



Social norms drive conservation intentions in Indonesia's songbird trade system

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Across rural and urban communities, perceived social expectations were substantially more strongly associated with conservation intention than individual attitudes, showing that behavioral change in the songbird trade is fundamentally socially embedded.

Why does the songbird trade matter?

Indonesia is at the center of the Asian Songbird Crisis. Wild-bird capture links rural livelihoods with urban markets, hobbyist demand and singing competitions, making overexploitation an ecological, economic and social challenge.

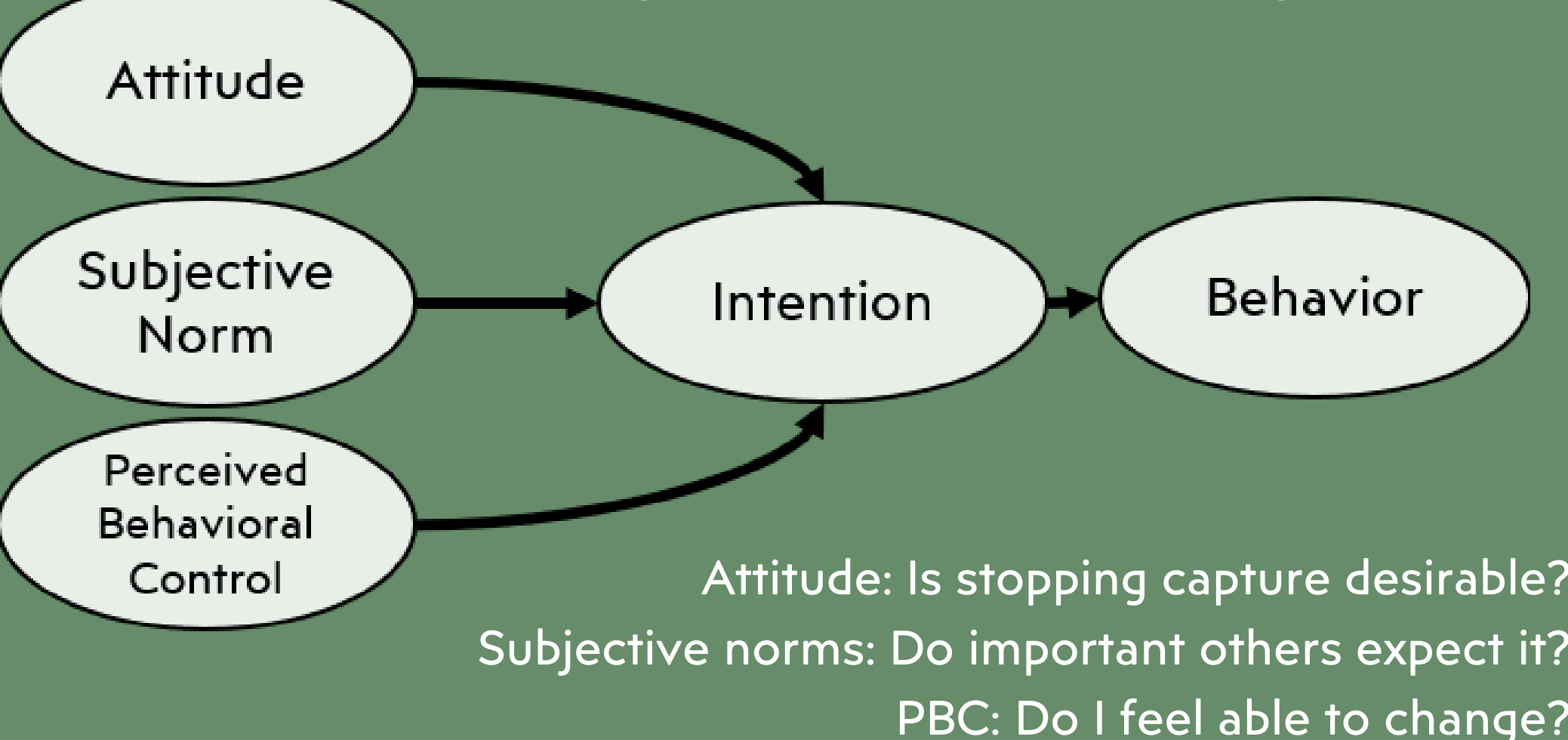
Enforcement and trade restrictions remain important, but may be insufficient when behaviors are culturally embedded, socially reinforced and constrained by livelihoods.



Research Question:

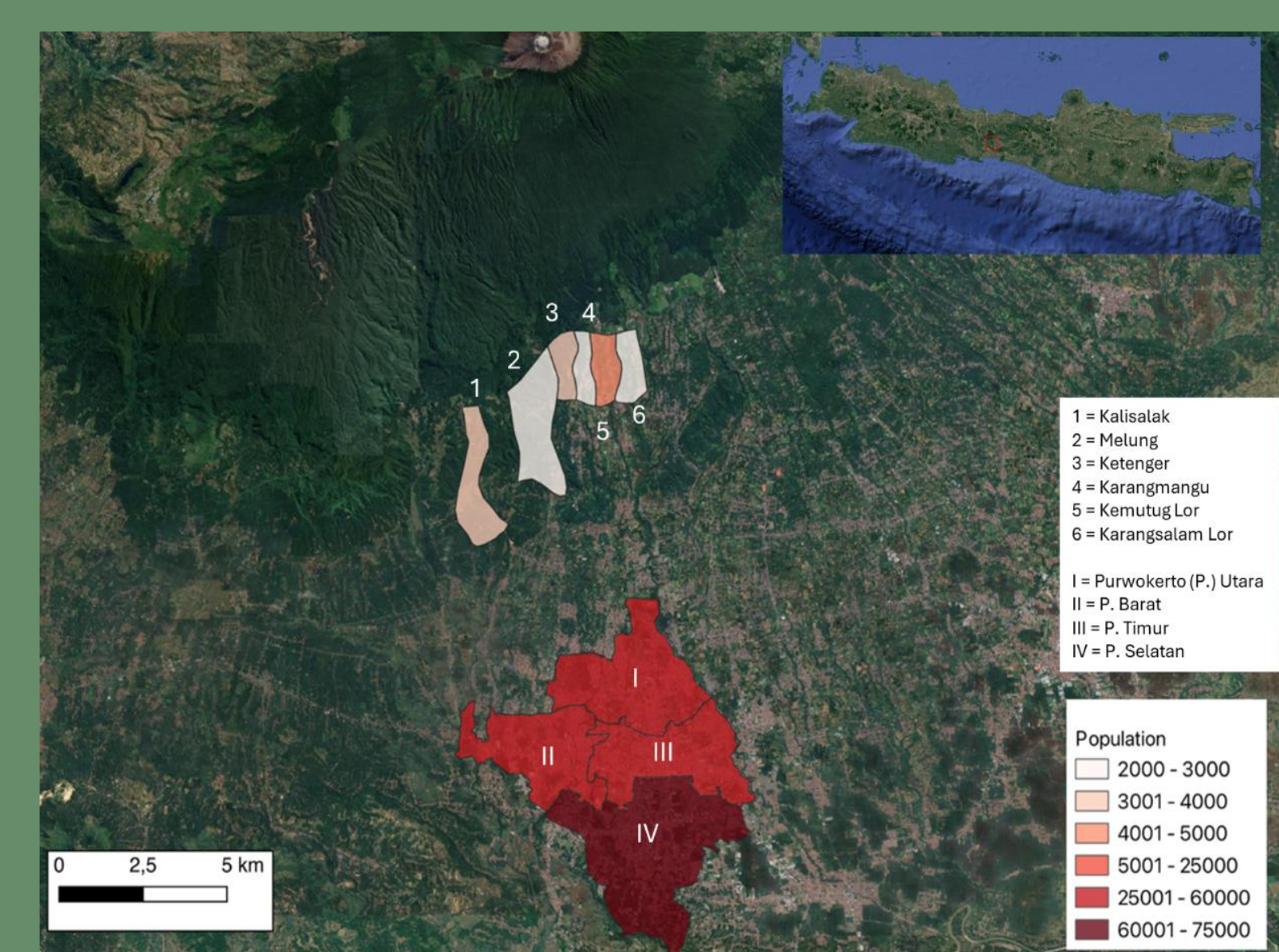
What shapes intentions to stop wild bird capture: individual attitudes, social expectations, or perceived ability to change?

Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)



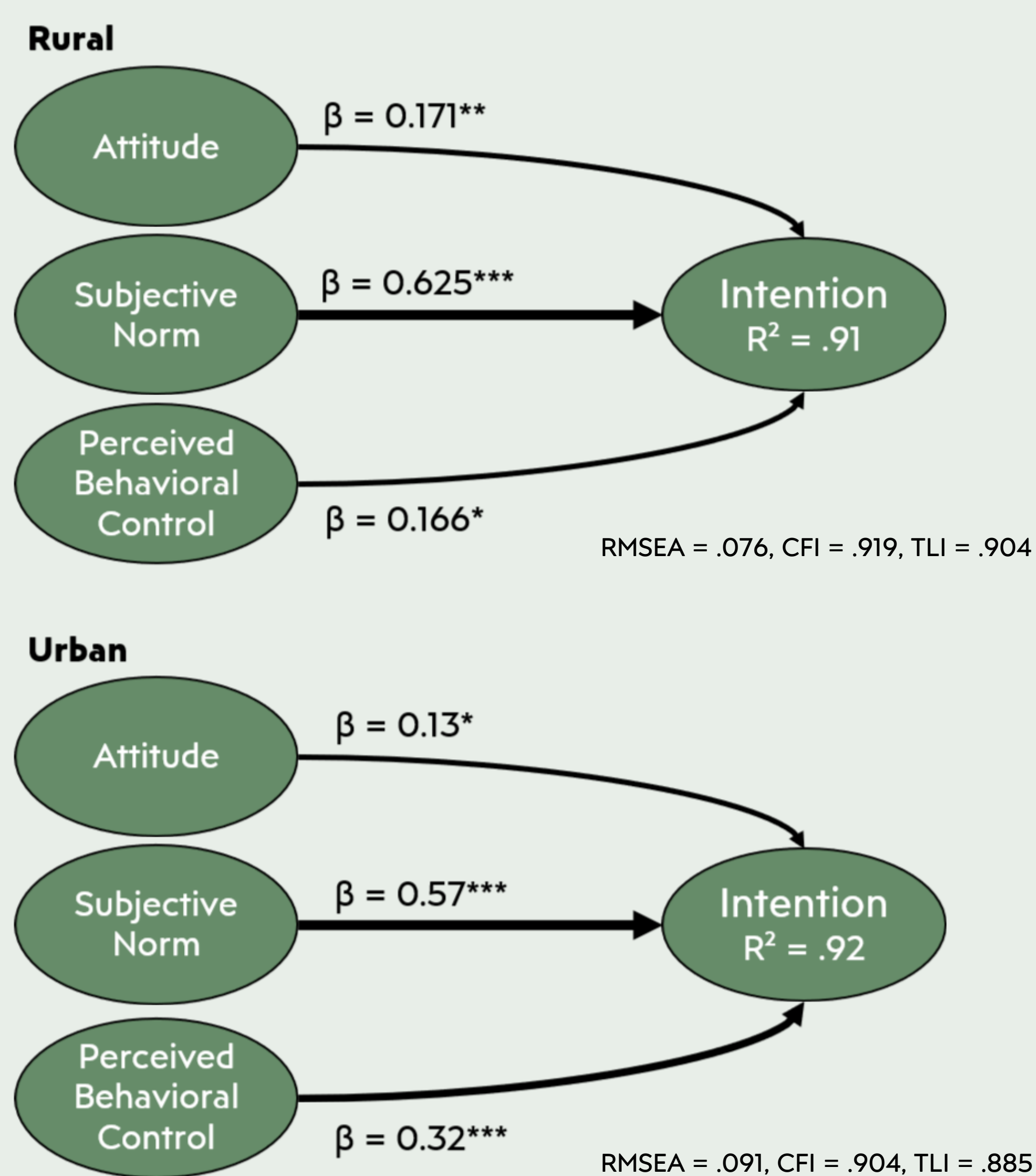
How did we investigate it?

Mixed methods: TPB survey + rural/urban SEM + semi-structured interviews



827 survey respondents
420 rural respondents
407 urban respondents
30 key informant interviews

Social norms emerge as the strongest predictor



Subjective norms were the strongest predictor of conservation intention in both contexts. Perceived behavioral control was more important in urban areas, while attitudes showed weak associations with intention.



Attitudes were similarly favorable in both contexts, while intention and perceived control remained lower. **Positive attitudes alone do not imply behavioral change.**

What lies behind these patterns?

Hobbyists

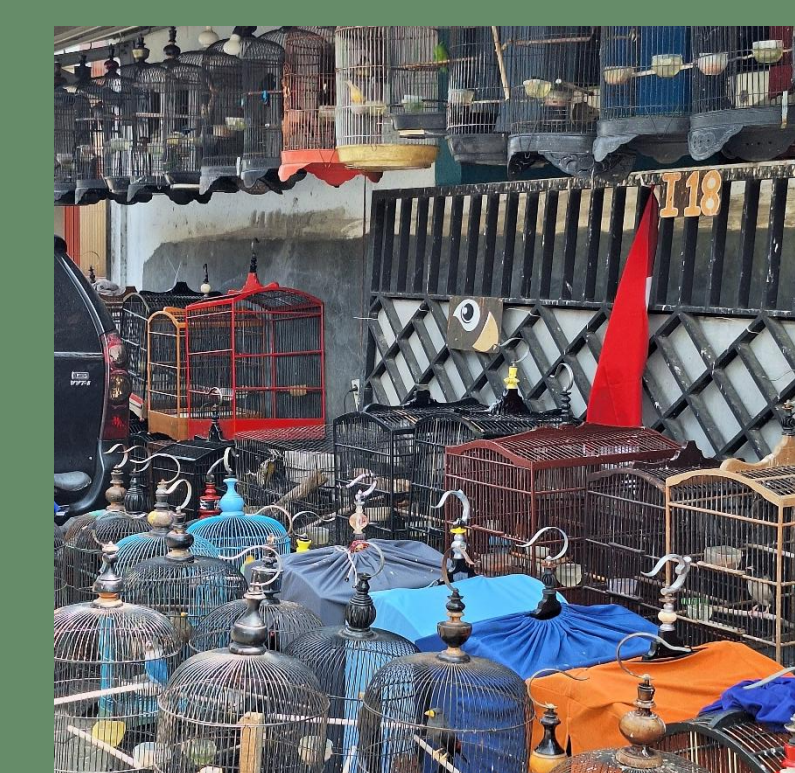
Birds as companionship and everyday life

Bird-keeping was tied to enjoyment, attachment and routine. Friends and family helped normalize it as an everyday practice.



Breeders & traders

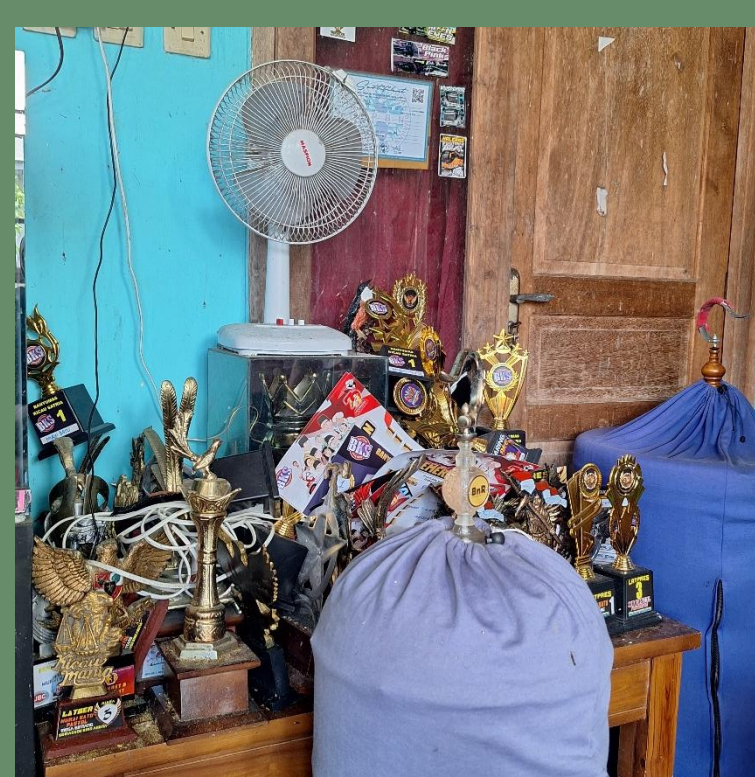
Expertise meets market demand
Technical knowledge increased agency, but decisions remained shaped by reputation, profitability and demand.



Competition actors

Performance and prestige

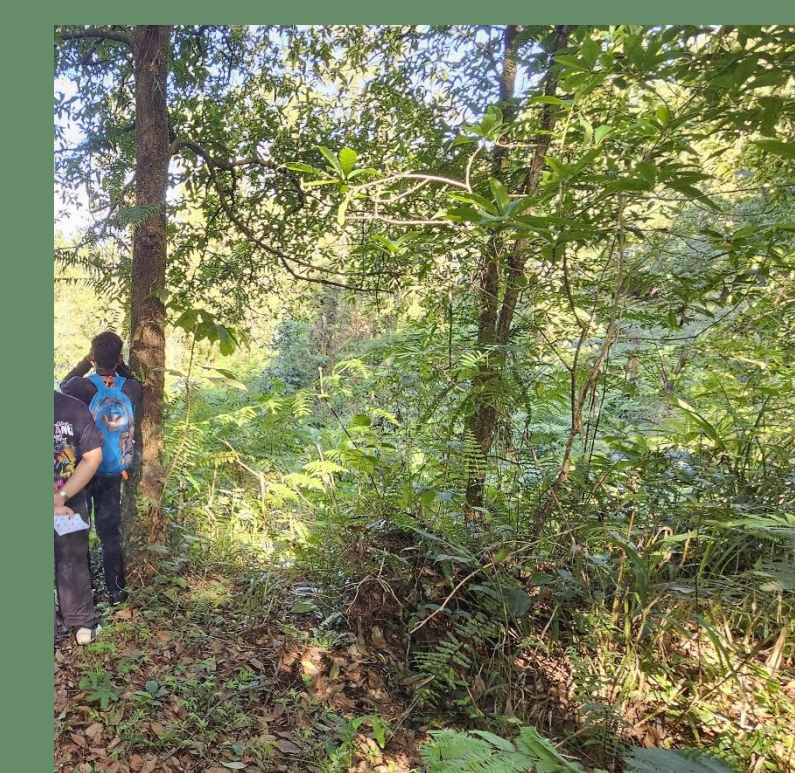
Trainers and competitors operated in highly visible networks where status, credibility and performance were evaluated by peers.



Bird catchers

The least room to change

Capture was often economically motivated. Limited livelihood alternatives and financial insecurity constrained disengagement.



Different actors face different normative environments and different degrees of agency.

The ability to respond to conservation norms depends on livelihood dependence, technical capacity, social visibility and access to alternatives.

Pro-conservation values already exist

Respondents generally reported high enjoyment of nature and resource care, while support for altering nature was low.

What does this mean for conservation?

Conservation interventions may be more effective when they target social norms and structural constraints.

Work with social networks

Engage respected breeders, trainers and competition organizers as visible advocates for captive-bred and non-extractive practices.

Shift reputational incentives

Increase the prestige of sustainable practices through competition rules, recognition and influential peer endorsement.

Make change feasible

Livelihood-constrained actors need viable alternatives and practical support to disengage from capture.

Conservation interventions should change the social and structural conditions surrounding behavior—not simply individual attitudes.

Limitations:

Non-probabilistic stratified sampling; limited access to less-visible actors; theory-informed item refinement; variable qualitative recording depth.

Acknowledgments:

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