

also recommends determining environmental correlates of patterns of abundance in the Great Victoria Desert. However, these recommendations are voluntary, and because the species is categorized as least concern, it is not a high conservation priority for the Australian Government. Because of the area of occupancy and observed flock sizes, researchers think as many as 10,000 breeding-age birds may exist. This estimate is not reliable because of the lack of research on patterns of abundance and movement of this species; however, even if the population is smaller, there is no reason to suspect a decline (Snyder *et al.*, 2000). According to C. Mobbs, Deputy Director, Wildlife Protection, Environment Australia (faxed letter to aviculturist M. Runnals, 1999), this species is considered common with a stable population in the wild.

#### *Turquoise Parakeet*

Much of the turquoise parakeet's habitat available before the 1890s has been cleared for agriculture, preventing the species' recovery in more than half of its former range. However, the population is rapidly increasing, with as many as 20,000 breeding-age birds (Garnett and Crowley 2000). An additional habitat threat is the loss of hollow trees necessary for nesting in forests managed for timber, but the species can be prolific when nestboxes are substituted. Poorly managed burn regimens tend to encourage shrubby vegetation that outcompetes the grassy understory required by parrots for foraging (Garnett and Crowley 2000). *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000* (Garnett and Crowley 2000) recommends conserving native pasture and promoting its use, maintaining a buffer zone around known nesting areas, and improving fire management to encourage forage diversity. However, these recommendations are voluntary, and because the turquoise parakeet is categorized as near threatened, it is not a high conservation priority for the Australian Government.

Therefore, we find that the populations of these species are stable or increasing despite some habitat loss.

#### B. Overutilization for Commercial, Recreational, Scientific, or Educational Purposes

*The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000* does not indicate overutilization as a threat to these species (Garnett and Crowley 2000). Both species are strictly protected by Australian State legislation and may not be trapped from the wild for commercial purposes (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999).

Since 1990, there has been no trade in wild-caught specimens of these species, according to the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) and the Service's Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS) databases, probably because these species breed readily in aviculture (Brown *et al.* 1994; Dingle 2000; Vriends 2000). The WCMC database indicates that the only specimens of these species traded internationally between 1990 and 1999 were captive-bred (9,980 scarlet-chested parakeets; 12,001 turquoise parakeets). Therefore, we find that overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes is not a threat to wild turquoise parakeets or scarlet-chested parakeets.

#### C. Disease or Predation

No threats from disease or predation have been reported for scarlet-chested parakeets (Garnett and Crowley 2000; Snyder *et al.* 2000). The turquoise parakeet was driven to near extinction in the early 1900s due to introduced herbivores, drought, and possibly an epidemic. However, the numbers are recovering rapidly, and the species is locally common (Collar 1997). The birds are vulnerable to predation by foxes because they nest close to the ground in hollow eucalyptus trees and stumps, but fox predation is not considered a threat to the survival of this species.

Therefore, we have no evidence, at this time, that disease and predation are significant factors affecting scarlet-chested parakeets or turquoise parakeets.

#### D. The Inadequacy of Existing Regulatory Mechanisms

As noted under Previous Federal Actions above, the Australian Government prohibits the commercial export of these species. Domestic use of these species is regulated by Australian State laws. Internationally, both species are listed in CITES Appendix II, which regulates their international commerce. Appendix-II specimens cannot be traded without a permit from the Management Authority of the exporting country. One consideration for approving or denying an export permit is whether or not the proposed export may be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

The United States has additional domestic measures that regulate the trade of these species. The Lacey Act prohibits the import, export, transport, possession, sale, or purchase of birds or their products in violation of State, Federal, or foreign laws or regulations. If these species are removed from the List of Endangered and Threatened

Wildlife, Endangered Species Act protection would no longer apply. In addition, the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 requires a WBCA import permit for wild-caught specimens of these species.

Because the only international trade in these species is limited to captive-bred specimens and specimens not of Australian origin, because the species are prohibited from commercial export in Australia, and because stricter domestic measures govern the importation of these species in the United States, the existing regulatory mechanisms appear to be sufficient.

#### E. Other Natural or Manmade Factors Affecting its Continued Existence

The scarlet-chested parakeet may be affected by competition with Bourke's parakeet (*Neopsephotus bourkii*) where permanent water has been provided by humans in semi-arid rangelands (Landsberg *et al.* 1997). Such competition, however, does not appear to be detrimental at a specieswide level. There is no information to indicate any other natural or manmade factors that affect the continued existence of these species.

#### Summary of Findings

We have carefully assessed the best available biological and conservation status information regarding the past, present, and future threats faced by the scarlet-chested and turquoise parakeets. We find few threats to the species in the wild. Enforcement of existing national and international laws and treaties has minimized the potential impact of trade, and wild populations are stable or increasing, with more than 20,000 breeding-age turquoise parakeets and 10,000 breeding-age scarlet-chested parakeets. In the 2002 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the turquoise parakeet is not listed and the scarlet-chested parakeet is included only as lower risk/near threatened. On the basis of this evaluation, we propose to remove *Neophema pulchella* and *Neophema splendida* from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife under the Act.

#### Effects of This Rule

This rule, if made final, would revise 50 CFR 17.11(h) to remove the scarlet-chested parakeet and the turquoise parakeet from among the species included in the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. Because no critical habitat was ever designated for these species, this rule would not affect 50 CFR 17.95.

If these species are removed from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife, Endangered Species Act