Each year, several new species are recognized as threatened or endangered. Today's worldwide zoos and aquariums are highly concerned in their conservation and the species kept in large numbers have high chances for possible future reintroduction. However, the selection of the species kept is decided by men and as such can be affected by human aesthetic preferences. The aim of this thesis was to test the hypothesis that zoos preferentially keep species that are attractive rather than endangered, using the parrot family (Psittaciformes) as an example.
We collected data from 460 human respondents who evaluated the attractiveness of parrots presented on painted illustrations. After analyzing which traits affect the perceived beauty we found that humans prefer parrots that are big, long-tailed and colourful (blue, orange and yellow). There was a considerable agreement among the respondents.
We repeatedly confirmed significant positive association between the perceived beauty and the size of worldwide zoo population. In addition of perceived beauty, area of distribution and body size appeared significant predictors of zoo population size. In contrast, the effects of conservation status and taxonomic uniqueness appeared insignificant. Our results suggest that zoos preferentially keep beautiful parrots and pay less attention to conservation needs.