PsittaScene

Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Autumn 2019

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World Parrot Trust
30th Anniversary Since 1989

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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 more than 70 species of parrot.

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ON THE COVER

By the early 1990s the wild population of **Echo Parakeets** *(Psittacula eques)* had plummeted due to severe deforestation, introduced mammals, and the effects of disease and severe storms. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of several organisations and dozens of individual contributors, after almost three decades of intensive management the species has been brought from a low of 12 to about 700 individuals.

See more on Page 10, **Celebrating 30 Years.**

Photo © **Mark Carwardine / Nature Picture Library**

A message from

Jamie's desk

As the World Parrot Trust turns 30, it's astounding to see just how much has changed in the parrot world in that time. When WPT fledged in 1989, for example, the USA was the world's largest importer of wild parrots; conservationists had no idea where – or even if – Blue–throated Macaws still occurred in the wild, and many of the great strides in our understanding of how to keep captive birds thriving had yet to be made. Over the decades, we and our colleagues and partners around the world have learned a great deal about the threats these beloved birds face – whether captive or wild – and thankfully we now have an infinitely more diverse and refined kit of tools to help save all parrots.

At our conception, indeed, in the maiden issue of the *PsittaScene*, Mike Reynolds launched the Trust with a prescient focus on stopping the mass trade in wild parrots. Over the years, we came to learn how human's love of parrots created seemingly insatiable demand for these birds, devastating so many wild parrot populations. But we also learned that stemming that demand is possible by encouraging wealthy western countries to stop importing wild birds. And most importantly, such policy changes – like the USA's Wild Bird Conservation Act – dramatically reduce parrot poaching around the globe. These lessons led the Trust – at a youthful 12 years of age – to spearhead a campaign to stop all wild bird imports to Europe. And by the time we turned 18, we'd accomplished just that; the EU ceased importing all wild birds leading directly to a 90% decrease in the global market – sparing the lives of millions of birds each year.

Building upon those lessons and successes, we've continued to work on protecting parrots from trade through a variety of means, including protecting threatened species from trade via the CITES treaty, including the Yellow–naped Amazon (2002), Yellow–crested Cockatoo (2004), and the Grey Parrots (2017). And now in its second decade, our own *FlyFree* program continues to encourage the enforcement of wildlife laws, the confiscation of wild parrots from traffickers around the world, and whenever possible, the release of seized birds to give them a second chance to thrive in the wild. This combination of reducing global demand, ending legal harvests, and confiscating birds from traders has proven to form a powerful deterrent to ongoing trade pressure, ensuring meaningful protection for wild parrots everywhere.

And while these initiatives have been focused on stopping trade in wild parrots, our experience with releasing thousands of confiscated birds has helped teach us another important lesson as well. Over the past few decades, we've worked to refine and expand the collection of traditional conservation tools at our disposal such as nest site protection, habitat restoration, and on occasion, reintroduction of captive bred individuals. Since the Trust's first project focusing on the recovery of critically threatened Echo Parakeets, we've gone on to help save dozens of threatened parrot species, learning from these experiences, and applying all tools, old and new, wherever they can help. From our extensive experience releasing so many parrots confiscated from trade, we now know how best to accomplish this feat, adding significantly to our toolbox of conservation solutions for endangered parrots.

Most importantly, none of this progress, none of these successes, and none of this empowerment of the WPT and our partners around the world to save parrots would be possible without the ongoing and generous support of parrot lovers like yourselves – most recently, we're deeply grateful to all of you for the astounding success of our campaign to support macaw conservation in Bolivia. We're optimistic that the next 30 years will bring many successes for parrot conservation and welfare, and we look forward to working with you to make all sorts of progress possible.

James D. Gilardi, PhD
WPT Executive Director

Bolivian wildfires charred more than four million hectares of forest and grassland between August and October 2019, impacting countless wildlife and human habitats. Photo © Jhony Salguero, Parrot Conservation Bolivia (CLB)

Grey Parrots © Pete Oxford

TO STOP THE WILD PARROT TRADE

A Decade of WPT's *FlyFree* Program

by Charlotte Foxhall

There's usually some discussion amongst the birds, but right now they're silent: they see that the release aviary door is open. They hesitate, and then a few brave souls venture to and then beyond the invisible barrier to experience the first heady and anxious moments of freedom. The rest follow tentatively in small groups, dispersing to the surrounding trees.

This is the hoped-for outcome for rescued parrots, but the future for most caught in the grim world of wildlife trafficking is not so certain.

In Indonesia, smuggled Eclectus parrots await rescue from pipes. © BKSDA Ternate

At the heart of the World Parrot Trust's formation in 1989 was the protection of the most critically endangered of Earth's parrots. Not long after, WPT founder Mike Reynolds grew concerned that wild parrots were being adversely affected by trapping for trade.

Science and decades of work in the field have since confirmed his fears, and more - that the trade in wild-caught parrots is inhumane, at least half of the birds trapped succumb to injury, starvation and disease, and wild populations can be virtually wiped out.

Since the 1970s, the capture of parrots for the pet trade has impacted over 17 million birds. Tens of thousands of parrots are still being captured every year and some of the most heavily trapped species, such as Grey Parrots, have suffered catastrophic population collapses – over 90% in Ghana alone.

But that has begun to change: in 2007, after WPT had successfully spearheaded a 7-year effort with over 230 NGOs, the European Union announced a permanent embargo on the import of wild-caught birds. The ban spared the lives of millions of birds each year, but still more was needed: in 2009 WPT launched the *FlyFree* program, an ongoing effort to counter the trapping that still occurs in many countries.

FlyFree supports direct action to rescue, rehabilitate and release wild-caught birds, through partnerships with in-country organisations and governments. More rehabilitated birds are being successfully released than ever before thanks to thoughtful and informed choices about where the birds are released, how many birds are in the group, their pre-release training, and careful disease screening for eligible candidates.

HOW IT WORKS

Increasing the capacity of rescues to receive, rehabilitate and release confiscated animals allows local governments to pursue trappers and confiscate more birds. The *FlyFree* program directly helps rescues and government agencies manage confiscated parrots by providing funding for food, release enclosures, disease screening, bands and tracking equipment, and basic veterinary and bird care training. Meetings with regional and international agencies such as CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) to advocate for better protections are a necessity to help parrots threatened by trade. On a different front, the WPT works to shut down channels through which illegal trade occurs with outside agencies such as airlines, shipping companies, and social media. And lastly, *FlyFree* actively promotes the circulation of educational materials to local people, to raise awareness and foster concern about the ecologically and culturally important wildlife that they live with.

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

African parrots are among the most traded of all species; as a consequence WPT pursues a multi-faceted strategy throughout the region. Studies documenting the impact and nature of trade have been recently completed or are ongoing in multiple countries (including Guinea-Bissau, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). These include the first national status assessment for Timneh Parrots, work which has identified key populations that are now being protected through engagement with local communities and hiring former trappers to protect nests.

Determining the current state of knowledge of a species informs advocacy efforts for improved policy and in 2016, WPT and its partners rallied to provide wild African Grey Parrots (encompassing *Psittacus erithacus* and *Psittacus timneh*) with CITES Appendix I protection from trapping. Ongoing investigations into trafficking enable WPT to monitor the situation, and have driven further CITES decisions to close loopholes and increase protections for other species; for example, a surge in export permits for Red-fronted Parrots (*Poicephalus guilielmi)* was addressed at a recent CITES meeting, and improvements to legislation in several range states have since been made. Working with various partners, WPT has also been able to convince airlines to boost protections against trafficking, recently working with Turkish Airlines to finalise an embargo on transporting African Greys, and improve training in vulnerable trafficking sites.

Rehabilitation and release aviaries for parrots rescued from trade have been built in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Senegal, Guinea and additional support provided in Sierra Leone. Training workshops in best practice protocols for caring for rescued parrots have been delivered in Angola and will soon be replicated in Cameroon. Additionally, ground-breaking research focussing on the spread of Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) virus through legal and illegal trade was completed with multiple partners in Senegal.

In Angola, WPT vet Dr. Davide de Guz provides training in parrot care to local officials © Rowan Martin

In Sierra Leone, new Timneh Parrot surveys give fresh insights into the species' status © Rowan Martin

In Nigeria, researcher Ifeanyi Ezenwa and WPT Africa Programme Director Dr. Rowan Martin discuss sampling methods © WPT

Chattering Lory, Indonesia
© Richard Carey

FlyFree has been growing since 2009 and supports front-line efforts of dozens of partner agencies in countries around the world, including Angola, Belize, Bolivia, Bonaire, Brazil, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, Nepal, Peru, Senegal, Sierra Leone and South Africa — all committed to ending the wild bird trade.

Indonesia

In recent years, WPT has partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Agency Indonesia (BKSDA) and local biodiversity groups to involve communities living in parrots' ranges with tree planting events, instruction in bird-watching, and gifts of binoculars and books to lead income-producing visitor tours. Chattering Lories *(Lorius garrulus)*, Purple-naped *(L. domicella)*, Black-capped *(L. lory)* and Red-and-blue Lories *(Eos histrio)*, White and Moluccan Cockatoos (*Cacatua alba* and *C. moluccensis*), and Eclectus Parrots (*Eclectus roratus*) have regularly been found in trade here, and WPT has been training officials on best practices for their care and rehabilitation, also ensuring that they are returned to their proper islands. In addition, WPT has provided funding for food, medicine and new holding enclosures, and has provided incentives for former trappers to protect nests and patrol areas known to attract poachers.

Central America

In Central America, WPT has been working closely with in-country partners Echo on Bonaire, Belize Bird Rescue, Macaw Recovery Network and Ara Manzanillo in Costa Rica, and Macaw Mountain Nature Reserve and Bird Park in Honduras, to help manage increasing numbers of surrendered and confiscated birds, with technical and financial support for their rehabilitation and eventual release. Threatened wild parrot populations are also boosted by captive breeding and releasing birds to the wild. Macaw Mountain's successful release of Scarlet Macaws in two locations – mainland Honduras and the Bay Islands off its coast – is an example of this.

In Honduras, successful releases of Scarlet Macaws continue © Macaw Mountain

South America

An intense local trade exists here; confiscated birds can number in the hundreds at a time. To help slow the deluge WPT has partnered with a number of in-country organisations to provide technical help, supplies and funding to improve rehabilitatie capacity and release of these confiscated birds. The Blue-fronted Amazon Project, an alliance with a local rescue centre and a Brazilian university wildlife facility, has rehabilitated and released nearly 300 Blue-fronted Amazons *(Amazona aestiva)* back to the wild, with more to follow in coming months. WPT supported Mundo Natural Rescue Center in Peru for the care of over a hundred parrots, all native species, sent to the facility. In Bolivia, WPT supports the Wild Parrot Conservation Center where, in the past year, 450 parrots including Blue-fronted Amazons, Canary-winged Parakeets *(Brotogeris chiriri)*, Blue-winged Parrotlets *(Forpus xanthopterygius)*, multiple species of conure, and Red-fronted Macaws *(Ara rubrogenys)* were brought to the facility for urgent treatment. Some of these birds are still being cared for, with others having been returned back to the wild.

In Peru, a group of 350 parrots – crowded into wooden fruit boxes – is intercepted by Perúvian authorities. © Rosa Elena Zegarra

In Bolivia, confiscated Canary-winged Parakeets await transportation © CREA

LOOKING FORWARD

The *FlyFree* movement has proven to be an effective means of responding to the immediate and longer-term needs of parrots intercepted in illegal international trade. The vast majority of international trade has been shut down thanks to the EU import ban and increasingly, parrot range countries are stepping up with enforcement, rehabilitation, and release with the *FlyFree* program encouraging these kinds of novel and effective efforts to stop trade in wild parrots for good.

About the Author:

Charlotte Foxhall joined the WPT in 2018 in an administrative and grant writing role. She holds an Honours degree in Environmental Science and is currently undertaking a Master's degree in Conservation Ecology.

Scarlet Macaw © Macaw Mountain

Celebrating 30 YEARS
1989-2019

The World Parrot Trust began in 1989 with a mission: to save the world's most threatened parrots.

Three decades on we've provided help to more than 70 species in 43 countries. This work is possible because of collaborations with local, regional and international partners, and the backing of thousands of supporters across the world.

The highlights

Protecting and Increasing Wild Populations

In 1990, the WPT's first project was with local and international partners to protect and increase the last remaining Echo Parakeet *(Psittacula eques)* population in Mauritius. With intensive management the species' numbers have increased from a low of 12 known individuals to over 700.

From the mid-1990s WPT has supported reforestation work, education programmes, captive breeding and release, and rehabilitation and release of Great Green Macaws *(Ara ambiguus)* and Scarlet Macaws *(Ara macao)*, with in-country partners in Mexico, Honduras and Costa Rica.

Stopping Trade in Wild Parrots

In 2007 WPT and over 230 other non-profits helped achieve a permanent ban on bird imports into the European Union, sparing the lives of millions of birds each year. Over a five-year span, WPT collaborated with international groups and governments to convince CITES to uplist Grey and Timneh Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus* and *P. timneh*) to Appendix I by 2017 to protect remaining wild populations. Intensive work to stop parrot trapping is also ongoing with partners in Africa, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Indonesia, Central America, and the Caribbean. Work includes directing workshops for customs, police and rescue workers on best practices for emergency and rehabilitative care as well as funding veterinary aid, disease testing, supplies and food, and building more housing for confiscated birds. WPT is also supporting education, awareness and ecotourism.

Supporting Education, Awareness and Ecotourism

The World Parrot Trust's first successful education and awareness project with Paradise Park Cornwall, UK was to provide interactive education buses to schools and other locations in St. Lucia, Dominica and St. Vincent in the Caribbean, and Paraguay in South America.

In other countries where people and parrots co-exist WPT has supported efforts to engage communities in protecting and benefiting from native parrots. Poaching remains a threat for these birds, and WPT's work demonstrating the concept of stewardship and sustainable ecotourism in place of trapping has proven successful in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Indonesia, Africa, Honduras, and Bonaire.

Protecting and Restoring Important Ecosystems

In Bolivia, thousands of native trees have been planted in an ongoing reforestation effort. In early 2017 WPT helped local and international partners establish Gran Mojos, a new 1.5 million acre protected area for the macaws and other species. The reserve holds 35% of the known Blue-throated Macaw wild population, and an estimated 50% of breeding pairs.

Bonaire's dry forest has been systematically degraded over 250 years. WPT has partnered with local organisation Echo to restore and protect areas on the island with native plants and trees. To date, Echo has protected over 33 hectares of dry forest and planted more than 13,000 native trees.

Blue-throated Macaw, Bolivia © Corey Raffel

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS: *The highlights*

Research Leading Conservation Work

Since 2002, the World Parrot Trust has led the Blue-throated Macaw *(Ara glaucogularis)* Program, an effort that has gained important insight into the birds' recovery issues. Ongoing studies include: breeding success and chick survival, molecular (genetic) analysis comparing wild populations to captive ones, and assessing the extent of habitat loss.

In the latter 2000s, a joint project between WPT and two universities found that both Central American Mealy Amazon subspecies were distinct from their South American cousins. Two new species, Northern Mealy Amazon and Southern Mealy Amazon (*Amazona guatemalae* and *A. farinosa*), were recognized by IUCN in 2014 and uplisted to Near Threatened due to trapping.

In early 2007, WPT backed research to study range and habitat use of Yellow-naped Amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*) in Costa Rica, and in 2015 for surveying and protecting a population on an island off Honduras. WPT has recently backed surveys in Costa Rica and Nicaragua; they found that there has been a marked decline in population from 2005 surveys.

Emergency Welfare Efforts for Parrots

WPT staff assisted with the recovery of the Puerto Rican Amazon project at Rio Abajo after Hurricane Maria in late 2017. Armed with funds generated by hundreds of WPT supporters, the team assembled incubators and brooders to nurse chicks, and bought cameras, recorders and climbing equipment for monitoring wild nests.

Also in 2017, a massive effort to rescue over 170 macaws and other parrots took place in the UK, thanks to a concerned individual donor who financed the building of The Kiwa Centre. A group of volunteers comprised of zoo personnel and veterinary staff took part in examining, disease testing, treating, and transporting the birds to the new facility. After months of recovery some birds have moved on to ambassador roles or breeding programs.

Elsewhere, WPT is providing support to rescues in Belize, Brazil, Honduras, Bonaire and Bolivia for parrots that cannot be released back to the wild. These birds also become public ambassadors or will be introduced into captive breeding programs.

Looking Forward

WPT looks to train more rescue staff, rangers and officials and fund more housing to rehabilitate parrots caught in trade. In these same areas, WPT will continue to spread awareness and support local ecotourism initiatives that benefit parrots and people. New research and conservation work is ongoing with Red-fronted Macaws, Timneh Parrots and birds caught in trade.

This work is possible because of your support — thank you for being with us on this journey.

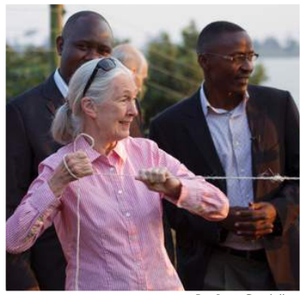
Yellow-crested Cockatoo, Indonesia © Mehd Halaouate

Local communities protecting native cockatoos, Indonesia © Oka Dwi Prihatmoko

Great Green Macaw chick health check, Costa Rica © Macaw Recovery Network

Blue-throated Macaw nestbox installation, Bolivia © CLB

Cleaning damaged feathers, Indonesia © Mehd Halaouate



Dr. Jane Goodall assists with Grey Parrot release, Uganda © Sherry McKelvie

Gov't official with confiscated macaw, Bolivia © CLB

Honduras President with Scarlet Macaw from Macaw Mountain breeding and release program © La Prensa

Vinaceous Amazon release, Brazil © Evet Loewen

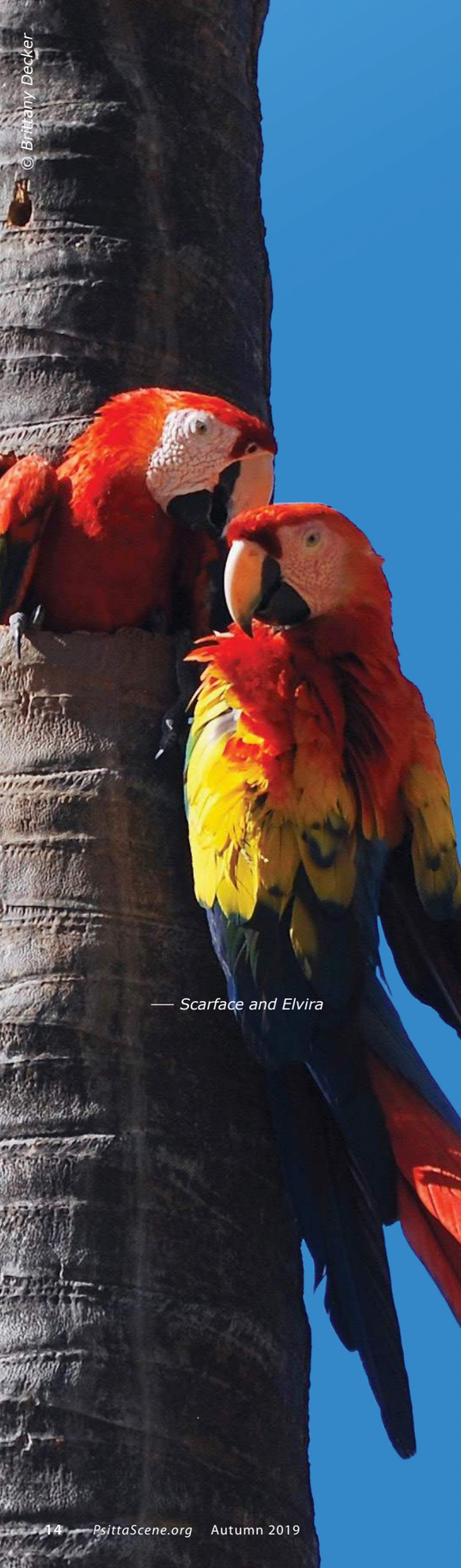
Parrot rescue manual & training, Angola © Rowan Martin

Tree planting program, Bonaire © Echo

Rescued parrots at the Kiwa Centre, UK © Alison Hales

Community education program, Bolivia © CLB

Southern Mealy Amazon, Peru © Corey Raffel



— Scarface and Elvira

Chica's Bumpy Road to Survival

by Brittany Decker, Head Bird Manager
Macaw Recovery Network

Following a night of heavy wind and rain, a team of staff and volunteers quickly assembled to rescue two Scarlet Macaw *(Ara macao)* chicks whose nest had flooded during the torrent. Time was of the essence, as the water was rapidly causing the month-old chicks to lose body heat. Accessing the fragile nest required much care.

Being a tropical country, Costa Rica is no stranger to heavy rain. With fairly routine wet and dry seasons, predicting when and where the rains will fall is easy for those who have spent their whole lives in these regions. On the Nicoya Peninsula, the Macaw Recovery Network monitors the breeding activity of approximately 50 Scarlet Macaws, which they released in Punta Islita. This monitoring takes place during the dry season, when food is most abundant and the macaws have enough energy to reproduce.

During the 2019 breeding season, field staff were able to locate active nests, one of which was in a dead palm tree. These trees are tempting for parrots to nest in, since they are easy to hollow out, get cozy, and difficult for most predators to access. However, they provide little protection during heavy rains and are capable of absorbing large amounts of water, which can cause the trees to become soft and fragile. Often, these trees collapse before a chick can successfully fledge.

Left: *The author, Bridget and Alice with Scarface and Elvira's chicks*
Right: *Chica the survivor*
Photos © Brittany Decker

When the field team discovered the nest of Scarface and Elvira, two adult Scarlet Macaws who were infamous for nesting in dead palm trees, it was clear their two chicks, which hatched in mid-April, could be in danger. Due to the fragility of the palm tree, the team used a long pole with a camera attached to the end to monitor the chicks' progress rather than risk the integrity of the tree by climbing it.

Mild showers regularly fell during the chicks' first month, but the nest remained sturdy and dry. The team, however, knew that the rains would soon fall heavier and so they brainstormed a plan for the worst-case scenario. In mid-May, the team awoke to the deafening sounds of wind and rain. They imagined the young birds, whose feathers had just begun to emerge the week before, sheltering in their fragile nest.

Setting off before sunrise, the team found that the tree remained upright, but Scarface and Elvira were keeping an unnatural distance. Normally they would fly down and scream at the intruders, but their behavior, which the teams know so well, was noticeably different. Using the camera, the team was horrified to see that the nest was partially flooded and the chicks were visibly lethargic. Immediately, a group of MRN staff, volunteers and friends brought supplies to rescue the chicks and provide care to them.

The tree, which the team had intentionally avoided climbing previously, would have to remain upright just long enough for one team member to quickly climb and retrieve the chicks. With ladders and ropes strategically positioned to provide extra support, the lightest and most experienced bird handler scaled the tree and scooped the young chicks out of the dirty water.

Visibly cold and weak, the chicks were warmed using body heat and taken to the clinic at the Captive Breeding Center to be evaluated and treated. The younger of the two had a crop full of water, likely from the flooded nest, but was eager for food. Both chicks received warm food via a syringe and were placed in a brooder where they could further recover.

© Brittany Decker

Meanwhile, another team began to carry out a plan to reunite the chicks with their parents in the wild. The option of returning the chicks to the original dead palm tree was quickly discarded; the team instead erected an artificial nest box next to the tree. This would hopefully give Scarface and Elvira a high chance of finding their chicks. A similar approach had been attempted in previous seasons when dead palms had fallen, but without success. It was the team's hope that this time it would be different.

Once the chicks recovered, the team took them to the site in the early hours of the morning and placed them in the dry, sturdy and protected artificial nest. Scarface and Elvira curiously looked on but were wary of the new structure which had suddenly appeared only a couple of meters from their home.

The team took cover and watched from a distance to see what would unfold. Normal nest watches last around three hours, but when trying to reunite chicks with their parents, it could be a multiple-day event. The pair followed their normal foraging schedule and upon each return, would venture slightly closer to the new nest. They performed a few close flybys to scan the funny box, but never landed. Worry crept into the team's mind, but then there was a subtle break-through: Scarface and Elvira began to play in the top of the dead palm and gradually made their way down to the cavity where they chewed at the original nest entrance, a mere two metres from the artificial nest where their chicks were waiting.

Elvira frequently craned her neck toward the new nest, obviously curious about the structure and the strangely familiar noises coming from within. They left to forage once more and then returned to repeat their careful investigation of the odd box. The team held its breath as Elvira flew to the top where she tip-toed around and casually peeked over to glimpse inside. She then displayed her acrobatics and climbed down the side before cautiously easing herself along the front perch. Slowly, she looked inside the nest, and as if in shock, gave her wings a quick flick upon discovering her two dry chicks eagerly awaiting her return.

Chica settled into the new artificial nest box
© Macaw Recovery Network

Despite the happy reunion, continued monitoring of the nest was necessary. Both chicks looked healthy the following day, but unfortunately one quickly fell ill and didn't make it to the next. The second chick, however, continued to thrive and fledged in early July. She is known in the community as "Chica".

Given the history of this geographic area, where deforestation took place on a large scale in order to make way for cattle farming, it's no surprise that Scarlet Macaws are having to settle for poor housing options. Few large trees remain in this secondary forest, and the trees that are currently being allowed to grow back up will take years before they are large enough to accommodate a Scarlet Macaw pair and their chicks.

For the time being, Macaw Recovery Network is attempting to supplement their housing with artificial nests and have had success in varying degrees each season with that program. They hope to improve designs and placements of the boxes each season based on the data they gather, and see more chicks successfully fledge each year. By the time Chica is grown, she will hopefully have the option to nest in a variety of reliable cavities. Until then, intense monitoring and interventions such as this one are necessary to safeguard this species and ensure their future presence in this country.

> ***UPDATE:*** *Since this article was written, Chica has been spotted by MRN staff in Punta Islita, feeding alongside her parents Scarface and Elvira.*

MACAW
RECOVERY NETWORK

After fledging as an organization just this year, MRN is off to a flying start. Their specialized team, led by Sam and Sarah Williams, now host five Costa Rican staff and international volunteers, students, field biologists and apprentices year round. MRN takes a holistic approach to conservation, where in-situ and ex-situ efforts are balanced by community integration and habitat conservation.

Find out more at **www.macawrecoverynetwork.org.**

UPDATE FROM THE FIELD:

LOVEBIRDS OF AFRICA'S MOPANE WOODLANDS

By Tiwonge Mzumara-Gawa, PhD

© LBD Photos

As heartbreaking as it was, an encounter with dead Lilian's Lovebirds (Agapornis lilianae) at a poisoned waterhole in Liwonde National Park in 2006 has led to a surprising journey in trying to understand and conserve these amazing birds.

Cathedral mopane forest, Lilian's Lovebird preferred habitat
© Hans Hillewaert, CC BY-SA 3.0

Now over 10 years later we have a good understanding of their biology, what they eat, where they forage, when they breed and their preferred habitats. For example, we now know that they breed almost exclusively in Mopane woodlands, and during their breeding season feed mainly on grass seeds.

There is a large variety of grasses that grow in Mopane woodlands that are rich in nutrients. During the dry season, their diet is more varied; they will feed on different types of fruit and also on dry seeds on the ground. Our studies have also shown that the lovebirds are not the only species that use nest holes in Mopane woodlands; we have learned that other species such as the Grey-headed Sparrow, Brown-headed Parrots and Rollers (another type of bird) also use them. This understanding provides a chance to explore just how much suitable areas are still available and determine the critical actions needed for their conservation.

In 2015, in partnership with the World Parrot Trust's Africa Programme and with financial support from the Isdell Family Foundation and the British Ecological Society, range wide surveys were initiated. Starting in the core of their range in Zambia, a month-long survey expedition found that the lovebirds were largely restricted to protected areas, notably the Lower Zambezi National Park and the North and South Luangwa National Parks and had disappeared from much of the Zambezi valley area.

Detailed assessments of woodland structure revealed that Lilian's lovebirds have very specific habitat requirements and are strongly associated with a type of woodland referred to as 'Cathedral' Mopane. These are forests that have large Mopane trees that are widely spaced out. The roost/breeding cavities can be between 6 and 20 meters above the ground.

We suspect that areas suitable for breeding and roosting are those which have a sufficient number of natural cavities in close proximity to each other. These roosting/breeding sites are spread out in clusters across the woodlands. At each cluster there are 4 - 8 roosts; in the dry season up to 5 birds use one roost cavity, while in the wet (breeding) season most nests will have only two birds.

This work has led to two recently published papers describing their habitat requirements and the impact of disturbance by people and elephants on the woodland structure *(see further reading sidebar on Page 21).*

Upper left: *The author and a ranger walk to a roost site.* **Lower left:** *Lunchtime in the field.* **Upper right:** *The team measures habitat in Mozambique*. **Lower right:** *Evidence of illegal logging. Photos © Upper left: Dirk Van del Abeele, others Hemant Tripsthi.*

Sadly, these large trees are also the target for timber and charcoal production. Throughout our travels in Zambia we noticed these large Mopanes being cleared out by both legal loggers (with concession permits), and illegal loggers and charcoal burners. The methods that the illegal loggers used to clear trees were most worrying. We observed on many occasions the trees being burned at the root, which leaves no chance of any future coppicing (new growth).

After the findings in Zambia, we realized the importance of doing a general survey in the other countries where the species occurs (Mozambique & Zimbabwe), to better understand how much habitat is still available for the species. In 2018 surveys were initiated in Mozambique, targeting areas where they have been recorded in the past and it is thought suitable habitat still exists.. As we had a better understanding of the birds and were confident of our model, we did not think we needed much time to locate the birds in Mozambique.

However, after four days of looking for the lovebirds, we saw nothing. Again, we observed large areas of Cathedral Mopane woodland that were cleared, with shrubs now growing in its place.

Much of this clearing was from legal concessions, and when illegal harvesting is added to this the results are most disturbing. Finally, on the fifth day we sighted our first lovebirds in the Saladza area in Mozambique in a habitat that was similar to where they occur in Malawi and in Zambia. The lovebirds were, interestingly, often seen in the busy fishing village coming down to the ground to feed. The area is also within a protected area, however the fishing villages are within the park. This lovebird population is possibly the only one that is living close to people.

A second sighting was along the Caborra Bossa dam where there have been historic sightings, but the area was found to be owned by a private fishing company and was difficult to explore. We are hoping to build partnerships with our Mozambique counterparts so that we can have access to this area and do some detailed surveys.

A reconnaisance was also made to Zimbabwe where a collaboration was formed with a local NGO. Surveys in Zimbabwe will commence in September 2019 meaning we will have covered the Lilian's Lovebird's full historical range. We already know that in Zimbabwe the lovebirds are restricted to protected areas as well (Mana Pools NP).

Data collected to date have been feeding into the development of computer models being developed in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh Department of Geosciences. These models use satellite images of land cover to determine the distribution of suitable habitat both in the past and under future scenarios. Preliminary results already show clearly that across their range, Lilian's Lovebirds are facing their biggest threat from habitat loss caused by both legal and illegal harvesting of Mopane woodland. Mopane is one of a few indigenous trees in this region that form natural cavities to host cavity dwellers. Thus the removal of large/old growth Mopane is surely threatening other species that are cavity dwellers.

The status of Lilian's Lovebirds is much more critical than previously recognized and it is important that the governments of the four countries come together and agree on a plan to conserve this habitat. This year will see the start of a new long-term project to explore how the loss of natural nest-holes can be mitigated through the use of nest boxes. The initiative is funded by the International Foundation for Science and the World Parrot Trust, and will be the first of its kind for any lovebird species. Clusters of nest boxes will be installed in Malawi (and later possibly Zambia) to help establish new breeding areas. As well as boosting populations of Lilian's lovebirds it will inform conservation approaches for other threatened lovebirds in the region including Black-cheeked Lovebirds.

Even though Lilian's Lovebird populations are in danger from the continued clearing of their critical breeding and roosting trees, there are solutions that can be put into practice to help mitigate the threat. Ongoing work with governments and local partner organisations will see to the species' protection and hopefully, the recovery of their wild populations.

About the Author

Tiwonge Ivy Mzumara-Gawa, PhD is a conservation Biologist/Ecologist currently working as a Lecturer in Ecology at the Malawi University of Science and technology. She is also the National Chair for the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi, the BirdLife Partner in Malawi.

Tiwonge's passion for birds and Conservation was sparked during a Tropical Biology Association field course in Kibale, Uganda.

Lilian's Lovebird *(Agapornis lilianae)*

World population: unknown

IUCN Red List: Near Threatened
CITES: Appendix II

Further reading:

Tiwonge I Mzumara, Mike R Perrin, Colleen T Downs. (2018) ***Feeding ecology of Lilian's Lovebird Agapornis lilianae in Liwonde National Park, Malawi.*** Ostrich 89:3, pages 233-239.

Tiwonge I Mzumara, Michael R Perrin, Colleen T Downs. (2016) ***Comparative performance of four survey methods for assessing Lilian's Lovebird abundance in Liwonde National Park, Malawi.*** Ostrich 87:3, pages 247-253.

Tiwonge I. Mzumara, Mike R. Perrin, Colleen T. Downs. (2016) ***The drinking habits of the Lilian's Lovebird and incidents of poisoning at waterholes.*** African Journal of Ecology 54:3, pages 289-298.

Tiwonge I Mzumara, Michael R Perrin, Colleen T Downs. (2016) ***Comparative performance of four survey methods for assessing Lilian's Lovebird abundance in Liwonde National Park, Malawi.*** Ostrich 87:3, pages 247-253.

Tripathi, H.G., Mzumara, T.I., Martin, R.O., Parr, C.L., Phiri, C. and Ryan, C.M. 2019. ***Dissimilar effects of human and elephant disturbance on woodland structure and functional bird diversity in the mopane woodlands of Zambia.*** Landscape Ecology 34 (2), 357-371.

Mzumara, T.I., Martin, R.O., Tripathi, H., Phiri, C., and Amar A. 2019. ***Distribution of a habitat specialist: Mopane woodland structure determines occurrence of Near Threatened Lilian's Lovebird Agapornis lilianae.*** Bird Conservation International.

Thank You to our Supporters

This project has involved a large number of collaborators who have been integral to its success including the Strunden Papageien Stiftung (SPS), Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM), Pamela and Neville Isdell and the Isdell Family Foundation, Birdwatch Zambia, the University of KwaZulu Natal, The FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town, Department of Geosciences at the University of Edinburgh, University of the Copperbelt, Museums of Malawi, Rufford Small Grants, BirdLife Zimbabwe, Mwambashi River Lodge, Munyamadzi Game Reserve, British Ecological Society, International Foundation for Science, Malawi University of Science and Technology.

NEWS

Experts look forward to a brighter future for Cape Parrots

The World Parrot Trust joined experts from South Africa and around the world in Hogsback, South Africa 26th-27th September to create a plan to secure the future of Cape Parrots *(Poicephalus robustus)*. The plan sets the stage for coordinated action to address newly emerging and long-standing threats to these iconic green and gold birds.

Cape Parrots are one of Africa's most endangered parrots, with less than 2000 in the wild. Their precariously low population is scattered across fragments of South Africa's mist belt forests most of which remain outside of South Africa's protected area network. The plan builds on a huge huge body of recent work by the conservation community to improve understanding of the biology of the species, the status of wild populations and the threats they face. Last year, following a taxonomic reappraisal, the species was placed on the IUCN Global Red List of Threatened species.

Workshop participants included government agencies, landowners, forestry companies, conservation NGOs, bird guides, virologists, community workers, geneticists, educators and even apiarists (bees have proven to be a problem for efforts to encourage Cape Parrots to use nest boxes) among many others. This diverse set of expertise set the stage for a range of discussions to identify opportunities and develop long and short-term strategies to boost protection for Cape Parrots. Critically, it also provided an opportunity for stakeholders to meet, share experience and forge collaborations for the future.

Among the goals of the draft plan, which will be finalised over the coming weeks and made publicly available, was an aspiration to double the area of Cape Parrot habitat under formal protection within the next 10 years. Strategies were also discussed to monitor emerging threats including an Asian wood-boring beetle spreading through South Africa's forests and the possible risks posed by exotic parakeets. The workshop was developed by the World Parrot Trust in partnership with the Cape Parrot Project, Birdlife South Africa and the Cape Parrot Working Group, which worked together as a coordination committee. Representatives of the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group, Kerryn Morrison and Harriet Mostert-Davies (Endangered Wildlife Trust), facilitated the workshop, following IUCN best-practice guidelines for species conservation planning and guiding participants through an objective process to identify issues of concern and priority conservation actions for the species.

Kate Carstens and colleagues from the Cape Parrot Project in Hogsback did a phenomenal job of hosting participants, coordinating logistics and ensuring the workshop ran incredibly smoothly. Funding was provided by WPT's Africa Programme, BirdLife South Africa and the Wild Bird Trust.

GIFT IDEAS

Gift ideas for parrot lovers!

Looking for ideas for the upcoming season of giving? Come check out the World Parrot Trust online store! From beautiful calendars, exquisite art pieces, funky phone cases, comfy apparel, gorgeous jewellery and huggable plushies, you're sure to find something for every parrot lover on your list.

Best of all, sale proceeds go towards conservation efforts to protect parrots. It's the gift that keeps on giving!

Start shopping:
www.parrots.org/shop

WITH OUR THANKS

Parrot watching tour helps to raise funds


© Elaine Henley

Our sincerest thanks go to Elaine Henley, whose recent Shades of Grey Parrot tour raised £1200 for the World Parrot Trust's work in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Dr. Rowan Martin, WPT Africa Programme Director said: "These funds come at an important time for our efforts to support the rehabilitation and release of Grey Parrots *(Psittacus erithacus)* seized from trade in eastern DRC and will be put straight to work to build aviaries and deliver training. In addition to this direct support, Shades of Grey tours have provided a real boost for Grey Parrots by raising their profile within the tourism sector in East Africa. We are deeply grateful to the tour organisers and all the guests on the inaugural tours this year."

Learn more about the Shades of Grey tours:
shadesofgrey.com

Save Bolivia's Macaws Campaign


© CLB

Matched dollar-for-dollar by Natural Encounters Conservation Fund, an amazing $60,000(USD) will be directed into important conservation efforts for Bolivia's endangered Blue-throated, Red-fronted and Hyacinth Macaws *(Ara glaucogularis, A. rubrogenys and Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus)*.

Your generosity ensures our project partner Parrot Conservation Bolivia (CLB) can continue intensive and critical work like protecting nests, restoring critical ecosystems, bolstering community engagement and sustainability programs, and more. Working closely with these macaws – and the people who live alongside them – we can secure their continued survival in the wild. We are incredibly grateful and can't thank you enough!

Correction Notice

In the article from PsittaScene Spring 2019 titled "An Examination of the Wild Bird Trade in Peru" by Rosa Elena Zegarra and Doris Rodriguez, the photo on page 17 with caged White-eyed Conures credited to Centro de Rescate Mundo Natural was taken by Walter Silva of ATFFS Lima. Our apologies for the error.

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PARROTS IN THE WILD:

Gang-gang Cockatoo (female)
(Callocephalon fimbriatum)

In Australia, Gang-gang Cockatoos are well known for their love of Hawthorn berries, and when the plant fruits between February & May each year these gregarious birds can be found gorging themselves on the berries for hours at a time.

Photo © Adam Blyth Photography