for, but after speaking with the two vets in charge of their care, I knew they were in good hands. These people were as appalled as I was about how these birds were mistreated.

I knew there was a male Eclectus parrot among the confiscated birds, but the cockatoos briefly took all of my focus. I stood a few minutes in front of the beautiful all-green parrot as he eyed me warily. It was like he was telling me "There is nothing you can do to me that is worse

than what I have already been through".

The birds were acquired on Ambon Island in Central Maluku. On this island the only cockatoo species historically to be found in good numbers is the Moluccan cockatoo. There are no other cockatoo species in this location, so



Medium Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita eleonora*)  
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these birds were taken from other islands. The Medium Sulphur-crested cockatoo is found on Aru and Kai islands where the species was introduced.

These birds had travelled for four days and nights at sea and it was pure luck and a miracle that they were found. The smuggler came off the ferry with the Eclectus on his shoulder and was clearly ignorant about the laws pertaining to capture, trade, or transporting wildlife



Six of the eight surviving cockatoos  
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without permits. The police at the harbour arrested him straight away. It was then that some of the passengers, upon seeing this arrest, came forward and informed the police that there were possibly more birds still on the ferry, as they heard screeching sounds from two big bags. When the policemen opened one of the bags they found plastic bottles, stuffed with cockatoos.

The news wasn't good, as 10 birds

were already dead, with two more barely alive, although there were some survivors. After gathering the necessary proof and taking some photos, the remaining birds were transported to Maharani Zoo for testing and urgent care. Only eight cockatoos and the male Eclectus remained alive.

The manager of the zoo informed me that because of all of the confiscated wildlife that gets delivered to them, their budget is very stretched and they struggle. As they are desperately in need of support, I promised that I would do all I could to provide them with some relief funding and to assist in any way possible.



The male Eclectus parrot (*Eclectus roratus*)  
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Immediately upon my return I contacted my colleagues at the World Parrot Trust with an urgent request

to share what I had learned, and to seek the kind support of others. A rapidly conceived appeal was launched and in less than three days, over £4,000 was received in aid of these, and other threatened Indonesian parrots. This help is essential and it is incredibly rewarding

to see this outstanding level of support. However, more support is still needed and you can help by visiting [www.razoo.com/story/Indonesia](http://www.razoo.com/story/Indonesia) or contacting the World Parrot Trust at [www.parrots.org](http://www.parrots.org) ■

*Note: At the time of going to press, we had not been able to obtain copyright permission from Getty Images, but it may still be possible to view the images of the bottles at <http://tinyurl.com/birds-in-bottles>*