

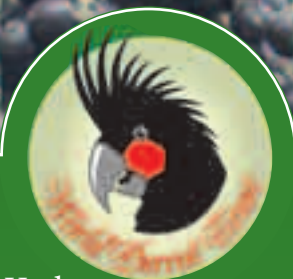
PsittaScene



IN THIS ISSUE:

Release of confiscated Amazons

Soil eating in Papua New Guinea & New York



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Cover Picture By MARK & MARIE STAFFORD

To purchase photos and video of these birds in the wild and help save them at the same time, please visit the website of parrotsinternational.org. All proceeds support wild parrot conservation.

In addition to donating the use of these photographs, Mark and Marie Stafford also donated funds to the Great Green project to support Ulises' field work this season!

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Release of confiscated Amazon parrots in Mexico

By CLAUDIA MACIAS, ALBERTO PARÁS, JOSÉ JAIME GONZÁLEZ, ERNESTO ENKERLIN, BRANSON RITCHIE, ELIZABETH STONE, NADINE LAMBERSKI and D. CIEMBOR

It was a sunny day on September 2001 when we released 21 Yellow-headed Parrots (*Amazona oratrix*) and 14 Green-cheeked Parrots (also known as Red-crowned) (*Amazona viridigenalis*) into the wild at a secondary forest with enough arboreal coverage for parrot food and nesting sites, located in Tantoyuca, Veracruz, northeast Mexico. With the exception of seven captive hatched Yellow-headed Parrots, the remaining 14 Yellow-heads and the 16 Green-cheeks had been illegally caught (by poachers) in the Mexican territory. These birds were immediately confiscated by the government and maintained near their original range in Fundacion ARA, a bird rehabilitation centre.

One out of each four birds were radio-collared prior to release, in order to document their movements, behaviour and survival. We found distinct differences between the behaviour of the two species of released parrots: while the Green-cheeks easily joined in flocks and moved together long distances, the Yellow-heads formed pairs or small groups (up to 4 parrots), moved only a few kilometers around the release site and used to come back for roosting. After 12 months of follow-up, some Yellow-heads remained 5 km around the release site, while the Green-cheeks had moved more than 40 km away as they joined two separate Green-cheeked Parrots wild flocks that were passing over during their seasonal movements.

But, how did we come up with the decision of releasing these confiscated birds and what were the risks involved in the process? This is not an easy task. Releasing confiscated birds without serious consideration and a careful procedure could bring several vital risks to the wild populations. The primary motivation for releasing these particular species of parrots was that these parrots are endangered. Their wild populations have seriously declined in their original distribution range. Another reason was that the origin and handling of the birds were well known, and the birds were not exposed to exotic birds/diseases. Additionally, the birds were held under strict hygienic and security conditions at Fundacion ARA. Finally, our



In-situ release site.

group had the knowledge and experience of studying both parrot species in the wild. This expertise was useful in increasing the chance of survival of the parrots to be released.

Risks involved

Three main risks are involved in parrot reintroductions:

- 1 Disease contamination,
- 2 Unintended ecological effects,
- 3 Cultural/genetic pollution of wild populations.

In order to reduce the risk of inadvertently introducing known infectious agents into the indigenous populations of the Yellow-heads and Green-cheeks we implemented a strict quarantine regime and developed a reasonable health screening program for significant and detectable pathogens known to be present in *Amazona* species. All pathogen assays were negative for each parrot. The health evaluations performed were considered sufficient for reintroduction of these birds that had never been removed from their country of origin.

Unintended ecological effects are a special concern when releases are attempted outside the historical range, as this situation leads to the species being placed in an environment where it has not evolved any adaptation to deal with it. To avoid this risk we did the release within the historical range of both species. Although both species had been extirpated locally, there was still enough suitable habitat.

When captive-bred stocks are used for reintroductions, they may introduce genetic and cultural traits, which have evolved in captivity. The two flocks of parrots were appropriate for release into the wild as their origin and geographic source were well known. The birds were not exposed to other



Red-crowned Parrot ready for release fitted with radio transmitter.

avian species or exotic parrots; therefore, the risks of mimicking abnormal behaviour or of interbreeding were minimal.

Releasing the parrots

We performed a "soft release" procedure, following the recommendations provided by the Association for Parrot Conservation, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This procedure involved a Pre-conditioning phase and a Post-release monitoring phase. Pre-conditioning was performed in the release site. Parrots were held in flight cages measuring 1.50 x 1.50 x 10 m, which allowed reasonable flight exercise. Two flight cages were set up, one for each species of parrots. We set up three perches on each side of the cage and coerced the birds to fly from one side to the other for 5

minutes twice a day during a 5 month period. After some time the birds exercised on their own without any difficulty.

The birds were simultaneously conditioned to eat local food. During their first two weeks at the release site, they were provided with the same diet offered while in captivity. This diet consisted of sunflower seeds, peanuts, carrots, apples, tamarinds, peppers, corn and water with vitamins. After two weeks, the birds were gradually conditioned to eat locally-available food items. These items were identified from the previous diet studies our group conducted on both species in the wild. After 6 months of training all the birds were successfully converted to a natural diet consisting of wild seeds and native fruits. During the 8 months of acclimatisation, the birds were held away from people and domestic animals. This period of time allowed flocking formation. The birds were also exposed to natural predators such as raptors and mammals, as well as to other native birds occurring in the region.

Prior to the release, we visited the neighbourhood in order to inform the local people about the project, talk about the importance of the parrots and their protection, and invite them to get involved in the project by protecting and monitoring the birds. All the neighbours were interested in the project and expressed their commitment on protecting the parrots. In conjunction with government officials, the local radio stations announced the project and the importance of preserving the parrots.

The release was performed in the morning and one of the most exciting results was to see several parrots feeding on wild seeds in



Yellow-headed Amazon foraging in the wild.

the trees nearby the release site the same day of release. Other birds were still dependent on the food provided. We supplemented food and water until all birds were fully competent in the wild (up to 6 months).

Post-monitoring phase was performed using telemetry equipment. Four Green-cheeks and six Yellow-heads were tracked during the 12 months after the release, for as long as the batteries of radio-transmitters were active.

Post-release findings

We identified a clear difference in the dispersion of the two species of parrots. Two flocks of Green-cheeked Parrots were formed, both flocks were stimulated by wild flocks of Green-cheeks passing over the area and left the release site. Only one of these flocks returned to the release site some months later, but left the area again after several days. The Yellow-heads formed small flocks of 2 to 4 birds and moved together around the release site. They basically remained 5 km around the release site and used this location as a roosting site for an extended period of time. Both species' behaviour was expected, according to the normal behaviour reported in our previous studies on wild populations.

The Green-cheeks behaved more "wild" or "rustic", except for one tame individual. After 12 months of release, at least 6 birds were confirmed to be active around the area.

Most of the Yellow-heads demonstrated a strong fondness for the training enclosure and the release site. Several of them seemed to be accustomed to the supplemental feeding as well as to human presence. Two parrots were especially tame, two of the juveniles that hatched in captivity from wild-born parents. After 12 months of release, 14 parrots were still observed around the area.



Released Yellow-headed Amazon feeding on wild vegetation.

One of the most rewarding findings was the nesting attempt of the two existing pairs of Yellow-headed Parrots near the release site. One of them actually raised two chicks, but unfortunately, these chicks together with their parents were poached. This strongly supports that a release program should be linked to a long-term educational program with the local people in order to reduce one cause of the parrots' extirpation, the illegal capture.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this parrot release, we conclude that using a soft release procedure was crucial to the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of at least 50% of the parrots involved. We strongly recommend a soft release procedure when reintroducing confiscated endangered parrots into the wild.

Reintroduction is currently a controversial

issue when referring to the protection and conservation of parrots. This is due to the numerous risks involved and the failure of similar projects in the past. Reintroducing confiscated parrots back into the wild is a challenging and difficult task to ensure that the released birds really represent a benefit for the conservation of their wild populations and that they do not cause potential and irretrievable damage to their own species and/or other wildlife species.

However, it is important to remember that other strategies for the management and conservation of confiscated birds have been proposed. When implementing a release strategy, it is fundamental to reduce the risks involved and to keep focus on the potential benefits that the released flock will bring to the wild populations.

We hope that our work will offer some guidelines for future conservation efforts of other parrot species worldwide.

Acknowledgements

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We are very grateful to colleagues who participated voluntarily and provided their knowledge, expertise and time: Elizabeth Stone, Nadine Lamberski, Branson Ritchie, D. Ciembor, Pat Schroder, José Luis Manzano, Romualdo Martínez, Cynthia Carlisle, Eduardo Iñigo, Juan Vargas, and Catalina Porras.

Helping local people value their natural treasures

By ANDREA JOHNSON and DONALD BRIGHTSMITH

Santiago Duran leans toward us through the blazing heat of a Peruvian jungle at midday. "Years ago," he recounts, his weathered hands absently swatting sandflies, "the men from the community used to go upriver to the big palm swamp. They would go in January, and take their machetes, and they would cut down the palms where the macaws had chicks. Thirty, forty nests at a time - they hardly thought twice, there were so many birds. And I tell you, the macaw stew we would eat..."

Times have changed, for both the men and the macaws. Today, that big palm swamp is part of Bahuaja-Sonene National Park, which along with the Tambopata-Candamo Reserve Zone and Bolivia's Madidi National Park, encompasses over 3.1 million contiguous hectares of primary rainforest in the southern Amazon basin. The Native Community of Infierno (NCI), a mixed indigenous and mestizo community of which Don Santiago is an elder member, lies along the banks of the Tambopata River at the edge of this grand swathe of forest. Nowadays, when people from Infierno go upriver, they are most likely to be accompanying a boat of ecotourists intent on seeing the very macaws to which our host refers as stew fodder.

The terrain of the native community forms a buffer to one of the largest remaining forested areas in the Western Amazon basin, and the indigenous Ese'ejá people's historical relationship with the land has ensured that their lands thus far remain mostly covered with lush tropical forest. Within the community's 10,000 hectares, 40% is set aside as a reserved area, and the rest is a matrix of good secondary forest and cleared farmland. For generations land use consisted of shifting agriculture, low-level timber extraction, and subsistence hunting. This is still the case, but population increases in the last decades

have meant growing levels of all these activities. In addition, in the past decade, tourism has become a major new economic player in the area; the NCI is now joint owner of a popular and innovative ecotourism.

Macaws in Infierno

These dynamics are making complex and at times conflicting demands on the community and its biodiversity - not least, the macaws, whose brilliantly photographable plumage and winning behaviour make them avian gold in ecotourism dollars.

Six species of macaws inhabit the forests surrounding the NCI: Scarlet (*Ara macao*), Red and Green (*A. chloroptera*), Blue and Gold (*A. ararauna*), Chestnut-fronted (*A. severa*), Red-bellied (*Orthopsittaca manilata*), and the rare Blue-headed (*Propyrrhura couloni*). Most species of macaws are threatened throughout their ranges by a confluence of habitat loss, illicit pet trade, and hunting. While macaws in the Tambopata region are lucky enough to live adjacent to a vast pristine sweep of jungle, they remain vulnerable due to their slow rates of reproduction and nesting requirements.

Unlike many regions, it appears that in Infierno, illicit capture for the pet trade is not a major problem for the macaw



Red-and-green Macaws at a clay lick near Posada Amazonas in the Native Community of Infierno.

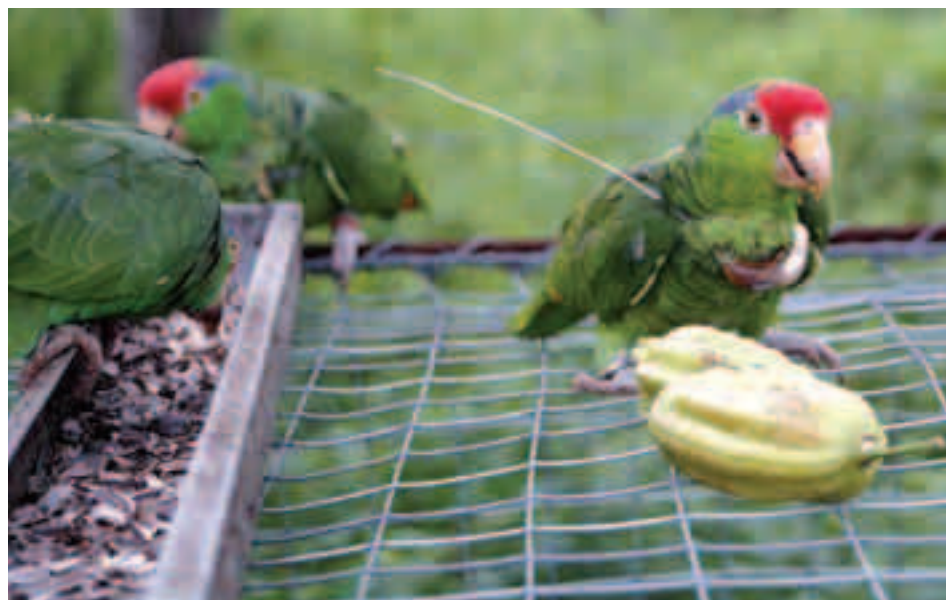
Photo: Eric Outwater

populations. But while the days of which Don Santiago spoke are gone, macaws are still occasionally shot for food. They have also historically been killed by brazil nut collectors, who view these skilled seed-eaters as competitors for a valuable economic good. Perhaps the most pressing threat is to their reproductive success. Despite the legendary diversity of rainforest flora, it turns out that there are only a few types of trees that form the spacious durable cavities macaws need as nests - and the overwhelmingly preferred nest trees, ironwood (*Dipteryx species*), are also ideal for making charcoal and flooring. These enormous centuries-old trees, found throughout community lands, are often sold at scandalously low prices to the prospective loggers. Once gone, they represent an irreplaceable loss.

That human activities have had a deleterious effect on the macaw population density in the NCI is suggested by extensive anecdotal and comparative evidence from community members and researchers. That the community has an interest from an economic standpoint in maintaining and improving the health of their avian population is a fact. The NCI, therefore, offers an excellent opportunity to

1 investigate the dynamics of a low-density population,

2 put to the test artificial nesting techniques



Red-crowned Parrots feeding on local foods at the supplementary feeding station.



The high school class (and a few extras) from the Native Community of Infierno and the macaw nest boxes they helped build.

Photos: Donald Brightsmith

developed elsewhere, and

3 work to strengthen the conservation-minded outlook among community members towards their incredible natural resources.

Since 2001, we have been working with the community of Infierno on these three fronts to understand and conserve its macaw population.

Primary forest

Six hours upriver from Infierno takes you into primary forest that provides a picture of what the macaw population may have once resembled. Here, at the Tambopata Research Center, macaws congregate at one of the largest clay licks known in the Amazon; on a good morning, over 1,000 parrots appear in a riot of colour and noise. You cannot walk into the forest for more than 5 minutes without hearing or seeing a flash of macaw red or gold. Studies at places like TRC and Manu National Park have shown that available nest sites seem to be the limiting factor on the population; it is estimated that less than 30% of potential reproductive pairs lay eggs in a given season. Nest demand, in other words, exceeds supply. It may be for this reason that artificial nest boxes at TRC have occupancy rates of approximately 80%. Reproductive success has been monitored and design improved since the first successful box was hung here in 1994. What we haven't known, however, is how artificial nests would be received among a population of lower density. Do the macaws in Infierno face a housing shortage as well? This question has important implications for conservation and management efforts.

With such thoughts in mind, we began our work with the community by putting Infierno's secondary school students to work! The kids helped to construct 14 artificial nests, which were then hung throughout the community's lands. We placed six in the trail system at Posada Amazonas, the ecolodge jointly owned and operated by the community, and eight on the lands of willing community members. During the 2001 and 2002 breeding



Girls from the high school in the Native Community of Infierno helping to build nest boxes.



Richard Amable (project assistant from nearby Puerto Maldonado) helping high school students build wooden macaw nest boxes.

seasons, the boxes were monitored every 7-10 days from November through January. We have found Blue-headed Parrots, Kinkajous, and all variety of stinging insects nesting inside, but thus far no macaws have shown interest. There are a variety of potential explanations for this. It may be that the birds simply haven't discovered the nests yet, or observed other macaws successfully utilizing them. It may be that the nests are placed too close to areas of human traffic, and that birds in the NCI lands are more skittish around people after generations of familiarity with hunters' guns. It may also be that these nests are unnecessary for a population of this density: simply put, that the birds of Infierno do not suffer from a housing shortage. There may be a sufficiently large number of inviting natural holes from which to choose.

Natural nest monitoring

Studying natural nesting holes has been another prong of our investigations into the reproductive dynamics of the macaw population in the native community. We wanted to discover where birds were nesting, and encourage the local people to take an interest in guarding these birds from hunting and their nest trees from felling. Thus in 2001 we began offering monetary incentives to community members who showed us macaw nests: \$25 was paid for an active nest, and \$25 more is paid if the chick successfully fledges from the nest. This strategy is effective on several levels: not only is it an inroad to local knowledge, but it has maximized project contact with community members. We rely upon their information, we pass

through their farms, we communicate regularly about the status of nests on each person's land. In addition, on a simple but important level this incentive payment makes clear to people that the macaw population - and local knowledge about it - is valuable as something other than a source of food. Anecdotal evidence from other sites where poaching is high tells us that poachers will show nests to researchers and then go back, after reaping the compensation, to steal the chicks. Fortunately, we have no evidence of this occurring during our work in Infierno.

In the 2001 and 2002 seasons, community members showed us a total of 12 cavities, of which 8 turned out to be active macaw nests; of these, 4 were of Red and Green Macaws, and 4 Scarlet Macaws. We were able to monitor the success of all but one of the eight nests (one was defended not only by angry parents, but also by a nest of Africanized honey bees). In two of the nests, predators took the eggs and the parents never relaid. Of the remaining five nests, a total of nine chicks hatched, seven of which either fledged or remained healthy and almost ready to fly at the termination of the field season.

All but one of these nests were natural cavities in large *Dipteryx* trees, holes up to 5 meters deep in canopy emergents that reach 40 meters and more in height. In one incredible nest that fledged a Scarlet Macaw chick, the climber had to lower herself 3 meters down into the trunk to check on the chick. Our experience confirms that *Dipteryx* are indeed a keystone for macaw reproductive success, and that concerted efforts to prevent their

felling should be a part of future management efforts.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this monitoring has been sharing it with community members. Although macaws are not a novelty to people in Infierno, most have never seen the birds up close, or thought about them as much other than a potential food source or Brazil nut competitor. The experience of seeing and handling young macaws, or climbing into a nest cavity that has been shaped over hundreds of years, changes peoples' perspectives. On several occasions, we have been able to bring children out to visit active nests; seeing the look on their faces as the gawky chicks emerge from the nest is confirmation that experiential education works. We have also had the pleasure of working with 7 community members as paid field assistants over the past two years, providing wages and training that makes them more employable by ecotourism lodges or other field research projects in the future.

In the long-term, the macaw population of Infierno is in the hands of the school children. Significantly, Posada Amazonas will also be in their hands in a very direct way: in 15 years, according to the agreement between joint operators Rainforest Expeditions and the NCI, the Posada lodge will pass into full ownership of the community. The next generation will decide how to run things, and we would like them to fully understand how



Local children joined the macaw research team when they went to visit a nest of Green-wing Macaws.



Green-wing Macaw chick from a nest in the Native Community of Infierno.

Photo: Adriana Bravo.

integral their community's biodiversity is to the success of their ecotourism efforts. Thus we are working to develop a relationship with the Infierno schools. We give educational presentations each season, discussing macaw ecology and reproduction - and why this matters to the people of the community.

Finally, we are attempting to keep a high profile in the community, attending assembly meetings, giving updates on our

work in public forums, carrying on conversations about parrots at every opportunity. Not only is it a responsibility of the project to report back to the community in which the work is done, but keeping macaws on peoples' minds encourages a new way of valuing the birds and their conservation. For people who have grown up with macaws in their backyard, like enormous fluorescent chickadees, it sometimes takes an outside perspective to emphasize just how impressive they are - and how much they are potentially worth, alive and flying. Despite calculations suggesting that a single macaw can be worth thousands of dollars in tourism income over its long lifespan, many people in the community still tell you that a 500-year old *Dipteryx* tree sold for \$100 to make charcoal is worth more.

Changing attitudes

Is our work making a difference? Two years in, it's hard to evaluate with any certainty. In community conservation, success is measured not by instantaneous solutions, but in small moments when change begins to take hold. To be sure, hunting and tree-felling continues. On the other hand, we begin to hear stories like those of Jesus Macias. Jesus, whose brother has worked for the project, led us out one morning to a prospective nest. Streamside under a massive *Dipteryx* that must have been standing when Pizarro first landed on the coast of Peru, he pointed out a hole high above. "I came by the other day and saw a pair of Scarlet Macaws sitting here," he tells us. "I almost shot them, but then I thought - no. My brother is looking for these nests, better that I hold off and show the project."

Great-billed Parrots in Indonesia

By STEWART METZ and KRIS TINDIGE

The world-wide population of the Great-billed Parrot (*Tanygnathus megalorhynchos*) has been estimated at "more than 100,000 birds". At first, this sounds like a large number but their status may, in fact, be tenuous.

When the Indonesian undercover investigative team KSBK (now called ProFauna Indonesia - see also *PsittaNews*) examined bird markets in Indonesia, they found that the Great-billed Parrot was the least common parrot seen. Concomitantly it was the most expensive, even more so than cockatoos. At an important site where the birds are trapped (Waigeo Island in West Papua), the selling price approaches that of Triton Cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita triton*). Therefore, one might be concerned that the Great-billed Parrot might be at risk, at least for some subpopulations.

First, some background on this relatively little known, but spectacular parrot. It is widespread, found throughout much of Nusa Tenggara, the central islands of Indonesia, West Papua and some islands off Sulawesi, and (outside the Wallacean line), on Balut Island, off South Mindanao, Philippines. Great-billed Parrots may also have been introduced to the Philippines. This widespread distribution may in part be explained by the fact that Great-bills are known to fly between small islands.

Like cockatoos, Great-billed Parrots are shy during feeding but unlike cockatoos, often fly out over the sea and then return to land. In fact, according to trappers on Gam Island in West Papua, the parrots only roost after flying from Gam to a nearby "Stone Island". Great-bills were again noted in flight between neighbouring islands during the course of very recent observations by one of us on Waigeo Island, West Papua between June 24 and July 3, 2003. According to Thomas Arndt, Great-billed Parrots live in coastal area forest, secondary vegetation and open and partially cleared areas below 1,200 m; occasionally, they visit cultivated areas and coconut plantations (which might contribute to their local name).

On a visit to Seram in the Moluccas in 2001, a few Great-bills were seen. However, upon a return to Indonesia in 2002, not a single Great-bill was encountered either in West Papua or Sumba. This might be partially explained by a severe drought of six months in both places. However, expeditions by others to Sulawesi and Halmahera also encountered only rare Great-bills. Since Great-bills can be quite noisy at times and visit even logged areas, it seems unlikely that they were simply overlooked. Rather, several of the younger trappers admitted that they knew very little about these birds because they had become "rare".

There are, in fact, scientific data supporting the conclusion that the Great-billed Parrot might truly be at risk, at least in certain populations (e.g. Sumba and possibly

Seram). Parrot populations can be expressed either as absolute numbers, or as the number of parrots per sq.km or hectare (ie, density). Either situation may render a species susceptible to declines. Data expressed in terms of absolute numbers suggest that the Great-billed Parrot is extremely vulnerable on Sumba. In 1995, researchers from Manchester University reported that the number of *T. megalorhynchos* on Sumba was only about 3,500, similar to or only modestly greater than that of the highly endangered Citron-crested Cockatoo.

Great-bill density comparable to Eclectus

With regards to density determinations: in a BirdLife Indonesia survey of 2002 on Sumba, the population of Great-bills was about 8 birds per 1,000 hectares (compared to 2-4 for Citron-crested Cockatoos). This ratio of 4-to-6 for Great-bills compared to Citron-crested Cockatoos is concomitant with results from another study as well and is comparable to the density of Eclectus, which are considered highly endangered on Sumba. It should be stressed that even these comparisons may unduly favour the numbers of Great-billed Parrots, which may be more readily counted not only due to their noisiness, but also due to their propensity to live near settled areas and to fly out over the ocean. In 1998, Marsden reported that on Seram, *T. megalorhynchos* were present at a density of 8.8 birds/sq. km. in unlogged land at heights of under 180 m, and 11 birds/ sq. km. in logged land. These estimates declined to 1.5 birds/sq. km in unlogged land > 300 m. At least at low altitudes, these figures are similar to densities for the endangered Seram Cockatoo.

It is therefore clear that insufficient knowledge is available concerning *Tanygnathus* species in the wild. The conclusion that it might not be at risk seems based only on limited scientific data.



An adult preening. Photo: Rosemary Low.

Since the distribution of these parrots is so wide, it seems likely that even if more than 100,000 Great-bills do exist in the wild, their density at any one location might be very low. This might lead to problems associated with an ageing population and/or an inadequate female-to-male ratio. That latter issue might be especially important for *Tanygnathus* species, given the claims of shyness in the males, the unusual behavioural dominance of the hens, and the low male:female ratio even among wild-caught birds in captivity.

Possible areas of localized extinction

Additionally, there may exist areas of localized extinction, since these parrots are represented on a large number of small islands. This was true of *C. moluccensis* (Salmon-crested Cockatoos), which are probably extinct now on Haruku and Saparua (two islands just southwest of Seram). This localized extinction may also affect other parrots such as some subpopulations of Palm Cockatoos or the southeast subpopulations of the Australian Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. Should we wait to study the issue more until we know for certain whether they are headed towards extinction?

Hopefully, that is only a rhetorical question.

Acknowledgement

The funding for Kris Tindige's expedition in Waigeo was provided by the *Tanygnathus* Society, and was a collaborative effort of Project Bird Watch-the Indonesian Parrot Project and the Papua Bird Club.

GREAT GREEN GALLERY

Since we recently received stunning pictures from the Great Green project in Costa Rica and we have run several stories about this project in recent *PsittaScenes*, we've chosen to let the pictures tell most of the story here. Bird pictures by Mark Stafford, field crew pictures by Luis Claudio Marigo, all © 2003



Above: A pair of Great Greens perched near their nest in a large Almendro tree. Below and lower right: Lapa Verde team member Ulises climbs into a massive cavity to monitor chick health and growth rate.

Above: A Great Green peering out of the nest cavity. Left: Ulises tracks radio collared macaws, while team leader Olivier Chassot documents their latitude and longitude using a hand-held GPS unit.



THE GREAT GREEN MACAW

(Ara ambigua)



Once ranging from Honduras south to Ecuador, the Great Green Macaw is now found only in small numbers along that corridor. These birds in Costa Rica are part of the population being studied and conserved by Olivier Chassot and Guisselle Monge Arias with partial support from the World Parrot Trust. Photo: Mark Stafford, ParrotsInternational.org



Geophagy and parrots in Papua New Guinea ...

By CRAIG T. SYMES and STUART MARSDEN

Geophagy (eating soil) is well known in neotropical parrots where large flocks of macaws are recorded visiting "clay licks", for example, at Tambopata reserve in Peru (Gilardi & Munn 1998). Studies have revealed that the most likely reason for this behaviour is to neutralize toxic and/or bitter tasting plant secondary compounds present in various tropical fruits (Diamond, Bishop & Gilardi 1999). Geophagy has also been recorded in Africa where Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) have been seen arriving in large numbers to feed on soil on flat ground in Lobéké Reserve, southeast Cameroon (PS May 2001). In the van Rees mountains of Irian Jaya, numerous parrots and pigeons were recorded feeding on soil at a communal site (Diamond, Bishop & Gilardi 1999) and in the Blue Mountains, near Sydney in Australia, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita*) have been observed ingesting soil (Cooper 2000). At Salt Springs farm, Creighton, South Africa the African Olive-Pigeon (*Columba aquatrix*) has also been observed feeding on soil (Downs & Symes unpubl. data). The soil at this traditional site, as its name suggests, tastes salty. Here the most likely explanation may be to ingest soil for obtaining micro-nutrients. The endemic and endangered Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*) is found in forests nearby and has been seen on the ground, and feeding on soil is suspected.

I (CTS) recently spent seven months in Papua New Guinea conducting research on bird communities in the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area (CMWMA), on the borders of Eastern Highlands and Chimbu Province (see Igag 2002a, b). While stationed at Haia, a local Pawaian man told me of a site where he had observed Palm Cockatoos (*Probosciger aterrimus*) feeding on soil. I visited the site in May, and was pointed to about three cleared areas, no more than 1 x 2 m, on a steep bank where the birds supposedly ingested soil. The bank was almost 8m vertical in height and was covered in mosses, ferns and sparse vegetation. Above the slope, pristine forest grew to the edge with some trees leaning over the edge at an angle. These trees allowed me to climb out and view back onto the sites. On arrival at the site, I saw three Blyth's Hornbill (*Rhyticeros plicatus*) and a lone Palm Cockatoo in the immediate vicinity.

By late September I had gathered more



Camera mounted onto a long pole to capture a clearing.

anecdotal information on geophagy in the region and was told of a further site near Yabaramaru (near Soliabedo indicated on 1:100,000 map of the region) where numerous parrots and pigeons were seen feeding. I gathered from a local landowner that this site was two days hike through swampy terrain from my station at Yabaramaru. I, therefore, never got to visit this site.

Local people told me of a further three sites where numerous bird species were seen drinking water. The water at these traditional sites was salty in taste, and indeed until a time when salt became available via trading stations at colonial settlements, these sites were used by local people to procure salt. Species that reputedly visited these sites included Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Rainbow Lorikeets (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) and Dusky Lories (*Pseudeos fuscata*).

In late September, I returned to Wara Oo with my guide Ijenepe, my partner Tracy Young, and two infra-red/movement sensitive cameras. I attached each camera to a long pole and extended them beyond the bank so the cameras faced back at an angle onto the bank. I changed the positions of the cameras once in the six days they remained set and checked them every day. The cameras were triggered ten times and once each, about 2-3 hours after I had set them up. Even though the cameras were not triggered over the following days I suspected that the birds still visited the bank to feed on soil. I saw Palm Cockatoos and Blyth's Hornbills near the site while



Soil samples taken for analysis.

checking the cameras each afternoon and on one occasion arrived to see two Palm Cockatoos flying away from the bank. Heavy rains over the next couple of days probably resulted in moisture entering the cameras and retarding the trigger mechanism. I borrowed these cameras from Dr Andy Mack (Director, WCS-PNG Program) who reported similar problems with moisture (the annual rainfall in the area is over 7 m).

My developed film showed reward for my efforts. In each frame, a single Palm Cockatoo could be seen, in some cases clearly eating soil. My final interpretation was that in 34 minutes, 4-5 individuals visited the site. This contrasts with observations in South America where parrots visit geophagy sites in flocks.

While Palm Cockatoo was the only species I confirmed by photographs to practice geophagy, communications with local landowners indicated that numerous bird species fed on soil and drank at salt-water sites. My guide, Ijenepe, noted that Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Dusky Lories were common at two different sites.

New Guinea is a paradise for parrots. Our study produced nearly 1,000 records with parrots of 16 species. Results to date indicate that not only is New Guinea richer in parrot species than surrounding islands, but also has perhaps twice as many individuals per hectare (Marsden & Symes in prep). There may be around 3 parrots per hectare in pristine forest, although this reduces to around 2 in disturbed habitats such as gardens. Some species were very common, and Orange-breasted Fig-Parrot (*Cyclopsitta gulelmiterti*), were often seen darting through the canopy and sub-canopy - clear views from the porch of my research hut reminded me of the African lovebirds (*Agapornis* species). Eclectus Parrots and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were commonly heard and regularly seen flying over, especially in the early morning and late afternoon. At Crater Mountain, Eclectus parrots show no seasonality in breeding (Igag 2002b) and I was fortunate enough to see a number of nests, high up in the canopy, where the nest occupants would peer suspiciously down at me.



Clear photographic evidence of a Palm Cockatoo eating the soil.

Possibly the most spectacular of all New Guinea parrots is the Palm Cockatoo. Its liquid piercing call carrying through the forest often helped me pinpoint birds moving over the canopy: these events never failed to move me and numerous individual sightings of these spectacular birds remain etched in my memory. Viewing Pesquet's Parrot (*Psittirichas fulgidus*) in an aviary did nothing to prepare me for my sightings of wild birds. The red feathers are something to be marvelled at, and it is no surprise that they are popular in the head-dresses of local tribesmen. Both these large species are very rare at Crater Mountain with densities of perhaps less than 1 bird per km² (Marsden & Symes in prep).

Current research in CMWMA includes the study focusing on large rainforest parrots



Hornbills have also been observed eating soil.

by Paul Igag and his team of assistants (see Igag 2002a). Further research here will open our eyes to the many strange and interesting biological wonders of these fascinating creatures, as well as producing important information to support the conservation and management of species. We hope that more research can be done on geophagy by parrots at the site - while observations at Crater Mountain support the hypotheses that soil ingestion is to counter-balance the effects of toxic compounds in fruit, as well as for obtaining micro-nutrients, we really are nowhere near to knowing the full story of geophagy in parrots. Geophagy in Pawaian people is not known and when asked interviewees could not explain why birds could possibly eat soil.



Another Palm Cockatoo captured on the camera.

Acknowledgements

The North of England Zoological Society and Manchester Metropolitan University funded our study at Crater Mountain. The National Research Institute of Papua New Guinea (NRI) are thanked for facilitating our research, and the Research and Conservation Foundation of Papua New Guinea (RCF) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS - Papua New Guinea Programme) are thanked for their help during the study. We particularly thank Andy Mack and Deb Wright for support throughout. The Pawaian people of the area, and especially my guides, Ijenepe, Rocky and Sam, and their families, are thanked for their hospitality, kindness and support.

... and in New York By JAMIE GILARDI

all pictures © 2003 j d gilardi, World Parrot Trust.



A Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) at a nest in Brooklyn, New York peers from its nest on a telephone pole. Along some streets there is a colonial stick nest built on virtually every pole. This is the only parrot known to build typical stick nests in the wild, thus their methods and design are entirely novel. Although they get along with their colony-mates, they spend an inordinately long time stealing nesting material from one another's nests, and defending their own nests against such marauders.

Led by Jen Usher and Jason Conradt to these amazing colonies of parrots, after watching nests, we ran into a spot where they were foraging on the ground. On closer inspection, what looked like seed eating, then grit eating, proved to be geophagy - soil-eating! They were fighting over a few spots where there was a nice smooth clay generally covered by tightly packed gravel. For the full city-effect, they were joined by a group of Rock Doves and House Sparrows - all three being introduced granivores with good reason to eat soil.



Dear WPT Members and Friends

By JAMIE GILARDI

I'm always delighted to make contact with our membership, mostly to learn about what inspires you to care so deeply for parrots that you choose to support us and our work. A side benefit of these contacts is that I get a sense for how the Trust is perceived by our current and potential members. We have this global name and global reach, but those of you who know us well realize

that we have very few staff and that we as an organization are spread very thinly. It's a minor miracle, for instance, that we're able to get this magazine out four times a year. I have to apologize for the lateness of the last two issues, we've all been extraordinarily busy with pressing parrot conservation and welfare issues, and unfortunately that sometimes means that your *PsittaScene* arrives late in your mailbox. As you'll note in this issue, we're quite concerned about the potential re-opening of trade in wild caught parrots between Argentina and the USA. Since we care deeply about the trade in general and we want to ensure that the Wild Bird Conservation Act will continue to save millions of wild birds a year, we've been putting a great deal of time and energy into ensuring that the birds win this particular battle.

Another result of being spread across the globe is that we work almost exclusively by electronic mail, and indeed, we really couldn't function without the internet. We do find, however, that to work together effectively, it is invaluable to get together in the same time zone and work on various Trust activities. I recently had the pleasure of visiting the UK and I thought it might be interesting for members to know a bit about this kind of travel, as opposed to travel to field projects. In all honesty, it was Rosemary Low who had the inspired thought that I should write this synopsis of my trip - I'll mention more about her in a minute since it's nice to save the best for last! Onwards ...

I arrived in London and had the happy coincidence to find a fellow parrot conservationist, Dr. Paul Salaman in town briefly, between a stint in Australia and his home in Quito, Ecuador. He was kind enough to spend the day with me and another friend, in which we discussed his ongoing parrot conservation work in Colombia (remember the balloons in lieu of palm fronds?) and his new position running the Andean conservation program for Conservation International. He continues to do great work and we'll look forward to remain in close touch on all things parrot. From there, I took the evening flight from Stansted down to Newquay to spend a week at WPT Headquarters.

It's always a pleasure to visit Paradise Park, but it's a special pleasure in the summertime! I had a very productive week working with Karen, Ray and Michelle, and we had very helpful strategic sessions with half of the WPT Trustees. Victoria Ewart was especially helpful in spending time with us and discussing a variety of ways to get the Trust more squarely in the public eye, helping to spread our message



to the masses. The Quentin Blake T-shirt she inspired and championed has come off beautifully, and I hope you'll all be buying those for your friends and family alike as the holiday season approaches. I also enjoyed meeting Tim Bennetts who has been very helpful finding new homes for parrots in need. These visits are always a whirlwind, a mixture of little details and big ideas, and I typically leave feeling I could have spent a month.

Although not Trust business, I was extraordinarily lucky on this visit to experience decades of Paradise Park's work come to fruition: Operation Chough's reintroduction of these fabulous cheeky Cornish birds into their historic range in western Cornwall. After breeding these birds, supporting years of field research, and literally decades of planning, they released the first six choughs onto a spectacular section of coastline. How tremendous to see these birds experience the freedom of the skies for the first time - it was certainly an unforgettable experience! For current news and pictures, please point your browser to



www.chough.org. Bidding farewell to all the good folk at Paradise Park, I picked up a rental car and headed north to Wales.

In recent months, I've grown in closer touch with a colleague who has just finished his Ph.D. at Bristol where he studied Burrowing Parrots (aka Patagonian Conures or *Cyanoleiurus patagonus*) back in his home country of Argentina. It turns out that Dr. Juan Masello is not just studying a colonial parrot, but in fact he's working on the world's largest parrot colony! The birds nest in sandstone cliffs along a beach there, and the first kilometer of cliffs has over 7,000 cavities and very nearly 100% occupancy! In fact the colony goes on for several more kilometers and contains at least twice that number of birds! Juan and his wife Dr. Petra Quillfeldt have been working there for years and are publishing loads of great scientific papers on these birds. Juan and Petra were kind enough to invite me for delightful Italian luncheon at their home in Cardiff, as they were soon pushing off for a field stint in Portugal and then hoping to do another field season with the parrots depending on funding. I left

there with their images of flocks of thousands of parrots circling my brain as I headed for London [far too rapidly I might add, as I had forgotten to ask about the speed limit on UK motorways, and so did my best to fit in with the locals at about 90-100 mph!].

South of London, I had a chance to meet up with one of the key players in parrot trade legislation, Dr. Sue Lieberman, who once worked with the US

Fish and Wildlife where she essentially wrote the Wild Bird Conservation Act. She is now the head of the Species Program at the World Wildlife Fund and she was kind enough to set up a meeting at her office in Godalming. We spent a very warm afternoon discussing a great number of parrot trade issues and she shared invaluable perspective on the EU, CITES, and other key players for our trade campaign.

From there I headed up to Cambridge to meet with a number of colleagues at BirdLife International especially Drs. Nigel Collar and Alison Stattersfield. In addition to being a world-center for bird conservation, they're the NGO that creates and manages the Red List for birds for the IUCN. After a wide-ranging and very productive discussion on threatened parrots, the bird trade, and many other conservation topics, we were joined by several other parrot enthusiasts, including Tony Juniper, and the gathering evolved into a wonderful warm summer evening of Indian food and bird conservation chatter on Nigel's back porch.

I then headed north to Chester to meet another of our Scientific Committee, Dr. Roger Wilkinson, the only member I'd not yet met in person. We had a wonderful afternoon and evening viewing their programs at the Chester Zoo (most visited zoo in the UK!), and discussing all manner of topics regarding threatened parrots and future conservation planning.

The next morning I drove cross country to Mansfield to meet Rosemary Low for the first time! Again, we've been in close touch over the years, but I'd never had the pleasure of meeting Rosemary in person. It was a wonderful experience to sit down with her to a lovely meal, to visit with her birds, and to chat about existing and future parrots projects, including her upcoming leading of the WPT trip to Bolivia and Peru. Knowing of Rosemary's special interest in Patagonian Conures, I mentioned my meeting with Juan Masello and his incredible colony of parrots in Argentina. She asked about the upcoming field season, and when I mentioned that that was dependent on funding, she promptly replied that she'd like to fund the project herself! I look forward to seeing our involvement in this species grow. As I sped toward London and on to San Francisco the following day, I was inspired by Rosemary's deep love of these birds and her commitment to their futures in the wild and in our homes. Indeed, it was a pleasure to spend time with all these colleagues in the UK, to build stronger relationships, and work together on a secure future for all parrots.

Please help us keep wild birds in the wild

Dear World Parrot Trust Members,

The trade in wild caught birds is important to the conservation and welfare of millions of parrots around the globe. We at the Trust therefore work on a number of issues which arise from this trade, everything from educating the general public about the trade in live birds and its consequences, to encouraging importing countries to reconsider their trade policies, to supporting organizations in exporting countries to monitor and discourage the export of wild caught birds.

For the past decade, we've held up the United States' legislation called the Wild Bird Conservation Act (WBCA) as a great model for the EU and others to emulate. It is great for a number of reasons, chief among them is the fact that it is not a ban on imports. Rather the WBCA simply stipulates that if a country wants to export its wild caught birds to the US, it needs to conduct its affairs in such a way that the harvest of the birds is sustainable. We hear language like this frequently, indeed CITES language is similar. This difference is simply that under the WBCA, the exporter has to show that their birds are being produced in a sustainable manner before the trade can occur. It therefore creates what's called a "positive list" in that there is no legal trade in birds unless the birds are part of an approved program.

Since it was signed into law in 1992, the WBCA has been a shining example of effective legislation, literally saving the lives of millions of parrots. The most recent scientific research on New World parrots even shows that poaching levels since the passage of the Act have been slashed by more than half (see PS Nov 02 for more details). It's not every day that we can point to examples of science influencing policy and policy influencing conservation of nature. But the act has worked, and worked extraordinarily well. That is until now...

For the past several years, the country of Argentina has been proposing that their harvest of Blue-fronted Amazons (*Amazona aestiva*) be approved by the US Government. The proposal has drifted through a variety of phases and processes and the Fish and Wildlife Service has now published a "Proposed Rule" for approving and implementing these imports. The comment period ends on 6 October 2003. If approved, presumably the imports of thousands of wild-caught Amazons will commence immediately. For more details, please see the original document at <http://policy.fws.gov/library/03-19945.pdf>

You can help by sending a letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service explaining your views on both the WBCA and on this proposed change to re-open trade in wild parrots. We find that sample letters or form letters are not very powerful in this context, so we urge you to simply communicate in your own words what you think of this policy change. There are many serious concerns, 1. the status of the birds in the wild (they are in decline), 2. the capture of juvenile and adult parrots as potential pets (not a great fit!), 3. the plan is biologically unsustainable, 4. the plan is economically unsustainable, 5. the birds will be treated inhumanely during capture, transfer, quarantine, and in a pet environment, 6. this plan will only add to the problem of unwanted birds in the USA, 7. this plan sets a dangerous precedent making it easy for a weak plan to damage the otherwise pristine record of the WBCA, and many others ... take your pick and please make your voice heard!

Dr. Peter O. Thomas, Chief, Division of Management Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 700, Arlington, VA 22203, USA. Fax (703) 358-2280. peter_thomas@fws.gov

If your preference is e-mail, please consider sending a carbon copy (CC) of the letter to the following: Craig_Manson@ios.doi.gov, Steve_Williams@fws.gov, Roddy_Gabel@fws.gov

JAMIE GILARDI



Blue-fronted Amazon parrot fledglings, Argentina 1991. Photo: Environment Investigation Agency.

up in Trinidad, organised the importation of recently wild-caught macaws from Guyana. They were released in 1999. Currently at least nine adults and their eight young from 2001 and 2002 are flying in the swamp area.

With funding from Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, a conservation activity booklet for schoolchildren was launched in March. It was to be distributed to the eleven schools in the swamp area, where 3,800 children participate in the Macaw Conservation Education Programme. Also in March, some of the children took part in a carnival competition. In the production the children told their story and that of the Macaw. Bernadette Plair raised money for materials (recycled and low-cost) with which to make the costumes. The spectacular result can be seen below in their creation entitled "Macaw King".



Twenty-four men from four villages bordering the swamp now participate in monitoring the Macaws and studying their nest sites. The four teams are paid modest stipends by Cincinnati Zoo.

Great Green Macaw update Festival Unites Neighbours

By David Boddiger, Tico Times

EL CASTILLO, Nicaragua - Once a 17th-century Spanish stronghold guarding the majestic San Juan River from pirates and invading British warships, the glory days of this tiny fishing village faded long ago into striking poverty. But a revival has begun here, and behind it is a movement that encompasses two countries to protect the Great Green Macaw (*Ara ambigua*) from extinction.

In April, some 300 Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans converged on this town of 3,000 to celebrate the second annual Great Green Macaw (known as the lapa verde in Spanish) Festival, which in addition to protecting the large, colourful bird and its primary habitat, the almendro tree (*Dipteryx panamensis*), has come to reflect an international movement to preserve the last frontier for creation of a binational

biological corridor, part of the greater Meso-American Biological Corridor.

The three-day festival was organised by the Binational Commission of the El Castillo-San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor, Fundación del Río, the Tropical Science Center, El Castillo Municipality Environmental Commission, the Great Green Macaw National Commission, the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor, and the Meso-American Biological Corridor.

Parrot Activists Attacked In Indonesia

By ROSEK NURSAHID, ProFauna Indonesia

ProFauna Indonesia has been conducting many actions to stop the endangered species trade in Indonesia, although it is highly risky. A coordinator of ProFauna Jakarta Office, Hardi Baktiantoro, and two of our members were attacked by animal traders on 30th July whilst helping police to confiscate many primates and endangered species near Pramuka Bird Market, Jakarta. Hundreds of animal traders attacked ProFauna activists and took our camera and mobile phone, and our members were hurt. This brutal attack was stopped when police fired into the air.

This incident happened because BKSDA of Forestry Department of Jakarta were unprofessional. BKSDA told traders that the confiscation was following information from ProFauna, and they pointed out Hardi as a ProFauna coordinator in Jakarta. So, hundreds of traders attacked Hardi and our other members brutally.

This incident will not stop ProFauna to campaign against wildlife trade in Indonesia! We will Never stop!

Imperial Parrot Breeding Season

Paul Reillo will report on the Imperial Parrot (*Amazona imperialis*) breeding season in a later issue. His news, in July, was as follows:

On a recent trip to Dominica I completed a couple of land acquisitions to add to the Morne Diablotin National Park (MDNP). The new Visitors Centre is finished but not yet open to the public. The apartments in the lower part of the building are occupied by staff of the Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division as a research station for the parrot programme.

Everything so far suggests a strong breeding season for both parrot species, the Imperial and the Red-necked (*Amazona arausiaca*), but Imperials have proved elusive at the easily-monitored nest trees. We did see a pair of Imperials with a fledgling in the middle of July, which

certainly is good news. There is plenty of activity in the forest and pairs are still territorial, suggesting that youngsters are about.

Between now and the end of November the parrot team will be focusing on high-density areas, and documenting parents and young travelling and foraging together. The observations are good evidence of recruitment to the population. The Amazon breeding season in the Caribbean is less well defined now, with egg-laying occurring in any month between January and May, and fledglings observed well into the autumn months. One determinant could be year-round rainfall patterns that promote the growth of forest fruits and shoots outside the historical parrot breeding season. The more continuous reproductive pattern makes our work even more challenging but seems to benefit the birds if they can capitalize on nesting opportunities outside the hurricane season.

Kakapo Update

By DON MERTON

There was no breeding this year and since there's no indication that masting is going to occur in any tree species next year, Kakapo seem unlikely to breed before 2005 - unless of course we can trigger breeding by way of our new pelleted supplemental diet!!

During a stint on Te Kakahu/Chalky Island in May 2003 I found that all Kakapo there were feeding heavily on the kernels of fallen Miro nuts (these are much larger

than Rimu or Totara nuts and their shells are exceedingly hard!). Later in May we found identical feeding signs on Maud Island. This was the first indication we'd had that Kakapo eat Miro - elsewhere such feeding signs is confounded by the fact that Kaka and Kakariki are present, but the Kakapo is the only parrot species present on Chalky and Maud Islands. Miro, Rimu and Totara are all plentiful on Chalky and Whenua Hou/Codfish Islands, their fallen nuts providing an important and enduring source of high energy food for parrots throughout winter - especially in those years when one or more of the tree species "mast" (ie fruit very heavily).

In late May we moved the last five Kakapo from Maud Island to Chalky Island in south-western Fiordland - so all breeding birds are now on Chalky (19) and Codfish (60) Islands. Seven males known to be, or suspected of being, infertile have been relegated to Pearl Island!

Biking Is For The Birds

At least this ride is!

Los Angeles Zoo Animal Keeper Karen Poly will be pedaling her bike from the streets of San Francisco to the beaches of Los Angeles in an effort to raise money for the World Parrot Trust. Joined by the Zoo's web editor and close friend Will Campbell, Karen will begin the 450 mile trek by crossing the Golden Gate Bridge on September 27, 2003. Following California's Pacific Coast Highway the two will wrap up their adventure seven days later. An avid cyclist, Karen has biked many miles for



charity including 400 miles from Montreal to Maine. As a member of the Zoo's World Of Birds Show team, Karen continues to strengthen her passion for all birds. At the 2003 IAATE conference in Oregon, Joanna Eckles of the WPT presented a paper entitled "The Plight Of Parrots: Good News And Bad News." Inspired by the work of the WPT Karen decided to combine her two passions and created "Biking For The Birds."

Please show your support by making a tax deductible donation payable to the World Parrot Trust and send to Karen Poly, 7543 Kyle St., Tujunga, CA 91042. You may also pledge via paypal from the website below. 100% of all donations will directly benefit the WPT. For more information, please log onto <http://wildbell.com/forthebirds/index.htm>. All donations accepted until 15th October.

BOOK REVIEW – Birds off the Perch

Larry Lachman is an animal behaviour consultant, Diane Grindol writes for *Bird Talk* magazine and Frank Kocher is a vet. They collaborated to write *Birds off the Perch*, described on the cover as being on the subject of "therapy and training for your pet bird"; not surprisingly the emphasis is heavily on members of the parrot family. The authors of the 16 chapters are not identified but are apparent from the subject matter.

Part one covers "Choosing and caring for a pet bird", and part two describes "Your Freudian feathered friend". Part three is entitled "Ornithology and the Olympics" - not to be taken literally as neither subject is covered! It is a short section on teaching birds to mimic and learning tricks. This section includes some information that should be borne in mind by the potential parrot owner who knows nothing about them: "Dogs have been domesticated for thousands of years. Most birds have never been "domesticated". Dogs want to please their owners. Birds, on the other hand, see themselves as your equal. They spend a great amount of time working out ways to control you through their behaviour and actions. They don't want to please you. They want to get what they want." This certainly applies to many parrots (although seldom to other species).

This book is packed full of information of value to the new parrot owner. It also contains many interesting little case histories that are very useful in illustrating certain points. There are countless analogies with human behaviour that perhaps might help some people to understand birds better but often seem to state the obvious. Describing the phases of the "Human Sexual Response Cycle" is not truly relevant! It might be described as "sexing-up" the book!

There is some strange terminology. Regurgitation, a normal part of courtship behaviour, is listed as "mate-induced vomiting" in the index! There is some misinformation. The long-lived Moluccan Cockatoo at San Diego Zoo was in his sixties when he died not "at least eighty years old" (longevity is constantly exaggerated in the literature) and large macaws do not have a lifespan of 75 years. Very few indeed live beyond 55 years.

Birds off the Perch is published in the USA by Simon and Schuster and costs \$US12 - certainly good value.

ROSEMARY LOW



Parrots in the Wild

Canary-winged Parakeet

Brotogeris versicolurus

By DART HUMESTON © 2003

Canary-winged Parakeet feeding on a shaving brush tree (*Pseudobombax ellipticum*) flower in Florida. Other *Brotogeris* species in Peru feed on the nectar and seeds of a closely related tree - the kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) pulling out clouds of white cottony fluff in search of seeds - the fluff, also known as kapok, provided the stuffing for life preservers until the middle of the 20th century. The Canary-winged Parakeet is frequently successful at establishing feral populations in North American cities, including a population which has lived in San Francisco for decades. For more bird photos, see www.dartscape.com.