



Birds of Paradise
Photo Credit: Birds.id

Protecting Indonesian Birds Interview with Marison Guciano, FLIGHT Founder

FLIGHT protects Indonesia's birds and raises awareness of birds in the country. Before forming FLIGHT, its Founder Marison Guciano spent two years investigating Indonesia's extensive illegal bird trade. Here, Biophilic Cities explores, through a Q&A with Marison Guciano, FLIGHT's strategy, successes, and challenges that lay ahead.

Biophilic Cities (BC): Can you explain how you became interested in bird conservation and how and why you formed the non-profit FLIGHT?

Marison Guciano (MG): Previously, I was involved in general issues regarding animal welfare and wildlife trade. I also campaigned to close the wildlife markets. While focusing on the issue of wildlife trade, I saw very few organizations targeting the illegal bird trade, especially that in songbirds. In fact, there is

currently a crisis here. The trade in songbirds is a significant threat to the continued survival of wild birds in Southeast Asia. Indonesia is the epicenter for this trade. In February 2018, FLIGHT: Protecting Indonesia's Birds was formed in response to this urgent conservation crisis. It is dedicated to stopping the illegal trade in birds.

BC: What are the main goals of FLIGHT?

MG: We want to stop the trade in wild birds, both legal and illegal. We believe that birds belong in the wild, not in cages. Wild birds that are traded and kept as pets do not have any quality of life. They are locked in small and barren cages just so that we can listen to them sing.

I realized that efforts to stop the bird trade will be a long battle.

It will not be easy. Especially in Indonesia, where keeping birds as pets has become a cultural practice. But, we are optimistic that we can bring change.

BC: Can you describe how serious a threat illegal trafficking in birds is in Indonesia and other countries?

MG: In Indonesia, the illegal trafficking in birds is a huge threat. For Javanese people, the largest tribe in Indonesia, raising birds as pets is a culture. Therefore, the demand for birds to supply markets in Java is very large. The results of our investigation state that at least 10,000 birds per week were sent illegally from Sumatra to Java.

FLIGHT was formed as a direct response to the massive scale of songbird trade in Indonesia, most of which involves the trapping of

wild birds to supply the demand. This is driving many species to decline and even causing local extinction in the wild.

BC: What motivates you to work on behalf of birds?

MG: Challenge. I often visit the bird markets. I saw them confined in small and barren cages. I feel that birds in the cages are depressed. They have wings, but they can't fly. Sadly, almost everyone who sees this cruelty thinks it is normal. I promised myself that I must bring change for these birds.

BC: What successes have you had so far?

MG: We have saved more than 10,000 birds from illegal trade and returned them to the wild.

BC: Are you finding public support for the work you are doing? And is this support growing?

MG: Yes, we are beginning to experience public support. And this is growing. Some members of the public have provided information, support and even funds for us.

BC: Can you talk about the importance birdlife in cities and villages in Indonesia?

MG: Yes. We also provide educational programs for the younger generation in schools. We are donating books related to bird preservation and their habitat. We want our younger generation to grow up with strong awareness of the

preservation of birds. We not only emphasize the importance of birds as seed spreaders but also as guardians of balance in the ecosystem. We also remind students that birds have the right to fly freely where they like. As studies show, birds also have emotions, like us. We must not remove the rights of birds by locking them up as pets in small, barren cages.

BC: What challenges have you had faced in your work?



Song birds rescued from illegal trade released by FLIGHT
Photo Credit: FLIGHT

MG: The resources of FLIGHT are very limited. Most of us are young people and work voluntarily. We are dealing with an industry that has strong connections with money, corrupt officers and other resources. We encounter many threats because we are perceived as interfering with these business interests.

BC: Are you optimistic that you can stop or significantly curtail the illegal trafficking of birds?

MG: Yes, we are optimistic. For now, at least, we have managed to disrupt the smuggling of birds from Sumatra to Java as a result of seizures carried out by the

quarantine authorities in the Bakaheuni Port (on the island of Sumatra) and Merak Port (on the island of Java), two ports that connect Sumatra and Java. We provide vital support to the quarantine authorities, including information from the results of our investigations.

BC: Keep up the great work that you do in Indonesia, and we look forward to partnering in the future!

*Edited by Sean Geygan
Editorial Note: In the past eighteen months, FLIGHT has rescued more than 20,000 birds. Since the interview, Lampung Quarantine authorities, assisted by FLIGHT, stopped the smuggling of hundreds of birds from West Sumatra to Jakarta at Bakaheuni Port on October 1, 2019. All of those birds have been released into the wild.*

Resources

FLIGHT. <http://flightprotectingbirds.org>.