

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

Amendments to Appendices I and II of CITES

Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Bangkok (Thailand), 2–14 October 2004

A. Proposal

Inclusion of *Passerina ciris* in Appendix II in accordance with Article II 2(a) of the Convention, and to satisfy Criterion B) i) in Annex 2a of Resolution Conf. 9.24.

B. Proponents

The United States of America.

C. Supporting statement

1. Taxonomy

- 1.1 Class: Aves
- 1.2 Order: Passeriformes
- 1.3 Family: Cardinalidae
- 1.4 Genus and Species: *Passerina ciris*
- 1.5 Scientific synonyms: None
- 1.6 Common names:
- | | |
|----------|---|
| English: | Painted Bunting |
| Spanish: | Mosaico, Sietecolores, Mariposa, Colorín Sietecolores |
| German: | Papst-Finkenammer |
| Italian: | Papa della Luisiana, Settecolori |
| French: | Nonpareil, Pape de Louisiane, Passerin nonpareil |
| Dutch: | Mexicaanse Nonpareil |
| Danish: | Papstfink |
- 1.7 Code numbers: None

2. Biological parameters

2.1 Distribution

Passerina ciris ranges throughout the southeastern and southwestern United States to the West Indies, Mexico and Central America, ranging from sea level up to 2,200 m (Sprunt 1954, Monroe 1968, Rappole and Warner 1980, Binford 1989, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Howell and Web 1995, AOU 1998, Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Lowther *et al.* 1999, Garrido and Kirkconell 2000). Its breeding, migratory and wintering ranges fall within the jurisdiction of 11 nations, all CITES Parties, including the proponents. The global breeding population of *Passerina ciris* is divided between two of the range countries, 80% in the United States and 20% in Mexico (Rich *et al.* 2004). During the breeding season this species is distributed in two disjunctive populations: the eastern breeding population ranges from the Atlantic Coast of the United States, including the barrier islands, from North Carolina south to central Florida. The western breeding population ranges from the southern Mississippi Valley, west towards the States of Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico in the

United States, and south into the States of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas in Mexico. During the non-breeding season, the eastern breeding population winters from Louisiana and Alabama southward throughout the Florida Peninsula, the Bahamas and Cuba. The western population winters in Mexico from Sinaloa south through the Pacific lowlands west of the Sierra Madre Occidental to Veracruz, and from the Yucatan Peninsula to Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama (Lowther *et al.* 1999, Sprunt 1954, Howell and Web 1995, AOU 1998, Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Garrido and Kirkconell 2000). During the last 50 years, *Passerina ciris*' range has diminished in some areas, and the species has been extirpated from others in the southwestern and eastern United States and northeastern Mexico (Lowther *et al.* 1999, Sauer *et al.* 2003, USFWS 2004). The species has been recorded outside of its natural range in Europe as introductions, transportees or escapees from captivity (Evans 1994, BOU 2004).

2.2 Habitat availability

General: *Passerina ciris* is poorly surveyed and not quantified at either breeding or wintering grounds (Sprunt 1954, Howell and Web 1995, AOU 1998, Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Lowther *et al.* 1999). It is evidently dependent on continuous scrub ecosystems during breeding, migration and wintering, and for both immature and adult life stages. It prefers partially open areas with isolated trees and brush vegetation, along riparian thickets and in weedy and shrubby areas. Breeding: The western population's breeding habitat consists of partially open areas scattered with brush, riparian thickets and shrubbery. The eastern population's breeding habitat consists of scrub communities and the margins of maritime hammocks (Howell and Web 1995, AOU 1998). Migration: During the spring and fall migrations, both eastern and western populations migrate across a large variety of open scrub, grassy habitats and semi-open lands. Winter: Wintering habitat is similar for both the western and eastern populations, consisting of tropical forest margins and tropical savanna (Lowther *et al.* 1999).

2.3 Population status

The current global population for the species is estimated to be 3,600,000 individuals (Rich *et al.* 2004). It is believed to be common in some localities to scarce and rare in other places (Monroe 1968, Howell and Webb 1995, Raffaele *et al.* 1999, Lowther *et al.* 1999). The species has been declining rapidly throughout its natural range in the last 50 years (Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002, Sauer *et al.* 2003, USFWS 2004). In Mexico, the species is a common to scarce winter visitor throughout the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico lowlands (Howell and Webb 1995, Lowther *et al.* 1999). In Guatemala, it is common to fairly common, and in Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, it is an uncommon to rare local winter resident (Lowther *et al.* 1999). In the Bahamas and Cuba the species is an uncommon and rare winter visitor, respectively (Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Garrido and Kirkconell 2000). A breeding territory is 1.13–3.92 ha (Lowther *et al.* 1999). *Passerina ciris* is a species of concern throughout its whole range (Rich *et al.* 2004).

2.4 Population trends

Overall, there has been a general decline in *Passerina ciris* numbers since the mid-1960s (Lowther *et al.* 1999, Sauer *et al.* 2003, NAS 2004b). Their desirability as caged birds and loss of habitat is the primary cause of their decline (Lowther *et al.* 1999, Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002, Phillips Lynch 2004). Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data for 1966–2002 survey wide, including all years for the continental United States and 5 years for northeastern Mexico, show a significant population decline of -2.5% annually ($P = 0.00$; $N = 338$; 95% confidence interval (CI) = -3.6 to -1.5) (Sauer *et al.* 2003). That is, over 55% of the original total population has been lost in the last 30 years (Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002, Rich *et al.* 2004) (Figure 1).

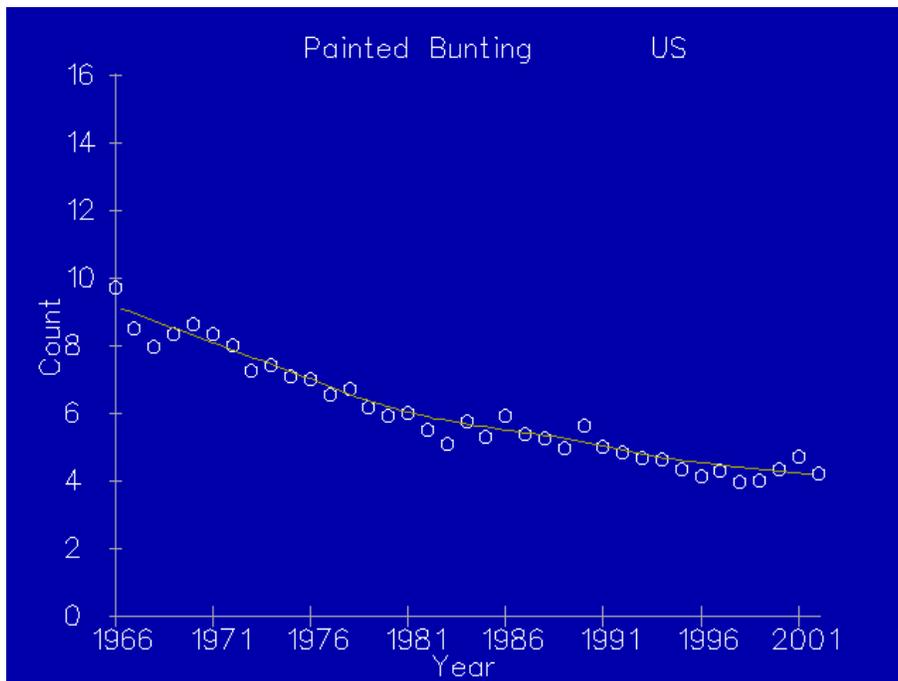


Figure 1. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data show a survey-wide population decline of *Passerina ciris* for the period 1966–2002. Source: Sauer *et al.* (2003).

Survey data from the non-breeding season from 43 years of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) from 1960 to 2003 also show a decline of the population throughout the United States (NAS 2004) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Data from National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts the non-breeding season. Year 60 = 1960, Year 102 = 2002. Source: NAS (2004).

2.5 Geographic trends

The eastern breeding population of *Passerina ciris*, which is within the southeastern United States and Caribbean, shows the greatest population decline of -3.9% annually ($P = 0.00$) based on BBS data (Sauer *et al.* 2003). The western breeding population, which is within the southwestern United States, shows a population decline of -2.5% annually ($P = 0.00$) (Sauer *et al.* 2003). The species has been extirpated for the last 50 years from some counties in North Carolina (USFWS 2004, Phillips Lynch 2004).

2.6 Role of the species in its ecosystem

Passerina ciris is a diurnal forager and uses different foraging strategies to acquire food. It is mostly a seedeater throughout the year, although insects make up 20–30% of its diet during the breeding season. Insects typically eaten include Orthoptera, Coleoptera, Hymenoptera, Lepidoptera, Hemiptera, Diptera, Arachnida and Gastropoda. *Passerina ciris* may be predated at different life stages from egg to adult, as are many other woodland birds, by snakes, corvid birds and ants (Lowther 1999).

2.7 Threats

Although the exact cause of decline of *Passerina ciris* is not known, it is most likely the result of a combination of factors such as habitat loss, capture for the bird trade, and brood parasitism. The eastern population, with its very limited coastal range, is especially susceptible to habitat degradation and destruction. The western population also faces the threat of habitat loss, especially on its molting grounds in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Development of coastal swamp thickets and woodland edges has significantly reduced the species' eastern coastal habitats. The loss of mid-migratory staging areas (riparian habitat) in the southwestern United States and in northwestern Mexico has contributed to the western population decline. Unfortunately, human development and land management practices have and continue to alter potential painted bunting nest sites. Stands of shrubby wax myrtle and buckthorn in open-canopied pines and hardwoods are increasingly limited on the southeastern U.S. coast. The replacement of native grasses and seeds with sod grass also denies buntings important food sources (Phillips Lynch 2004, <http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us>).

The species has been trapped and sold in local markets in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and also transported overseas to international markets in Europe, South America and Asia (Ramos 1982, Iñigo-Elias 1986, Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002). The trade of *Passerina ciris* targets primarily wild, mature males because of their colorful feathers and songs. This affects the wild population structure and dynamics. Another threat to a lesser extent is brood parasitism by *Molothrus ater* throughout the breeding range.

3. Utilization and trade

3.1 National utilization

Currently *Passerina ciris* is protected by law and therefore is not legally exploited within the United States. In Mexico, the species has been exploited legally for at least the last 50 years (Ramos 1982, Iñigo-Elias 1986, Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002). Today the species continues to be exploited legally across Mexico. In a recent study by Iñigo-Elias *et al.* (2002), they estimated that, at least during the period of 1979–2000, Mexico legally authorized the domestic trapping and trade of a minimum of 100,000 *Passerina ciris*, or an average of 5,800 birds per year. These figures are probably under-estimates because, in the 1984–1985 harvest season for the domestic trade, trappers were authorized to harvest 23,000 individuals in five Mexican states (Iñigo-Elias 1986). This species has also been reported in local markets in Cuba, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Guatemala (Lowther *et al.* 1999, Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002, P. Sykes, U.S. Geological Survey, pers. comm.)

3.2 Legal international trade

Since the 1950s, legal trade of *Passerina ciris* has been documented from Mexico to Europe, Asia and South America (Quiñones and Castro 1975, Ramos 1982, Iñigo-Elias 1986, Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002). During the 1974–1975 harvest season, Mexico exported over 15,000 individual *Passerina ciris* to international

markets (Quiñones and Castro 1975). This trade continued in similar proportions until 1982, when Mexico banned exports of all wildlife (Iñigo-Elias 1986). Later, in 1999, Mexico again opened international trade of wildlife and allowed exports of *Passerina ciris* and other passerines to Europe, Asia and South America (see 7. Additional Remarks). During the 2001–2002 harvest season, it is estimated that Mexico exported approximately 12,000 individuals of *Passerina ciris* (Lopez Medellin and Iñigo-Elias 2002, Iñigo-Elias *et al* 2000). Major global importers of *Passerina ciris* are: Argentina, Belgium, Greece, Japan, Italy, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Paraguay, Spain and the United Kingdom. Because the species has not been listed in the CITES Appendices and does not receive any other international protection or monitoring, there is only scarce information about exports and international trade from other countries in Central America and the Caribbean.

3.3 Illegal trade

Since the trade ban in Mexico was lifted in 1999, the demand for *Passerina ciris* has increased in the international markets, including Europe, Asia and South America. Within the United States, there is currently a domestic illegal trade in southern Florida, primarily in Dade County around Miami, where *Passerina ciris* are trapped in the wild and later sold in pet stores and at bird auctions (P. Sykes, U.S. Geological Survey, pers. comm.). In Mexico, there is constant illegal domestic trade of *Passerina ciris* and other species, but few or no data are available (Ortiz 2001, www.profepa.gob.mx). Illegal, unreported, and unregulated trade in wild-caught birds poses a significant threat to *Passerina ciris*, compromises attempts at stock assessment, and has prompted new policies within and between nations. Because this species is not listed in the CITES Appendices or otherwise monitored internationally, it is almost impossible to trace any illegal international trade of this or other such species.

3.4 Actual or potential trade impacts

Due to the recent increased demand for *Passerina ciris* as a caged bird, and its continued population decline, there is an urgent need to identify the impact of global trade on this species. Listing in Appendix II of CITES would a) contribute to a more accurate understanding of the international trade; b) link more precisely the potential correlation of this trade with local, regional and global populations; c) improve current management mechanisms used by exporting countries by standardizing permitting and reporting requirements; d) improve protection under national legislation for managing bird trade; e) encourage the development of national monitoring systems and conservation programs at local and national levels; and f) combat illegal trade by enforcing national legislation and implementing stronger incentives (fines) against this activity.

3.5 Captive breeding or artificial propagation for commercial purposes (outside country of origin)

Large-scale captive breeding for commercial purposes is not yet known. Small captive-breeding operations exist in specialized aviaries in Latin America, Europe and Asia.

4. Conservation and management

4.1 Legal status

4.1.1 National

In the United States, *Passerina ciris* is a Federal “bird of conservation concern” (USFWS 2004), and is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In the recent North American Land Bird Conservation Plan, *Passerina ciris* is among the bird species for which we have the “greatest range-wide concerns, and which are most in need of conservation attention” (Rich *et al.* 2004). In Mexico, the species is not protected under the Endangered Species List or Norma Oficial Mexicana NOM-059-ECOL-2001 (DOF 2002). However, the Avian Species Conservation Assessment shows that *Passerina ciris*’ “breeding population in the Tamaulipan Scrub and Chihuahuan Desert is of high concern.”

4.1.2 International

Passerina ciris is currently listed on the Partners in Flight Watchlist as a species of special concern (Lowther *et al.* 1999, Rich *et al.* 2004), but there is no international body or organization responsible for the management and trade of migratory passerine birds, and no international regulation through trade controls. Recommendations for bird trade management were developed at the VII Meeting of the Canada/Mexico/U.S. Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management in April 2002, and are summarized at <http://www.trilat.org/>. These recommendations have yet to be implemented.

4.2 Species management

4.2.1 Population monitoring

There are now important long-term survey programs in place to monitor population trends during breeding and non-breeding seasons for all species in the United States. These are the Christmas Bird Count and the Breeding Bird Survey (Sauers 2003, Audubon 2004b). The North American Bird Banding Program, a joint effort between the Canadian Wildlife Service and the United States Department of the Interior, is an indispensable program for studying the movement, survival and behavior of birds (http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/index_e.cfm, <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/>). However migratory and wintering population survival is still poorly known and habitat selection and availability in wintering grounds is undocumented.

4.2.2 Habitat conservation

Appropriate habitat for this species has likely been conserved in protected areas throughout the species' range (e.g., National Wildlife Refuges and National Parks in the United States). Several conservation measures are in place for *Passerina ciris* habitat conservation in both breeding countries (Mexico and the United States) on wintering grounds. However, additional measures are needed for the conservation of suitable breeding habitats in coastal areas.

4.2.3 Management measures

At the 2002 meeting of the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystems Conservation and Management, the U.S. and Mexican governments discussed setting up a joint task force to assess the impact of the bird trade on *Passerina ciris*, but this is yet to be implemented (TCWECM 2000).

After 2000, Mexico implemented a program to promote the sustainable harvest of wildlife within geographical management units (UMAs). However, harvest of this species is not limited to this harvest management scheme, and much improvement is required for it to become an effective measure.

4.3 Control measures

4.3.1 International trade

Currently, trade in *Passerina ciris* is not limited by any international system. However, Mexico and the United States are signatories to the Migratory Bird Convention between the United States of America and the United Mexican States for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Game Mammals, which restricts the "taking" of migratory birds. Stronger enforcement of the Migratory Bird Treaty is needed, particularly by Mexico as the primary exporter of this species.

4.3.2 Domestic measures

As stated earlier, *Passerina ciris* is protected under U.S. laws (Migratory Bird Treaty Act), as well as treaties for the protection of migratory birds. In the United States, the trapping, possession and trade of *Passerina ciris* and other migratory birds is prohibited. *Passerina ciris* has been harvested in Mexico since the 1970s. Several national bird-harvesting programs have regulated the capture and trade of wild-caught birds in Mexico, including the 1979-2000 Annual Harvesting Calendar for Song and Ornate Birds and the program for Wildlife Management Units and Subsistence Harvesting Permits (Iñigo-Elias 1986, Lopez Medellin and Iñigo-Elias 2002). No information is available on bird trade controls in Caribbean and Central American countries.

5. Information on similar species

The peer-reviewed taxonomic checklist of the American Ornithologists' Union (1998 and future supplements) is the most widely used reference for the genus *Passerina* in North America, the Caribbean and Central America.

Several neotropical migratory passerine birds are captured for the pet trade throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (Quiñones and Castro 1975, Ramos 1982, Iñigo-Elias *et al.* 2002). Among these are migratory and endemic species of *Passerina*, such as *P. cyanea*, *P. lechlancherii*, *P. amoena* and *P. versicolor*, which are heavily exploited for domestic and international markets.

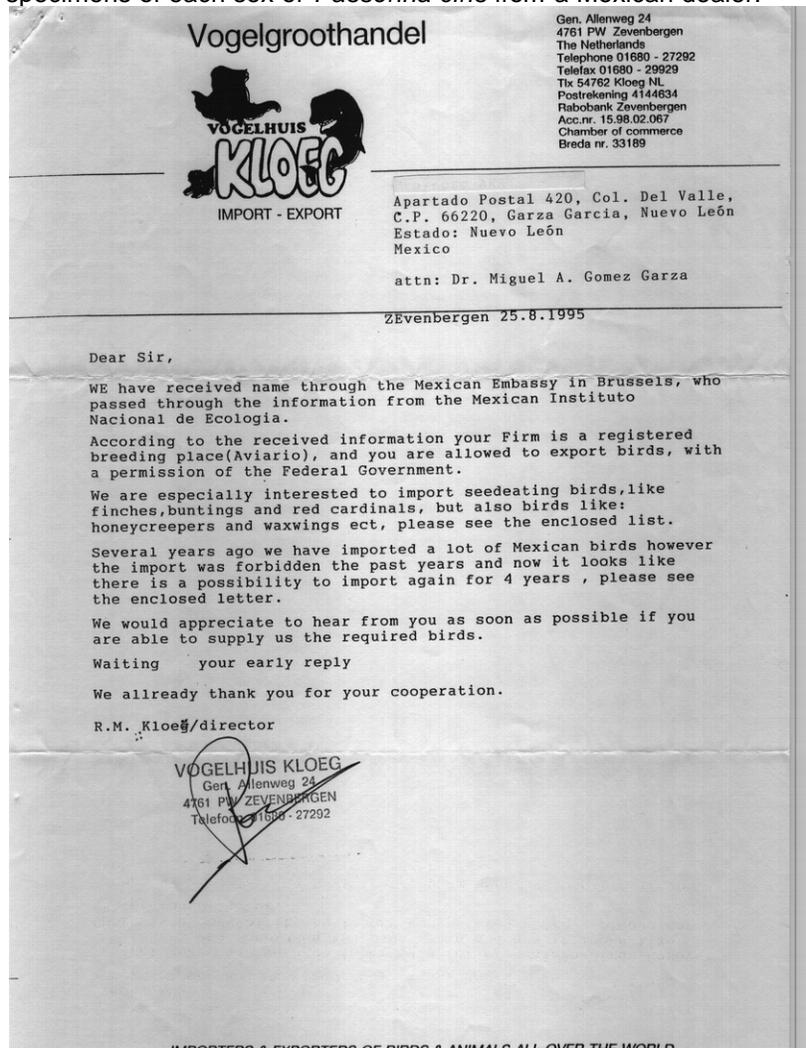
On 9 October 2001, the Bulletin Board for Ornithologists working with neotropical birds (NEOORN-L@listserv.lsu.edu) received a report that *P. cyanea*, *P. lechlancherii* and *P. amoena* were recently "available for sale in Britain at \$116.80 per pair. I believe they probably arrived here via Mexico."

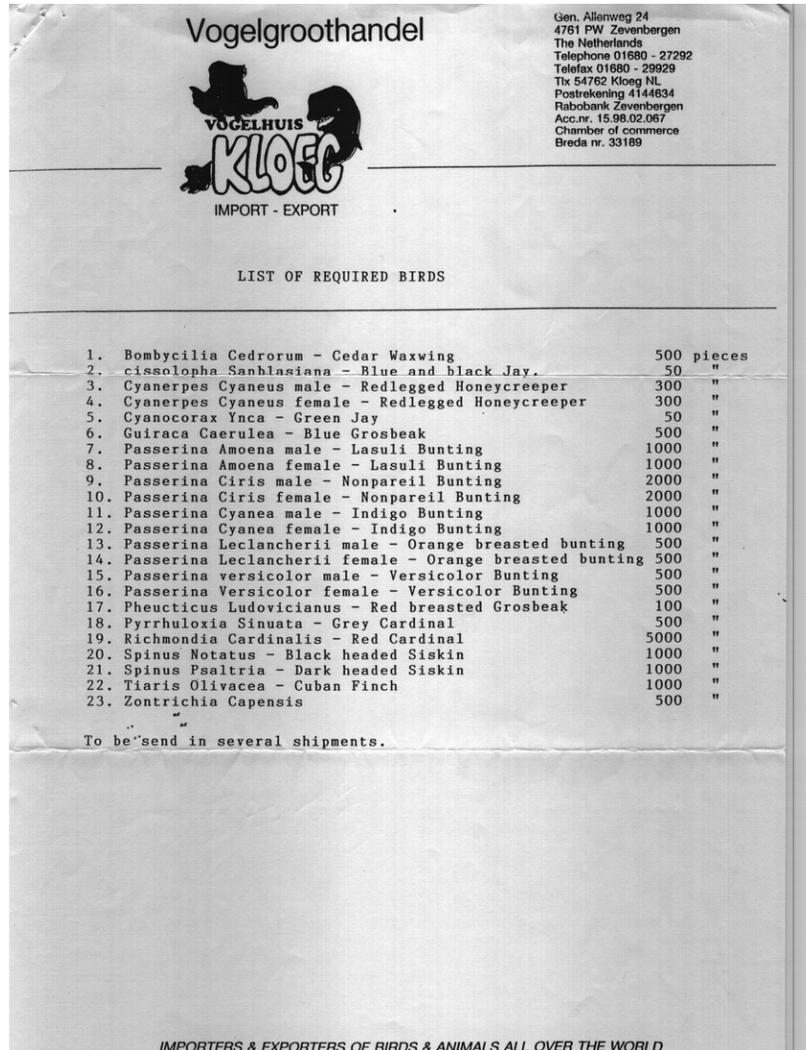
6. Other comments

None

7. Additional remarks

The demand for wild caught specimens is constant. Following is a letter from a Dutch bird importer requesting 2,000 specimens of each sex of *Passerina ciris* from a Mexican dealer.





8. References

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