

NOTA DE PRENSA

The Doñana Biological Station explores the Congo to study endangered grey parrot populations

- Researchers from the Estación Biológica de Doñana and the Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles conducted a five-week scientific expedition into one of the least-explored rainforests of central Africa
- The grey parrot is an endangered species, mainly due to decades of heavy trapping to supply international pet markets.



Grey Parrot in the Lomami National Park. Photo: José L. Tella

Seville (Spain) 20th December 2024. Despite their immense biodiversity, the rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo remain among the least-studied regions of Earth. Geographic inaccessibility, political instability, and a lack of proper infrastructure have left many of these vast areas largely unknown to science. A scientific team led by the Doñana Biological Station – CSIC and the Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles has ventured deep into these forests to investigate the status of the grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*), a species globally listed as “Endangered” by the UICN since 2016.

Pedro Romero Vidal and José Luis Tella, researchers from the Doñana Biological Station, are two of the scientists leading this expedition. Until now, their studies on wild parrot populations had primarily focused on Central and South America. They had also conducted research in Asia, Australia, and Africa, but this marks their first venture into the Congo. The researchers collaborated with Luis Flores from the Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles, a research institution based in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

The primary goal of the expedition was to assess the status of red-tailed grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) populations in these understudied regions. This species has been globally listed as endangered since 2016, mainly due to decades of intense trapping to supply the international pet and cage bird trade. The team focused their surveys on the vast Lomami and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks, while also covering some of the species' peripheral distribution areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.

“The surveys conducted reveal that populations of this species exhibit extremely low densities and it has even disappeared from large parts of their range, including protected natural areas,” explains José Luis Tella, a researcher who began this line of study over 15 years ago, focusing on parrot populations in various parts of the world.

The scientific team has confirmed that illegal trapping for international trade continues, with frequent confiscations of dozens of individuals. These parrots receive veterinary care before being released at the Lwiro Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. Additionally, significant deforestation is occurring outside protected areas to produce charcoal, which serves as the country's primary energy source for cooking.

“Deforestation and hunting, primarily to supply food locally and to large city markets, pose serious threats to a remarkably rich biodiversity whose full extent remains unknown,” says Pedro Vidal Cordero. “In fact, this expedition recorded the presence of around 500 bird species and 40 mammal species. Surprisingly, dozens of these were previously undocumented in this vast and unexplored region of Central Africa”

Following this expedition, the team plans to continue investigating the impacts of hunting and forest destruction on the country's biodiversity and to assess the conservation status of the grey parrot throughout its range in Central Africa.

The expedition was funded by the Psittacus Foundation, with additional support from the University Pablo de Olavide's Plan Propio for cooperation, led by Martina Carrete. It marks the first step in a five-year scientific collaboration agreement established between the CSIC and CRNS-LWIRO.



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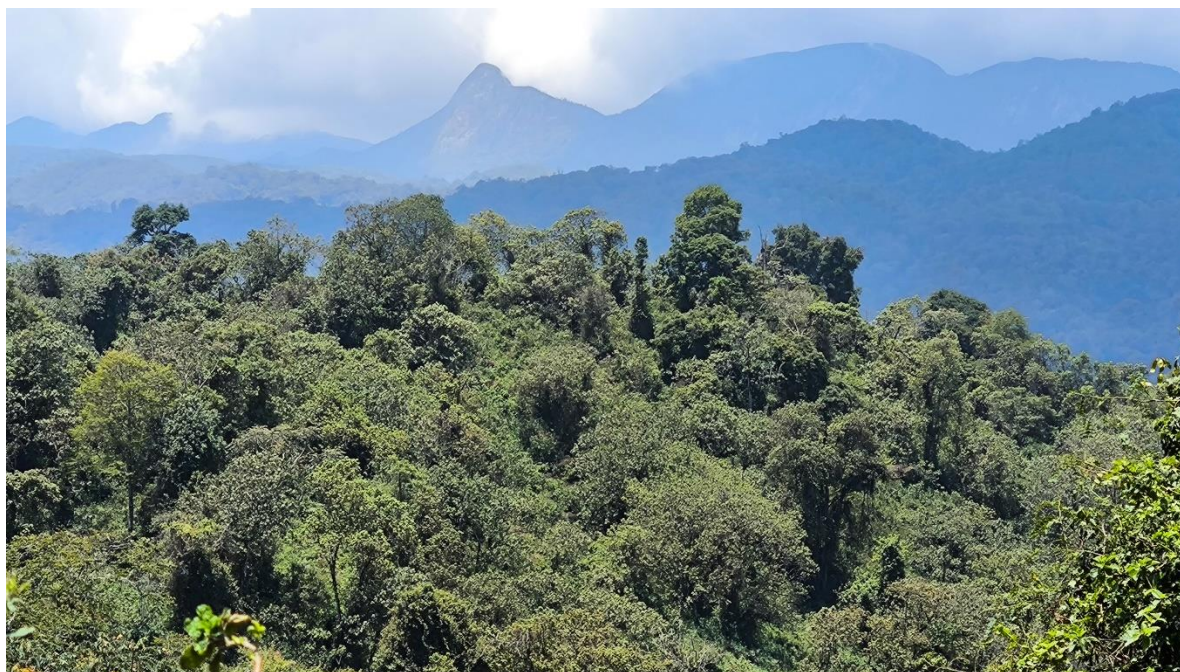
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Grey parrots illegally captured for international trade, seized and undergoing rehabilitation at the CNRS-LWIRO rescue center for their eventual release into the Congolese forests. (Photo by José L. Tella).



Selva de montaña en Parque Nacional de Kahuzi-Biega. Foto José L. Tella



ESTACIÓN BIOLÓGICA DE DOÑANA – CSIC
COMUNICACIÓN Y DIVULGACIÓN
prensa@ebd.csic.es
(+34) 955 14 94 16

C/ AMERICO VESPUCIO, N° 26
41092 SEVILLA (ESPAÑA)
TEL. : (34) 954 466700
FAX: (34) 954 621125

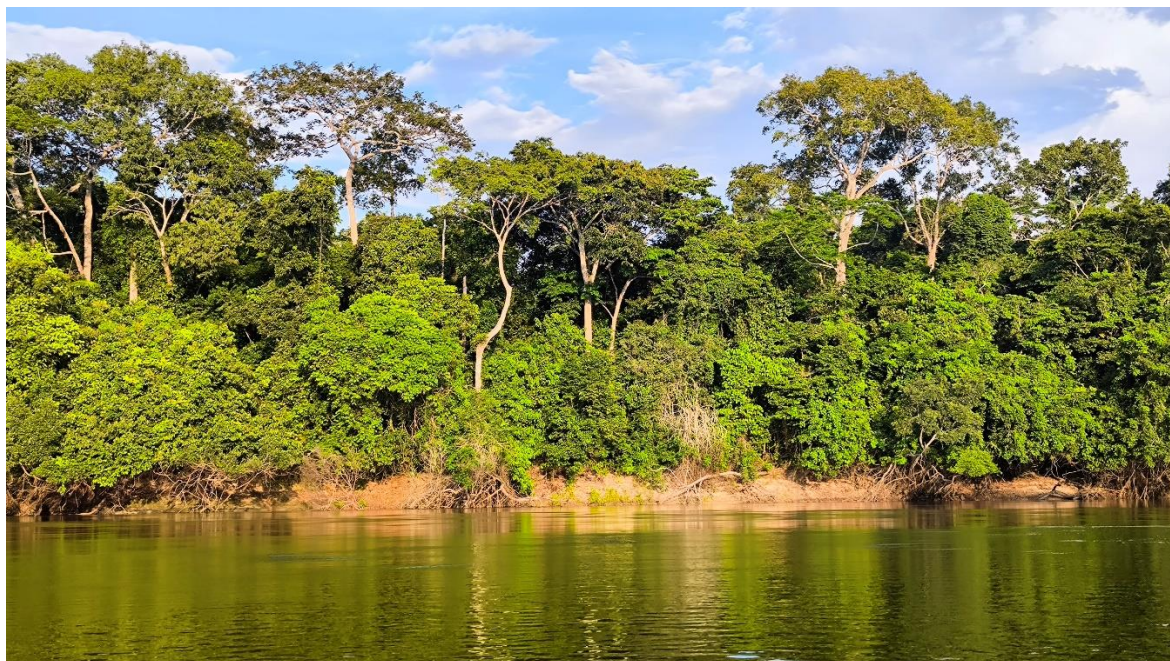


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Selva de tierras bajas en Parque Nacional de la Lomami. Foto José L. Tella



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