

# PsittaScene



FLY FREE ... INDEED!  
EU HALTS WILD BIRD IMPORTS  
(FOR NOW)



IN THIS ISSUE

Conservation education in Guyana  
Agricultural pest in Patagonia?

November 2005

# Psitta Scene

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Cover Picture By © LUIZ CLAUDIO MARIGO  
[www.lcmarigo.com.br](http://www.lcmarigo.com.br)

Of all parrots, the Blue-and-Gold Macaw (*Ara ararauna*) is surely among the most stunning in flight, with impressively iridescent feathers and a grace on the wing, they are indeed quite a sight to behold. As a heavily traded species - particularly from the northern edge of South America - their story and their beauty exemplify our exhilaration and motivation to see this trade in wild birds stopped for good.

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From the Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett to the House of Commons, 13 Dec 2005 (virtually a year to the day from when the Wild Bird Declaration was submitted to the EU): Reporting on the results from the Environment Council, Secretary Beckett announced that, "Belgium raised the subject of the importation of wild birds into the EU and urged the Council to agree to discuss and adopt tough restrictions, [these] were supported by Hungary, Portugal, Germany, Spain and Poland. The Commission agreed to a Presidency request to undertake an option study on the issues involved."

## Fly Free Indeed

### EU halts all wild bird imports (for now)

By JAMIE GILARDI

Events are moving quickly in the European Union, far more quickly than we could have anticipated. And luckily for wild birds, and for those of us working to protect them, recent changes have been rapidly heading in a very positive direction indeed. In the August issue of *PsittaScene*, we featured an unfortunate Amazon trapped in a mist net on the cover. It was an admittedly disturbing image, which illustrated the plight of millions of wild birds and provided the basis for our update on WPT activities to end this trade for good.

Soon after that issue went to press, I travelled to the UK, Netherlands and Belgium to meet with collaborating individuals and NGOs to develop and pursue strategies to move this campaign forward in the coming year. The afternoon before the key meeting in Brussels, a group of us gathered in a city park to enjoy unseasonably beautiful weather and we encountered some unexpected visitors. I'm generally not a big believer in omens, but somehow when a flock of gorgeous Ring-necked Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) arrived overhead and confidently chatted and chewed away in the Plane Trees (*Platanus*), I had the distinct sense that things were heading in the right direction. The meeting was truly a success with abundant enthusiasm and lots of fresh ideas and avenues to pursue, both with member states and with various Directorates General of the EU. At the same time, we were ever-cognizant of the news that H5N1 avian influenza had just been discovered on the eastern borders of the EU and might already be in Europe. It wasn't until the following week that the flu would really change everything for this campaign, and move things forward on a time scale of days rather than years.

The concern about disease and trade is something we've been highlighting for some time. There are clear examples of traded birds moving dangerous and costly infectious diseases across borders. In addition we've learned that changes in trade practices influence major shifts in disease prevalence in aviculture. For instance, after the passage of the Wild Bird Conservation Act in the early 1990's in the USA, many of the common diseases recurring in American aviculture became largely a thing of the past. Combined, we feel these issues

make a compelling argument for stopping the trade - protecting humans from diseases which move from birds to people, protecting the huge commercial agricultural sector from costly viruses like exotic Newcastle disease, and protecting avicultural collections from a slew of infectious agents common in traded wildlife. Combined with our concerns about the conservation and welfare impacts of the trade in wild birds, infectious disease concerns comprise the third component in the foundation of the Wild Bird Declaration (for more detail, please see <http://birdsareforwatching.org/supporters.html>)

While all eyes were on Romania, Greece and other countries on the eastern borders of the EU, the imports of wild birds continued from much of the rest of the world. In September, a consignment of birds arrived in the UK from Suriname and another from Taiwan and the two were quarantined together at a private facility in Essex, just north of London. A great deal of ink has been spilled about these birds, this facility, and what actually took place there, and it's natural to suggest that the 'rest is history' as the cliché goes, but in fact we still don't really know what went on there. We are told that some birds were dead on arrival, that the birds from both shipments were mixed, that some species of parrot from Suriname suffered 100% mortality and that most of their bodies were incinerated. For the purposes of this discussion, the important details are that none of the birds were tested for flu or Newcastle disease prior to some deaths near the end of the quarantine period, that sentinel chickens in the same facility did not become ill as they are meant to, and that a combined sample of a parrot from Suriname and a Mesia (a small songbird)



*Patagonian Conures (Cyanoliseus patagonus) recently trapped in Argentina, packed in cramped cages, and ready to be sent to the European Union. These highly unnatural social environments cause undue stress, frequent mortality, and encourage outbreaks of infectious disease.*

from Taiwan tested positive for H5N1 avian influenza.

Within days of that discovery, the UK authorities took rapid and immediate action both at the national level and by encouraging the appropriate branch of the EU (DG SANCO; an acronym for the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Affairs) to consider action at the EU level as well. Luckily, this time SANCO Health and Consumer Protection took this issue seriously and by the end of the week had shut down all imports of all wild birds to the European Union for a period of one month.

With recurrent and insightful prodding from a number of MP's in both houses - particularly Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer, a Liberal Democrat in the House of Lords, and Oliver Letwin MP, a Conservative in the House of Commons - the UK government saw fit to empower an independent panel to conduct a one month review of quarantine procedures for imported wild birds. As the quarantine process has been a central issue for the Trust over the past year, we have had the opportunity to provide this panel with a wealth of input on a variety of concerns about this disease screening process. We have shared scientific findings on the nature of the diseases of concern, and the details of how quarantine facilities are run in practice both in the UK and EU. Responding to an invitation from the panel,

we were pleased to provide in-person consultation by Cristiana Senni, who flew over from Italy for the sole purpose of testifying.

Starting in early November, we also elected to hire a consultant to help us navigate the complexities of our work in Brussels and coordinate the increasingly diverse and active coalition of NGO's working on this campaign. Lolita Szabo is a lawyer from Hungary who came to us highly recommended by several of these collaborating groups. She arrived on the scene well aware of the issues and ready to 'hit the ground running' as we say. Working from the offices of Bird Protection Belgium, Lolita immediately began playing a central role in the coalition, and orchestrated important work among Members of the European Parliament.

A few weeks into November, we learned that the Belgian Minister, Bruno Tobbacq, had again tabled an initiative regarding the wild bird trade which meant that all environment ministers were to discuss the matter at an Environment Council meeting in early December. In response to our original Declaration, Minister Tobbacq had raised this same issue in March of this year. At the time, his "Intervention" which called on the European Commission to review the question of wild bird imports because of health, conservation and welfare reasons, was largely ignored. In the wake of a frighteningly close call in Essex and with

flu hovering on the EU's eastern border, the response this time was to be considerably stronger and more positive, particularly with the UK currently holding the EU Presidency. Minister Margaret Beckett announced on 2nd December that not only had the Environment Council recommended that the Commission review the issue of the import of wild birds, but in virtually the same breath, she announced that they had agreed to do so (see announcement at top of page 1). For those of us in the coalition, this was a watershed moment, as it broadened the question to include not just the question of avian flu and other infectious diseases, but coming from the Environment Ministers, it means that the conservation concerns are now squarely on the table as well.

The current moratorium on imports is of course a temporary one, although in mid-November, DG SANCO extended it until the end of January. We hope that with the avian flu threat continuing to dominate the front pages, with the quarantine review in the UK, and with the review of the wild bird trade sanctioned by the Environment Ministers, that the EU will choose to extend yet again. In the mean time, not only will this interruption of imports spare over 900,000 wild birds (see [BirdsAreForWatching.org](http://BirdsAreForWatching.org)), but the EU must now face a very different question. Rather than considering the possibility of curtailing a trade that has been ongoing for centuries or even millennia, the question at hand is now whether the risks of resuming trade outweigh the benefits. That is, the action now is to open trade and take a large, serious, and potentially very costly risk. Naturally, our goal is to help the decision-makers in member states and in Brussels to see the wisdom of eliminating this risk altogether by simply leaving things the way they are.

Although we have hoped all along that this grim and frightening avian influenza might bring with it a silver lining for wild birds, we could not have guessed that progress might proceed in days rather than months and years! It is difficult for most of us to fathom what it means for the EU's actions to be sparing the lives of hundreds of thousands of wild birds. We are delighted that these issues are now inspiring the action and the deep consideration they deserve at the highest levels. We remain deeply grateful to all the individuals who have signed the trade petition and who 'got banded', to the organizations who have endorsed the Declaration, and to the coalition of conservation and welfare NGO's who are fighting hard to make this solution permanent. Thank you, stay tuned, and together let's hope that more great news is on the way for wild birds everywhere.



# Current impacts of avian flu on the pet bird trade

By **CRISTIANA SENNI**

Getting to grips with the potential threat of avian flu has been a very gradual and at times difficult process for many aviculturists and pet owners. The onset of the first outbreaks in Asia, at the end of 2003, went virtually unnoticed in the rest of the world. As avian flu kept spreading in Asia and then in Europe it increasingly attracted the attention of the media worldwide with its toll of human and avian lives.

It was largely considered a disease affecting only wild birds and poultry, until, at the end of October 2005, it was announced that an H5 highly pathogenic flu virus was isolated in a dead parrot in a UK private quarantine.

The implications of that single incident had huge consequences on the European bird trade. In a matter of days all commercial imports of birds in Europe were stopped, and shortly after, the European Commission banned birds at markets, shows and fairs, unless a special authorization licence is granted.

Many aviculturists and pet owners have become increasingly concerned, and their questions on avian flu and on the risks that it may represent for their birds are starting to appear on many bird forums and e-mail lists.

The reactions to this potential threat vary greatly, due to the fact that a number of media reports don't promote a clear understanding of the risks as avian flu approaches Western Europe. There are those who fear that their household pet birds

could suddenly start to transmit the disease, or a few pet stores have rapidly given away their birds, meanwhile a minority of staunch sceptics refuses to believe that avian flu could ever represent a risk at all. But in most cases, there remains a hunger for more information and advice on how to best protect ourselves, our families, and our pets from the potential risk of transmission.

The effects of all these events on the trade were quite sudden. The flow of imported birds, both wild-caught and captive-bred, came to an immediate stop. Many bird fairs have still been authorized, but in some cases the sales have been restricted or not allowed. In reading several forums of bird breeders, it is quite evident that the general mood among them is not very positive. While a minority express some anger at the EU decision to ban imports, many are mostly concerned about the increasing difficulties in selling their birds. Compared to last year, the public visiting bird fairs was noticeably reduced, and many pet stores are not willing to buy birds as their clients no longer view them as desirable pets.

Although many of the fears concerning avian flu and domestic captive-bred pet birds are not currently justified, the conflicting information on many aspects of this disease has created some understandable confusion. That confusion will likely result in a substantial reduction of birds in trade for the months - or maybe years - to come.

## What to do about the flu part two...

By **JAMIE GILARDI**


**As anyone who has read a newspaper in the last few months can attest, the flu stories from around the world have been flying in fast and furious. In the August *PsittaScene* we attempted to provide basic background about H5N1 avian influenza, and we made some predictions about the arrival of this virus in Europe. Luckily for most Europeans, although the virus has indeed arrived, it has barely made appearances along the eastern border of the EU. With any luck and substantial precautionary action from all Europeans, it may not penetrate further into the heart of Europe this winter. With the added help of the Commission halting all wild birds imports to the EU, future introductions like the flu-positive birds in Essex (UK) in October and the infected eagles in Brussels last year, will now largely be a thing of the past.**

As the flu moved westward across Asia this summer and into autumn, the virus has been evolving rapidly. Although it is still quite lethal to poultry and waterbirds, it does not appear to be able to jump to humans as has been seen in southeast Asian strains. This could change rapidly at any time, but this trend is indeed encouraging.

It remains unclear if migratory birds have ever played a role in moving this flu from one place to another, although there is a tendency in some circles to assume this is the case. To date, there has been very little

sampling of healthy wild birds in active outbreak areas, so it is still impossible to know the degree to which these wild bird populations become infected and transmit the virus from place to place. A new study found that tree sparrows in an outbreak area in China were infected with a strain of H5N1, although they were apparently showing no symptoms. Reports of similarly asymptomatic wild birds in Russia and from domestic ducks are equally worrisome. Now that the fall migration is largely over, it's clear that the

flu has not yet been carried to all the various countries and continents where Asian waterfowl winter, and if this observation holds up over time, it certainly weakens the suspicions about migratory birds playing a central role in the movement of the disease.

We had hoped by now to have solid and useful information for pet owners about the availability of flu tests and vaccines, but this seemingly simple process has proven far more challenging than we could have imagined. It appears that the available and legal options are highly variable from country to country, and we encourage you to contact your local veterinarian for up to date information on what they can offer. Simple flu test kits may soon be on the market, and we'll be sure to provide news on these kits as they become available. In the mean time, pet bird owners in Western Europe should remain informed about flu in their area, practice sound biosecurity and sanitation around their birds and aviaries. Remember to isolate your captive birds from wild birds and bring them inside or provide covers over the aviary whenever possible. Avoid bringing in new birds to your flock and refrain from travelling with your birds away from home, especially out of the country. 

# Psitta News

## Whistle-stop visit to Harewood Bird Garden

By AVRIL BARTON

Jamie Gilardi recently made a whistle-stop visit to the UK on behalf of the World Parrot Trust, and was able to allow himself time to visit Harewood House and Bird Garden in Yorkshire.



Photo: Avril Barton

I was delighted to escort Jamie, Sam Williams, Rowan Martin, Gerard Johnson and Eileen Cole on a private tour given by Jim Irwin Davis the Curator of Harewood. Everyone seeing the Bird Garden for the first time were very impressed with the work put into it, and the success of the



Photo: Sam Williams

year's breeding programs, including the Palm Cockatoos (*Probosciger aterrimus*) who are rearing their 5th healthy chick since arriving there.

For me, the Palms are my own special favourites. They live in a wonderful aviary built high in the undergrowth, sharing it with the juvenile Palms and a group of Ibis. Their nest is created to be as near to natural as possible, with the hen having look-out holes so she can detect danger. As visitors cannot get close and disturb them, they were almost as interested in us as we were in them, and vocalise with "hello's" when they see someone they like. As Sam was one of the fittest of us, and used to rough land and climbing trees, Jim took him into

the aviary and he took a photo of the chick in the nest without the hen worrying at all.

We then toured the House, which is the home of the Earl and Countess of Harewood. The Earl being the Queen's cousin, and Harewood House is one of the few privately owned Stately Homes still lived in by the family.



Photo: Sam Williams

Harewood House and Bird Garden is on the A61 seven miles from Leeds. It is open most of the year and well worth a visit. All the staff are very friendly, and will always take time to talk and answer any questions. There are lots of different species of birds from Penguins to very rare Parrots, and the lake has some wonderful rare waterfowl living on it. Take a look at their web-site at [www.harewood.org](http://www.harewood.org) and see what Yorkshire can offer you.

Finally I decided that instead of the usual posed photograph of "this is us at Harewood" I would show you the photo of the Palm chick in the nest!!! So young it still didn't have feathers, but hopefully may become a star of the display there, and more importantly - a parent of a future generation of Palm Cockatoos.

## Parrot T-shirts help birds find a home

<http://caymannetnews.com/2005/09/925/t-shirts.shtml>, Friday, September 16, 2005

Two local participants in National Trust Parrot Monitoring Programme, Jenny Nickolov, and Marnie Laing, had the bright idea of helping the national bird population, the Grand Cayman parrot, recover after Hurricane Ivan, by selling T-shirts.

Money from the T-shirts will be used to provide bird houses and bird feeders. The houses and feeders will be placed around Grand Cayman, and are intended to help the parrots, which have lost so much of their natural habitat and feeding territory.

Apart from the parrots, it is hoped that the programme will provide help for other indigenous birds such as Thick-billed Vireos, Cuban Bullfinches, Caribbean Doves and West Indian Woodpeckers.

Two different designs of T-shirt are



available, and will be sold at all the main supermarkets including Foster's at The Strand and Airport; Hurley's; and Kirks, on Saturday 17 September between 9:00 am and noon.

Both of the designs, one depicting indigenous Cayman parrots, and the other one depicting parrots along with other kinds of indigenous wildlife, have been provided by local artist Guy Harvey.

"We were aware that the bird population had been quite hard hit, and we wanted to help them through this hard time, but we wanted our birds kept wild," Ms Laing said.

"We also thought this would be a good way of educating people about the condition of the bird populations since Hurricane Ivan, and about habitat degradation."

Providing bird feeders and houses was the right idea, she said, because it addressed the two most apparent needs of the birds, food and shelter, while keeping the level of human interference to a minimum.

It is anticipated that at least 30 of the bird houses and feeders will be built. No design for the houses and feeders has been decided upon yet, and Ms Nikolov suggested that if members of the public had a good idea for such a design, or could help with making them, that they should let the National Trust know.

In addition, sites are being sought for the bird houses: "We are asking people if they would like to have a bird house and bird feeder in their yard," said Ms Laing.

In addition to expressing their thanks to Guy Harvey who has helped provide the T-shirts, Ms Laing and Ms Nikolov expressed their thanks to Air Jamaica who has assisted in the transportation of the T-shirts from Jamaica, where they are made.



# Guyana - land forsaken or preserved?

## Country at a crossroad

By **MARC JOHNSON** and The Honorable **SHIRLEY MELVILLE, MP**  
Guyana

The conservation efforts of Foster Parrots in Guyana unfortunately began with the death of a close friend and board member, Nancy Cullity. Nancy and her husband, Brian, had spent many years on the hunt for the remote places where tourists are few and far between. They had taken many adventurous trips including a trek across the Darien peninsula of Panama and deep into the northeast jungles of Peru. Their last trip together was to Guyana where they met the villagers of St. Cuthberts (some 40 miles south of Georgetown, the capital), known to the local people as Pakuri. It was here that they met an indigenous people hanging on to the last vestiges of their cultural past. Brian and Nancy's trip into the jungles just south of the village brought them face to face with the gold miners, washing away the forests with high-powered hoses leaving the land scarred and the rivers muddied and polluted.

Pakuri's culture is suffering from its close proximity to the highly populated areas of the north where over 90% of Guyana's population live. The heritage and culture of this village is fast disappearing as the trappings of the modern consumer culture take hold. Guyana is roughly the size of Idaho. There are only 740,000 people in Guyana, 90% of whom live on the north central/east coast. The remaining 10% are Amerindians. 90% of Guyana is covered by rainforest and 95% of that is untouched. The areas in the north of Guyana have also suffered greatly from easy access by the wildlife trappers, miners and loggers, thus making any eco-tourism effort virtually impossible. The forests were being taken, the animals were hard to find and the culture of thatched roofs and bows and arrows had given way to pickup trucks and jobs in Georgetown.

This is where the true urgency of the choices we make now will determine which path will determine Guyana's future. Many foreign commercial interests are at play with their plundering eyes set on the vast mineral and natural resources of the interior. All of these economic interests threaten the vast wilderness that makes Guyana the unique earthly gem it is today. Must Guyana do what is seen as most valuable for its economic future? Unfortunately the obvious and easiest choice is to exploit what is immediately available... the forests, the animals and the minerals.

The choices confronting Guyana are limited. To leap into the modern industrial world or to take a measured and thoughtful path to become the world's leading rainforest tourist destination is the



*Marc and Shirley (trusty Betsy, the Landrover in background) visiting the Farias house.*

crossroad that now faces this nation and I often wonder if the people of Guyana even know how special their country really is. Is there any reason for them to know this when one considers the examples of our "modern" world and its trend towards over-use and exploitation in the name of progress and economic gain. Do they even realize that they have any other alternatives?

From our first encounter we knew that there was something very special about Guyana and that we had landed there at that "unique" moment in time when a little effort could make a big impact. Knowing that over 90% of its rainforests were intact we sensed this opportunity would be fleeting and we knew that we needed to explore until we could find the place where our small effort would have the maximum benefit. With the preservation of parrots

Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP



*Yellow-fronted Amazon in a Georgetown coconut tree.*



*Our trusty guide, Paul Farias, getting in some bow and arrow practice!*

Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP

Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP



*Nestled in the foothills of the Kanuku mountains are the many Amerindian villages of the Rupununi.*

and the conservation of their habitat as our goal we set off into the “hinterland”. Again, good fortune would smile upon us as we were introduced to The Honorable MP Shirley Melville. Shirley is an Arawak Amerindian with strong beliefs and motivations to ensure that the forests and the people and animals that depend on them are preserved. Shirley is passionate about Amerindian rights as well as a staunch defender of the eco-systems of the Rupununi region of central Guyana. Her intimate knowledge of the customs and traditions of the Amerindian culture saved our efforts from the many pitfalls that would normally await the uninitiated in the eco-tourism/conservation field. Without Shirley, the difficulties of accomplishing all that we have would surely have been much more difficult, if not impossible. Her addition to our Board and position as



*In this photo are those who took the courageous step into their own future. The lodge complex has been built entirely by labor donated by these wonderful people. Entire families have moved onto the site while work is completed.*

Project Coordinator has made this project the success it has become. Thank you Shirley for your tireless dedication, hard work and for your vision.

Our proposal to Nappi Village was a simple one. We would provide the funding for the building of a lodge complex in exchange for a pledge by Nappi Village to protect the parrots and other wildlife in the 144,000 acre area under their control. The lodge would be 100% owned and operated giving the village complete control over all aspects of lodge operation.

It has been a tough eight months but as the lodge nears completion and the first guests have returned with rave reviews our hopes are becoming a reality. In addition Foster Parrots has provided a TV, DVD player and generator as part of our Video Pal program connecting the Nappi middle school with

one here in Massachusetts. Plans are now underway to outfit a vehicle with similar equipment that will then be able to visit more remote villages and to expand our “lodges for conservation” program. The February trip costs approximately \$2,100, all inclusive - includes the round trip air travel out of NYC (three spots available).

In maps projecting the destruction of the rainforests of the world, Guyana is expected to be one of the last bastions of this quickly disappearing eco-treasure. Little did we know when we visited that we would be able to take part in an effort to save a small piece of this treasure. If we do nothing more than sit in our “comfy chairs” proclaiming “save the rainforest” it should come as no surprise if in twenty years Guyana’s forests and heritage are just a memory.



*There are many signs and painted walls declaring the way to a secure future of conservation. This one is located outside Shirley’s home in Lethem.*



*The interior of the dining “benab”. It will be furnished with chairs and tables and act as a lounge/bar area.*

# Culture and conservation

## a natural union

By The Honorable SHIRLEY MELVILLE, MP Guyana

Rupununi, named after a berry found along the Rupununi river, is a haven for unique and abundant forests and wildlife. To compliment this treasure are the friendly and hospitable people of the Amerindian tribes known as the Wapishana, the Macushi, the Wai Wai and the Arawaks. All are closely tied to their culture and all realize the need to preserve our environment and live harmoniously within it. Changes, however, are occurring which may be inevitable. How will we deal with these changes while at the same time recognizing that a way must be found to keep strong the link between our culture and conservation of our lands.

Foster Parrots Ltd has made a powerful, bold and timely step in a very short time in addressing some of these issues with just a modest but well targeted effort. One must understand it was a step into the unknown. Fortunately for Foster Parrots and the village of Nappi, there are groups of committed and determined persons involved in the Nappi eco tourism project. Just eight months ago a little seed was planted and it has begun to germinate as a result of the caring environment that was provided. Most important is the fact that Marc and the Foster Parrots team recognized and respected the culture and practices of the local people. Therefore, emphasis was placed on the utilization of the villager's knowledge and skills. An educational/cultural exchange program was established with the Nappi school where the donation of a TV, DVD player and generator made the dissemination of information via DVD's possible. Having the educational aspect attended to, the people of Nappi were mobilized to take on the challenge of finding sustainable, economical development along with the conservation of our wildlife resources. The

alternatives to trapping were considered and eco tourism was agreed on as a viable option. Once again Foster Parrots played a pivotal role in making a dream come true. Finances were pledged for the construction of an eco tourism complex with the labour being donated by the people of Nappi Village and despite the harsh conditions of the rainy season (Guyana has two seasons, the rainy and the dry season) we have watched the building of the lodge in record time. It was inspiring to see our people put their shoulders to the wheel, determined to make "Project Guyana" a successful pilot project. Work was done with the macaws flying overhead and monkeys swinging from tree to tree, an experience to take your breath away. We invite you to come and see for yourself!

As the Indigenous Parliamentarian for the largest region in Guyana, it would be remiss of me if I did not embrace such a noble cause and find ways of complimenting the same. Therefore, apart from my responsibilities as project coordinator for Foster Parrots-Guyana, I have held many discussions with leaders across the Rupununi, fellow



Photo: Marc Johnson

*Karen Windsor, Marc and Shirley Melville outside the cyber-cafe in Lethem.... yes, you can get your email in this remote town in south western Guyana!*

parliamentarians, renowned conservation organizations, tourism agencies, Guyana's wildlife division and other highly influential and concerned persons, on the way forward. The main issues were:

1. to find ways to sensitize our people about the need to value the riches of our biodiversity and,
2. to look at the weak areas of Guyana's wildlife regulations.

Educational programs on the National Television, regional educational outreach programs and the expansion of eco-tourism lodges were well supported by all of these groups. Guyana is a beautiful country with a rich biodiversity and vast uninhabited rainforests. Until the recent ban by the EU Guyana was the fifth largest exporter of live caught birds in the world, mainly parrots, macaws, parakeets, song birds as



Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP

*Representatives from all of the villages in the Rupununi don their finest traditional outfits for the opening ceremonies of Amerindian Heritage week, held in late September every year.*

Photo: Marc Johnson



*Karen and Shirley sit next to the Prime Minister at the Amerindian Heritage celebrations held in Shulinab, a village located at the southern tip of the Kanuku mountains.*





*The spider monkeys of Guyana seem to be as curious about us as we are excited to see them. This particular variety of spider monkey seems much furrier than their counterparts in other parts of South America.*

well as mammals (mainly primates), reptiles, amphibians and arthropods. Eco-tourism offers many, the opportunity to economically gain from the forests without destroying them. Therefore, Foster Parrots has started a most meaningful and humanitarian initiative. We invite you to join them and make a difference. Not only would you be able to see one of the wonders of the world, Kaitour Falls 741 single drop waterfalls, but you would be enriching the lives of many Amerindians. There would be a ripple effect with the empowerment of the Indigenous people, the creation of jobs, confidence building, improved standard of living, happy faces, and most of all the conservation of an important part of our planet Earth. As the saying goes, "If you don't climb the mountains, you can't see the view".

Foster Parrots we thank you and we are fortunate to have you as our partners in development. Let us continue to make this world a better and healthier place.

For more information on visiting Guyana please contact us at [Marc@fosterparrots.com](mailto:Marc@fosterparrots.com) or visit our website at [www.fosterparrots.com](http://www.fosterparrots.com)



*This year saw the first celebration of Jane Goodall's "Roots & Shoots" International Peace Day at the Nappi school where some 85 children and their teachers are now linked to schools in the US via the Foster Parrots "Video Pal" program.*

# WPT USA branch

## The joy of automatic gifts!

Would you be willing to trade in one gourmet coffee drink a week to help parrots? Buy a fancy toy for those wild birds? Or treat them to a luscious pomegranate or organic kiwi every day if they'd indulge? For the amount of a daily piece of fruit, a weekly coffee, or a monthly parrot toy you could have the pleasure of giving a substantial gift to wild parrots. We are happy to offer the ability to make your gift to WPT USA automatic either by direct deposit from your bank account or as a reoccurring charge on your credit card. Gifts may be made monthly, semi-annually or annually. You won't miss the renewal cards, the memory lapses or the check writing. The parrots will benefit from a reliable source of funds and your contribution goes farther as we spend a bit less time on annual renewals. Contact Joanna Eckles at 651-275-1877 or [usa@worldparrottrust.org](mailto:usa@worldparrottrust.org) for details.

## Make your holiday purchases count!

The holiday shopping season is upon us. We would like to invite you to consider supporting the World Parrot Trust-USA through an organization called iGive.com. By going through iGive.com to the stores you might normally purchase from online you can have a percentage of your purchase donated to WPT USA. The iGive.com network contains over 650 well-known online stores. Depending on the store, anywhere from 1% to 26% of your purchase is donated here to help parrots. If you join iGive.com and make a purchase within 45 days from one of 650 or so participating stores, iGive.com will donate \$5 FREE!

### How it works

1. Go to iGive.com and join to Support World Parrot Trust-USA. It's FREE, private, & easy.
2. Shop at iGive.com at familiar stores like Lands' End, Office Depot, JCPenney, Neiman Marcus, Expedia, Barnes & Noble, and eBay to mention just a few!
3. Up to 26% of EACH purchase gets donated to World Parrot Trust-USA!
4. And, if you download iGive.com's 'shopping window' you will get a notice on your screen when you are shopping on a site within the network when you may not have known you were. That way, even if you go online to shop without going through iGive to that store, the donation still goes to World Parrot Trust USA.

## USA Store Update

Our USA Online Store is 1 year old! We have learned a lot this year and continue to try to update the store features to make it easier for you to join, renew and purchase items. Thank you for your comments and suggestions. Some we have incorporated, some we are still working on!

The main store questions we still get are about Logins and Passwords at checkout. A Login name and Password are optional. They simply make it easier when you visit the store at a later time. You have 3 choices at checkout:

1. Create a New Account: Choose this option to set up the Login name and password of your choice for future visits.
2. Place an Order without an Account
3. Login to Existing Account: Use this option to enter your login and password if you created an account on a previous visit.

## Attention Birdwatchers in USA and Canada

Great Backyard Bird Count - February 17-20, 2006

Everyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to seasoned experts. During the count, bird watchers tally up birds for as little as 15 minutes, or for as long as they like, keeping track of the highest number of each bird species they see together at one time. People are encouraged to report birds from public lands and local parks in the United States and Canada, as well as from their backyards. Participants enter their numbers online at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc) and can explore sightings maps, lists, and charts as the count progresses. Contact 1-800-843-BIRD (1-800-843-2473) for more information.

# Burrowing Parrots

## an agricultural pest?

By LIC. M. RITA PÉREZ, Biol. MAURICIO FAILLA, VERÓNICA SEIJAS, Dr. PETRA QUILLFELDT & Dr. JUAN F. MASELLO

Burrowing Parrots or Patagonian Conures (*Cyanoliseus patagonus*), well known to *PsittaScene* readers, are one of the most southern Neotropical parrots. In Argentina they occur from the Andes slopes in the Northwest to the Patagonian steppes in the South. They breed in colonies, digging their own nest burrows by tunneling into the face of sandstone, limestone, or earth cliffs (see *PsittaScene* Vol 15 No 4: 12-13, *PsittaScene* Vol 16 No 2: 7-9 and *PsittaScene* Vol 17 No 2: 12-14. Formerly, these parrots were very common in Argentina, but their range has been reduced considerably since the second half of the XIX century, and now they are only regionally abundant. The decline of the Burrowing Parrots is in part due to persecution as a crop pest, increasing conversion of grassland to croplands and trapping for the live bird trade.

In Argentina, Burrowing Parrots are officially considered an agricultural pest according to the Argentinean National Law of Sanitary Defense of the Agricultural Production of 1963 (Act no. 6704/63). However, the only previous objective research on this topic is consistent with our impression that except for marginal agricultural areas and exceptional events, damage has never been intense (for further reading we recommend: *Bucher, E.H. 1992. Neotropical parrots as agricultural pests. In: New World Parrots in Crisis: Solutions From Conservation Biology. Edited by S.R. Beissinger & N.F.R. Snyder, pp. 201-219. New York and London, Smithsonian*

*Institution Press*). Damage is almost always related to bad agricultural practices, eroded soil, inadequate climatic conditions or insufficient water supply. Despite this, lethal methods of control, such as nest poisoning, massive nesting habitat destruction, roosting tree destruction, use of poisoned bait and shooting of the birds, have been carried out during years in various regions of Argentina, without objective quantification of real damage and adequate consideration of alternatives and consequences.

Since November 2004, we have carried out a detailed study of the very poorly known

diet of Burrowing Parrots and their potential interaction with local agriculture in Northeastern Patagonia. This is the region where the Burrowing Parrot colony of El Cóndor is located. A common claim of the farmers of Northeastern Patagonia is that every year the Burrowing Parrots completely destroy their crops and thus ruin them. But because the region is a marginal agricultural area, very much eroded in some sectors and depending in most cases on irrigation, it is logical to doubt the validity of these claims. The local government has received claims of thousands of dollars on several occasions from local farmers that think the authorities must economically compensate them for losses caused by wildlife, mainly parrots and geese.

As a part of our study, and in co-operation with the biologist Mauricio Failla, Director of the local Wildlife Division of the province of Río Negro, and his wife Verónica Seijas, a questionnaire was distributed to local farmers in order to gather information on the damage to crops caused by parrots in the region around the Burrowing Parrot colony at El Cóndor. This initiative, partly funded by the WPT and a generous donation from the photographer Don Preisler, also aims to investigate the perception that farmers have about bird damage to crops, in particular Burrowing Parrots. This information, together with our own future estimates of bird damage to crops, will help us to assess the real extent of the damage caused by Burrowing Parrots and to propose management measures to mitigate them, if necessary. It is crucial to understand the perception that farmers have



A burrowing parrot chick.

Photo: Petra Quillfeldt



Patchy fields like these are easily attacked by Burrowing Parrots. The damage is usually not attributed to the eroded soil or poor agricultural practices but to the birds.

Photo: Petra Quillfeldt

of the problem if we want to develop mitigating measures that they will be ready to accept.

Between December 2004 and February 2005 we interviewed 70 farmers in the districts of Adolfo Alsina (province of Río Negro) and Patagones (province of Buenos Aires). These districts are the ones daily visited during the breeding season by feeding flocks of the Burrowing Parrot colony at El Cóndor. It is important to bear in mind that none of the farmers in the region are subsistence farmers. In the questionnaire we asked the farmers about characteristics of their crops and fields, the occurrence of damage to their crops caused by birds and wildlife in general, the size of the affected areas and about the implementation and effectiveness of measures of damage control. Most of the interviewed farmers have been extremely co-operative with our queries and we thank them very much.

The results we obtained from this first questionnaire show that the level of damage tends to be overstated. Of 40 farmers interviewed in the district Adolfo Alsina, only 20 (50%) reported some kind of damage to their crops caused by birds. This figure, although important, is much less than that one might expect after a casual talk with a local farmer or after looking at the claims they presented to the local government. Only 7 (18%) mentioned that only Burrowing Parrots caused the damage. Another 8 farmers (20%) pointed out that Burrowing Parrots together with the Upland Goose (*Chloephaga picta*) were responsible of the damage. Lastly, the 5 remaining farmers (12%) pointed out that other birds such as Monk Parakeets (*Myiopsita monachus*), Austral Thrushes (*Turdus falcklandii*) or Field Flickers (*Colaptes campestris*), were responsible for the damage. The main affected crops in this district were maize sunflower and oats. Farmers also pointed out damage on millet and almonds. The extent of damage was variable but in most cases relatively low. Farmers stated that 10% to 100% of their maize crops were affected, although in most cases damage oscillated between 10 and 20%, with only two small fields of 5 and 8 hectares each being seriously affected. It is known that in small fields damage tends to be much higher than in large ones, because the parrots access the fields from the margins. Also, fields in poor condition (eroded and with patchy crop) are much more easily affected (see Photo on page 10). Oat and sunflower showed a similar situation.

Patagones, is the sector of Northeastern Patagonia claiming for the most serious Burrowing Parrot damage to crops in all



Photo: JDC

*Dr. Juan Masello inspecting a young chick back at the colony in El Condor. Whilst his scientific studies have focused on the breeding birds, Juan's team has expanded the scope of their efforts to include educational work at the colony and surrounding communities, and developing a better understanding of their foraging in neighbouring regions.*

Argentina. There, only 11 (37%) of 30 farmers surveyed, reported the occurrence of bird damage to their crops. Only 8 implicated Burrowing Parrots as the main cause of the damage. Only 6 farmers thought the damage caused by Burrowing Parrots affected their profits noticeably. In this area the main crops affected were wheat, sunflower and oats. Most farmers surveyed in this area did not want to answer our question regarding the size of the affected areas, but claimed that the damage extended over large areas. Because they did not give exact figures we doubt the validity of their claims.

The majority of the farmers surveyed indicated that shooting of birds in general and parrots in particular, was the most commonly used method in the region to control crop damage. Although illegal, some of them also reported the use of poisoned baits as a measure of control. But all the farmers surveyed recognized that these two methods of control were ineffective and the cost for bullets and poison often exceeded that of the damage.

As a very encouraging result we found that some farmers in the region use non-lethal methods of damage prevention, like dense sowing of their crops, sowing and harvesting at times when the risk of damage is lowest, or sowing unattractive crops surrounding the main crops (usually rye surrounding wheat). The farmers using those non-lethal methods assured us that they were very effective control methods. In addition to being very effective, those non-lethal methods of damage control had little economical cost.

In the next months we will repeat the questionnaires to a larger number of farmers in order to more precisely identify the most affected sectors. After that we will start quantifying the occasional damage to the most affected crops. All this information will allow us, in co-operation with the local Wildlife Division and the local farmers, to develop management measures to mitigate, where necessary, the damage caused to crops without harming or risking the Burrowing Parrot of El Cóndor.

## 'In my opinion....':

We have decided to run regular opinion pieces in *Psittascene*. If you have issues you would like to see discussed here that you think our readers would be interested in, please contact us at [uk@worldparrottrust.org](mailto:uk@worldparrottrust.org) with initial suggestions.

# Does private aviculture matter to parrot conservation? part two

By EB CRAVENS

**Much of the way the conservation community looks at private aviculture has to do with the environments in which aviculturists house their birds. This was abruptly brought to my attention as far back as 1991 when I was attending a lecture at the annual AFA Convention. One respected European speaker, while describing his visit to a successful U.S. breeder facility, used the words: "The parrots are kept in cages-I will not call them aviaries."**

That single phrase set me thinking about all the hundreds of bare, lackluster psittacine flights I had viewed, many lined up row upon row in dull, unimaginative barn-like establishments.

Such smallish bare wire cages, raised up off the ground and furnished with two perches, a nestbox, a food and water dish, not only offer no stimulation for the intelligent birds kept within, but they do nothing to bring out any natural behaviours or latent instinctual savvy in parrots. Furthermore, they degrade the international reputation of captive birdkeeping in the eyes of ornithologists and the avian conservation community.

How much scientific knowledge could ever be gleaned from observing birds in such dismally sterile habitats? To the contrary, parrots kept thusly are much more likely to manifest dysfunctional and misleading mannerisms, if not neuroses in their day to day activities.

Sometimes I feel like certain breeders are unwittingly urging their parrots to reproduce in such situations by denying them a quality of life to the point that sexual activity becomes the single remaining high point in the birds' existence! I mean, what else is there for a pair of hookbills to do in such a barren environment?

Want to emphasize quality over quantity at an avicultural facility? Try breeding parrots in a large tree-planted flight with the ground and sky, the sun, wind and rain, bushes and grass-covered soil, hollow logs and growing berries, with wild birds outside and others of the same parrot species nearby to observe and call between. Stop feeding them the same boring processed and dry foods every day of the year. Offer a natural nesting chamber inside the flight where the birds can be around and below and on top of it. (One they can even "defend" a bit against human intruders!) Give them new things to do and items to forage.



Photo: EB Cravens

*Parrot freeflight is perilous, but it is one way to train chicks to be more savvy than their captive parents.*

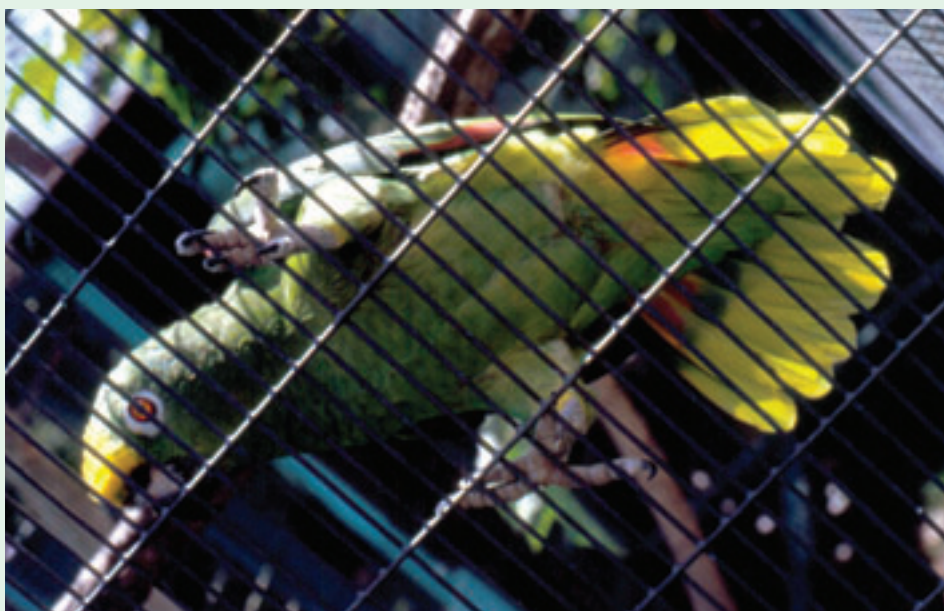
Then sit back and watch your hookbills come alive. Under such enhanced conditions, you will not be merely breeding them; you will begin teaching them-and of course, will soon commence learning from them as their truly natural gestures and norms begin to emerge.

Such aviaries are not only fun and highly educational for the keeper, they likely earn the respect of those that come to view them, enhancing aviculture's standing in the scientific community. Remember, if routine private aviculture is going to ever really matter to world parrot conservation, then it must earn that status. And that means raising its standards. It also implies some years of effort tearing down the poor image we all have inherited.

Want to emphasize conservation in your breeding flock? Change your focus from multi-caged quantity to fewer birds and quality. Make a conscious sustained effort to concentrate on a single species of parrot, or several species, working to establish a multi-generational family tree which can become a useful study group. This does not have to be a severely endangered CITES I species; so many psittacines are declining in numbers in the wilds these days that no one can positively predict just which ones will be sorely threatened ten, twenty, thirty years from now.

If in doubt, choose a species less common in captivity. This often reflects the ones with smaller numbers or range in the wilds. Moreover, should private aviculture actually lose many more of these formerly numerous yet difficult to breed parrots, then it has once again proved itself a failure, and perhaps does not deserve mention as a valid conservation entity.

My own choice of the Yellow-fronted Amazon, made almost twenty years ago, had nothing to do with rarity or conservation need; it was done purely out of knowing that my fascination with this



Photos: EB Cravens

*Is it really conservation to produce psittacines which can only survive in cages?*



Keeping only one parrot in a genus practically eliminates the chances of offspring learning many non-species calls or mannerisms.

species made it one I could offer love and commitment to for a lifetime of study and friendship. More than a decade later I see fewer and fewer Yellow-fronts in captive aviculture-and I soberly worry how safe *Amazona ochrocephala* is going to be in its native lands.

Once you are blessed with reproduction in a breeding program, take careful account of each of your baby birds and its potential to help its own kind. Evaluate whether hens are more important, or well trained males with no human imprinting. Raise chicks in species clutches, wherever possible avoiding any mixing of fledgling amazons or pionus or macaws of different races. Work to suppress noisemaking contact or vocalization "pollution" between different species of the same genus. Choose a psittacine such

as the Noble Macaw (*Diopsittaca nobilis*), or the Gold-Capped Conure (*Aratinga auricapilla*) or the Superb Parakeet (*Polytelis swainsonii*) and establish a controlled colony habitat where young captive raised birds can learn from elders. Respect and protect every wild-trapped member of your species family (even non-producing retirees!) for the incalculable wild savvy they have to teach your offspring.

As we can all see, it is a long road ahead. Up to now, private aviculture has seemed to demonstrate that each succeeding generation of birds it breeds are further removed in abilities and instinctive wisdom from the ones before them. Reverse this trend, and we will be well on the way to earning the title "conservationists."



Natural environments bring out a greater number of scientifically valid avian behaviours.



## Parrots at Play Calendars 2006

The 2006 Parrots at Play Calendar was produced to benefit parrot causes and features wonderful photos and stories of pet birds from around the world. The photos represent the winning entries in the Parrots at Play annual photo contest. For more information or to join in next year's contest see [www.parrots-at-play.org](http://www.parrots-at-play.org).

The wall calendar is 17 inches high x 11 inches wide and is printed on high quality paper on a four-color printing press. The artwork is colorful and vibrant.



### Purchase from World Parrot Trust USA online store:

Calendars are \$16.50 including shipping and handling. USA supporters can order at [www.parrottrustusa.org](http://www.parrottrustusa.org) or send a check to World Parrot Trust USA, PO Box 353, Stillwater, MN 55082. Supplies are limited.

### Purchase from World Parrot Trust UK/International online store:

Our Thanks go to the company Northern Parrots ([www.24Parrot.com](http://www.24Parrot.com)) who kindly

donated 50 of these Calendars to WPT UK for us to sell direct. Calendars are £10 including postage and packing. International (except USA)



supporters can order via [www.worldparrottrust.org](http://www.worldparrottrust.org) or send a cheque to World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HB, UK. Supplies are limited.

### Purchase directly from Parrots-at-Play:

[www.parrots-at-play.org](http://www.parrots-at-play.org). In the message box where it says "I want my donation to go to" - simply specify your charity as World Parrot Trust/World Parrot Trust-USA and they will reserve a \$10 donation on each calendar purchase for us.

# The Meyer's Parrot

## - an African parrot

By STEVE BOYES, Research Centre for African Parrot Conservation, University of KwaZulu-Natal

With the widest distribution of any other African parrot and common throughout its range, the Meyer's Parrot (*Poicephalus meyeri*) may be considered the parrot best suited to life on the African continent. The Meyer's Parrot has previously not been studied in the wild and their habitat requirements are relatively unknown. No prior conservation action for the Meyer's Parrot has been implemented. Changes on the continent may align to threaten this little known parrot, as we see live capture and persecution escalating. The species has been observed as a crop pest throughout its range predominantly due to man's encroachment on its habitat. The resulting conflict between the two species is escalating and needs to be managed correctly.

The Research Centre for African Parrot Conservation (RAPC) has done work on the Brown-headed Parrot (*Poicephalus cryptoxanthus*), the Ruppell's Parrot (*Poicephalus rueppelli*), and the Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*), thus specializing in the *Poicephalus* species that have seen decline in or have limited population and/or distribution. The Meyer's Parrot Project was started in the Okavango Delta, Botswana, on the southern tip of its range in 2004. This project looked at the interaction of two subspecies of the parrot, *Poicephalus m. damarensis* and *Poicephalus m. transvaalensis* (they are distinguished from each other by a yellow patch on their crown). Both subspecies are persecuted as a crop pest in the Northern Province, South Africa. From this study, the designs for a broader project were generated. That project will look at why this parrot has been so successful in Africa and maintained six similar sub-species through its range. The study in the Okavango Delta indicates that its wide distribution is supported by habitat-tolerance with a preference for broad-leaved or savanna woodland. For 2006, the study will remain in the Okavango Delta, continuing to look at nest site characteristics, habitat preferences, the food item calendar, daily flight activity, breeding

biology, and vocalisations, thus providing the tools for the analysis of the other subspecies through Africa in 2007. These data will provide us with a clear picture of the continental requirements of this species for the first time, and set a benchmark for parrot conservation in Africa.

I would like to put forward the hypothesis that all the *Poicephalus* species have a common lineage from the Meyer's Parrot. This is supported by the fact that the distribution of the Meyer's touches on (with limited discontinuity) the known distributions of all the other *Poicephalus* species - no other species is geographically continuous with all the others. The Meyer's Parrot has been found to be a food item generalist throughout its range, while the other *Poicephalus* species researched have shown, to varying degrees, a dependence on a limited number of food items within their primary habitat. I put forward that this could be used as an indicator of the age of the species. Basically, a precursor for speciation is the isolation of the gene pool through a vicariance event. Time is an important factor that needs to be accounted for, and feeding behaviour could be an indicator of this. It can be hypothesized that once a subspecies becomes more and more dependant on specific food items it can move into new habitat types and plant communities as they become available, this allows the subspecies to isolate itself and divergent evolution sets up a new species over time. DNA sequencing of blood samples taken from as many *Poicephalus* species and subspecies as possible could be used to distinguish convergence and true phylogenetic relationships between them. A considerable amount of time is required for physiology to change in line with food items and conditions in a new habitat type (e.g. a bigger bill or smaller size). Thus there should be a long period during which the species is vulnerable to changes in the habitat, especially if these changes impact the food items or nest cavities the



Meyer's Parrot feeding on a Sausage Tree flower (*Kigelia africana*).

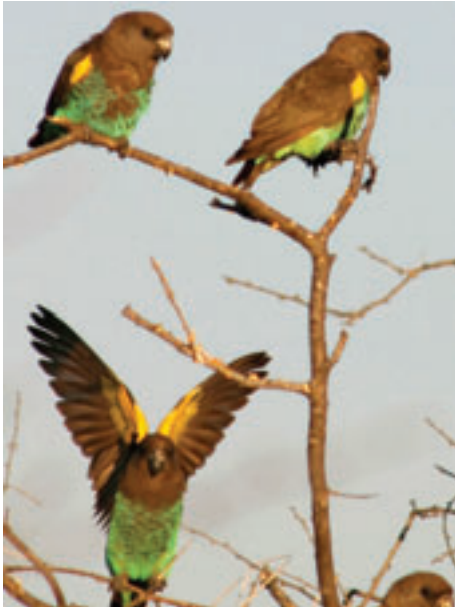
“emergent” species is specialising in. For example the harvesting of Yellowwood (*Podocarpus falcatus*) in South Africa contributed to the rapid decline of the Cape Parrot. Hybridisation between the different *Poicephalus* species has been observed in captivity and reported in the wild. The Meyer's Parrot has been confirmed to hybridise with the Ruppell's Parrot and the Brown-headed Parrot in captivity, and has been reported to “hybridise extensively” in the wild in a contact zone between their distributions. This is evidence of the close genetic association between the *Poicephalus* species.

How do we then prioritise biodiversity conservation? Should we focus on endangered species in the wild and allocate resources reactively? Yes, investment should focus on programs that support endangered species, but how are we assessing status and are the methods we are using proactive? The Meyer's Parrot Project could be used to tackle these theoretical problems by examining the possibility of divergent evolution from the Meyer's Parrot, the possible correlation of the age of the species and susceptibility to decline due to disturbance, and the possibility of using DNA analysis as a means of identifying species that are younger and thus more vulnerable. This, used in conjunction with existing indicators, could be used as a conservation prioritisation tool in the future. Of course, discussions such as these are overshadowed by the fact that any relationship finds itself influenced by innumerable other relationships and factors. For the relationship between age of the species and susceptibility to decline to stand, the climate must remain constant, no exotic species are to be introduced, and live capture and trade must be constant for all species being assessed.

The Meyer's Parrot Project has already yielded some interesting results over the past one and half years in the Okavango



Typical landscape of the Okavango Delta in flood 2005. Riverine forest is the primary habitat of the Meyer's at this time of year.



Young Meyer's Parrot socialising in the mid-morning. Arch-angelling, allo-preening and preening in the sun. In the winter.

Delta. The intensive study site was located in Kwedi Concession on the NE edge of the Okavango Delta, an area reputed for its diversity of habitat types with all 11 land classifications represented. The first year of the project was aimed at the study of the breeding biology, feeding biology and nest site characteristics of the species, while mapping the study site, delineating the vegetation communities, recording climate, and developing a food item calendar for frugivorous birds in the Okavango Delta (for comparison with the food item calendar generated for the Meyer's). There were 51 potential food items, including the Sausage Tree flowers and fruits (*Kigelia africana*), the pods from the Silver Terminalia (*Terminalia sericea*), the unripe fruits from the African Ebony (*Diospyros mespiliformis*), African Mangostene (*Garcinia livingstoni*) and Marula (*Sclerocarya birrea subsp. Caffra*), and the figs from the Sycamore Fig (*Ficus sycamorus*) throughout the year. The parrots were observed to be feeding on 38



Fledgling Meyer's Parrot feeding on the Sausage fruit (*Kigelia africana*). Stripping the fruit in half to expose the seeds.

different food items in the study area over 2004/2005, and preferences mirrored availability on the food item calendar. We consistently found the parrots feeding on the unripe fruits, to avoid competition with baboons and monkeys. The parrots were never present if the baboons or monkeys were feeding in the canopy. The parrots only feed on the kernels or seeds of the fruits and pods, and very seldom were observed eating the flesh. We will do crop analysis of the chicks in the coming season. The parrots freely associated with other frugivorous birds feeding in the canopy, only becoming competitive and defensive when near an active nest site or roosting cavity.

The parrots were observed successfully warding off attempts by a Little Sparrowhawk (*Accipter minullius*) to capture fledglings and nests were observed being robbed by a Gymnogene (*Polyboroides typus*), Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus vocifer*) and Tree Monitor (*Varanus prasinus*). Gymnogene were frequently observed investigating nest sites, so we assume they are a primary predator of the Meyer's Parrot. We observed the Meyer's competing for nest cavities with Lilac-Breasted Roller (*Coracias caudatus*), Burchell's starlings (*Lamprotornis australis*), Woodland Kingfishers (*Halcyon senegalensis*), and Red-billed Woodhoopoes (*Phoeniculus purpurea*).

Even though the parrots are secondary cavity nesters, they were observed to modify the nest cavities by widening the entrance and excavating the main chamber of the nest hole. Over the period, April - June, the primary breeding season of the Meyer's, ten out of the twelve active sites were in Knobthorn Acacia (*Acacia nigrescens*), with the other two being in a Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) and Mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*). Basically, the parrots seemed to be selecting nest cavities excavated by barbets or woodpeckers, 6-12m above the ground, and in a dead tree or a tree with a large portion of dead canopy. From this an interesting association can be drawn. Knobthorn Acacias are heavily disturbed by elephant throughout their range, whereby they strip the bark past the cambium killing off portions of the canopy or eventually ring-barking the tree. So, in the absence of elephant disturbance there would be less dead branches, less open parts of the canopy, and less potential nest sites for the Meyer's Parrot. Every Knobthorn Acacia with a nest cavity had a dead portion of the canopy and evidence of elephant disturbance on the trunk. This is probably not a limiting factor, but an interesting interrelationship nonetheless.

Up until this point we have been supported exclusively by the RAPC and Wilderness



Meyer's Parrot nesting in a dead Knobthorn Acacia (*Acacia nigrescens*) – this was an active nest site producing one fledgling.

Safaris, and have been limited in our resources. Our trusty vehicle at the moment is a 1972 Series 3 LandRover, and has taken us through two rainy seasons with the odd crank and a bit of care. Okavango Wilderness Safaris has provided us with access to these remote wilderness areas and the ideal study site. Otherwise, we gathered together the radio telemetry, vocalisation and climbing equipment from past RAPC projects and the university community. Acquiring funding has been difficult in that the Meyer's is not threatened. We need future donors or funding to enable us to venture forward into the next stage of the project, whereby we use the Meyer's Parrot as the centre piece in a broader project looking at all nine *Poicephalus* species in Africa. The project would require transport and living costs for a 9-month research trip through Central and Eastern Africa. The project would focus on gathering data on the six sub-species of the Meyer's Parrot, and gathering blood samples from as many of the *Poicephalus* species and sub-species, thus enabling us to distinguish convergence and true phylogenetic relationships between the *Poicephalus* species through DNA analysis. The project would complete the story of the Meyer's Parrot and that of the *Poicephalus* parrots, an African story and a valuable project.

If any person or agency would like to contribute as a donor or provide technical assistance (e.g. DNA sequencing) to the Meyer's Parrot Project, then they can contact myself, Steve Boyes, on [meyersproject@yahoo.com](mailto:meyersproject@yahoo.com) or Prof. Mike Perrin on [perrin@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:perrin@ukzn.ac.za). The World Parrot Trust could also be contacted for further details.

The Research Centre for African Parrot Conservation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal is a non-profit organisation and experienced in administering research grants and donations to the fund.



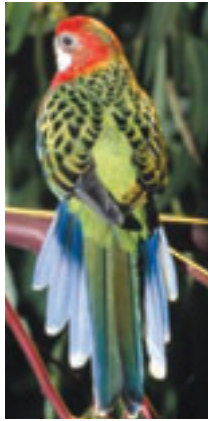
## Parrot promotion creates flurry of calls

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK0508/S00117.htm>, Environment Bay of Plenty, Wednesday, 17 August 2005

“Have you seen this parrot?”

When Environment Bay of Plenty wanted to find out more about an Australian parrot that was damaging horticultural crops in the region, staff asked for help from local residents. And they got it.

Over a period of two weeks, more than 1000 people called a special number to report sightings of the distinctive Eastern Rosella.



*Sightings of the Eastern Rosella flew in from all over the region.*

“We were absolutely swamped,” admits pest animal coordinator David Moore. “We had no idea there were so many of these pest birds within the region, or that people would be so very helpful.”

Mr Moore launched the short, intensive promotion because he was receiving complaints of Eastern Rosella damaging fruit crops. The parrots can also carry diseases that are a potential threat to our native parrots, such as kakariki and kea.

“We’d heard lots of stories but had no verified information. We didn’t have any real idea of how many were out there or how big the problem might be.”

Now, of course, he has “a massive amount” of data on their distribution and numbers. The information will now be checked for duplicate sightings. After that, locations will be plotted on a regional map, along with the numbers in each area.

The next step, in association with Massey University, will be to test a sample of eastern rosellas for beak and feather disease. The results will help determine what follows. “We will be looking at options, and one of them may be some form of control.”

Eastern Rosellas (*Platycerus eximius*) are Australian parrots that first established in Dunedin around 1910. They are larger and much more colourful than native parakeet, with an average size of 330mm. The birds feed on a wide range of seeds, berries, fruits and blossoms.

The Eastern Rosella is listed as a surveillance pest animal in Environment Bay of Plenty’s regional pest management strategy.



# WPT partners reach thousands

By JOANNA ECKLES

At the end of each day last summer the Animal Encounters staff at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh (PA, USA) anxiously awaited a call on the 2-way radio. The daily update from the finance department told them not only how close they were to beating last year’s fundraising goal, but also how much bird seed to put in their display sign indicating their new total. The fundraising efforts of this modest show have far outpaced even their expectations. With just 10 public performances per week to crowds of up to 100 people this show is small by some standards. Still, their band of birds along with those visiting for the show season from Natural Encounters (NEI) in Florida have made a big impression on Aviary guests. The birds are trained to demonstrate natural behaviors like flight and foraging and the message focuses on natural history and conservation. The show culminates with the flight of a Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*) followed by a small flock of macaws while the trainers talk about the work of the World Parrot Trust. After the show, visitors line up to hand donations to a very focused Collared Raven (*Corvus torquatus*) who stuffs bill after bill into a large donation box. A Red-fronted Macaw (*Ara rubrogenys*) accepts them as well but with a bit more finesse! Often visitors stand in both lines just for the opportunity to interact with these two very different birds.

That image should make it clear why we so deeply appreciate these partnerships. They not only provide people with a magical bird experience they’ll never forget but they connect us with an audience that we would not otherwise reach. As the season progressed, the daily radio call made people throughout the aviary pause to listen. When their initial goal was surpassed with two weeks left in the summer season, cheers went up from other staff listening in. The show ended up raising nearly \$15,000 for conservation and dedicated half of that to our fund for Red-fronted Macaws. In fact, it was the Aviary’s fundraising efforts that made it

possible for us to consider a survey of this species in 2004. Their continued support ensures that this work will continue. That’s good news for Red-fronted Macaws and for the dedicated trainers at the Aviary who work so hard to get this message out and to make a connection between the birds they work with and the wild birds in need.

The staff from NEI perform shows all over the world either on their own or in conjunction with other facilities like the National Aviary. The focal point of their year for over 10 years has been a 3 week show at the State Fair of Texas in Dallas. These 96 shows represent months of



The National Aviary Show Staff (L to R): Caitlin Stone (the artist who made the display board), Teri Grendzinski with Red fronted Macaw “Melon,” Nicole Begley and Elizabeth Bruccoleri (kneeling) and Cari Clements with Palm Cockatoo “Palmer.” Not pictured: Erin Estell.

Photo: Cari Clements





*The Collared Raven is just one of the birds that collects donations at the National Aviary and State Fair of Texas. After having watched the show the visitors are keen to support conservation.*

training, planning and exhaustive preparation just to get the birds and messages ready. From the very 1st year, they have added to this workload by taking on merchandise sales and fundraising to raise money for conservation. The first day of this year's show they found the fair crowds more than willing to pay the \$2 pricetag for our FLY FREE wristbands. By the end of 3 weeks NEI sold over 2,600 bands at \$5 each, with all the proceeds going to our continued work on the EU trade ban.

Partnerships between World Parrot Trust

and zoos and related parks really began with the shows at Paradise Park, our UK headquarters. All along the park has been somewhat synonymous with World Parrot Trust and their fundraising efforts on our behalf have been extraordinary. This year they added a new component to their Bird of Prey program to highlight the EU Trade ban. They explained the importance of the ban in Europe and sold precisely 4,664 wristbands over the course of the show season. Never to miss a gag, the show crew didn't wear the bands the traditional way. Birds don't wear bands on their wrists! During the show the trainers hike up their



*At the end of the Bird of Prey 'Eagles of Paradise' show at Paradise Park, the visitors can purchase the TradeBand wristbands or make a donation to World Parrot Trust.*

trousers to display their bands properly placed around their ankles. Brilliant!

You won't meet many people as energetic and excited about what they do as these creative keepers, trainers, and presenters at zoos and parks all over the world. We are ever grateful for their enthusiastic support of the World Parrot Trust and their efforts to make a real connection between the marvellous ambassadors in their care and the wild birds that need more partners working together than ever.



### Dear WPT

When the August issue landed in my mailbox, I pulled it out of the plastic and looked at the front cover, like I do every issue – well, there's a parrot wrapped up in a net, I thought. I really hope he's playing some kind of fun game. Obviously, I was hoping against hope, and one look inside the issue cleared things right up.

Your editorial said that you generally avoid graphic and gruesome images. But I am glad you used the photo on the cover and the additional ones inside. The cover image is devastating, heart-crushing, unspeakably painful to see, and those in the article aren't much better – the mind reels at seeing the flock in the cage and on the perch, and one shudders to think of these animals' likely fate.

Yet, as miserable as these images continue to make me, it was important for me to see them. They remind me that the parrot trade is still real, still wrong, still indefensible, and continues to affect individual animals that have a right to independence and self-determination. They remind me that the people who traffic in parrots need some other endeavor to support themselves and reasons to preserve their natural resources. And they remind me that in our everyday lives, our choices need to reflect our values and support those working for positive change.

I continue to hope that continued efforts of WPT and other organizations can bring about yet more steps in the right direction, and make the parrot trade part of a long-lost, hard-to-imagine past.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Claudia Bauer, Oakland, CA

## World Parrot Day at Seaview Wildlife Encounter

By NAOMI WHITE

We planned for this year's conservation and fund raising project at Seaview Wildlife Encounter, (formerly Flamingo Park) to be centred around our parrots. We are constantly inundated with requests to rehome unwanted pet parrots and our daily talk and presentation attracts many questions and comments from our visitors. Our aim was to raise awareness of the issues threatening parrots in the wild and also to offer help and advice to parrot owners on well-being, health, nutrition and behaviour of their pets. We had on display information on diets, advice on housing requirements and educational material to enable people to become aware of the trade in wild birds. After visiting Paradise Park in Cornwall and seeing the Fly Free wrist bands we decided to promote them throughout the whole of July and August at our daily parrot talk. The petition signing went very well indeed with over a thousand signatures to date (even our resident Senegal parrot "Dougie" was keen to sign!)



The August Bank Holiday weekend event was very well attended, the weather on the Isle of Wight was perfect and visitors took part in games and competitions like "hook a duck", tombola, face-painting and name the Patagonian Conure chicks. Several of the tame parrots joined in with the fun, including "Sammy" a Blue-fronted Amazon who sang opera to the crowd and a free flying display of a pair of young Yellow-fronted Amazons "Brutus and Nero".

Our very own (home-made) "Blue the Cockatoo" was a huge hit and helped convey the message to many of our visitors young and old. The Animal Care Team all enjoyed getting involved and worked hard to make the event a success turning their hand to face painting and answering questions for the public.



We would like to thank everyone involved especially those who visited over the weekend and gave their support so generously.

As well as the donations of £200 we raised for the World Parrot Trust and the £1,800 sales of the Fly Free TradeBands, we also managed to raise £1,000 towards designing a new aviary at Seaview Wildlife Encounter to secure a safe and enriching home for all the parrots in our care. We hope to repeat our parrot weekend next year.

## Drayton Manor support WPT

By JOYCE ROBERTS

This year Drayton Manor Zoo chose the World Parrot Trust as the charity we would like to raise funds for as part of our out of house conservation project. Therefore I have great pleasure in enclosing a cheque for £4,758.78 which is the amount we raised over the summer season.



Our dedicated zoo staff worked very hard selling badges, raffle tickets, running a 'tombola' stall and charging public to feed the sealions. I hope you will be able to put this money to good use.

## Parrot Day at Blackpool Zoo

By SARAH THOMAS

This summer, Blackpool Zoo and Dinosaur Safari raised over £2,500 for the World Parrot Trust.

The fundraising campaign was launched with "Parrot Day" on May Bank holiday, which included themed talks about the plight of many exotic birds and the trade in these endangered species.

There were lots of activities for the kids, including face painting, badge making and a chance to buy a wrist band to show their support for the conservation of these birds. The wrist bands proved a huge success and were sold throughout the summer in conjunction with the daily parrot displays.

Samantha Marshall, who was in charge of the displays said "This campaign creates awareness of the threats many birds face throughout the world. Our zoo visitors have shown overwhelming support through purchasing the wrist bands or making a donation. To many, the wrist bands are a

personal statement of their commitment to the conservation of birds."

In the future the zoo aims to continue it's support for the Trust, and with a new South American mixed bird and primate walk-through exhibit opening early next year, we will be able to educate and inspire people, as well as continuing to provide financial contributions to the World Parrot Trust.



Ruben presents a cheque for £2500 to Samantha Marshall for WPT.

## Run for the parrots

By WPT USA

Sometimes supporters make it really easy for us! A few months ago we heard about a road race benefiting World Parrot Trust. What a great idea! We loved it of course, but who was doing this and why? We tracked down the good folks at the Downtown Aquarium in Houston Texas after they generously donated the \$1,000 in proceeds from the run and found that they have many good reasons to share in the World Parrot Trust's mission. Downtown Aquarium is one of 2 AZA accredited Aquariums owned by Landry's Restaurant, who also own 27 Rainforest Cafés and several other Aquarium properties. The company has a history of supporting conservation through their involvement with Wild Aid, Houston Audubon, Texas Parks and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The Downtown Aquarium has a special tie to the conservation of both Ocean and Rainforest environments. They teach the public about these habitats through their exhibits and through outreach programs. Their programs feature many ambassadors including two Red-fronted Macaws. Patti Shoemaker, Curator of Mammals and Birds, said, "We wanted our conservation efforts to be a reflection of what we have in our collection." Appropriately, the funds will serve wild Red-fronted Macaws directly as we continue to survey this species and make plans for long term protection. We thank Downtown Aquarium, Landry's Restaurants, and Patti along with race organizer Mary Falcon and Aquarium Director of Biology Jim Pappas for making this 1st 5K run a success. They didn't even ask us to run or man the water stops!

# 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**



## Canadian Branch Re-launched

The Canadian branch of the World Parrot Trust is pleased to announce that they have re-launched and are ready to work to save parrots all over the globe.

Recently they attended the Canadian Parrot Conference at the Sheraton Hotel in Hamilton, Ontario which was arranged by Mark Hagen, Director of HARI, Chris White from Hamilton Aviary, Suzan Payne from the Golden Triangle Parrot Club, and Nathalie Lemieux from the Golden Triangle Parrot Club and Ontario Veterinary College's Wild Bird Clinic.

They heard excellent presentations by Jamie Gilardi, Director, the World Parrot Trust; Matthias Reinschmidt, Curator of Birds, Loro Parque; Irene Pepperberg, the Alex Studies; Barbara Heidenreich, Behaviourist; Susan Chamberlain from Bird Talk magazine; Dr. Michael Taylor, DVM, from Ontario Veterinary College and Dahljah Rahm, President, the Budgerigar and Foreign Bird Society. Topics ranged widely from solving companion parrot behaviour problems to avian disease diagnosis, and parrot conservation in South America.

The Canadian World Parrot Trust received many people at their booth, signed up 22 new members to the Trust, and sold a lot of WPT merchandise to support the European Trade Ban (Get Banded!) and other projects currently being completed by dedicated researchers.

They are looking forward to the future and to playing a significant role in the various projects throughout the world that need the World Parrot Trust's help. Anyone who is interested is encouraged to email them at: [Steve\\_Milpacher@telus.net](mailto:Steve_Milpacher@telus.net) or write to the address listed in our International Contacts.

## WPT International Contacts

### WPT Web Sites:

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**Italy:** <http://www.worldparrottrust.org/italia>

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## 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
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- Conservation** (Life) £1,000 / US\$1,500 / €1,500
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# Parrots in the Wild

Green-wing Macaw

*Ara chloroptera*

By © PETE OXFORD PHOTOGRAPHY

We're so thrilled with the idea of hundreds of thousands of birds flying free, we thought it might be fitting to cover both sides of the *PsittaScene* with stunning parrots in flight: these Red-and-Green or Green-wing Macaws on the wing over a forest in southern Brazil.

