

IUCN SSC Pigeon and Dove Specialist Group

Position Statement on the Value of Ex Situ Populations in Conserving Threatened Columbiformes and Recommendations on Enhanced Use of CITES to Address Unsustainable Trade

BirdLife International recognizes 354 species of pigeons and doves (Columbiformes), of which 68 are considered globally threatened by the IUCN Red List. 14 species are currently listed as Critically Endangered or Extinct in the Wild. Ex-situ rescue or ex-situ assurance has already been identified as an important conservation tool for eight of these species, and recent extinctions are feared for at least three of the remaining. Another 19 species are currently listed as globally Endangered, but only a handful of these most threatened Columbiformes have sustainable ex-situ populations. Furthermore, there is widespread illegal and unsustainable use in Pigeons and Doves, which is increasingly being driven by international demand.

We, the IUCN SSC Pigeon and Dove Specialist Group (PDSG), acknowledge the urgent need to address the threat of illegal and/or unsustainable international trade to pigeon and dove species. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is currently the only global mechanism in place to regulate, monitor, and control this trade.

Illegal and/or unsustainable international trade is regarded as a serious risk to several threatened species of Columbiformes. However, this trade remains poorly studied and regulated. Currently, only seven species of pigeon and dove are listed in the Appendices of CITES.

To ensure that international trade in pigeons and doves is adequately monitored and regulated, and to secure a sustainable future for these species, we urge Parties to enhance their use of CITES by listing species potentially threatened by international trade in the Appendices of the Convention.

In particular, we make the following recommendations:

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Reference and additional literature:

CITES Notification to the Parties (No. 2022/056) [Registration of operations that breed Appendix-I animal species in captivity for commercial purposes](#)

Lees AC, Devenish C, Areta JI, de Araújo CB, Keller C, Phalan B and Silveira LF (2021) [Assessing the extinction Probability of the Purple-winged Ground Dove, an Enigmatic Bamboo Specialist. Front. Ecol. Evol. 9:624959.](#)

Maunder M and Byers O (2005) [The IUCN Technical Guidelines on the Management of Ex Situ Populations for Conservation: reflecting major changes in the application of ex situ conservation.](#) *Oryx*, 39(1), 95–98

McGowan P.J.K., Traylor-Holzer, K. & Leus, K. (2016) [IUCN Guidelines for Determining When and How Ex Situ Management Should Be Used in Species Conservation.](#) *Conservation Letters*, May 2017, 10(3), 361–366

SSC (2023) Draft (Online Consultation) [IUCN Species Survival Commission Position Statement on the Role of Botanic Gardens, Aquariums and Zoos in Conservation.](#)
Accessed 24/1/23

1. Facilitation and funding of much needed research into the commercial trade in pigeon and dove species, with a focus on international trade. This is particularly recommended in range states with special responsibilities for threatened or potentially threatened pigeon and dove species;
2. CITES Parties are encouraged to put forward evidence-based proposals to include species of pigeons and doves threatened by international trade in the Appendices of CITES, in collaboration with the IUCN SSC Pigeon and Dove Specialist Group and other relevant experts and stakeholders;
3. CITES Parties are encouraged to develop and/or use national legal frameworks to enforce CITES regulations to the full extent.

Additionally, we are firm in our belief that ex-situ management can play an important role in the recovery of threatened pigeon and dove species, both in the short-term (as with the Endangered Santa Cruz Ground-dove, *Alopecoenas sanctaerucis*), or in the long-term (as exemplified by the stable EAZA ex-situ Programme (EEP) for the Extinct in the Wild Socorro Dove, *Zenaida graysoni*).

We concur with an SSC Position Statement, currently in development, which stresses the value of ex-situ populations as part of a holistic 'One Plan' conservation approach (SSC, 2023), and we encourage all stakeholders to consider and assess the potential of ex-situ populations in conservation planning. Ex-situ populations can act as 'conservation assurance populations' when transparent measures are taken to ensure best possible genetic diversity, sustainable long-term management and legal acquisition. Furthermore, the institutions holding these populations can play valuable roles in advancing research, education and community engagement, policy development, equitable access to nature and conservation fundraising.

We make the following recommendations:

4. Conservation including ex-situ components must be considered in the framework of the [One Plan Approach](#);
5. Capacity building and facility development in range states are valuable investments in conservation when developed and managed in a transparent and coordinated fashion;
6. Building on existing ex-situ populations of threatened pigeon and dove species has the potential to result in conservation opportunities, as well as the development of knowledge and know-how. This should be explored, in a structured way;

Regrettably, some captive populations are not currently managed for sustainability and/or are of unknown or questionable origin, or from known illegal or unsustainable acquisition (an example being the European population of Blue Headed Quail Doves, *Starmoenas cyanocephala*). In such instances, we make the following recommendations:

7. No commercial exploitation or monetary value for individual birds should be tolerated in ex-situ populations when formally used as, or claimed to be, a conservation tool;
8. Legal issues regarding the original acquisition must be worked out in holding countries, preferably also involving range states or countries of origin of that population;
9. The potential for sustainable management must be assessed in an integrated matter (considering the One-Plan-Approach) and initiated within a mandatory governing framework;

The PDSG believes that the purpose of the ex-situ population must serve the greater needs of the species, above any interests of an individual person or institution, in order to be regarded as an ex-situ conservation contribution.

Using ex-situ populations for conservation purposes should always be in accordance with the relevant IUCN guidelines as well as national and international legislation and policies, such as but not limited to:

- [IUCN Species Survival Commission guidelines on the use of ex-situ management for species conservation](#). Version 2, 2014.
- [IUCN guidelines for reintroductions and other conservation translocations](#). Version 1.0.
- [IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020 Resolution 079](#) - Linking in situ and ex-situ efforts to save threatened species.