



Caracas, March 2017

To aviculturists of the world:

The Red Siskin (*Spinus cucullatus*) is a highly endangered bird in northern South America that has been decimated by trapping for the pet trade. Today, this species persists only in very small numbers in western Venezuela, Colombia, and Guyana. Where once there were millions, now there may be fewer than 1000 individuals. This tragedy may seem very far away from you, but we think you can help us, with the other aviculturists who have joined us at [www.redsiskin.org](http://www.redsiskin.org).

Demand for male Red Siskins exploded in the early 20th century due to the popularity of breeding “red factor” Canaries through deliberate hybridization of these two species. Due to unsustainable demand for wild birds, the large flocks of brilliant Red Siskins that once graced the skies of rural and urban Venezuela have disappeared.

Nonetheless, the Red Siskin remains a culturally iconic species in Venezuela that is forever embedded in the popular imagination through songs, poems, and paintings. It is also the official bird of Lara State and is illustrated on the highest value currency, the 20 000 Bolivar note. However, despite being a cherished bird and one of the top four priority bird species for conservation in Venezuela, illicit wildlife trafficking and habitat loss continue to threaten its survival.

In response to this urgent conservation need, a diverse international association of public and private institutions, communities, people, and other stakeholders have joined together to form the Red Siskin Initiative; a comprehensive conservation effort that is committed to understanding, protecting, and restoring populations of this beautiful bird across its historic range through research, threat reduction, and captive breeding for reintroduction into natural areas and shade coffee plantations certified as Bird Friendly by the Smithsonian. Ultimately, we want this project to become an inspiring example of successful conservation teamwork for northern South America and across the world.

With leadership from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.; Provita in Caracas; and South Rupununi Conservation Society in Guyana we are making progress on key actions that aim to protect and restore thriving populations. But we need more help.

Many aviculture and Canary breeding associations, clubs, and societies are already partners of the Red Siskin Initiative, making important contributions to education, avicultural knowledge, and fundraising. We seek to expand participation and support of clubs and breeders from across the world. We value your passion for birds, practical knowledge, and outreach capacity to key stakeholders and the general public. Whether you are a bird-breeding enthusiast, or a club president, we welcome you and your organization to become a part of our team effort to conserve the Red Siskin. Working together, we can save this amazing bird. Join us!

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