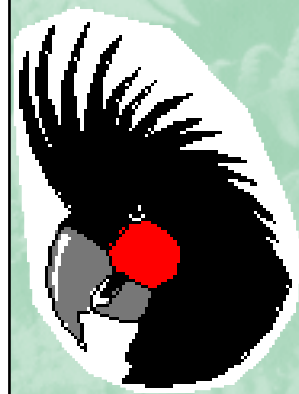


PROMOTING EXCELLENCE
IN PARROT CONSERVATION
AVICULTURE AND WELFARE

World Parrot Trust
in action



Vol. 13 No. 1 February 2001

Psitta SCENE



Thick-billed Parrot

Great Green Macaw

Brazilian Macaws

Cape Parrot

Parrot Welfare

psittacine (sit'ã sîn) belonging or allied to the parrots; parrot-like

Thick-billed Parrots

Field Observations and History

by DR ALAN LURIE and DR NOEL SNYDER

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Cover Picture

The ability to extract seeds from pine cones is crucial for the survival of Thick-billed Parrots and takes months to develop in fledglings, necessitating a long period of dependency on their parents.

Photo & copyright Noel Snyder

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It is late afternoon and we are standing near the summit of a 9,000 foot peak in the northern Sierra Madre Occidental in Mexico. A raucous call emanates from the south and a single Thick-billed Parrot, *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*, flies below us, northward across the valley. The parrot moves powerfully in a straight line, like a missile, calling all the while, until it disappears from view past the mountain slope.

Our journey to this spot began well before dawn in Portal, Arizona. It has taken us across the deserts of northern Chihuahua, through mud and rivers, up precarious mountain roads, and into the high old growth pine forests so crucial for these birds and so endangered by relentless logging. We have come to observe the Thickbills in their most northerly nesting habitat presently known and to reflect on how they live, why they disappeared from the United States and on what the future may hold for them.

Appearance and history

Adult Thick-billed Parrots are bright green, lighter and more yellowish on cheeks and ear coverts, with bright red foreheads, forecrowns,



View from the crest of the Sierra Madre Occidental, showing the habitat of the Thick-billed Parrots
Photo: A Lurie

superciliary stripes, bends of wings, carpal edges and thighs. They have brownish markings in front of the eyes, yellow greater underwing-coverts and grayish undersurfaces of remiges and rectrices. Their legs and feet are gray, their bills are black, their iris is orange-yellow and they have yellowish-orange periophthalmic bare skin rings.

Juvenile birds differ in that they have largely white upper mandibles, a dark iris, gray periophthalmic rings, reduced red on the thighs and a lack of red superciliary stripes, wing bends and carpal edges. There is no obvious sexual dimorphism in adults, although males average

about 8% heavier than females. Thick-billed Parrots and the extinct Carolina Parakeets are the only parrots whose natural ranges included the continental United States. The stronghold of the Thick-billed Parrots, has always been the Sierra Madre Occidental of Mexico, but the species was also found in substantial numbers in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico in earlier times. While breeding colonies were never formally recorded north of the border, these birds were annually seen in good numbers during breeding season in the Chiricahua Mountains, making it likely that they did, in fact, raise families in the United States.

Thick-billed Parrots suffered massively from shooting in the U.S. and were essentially gone from U.S. territory by 1920. Their garrulousness, relatively large size and tame inquisitive behaviour, sadly made them easy targets for subsistence-hunting prospectors and other early settlers. Occasional sighting continued until 1938 in Arizona and until 1964 in New Mexico, but no parrots were recorded thereafter until a few captives were released to the wild in the late 1980's.

Thick-billed Parrots, which are CITES Appendix 1 listed, have become endangered in their remaining Mexican strongholds, principally because of extensive lumbering of old-growth pine



Toyota 4 Runner ascending the road in the northern Sierra Madre Occidental
Photo: A Lurie

forests. Where flocks of thousands once flew, now only about 500-2,000 pairs survive in the wild. Numbers in captivity have been hard to document, as almost all were captured illegally.

Habitat

During the breeding season from July through September, Thick-billed Parrots live high in the conifer forests of the northern Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains, mainly in Durango and Chihuahua. They prefer altitude nesting and this might relate mainly to the availability of their primary food trees - Mexican white pine, Arizona pine and Durango pine - and to an absence of nest predation threats from arboreal snakes. Nesting is timed to coincide with the monsoon season, when most conifers are fruiting.

Our trip has been timed to coincide with the height of the nesting season. We drove into the Mexican state of Chihuahua, the largest state in the country.

For several hours the route is across dry desert, interrupted by stretches of wheel-spinning mud created by recent cloudbursts. Jostling along, we ford rivers, drive up stream beds and finally begin to climb high into the mountains on a one-lane track that is barely passable in dry weather and a major challenge in the rainy season. Progress is slow and we reach our destination only near the end of the day.

Near the top, we encounter freshly cut old pine trees - an ominous finding that timbering has occurred on ejido lands supposedly reserved from cutting.

Nearby, we pull off into a lupin meadow and head to a rise giving a view of several known nest trees from past years. These are all huge dead pine and fir snags with their tops broken off. The vista across the mountains and valleys is breathtaking. The relatively strong growth of trees on the moister north sides of the mountains is obvious from our vantage point. We do not see any parrot activity in the nest trees, but we do get an initial greeting from the solitary Thick-billed Parrot flying across the valley, followed by a group of 3 more overhead.

We move on to the campsite near the mountaintop. At this point, the monsoon weather moves in and we are enveloped first by dense fog, then by chilling rain.



Thick-billed Parrot feeding on Chihuahua Pine cone

Photo: N Snyder

Day two - Morning

From various directions male parrots can be heard noisily leaving their nest trees to head off for their first foraging of the day. They will return at intervals through the day to feed their mates at their nests, then head off again to join other parrots in resumed foraging.

Food, language and natural predators

Thick-billed Parrots mainly feed on the seeds of pine trees.

Working in small flocks, they normally clip cones from the branches and then thoroughly shred the cones with their bills in a systematic spiral fashion. They start from the base and end at the apex, removing each seed as they progress. They eat seeds from a variety of conifers, including various pinons, Douglas fir, Apache pine, Chihuahua pine and Mexican white pine. It takes a parrot from one to 20 minutes to consume the seeds from a single

cone, depending on the cone species. Mexican white pines, with their large seeds, appear to be favoured, even though the cones are so heavy that they are difficult for the parrot to hold and are frequently dropped inadvertently. With this pine species, the parrots sometimes refrain from clipping the cones free from the branches and work on them in place, hanging upside down, although their ability to extract seeds is hampered when the cones remain attached to the branches.

Other foods in the Thick-bill diet include acorns, juniper berries, agave flower nectar, cherry fruits and insects. An interesting component of the diet is tree bark - an item found in the diet of some Amazona parrots as well. Reasons for eating tree bark are unknown, but the material is a frequent component found in sampling the crops of nestling parrots and must have some important function in the diet.

Thick-bills, unlike some other

birds that feed on pine seeds, do not appear to store food, although they have been seen raiding the granaries of acorn woodpeckers, much to the displeasure of the latter. Water is generally taken from potholes in cliffs or from the tops of waterfalls, where the parrots can have a clear view of the approach of predators and have a clear downward flight path for escape. They rarely drink from streams in the bottoms of canyons.

Thick-billed Parrots have a variety of vocalizations, which they use for alerting flock members to the approach of predators, flock integration, territorial interactions and soliciting food from mates and parents. Under the tutelage of their parents, the chicks begin vocalizations early and appear to have the full complement of vocalizations when they fledge. During flight, a flock will be garulously calling, sounding like laughing children. Feeding flocks often post sentinels, who scan intently for predators. An alarm call from a sentinel will put the entire flock into instantaneous flight and the birds are normally easily capable of outflying their avian enemies.

Threats from Raptors

The primary predation threats faced by Thick-billed Parrots come from various raptors. Chief amongst such raptors are Red-tailed Hawks, Apache Goshawks and Peregrine Falcons. The parrots are powerful flyers and are rarely taken except when raptors are able to gain close approach undetected by the parrots. Surprised in midair by a Peregrine Falcon, they dive straight for the ground and



Nestling Thick-billed Parrot in nest hole

Photo: N Snyder



Adult and young about to fledge from nest in snag of Mexican white pine in the Sierra Madre Occidental

Photo: N Snyder



Sampling the crop (with a syringe) of a juvenile parrot Photo: N Snyder

evade the falcon with agile manoeuvres as they dive into trees that the falcon is reluctant to enter. Nocturnal predation comes mainly from ring-tailed cats. Thick-bills appear to be free of severe threats from snake predation faced by *Amazona* parrots inhabiting lower altitudes. Back at camp two parrot pairs and a solitary individual fly overhead, heading toward the nest trees which are now out of sight. Meanwhile, Noel and Rurik return from their search and report locating several new active nests.

Nesting Biology

Nesting females will usually lay clutches of 3 eggs, with intervals of 2-3 days between eggs. The male spends the night in the nest hole with the female. Incubation takes approximately 26 days from the first egg, after which the chicks hatch at 2-3 day intervals, comparable with the laying intervals. The chicks first open their eyes at 6 days, and their eyes are fully open at 16 days. Pinfeathers begin erupting at 16 days and the chicks are well feathered at 36 days and they have their full juvenile plumage by 56 days.

The juveniles have mostly white upper bills, in contrast to the black bills of adults and they usually fledge at 59-65 days from hatching. Much pre-fledge time is spent exploring the entrance of the nest and looking outside. The young are quite vocal at this time and are accompanied by the parents upon their first flight. They remain fully dependent on their parents for several months. Learning to cut pine cones off branches and how to extract pine seeds is a slow and complex process and the parents continue

to feed their youngsters fully capable of feeding themselves. Toward the end of the breeding season in the fall, family groups begin flocking together in preparation for migration to more southerly regions.

Day two - Afternoon

We decide to visit one of the active nests found by Noel and Rurik once the storm subsides in late afternoon.

We set out on foot for the nest site, even though it is still raining lightly. There is a steady downhill hike of 30 minutes and then we climb down and across a steep slope with jumbled rocks, agaves and tangles of brush and fallen and living trees with no trace of a trail and few recognizable landmarks. We finally reach the site. There, on a snag 50 feet in front of us, are 5 Thick-billed Parrots. They are grooming each other, sitting not far from a nest hole. We videotape them, and Rurik photographs them for about 10 minutes and they pay us almost no attention, even though we are in full view of them on the slope. Then they finally fly off in a flurry of raucous calls that echo across the canyon and gradually fade in intensity. It is a spectacle of powerful natural beauty, never to be forgotten.

Day three

We are up at 4am, eat, pack and are on our way down the mountain by 5:30.

Essentials of conservation

With sound conservation efforts in Mexico and a thoughtful reintroduction program based on healthy wild populations, we could see again this wonderful parrot in the skies of Arizona and

New Mexico. While the species is not presently critically endangered, it is endangered, especially due to continued, massive lumbering and destruction of its primary habitat.

Trapping for the pet trade continues to be a problem. Though most birds are netted as adults, nest-robbing continues, sometimes with the felling of nest trees. With nesting snags becoming increasingly rare, such harvest penalizes not only present but also future parrot generations. In addition, the disturbance associated with lumbering operations sometimes causes nest abandonment. Clearly habitat destruction and the pet trade are the major problems faced by the species. While regeneration of pine forest is generally good in the Sierra Madre Occidental and young pine forests do offer some food resources for the birds, they do not provide the nest sites that are equally important for their survival.

Sadly, almost none of the old-growth or near old-growth forests of the Sierra Madre Occidental have been set aside as preserves. Yet these mountains represent one of the major centers of biodiversity in the world.

Conservation interest in the biological resources of the Sierra is very recent. In very recent years, several habitat conservation programs have been proposed including a series of reserves which would protect the best remaining forested regions. Perhaps the most substantial of these is the El Carricito region of northern Jalisco. Unfortunately, this region is south of the nesting range of the Thick-billed Parrot.

Recently, following intensive negotiations, an agreement was signed between the Ejido Tutuaca,

a rural forest cooperative and a number of organizations, principally The Wildlands Project, Pronatura and Naturalia, creating a 15 year moratorium on any cutting of timber in a region of southern Chihuahua that hosts the most important remaining nesting habitat of the Thick-billed Parrot. This agreement was reached after collaborative studies of the region conducted over a period of 5 years by the Wildlife Preservation Trust International (WPTI) and Monterrey Tech (ITESM). More than 100 active nests have been found in the region in some recent years and it may represent more than 10% of the total breeding population of the species.

Other conservation measures of potential importance that have been implemented include a ban on cutting of spruce, *Pseudotsuga* (Douglas fir) and *Abies* firs throughout the Sierra, trees that often serve as nest sites for the Thick-bills. To the extent that this ban is honored by timber harvesters, it may ensure at least a minimal number of nest sites for the species into the future.

Finally, there have been experimental efforts to assess the feasibility of reintroducing the species into Arizona.

Donations towards habitat preservation for the Thick-billed Parrots can be sent to:

Leanne Klyza Linck, Executive Director, The Wildlands Project
1955 West Grant Road, Suite 145
Tucson, AZ 85745-1147, USA

Such donations should specify that they are to be used for Thick-billed Parrot Conservation efforts in Mexico, and will be used to preserve additional important nesting habitats in the Sierra Madre Occidental.



Flock of released, wild-caught Thick-bills overhead in the Chiricahuas of Arizona in 1986 Photo: N Snyder

From **Rosemary Low**, founder member and Editor of *PsittaScene*

An organisation dedicated to saving the world's parrots? When Mike proposed the idea to me I was totally in agreement because the foundation of such a Trust was desperately needed and long overdue. But there was so much to do the whole prospect seemed daunting - even over-ambitious. Could we really make a difference?

Today the answer is an emphatic Yes! The World Parrot Trust has become an organisation which has gained world-wide respect and influence. I honestly believe that it succeeded because of Mike's leadership. He had the vision, the enthusiasm and the administrative skills which were essential to its survival. He was the Director - and so much more.

One needs to consider the moral climate in 1989, at the time of the launch. Conservationists had no time for aviculturists. Mike could do nothing without gaining the respect, trust and, even the admiration of the conservation community. This he did - and how! He galvanised people into action, raised funds, liaised with government spokesmen and won the trust of the ordinary parrot keepers who make up a large part of the membership. He did it not with a Paul Butler type ebullience, but with quiet reserve and determination. He thought up ideas which brought in funds or just admiration for initiative.

As editor, I appreciated his countless written contributions to *PsittaScene*, not only for their ideas (often inspired) but because they were so well written. I also appreciate the enormous amount of time he spent in producing the magazine and in running the Trust - often to the detriment of his family business, I feel sure. And no one should forget Audrey and the rest of the family, who were always there, not only giving staunch support, but helping with the day to day running of the Trust.

I truly believe that Mike and Audrey have made a contribution to parrot conservation worldwide which will never be equalled. I am proud to have worked with them.

From **Joseph M Forshaw**, Wauchope, Australia

In our society it has become fashionable to typecast idealists as impractical persons, whose efforts seldom achieve worthwhile results, and regrettably this mode of thinking often is prevalent in conservation circles! Because of his steadfast adherence to high ideals, Mike Reynolds could be considered an idealist, but his tireless efforts in pursuit of those ideals have achieved outstanding practical results, often after the efforts of others have failed. Having experienced much personal pleasure from an association with parrots through aviculture, Mike set out to repay parrots by contributing through aviculture to their welfare and conservation - surely a noble ideal, and to achieve this objective he established the World Parrot Trust.

My association with Mike has been through activities of the Trust, and always I have admired his resolute pursuit of the 'aims of the Trust' despite difficulties and setbacks along the way. Quite early, it came as a shock to Mike to find that his ideal of 'repaying the parrots' is not shared by all sections of the avicultural community. Criticisms of the Trust and of Mike personally persist to the present time, but instead of deterring him in his efforts these have strengthened his resolve to see the Trust succeed - and succeed it has, primarily because of the efforts of Mike, always backed up by the ever-present support from Audrey.

For my part, the major achievement attributable to Mike's efforts is publication of *Parrots: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan 2000-2004* (IUCN, 2000), which provides a practical blueprint for the conservation of parrots worldwide. Production of this Action Plan, after the failure of earlier attempts, is fitting testimony to the perseverance and dedication of Mike and colleagues at the Trust. To Mike and Audrey, on behalf of the parrots, I say thank you, and we wish you well in 'semi-retirement' in beautiful Hampshire - one of my favourite counties!

Tributes

On 1st January 2001 Mike Reynolds the founder of the World Parrot Trust, retired as Director and now takes the position of Chairman.

From **Avril Barton**, UK member no 80.

As a long-standing member of the World Parrot Trust, I would like to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of Mike Reynolds in the past decade. Over the past years I am sure that many of the Trust's members, like me, consider that he and his family have become their friends via the magazine. Not only has the parrot conservation work throughout the world been wonderful, but Paradise Park has gone from strength to strength. My only complaint is that it is not nearer to the north of England!

Without the founding of The World Parrot Trust these most wonderful birds would have been struggling even more in the wild by now. We all owe it to Mike to pass his beliefs and ideas on to the next generation of adults, so that they can learn how to protect the birds. We are only the caretakers of the knowledge gained; it must be spread far and wide.

I would like to wish Mike and Audrey health and happiness in their retirement. We all wish Jamie Gilardi great success in his new post. I am sure that everyone will support him totally.



Mike, Alison with Harley the Hyacinth, Audrey and Nick Reynolds with Katie the cockatoo Photo: Francis Apesteguy

From **Cristiana Senni**, WPT Italy

I will always be grateful to Mike for having created the WPT, and shaping it into a group who's only interest is the well being of parrots. His help and support on all matters is something I have always been able to count on and I must thank him for his patience and all that he taught me. I hope that he will feel like staying involved in the WPT for a long time to come.

From **Freddi Virili**, WPT Italy

Mike's sincere passion and determination was and will be a light for us. Thank you, Mike. Through you and the World Parrot Trust I have had the opportunity to try to help the parrots and increase my own working experience. Thank you also for the human touch you have always shown.

From **Dr Carl Jones**, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Seconded to the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation as Scientific Director

Lots of people have good ideas but few are able to make them happen, and when you meet someone with a big idea who then makes it work you have indeed met a rare person. I first met Mike in Cincinnati in 1988 at the World Conference on Breeding of Endangered Species in Captivity. I had just given a talk on the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trusts (now Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust) recovery programme for the Pink Pigeon in Mauritius. In the introduction I showed a picture of an Echo Parakeet and mentioned that it could possibly become extinct because so far no organisation wanted to fund its conservation as it was thought to be too high a risk. Mike approached me and told me that the following year he would be founding the World Parrot Trust and said "We would love to help you with the Echo Parakeet, what do you need?"

Mike and his family, together with other members of the World Parrot Trust found some funds for us and we were able to launch the conservation programme for the species. This early support was crucial, as it has encouraged other individuals and organisations to offer funds. This was the Trust's first international project and they have been a major player ever since. Not just content with providing money we have had the benefit of Mike's wise counsel and the expert advice from his staff at Paradise Park who have visited to help with fieldwork and the hand rearing of captive chicks. The Echo Parakeets have increased from less than twenty in the late 1980's to an increasing population of over 120 free-living birds today.

The objectives of the World Parrot Trust were bold with the aims of conserving wild populations, responsible aviculture and good parrot welfare. Under Mike's Directorship the trust has achieved many of its goals but of course with the huge pressures that parrots are under worldwide and the problems they face in captivity the Trust's work is more important today than ever before.

Mike Reynolds had the vision and as its first Director made the Trust grow and flourish with the help and support of Audrey and the rest of the family. The World Parrot Trust is an important organisation and we hope it will continue to grow and blossom with Mike taking more of a backseat but as Chairman with his hand firmly on the tiller.

From **Mike Parr**, Vice President for Program Development, American Bird Conservancy

American Bird Conservancy and World Parrot Trust have formed an extremely productive partnership over the last few years. This is due in no small part to Mike Reynolds willingness to work in partnership and share credit for joint achievements, to be open to new ideas, and to commit 100% of available resources to the top priorities in parrot conservation. I have enjoyed working with Michael and hope to continue doing so for many years to come.

From **Lars Lepperhoff**, WPT Switzerland

I have always been fascinated and impressed by Mike's idea to found such a good and needed organisation. There are very few people who decide to give back what they have earned from their parrots. Mike did it in a very special and powerful way: he created The World Parrot Trust. During the past 12 years he has given such a lot of his time and money for the welfare of parrots. His organisation has become well known all over the world. It has been a pleasure to work with him because he has always been modest, friendly and helpful.

Raising funds for the Great Green Macaw

by ROSEMARY LOW

The Great Green or Buffon's (*Ara ambigua*) is perhaps the most majestic of all macaws. Only the Hyacinthine is larger and is generally considered to be the most beautiful and striking; in behaviour it might be described as clown-like. The demeanour of the Great Green is quite different. It is a regal bird.

Generally speaking, it has failed to attract much attention from aviculturists or from those concerned with parrot research and conservation. If its plumage had been blue, instead of green, this would have been a totally different story. I would not now be writing this article which is a plea to help the Great Green Macaw before it's too late.

Range

Compared with other large macaws, only Lear's and the Blue-throated have smaller ranges. The Great Green's range has been contracting with alarming speed in recent years. Because this species needs to forage over large areas and so much forest has been destroyed within its range, leaving mainly fragmented areas, it is now endangered and listed on Appendix 1 of CITES.

It occurs in lowland humid forest from eastern Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to Panama and north-western Colombia. There is a tiny relict population in western Ecuador (sub-species *guayaquilensis*) which is nearly extinct. Compared with the range of the Scarlet Macaw, that of the Great Green covers an area of about one twentieth of that

species. Yet much has been made of the decline of the red macaw.

In Costa Rica

It is not always realised how small are the countries of Central America. For example, at less than 20,000 sq miles (51,000 sq km) Costa Rica is about two and a half times the size of Wales. However, the macaw's range there covers only a small area, although it was once found over about one third of the north-eastern part of the country.

Ground-breaking research

Research on La Lapa Verde, as this macaw is known in Costa Rica, commenced in 1993. One of those who initiated it was Dr George Powell, a respected and life-long conservationist who, in 1972, was involved in founding the famous cloud forest reserve of Monteverde in Costa Rica. The scientific papers which have been published as a result of Proyecto Lapa Verde surely set new standards in research on endangered parrots. When I read them last year I was impressed beyond words by the work which had been carried out on

population, diet and movements (migration).

Telemetry

The study centred around the use of radio telemetry methods to determine the home ranges and habitat use by the macaws and the fruiting phenology of tree species used as food. The location of nests and the movements of radio-tagged birds defined the study area in northern Costa Rica, just south of the border with Nicaragua. The study area was expanded during the non-breeding season when most of the macaw families migrated out of the breeding range, mostly north into Nicaragua.

A macaw-proof transmitter was tested on captive birds, then the equipment was fitted to several wild Great Green Macaws. Some adults captured after wearing a transmitter for one or two years showed no ill effects. This was the first time that radio transmitters had been successfully used on wild macaws. The transmitters are tiny and weigh only 30g - about 3% of the average body weight.

The radio-tagged macaws were tracked in off-road vehicles using a network of rudimentary logging roads. Whenever possible, a given radio signal was followed until the bird associated with it was visually detected. In that way the precise locality of the bird, its activity, the tree species it was in, and the number of macaws with it were recorded.

Food sources

At the start of the project there was little data on diet. It was known only that the seeds in the fruit of the large leguminous tree *Dipteryx panamensis* (known as 'almendro') were an important item in the diet during at least part of the year. Subsequent years of tracking resulted in the

identification of other important tree species, including *Sacoglottis trichogyna*. To measure seasonal change in canopy fruit production, monthly counts of fruit and flowers on individually marked trees were conducted. The macaws usually nest between January and May and their young are fed primarily on the fruits of *Dipteryx* and *Sacoglottis*.

Identifying priority areas

Identification of the most critical habitats for the macaws was based on four key factors: density of nests, distribution of each of the two main sources of food (the trees mentioned above) and quality of the remaining forest habitat. In this way the areas which should be given priority for the conservation of the Great Green Macaw were identified.

The researchers determined that the current breeding range of this macaw in Costa Rica is restricted to an area of about 1,120 sq km in the northern zone, the last remaining forest of its kind in the country. It is marked by the presence of large almendro trees. (Unfortunately, this tree is now one of Costa Rica's primary sources of hardwood for flooring and for truck bodies). The researchers propose that two priority areas should be given the strictest protection. They should be surrounded by a buffer zone of sustainably managed forest that encompasses the macaw's range during migration and links the breeding area with the montane protected areas in the Central Volcano Range. In this way they believe that a sustainable breeding population would be achieved.



Radio-tracking the macaws

Photo: Steve Winter



Removing a young Great Green Macaw from the nest to check its development
Photo: Steve Winter

Nests and fledgling survival

Extensive field searching and interviews with residents revealed 51 confirmed nest sites over the six years of the studies. All nests were in natural cavities of large living trees, 88% of which were almendros. Some supposed nest sites proved to be holes from which the macaws regularly drank water. Eight of the 51 nest trees were cut down during the course of the study.

Close observation of the nests indicated that the success of clutches (surviving incubation, brooding and fledging, to produce at least one young) is 60%. The productivity of 18 successful nesting attempts involving 15 nest holes during five years was equal to 1.83 young. First-year survival of 23 fledglings from 12 nests was monitored. Fifteen of them survived until the start of the next season, when juvenile birds separate from their parents.

Only 35 breeding pairs

Extensive data collection indicates that fewer than 35 pairs of Great Green Macaws are breeding annually in the northern zone of Costa Rica. The population is believed to number in the region of 200 macaws. There is no evidence of a breeding population elsewhere in the country.

Loss of habitat and nest sites

Satellite images of the macaw's breeding area in Costa Rica reveal that about 35% of the forest was eliminated between 1986 and 1992. The problem of habitat loss is compounded by the cutting of nest trees. Sixteen percent of all known nest sites since 1994 have been cut down. Half of these were felled since the 1996 law which prohibits the cutting of nest trees and hollow *Dipteryx*.

As Atlantic lowland forest throughout Central America comes under pressure from logging and colonisation, it is imperative that the reproductive potential and habitat requirements of the macaw in Costa Rica are further analysed. In this way the actions which would be most effective in preventing the elimination of this macaw throughout its Central American range can be determined. The most detailed information has



The chick's vital statistics are recorded come from the study in Costa Rica, which has important implications for the survival of this endangered macaw.

Lack of funding

Recently I was in Costa Rica and met Guisselle Arias, the director of Proyecto Lapa Verde, and her Swiss assistant Olivier Chassot. They told me that funding is desperately needed to continue the project in 2001. Last year George Powell personally donated a very large sum to enable the project to continue. He can no longer do that.

Olivier and Guisselle told me that currently the project has only one volunteer instead of the three or four needed. There is no money to fund more volunteers although food and lodgings are inexpensive. Ideally, there is one team in the field and one team processing data, writing proposals and keeping up the press campaign (on TV and in newspapers) which has reduced to almost nil the number of Great Green Macaws shot in Costa Rica.

Education Programme

Habitat loss has become the major threat to the survival of the Great Green Macaw. Direct human persecution is now rare, thanks to the extensive education programme which has been undertaken by members of the project and volunteers.

A recent paper published by IUCN suggests that the total population of the Great Green Macaw throughout its range might number fewer than 2,500 mature individuals. Without funding, this number will continue to fall.

We are determined to raise enough funds to ensure that this important project continues.

Photo: Steve Winter

When I met Olivier and Guisselle their dedication to the project and concern for its future were as strong as my desire to help in some small way to prevent the extinction of this magnificent macaw. The need to help became a matter of priority in early January when I received a communication from George Powell. It emphasised that the need for funding was extremely urgent.

He wrote: 'We cannot face giving up and had felt certain that one of our dozen or so proposals sent out would bring in the desperately needed funds. But so far this has not happened and we have been forced to set 31st January as the date we will have to shut down the project if no funding is forthcoming. It is sad to face this after building up a six-year database that is almost certainly the best data on individual wild macaws in existence. We wondered if you could consider the challenge of raising funds to pay the modest salaries of Guisselle and Olivier, plus \$200 per month to keep them operating effectively as the voice of *Ara ambigua*.

Our data is showing dramatic declines in the macaw populations in Costa Rica. It is our hope that this tragic situation known to the Costa Rican public will cause them to demand corrective action by politicians."

Magnificent response

World Parrot Trust, Zoo-de-Doue, Chase Wildlife Foundation, Natural Encounters Inc. and Parrots magazine responded magnificently to the funding challenge. We are delighted to report that funds have been diverted to the project which ensures not only payment of

salaries but funding towards a national park proposal that would be used as a fund-raising tool.

The project had just entered a new phase when the funding crisis became urgent. A proposal for the establishment of a national park in Costa Rica had just been completed. The park had been designed (on paper) on the basis of the macaw research findings. In addition, it was proposed that a wildlife-corridor would connect the proposed park with other major parks in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. This would allow the macaws to migrate between breeding and non-breeding areas which are protected. The proposal was developed at the request of Mario Boza, Costa Rica's leading conservationist.

Do you belong to a bird club or part of society? Why not suggest that the proceeds of the next raffle should be donated to this cause? Do you have a few unwanted gifts which are destined to lay unused in a cupboard? Then join forces with others who care about parrots and have a car-boot sale. Do you own a shop or a restaurant? Then ask the Trust for a collecting box which you can display with a poster promoting the Trust.

Raising funds can be a very rewarding experience. Please send your donation to the World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HB, clearly marked 'Great Green Macaw Fund'.

For additional information on this project, see the article in the August 2000 issue of *PsittaScene*.

Late news from Jamie Gilardi

I just spoke with Guisselle Monge, the field director of the project, today. Sad news for the birds, a tagged recognised active nest tree (almendro) was cut down this week on a farm of a landowner known to the project team. It is illegal in Costa Rica to cut a macaw nest tree, and the owner knew it very well, so we will have to see what happened. Guisselle was going to call MINAE, the Environment Ministry, to have them investigate. So, even farms with approved forestry management plans do not necessarily follow them, which strengthens our view of the need for official protection and better monitoring of 'sustainable' forestry in the area.



Observing Macaws in Brazil

article and photos by PRISCILLA OLD

The beauty of all creatures in the wild is wonderful to see and was the purpose of our trip to Brazil to observe macaws. We were thrilled each time we saw the birds fly with such effortless beauty and grace. We wanted to see what their natural habitat and activity included to help us understand our own pet macaws at home. We did not expect the emotional impact these observations would have on us. We are much more sensitive to the possible extinction of these wonderful birds for having observed them first-hand.

Sadly, this is not true in most of the rest of the world. Countries worrying about feeding their people are not very interested in saving wildlife. In spite of the Brazilian government's efforts to prevent the loss of their wildlife, thousands of animals and birds are illegally smuggled into other South American countries and shipped all over the world. The percentage of loss is extremely high between capture and delivery to the destination.

As an outsider it is hard to say to a Brazilian living in a small village of huts and tiny houses, 'you shouldn't be making money trapping those beautiful birds.' To them this is just a way of making a good income - better than anyone else in their village makes and the wildlife has been there in abundance for the taking. They see those Hyacinth chicks (one or two each year) as a source of income, not a treasure to be preserved.

There are many organisations throughout the world attempting to prevent the loss of exotic animals and birds whose natural habitat is threatened. Also, trapping greatly reduced their numbers. These 'Eco organisations' are approaching their tasks in different ways, but all are attempting to stop the loss of species in the wild.

We went to Brazil with one of these organisations, the Fundação BioBrasil (Bio Brazil Foundation or BBF). Their approach is to protect the habitat by involving the locals; educating them about the value of saving their wildlife, giving them jobs as guides, drivers, builders and teaching them to provide Eco tourism rather than trapping for a living. One of their greatest challenges is to make the locals understand that these creatures will not be here forever if they are not protected. The average Brazilian, whether in the country or the city, has the attitude that God gave

them these creatures and their habitat to use. They have no concern about preserving the wildlife or forests, as they consider nature a source to be used.

In BBF's case, they have hired former trappers as field guides. They have involved them in the process of saving the birds, rather than removing them from the wild. It is an interesting process. As you might expect, these men understand the birds in every details.

Impressive knowledge

They are men who have been stealing chicks from high cliffs since they were ten years old: hanging from hemp ropes, swinging into caves. They know when to do it, how to do it and how the birds are acting at any given moment. Their knowledge is impressive and very valuable to tourists who pay to see these creatures in the wild. Our three field guides (all former trappers) could hear the birds, know the species, the number and which way they were flying, by the time we started to hear the call ourselves.

We wish the many talented members of the Bio Brazil

Foundation success in every aspect of their work. It is tenuous and relies on support from those of us on the outside and the cooperation of Brazilians, especially those closest to these treasures of nature.

Since our return to the States we have learned that IBAMA (like our Department of Natural Resources) is closing seven stations in the Amazon area. This means that it will be much more difficult to protect wildlife from poachers, loggers and miners in that region.

Hyacinth Valley and Hyacinth Cliffs

From Sao Gonçalo, a small village north of Barreiras, Brazil, we entered BBF's camp called Hyacinth Valley. This is the camp where we spent the nights, ate our meals and embarked on sightings of the Blue and Gold, Red-bellied, Red-and-Green and Hyacinth Macaws. The camp consisted of several thatched huts and four new block houses under construction for visitors. Meals were served in a large thatched, open-sided area. This was also the gathering spot for everyone when there was spare time in camp.

Our first sightings were of Red-

and-Green and Red-bellied Macaws flying directly over camp on their way to the Mauritia palm feeding area. They were nesting at the time of our visit, and would leave the nest a little after daybreak for their first feeding. Then they would return to the nest to feed chicks. Later in the morning they would again visit the palms, but by 10.30 or 11am they would stay quiet because of the heat of the day. They would again start feeding about 3pm or so, continuing until just before dark. All the macaws we observed, including the Hyacinths nesting in caves in the red clay cliffs, followed this routine.

A Blue and Gold pair was nesting in a dead palm some distance from camp. We walked into the site where the guides had built a blind for viewing. We were thrilled to see the pair leave the nest when the guides called out harsh, sharp calls. Each of the pair peered out and then came through a small hole in the trunk, flying off in effortless flight. Later that afternoon we watched the pair and last year's chick flying back to the nest for the night. We observed this nest several times during our three day stay at the Hyacinth camps.

The next day we saw our first Hyacinths. After driving approximately 20 miles across the valley, we arrived at BBF's campsite they call Hyacinth Cliffs. From there we went to a nesting site in the red clay cliffs. These are like our mesas out west in the US - a flat, valley floor with mesas at a distance on each side. They are quite beautiful as you drive through the valley. You can see the caves dotting the sides of the mesa cliffs. We watched a beautiful nesting pair of Hyacinths fly near their nest, which was in one of the caves.

Our walk into the Hyacinth nesting area was quite a hike in the heat of the mid morning sun - approximately 4 miles through semi-arid shrub land. However, it was well worth the effort and we rested as we sat in a small blind built about 85 feet from the nest and waited for the pair to leave after feeding their chicks. After an hour or so we saw the first beautiful purple blue head look out of the cave, observing all that was going on below. Soon the second head appeared and we watched for half an hour or so as they preened and sat at the mouth of the cave. Our guides told us the cave is about 20 feet deep and the nest is near the back. This cave had 'belonged' to one of our guides in his trapping days, so he knows it well.



Hyacinth camp of BioBrazil Foundation

All Photos: Priscilla Old



Pair of Hyacinths at mouth of cave nest

The Hyacinths knew something was in the blind. I think they spotted the camera lens jutting out, or they heard my knees quivering. The preening stopped and they raised their 'crests', growled and squawked directly at us for the remaining time we watched. We were very excited to be able to observe them so close. We were also thrilled to know our 'Cha Cha' acts like her wild cousins, 'telling' us about it when she doesn't like something and throwing her head feathers forward.

Finally, after a nice lengthy viewing they flew out of the cave and swooped along the cliff, screaming and squawking at us and circling us as we descended out of the blind and down the hill. Our walk back to the truck was accomplished with little effort, as the adrenaline was running high at that point, in spite of the heat and the sun.

On our return trip to Hyacinth cliffs (for lunch and a nap in hammocks) we spotted six Hyacinths in a bumed area. Our guide, Gil Serique, informed us that this is a favourite type of feeding area because the palms they feed upon produce clusters of nuts close to the ground. Hyacinths are actually attracted to burning areas because they can forage more easily for their food after a burn. There were four birds flying together; a pair and their last year's chicks and another pair at some distance. The two pairs spent quite a lot of time squawking raucously at one another. We observed for quite a while and managed to get close enough for a good look at them. They eventually flew right over us as they left the area. The palm nuts they feed on are like a small coconut, growing together in very tight clusters at the base of palm fronds about 3 to 4 feet tall. These palms are the Catole (pronounced catolaya) palm (genus *Syagrus*); it has one nut

inside - preferred by Hyacinths and the Piaçaba (peassaba) palm (genus *Attalea*) has several small nuts inside. The guides could tell which palms were which by the fronds, but there is a minute difference between them and very hard for the untrained eye to spot the difference. The nuts look exactly the same from the outside. We ate the nuts, which are like a fibrous coconut, mildly flavoured and drier than a coconut.

Another feature of the BBF Hyacinth area is a large blind they have built for picture taking and observation. Many scientists visit the area for numerous reasons, as well as tourists. We visited the blind, which is approached by a 40 foot thatch covered tunnel, so as not to disturb the birds at the eating site. We were unable to view the birds at the site because it was their nesting season and they do not congregate during the next several months. However, this would be a wonderful place to see Hyacinths from probably April through July each year.

Lear's Macaw

Our desire to see the Lear's Macaws took us on a long trip by car. We had arranged to fly from Barrieras to Salvador and take a car from there to Canudos - supposedly a 4 or 5 hour ride. Well, we learned that no travel by car matches the kilometres shown on the map. Oh, the kilometres are correct, but the condition of the roads is unbelievably poor! What should take 5 hours (when the roads are newly paved) takes 10 hours with road conditions that we had on our trip. Our flight to Salvador was cancelled because of rain, so we chose to drive from Sao Gonçalo to Canudos. This sounded like a good idea, especially during the first afternoon when we travelled 6 hours and stopped at a lovely village called Lençóis (pronounced Lensoysh). It had been a diamond mining area in

the early part of the century, but that is long gone and it has been turned into an artist colony and tourist area. It reminded us of a miniature Santa Barbara. We stayed at a lovely hotel, had great food and left the next morning expecting to reach the Lear's area by noon or 1pm.

Oh, no! No way! 14 hours later we arrived in Canudos with sore bottoms and nerves on edge. Our young driver (Messias) has the patience of a saint on those roads. I would have been pulling hair after a couple of hours or less. There was about a 30km stretch where the road was decent. The rest was a mix of 1in blacktop full of huge holes - literally 3 feet deep and sometimes 15 feet across - and plain old clay roads with the same style potholes. Messias would have to stop completely, navigate in and out of these massive holes for miles and miles on end - on the wrong side of the road about 3/4 of the time. Of course, that didn't matter because nothing could move fast enough to be a danger.

Washboard sections were a blessing and where we picked up some speed. The trip that should have taken 10 hours at the most took 20 hours. We did get to the Lear's site the following morning after spending an evening in Canudos with 'no mosquitoes' (Twenty five of them left bites on my arms). The trip to the site was about an hour and a half out of Canudos on the same kind of roads as before. However, the sighting was wonderful and worth our two days of discomfort.

We entered a goat farm approximately an hour and a half north of Canudos. It was a grey morning; a light mist was falling as we walked into the fields to await the arrival of the Lear's. We weren't sure we would see them but we were hopeful. It didn't take long for a pair to arrive in a tree a couple of hundred yards from us.

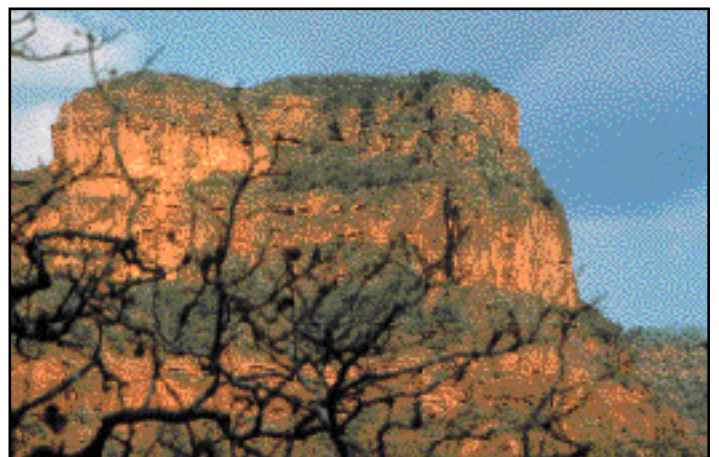
Within another half hour other pairs began to arrive. By the end of the morning we had seen 40 plus individuals.

Our guide uses a multi-directional audio recording device to record birdcalls. When he plays these recordings, the birds often approach, 'answering' the call. In this manner we were able to view these beautiful creatures at close range (as close as 25 feet overhead). Several times they flew around us in circles, looking down to figure out what those strange creatures on the ground were doing. We continued to observe several hours and enjoyed our view tremendously.

It is believed that there are only about 150 to 170 Lear's left in the wild. It was hard for us to determine if the foundation is successful in preventing the loss of the Lear's through trapping, but our guide informed us that they are eating corn as well as the Licuri palm nut, which is its natural food, so they can survive on available foods. However eating com makes them a threat to and unwelcome by famers. It seems that the exact number (legal count: 18) held in captivity is unknown, as it is illegal to own them and owners are closed mouthed, as one would expect.

The Lear's are slightly smaller and more slender than the Hyacinth macaws, with a teardrop shaped yellow face patch and yellow ring around the eyes. They fly like swallows, swooping and gliding with ease. The highlight of our viewing was a 'fly-over' as we left the fam. Six of these wonderful creatures bade us farewell with the sun reflecting their brilliant blue colour as they swooped in front of us and then flew high overhead.

Will they be saved from extinction? Certainly they are in great danger. To see a species that is so close to the brink causes a great deal of emotion even to the untrained. We can only guess at how strong the feelings are among those who work to save them.



Hyacinth cliffs

The people who live with Lear's Macaw

by RICHARD HARTLEY

It is a near mythical experience watching clamorous flocks of up to 40 Lears macaws swooping through arid fields replete with the sinuous palms whose nut serves as their primary food source. To think that this single conglomeration of the birds comprises one third of the total wild population is to imbue the jarring realisation that the future survival of these spectacular creatures is in severe jeopardy.

A mere 20 years after the scientific discovery of the species, the Lear's Macaw is on the brink of extinction. The paucity of Lears is largely a result of unabridged illegal poaching of the bird in the backdrop of a native habitat ravaged by drought and social misery. The actors involved in preserving the wild populations are eager to recount the history of the bird. And the principal figures responsible for the pillaging now wish to undo some of the damage they reaped. What unfolds is a fascinating tale, which reflects in a more general sense the great challenges involved in preserving species with high commercial value.

Jose Cardoso de Macedo, 60, looks out with an air of proprietorial pride over the green valley nestled between spectacular deep red cliff faces that form the canyon where the Lears nest. The land has been in his family since the turn of the century so if there is such a thing as a guardian of the Lears, it is Sr. Zequinho, as he is known. "There used to be 200, maybe 300 birds flying overhead every day," he says, dragging deeply on his cigarette rolled with tobacco so strong it is referred to as rat killer. He leans on the mud house where he was born, his avuncular face curling up into a grin as he strokes the turquoise-fronted parrot caged above his head. His wife, Dona Raimunda, frets to make sure all the visitors are served with coffee.

"After the gringo came, people from all over the world have visited. But we also saw that the amount of birds went down a lot. That's when the traffickers came here all the time."

The gringo referred to was Helmut Sick, the intrepid expatriate German scientist considered

Brazil's premier ornithologist. Until his discovery of Lears in 1978, the birds' origin had been shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. Described in 1856 by Charles Lucien Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, it was valued as a great rarity and was first painted by Edward Lear, an English artist known more for his nonsense poetry. Numerous theories abounded about the bird, one of the most accepted being that it was a hybrid between the Hyacinth and Glaucous macaws. Sick was convinced otherwise and after several frustrated attempts, managed finally to locate the Lear's roost, a moment he describes as the most thrilling in his illustrious career.

Inhospitality of their habitat

Sick's difficulty in finding the birds was compounded by the extreme inhospitality of their native habitat. Referred to as the Caatinga, which in the Tupi native language means white forest, the area is naturally prone to

droughts. The vegetation consists of succulent plants, cacti, terrestrial bromeliads with thorny trees and bushes hitched to a sandy soil.

At the turn of the century, a messianic priest called Antonio Conselheiro and his 30,000 followers, royalists who were resisting the imposition of republican rule, were slaughtered to the last man in a town right next to the Lears population. The region has also produced other charismatic characters, able to harness the discontent prevalent among the peasant classes against an exploitative elite. But a rugged local population struggles on, stubbornly proud of the land which has let them down so often in the past.

Sr. Zequinho continues. "You see that field over there," he says, pointing to a parched open plain seemingly devoid of cultivation. "We used to swim there. And next to it we used to grow rice."

This scenario is almost impossible to fathom. Countless riverbeds, which have apparently been dry

for decades, dot the area. And an unrelenting drought over the past year has made a population already mired in poverty even more desperate. Clearly the Lears have also suffered, since their food staples are drying up and the native population clawing out a living is resentful of conservation efforts they regard as valuing the lives of a hundred birds more than theirs. A recent economic downturn also fares badly for the Lears, as traffickers are more easily able to lure members of the local population to scale the perilous cliffs and pluck Lears from their nests to feed the continuing illicit international demand for the bird.

Since 1992, official efforts to protect the birds have been the responsibility of the National Lears Committee who in 1997 received a \$200,000 grant from the Brazilian government for Lear's preservation. From the start, however, discord between the various actors charged with formulating strategies to save the Lears has been rife. The two opposing camps fundamental disagreement centres around the idea of using ex-traffickers and the extensive knowledge they possess about the Lears as a pillar in the conservation strategy.

"Yeah, I know Carlinhos, that no good thief," says Eurivaldo Macedo Alvez, 28, nicknamed Coboco, who is charged with guarding the Lears area against poachers. He is paid by Fundacao Biodiversitas and his assessment of Carlos Araujo Lima, the trafficker most responsible for depleting the Lears population, is widely held. Another foundation, BioBrasil, of which the author is executive director, has over the past four years been paying Lima whom it believes has forsworn



Licuri palm nuts, the most important food of Lear's Macaws Photo: Priscilla Old



Guide Gil Serique in Lear's habitat, with audio equipment Photo: Priscilla Old



Lear's Macaws answering the calls from the audio equipment Photo: Priscilla Old

trafficking and has provided vital information in locating feeding grounds and possible undiscovered populations.

"Last year I apprehended two guys who said Carlinhos paid them R\$1,000 each to get Lears. I handed them over to the authorities, but nothing happened," says Coboco. "If I find them here again, I won't hesitate to shoot."

He is perched on a rock looking up at two active Lear's nests, donning fatigues and brandishing two firearms he seems itching to use. His youthful yet hardened face and compact muscular frame belie the innocence and affection he exudes when talking about Lears, which he considers his personal patrimony. His father, Eliseu Pereira Alvez, guided Helmut Sick's successful discovery expedition, so the family's involvement with Lears has a deep history.

"They're checking us out," he says, pointing to the pair of Lears circling overhead, squawking loudly before swooping into their nest holes. Teams of parakeets flutter in the valley, and the operatic crescendo of their high pitched cries combined with those of the more baritone Lears are the only sounds reverberating against the cliffs. Almost immediately after entering, the gargling of the Lear's chicks becomes audible. The adult pair spend the next two hours either perched on the edge of their nest hole, or out of sight inside the hole that is over six feet deep. At around 3pm, they take off again in an interminable search for food and will only return at dusk.

The drying up of funds means that Coboco and Sr. Zequinha, who also guards the site, will be deactivated. His frustration is obvious and his fear for the birds' future palpable.

"Without me here, the traffickers will have free range. And more than likely, the Lears will suffer the same fate as the Spix's," he continues, referring to the smallest blue macaw, now extinct in the wild (see page 17). "But what can you do?" he concludes, shrugging his shoulders in resignation and continuing his observation of the nesting pair through the monocle bequeathed to him by his deceased father.

Carlinhos and friends

The infamous Carlinhos lives in Petrolina, a bustling town of 100,000 perched on the banks of the San Francisco, a massive river that winds through the arid north-eastern region of Brazil known as the Sertao. He is in a jovial mood, spurred on by Sunday afternoon celebration and a good amount of beer, he seems proud to interject. He is surrounded by friends though obviously is the centre of attention, and basks in his primacy.

Around five feet six inches tall with a jocular face formed with mestico features, he is given to wearing his shirts open to show his multiple gold chains, large belt buckles and cowboy boots. He greets his visitors warmly and immediately launches into a tirade against the present day traffickers, and those in the conservation community, including his current employer.

"These guys are going to finish off the Lears," he states forcefully, "the level of theft is so bad that they actually took an adult pair who were nesting, leaving the chicks to starve to death. Can you believe it?"

At 11 years old, Carlinhos was asked by his neighbour to look after some birds he was rearing. This neighbour was forced to

leave the area and told Carlinhos he could sell what had been under his care.

"I put all the birds in a cart and went round through the streets trying to get rid of these animals," Carlinhos says. "I found that it was quite easy to do, so I started to get more serious about it."

He had soon become a very successful dealer, buying a car at 17 and gaining notoriety throughout Brazil and even the world. If you wanted to buy a Brazilian macaw from overseas, you got it through Carlinhos.

"One of the first pair of Lears I sold, the guy gave me US\$13,000 cash and a brand new Opala" he continues, "I probably sold between 40 to 50 Lears in my heyday. But money is just money and after I got arrested, I realised that I had to stop."

He spent seven months in jail, during which time he was visited by members of the foundation, who offered to post bail and pay him a monthly salary and with his knowledge and network, help to preserve the Lears. In two recent expeditions based on information he provided, the foundation has located two unknown feeding sites and a possible separate population.

"I bet you there are 1000 Lears out there," Carlinhos says, more than five times the official count of 181. Aside from the salary he receives from the foundation, Carlinhos has a pet shop and a farm near the city to where he wants to retire and raise Emus and Capybaras. But what of those persistent rumours that he continues to traffic? Before receiving that question, he is first asked whether he believes in God. He grimaces with indignation, as if he has just chewed on a lemon.

"How absurd! Of course I believe in God, and I swear to Jesus Christ that I am not trafficking anything. But if you guys would listen to me, I could tell you who is and stop it."

Regardless of the merits of the various conservation strategies, it is clear that they are not working well. The birds seem harried, the feathers have fault bars, and according to experts they show signs of in-breeding. Their sources of food are in decline and there still remains a great dearth of basic information on the bird. Of the forty three breeding age pairs in the area visited, only three produced young this year, yet no one knows why. And just this February, when Coboco was on holiday an intern to the project watched helplessly as two men captured a pair of Lears and catted them away, no doubt spurred by the money the birds can fetch on the market.

The extinction of any species is a tragedy in its own way but the extinction of an intelligent and beautiful being such as a macaw is a harsh testament to man's fundamental disregard and disrespect for his fellow inhabitants on the planet. Much time has been lost to petty inter-institutional squabbling, but it is incumbent on those with the knowledge and means to save the Lears to put aside their differences and pool their resources together. They will be doing the world a real service.



This article is a frank account of the extreme difficulties that face those working for parrot conservation in the field. It illustrates the harsh realities that exist on a day to day basis and the hard decisions that have to be made. Ed.

Why parent-rearing of parrots is so important

By ROSEMARY LOW

Parrot welfare and over-production of parrots are inextricably linked. No one will deny that over-production means low prices, unwanted birds and breeders desperate to sell -- to anyone who will buy. Many parrots are carelessly sold -- by breeders because of space reasons and because they need income to finance the upkeep of their birds. They are sold carelessly by pet shops and dealers because, frankly, most of them have absolutely no interest in the future of the bird that is sold. The income is all that matters.

Sadly this has always been so but formerly it was easier to place parrots which had to be found new homes. Now there are so many in this situation (partly as a result of impulse buying) that only a fraction can be found suitable homes. In industry if there is no demand for a product or if the price has fallen due to over-production, production stops. Yet bird keepers appear to be, in the main, totally careless of the fact that the reason they cannot sell their young, or sell them at a reasonable price, is because they are breeding too many.

Hand-rearing is to blame where the larger parrots are concerned, and the strange notion that parent-reared parrots are useless as pets. What saddens me most about the current pet parrot scene is that so many hand-reared parrots can never fulfil their potential as adorable and loving pets who have a home for life - or as long as their owner survives. In many cases, especially where the white cockatoos are concerned, the unfortunate birds are weaned too early. This means that they are anxious and whining and already maladjusted psychologically.

The new owner soon becomes disenchanted with such a demanding bird which is refusing to feed itself, screaming and craving attention to an excessive degree. Even species which wean much earlier than cockatoos, such as Greys, may not be fully weaned when sold to an unsuspecting

owner or pet store. Some die. Others develop severe behavioural problems.

The fact that countless breeders do not want to look in the face, is that many parrots take a long time to wean at the natural pace. Breeders are either unaware of this or frankly unwilling to undertake the extra work and expense over a few more weeks - possibly even months. Clearly such breeders should not be hand-rearing parrots.

Mortality of chicks

But they do not want the parents to rear their own young for two reasons. One is that mortality of chicks is often high in inexperienced hands. The other is that there is little or no demand for parent-reared parrots as pets. Neither of these problems are insurmountable, as I will explain later.

First let me elucidate on why parent-rearing is preferable to hand-rearing.

1. It reduces the number of parrots reared at a time when supply exceeds demand; prices are maintained and unwanted parrots are reduced.
2. "Burning out" females by constantly removing the eggs for artificial incubation, so that they lay four or five times a year, is carried out by many commercial breeders. It would be impossible if hand-rearing techniques had not been perfected. The breeder never considers the psychological harm that constant removal of eggs and chicks causes. Permanently denying them the opportunity to rear young is cruel. That such wonderfully intelligent and sensitive birds should be reduced to egg-machines is one of the very worst aspects of

aviculture. It is fuel for the anti-birdkeeping element. Parrots are more sensitive than most birds to events which are emotionally disturbing. This is why feather plucking is common among parrots as a group yet rare among other birds. It is often the human equivalent of tearing out their hair with frustration. These poor birds are totally at the mercy of their keepers.

3. Parent-rearing keeps the pairs occupied for weeks or months, according to the species. They need the occupation. Rearing reduces the monotony of the days and weeks and years which have little to distinguish them. Boredom and lack of stimulation is a very real problem for the more intelligent species. Many parrots enjoy family life and most "owners" obtain a lot of enjoyment from seeing family groups in an aviary. (And I do mean an aviary and not a little suspended cage where close confinement can result in aggressive encounters.)
4. Many hand-reared birds are useless for breeding, and countless males of white cockatoos are serial killers. For breeding purposes there is nothing wrong with hand-reared birds per se; the problem is that they are not socialised at an early age. Most are separated from their own species at or before weaning, leaving many of them unable to behave normally in the presence of their own kind, if breeding is attempted at a later stage. Some are confused about their own identity and can relate only to humans.
5. Promoting appealing hand-reared cockatoos and macaws, and other parrots, as pets,



Rearing their young helps to break the monotony of life in captivity for lorries and other intelligent parrots



This young Red-topped Amazon (*Amazona rhodocorytha*) was reared by foster parents. This is a better alternative to hand-rearing for endangered species



The hand-rearing of endangered species such as this Hyacinthine Macaw, increases the probability of being sold into the pet trade



Most hand-reared male cockatoos, such as this Citron-crest, are useless for breeding purposes

results in them being bought by people who have no previous experience with parrots (or even with birds). They are unprepared for such a demanding pet and for one which is so complex emotionally. They are unable to cope and the parrot ends up on the re-homing roundabout. Many people who would not have the time and patience needed to tame a parrot buy hand-reared birds although they do not have the time, patience or sympathy to offer loving care.

6. Inexperienced people who do not understand the problems involved in hand-rearing, too often start with Greys, cockatoos and macaws. Sadly, the result is birds crippled with rickets or which suffer painful crop burns and other injuries. Too often, all the vet can do is to put the young parrot to sleep after a short life of constant suffering. Those attempting to hand-rear should start with smaller species (but not Budgies and Cockatiels which are not among the easiest).

I am not suggesting that no parrots should be hand-reared as pets. I am suggesting that it is morally wrong to flood the market with hand-reared birds of species such as cockatoos, macaws and Greys which can live into their fifties. Comparatively few people look after such birds conscientiously over the long-term. It is more sensible to make available to the pet market conures such as the Green-cheeked or Blue-cr owned. (But of course, not so profitable – but neither is it so time consuming.) Potentially conures can live into their twenties or early thirties so they are still long-lived – but much easier to rehome if problems occur.

So how can breeders be persuaded to let their pairs rear their own young? First of all they must realise that most parrots will rear if they are in a relatively stress-free environment and if they are fed well and often. The production of healthy young also depends on the right calcium/phosphorous balance in the diet. Probably the two most common reasons for failure of parent-rearing concern feeding and health: insufficient, unsuitable or infrequent feeds, and disease which originates from the parents. Deaths of young chicks are often due to bacterial infections (possibly a result of a dirty nest-box) or due to viral diseases such as polyoma. Breeders should make more use of avian vets to screen their birds for potentially fatal diseases and to eliminate carriers from their breeding aviaries.

Daily nest inspection

If parent-rearing is to be successful, one must know what is happening inside the nest. Cameras can be extremely useful but they do not tell the whole story. Handling a chick provides vital information. However, the parents must be used to daily nest inspection (after the clutch is complete). One needs to know the temperament of each individual bird and how they react to nest inspection.

Daily handling of chicks in the nest until about three-quarters of the way through the rearing period (after that it is too difficult) is necessary for two important reasons. Handling and daily weighing enables an assessment of

a chick's health to be made. Should it need to be removed for hand-rearing or treatment of some kind this will be apparent before it is too late. Observant breeders seldom find a chick dead in the nest, except as a result of an accident. They recognise early signs of deterioration in health and development.

The second reason is that chicks which are handled regularly in the nest are easier to tame as pets than those which have not been handled. The ease of taming a parent-reared parrot is dependent on the following:


- If the parents are steady, allow close approach and are not nervous, the young have no reason to be nervous either.
- Removing the young parrot from its parents at independence (when it feeds well on its own and when the separation from its parents will not be too traumatic emotionally) and keeping it in a spacious cage in the most lived-in room in the house. Handling should not be forced on it. It will come to you when it is ready.
- The personality of the individual. Some parrots, including many which are hand-reared, do not have pet potential.

The rewards of taming a young parent-reared parrot are great. It is very satisfying. In addition, such a parrot will usually be well adjusted emotionally, better able to amuse itself in your absence, less likely to resort to feather plucking in times of stress and less likely to try to dominate you. It will also cost less than one which has been hand-fed and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that the parents were

allowed to rear it.

However, the purchaser of a parent-reared parrot should have the knowledge, the information or the evidence which allows him or her to distinguish such a bird from one which has been wild-caught. Remember that Orange-winged and Mealy Amazons, some macaws and caiques are still coming into the country from Guyana and that countless wild-caught Greys are being imported from Belgium. No member of the Trust is likely to fuel this trade but I would ask every member to take the opportunity to tell people who might seek their advice never to buy a wild-caught bird.

But to return to the subject of captive breeding, much of the blame for misunderstood and unwanted parrots must be laid at the door of breeders. They are producing parrots without giving any thought to the consequences of their actions. Some aviculturists who are truly concerned and conscientious have already made the decision to stop rearing parrots or to breed only to order for a few caring people. These are the real parrot lovers.

The claim that is often made that the rarer parrots are being bred to "save them from extinction" no longer has any credibility. There are now too many serious diseases in parrot collections to release captive-bred birds and risk wiping out wild populations. In any case, there are too many hazards in the natural habitats (or what is left) for releases to be successful, in the majority of cases. So breeders, please do not delude yourselves about your reasons for producing the rarer parrots... 

Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2000

by DR COLLEEN DOWNS

The Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* is South Africa's only endemic parrot and it is regarded as endangered as there are likely less than 500 in the wild. Several factors have caused the rapid decline of the species. These include forest degradation, food and nest-site shortages, little recruitment, removal of birds from the wild for the caged bird trade, and disease (the beak and feather virus). Although restricted to afro-montane forest patches in the Eastern Cape



(from Fort Beaufort) north to southern KwaZulu-Natal (Karkloof), the birds are highly mobile moving between yellowwood forest patches, visiting orchards and occasionally forest near the coast (Mboyiti to Port St. Johns). Flock size varies; singletons, pairs or groups of 5-6 birds are usually observed. However, at localised food sites flock size may increase to 20-70 birds caused by aggregation and giving a false impression of abundance.

Accurate estimates of population size are difficult as standard bird census techniques are inappropriate because the birds are not predictable in their occurrence at particular forests. Consequently, a Cape Parrot Big Birding day was initiated 4 years ago and is held annually. This requires the involvement of volunteer observers including birders, landowners, farmers, students and other interested people. The forests, where Cape Parrots have been observed in the past ten years, are monitored from dispersed observation points. In addition, local orchards where birds occasionally visit are monitored. Time of day, numbers of birds seen, and their movements are recorded. When analysed the results are scrutinised to avoid any repeated counting of the same birds. Other birds and mammal species observed are also recorded.

This year it was decided to split the observations over the afternoon of one day and the morning of the following to facilitate maximum involvement of volunteer observers.

Compared with the dismal weather of 1999, most areas experienced excellent weather this year except for an afternoon thunder storm in the Stutterheim area.

The Cape Parrot population numbers observed during the 1998 to 2000 censuses are shown in Table 1

Table 1: Numbers of Cape Parrots counted on the Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 1998-2000.

Year	AM Total	PM Total
1998	348	179
1999	282	237
2000	395*	396*

*provisional as there are a few outstanding data sheets, however it is expected that numbers will not increase by more than 40.

Implications

The 1998-2000 censuses (Table 1) revealed that Cape Parrot population numbers are low compared with the previous estimates made by Skead (1964), who estimated 600 birds in the Eastern Cape, and Boshoff (1989) who estimated as many as 1,000 birds. Currently these are optimistic figures.

During the censuses, most sightings of Cape Parrots were made of birds flying to or from forest patches and roosting sites. Information collected prior and subsequent to the 2000 Cape Parrot Big Birding Day suggest that there are about 70 birds that move into pecan nut orchards. In the Umtata - Port St. about 170 birds. In the Boston-Dar g-le-Balgowan area there are 16-20 birds and in the Karkloof only about 5 remaining. This suggests a total of about 370 Cape Parrots, which is similar to the number counted on the census day.

Cape Parrots form isolated subpopulations in these areas which are then important nuclei for the surviving population. Forest in these areas must be highlighted as focal conservation areas. In particular the Gxalingle Forest in the Creighton-Riverside area, which has many large yellowwoods (*Podocarpus* spp.), needs special attention as 51

birds were observed roosting there, leaving in the morning early and splitting into smaller flocks to visit nearby forest patches.

Observations prior and subsequent to the census day suggest that there was a shortage of food in the forests this summer and autumn as the Cape Parrots aggregated to feed on fruit (usually pecan nuts) outside of forest. Furthermore, the parrots were observed visiting sites where they have not been seen for the past 5 years. It is speculated that the unusually high summer rainfall caused the fruit of the *Podocarpus* spp. to fall, although it usually remains on the trees for extended periods, whereas other preferred fruiting trees of Cape Parrots eg. *Celtis africana* produced little fruit (pers. obs.).

The Cape Parrot Birding Day is an example of a combined conservation effort incorporating birders, landowners, farmers, students and the general public. In particular, the Creighton-Donnybrook community under the leadership of Malcolm Gemmel is exemplary in its efforts. It had observers at all forest patches in the area in radio contact with one another so that not only numbers of Cape Parrots but also directions of the parrots movements were confirmed.

Future Considerations

Little is known about the density, demography, movements and roosting sites of Cape Parrots in the Eastern Cape- KwaZulu-Natal areas, except that their numbers are very

low. The information obtained during the censuses makes a valuable contribution to knowledge. It is hoped, that as in previous years, participants will volunteer for the 2001 Cape Parrot Big Birding Day to be held on the afternoon of Saturday 12 May and the morning of Sunday 13 May.

Acknowledgements

Mazda Wildlife are thanked for their vehicle support. All those who have participated in Cape Parrot Days are thanked, especially the local organisers.

Contact Persons for Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2001

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 Donnybrook- Creighton: Mr Malcolm Gemmel 039-8331029/1129
 Weza: Graham Acheson 039-6812126
 Kokstad: Mr Pat Lowry (KZNNCS) 039-7273844
 Umtata: Mr Don Kemp 0833100664, Dale Forbes 033-2605127
 King Williamstown, Alice, Hogsback: Ms Gertie Griffith 0431-352195, Cheryl & Peter Mather-Pike 043-7403566
 Sutterheim: Mr Cameron McMaster 043-6832796
 Wild Coast: Charles Battle 047-5641220
 Northern Province: Craig Symes 083 426 8000
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South African Cape Parrot (Male)

Photo: Rosemary Low

Parrots and the need for a new aviculture

by GREG GLENDELL

Mr Glendell formed his organisation 'Birdsfirst' to work for the welfare of birds in general and parrots in particular. His vehemently expressed views may come as rather a shock to aviculturists in general. Ed.

This article is in response to Rosemary Low's article 'Over-production of parrots' in *PsittaScene* volume 12 number 3, August 2000. Perhaps, instead of asking "What's wrong in aviculture?" We should be asking "What's right in aviculture?"

In the UK we still import many wild-caught parrots every year, most dying long before they even get advertised in the bird keeping press. Yet captive breeding and the practice of seeing hand rearing as a panacea to the problems of trade in wild-caught birds has probably increased the level of suffering experienced by parrots. Large suppliers/breeders often keep breeding pairs in cramped, degrading conditions; conditions condoned by some 'experts' who actually advocate the use of breeding cages where birds cannot even fly. Such pairs are used as egg production machines, their eggs removed on hatching for incubation and hand-rearing. Such removal, of course forces the hen to replace her lost clutch and these circumstances can be inflicted on her for much of her life.

The babies, being hand-reared from the egg, are deprived of all the parental interactions needed to ensure their mental well-being. Many hand-reared parrots are subjected to gavage feeding, forced weaning and the traumatic effects of bright-light conditions (brooders) even before their eyes have opened. Such ignorant treatment often culminates in the wing-clipping of recently fledged birds prior to sale.

These grim conditions are casually accepted by many aviculturists as a standard practice that can go unquestioned. Each year thousands of birds are produced in this way in the UK. The birds are then sold in pet shops to an uneducated public duped into buying cuddle tame babies which are abused as cuddle bags by the emotionally immature. Many of these birds, particularly cockatoos and African greys, are destined to suffer the trauma of self-mutilation, which first appears as feather plucking.

Owners of such birds consistently fail to get good, effective advice from those who have sold them the bird. Indeed pet shop staff and breeders often have little more understanding of a parrot's needs (particularly its behavioural needs) than the buyer. Some staff have neither the information nor the inclination to care about such suffering. So, pet birds eke out a kind of existence with their owners, many never receiving the care they desperately need to have, since even basic training is never undertaken. Troubled owners of traumatised birds may seek help from various sources.

Pet birds which bite, feather pluck or scream are thus sold from one unenlightened owner to another, a process that can take the bird on a life tour of uninformed owners for most of its 50 years or more. Those which are not suffering so acutely, may suffer chronic illnesses due to incorrect diets such as so-called 'parrot food' as its mainstay.

Existing legislation could be used

Now Britain does actually have some legislation which, if it were actually used could reduce much suffering. Acts such as the Protection of Animals Act, Pet Animals Act, Sale of Goods Act, and Wildlife & Countryside Act can help. But again ignorance coupled with the institutionalised inertia found within local government (and even in some animal welfare charities) ensures nothing effectual is ever done to ease the mass suffering of countless thousands of birds. Thus, animal welfare officers remain ignorant about the suffering experienced by these birds. Without the specialist knowledge, enforcement and welfare officers lack the confidence to take action in

the face of gross cruelty. So, pet shops up and down the country continue to sell neurotic, traumatised and diseased birds to an uninformed and gullible public. A public with hundreds of pounds in their pockets looking for a cuddly baby to take home, while utterly ignorant of its real and desperate needs.

With the growing band of high quality specialist avian vets in the UK you can now get good care for your bird. Sadly though, many birds are merely taken to the High Street cat and dog vet. Here, veterinary treatment, can cause further suffering. Birds have bits of their wings, claws and beaks removed; nerves being severed on unanaesthetised birds who scream in terror as vital bits of their body are removed in routine practices to give the fee-paying owner a flightless bird with dull useless claws that won't scratch the hands.

And what about the bird shows? If the main function of these was to spread disease as rapidly as possible from bird to bird it could not be more efficiently organised than it is! Thousands of birds in tightly packed cages crammed next to each other for hours or even days at a time. Birds, already weakened and stressed by a long journey end up in some dingy hall where smoking punters breath carcinogens onto them. Again naïve and ignorant buyers, some duped into sympathy buys by deliberate exhibitions of gross cruelty by some traders, part with hundreds of pounds per bird. And so often, caring buyers are destined to see expensive vets' bills (or death) a few days away for their latest purchase, as bacterial infections rip through the bird's guts before it has even settled in to its new home.

Biting pet birds remain imprisoned in cages for years -decades even-



Countless hand-reared cockatoos become feather pluckers due to the lack of understanding of their needs
Photo: World Parrot Trust

when all that is required to ask it to refrain from such activity is a few hours of basic obedience training for the bird. Screaming birds are sold on from one unsuspecting owner to another. Many are beaten, kept in the dark or ignored for years. Some traumatised birds end up in so-called rescue centres. While the UK has a few good ones, it has many which operate on very dubious grounds; selling donated birds on within a few weeks of acquisition. Or even breeding from such birds to produce yet more birds, more suffering, more profit in an endless cycle of parrot hell.

How is it that we have come to do this to such beautiful, intelligent and sensitive creatures? How is it we routinely torture, imprison and abuse countless thousands of these entirely innocent creatures every year of their lives. And nobody moves on this; nobody moves on this at all. If we want to move on this, a campaign whereby like-minded groups come together to work on the following matters is needed now:

Make welfare the central theme

1. Avicultural societies should amend their constitutions to make the welfare of birds their central aim instead of concentrating on the interests of their members.
2. An end to the commercial importation of all wild-caught birds into the UK and EU.
3. An end to hand-rearing, with parent or part-parent rearing the only options.
4. Public acknowledgement of responsible breeders; those who use humane methods only for the production of parrots (they would not breed cockatoos at all).
5. The establishment of a network of Parrot Centres around the country. Their function; to educate animal welfare/law enforcement officers and the wider parrot-keeping public of these birds' needs. Also, to rehabilitate traumatised birds and maintain them either in non-breeding colonies or as companion birds for the rest of their lives.
6. An educational campaign directed at those responsible for anti-cruelty law enforcement; to ensure such people are fully aware of the special care needed for parrots.
7. An end to the myth of conservation breeding by commercial breeders. Genuine conservation breeding means production of wild-type birds for re-introduction to habitats waiting for them.

I suspect that if aviculturists do not make significant and rapid improvements in the care of birds, aviculture as we know it will not survive. And if it does not change, for the sake of the birds, it deserves to be outlawed.

The 2000 Canadian Parrot Symposium-East

The Canadian Parrot Symposium - East was held at the Airport Hilton Hotel, Toronto between November 10th and 12th 2000.

There were 248 delegates with another 60 persons in attendance



Sharon, Sandra and Mike Pearson at the Canadian World Parrot Trust booth

Photo: R. Low

including 22 vendors, speakers and committee. This is probably the largest crowd to date.

Speakers at the symposium included Rosemary Low (UK), Wolfgang Kiessling (Canary Islands), Chris Davis (USA), Linda Rubin (USA), Steve Hartman (USA), Brian Eddy (Canada), Janna Price (Canada) and Beth Morehouse (Canada). A worthwhile feature of this meeting was to give each participant a slip on which he or she could anonymously write a question for one of the speakers. At the end of each day's session, these questions were answered.

The Symposium surplus revenue totalled \$6,000. The sum of \$5,000 was donated to the Graduate Award in Avian Studies at the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Ontario. Each year surplus revenue and the money raised from an auction held at the symposium are added to the endowment. The principal remains intact, with the award(s) made from the interest earned.

In addition, a donation of \$1,000 was made to Dr Michael Taylor, Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Ontario to further his avian research.

The hotel is booked for 16th - 18th November 2001. The trade show will be open to the public this year, both afternoons from 1-

4pm, with a \$5.00 admission fee. As usual Mike Pearson and Sharon were in attendance on the Canadian World Parrot Trust stand. This was Mike's last symposium as organiser of the Canadian branch. Mike, seen here with Sharon, handed over to Sandra Metzger (pictured centre), at the beginning of the year. The booth was extremely busy with 6 new members being signed up and 23 renewals. The booth raised \$7,477 comprising of \$3,085 from the membership fees and sales of WPT merchandise with the balance of \$4,392 being donated by the Hagen Corporation from the sale of Hagen merchandise. Our sincere thanks to Mark Hagen and the Rolf C. Hagen Corporation for their continued support of the Canadian Parrot Trust.

Sale of Macaw parts in Bolivia

By CRISTIANA SENNI

In the November 1999 issue of *PsittaScene*, Harold and Susan Armitage wrote about their trip to Bolivia and their visit to a store in Trinidad selling all sorts of goods made with animal parts. Among them were Macaw skulls, wings, tails and feather headdresses.

This news, and the pictures which came with it, were particularly shocking because although poaching might be more of a threat to the survival of the Bolivian Macaws, this may represent one of the worst ways of exploiting parrots for purely commercial and non-traditional reasons, and regardless of the fact that Bolivia is a party to CITES and has legislation which does not allow the trapping and trade of its wildlife.

This report generated a deluge of complaints to the Bolivian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment and to Bolivian Embassies worldwide. The only official reply that we know of came from the Bolivian Embassy in Rome, Italy, which we thank for having pursued this matter with their government. They wrote that an investigation was underway.

However, sources in Bolivia, just informed us that to their knowledge this matter is not being investigated. Can there be any hope for the long term survival of the Bolivian Macaws and other wildlife species if national and CITES regulations do not seem to be of any concern to the local authorities?

From the Embassy of Bolivia - Rome, Italy.

2 March 2000

In answer to your letter of 30 October 1999 in which you requested this Embassy to plead

with the Government of Bolivia for the enforcement of CITES and national regulations for the protection of the Bolivian wildlife, I wish to inform you that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with other national authorities, as the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, have started an investigation in the Beni district.

Nevertheless, after viewing the website that you indicated, it was possible to verify that the magnitude of this alert has tainted the image of Bolivia, its traditions and costumes. In the region of Beni, particularly in the indigenous communities, holidays are celebrated with costumes made with the feathers of certain species of fauna, this in no way affects the survival and existence of those species.

Therefore your conclusions do not justify starting a worldwide alert.

At the same time, I wish to inform you that this use is normal in the indigenous communities and allowed by a law that regulates the conservation of wildlife species.

Best regards, Rosa Chàvez Bustios Encargada de Negocios a.i.

Illicit trade in St Vincent Parrots

Amazona guildingii, CITES Appendix I, is endemic to St Vincent and the Grenadines, where it is the national bird. The total wild population is estimated to be approximately 500 birds.

Although a number of birds are known to have been smuggled out of the country in the past, current information suggests that eggs are being collected from nest trees during the breeding season (February - August) and then taken abroad for incubation.

The Management Authority of St Vincent and the Grenadines has reason to believe that illicit trade in such specimens is reaching serious proportions and one source of information suggests that there may be as many as 40 birds in one European country alone.

All Parties, especially those with an active exotic trade in pet birds, are asked to alert their enforcement authorities to this problem. Any information that may be of assistance in combating the trade should be passed to the Secretariat.

New boost for Dominica forestry department

By ROGER SWEENEY, Graham Hall Bird Sanctuary, Barbados, West Indies

Forestry officers of the Dominica Forestry division received another boost to their highly successful field conservation programmes recently with the pledge that every officer in the division (23 officers in total including both senior and junior ranks) will receive a free copy of the new 'Conservation Handbook' that has been written by William Sutherland of the University of East Anglia.

William Sutherland has already written several books to highlight practical techniques for monitoring natural ecology. When he wrote his latest book he had two main objectives; to produce in one volume a practical guide to all aspects of field ecology and conservation that a field worker would need, and the second aim was to get this book into the hands of as many field conservationists as possible in the developing countries. Under an agreement called the 'Gratis copies project' the author managed to negotiate an arrangement whereby almost half of the copies produced of this book would be distributed free to conservation fieldworkers in developing countries. The publisher of the book 'Blackwell Scientific' will provide these copies of the book at cost price, and then the author's royalties will be used to pay the remaining cost. This means that for every copy of the book sold, another copy will be made available to a field worker, who would otherwise be unlikely to see the book, without charge.

The Gratis copies project has already pledged close to 400 copies of the book to field workers outside of Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand or Japan. The Pledge of 23 copies to the forestry division of Dominica will provide a great practical support to their training and field programmes. Additionally the Gratis project has also pledged other copies for fieldworkers elsewhere in the Eastern Caribbean including conservationists and forestry staff on St. Vincent and Barbados.

Feathers needed

By AVRIL BARTON, 6 Edgware Mount, Leeds, LS8 5NG

After reading the request for discarded Macaw and Parrot feathers in the August 2000 issue of the magazine, I discussed with Mike Reynolds, then contacted Steve Albert in New Mexico. Arrangements are being made for the Zuni tribe to take part in projects arranged by the U.S. branch of the Trust.

I have offered to become a central collecting point for all feathers

from England, so if anyone would like to send feathers to me, no matter how few, I will be delighted to pass them on. All types of feathers are needed, from parrots and other birds, even the small ones. I would be grateful, however, if you would put the feathers from protected species in a separate package to save any problems with Customs.

Also, if there are any children out there who would like to write or send photos or drawings to the tribal children, Steve and I are hoping to set up an exchange project, so the children can get to know each other's ways.

Pet Parrot Workshops in the Netherlands

by ROELANT JONKER

With keen interest I read the November 2000 edition of *PsittaScene*, especially the articles regarding the growing problems faced by parrot rescue centres and the section about parrot overproduction. I am a member of the board of WPT Benelux. Furthermore I am involved with Stichting AAP, an organisation which rescues exotic mammals and tries to find them suitable homes much like the parrot rescue centres mentioned. Unlike most of the latter this has an annual budget of up to 3 million guilders which is approximately £1 million. In fact Stichting AAP is the 7th biggest nature and environmental organisation in the Netherlands. The strange fact of the matter is that they rescue far less animals than for instance the famous parrot rescue centre NOP in Veldhoven, The Netherlands. Only 120 monkeys and 150 other small animals like raccoon's and squirrels are housed. Every year about 100 new animals find temporary homes at the centre before relocation. My work for Stichting AAP involves creating educational guidelines for schools around the country interested in learning more about Stichting AAP and its concerns. This considers thinking about the preconceptions held by the target group on the subject.

At WPT Benelux we were forced to reconsider our target group. This was traditionally mainly the aviculturists. This target group has proven to be quite difficult to reach with our message. Most of the people in this target group are just not interested. The bold statements we made in the past, e.g. about the undesirable

practice of trading baby parrots, did a lot of damage to our image. They regard us as people who try to take their hobby away from them.

We are faced with having far too few new members and increasing problems, not only the wild situation but especially the domestic problems of welfare and rescue. So I think it is right to rethink our target group. The welfare and rescue problems originate mostly with people keeping a single parrot at home. These people, by and large, mean well. They don't start out looking for a parrot to mistreat. In their love for the animal they are faced with a lot of problems. As Julie Weiss Murad mentions in her paper (*PsittaScene* v.12(4):7), 'an insider's look at rescue and sanctuary' 'a basic truth is that many of the behaviour problems which cause a parrot to lose its home are the result of a really bad environment and poor nutrition. Simply providing advice regarding a healthful diet, exercise, adequate light, proper caging, as well as mental and physical stimulation will resolve many problems.'

In the Netherlands we have started to organise workshops for people with a pet parrot. These are just starting but are very promising. I feel there is a need for a campaign targeting the general public. People caring for animals are quite willing to make a small sacrifice on their behalf. Last Christmas there was a broadcast on Dutch television regarding Stichting AAP. The topic was no more than five minutes. It generated 2,000 phone calls from people wanting to become a member; 58,000 people are members and pay an average of F35 (£10) each year. This is, I believe, equally as possible for organisations for parrots. We just need to rethink our target group.

I should mention here that a better informed public when buying a parrot will do so more carefully. Our message to aviculturists should be to deliver quality and not quantity. If not they won't sell their birds.

There is therefore another area that needs our attention. As Michael Reynolds rightfully mentions in 'The parrots of the world - A critical question for us all' (*PsittaScene* v.12(4):8) - the problem is that we are preaching to the converted. We need a leaflet that reaches a wider audience. We need a leaflet that's more easily read, without the scientific reports that fills these

pages at present. It would not hurt, for instance, to have a special children's section. Children are very involved in the welfare of animals. But everyone with a heart should be addressed on the drama that parrot face today. Conscious creatures may not be allowed to suffer in ignorance.

I get the distinct impression that the *PsittaScene* costs us more members than it gains. People are not paying £20 for a magazine they can't read or comprehend. At our stands we see many people that pick up a *PsittaScene*, go through it and put it down. And some members cancel their subscription after one year. *PsittaScene* just doesn't keep them involved.

Dear caring parrot community it pains me to use such strong words. It frustrates me to see so many good people working for the parrots getting disillusioned by the setbacks they have to face. We need to make some opportunities and then these charismatic birds will practically sell themselves. (We know this already in the wrong sense of the word) I see a bright future for the parrots I know you do too.

I am writing on a personal note, not representing the views of the WPT Benelux. I hope this will start a fruitful discussion.

WPT Members Discussion List

Given the powers of the internet, we are in the process of starting something new - that is the World Parrot Trust Members Discussion List - or the Members List for short. Since we have a very impressive collection of researchers, aviculturists, educators, and all around committed parrot owners among our ranks, we thought it might be helpful to have a venue for:

- Asking and answering questions about parrots, parrot care, and parrot conservation.
- Updating members on the latest news from the field, faster and with greater depth than in the PS.
- Providing information on upcoming meetings and events that might be of interest to members.

Signing up is easy. Just send a message to wptmembers@worldparrottrust.org along with your name and member number (that's on your mailing label) and we'll send you a welcome letter with the details on how the whole thing works. Please give it a whirl, and we'll look forward to seeing you there!

Report on Spix's Macaw

Last Spix's Macaw feared dead

By Michael McCarthy,
The Independent,
27 December 2000

The last wild Spix's macaw, the blue Brazilian parrot that for 10 years has been the world's loneliest and rarest bird, has disappeared and may be dead.

It has not been seen in its territory in Bahia, north-eastern Brazil, since 5 October and extensive searches have failed to find any trace.

The male bird was the last free-flying example of a species now down to just 60 individuals, all held in zoos or by private bird collectors, and had been the focus of international hopes of a reintroduction programme. Five captive-bred birds were due to be released to join it early next year.

Its disappearance, greeted with anguish by ornithologists involved in the project, is an enormous and possibly fatal blow to the chances of re-establishing a wild population, as conservationists had hoped the wild bird would teach its captive-bred colleagues the skills needed to survive in the arid thorn-scrub savannah that is their natural habitat.

Cyanopsitta spixii, discovered in 1819 by Johann Baptist von Spix, a naturalist working for the Emperor of Austria, has never been common since it was first recorded and was gradually driven to the brink of extinction, first by grazing animals destroying its wooded-creek habitat, and then, as it became rare, by bird collectors.

It was believed to be extinct in the wild until the last bird was discovered by the British parrot expert Tony Juniper and a Brazilian colleague near the small town of Curaca in July 1990. For the past decade, this bird has managed to survive alone, while a committee set up by the Brazilian government has tried, without great success, to put together a reintroduction programme.

The wild bird had grown very cunning, but it may at last have succumbed to a predator, or to an age-related disease. It had never previously disappeared from its territory for more than 15 days.

Tampa Roundup

by JAMIE GILARDI

First and foremost, I'd like to thank the Gabriel Foundation for allowing us such a high profile at their symposium which was held in Tampa, Florida- they not only facilitated our holding the first Parrot Welfare Summit and a WPT members meeting, but we also were very well represented among the speakers and panellists. It was a great opportunity for the Trust and it would not have been possible without the kind support of Julie Weiss Murad and all the Gabriel Foundation staff.

The Bird Behaviourists' Summit

In the morning of the 4th January, Steve Martin held the second Behaviourist's Summit. As he put it, "The purpose of this meeting is to bring together as many companion parrot behaviour experts as we can to exchange ideas and information for the benefit of the birds and bird owners we work with." Several WPT folks attended this meeting and it proved to be a focused discussion of parrot behaviour in the captive context and the potential sources of behavioural problems in these birds (and their owners!). As many of you are aware, there are a large number of people in the US who now work professionally as consultants for parrot-owners with real or perceived behavioural problems. One of the outcomes of this meeting was a clearly positive response to the idea of forming a small organization of people who work in this environment. Liz Wilson is working on the organizing of this group: for those interested, please contact her directly at: Lwilsoncvt@aol.com.

The WPT Trustees' Meeting

Since there were so many WPT Trustees present, Mike Reynolds arranged a meeting on the day before the Gabriel event. This provided a welcome chance to talk about the central issues of the Trust, and to simply sit down face-to-face which was a rare pleasure; at the table were Mike and Audrey Reynolds, Andrew Greenwood, Steve Martin, Charlie Munn, Joanna Eckles (USA administrator), and myself. We had far too much to cover in a single meeting, but we managed to raise such issues as the future of the Parrot Action Plan, the Trust's relationship to our members, how we might allot what resources we currently have, and more importantly, how to acquire more funding.

The Welfare Summit

As many of you know from reading *PsittaScene* v.12(4), we are very concerned about the growing problem of unwanted parrots, particularly in the US where the problem appears to be especially acute. One of our very active members and supporters, Dr. Stewart Metz, made the suggestion that the Gabriel Symposium would be an ideal venue to bring together many of the groups and individuals who are working on this problem. We agreed with Stewart that the Trust could play an important role as an un-biased facilitator of such a meeting, so we invited over 100 groups and individuals to attend this two hour "summit." I'm pleased to say that 42 people showed up for the summit, and what could have been a contentious gathering, proved to be a most productive session. Stewart and I ran the meeting and kept things on track by providing some background and then giving all attendees three minutes each to discuss the issue(s) they felt were most important.

Those in attendance were remarkably unified by their selfless focus on the tragedy of many thousands of unwanted parrots. This unity led to strong support for the formation of an 'umbrella organization' which may:

- provide information sharing among the welfare groups and individuals
- assist new groups in the process of getting started
- create guidelines for the operation of a rescue or sanctuary facility
- pool resources to seek outside funding to support the work of the members
- help groups work together to try to solve the underlying problem of unwanted parrots

To create such an organization, we formed a steering committee which will help define its name, mission, and structure. That committee is now up to 30 members, which may be too large to be agile, but it gives you an idea of the level of motivation out there. I was personally very pleased to see how well this process worked and I'd like to thank Stewart and all the other people who were willing to fill me in on the history of this problem and the current state of affairs (I knew very little about the parrot welfare issue going into this). I would like to thank Steve Martin for helping us organize the Summit and for providing



Jamie Gilardi, Steve Martin, Charlie Munn, Stewart Metz, Joanna Eckles, Andrew Greenwood, Mike Reynolds, Audrey Reynolds, Glenn Reynolds, Catherine Carlton

refreshments. For further information on the Summit or the steering committee, please contact Stewart (parrotdoc@email.msn.com) or contact me directly at gilardi@worldparrottrust.org.

WPT members' meeting

Following the same logic that inspired the Trustee Lunch, Mike arranged for a room and some wonderful refreshments to be available for WPT members on the evening before the Gabriel Symposium. This unstructured setting made a great forum to meet members and hear some of their ideas about the Trust, what we're doing well and what we're doing not so well. We got a chance to see the Golden Conure painting that Glenn Reynolds had painted and has used very successfully to raise money for the Golden Conure Fund. He mentioned that the artist, Grant Hacking, will be working on a similar print to help launch the Great Green Macaw fund and is looking for good clear pictures of this species. To learn more or to provide good photos, please contact Glenn at info@breedersblend.com and check out his site at <http://www.breedersblend.com/goldenconurefund.html>. This members meeting turned out to be just the sort of relaxed affair that encourages openness and clear thinking which made it both fun and productive.

The Gabriel Foundation Symposium 2001

This was the second such symposium, entitled, "Parrots in the New Millennium: Issues of Sanctuary, Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Adoption of Companion Parrots," which ran from the 5-7th January. As the title suggests, a range of issues were covered and the format was an interesting mix of speakers, panel discussions, and question-and-answer sessions. We heard speakers from Australia, Brazil, the Netherlands, England, Japan, and of course, the United States. And I must say that the Trust was very well represented among the speakers - including Mike Reynolds, Charlie Munn, and Jan Hooimeijer from the Netherlands. Then Steve Martin brought out some spectacularly

well-behaved birds on the last night as part of his 'Kings of the Wind' show, plugging the Trust at every opportunity.

Mike gave a wonderful presentation on the Trust, showed the Cleese video, and explained his piece in the last PS entitled, "The Parrots of the World - A critical question for us all." Charlie gave an inspiring presentation which extrapolated from his conservation achievements in South America to cover the rest of the planet: calling it, "How 50 Parrots Species Can Save 500 Million Acres of Tropical Forest Around the World." And Jan provided some European-perspective on the origin of some of the problems exhibited by captive parrots.

In addition to these meetings, there were auctions, a dinner cruise, and a well attended collection of display booths. The Trust was given a wonderful location just inside the front door of the hotel and Joanna put in a great deal of time signing up new members - several lifers! - as well as selling loads of shirts and books - many thanks to her and all those who helped her keep the booth staffed. As you saw in the last PS, the Jewels of Nature is an impressive work in progress and Okko Boer was there at the 'JON' booth to present several original paintings as well as a sample of what the first of the bound volumes will look like.

The Aftermath...

After the last presentation on Sunday, we packed up and headed for Steve Martin's place, to see his amazing collection of birds - most of which are used in his Natural Encounters shows (<http://www.naturalencounters.com/>). In addition to facilitating another informal Trustee gathering, Steve had set up a critical meeting for us at Disney's Animal Kingdom, allowing us to make a presentation of the Trust's work and hopefully convince them to support our parrot conservation projects around the world.

All in all, the various events in Tampa were a great opportunity for the Trust to piggy-back our activities on another event, and put our best foot forward to a large and committed audience.

Aims of the Trust



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Canada: <http://www.canadianparrottrust.org>

Italy: <http://www.worldparrottrust.org/italy>

Denmark: <http://www.image.dk/fpewpt>

The survival of parrot species in the wild, and the welfare of captive birds.

These aims are pursued by:

- Educating the public on the threats to parrots.
- Opposing trade in wild-caught parrots.
- Preserving and restoring parrot habitat.
- Studying the status of parrot populations.
- Encouraging the production of aviary-bred birds.
- Creating links between aviculture and conservation.
- Promoting high standards in the keeping of parrots.
- Supporting research into veterinary care of parrots.

WILD PARROTS, CAPTIVE PARROTS.... WE WANT TO HELP THEM ALL

Dear WPT Members,

I'd like to take a moment to discuss a central issue with regard to membership with the World Parrot Trust. At the Gabriel Symposium in Tampa, we had the opportunity to have a small WPT members get-together (see opposite page). That meeting provided a great chance to meet with a number of members and to hear their perspectives on the Trust. I'm pleased to report that most of the comments were wonderfully complimentary.

A couple of comments were made suggesting that there was a time when members experienced delays in hearing from WPT on specific requests and new memberships. My understanding is that, while there was a brief hiccup between administrators here in the US, that has been resolved by the wonderfully-effective Joanna Eckles who is based in Stillwater. But the comments also inspired an insightful comment by our Trustee, Dr. Andrew Greenwood. He pointed out that being a member of the Trust is really about seeking out ways to help and support the Trust rather than being about looking for what the Trust can do for you. As you all know, the World Parrot Trust is all about saving parrots - conserving the ones in the wild and caring for the ones in our homes. Over the years, many members have given a great deal of time, energy, and money to help us achieve these goals and we're very much indebted to them for that support. The *PsittaScene* is our way of keeping track of what's going on in the parrot world and sharing that information with our members. I'm hopeful that members can avoid seeing their membership in the Trust as a "subscription" to the *PsittaScene*, with the idea that you "get" something for

your annual membership rates. On one hand it is a great compliment to the quality of the work that Rosemary Low and Mike Reynolds have done in creating and editing the *PsittaScene* that people feel it's worth subscribing to as though it were a magazine. However, our feeling is that what you "get" for being a member of the World Parrot Trust is the opportunity to be part of a small yet globally-effective organization that is extremely efficient at conserving parrots. I am inspired by the fact that we have as many committed members as we do - members who are committed to supporting our work with the parrots, rather than subscribing to our newsletter.

Having a small staff means a lot of things, mostly good. At the top of that list is that it enables us to send donated funds straight to the conservation work, rather than paying for staff, phones, and faxes. By allotting so much of our resources to our work rather than to our staff, we're likely to get some of the day-to-day details wrong. We're sorry if we've made mistakes in the past and we hope we're now on track. The really good news is that, if you're experiencing a glitch, you can contact us directly if you have a problem and you're more than likely to get a personal response. If you write to your branch and don't receive a satisfactory reply send me a note directly and I'll do my best to get back to you as soon as possible.

Finally, one thing we are adding this month which should complement the *PsittaScene* contents well is the WPT Members listserver (see page 17) - we'll look forward to your signing up as well as your contributions and questions there.

Jamie Gilardi

YES, I WANT TO HELP SAVE THE PARROTS OF THE WORLD

SUBSCRIPTION RATES (please tick)

- Student membership £10 / US\$15
- Single membership £20 / US\$30
- Joint membership £27 / US\$40
- Club membership £100 / US\$150
- Fellow (Life Member) £300 / US\$500
- Conservation membership (Life Member) £1,000 / US\$1,500
- Additional donation of

(or equivalent exchange currency, credit card payments by Visa/Mastercard only)

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We heard about the World Parrot Trust from

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Parrots in the Wild

Psitta Scene

Juvenile Kea *Nestor notabilis*



by KIRSTY SWINNERTON

My friend and I were walking a track through the Kepler mountains in South Island, New Zealand while on holiday in 1998. On our second day, as we were resting at a shelter in the snow-covered mountains, a pair of Keas with their two youngsters appeared where I took this photograph. In captivity, Keas have a reputation for being mischievous and these wild birds were no different, attempting to tear apart our rucksacks looking for something to scavenge or play with. For thirty minutes the family followed us down the ridge, weaving back and forth and flashing the brilliant red feathers under their wings. As we dropped into the valley, they disappeared leaving me with a perfect holiday memory.