

PSITTAScene

Magazine of the WORLD PARROT TRUST



Spring 2019



ABOUT THE WPT

Capture for the live-bird trade, habitat loss and other factors put wild parrots at risk. One in three parrot species are currently threatened in the wild.

As an international leader in parrot conservation and welfare, the World Parrot Trust works with researchers, in-country organisations, communities and governments to encourage effective solutions that save parrots.

Since 1989 the WPT has grown to become a global force that moves quickly to address urgent issues and support long-term projects. Over that time WPT has led or aided conservation and welfare projects in 43 countries for 70 species of parrot.

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ON THE COVER

The **White-winged Parakeet** (*Brotogeris versicolurus*) is found in a narrow strip of range from NE Brazil west to Perú. This lovely and personable little parrot is heavily trapped for the pet trade in South America, particularly in Perú.

Photo © Charles Bergman

Read more about the effects of trapping on this and other parrot species in Perú on **page 15**.



A message from the Editor

Greetings! We're well into year 2019, with the Trust busily continuing to do the work of saving parrots around the world. Once again we heartily thank you for your support of our efforts, and carry on in the spirit of your generous giving.

We'll continue to update you on WPT parrot projects/partnerships currently happening, share some research data, and allow for a bit of levity in what can sometimes be a sea of seriousness. In this issue we bring you a report from WPT Central America representative Rosa Elena Zegarra and her colleagues, that reveals the impact of the wild-bird trade in that country.

The Blue-throated Macaw Project team talks about the importance of involving local Bolivian communities in conservation work, and lauds their burgeoning ecotourism successes. And lastly, we have a lighthearted piece on the many morphological, behavioural and otherwise bewitching quirks found in wild parrots.

Enjoy-



Desi

Desi Milpacher
WPT Publications Editor

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR PARROTS



What will be your legacy?

By including the World Parrot Trust in your Will, trust or beneficiary designation, you are creating a personal legacy that will have a lasting impact for parrots.

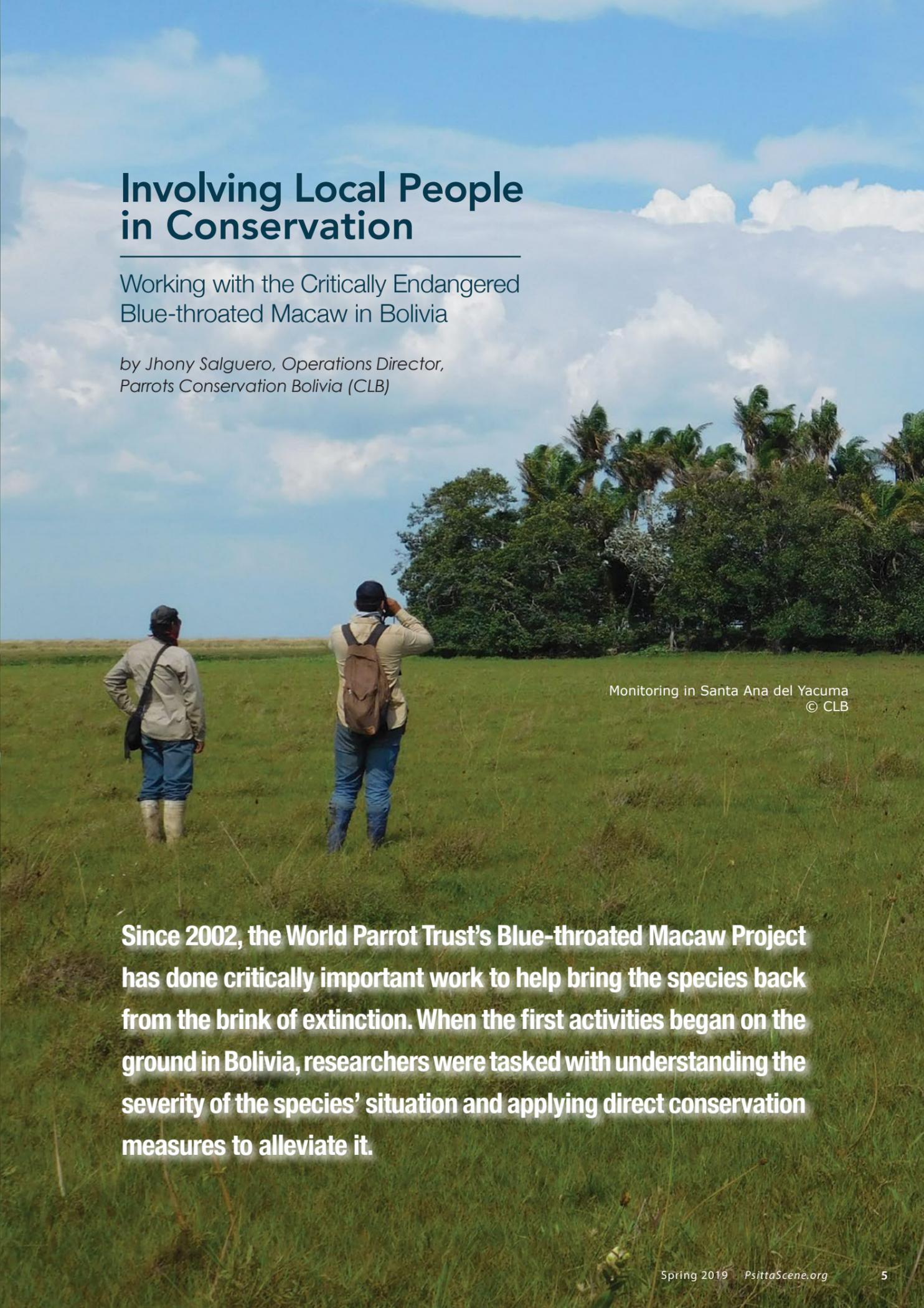
Visit parrots.org/legacy or contact the branch nearest you for more details (page 19.)

Red-and-green Macaws © Corey Raffel

Involving Local People in Conservation

Working with the Critically Endangered Blue-throated Macaw in Bolivia

by Jhony Salguero, Operations Director, Parrots Conservation Bolivia (CLB)



Monitoring in Santa Ana del Yacuma © CLB

Since 2002, the World Parrot Trust's Blue-throated Macaw Project has done critically important work to help bring the species back from the brink of extinction. When the first activities began on the ground in Bolivia, researchers were tasked with understanding the severity of the species' situation and applying direct conservation measures to alleviate it.

UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE BLUE-THROATED MACAW PROJECT, hundreds of people, including deeply committed and talented volunteers, are involved in the conservation of these birds. We were very clear from the start that the locals needed to be the real conservationists in this story, as they are the ones whose lives are tied to the macaws and other fellow creatures. *(A great example of this is the Duran family and their important role in Blue-throated Macaw conservation, featured in PsittaScene's Spring 2016 issue.)*

Recently, thanks to the creation of the APM (Área Protegida Municipal) Gran Mojós or Gran Mojós Municipal Protected Area, the local community is taking a leadership role in Blue-throated Macaw conservation. The Blue-throated Macaw Project supported the Protected Area's creation in February 2017, and provided the funding necessary to the people of Loreto for their innovative plan to manage the area. **In the Protected Area, which covers an area of 580,000 hectares, 35% of the known Blue-throated Macaw wild population exists, with 50% of their wild nests.** This fact makes the APM Gran Mojós a critical space for the preservation of the species.

In November 2018 we opened the first Interpretation Center for the Protected Area, located in the village of Loreto. The center has space for administrative work and management of the personnel in charge of the Protected Area. Most importantly, it serves as a place for continuing education for visitors, and to accommodate groups of researchers and professionals who want to contribute to the growth and benefit of Gran Mojós.

The Protected Area has a team of four highly dedicated people: a director, two park rangers and an interpretation center assistant, all of them from Loreto's village and neighbouring communities. Locals Luis, María, Jorge and Bismar are taking the lead on developing conservation activities to help the species. With training provided by the organisation Parrots Conservation Bolivia (CLB), they were able to build and install 27 nest boxes on four different private properties inside the Protected Area. The birds have bred on one of the tracts in the past and there are three others where there have been macaw sightings but not many natural cavities available for breeding.

The team is also carrying out the monitoring activities of those nest boxes, as well as collecting data on population numbers in the area. **Just a few weeks after the Gran Mojós team installed the boxes at least one of them was occupied by Blue-throated Macaws.** One of the nest boxes was taken over by a pair of birds which had laid three eggs in it! Is there anything more exciting?



A pair of Blue-throated Macaws take up residence in a nest box. © CLB



Team members prepare to lift a nest box into position. © CLB



A successful result! © CLB



Care and a good sense of balance are critical during installation. © CLB



Far left: A wild Blue-throat observes the observer.
Near left: An acrobatic macaw checks out a nest cavity.
Middle right: Children take part in educational activities at the Interpretation Center.
Far right: Monitoring and other activities are carried out on horseback.

The occupied nest box is located on a property where no breeding has been recorded before, which is a very important indicator of how the species is increasing its territory inside the Gran Mojos Protected Area. Chino Melgar, the owner of the 3 Estrellas Ranch, is excited to have a pair of Blue-throated Macaws breeding on his property. He is very interested in supporting the macaws' conservation, as well as in developing his ranch as an ecotourism destination where tourists from all over the world can see, photograph and enjoy the birds in the wild.

Supporting ecotourism related to Blue-throated Macaw conservation

is an important component that the project has developed in the Protected Area. The idea has had success prior to this at La Esperancita cattle ranch, which has been an ecotourism destination for three years. Last year a second macaw-observation location was introduced at La Cantina cattle ranch, to the delight of visitors.

The road to access the property was fixed with the Protected Area's support, and three local tourism companies with a total of 16 tourists visited the ranch and observed the species in the wild. These activities generated incomes for the Zabalas family, owners of La Cantina ranch,

and for the management of the Protected Area.

This year the Zabalas family is interested in building cabins for the tourists, and the owner of 3 Estrellas Ranch is moving forward to create an ecotourist location. Encouragingly, the local community is becoming more and more involved with protecting Blue-throated Macaws, thanks to the Gran Mojos' support for ecotourism.

Environmental education activities have begun at the Interpretation Center in Loreto, most recently in February, to mark the second anniversary of the Protected

Area. About 60 enthusiastic people participated, including students, teachers, councillors and other members of the community.

There are also promising new plans going ahead this year for Gran Mojos, among them the development of the first Blue-throated Macaw festival and Blue-throated Macaw survey. We will make sure you all hear about the new steps to unify these people for Blue-throated Macaw conservation!

Apart from all of the things going on in the Gran Mojos Protected Area, the Blue-throated project team was able to cover a vast area

monitoring wild macaw populations. During a survey carried out at the Yacuma province we were able to identify a roost site on a property called Tacuaral, named because of the amount of giant bamboo (locally named *tacuará*) found on the forest island where the site is located.

The owner, Ruben Darío Arteaga, told us about the roost and we were able to confirm it, counting 47 Blue-throated Macaws returning to rest on the forest island.

After this incredible sighting, we had several conversations about developing an ecotourist site with the owner of the ranch.

The potential of seeing large numbers of Blue-throated Macaws, as well as other unique bird species restricted to the dry grasslands of Yacuma province, makes this ranch an attractive place for bird-watchers.

All this would not be possible without the important support of the World Parrot Trust, the Indianapolis Zoo (a long-term supporter of the activities of the Blue-throated Macaw Project), the municipality of Loreto, and the Gran Mojos Protected Area team for their strong commitment for the conservation of the species. □

Diversity in Parrots

...a broad and fascinating spectrum

by Desi Milpacher

Parrot lovers know how varied the nearly 400 species are — they can see it in their colours, beak shapes and behaviours. But what they may not know is *how many ways* these birds differ from each other.

Parrots large and small.

Parrots that live high and those that live low.

And parrots that sleep...well, strangely.

Many curious and extraordinary examples are featured here, and all are part of a collective already known for standing out in the bird world.

We begin at what scientists have determined (so far) to be the start—35-55 million years ago in the Eocene, the first parrot or parrot-like bird appeared. However, the hooked bill that is so identifiable with parrots is thought to have started evolving before that, in the early Cenozoic **65 million years ago**.

On a different type of time scale, parrots are well-known for achieving advanced lifespans: the enigmatic Kākāpō has been documented reaching (at least) the century mark in the wild while companion cockatoos, macaws and Amazon parrots can live into their 70s and 80s. (*Cookie, a Major Mitchell's Cockatoo that called Chicago's Brookfield Zoo home, lived to the ripe old age of 83, the longest recorded to-date for his species.*)

Kākāpō (*Strigops habroptila*)

© Scott Mouat

All parrots great & small

No list of extremes would be complete without the pocket-sized and the large, and with parrots there's everything on the spectrum. The **largest parrot** is the Hyacinth Macaw, measuring a whopping 90-100cm (35-39 inches) from head to tail and weighing 1.3 kg (2.9 lbs). Not to be outdone, the Kākāpō weighs in at a solid 1.5 to 3.0kg (3.3-6.6 lbs), and a Kākāpō chick at hatching weighs *three times* as much as an adult Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot, which at 8.4cm (3.2 inches) and 10-15g (0.5 oz) is the **tiniest parrot**.



Hyacinth Macaw
(*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*)

To a land far, far away... or that old stump down the hill

In the race for mightiest traveller, Orange-bellied Parrots put many other parrots to shame. These highly-endangered birds **make trips twice a year** between mainland Australia and Tasmania over the Bass Strait (an average distance of 300km or 186mi across), stopping at King Island about halfway. Thick-billed Parrots have been tracked on **remarkable non-stop flights of 320km** (nearly 200mi) on their Spring migrations. Cockatoos, macaws, Amazons and African parrots will fly **tens of kilometres** per day in search of food. Some parrots **commute between islands**: Kākā fly between northern New Zealand islands daily, crossing 20-30km (12.5 to 18.5mi) of ocean; some *Eos* lorries will travel between islands in the largest archipelago on Earth (Indonesia).

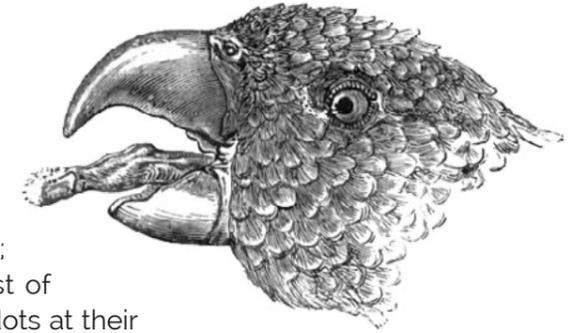
There are also those that prefer home sweet home: Kākāpō **travel in hundreds of metres** and **stick to one island** (*being flightless helps here*); many lorikeets and other parrots are similarly restricted, owing to the reality that each are found on only one island.

Weather extremes as a way of life

Parrots are no strangers to challenging climates. In Australia, temperatures soar into the **40-50C (104-122F)** range, often making survival difficult. Dry, harsh weather occurs in parts of Brazil, where the Lear's Macaw lives in **arid caatinga** (*thorn scrub*), and on Bonaire, where Yellow-shouldered Amazons and Brown-throated Conures exist in a unique and **fragile dry forest**. In the Amazon and Central American rainforests, parrots have to contend with high temperatures, high humidity and **sudden deluges of rain**. Andean and some New Zealand parrots live near or on **snow-covered mountains** for part of the year. *Cyanoramphus* parakeets roam the **windswept islands** off New Zealand and Australia, where stiff breezes can reach more than 100kmh (62mph). Caribbean Amazons and parakeets face a yearly threat from **severe storms**, which are becoming more frequent and damaging thanks to climate change.

Special editions

Some species of birds, parrots included, come equipped with more than the usual gear of body feathers, wings and beaks. Horned and Ouvéa Parakeets have decorative, **feathered topknots**; racquet-tails have their **racquets**, which consist of two exceedingly thin feathers with dime-sized dots at their terminus, and the cockatoos (*including cockatiels*) have those exuberant **crests**. Kea, Kākā, lorries and lorikeets have **fringed tongues** (*to lap up nectar, pollen or tree sap*), and all parrots have **zygodactyl toes** (*two facing forwards and two back*), a trait shared with woodpeckers and their cousins. But Vulturine, Orange-headed and Pesquet's Parrots could be the oddest of them all: the **feathers on their heads are mostly missing**. It's been surmised that they evolved this way because of hygiene - it's better to not have fruit, picked up from feeding on either seeds or pulp, gumming up the plumage around their eyes and nares. Another species, the Vasa Parrot, has its females not only losing their head-feathers in the breeding season, but also undergoing a **skin colour change** from pale to robust orange-yellow. This may have the effect of keeping males more attentive to her and the chicks' needs during what is usually an intensely competitive season.



Lory fringed tongue illustration
© Likely Alfred Henry Garrod (d. 1879)
[Public domain] Source: Lydekker, R.
1895 The Royal Natural History, Vol 4.
Frederick Warne and Co.



The zygodactyl
foot of a macaw

Searching high and low

In addition to appearing on **every continent except Antarctica**, parrots occur anywhere from **sea level** (*Ouvéa Parakeets can live right at sea level*) to high up in the **Andes mountains** and its offshoots (some *Bolborhynchus* and all *Hapalopsittaca* parakeets, at **dizzying heights** of up to 4,000m/13,000ft). Keas can be found at altitudes up to 3,000m/9,840 ft in their native New Zealand. And lastly, a number of species have adapted to life at various altitudes in **cities across North America and Europe**, adding unexpected colour and sound to the human element.

Kea
(*Nestor notabilis*)



...multiple marriages & other wonderful behaviours

Nearly all lovebird females **tuck leaves, bark and other debris** into their body feathers to take back to their nests - the only holdout is the Grey-headed Lovebird, which uses its own feathers. Kākāpō males have evolved to really make their presence known: their breeding arena is an elaborate track-and-bowl system where they project their intentions via a far-reaching **chest boom**. There's **polyandrous** (where multiple males mate with one female) and **polygynandrous** (where both sexes have multiple partners) breeding in Eclectus Parrots, and female Vasa Parrots lead the charge in **chasing away** other females and males from their territories to protect their nests. Kea **wrestling on snowy slopes** is an incongruent sight, as is their dismantling (using their strong beaks) of windscreen wipers and camping tents. Palm Cockatoos **bang a 'drum'** (tree trunk) to attract a mate, and caiques and other parrots **'surf' on wet leaves**, using them as bathing cloths (and, maybe because it feels good?) And last but not least, a Hanging Parrot sometimes **roosts upside down**...like a bat.

Vernal Hanging Parrot
(*Loriculus vernalis*)



© Walter Silva, ATFFS - Lima



© Rosa Elena Zegarra



© Centro de Rescate Mundo Natural

These behaviours and adaptations have evolved over millennia, allowing each species to live in its own unique place in the world.

For a family with an abundance of weirdness and wonder you need go no further than the parrots, which are truly remarkable in so many ways.

Palm Cockatoo
(*Probosciger aterrimus*)



© Christina Zdenek

An Examination of the Wild Bird Trade in Perú

by Rosa Elena Zegarra and Doris Rodriguez

In the Winter 2018-2019 issue of *PsittaScene*, WPT representative Rosa Elena Zegarra and wildlife veterinarian Catalina Hermoza-Guerra reported on WPT's involvement in the rehabilitation of parrots recovered from trade and sent to Mundo Nature Center in Perú.

Now, Rosa Elena and colleague Doris Rodriguez take a look at the harrowing statistics that make up the wildlife trade in that country, and what is being done to combat it.

Top: 350 parrots were crowded into wooden fruit boxes. The shipment was intercepted by Peruvian authorities and seized as it was being transported.

Bottom: Survivors arrive at Mundo Nature Center rescue facility to begin their recovery.

SOURCES:

Parrots of the Wild: A Natural History of the World's Most Captivating Birds, Catherine A. Toft PhD, and Timothy F. Wright PhD, University of California Press, 2015.
Parrot Encyclopedia: www.parrots.org

Illegal wildlife trade permanently threatens wild bird populations in Perú, with the parrots in particular being in great demand. In the rainforest region of the country there is a long tradition of keeping companion wildlife and because parrots are strong and resilient birds, keeping them in captivity does not involve much effort on the part of the owner. This fact, besides their natural charisma, makes parrots some of the most popular wild companion animals.

In this sense, official trade statistics are probably only a small fraction of the real numbers of parrots that are illegally trapped in the country which, because of the high level of mortality associated with informal wildlife capture and market systems, can cause unexpected levels of pressure on some wild parrot populations. Moreover, there is the welfare of these birds at stake: thousands suffer from mistreatment and many endure painful deaths. This reality has proven to be the case in other countries as well.

Although Perú has a legal framework that allows for the commercial use of birds (hand-raised or legally harvested from nature), between 2007 and 2017 seizures and other reports¹ of wildlife (mammals, birds, and reptiles)² have totalled an average of almost 3000 specimens a year (**Fig. 1**). By far the largest numbers (55%) comprise some of the approximately 53 species of parrot found mostly in tropical forests, with *Brotogeris*, *Psittacara* and *Forpus* the preferred genera. (**Fig. 3**).

¹ Other reports include rescues, voluntary surrenders or discoveries by authorities; most if not all involve illegal trapping of wildlife. Some of these animals are found abandoned in public places, or are reported by citizens who find them in their homes after being released or escaping from former owners.

² Amphibians are excluded in this statistic as recently the presence of *Telmatobius* frogs in the illegal market has risen into the thousands. These frogs are consumed for folk medical purposes because of the healing properties attributed to them.

³ Supreme Decree N° 004-2014-MINAGRI.



© Corey Raffel

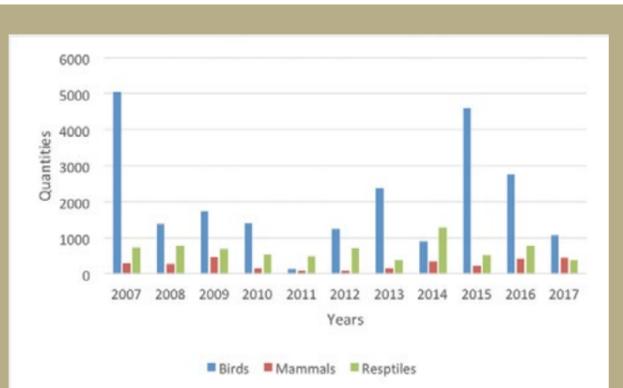


Fig. 1. Seizures or reports of wildlife per year (2007-2017)
Source: SERFOR

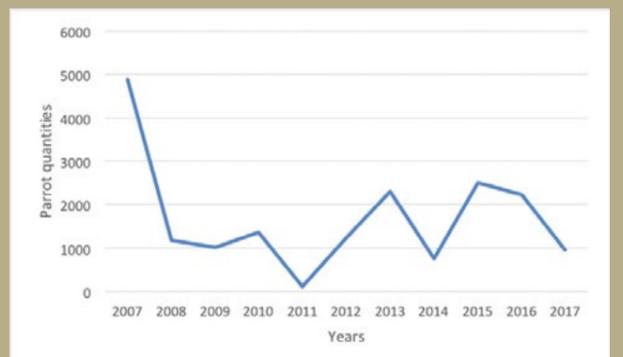


Fig. 2. Seizures/reports of parrots per year (2006-2017)
Source: SERFOR

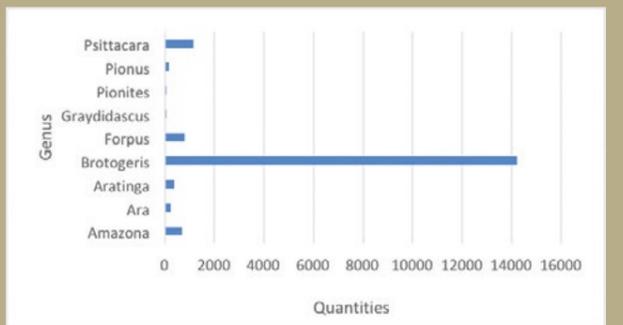


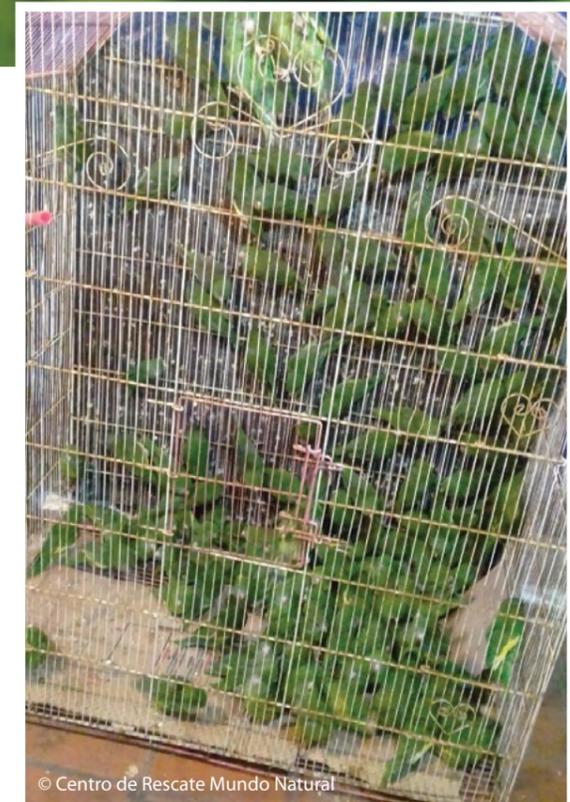
Fig. 3. Seizures/reports of parrots by genus.
Source: SERFOR

Species in these genera are not listed on the Peruvian Red List³ but are listed on Appendix II of CITES (*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora*). The birds are illegally trapped to supply both the international black market and the illegal domestic market of wild pet animals in different regions of the country.

In 2017, Perú approved the National Strategy to Reduce Illegal Wildlife Trafficking (*Supreme Decree No. 011-2017-MINAGRI*). In this context, Peruvian authorities are working on three main actions to fight illegal trade:

1. To spread awareness to local communities about illegal wildlife trafficking.
2. To develop conditions for the strict law enforcement and effective control of illegal wildlife trafficking in Perú.
3. To implement alliances with bordering countries and with those that are the destination of illegal trafficking of fauna from Perú.

This is a 10-year strategy that prioritizes the main actions against illegal trade among government agencies, organizations and other key stakeholders. Although the last two years' statistics show a decrease in seizures and wildlife reports, we are far from ending the threat of illegal trade. New challenges include traffickers that find new ways to go unnoticed, which is the reason why we need to be vigilant in confronting this problem that threatens our beloved forest dwellers. □



Top: Wild White-eyed Conures (*Psittacara leucophthalmus*).
Bottom: *Brotogeris* parakeets huddle together after being rescued.
© Centro de Rescate Mundo Natural

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³SERFOR - Servicio Nacional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre

Mongabay Latam: Wildlife traffickers thrive on Guatemala's murky border with Belize



© Guatemalan Environmental Ombudsman's Office

According to local experts and authorities, poverty, corruption, and a long-running border dispute between Belize and Guatemala has resulted in a siege on local fauna by wildlife traffickers. Unsustainable poaching in the forests on the border between the two countries has become so intense that local environmentalists have resorted to extreme measures, such as hiding under trees, to guard Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) nests. Scarlet Macaws and other parrots are being smuggled across the border and sold on the local black market and in Mexico.

Read more: tinyurl.com/y6b5v2ga

Parrots at Paradise Park shows creatively collect funds for WPT



© Paradise Park

At Paradise Park UK, education is an important component of the work they do. Each year, from Easter to September, the park presents two memorable flying shows: the *Eagles of Paradise Display* and the *Free Flying Bird Show*. The latter begins at 3:30pm every day (weather permitting), where you can see free-flying macaws, conures and kookaburras, amongst others. You may even see a Kea demonstrating recycling by crushing an aluminum can!

The highlight of the Free Flying Bird Show: visitors are invited to come up on stage to give a donation to the World Parrot Trust in a unique way – by giving a parrot a coin or note and having it fly back to the trainer who is holding a container ready for deposit. This year's collection has totalled £2,892, and the WPT are eternally grateful to the park and its supporters.

Visit the website to learn more: paradisepark.org.uk/free-flying-bird-show-summer/

Belated Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to **Tropical Butterfly House** and **Mundo Aquatica** for raising money this past year for the WPT through sales of their wristbands at their zoos. They raised £2,129 and £6,400 respectively. And much gratitude goes to **Petra Seeber Steiner**, who donated funds in the past year for WPT efforts.



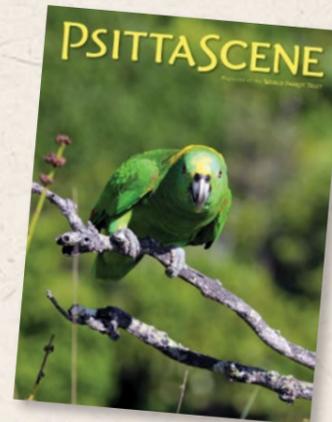
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PARROTS IN THE WILD:
Sulphur-crested Cockatoos
(Cacatua galerita)

These flamboyant birds are easy to spot in their home regions of Australia and Indonesia, where their populations appear to be decreasing due to trapping and hunting. They congregate in large flocks to feed on the ground, with sentinel birds keeping a watchful eye for predators.

Photo © Aaron Fellmeth Photography