

# MACAWS: REGULATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA FACT SHEET

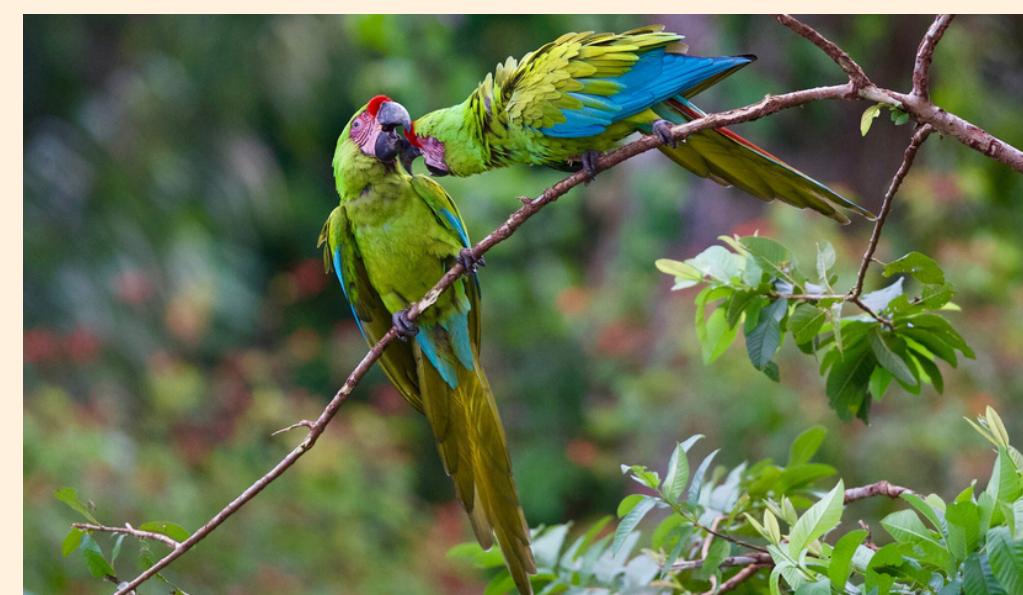
## What are macaws?

Macaws are birds that belong to the Psittacidae family and are amongst the most threatened species of birds in the world (Guedes). In fact, many species of macaws are currently listed as endangered or under critical risk in the IUCN Red List.

Species of macaws belong to six different genera: Ara, Anodorhynchus, Cyanopsitta, Primolius, Orthopsittaca, and Diopsittaca. There are 17 extant species of macaws throughout Latin America.

They are very social and highly intelligent animals who tend to mate for life and live in flocks of up to 30 individuals (national geographic)

## Example: Great Green Macaw



<https://wildnet.org/finding-answers-for-great-green-macaws/>

It is estimated that only about 40 to 70 Great Green Macaws can currently be found roaming in the wild in Ecuador (Montenegro-Pazmiño et al, 148). And less than 1,000 individuals in both Central and South America (David Vasquez)

Some of the factors affecting macaws in the wild are loss of habitat from deforestation, illegal hunting, and trapping for the exotic pet trade (Guedes, 280).

## Why should the average person care?

Macaws are often described as “flagship” species for advocacy of environmental conservation (Guedes, 280). To save macaws you must save their entire habitat. So advocating for macaws means advocating for an entire biome. Plus, they are beautiful, intelligent and easily recognizable birds, which makes it easy for people to care about them. For instance in Ecuador, the Great Green Macaw has been described as an “emblematic” species for the “conservation of forests” in Ecuador, and there are many non-profit conservation organizations such as Fundacion de Conservacion Jocotoco and Fundacion Jambeli that are working towards protecting the species and their biome through community education and reintroduction into the wild.

The conservation of macaws may also be vital for the overall health of the forest biomes. Recent studies have suggested that members of the Psittacidae family are primary pollinators of many large-seeded flora (Baños-Villalba et al., 2017). In the Bolivian Amazonian savannah, the *Ara ararauna*, *A. glaucogularis* and *A. severus*, are the primary pollinators of a large seeded tree, the motacú palm, (Baños-Villalba et al., 2017).

## Macaws as pets:

Species in the Psittacidae family have endured a long history of overexploitation by humans for their feathers and for companionship. They are large, beautiful, brightly coloured bird species believed to be as smart as human toddlers. Macaws are a long-lived species, some of which are known to survive over 60 years often outliving their keepers. While most birds kept as pets have been domesticated, macaws continue to be wild animals. It is virtually impossible to provide a natural existence, since naturally changing temperatures, food, vegetation, and landscape cannot be recreated indoors, nor freedom to fly and exhibit instinctual behaviours. Additionally, they can be challenging to keep as pets as they can be very loud and destructive in human home environments. These birds also require constant attention seven days a week for the rest of their life. Keepers have described the experience akin to having a toddler for decades. Handling these large birds which tend to become more aggressive once they reach maturity often proves to be problematic for some keepers and is a commonly cited rationale for relinquishment (exoticpetvet). Plus, if macaws take a member of the household to be their “mate” as they would another macaw in the wild, they can show aggressive behaviours towards other members of the household and people in general. This also means that any separation from their keepers can result in extreme stress to macaws (such as plucking their own feathers).



## Solution: What can be done in British Columbia to protect macaws?

This project would seek broader protections for macaws within the pet industry in British Columbia by prohibiting, or substantially restricting ownership of these species as pets throughout the province. By either naming the genus of macaws a controlled alien species under the Wildlife Act or by proposing a provincial bill similar to the section of the bylaws of city of Surrey and the Ahousaht First Nation that deal with possession of exotic birds.

According to *Pfeifer and British Columbia (Director of Wildlife)*, the Controlled Alien Species regulation is not aimed at controlling all alien species or concerned with protecting foreign wildlife and biomes. *Pfeifer*, highlights the aim of the legislature when creating the Act and the regulation: "It deals with alien species that could create risk to humans and that could certainly be harmful to native wildlife. It makes sense to be able to manage those and to prohibit ownership that isn't responsible ownership of those alien species". Nevertheless, what constitutes "harm" to humans and native wildlife should be qualified. As animals such as pandas and giraffes can also be found on the list along venomous snakes and tigers. In *Pfeifer*, the Director's of Wildlife's reasoning that cheetahs constitute "one of the most dangerous species of wildlife" because of the potential damage they can do with their "teeth and claws" was accepted. It was also accepted that cheetahs were the easiest big cats to domesticate, which is why they are often used in conservation campaigns and trained by humans. Nevertheless, it was also concluded, that it was necessary for the humans to undergo training themselves to be able to train and care for the cheetahs. Likewise, although macaws, in theory, can be trained by humans, they should not be kept by just anyone. People should undergo training to keep macaws, and since they are inherently wild animals, if they are to be kept by people, there should be an underlying reason like the CAS regulation foresees. Moreover, macaws have strong, sharp beaks that can potentially tear the skin and break bones. Plus as seen above they can become aggressive, which could make them potentially dangerous like the cheetahs in *Pfeifer*. Moreover, since the Covid-19 pandemic, the world has become more sensitive to zoonotic diseases. Like other parrots, Macaws have the potential to carry psittacosis, a zoonotic disease with similar effects to the flu or pneumonia. This disease has been linked to macaws that have been poorly kept by their keepers in captivity (amparasilvestre).

Adding Macaws to CAS regulation would provide protection for Macaws as the aim of the legislation is to reduce the numbers of CAS in private ownership. However, if this approach is followed it is important to advocate that individual keepers, and sanctuaries of Macaws already in the province are able to keep caring for those birds. Per *Demcak v British Columbia (Director of Wildlife)*, when BC began to regulate CAS, a witness testified that he was denied permits and had to send his CAS animals to Alberta or they would have been put down.

Alternatively, the city of Surrey in Metro Vancouver and the Ahousaht First Nation in Alberni-Clayoquot have both passed bylaws that essentially prohibit casual ownership of macaws by private individuals. The Animal responsibility bylaw (2017, NO 19105) in Surrey and the Animal Control and Care bylaw (2019, NO.1) in the Ahousaht reservation ban "all birds" with some listed exceptions. Macaws aren't listed in the exception so they cannot be possessed, sold or displayed in these territories. DTA could advocate for a provincial bill that extends these protections for macaws to the rest of British Columbia.

## Final Thoughts

1. Please note that the goal of this project is to reduce future trade of macaws in BC as a preliminary step to address this global problem. Individuals and sanctuaries currently caring for macaws should continue these important activities.
2. This project would complement DTA's current caged bird advocacy efforts as well as its other initiatives in BC and would be a natural next step for DTA and its partners.

#KeepMacawsWILD



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