Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

PsittaScene

In this Issue:

Yellow-shouldered Amazon of Bonaire
Black-cheeked Lovebird in Zambia

February 2004

Volume 16 Number 1

Psitta Scene

Editor
Rosemary Low,
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall,
TR27 4HB, UK

CONTENTS

Cover Picture By SAM WILLIAMS

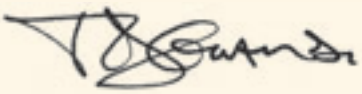
Oscar, a beautiful and charismatic Yellow-shouldered Amazon (*Amazona barbadensis*). Originally from mainland Venezuela he is now one of many pet parrots on Bonaire. His colouration is certainly different to other pet *barbadensis* on Bonaire, could this support the classification of the island subspecies (*A. b. rothschildi*) or is it simply natural variation? This question has major conservation implications yet it has still not been answered to science's satisfaction.

Dear Members,

We always look forward to hearing the latest from the field, especially when they're from new projects, countries or species new to us at the Trust. With pleasure we include such a report from a field project we have supported recently in the Caribbean.

Several years ago we heard from Paul Butler at RARE asking if we might help a ringing and amnesty initiative to protect the native Yellow-shouldered Amazons on Bonaire in the Netherlands Antilles. You'll recall reading about this effort in *PsittaScene Vol 15 No 1 Feb 2003* in which we connected colleagues in Bonaire with a supply of discounted bands, and through our Benelux branch, supplied them with copies of the 'Happy Healthy Parrot' leaflet printed in Dutch. Since our understanding of the wild birds remained largely a mystery, we were lucky to interest Sam Williams in this species and encourage him to spend several months exploring conservation opportunities there. After reading his rich and detailed article you'll surely share our hope that he's able to continue this work in future years.

As always, thank you all for your continued support. We wish you all the best for a happy and healthy 2004.



Jamie Gilardi, Director

Bonaire's 'Lora'

By SAM WILLIAMS

The Yellow-shouldered Amazon Parrot (*Amazona barbadensis*) is certainly not one of the rarest parrots in the world today. There are small populations on four Caribbean islands and a few more isolated populations are scattered over the northern coastal areas of Venezuela. On the island of Bonaire alone there are estimated to be around 400 of these charismatic birds. Numbers however, do not paint the full picture. The wild populations of the Yellow-shouldered Amazon have experienced habitat loss, drought, predation and most significantly intense poaching. There may be a few thousand individuals of this species in total and the populations may appear stable but with so few young birds joining the wild adults each year as a result of poaching, the wild populations are ageing. If nothing is done then in a matter of years these populations will almost certainly crash.

During the 2003 summer I visited Bonaire to learn about the island's Yellow-shouldered Amazon population and to help with their conservation. Few people have heard of this Dutch island and most of those who have, know of Bonaire because of the beautiful reefs that surround it. Indeed these reefs are considered the best in the Caribbean and diving-associated-tourism has become a major part of the island's economy. The value of the reefs has brought about an outstanding level of environmental awareness and protection. Fortunately the community's awareness is not limited to the marine world. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon, known locally as Lora, is a highly regarded and protected species and the island's government is actively involved in working towards their conservation. There have been awareness campaigns in previous years and last year a ringing campaign took place whereby all pet Loras were given a unique ring. If anyone is now found with a pet Lora that does not have one of these rings they face a serious fine and the confiscation of their pet (See *PsittaScene* Feb 2003).

The parrots live in a dry thorny habitat made up of relatively small trees, bushes and many cacti. They feed on a variety of fruit and seeds from both native and

Groups of Lora will forage together and can land on spiky cactus with remarkable ease.

cultivated plants. They are also able to feed directly from the juicy tips of cacti although this does not appear to be their favourite food. Lack of rain is a common problem and this obviously has a major impact on the whole ecosystem. The Loras have learnt that when food availability is low in their natural habitat, people's gardens in the two towns may offer better foraging.

When I first arrived I was amazed to see parrots hanging out of trees and feeding all over Kralendijk, the main town. Last year Bonaire received only 105mm of rain up to and including September, less than half the typical average for that period. In previous years drought has been a massive problem for the Loras and on at least two occasions literally hundreds of parrots are believed to have died despite the honourable efforts of islanders to provide fruit. Tolerance toward roaming parrots stripping delicious fruit from garden trees is remarkably high and this is almost certainly a result of the earlier campaign work. Some rain did finally arrive in July and this brought about a considerable change to the habitat and the distribution of parrots. Almost overnight trees and bushes were growing leaves and the parrots disappeared from the towns.

Sam Williams with a Yellow-shouldered Amazon. Photo: *Rebecca Tempest*

Pictures of Lora can be found in many prominent places around the two towns.

While the birds were in and around Kralendijk there had been three main roost sites within a few kilometers of the town center and each night 20 to 40 birds could be seen at each one. Immediately following the July rains these roosts were almost empty. I had been told the location of a number of other roosts outside of the towns but before the rains most of these had been inactive. Suddenly these areas were busy with parrots again and one in particular had over 60 birds. This was at the head of a small valley and the noise just before nightfall was truly fantastic.

A poor breeding season

Loras are known to nest in tree and rock cavities. There are very few trees on the island large enough to form a cavity suitable for an amazon and unfortunately it seems any tree nest that was once active had also been poached. In what can only be described as a thoughtless and shortsighted approach poachers have cut access holes into cavities with chainsaws which of course renders the cavity useless for future breeding seasons. This year there was very little sign of the parrots breeding and this was almost certainly due to the lack of rainfall. I found only two nests that were active and both of these were in rock cavities on cliff faces, one on a hilltop, the other near to the sea. This was a limited sample but it no less provided me with the opportunity to observe the Lora's nesting behaviour and to find out what pressures the breeding birds faced specifically on Bonaire.

The first sign of breeding I observed was a male feeding a female in a treetop at dusk. The female was very persistent in her begging and she received a huge amount of food from the male over ten minutes or so. Then gradually the pair made their way up the hillside, stopping in a few trees along the way. By the time the pair reached the small cliff outcrop at the top of the hill the light was fading and they were so far away they were only tiny green dots in my binoculars. I strained to see what was happening but sure enough one green dot disappeared into a cavity and shortly after, the other flew back down the valley toward a roost site. I had found a nest! The female was roosting in the cavity but the male probably went to a communal roost.

With the use of climbing equipment it was later possible to get to the cavity. The first inspection revealed the pair had two eggs and a newly hatched chick. Both of the eggs hatched and I was able to follow the

early development of the chicks but unfortunately pearly-eyed thrashers (*Margarops fuscatus*) attempted to take over the nest and within 10 days of the eldest chick hatching all of them had been killed. After the joy of finding a completely unexpected active nest the loss of these three chicks was terrible.

An abseil down to the cavity of the second nest (near to the sea) revealed that it would not be possible to conduct inspections. The entrance tunnel was over 2 meters long. I still continued to visit and observe the pair's behaviour but I was unhappy to note the regular presence of pearly-eyed thrashers. The pair seemed to feel the same way about the thrashers and they would perform aggressive displays. These would include tail fanning and stretching their wings upward while screaming loudly. Unfortunately this nest also failed and because of the repeated observations of thrashers in the vicinity of the nest I believe they were the cause.

Sam searching for nest holes in rock cavities on cliff faces. Photo: *Rebecca Tempest*

The endemic island subspecies of Brown-throated Conure (Aratinga pertinax xanthogenia) feed on cactus fruit.

From the nest monitoring last year it would seem that the pearly-eyed thrasher is a serious problem. Future work will have to involve a greater number of nests so that it is possible to determine whether this is indeed the case for the Lora population on Bonaire as a whole. If in actual fact only a small percentage of nests are lost to thrashers then perhaps our conservation efforts would be more effective if directed at other problems. This highlights the importance of studying the parrots first to learn what are the most serious problems and then making informed conservation management decisions.

Improving the care of captive Loras

During the 2002 registration campaign, over 600 pet parrots were banded. There are therefore more captive Lora on Bonaire than there are in the wild. This is despite it having been illegal to take parrots from wild nests. Hopefully the ringing work and enforcement of the parrots' protected status will now contribute to a reduction in poaching. As the ringing work was completed Lora owners were asked the age of their pet and the results were alarming; approximately half of the captive Loras are (said to be) less than 5 years of age and less than a quarter are over 10 years old. These numbers suggest that in the last five years around 300 chicks have been taken from the wild, but actually the figure may well be many more because this does not account for chicks that died. The low

number of older pet birds suggests that many of these captive birds are dying young, the obvious cause being poor care.

If the level of care given to pet parrots was improved then it may serve to benefit both the captive and the wild birds. Firstly the captive birds would have a better quality of life and secondly if captive parrots lived longer then the pressure on the wild nests would, in theory, be reduced. With this in mind a pet care campaign was launched. Fortunately, I had been introduced to Anna Pauletta, a Bonairean lady who had been on the ringing team last year. It seemed she knew everybody on the island and as a parrot keeper herself she was keen to learn and promote good parrot care. Having Anna front the campaign made a real difference because not only could she speak Papiamentu the local language, but the local people respected her and were interested to learn from her.

For each of the eight weeks the campaign ran we promoted an aspect of good parrot care. These included having a large cage, giving the bird attention, providing fresh wood and, most importantly, diet. We visited Lora owners who were doing one of these components well and they became the campaign's "Owner of the week". Their pictures appeared in the local papers (English and Papiamentu) along with an article discussing why they had been chosen and why that aspect was important for good care, often with a comparison to the wild parrot's behaviour. These articles were also aired on the island's radio. Promoting parrot care whilst not encouraging others to want to keep parrots proved challenging but we made sure that every article reminded the reader that the Lora is a protected species.

The pet care campaign encouraged putting captive Lora in garden trees for exercise and stimulation.

Further study and conservation

In the short term a study of the nesting Lora and the pressures they face is clearly a priority. In 2003 the lack of rainfall limited the possibility of this. Of course this itself is important information. Rainfall and food availability will have to be monitored in future for comparison with breeding success. I have been invited to return to Bonaire to continue my work and I am currently preparing a funding proposal.

The long-term conservation of the Lora will depend on a much broader investigation. There remains some doubt over the possible island sub-species classification of *Amazona barbadensis rothschildi* and this has considerable implications for their conservation. I am currently seeking funding for a 3-year Ph.D. study with Dr Jim Groombridge from the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent at Canterbury. This study will investigate the species issue by evaluating morphological and genetic variation. Furthermore I will investigate how severe drought affects the Lora's reproductive output and their ability to maintain genetic diversity. These are two key parameters that foster recovery and of course the information gained from this study could be used to benefit the future conservation of other species.

Many tree nests have been destroyed by poachers chain-sawing access holes in to them (left hole). Sam and Rebecca measure the nest to learn about this Amazon's nest site preferences.

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to conduct this work without the support of the World Parrot Trust and once again I am very grateful for their support. Additional support for this work came from the Amazona Society USA and the Amazona Society UK and this allowed me to prolong my stay and learn more. The Parrot Society UK contributed to the Lora Care

Wild Lora eat nearly 30 different food items.

Campaign, which will hopefully improve the lives of many parrots. I met many wonderful people on Bonaire and all their encouragement and support will not be forgotten. My girlfriend Rebecca Tempest visited Bonaire for a holiday at her own expense for 2 of the 4 months I was there. Her "holiday" included getting up at 4.30am, cycling over 15 miles before dawn and sitting watching parrots (on her own) for hours on end. For a "non parrot person" her contribution to this project was massive and I am deeply indebted.

Parrots At Play Inc.

Calendar

The Parrots At Play Calendar Program was initiated last year to raise funds to help birds. The heart of this annual program is a photo contest which runs from Feb 1st to June 30th and is open to all bird owners.

Net proceeds benefit non-profit avian organisations. You can participate in two ways:

1. Enter your bird in the photo contest; contest rules and details are available at www.parrots-at-play.org

2. Buy a calendar; 2004 calendars are still available and the 2005 calendar will be ready for distribution in September, 2004.

You can purchase a calendar for $15 plus $1.80pp on-line or by mail to Parrots At Play Calendar, P O Box 890235, Weymouth, MA 02189, USA, Tel (001) 781 331 5845, and designate a donation to the World Parrot Trust.

Full program details are available at www.parrots-at-play.org

The plight of the elusive Western Ground Parrot

Photo: *Allan Burbidge*

Text and illustrations By BRENT BARRETT

The Western Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus flaviventris*) is found only along the southern coast of Western Australia. Once numerous it is now severely restricted in range and occurs only in three known locations, two of which contain dramatically reduced populations. Ground Parrots are shy and elusive and seldom seen unless flushed from the undergrowth.Typically they fly 20-60 minutes before sunrise and 10-60 minutes after sunset. This is also the optimal time for hearing them call. When flushed Ground Parrots burst out of the undergrowth and fly a short distance (10m) before diving back into the undergrowth with an abrupt change in direction. Like quail they often fly much further when they are flushed for a third time (>200m). The Ground Parrot's flight pattern is similar to that of a quail with the bird forming a slight horizontal zigzag just above the low vegetation.

Local Aboriginal names for this species include Ky-lor-ing (Albany District) and Djar-doon-gur-ree (Perth Area). Other common names include Button Grass Parrot and Swamp Parrot. Ground Parrots are divided into three sub-species of which the Western Ground Parrot is the rarest. The other two sub-species occur in south-eastern Australia (*Pezoporus wallicus wallicus* - vulnerable) and Tasmania (*Pezoporus wallicus leachi* - secure).

Ground Parrots and Night Parrots (*Geopsittacus*) share a similar ancestry and are closely related, as are birds in the Genus Neophema which includes the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*). Another related species is the Kakapo a flightless parrot found only in New Zealand.

While conservationists know and appreciate the plight of an endangered species it is particularly difficult to observe the true predicament of an elusive parrot. When a bird calls infrequently, and not during a human's usual active period, it can go unnoticed for a long time. Couple this with the local birds' tendency to mimic the parrot's call and you have a difficult species to monitor. The truth about the plight of the Western Ground Parrot is only just unfolding. Until recently the Western Ground Parrot was classified as endangered, however recent evidence indicates that this species is very close to extinction and therefore better classified as critically endangered. Its historic range has been dramatically reduced and permanently modified so that Ground Parrots are forever excluded from its avian fauna.

The birds' current range is within National Parks and Reserves and is protected from further habitat destruction. Fire, however, is a major process in the Australian ecosystem and will naturally occur due to events such as a lightning strike. Fire may also enter the park from an external source that might be started by human activities. The Ground Parrot is by no means secure. Balanced precariously between survival and annihilation its only chances may be through the exclusion of major wild fire within its current range and by targeting any introduced predators found to be affecting the population. One conservation option is to increase the current range by translocation of a number of individuals to a suitable habitat further from the source population. This will ensure that one large fire event does not decimate all the remaining Western Ground Parrots.

In 2003 the local conservation authority started a project to do just this. Its objective was to capture and successfully translocate a small number of individuals to a secure habitat 400km west of the source population. This was part of the species' historic range and was the site of the last Western Ground Parrot nest ever found (in 1912). In October a conservation officer from New Zealand's Kakapo Recovery Team was employed to head the project in Australia's south-west. By November that year a suitable site had been selected and a temporary aviary for soft-release had been constructed. Later in that month a team consisting of key players in historic surveys entered the Fitzgerald River National Park to conduct a pre-translocation survey of the last stronghold of this severely reduced species. The trip was a failure. Very few birds remained in the target habitat. Where birds had been consistently heard in previous surveys rising to a maximum of 60 calls per listening site in 2000, the number recorded in November 2003 ranged from none to seven. This population had suffered a serious decline. A drastic change in methodology was made and historic areas were surveyed in the latter part of the November survey. The results indicated that the population had declined across the northern range of the park. A few birds were still calling but not in the abundance that was recorded as little as three years prior.

This cannot be the end of the saga. In Cape Arid the population disappeared under similar circumstances and in March 2003 they were rediscovered in large numbers moving back into the historic range after the post fire vegetation had recovered sufficiently. Current evidence does not indicate a total population collapse in the Fitzgerald river National Park but rather it suggests that a dispersal event has occurred. The new plan for the Western Ground Parrot in 2004 is to locate this dispersed population through a broad scale survey of the entire 330,000-hectare park. Only ten percent of the park is identified as critically important habitat and targeted surveys of these areas are expected to run until July 2004. Currently the team is identifying the true extent of the critical habitat so that a systematic approach can be employed.

We have not heard the end of the Western Ground Parrot. The discovery of this displaced population may yield valuable information about the process that dictates habitat selection and population dispersal. Furthermore, knowledge of the location of the current population will better aid park managers in protecting key Ground Parrot areas from a fire event and identify areas where predation may need to be targeted. With persistence and community support we hope to aid this species in its struggle against extinction.

Breeding Great-billed Parrots in South Africa

By WILLIAM. A. HORSFIELD

It appears that only 60 to 70 Great-billed Parrots were imported into South Africa during the last 20 years. The handful of imported birds still in collections originate from the later imports in the eighties and early nineties. Merridy Ballinger purchased a pair in 1993 and over the years managed through persistent advertising to obtain most of the few remaining birds scattered across South Africa. Initially her attempts to find these individuals proved exceptionally frustrating. Suddenly her luck changed and she acquired half a dozen unrelated birds. I was incredibly impressed with her enthusiasm and her determination to get the species established and breeding. It wasn't long before she had her first successful breeding.

Great-bill male. Photos*: W. Horsfield*

I exchanged a young pair of Red-fronted Macaws (*Ara rubrogenys*) for my first pair of Great-bills in 1997. The pair had bred a couple of times but the seller suspected the hen of killing the chicks. The pair settled down fast and they were soon on two eggs. I decided to give them the benefit of the doubt and they did a magnificent task of hatching and raising their chicks.

Breeding

That first pair would breed 3-4 times per year if I pulled the first clutch of eggs. I have two eggs per clutch from my pairs with one instance of three eggs. The same female has twice laid an enormous second egg that was double-yolked. In the first instance both yolks were fertile but died at 17 days and the second time neither was fertile.

A sample of 10 eggs and chicks from my flock revealed the following information.

Egg sizes range from 38mm-43 mm in length with an average length of 40.25mm. Egg width ranges from 26mm-32mm with the average being 30.5mm.

Egg mass ranges from 14.7 grams -24 grams with the average being 19.8.

Eggs are pure white and typically oval and are laid at two day intervals.

Chick hatch mass ranges from 13.3 -17.9 grams with the average being 16.11 grams.

Chicks are blind and deaf at hatch with a sparse covering of pale yellow down approximately 3.5mm in length. The beak is pale orange and similar to that of an Eclectus chick in shape.

The egg tooth is prominent. Incubation period is 26 days to first external chip. From first external chip in shell to hatch is 48 hours. The chick will start to vocalize once it has been actively chipping in the airspace chamber for a number of hours. (A table of chick weights from day 1 to day 42 is available but is omitted here due to pressure of space.)

Artificial Incubation

Great-bills double clutch and even treble clutch. In order to increase the numbers of chicks bred, I pull eggs of the first two clutches for artificial incubation. Eggs are incubated at a temperature of 37.5C with a relative humidity of 55% in Grumbach incubators. Germicidal ultraviolet globes in the lids of the machines and above the water tanks have proved useful in lowering pathogen counts. VIRUKILL® is used as disinfectant of choice in the incubators, also in the water tanks. There are high/low alarms for temperature, humidity and turning and these are connected to our home burglar alarm so that the security company will phone me in the event that I am not at home if one is activated. We are protected by electrified perimeter fencing, infra-red beams, trained guard dogs and dangerous Ostrich sentries. An armed rapid-response security company provides us with immediate backup in the event of an emergency.

I have hatched eggs with no assistance with greatly varying degrees of density-loss and no longer use standard weight-loss techniques for this species. I found that by trying to manipulate the weight-loss of eggs off target I was unexplainably losing some of them and when I gave up and let them do their own thing they hatched fine. Moving-carpet turning seems to hasten vein growth across the yolk in the initial period of incubation and I prefer this method to rollers or tilting trays. Great-bill eggs are automatically turned every 15-30 minutes.

The relative humidity in the hatcher is increased to 70% until the chick hatches. Upon hatching the chick is weighed and fed one feed with Ringers Lactate then placed into a brooder at 37.2C. The temperature is lowered by approx 0.2C per day so that by the start of pin feathering the chicks are kept at 30 degrees Celsius.

Handraising

Apart from the first feed of Ringer's, the chick is immediately fed on the Kaytee macaw hand-raising ration. I use the softest toilet tissue to cushion the chicks and place them in round Tupperware® tubs, feeding at an interval of 2 hours. If the chicks are less than 15 grams I feed throughout the night but otherwise last feed is 23h00 and first feed is 06h00. At peak weight (460-480 grams) the maximum volume of formula fed is 35ml per feed. Larger volumes will overstretch the crop and cause crop slowdown. We find that as soon as the chicks are more of less fully feathered and are accommodated in pairs or trios in small wire-bottomed weaning cages (40 x 60 x 60cms), they will begin to sample foodstuffs. The later food is offered to them the longer they take to wean. Ours wean at approximately 13 weeks.

They seem to be particularly susceptible to *Candida* infection and with many other chicks of various species in the nursery, have been the only ones to show symptoms of a fungal overgrowth. They appear on and around the tongue and adjacent areas. The problem is easily solved by treating with Nystacid. For this treatment to be effective the drops need to be applied directly into the mouth 3 times per day at least 20-30 minutes before feeding. It is no use mixing the medication with the handraising formula as it is not absorbed. However the root cause is probably diet.

Management

All my Great-bills are housed in suspended aviaries 3.6m x 1.2m x 1.2m with 2.6 meters of the flight being fully outdoors and the remainder indoors. Aviaries are separated by a 60cm gap in which a dense shrubbery of evergreen flowering shrubs is planted. Overhead misting systems allow

the birds to bathe in the hot weather and irrigate the gardens between the cages at the same time.

I have had problems with my own youngsters chewing the clips traditionally used to hold these cages together. This has progressed in many of the stronger male birds to chewing and breaking of welded mesh as strong as 2.5mm thickness. This destructive tendency has always started when they are over 2 years of age and has not been seen in our younger birds. They seem to be very inquisitive and will explore every nook and cranny of their aviary and chew on anything that catches their eye. In the case of the clips and the wire, this ultimately proved to be fatal. Initially I removed all the clips and threaded a single strand of wire to hold the cages together. The birds then used their beaks like side-cutters and had this in pieces in no time. Round about the same time a number of the birds started to look scruffy and to pluck, yet foolishly it did not occur to me that this had anything to do with the welded mesh and I instead focused on their diet. Only after a number of these birds died did I discover that their zinc levels were sky high. They had actually been chronically poisoned from the gradual build-up in their systems from chewing all the galvanized cage clips and the welded mesh.

No galvanized wire is ever used to secure anything in their aviaries and perches are slotted into V-shaped holding brackets that are pop-riveted onto the cage with the rivet concealed by the perch itself. I have since built a row of suspended aviaries specifically for the Great-bills using 3.2mm diameter stainless-steel welded mesh, so thankfully that problem will not recur.

Diet

Great-bills are avian gourmands and the highlights of their day are feeding times. They are particularly fond of nectar-rich flowers and blossoms and I provide these freshly picked every day when available in my garden. Bottle-brush, honey-suckle (*Tecomaria*), coral tree (*Erythrina sp*), hibiscus and pentas are favourites. Berries like Cotoneaster and Pyracantha and all palm dates are relished. They discard the fleshy covering to the palm dates and crack the actual nuts open. Branches of fruit trees like peach, mulberry, guava etc are stripped of their bark and shredded. Sugar cane is also a favourite. I provide pine cones and coconut shells for extra distraction and amusement.

The diet consists of soaked sunflower, oats, barley, wheat, white and red sorghum, boiled peas and beans, especially mung beans with whole boiled maize. I have seen birds that have been on diets too high in protein developing kidney problems and even gout and the protein-rich peas and beans may need to be rationed. A variety of fresh vegetables and fruits are also fed, such as apple, pear, carrots, green beans, spinach, broccoli, pumpkin, squash, beetroot, sweet potato, tomato, kiwi, melons, papaya, mango, peppers and chillies. Spirulina and Barley Grass extracts are added to the diet in a rotation with commercial vitamin and mineral supplements.

Behaviour

The adults do not have a strong pair bond and are much like the Eclectus Parrots. The female is dominant, although slighter in size and with a noticeably smaller mandible than the male. The birds are usually seen sitting at opposite ends of the same perch and the female often keeps the male away from the area close to the nest.

Mating is followed by egg laying within 2-3 weeks, during which time the female spends increasing amounts of time in the nest. The male is curious to see where she has disappeared to but does not venture into the nest as a rule until the chicks have hatched. The female broods the chicks until they are starting to get their thick white down at which point she starts to leave

Great-bills are housed in 3.6m long suspended cages containing indoor and outdoor sections with microsprayers.

Notice the Great-bill Sumba male has much darker plumage.

them unattended. Cold weather may necessitate pulling the chicks to prevent them getting chilled at night. I use 12mm seamless stainless steel bands for ringing.

I attempted to use Eclectus as foster parents and this has been a resounding success. Certain Eclectus females turn nasty on their newly-fledged daughters when they want to lay again and may even seriously injure them in unprovoked attacks. This is a real nuisance when the parent-raised chicks are fledged but not yet weaned. This behaviour has not been seen when they have raised female Great-bills. Perhaps the orange beak colour pacifies the broody and moody Eclectus hen.

Once the youngsters are weaned, whether parent-raised or hand-raised, I like to put them into small socializing groups in aviaries adjacent to adult pairs. After a few months in these groups a social hierarchy develops and care must be taken to ensure that no one is getting bullied. At 12 months of age, I place the young birds in pairs with their future mates. Breeding can be expected from 3-4 years of age.

Conclusion

With Merridy Ballinger, our combined number of Great-bills is 23 individuals. We are aware of six non-breeding birds, bringing the total number in South Africa to 29. I need to focus on increasing our productivity, keeping back more youngsters in order to build up the breeding stock to at least 15 pairs. Having the largest number of the striking *Tanygnathus megalorynchos* places a firm responsibility on my shoulders and I will endeavour to do my utmost to secure the future of this striking and independent bird on our continent.

Finally, I would be most grateful to hear from and to correspond with other breeders of the species and to hear of their own trials and tribulations.

Since the above was written, William has reared six more young Great-bills.

The Black-cheeked Lovebird in Zambia

By LOUISE S. WARBURTON, University of Natal, South Africa

This study was undertaken to investigate the ecology of the Black-cheeked Lovebird (*Agapornis nigrigenis*) in the wild. Prior to this study little was known about the ecology of this parrot or other members of the genus *Agapornis*. The Black-cheeked Lovebird is classified as Vulnerable and has suffered a severe population decline and reduced distribution, from which, for largely speculative reasons, it has never recovered. The overall aim of this project was to elucidate the basic biology of the Black-cheeked Lovebird and determine the conservation actions which are necessary to conserve the species in the wild.

Black-cheeked Lovebird
Photo*: Louise Warburton*

Fieldwork was conducted across the species' range in south-west Zambia over twenty-two months between May to December 1998; March to December 1999; and February to May 2000. An education project focussing on Black-cheeked Lovebird conservation was conducted with local schools, villagers and Zambia Wildlife Authority scouts during September 2001.

Historical records pertaining to distribution of the Black-checked Lovebird, both within and beyond Zambia are few, anecdotal and often discredited, and it is suggested that the species should be considered as endemic to Zambia. Within its core range the species has a clumped and localised distribution, associated with Mopane woodland and permanent water sources. Two sub-populations occur and appear to be distinct.

Black-cheeked Lovebirds were most active in the early morning and late afternoon, forming the largest daily flock sizes during these times, which correlated with drinking and feeding activities. The smallest flock sizes occurred when roosting. Overall flock sizes were significantly larger during the dry (non-breeding) season.

Black-cheeked Lovebirds were observed feeding on 39 species. Food items included seeds, leaves, flowers (especially nectar), fruit pulp, invertebrates, bark, lichen, resin, and soil. Various foraging techniques were used. Terrestrial foraging was dominant, with little temporal or spatial variability. Arboreal foraging in plants varied seasonally and by availability. Feeding preferences were not specialised and there was no dependence on a limited food resource.

Black-cheeked Lovebirds fed on two agricultural crops. There was no evidence to suggest an extended foraging range during the crop-ripening season, or the reliance on crops for survival. The crop-ripening season coincided with the lovebird breeding season. The species is widely perceived as a crop pest, with 18% of seed heads of millet crops suffering more than 20% damage during the ripening season. Local farmers attempted to protect their crops in a variety of ways, however, these were largely ineffective and rarely lethal to lovebirds. The importance of elevating local tolerance for the species through education programmes is highlighted.

This study presents the first collection of breeding data on the species. Breeding occurred from mid-late January to early May. A single clutch was raised by most pairs per breeding cycle. Seventy-eight nests were found and characteristics measured. Fidelity to nest-sites is suspected. Although breeding behaviour was non-cooperative most nests were found in a loosely clumped distribution. No nesting requirement appeared to be in limited supply, or had reason to affect the population's reproductive output. In addition courtship, copulation, parental care and juvenile behaviours are reported. Data on clutch size, laying intervals and hatching success with captive birds are included.

In this study, 78 nests were found.
Photo*: Louise Warburton*

One nestling tested positive for Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease Virus (PBFDV). Other observations suggest PBFDV is present in the wild population.

Black-cheeked Lovebirds roosted inside naturally formed cavities in live Mopane trees. Roost cavities were found in a loosely clumped distribution. No roosting requirement appeared to be in limited supply.

Black-cheeked Lovebirds are highly dependent on surface water supplies and need to drink at least twice daily. The lovebirds are highly cautious drinkers that will not drink if the water resource is actively disturbed by humans or livestock. Water availability is a limiting factor to the Black-cheeked Lovebird. The gradual desiccation of its habitat appears to be the major cause behind the reduction of occupancy within its small range. In recent years (1950 - 1997) the annual rainfall in the Black-cheeked Lovebird's habitat has decreased resulting in further reduction of its already highly localised distribution, increasing the species' dependence on artificial water supplies.

Its conservation management should be prioritised towards maintaining and creating water resources with minimal external disturbance; upholding the wild-caught trade ban in the species, continuing environmental education with local schools promoting lovebird conservation, and monitoring populations through dry season water source counts.

Acknowledgements

The project was sponsored by the Loro Parque Fundacion, WPT (Canada), The Parrot Society, BOU, NRF, WCS, Zambezi Society (UK), IFAW, Lovebird (1990) Society, ZCSP, and The Society for Conservation in Aviculture. British Airways Assisting Conservation and Station Africa also contributed.

Focus on endangered macaws in Bolivia

By ROSEMARY LOW

In the November issue of *PsittaScene* I related the story of the Peru portion of the first-ever WPT members' expedition last August. In this article I will describe our short but exciting stay in Bolivia, before we travelled on to Peru. There were nine of us, four from the UK and five from the USA, and we all met up in Santa Cruz, Bolivia's windy capital.

At the airport we were met by Jean-Paul Ayala of Green Bolivia, who was with us throughout the Bolivian part of our adventure. Next morning we flew to Cochabamba then took another short flight to Trinidad, giving us exciting views of the Andes. Our first destination was the Llanos de Moxos where we were to search for the Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*), one of the world's rarest parrots (see *PsittaScene February* 2002).

To reach the area where it occurs we travelled through the seasonally flooded lowland savannah in the state of Beni. The birdwatching along this main road is among the best in the world and not unlike that of the Pantanal region of Brazil. Scattered palm trees and numerous termite mounds decorate savannah that is covered in low sedges. Giant Jabiru Storks (*Jabiru mycteria*) feed near the roadside, ungainly on the ground but spectacular in flight, Wattled Jacanas (*Jacana jacana*) step on the water lilies in the little pools, yellow

Members had a brief sighting of Blue-throated Macaws. Photo*: Bent and Birthe Pedersen*

Preparing to set off across the swamp to the palm island. Photo*: Krystyna Szulecka*

under wing coverts gleaming in the sun, and the occasional Crested Screamer (*Chauna torquata*), big as a turkey but with a loud honking call, takes to the wing. Stately Cocoi Herons (*Ardea cocoi*) are common and flap away gracefully at the approach of our two vehicles.

From the dirt road (that even the previous week had threatened to be impassable after rain) plenty of parrots are seen in flight: the common Weddell's or Dusky-headed Conure (*Aratinga weddellii*), Severe Macaws (*Ara severa*) and Blue-headed Pionus (*Pionus menstruus*) feeding on the orange flowers of a *Cosorio* tree.

We were heading for the Blue-throated Macaw Lodge, near the Rio Mamore and 68 km (43 miles) from the nearest town of Trinidad. The lodge was recently set up to cater for the rare tourists who will come to this remote ranch that spans more than 100,000 acres. We were hoping to glimpse what is almost certainly the rarest macaw

WPT - Expedition 2003 - Part Two

in the world, after Spix's. It is worth pointing out that only four species of macaw are endemic to single countries: Spix's and Lear's to Brazil, and the Blue-throated and the Red-fronted to Bolivia. Both the Brazilian species are classified as Critically Endangered, and both the Bolivian species are Endangered.

Only about 50 Blue-throated Macaws are known to exist in their habitat of palm islands among natural savannah that is used as cattle pasture. The predicament for this species is that it is known to survive only on privately-owned land; the wealthy landowners are many miles away in the cities, perhaps completely out of touch with nature. The cowboys and their families have thus become the most important players in the future of this very beautiful macaw.

A pair of Green-winged Macaws were curious about our activities.
Photo*: Krystyna Szulecka*

It has long been close to my heart since I had in my care the first pair to breed in Europe (at Loro Parque). I have ambivalent feelings about this. The reason why this macaw is critically endangered is because of the theft from the wild of so many birds in the early 1980s, soon after its population was discovered by trappers. Ironically, this species was not discovered by scientists until 1992. In 1983 it was placed on Appendix I of CITES and Bolivia ceased to export parrots. The illegal trade continued for a while - perhaps until this macaw became too difficult to find.

The picture in my mind of those who trap such rare species was one of lean, hard-faced men who cared nothing for the birds they trapped. This mental picture was shattered when I met Pocho, a former trapper, who was our guide. Next morning, we left the lodge long before first light to travel over two hours by road to reach a palm island. When the sun came up we saw Yellow-collared Macaws (*Ara* or *Propyrrhura auricollis*) flying by the roadside. On reaching our destination we crossed a swampy area on foot (clad in Wellington boots bought in Trinidad) to reach the island. As we did so Blue and Yellow, and Green-winged Macaws flew overhead in exuberant early morning flight.

On reaching the island a pair of Yellow-fronted (Yellow-crowned) Amazons (*Amazona ochrocephala nattereri*) took to the wing. We sat quietly on fallen logs in the low forest dominated by *Schleelea* and other palms. Giant dead fronds, 3m (10ft) long, hung from them like shabby skirts. It was tinder-dry underfoot and the palms were interspersed with much low, shrubby growth and numerous rotten logs. With a machete the men opened the palm nuts on which the macaws feed, so that we could photograph the interiors. But Blue-throated Macaws are shy; we needed to be quiet.

We sat for hours, waiting. A pair of Severe Macaws flew over. The cooing of doves and the liquid calls of oropendolas were the only sounds. We were entertained by a gorgeous pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars (*Galbula ruficauda*), with glittering iridescent green plumage like giant hummingbirds. At 10.45am a pair of yellow and blue macaws flew above us. I jumped to my feet on hearing them call - higher pitched, more scared-sounding and less throaty than that of *ararauna*. They were Blue-throated Macaws! They looked magnificent in flight, the sun lighting their brilliant shades of turquoise blue and yellow.

Jean-Paul, Tanya and I followed the direction of their flight to find one of the pair perched in a large deciduous tree. I gazed at its face through my binoculars and

Green-wings coming in to land. Photo*: Priscilla Old*

WPT - Expedition 2003 - Part Two

heaved a sigh of contentment, guessing that this was to be the only chance to observe one of my favourite species. I was delighted that Tanya covered this rare sighting with her video camera and acquired some excellent footage.

Soon we were visited by a loquacious family of Green-winged Macaws. On several occasions the adults flew in in total silence, then gave a call when they saw we were still there. Their youngster was "parked" in a large tree a little way off. They did not seem to be alarmed by us - just curious. At 5pm the sun was setting, an orange globe in the sky, as we made our way back across the swamp. Five Blue and Yellow Macaws were flying in the distance.

Not far along the road we stopped to distribute pencils, crayons and drawing pads to a group of excited local children with big sparkling brown eyes. We had bought these items in Trinidad as a small contribution to the community and, equally important, to reinforce the idea that tourists who come to see the macaws are indirectly beneficial to them, therefore the macaws are worth protecting. It was gone 9pm when we arrived back at the lodge, tired but content.

Next morning we left at 7am to return along the road to Trinidad, a mist hanging just above the ground over the wide vista of the palm savannah. Every excuse to stop brought a feast of birds, including Blue-winged Parrotlets (*Forpus crassirostris flavescens*), White-eyed Conures (*Aratinga leucophthalmus*) and a flock of 13 small and uncommon Bare-faced Ibis (*Phimosus infuscatus*) perched close to the road.

Photo: *Rosemary Low*

The winter-flowering *Tabebuia* trees added unexpected touches of colour to the landscape. First come those with glorious deep pink flowers, followed by yellow and white-flowering trees. Some of the low, fire-resistant palms were scorched from the annual burn of the savannah that brings dozens of birds of prey to feed on the fleeing creatures. The early morning landscape was filled with bird song and the harsh cries of conures. Jabirus and spoonbills were gathered around a waterhole and a group of capybara left the water in descending order of size. On the road in front of us six Weddell's Conures were drinking from a puddle. We wanted to linger - but we had a flight to catch!

Our group flew to Cochabamba, and then on to Santa Cruz, two short flights that left us with the afternoon to spare in Santa Cruz. This city has little appeal for me so I visited the zoo again. (We had a very brief spell there during a "city tour" on arrival.) It was an interesting if not entirely happy experience. My best memory is of a group of Red-fronted Macaws rolling and bathing in their pool. They were a joy to watch! Most of the parrots were in small, overcrowded cages, despite the existence of a huge, planted aviary where many of them could have led a wonderful life. It was sad to see a lonely but beautiful Plum-crowned Pionus (*Pionus t.tumultuosus*). A heart-breaking sight was that of a pair of Harpy Eagles (one of the world's most majestic birds) in an aviary that was intolerably small.

Next morning, August 23, we drove through the outskirts of Santa Cruz and on through small towns, stopping to buy tiny bananas and tasty tangerines from two little girls. In passing, we saw two Maximilian's Pionus on a roadside bush and, on stopping, a number of Blue-crowned Conures (*Aratinga a. acuticaudata*). The landscape changed with the hours, the small towns giving way to lush countryside, then desert with huge cacti. At 1,800m (5,900ft) we reached the little town of Comarapa, our base for the next two nights. Passing a dam, we came to a very steep incline in the dirt road that our vehicle was unable to negotiate at the first attempt. Feeling that caution was the better part of valour, we decided to disembark and leave the driver to it!

Sixteen miles (25km) west of Comarapa there were spectacular views over the

Blue-crowned Conure.
Photo: *Priscilla Old*

green, irrigated Misque valley floor far below us. Small adobe houses dotted the fields bordered by trees and giant cacti. Peanut farmers were working in the sun. Peanuts: the clue to our next species! Yes, we were looking for Bolivia's second endemic macaw: the Red-fronted (*Ara rubrogenys*) Macaw. Confined to an area that is a dot on the map of central Bolivia, this endangered species occupies a strange habitat for a macaw: arid montane scrub at 1,100 to 2,500m (3,600 to 8,200ft). Its range is tiny, apparently only approximately 180km (112 miles) from north to south and 150km (93 miles) from east to west.

Its total population is difficult to assess but seems unlikely to exceed 1,000 birds. Between 1973, when the species was introduced to aviculture, and 1983 when it was placed on Appendix I of CITES, hundreds of these macaws were trapped and exported. It is uncertain what impact this had on its population in view of the fact that it is persecuted as a crop pest by the maize and peanut farmers. Its main problem now is that its entire known habitat has been converted for agricultural use.

Red-fronted Macaws in tree top. Photo: *Mark Stafford*

WPT - Expedition 2003 - Part Two

The people here are so poor that the success or the failure of their crops is crucial to their survival. Why should they protect the macaws that raid these crops? There is only one reason: eco-tourism potential. I saw just what this meant on the following day when we all gave money to the old, wrinkled peanut farmer over whose land we had been walking. With a hand as

The peanut farmer.
Photo: *Krystyna Szulecka*

hard as cured leather, he pressed these notes to his lips, then shook us by the hand. We had probably given him more money than he would reap from the potato crop he would plant next week to follow the corn and peanuts. We all felt very strongly that this was the best way to impress on this farming community that Red-fronted Macaws are valuable as an occasional cash bonus, despite any damage they might cause to the crops.

Our first afternoon in the Misque valley was disappointing. The wind was so strong that we had to hang on to Jean-Paul's spotting scope for fear it would blow away. After a while we heard macaws calling and had brief glimpses of distant birds as they flew down the mountain. But the wind was so strong they did not stay. The sun lit up their orange under wing coverts for a brief second as eight birds flew high above us to roost somewhere in the mountains. We headed back to Comarapa, stopping briefly to watch a truly magnificent pair of large, scarlet-headed Cream-backed Woodpeckers (*Phloeoceastes leucopogon*).

Early next morning we were back in the valley, full of anticipation. At once our spirits lifted: in the field far below we could see and hear a flock of macaws. More and more were flying in. Excitedly I counted 45 - but there were more than that! Jean-Paul was elated. This was the largest flock he had seen in several years.

I leaned against the Landcruiser, an alpaca shawl around my shoulders (it was cold up there!). Far below I could see the macaws playing, feeding, squabbling and walking around or hanging upside down to display their orange wing coverts. Through the scope I tried to count juveniles. In one group of 15 there were three, possibly four.

The bright colours of the macaws were a stark contrast to the reddish-brown, stony soil, the grey trees with light green leaves and the tall cacti, spiny or fluted. There was some amusing interaction between a young macaw perched in a tree and two Plush-crested Jays (*Cyanocorax chrysops*). At this early age and with the close back-up of an adult, it was determined to assert its authority. Even when the adult flew the young macaw would not give way. The jays were left bouncing on the end of the bough until they gave in to the superior weight of their psittacine neighbour and flew away defeated.

We climbed down the slope to the field where the macaws were feeding on remnants of corn from the recent harvest. Jumping across two little streams and climbing a couple of stiles, we crept closer and closer. In so doing we disturbed a family of Blue-fronted Amazons (*Amazona aestiva xanthopteryx*) that had been feeding in the top of a flowering tree. I was sorry that they flew. The Bolivian birds are surely the most beautiful Blue-fronts throughout the whole huge range.

The young macaws, identified by their brown foreheads and lack of orange, were incautious, the last to move away from the onlookers. A couple just sat in the field, oblivious to danger. The adults were feeding, picking up pieces of corn left from the harvest; they moved further off but stayed for another hour or more. Gradually they drifted away and we left at 11am. Returning to Comarapa we enjoyed the colourful, bustling Sunday market, a big local event, where you could buy anything from dried coca leaves to live turkeys.

At 3pm we set off again, back to the Misque valley, hoping for more photo opportunities. On the way we stopped to watch five Andean Condors (*Vultur gryphus*) circling high above us, and a group of Blue-crowned Conures, resting and preening in a roadside tree.

"Our" macaws were there, in the same field, and we climbed down to watch them again. This time we were lucky: the sun came out, turning them into kaleidoscopes of blue, pale green and orange as they floated down to the field in their typically fluttering flight. Shutters clicked as they grew bolder and flew above us, quite possibly nearly as curious about this strange group of humans who did not work the land as we were mesmerised by their beauty.

Some people who have seen these macaws in the field believe that they are the most beautiful of all macaws in flight. Refresh your memory with those stunning photos in *PsittaScene* that occupied two pages in the November 2002 issue! When a flock lands in a tree-top, it is as though the tree suddenly bursts into orange flower! Sometimes it seems that macaws hang on the wind with the sole purpose of displaying those flame-coloured coverts!

We all came away with abiding memories of their beauty.

The Bolivian Blue-fronted Amazons are surely the most beautiful of all.
Photo: *Krystyna Szulecka*

Pacheco's disease: a 'parrot killer' from Guyana

By GINO CONZO, DVM, PhD, Avian Vet Practitioner, Naples, Italy

Pacheco's Parrots Disease (PPD) is a fatal disease of psittacine birds, associated with parrots imported from South American countries. Usually losses due to PPD begin between one and two weeks (considered to be PPD's incubation period) following the arrival of the shipments to the quarantine stations. Most affected birds develop the peracute form of disease and suddenly die without showing any premonitory symptoms. Anorexia, lethargy, ruffled feathers and typical yellowish watery droppings are the commonly seen signs in the acute form. In both cases the infectious and mortality rates are very high, reaching sometimes 100% of the affected birds. PPD's causative agent is Psittacid Herpesvirus (PsiHV), a virus able to quickly destroy liver, spleen and kidney cells of the affected parrots. For this reason massive necrotic lesions of the above mentioned organs, sometimes made worse by hemorrhagic enteritis, are detected at necropsy typically. These signs and the history (recently imported parrots) are often indicative of PPD, confirmed by histological examination of hepatocytes, virus cultivation and, more recently, DNA probe based tests.

Pacheco's is a typical example of stress associated disease. PsiHV can latently infect birds for a long time, but when the host immune response is depressed by stress conditions this "balance" is easily broken and the virus can spread through the parrot's organism reaching target organs. This is precisely what happens in imported psittacines. Some parrots are latently infected in the country of origin; after their capture all the stress factors related to importation (capture, overcrowding, change of foods, climate variation, shipment, etc.) determine immune suppression and the consequent development of PPD. Infected birds (apparently showing very good health at the time of arrival) shed large amount of virus through faeces or nasal discharges and quickly infect other parrots of the same facility. Without a close separation between the different parrots shipments and severe health management, all the psittacines of the quarantine facilities can rapidly develop PPD. Although most new world species are considered highly susceptible to PPD, all psittacines can die from this disease. Amazons, Pionus, Macaws and Monk Parakeets are particularly sensitive to PPD, and often all infected birds of the same shipment die within a few days following the first deaths. Other species show intermediate sensitivity, while some Conures (Nanday and Patagonian mainly) very rarely die and, often, don't show any sign of disease, although PsiHV is housed in their body. These Conures are considered very "dangerous" birds because are healthy carriers of PsiHV and can spread PPD among all the parrots they are housed with (breeding facilities, pet shops, etc…).

PPD is very commonly seen in imported parrots coming from Guyana. Data obtained from avian veterinary practitioners, working into quarantine stations of Belgium, Holland, Italy and Spain (personal communication), constantly show the highest mortality rate (very close to 100% of the imported birds) in Orange-winged Amazons (*Amazona amazonica*), imported from Guyana, followed by other species of the genus *Amazona*, *Ara*, *Pionus*, *Pionites* and *Deroptyus* of the same shipments. The high rate of mortality of Orange-winged Amazons is probably due to the large number of imported parrots of this species in every shipment and the bad conditions (overcrowding, poor hygiene) in which they are housed during quarantine. Less frequently is it possible to detect PPD outbreak in parrots (Monk parakeets, mainly) imported from Argentina. However the high number of Conures coming from this country enhances the chance to import PsiHV carriers.

A parrot export station in Georgetown, Guyana. *Photo:* Marc Johnson

Various species of Amazon packed together. Photo: *Freddi Virili*

Attempts to treat or to prevent PPD are rarely effective. Parrots' vaccination against PPD is difficult because different PsiHV serotypes (without cross reaction) exist; for this reason parrots vaccinated by PsiHV1 serotype including vaccine (the only one in trade) are not protected against other PsiHV serotypes associated infections. Moreover, stress conditions of recently imported parrots make their immune system poorly responsive to vaccination. Acyclovir (an antiviral drug used to treat various Herpesvirus infections) based treatment of parrots can reduce the virus spread to healthy birds, but it isn't effective to treat already infected psittacines. On the basis of the above mentioned considerations, to ban parrots' importations from South Americans PPD endemic countries (Guyana mainly) seems to be, at the moment, the only effective preventive measure to avoid death of a large number of wild parrots and PPD spreading into European countries.

The EU requires that all imported birds are accompanied by a health certificate and must be from countries which are members of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE). The WPT has written the appropriate authorities to encourage their due attention to this important issue.

Psitta News

Avian Influenza

Outbreaks of Avian Influenza, aka 'bird flu' or 'avian flu,' in several Asian countries as well as several states in the USA have heightened concern around the globe due to the risks to human health, impacts on the poultry industry, and of course the potential threat to all captive birds. In Asia, millions of birds have now been destroyed in an effort to control the outbreak, including at least one shipment of lovebirds. The European Union and the USA have stopped the importation of all birds from much of Asia, responding rapidly to at least 13 human deaths associated with this especially deadly strain of the virus. The disease has not yet been found to move from humans to humans, and all human fatalities have been associated with direct contact with poultry.

In recent weeks, less deadly strains have appeared in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and now Texas in the USA. Not surprisingly, the EU has now banned imports of poultry from the USA. Apparently all birds are susceptible to strains of this virus, so as always, we encourage all those working with and around birds to exercise caution and practice careful biosecurity around their bird facilities. News on these outbreaks is coming in quickly, so we recommend keeping an eye on our new pages at Worldparrottrust.org and other local news sources for your area.

Deadly Newcastle Disease Discovered in Parrots and other Birds Imported from Pakistan to Italy

4000 birds destroyed 20th February, International Authorities not yet Notified.

According to the OIE, the World Organization for Animal Health, Italy's Health Ministry has not reported that a deadly avian virus, Exotic Newcastle Disease (END), entered Italy earlier this month in a shipment of wild and captive parrots, and other caged birds. In addition, the World Parrot Trust, an international parrot conservation organization, discovered that several regional Italian Veterinary districts were not yet informed of the presence of the virus on Italian soil. For more information, please see: www.worldparrottrust.org

31st May 2004

This special day has been planned to take place in the UK on the Spring Bank Holiday. It will highlight the plight of parrots in the wild, and the need to give them a good quality of life in captivity.

Zoos all over the UK are invited to join in, and children will be urged to '**Go and See a Parrot!**' We are in discussion with 'Blue Peter', the top children's tv programme, and much other media coverage is expected. The Natural History Museum will also support this day.

We will be joined in this effort by our friends at The Parrot Society UK, who will bring some especially interesting parrots to our Main event, scheduled for 1pm on May 31 at Trafalgar Square in London. All parrot supporters are welcome!

We will also arrange a press release to be issued by our international branches. Any ideas from members about media or celebrity contacts who might help this project would be very welcome. Please email Karen at uk@worldparrottrust.org.

Long live the parrots!

Controversy over Nicaragua's parrot trade

Excerpt from LA PRENSA, Nicaragua, March 2003

The decision of Nicaragua to support the inclusion of the Yellow-naped Amazon (*Amazona auropalliata*) into CITES Appendix I has raised controversy among ornithologists, conservationists and exporters.

The ornithologists and conservationists applauded the government decision. However, the exporters opposed the new regulation because the inclusion into Appendix I prevents the international trade of Nicaragua's Yellow-naped Amazons.

Edgard Castañeda, manager of the ecologic reserve "El Chocoyero" added: "Many of these species are declining due to the loss of habitat and it's necessary to stabilize their populations. The research shows that if the domestic trade continues, it will be necessary to reduce the export quotas. Scientists informed the government in 1999 but the export quotas have not been changed".

Ornithologists, researchers and environmentalists stated that the exporters do not own captive-breeding facilities, and that most of the birds are captured in the forested areas of Nicaragua.

Good quality digital camera urgently needed in Costa Rica

The work of Guisselle Monge Arias and Olivier Chassot with the Great Green Macaw has featured frequently in these pages. They urgently need a good quality digital camera for use during their almost weekly meetings, workshops and educational material design activities (such as making posters). If anyone can provide such a camera it would be put to exceptionally good use in Costa Rica for a very worthwhile project. Please contact Karen at The World Parrot Trust, UK if you can help.

Thick-bills return to the USA?

The presence of a Thick-billed Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*) has caused much speculation in New Mexico. It appeared on the Armendaris Ranch and lived in a sparse patch of pine trees near the sun-baked desert east of Truth. Hundreds of bird watchers visited the ranch, keen to add another species to their list. But was it a wild bird or an escapee? Tom Waddell, property manager at the ranch, is convinced that it was a wild bird, judging by its behaviour and lack of interest in commercial parrot food. If it was wild, it was either blown off course by the storms of early May 2003 or it is a survivor from the birds released in Arizona in the 1980s.

One of the many scenic views along the California coast. Photo: *Will Campbell*

Will, Karen, and Sherry, joined by Jamie Gilardi for their first day, starting out across the famous Golden Gate Bridge.

Photo: *Will Campbell*

Biking for the birds

BY JOANNA ECKLES

Karen and Will arrive in Los Angeles.

A beautiful package arrived on our doorstep in November. It was the fruits of almost a year of planning and hard work by a small group committed to a big goal - to cycle over 450 miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles California to benefit parrots. A thick stack of donation checks, an entertaining video, and a day-by-day account of the 8-day ride were testimony to the success of this bold venture. It all started with Karen Poly, a WPT member and avian trainer at the Los Angeles Zoo. Karen is an avid biker and bird expert and is not averse to a challenge. Two years after a successful 400-mile ride to benefit AIDS research, Karen was in search of another project and 'Biking for the Birds' was born. Fundraising, training, and planning took months. In September Karen, biking partner Will and a support crew of one - friend and zoo docent Sherry - set off on a trek that was a success in every respect. They traveled over the Golden Gate Bridge and down the beautiful California coast, watching surfers, elephant seals and otters as they rode. They were rewarded by a lone California Condor soaring overhead on a deserted stretch of road and punished by hills and wrong turns and more hills. They met some interesting characters en route and were welcomed by a gang of friends and supporters at a picnic in their honor when they arrived 'home' after 473 miles in 8 days. Not only did they accomplish this impressive feat but they also raised well over $4,000 for the World Parrot Trust in the process.

We thank Karen, Will Campbell, Sherry Kramer and all their friends and supporters that made this effort a huge success.

Ways to raise funds

By ROSEMARY LOW

In 1986 I wrote an article about the plight of the Imperial Parrot (*Amazona imperialis*) that was published in *Cage & Aviary Birds*. I had mentioned that a substantial sum of money was needed by ICBP (the forerunner of BirdLife International) to help save this species. The plea was read by Andrew Philp, a keeper at Cricket St Thomas Wildlife Park in Somerset. He immediately thought up a very effective method of making a contribution. He erected a notice about the Imperial and invited visitors to throw coins into the pool. Within four weeks he had collected £288! A cheque for this sum was sent to ICBP.

For some reason visitors to parks and gardens cannot resist throwing coins into shallow areas of water. There must be hundreds of such pools in places open to the public. Armed with literature and a few copies of *PsittaScene* (our Administrator will be pleased to send you a few extra ones), go and see the director of an appropriate attraction - and explain your mission. Ask permission to put up a "*Help Save the Parrots*" board (*see image*). These can be sent out by The World Parrot Trust. They come complete with a cash box as part of the design. Displaying this board indicates that the zoo or other organisation has a very real concern for parrot conservation.

Giving talks

At least two of our UK members are in demand as speakers at parrot club or cage bird society meetings. Instead of taking a fee, they ask for a donation to the Trust. Information is given on its work and membership leaflets and copies of *PsittaScene* are available. If you give talks or slide shows, please contact our Administrator at Glanmor House. She can provide you with membership leaflets and "*Happy Healthy Parrot*" leaflets.

Parrots in class

Are you a teacher? Can you obtain permission to take a parrot to school? If so, you might give the most popular lesson of the term! At the same time there would be an opportunity to tell your pupils about the threats that are facing parrots in the wild, and the work of the Trust to help them. No need to mention that it is important to emphasise that their family should never buy a wild-caught parrot!

Making items for sale

If you own a shop or a business where you have direct contact with members of the public, you are ideally placed to publicise the Trust and to raise funds. In Australia, our member Anne Morrison hit on this idea some years ago. At her *Pioneer Pottery* shop in Todd Mall, Alice Springs, she offered for sale items she had made and donated 50% to the Trust. Items included gift cards and dreamcatchers. Literature about the Trust was prominently displayed.

Do you work for a vet?

If you work for a vet or you are on good terms with one, please ask him or her to display the "*Happy Healthy Parrot*" leaflet and the membership leaflet in the waiting room.

Parrot parties

During the third year of the Trust's existence (1991) several members raised money during the summer months by holding a parrot party. One member sent interesting recipes for cockatoo punch and barbecued budgie. Only joking, of course!

Levy on advertisements

Another fund-raising idea in the early years of the Trust came from a parrot club. Members were asked to pay a little more for advertisements in their magazine. The extra revenue was donated to WPT. Other clubs that publish a magazine might like to think about this!

Corporate sponsorship

Those members who work for large companies might like to bring the Trust's aims and activities to the attention of the company chairman. They could point out the PR benefits of adopting the parrots, or perhaps one particular species. Companies that manufacture items have a lot of potential here!

If you have put into practice a novel way of fund-raising, please let us know!

Do you spend money on the lottery? If so, you might like to follow Avril Barton's lead. Since the lottery's inception in 1995, she has put money every week on certain numbers drawn out by her Grey Parrot Dudley. She wrote and informed us of those numbers. Who knows, they might come up big one day!

WPT Members Only E-mail List

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

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!

Aims of the Trust

With thousands of members in over 50 countries, our branches work to achieve the stated aims of the World Parrot Trust, which are:

- **The survival of parrot species in the wild**
- **The welfare of captive birds everywhere**

To Achieve these Aims, we:

- Restore and protect populations of wild parrots and their native habitats
- Promote awareness of the threats to all parrots, captive and wild
- Oppose the trade in wild-caught birds
- Educate the public on high standards for the care and breeding of parrots
- Encourage links between conservation and aviculture

Member, Donation or Legacy

If you become a member of our Registered Charity you will receive a new member package, four of these *PsittaScene* magazines and one free entry to Paradise Park in Cornwall, UK per year with your membership card. You can also join our members only group email list and gain access to many other members for parrot information and support.

Each renewal year you will receive the quarterly magazines and one free entry into Paradise Park (Winner of Good Britain Guide, Family Attraction of the Year, for 2 years).

100% of money donated to designated funds is spent directly on parrot conservation.

Please consider a donation or legacy to the Trust.

United Kingdom
Michelle Cook, (Mem); Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HB UK.
Tel: (44) 01736 751026 Fax: (44) 01736 751028,
Email: admin@worldparrottrust.org
Karen Whitley, Administrator, Email: uk@worldparrottrust.org
Michael Reynolds, **Chairman**: reynolds@worldparrottrust.org

Africa
Vera Dennison, PO Box 1758, Link Hills, Natal 3652, South Africa.
Tel: (27) 31 763 4054 Fax: (27) 31 763 3811,
Email: africa@worldparrottrust.org

Asia
Catherine Carlton, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 9235 6300, Email: asia@worldparrottrust.org

Australia
Mike Owen, 7 Monteray St., Mooloolaba, Queensland 4557, Australia.
Tel: (61) 7 54780454, Email: australia@worldparrottrust.org

Benelux
Jacques Gardien (Mem), Laan van Tolkien 51, 5663 RW Geldrop, The Netherlands.
Tel: (31) 40 2855754, Email:benelux@worldparrottrust.org
Belgium enquiries: Romain Bejstrup (32) 32526773
Netherlands enquiries: Ruud Vonk (31) 168472715

Canada
David Cooper, 1584 Woodhenge Way, Mississauga, Ontario L5N 7T1, Canada.
Tel: (1) 519 823 8941 Fax: (1) 519 823 8941,
Email: canada@worldparrottrust.org

France
Olivier Arnoult, 16 Chemin du Peyronnet, 06500 Menton, France.
Mobile: (33) 61 099 1309 Email: france@worldparrottrust.org
J. & G. Prin, 55 Rue de la Fassiere, 45140, Ingre.
Tel: (33) 2 38 43 62 87 Fax: (33) 2 38 43 97 18

Italy
Cristiana Senni, C.P.15021, 00143 Roma, Italy.
Email: italy@worldparrottrust.org

Spain
Gemma Cruz Benitez, C / Enrique Granados, 5 ch. 4, 28290 - Las Matas, Madrid, Spain. Tel: (34) 619 847 414 Email: spain@worldparrottrust.org

Sweden (Scandinavia)
Dan Paulsen, Tjelvarvagen 28, S-621 42 Visby, Sweden.
Email: sweden@worldparrottrust.org

Switzerland
Lars Lepperhoff, Lutschenstrasse 15, 3063 Ittigen, Switzerland.
Tel: (41) 31 922 3902

USA
Joanna Eckles, PO Box 353, Stillwater, MN 55082, USA.
Tel: (1) 651 275 1877 Fax: (1) 651 275 1891,
Email: usa@worldparrottrust.org
Jamie Gilardi, **Director**: gilardi@worldparrottrust.org

WPT Web Sites:
Main: http://www.worldparrottrust.org,
Canada: http://www.canadianparrottrust.org,
Italy: http://www.worldparrottrust.org/italia
German: http://www.papageien.org/WPT/

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

MEMBERSHIP TYPE (please tick)

- ☐ **Student** (Annual) £10 / US$15 / €15
- ☐ **Single** (Annual) £20 / US$30 / €30
- ☐ **Joint** (Annual) £27 / US$40 / €40
- ☐ **Club** (Annual) £100 / US$150 / €150
- ☐ **Fellow** (Life) £300 / US$500 / €500
- ☐ **Conservation** (Life) £1,000 / US$1,500 / €1,500
- ☐ Additional **donation** of .....

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

Name .....

Address .....

.....

.....

..... Zip/Postcode .....

Telephone .....

Fax .....

Email .....

We heard about the World Parrot Trust from .....

.....

Please charge my Visa / Mastercard No.

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Expiry date ...../.....

Name on Card.....

Total Amount £ / US$ / € .....

Signature.....

OR:

Enclosed cheque made payable to World Parrot Trust ☐

Please send me some information on:

- ☐ Bankers Orders
- ☐ Legacies

JOIN US NOW on our website or view our online sales items at: **www.worldparrottrust.org**

Parrots? in the Wild

Burrowing Parrots also called Patagonian Conures

Cyanoliseus patagonus

By J D GILARDI, WPT

Pigeons? falcons? no - parrots! A huge flock of Burrowing Parrots return to feed their chicks at the El Condor colony in Patagonia, Argentina. Stay tuned for more photos and an update from the field in the next *PsittaScene.*

Printed by Brewers Business Solutions Ltd. Tel: 01326 558000