PROMOTING EXCELLENCE
IN PARROT CONSERVATION
AVICULTURE AND WELFARE

World Parrot Trust
in action

Vol. 10 No.4 November 1998

Psitta scene

Lear's Macaw

African Parrot Review

Visit to Pantanal

psittacine (sit'a sin) belonging or allied to the parrots; parrot-like

Psitta scene

Editor
Rosemary Low,
P.O. Box 100,
Mansfield, Notts.,
United Kingdom
NG20 9NZ

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Lear's Macaw

Some history, the current situation,and proposals for its preservation

A Report by MICHAEL REYNOLDS

Background

The World Parrot Trust (WPT) has taken a special interest in this species for the last eight years, working with Dr. Charles A. Munn III and his Brazilian associates, notably Dr. Carlos Yamashita and Dr. Pedro Lima. After attending the important 'Blue Macaws' meeting in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 1992, WPT pursued the long-term objective of growing and transplanting Licuri palm trees to boost the food supply for Lear's Macaws at their Rasa da Caterina location. A more immediate and urgent requirement was, and remains, to provide adequate protection at this first known site to prevent the illegal capture of Lear's Macaws for collectors within Brazil, and also in other countries.

Dr. Charles Munn

A degree of protection has been in place for several years, with guards arranged by IBAMA (the official Brazilian conservation agency), and Biodiversitas, a conservation non-governmental organisation (NGO). It is difficult to know how constant, reliable and effective these guards may be, faced as they are by a difficult task in a large and challenging terrain, but it is generally accepted that macaws are still being removed from the wild population at a rate of as many as twenty birds each year. Obviously this loss is totally unacceptable, since it could lead to the extinction of Lear's Macaw in the wild within six years or so. WPT has highlighted this appalling prospect in previous issues of PsittaScene (see Vol.7 No.4 November 1995 'Lear's Macaw: a second population confirmed', and Vol. 9 no.2 May 1997 'Lear's Macaw - next in line for extinction?').

WPT Proposal

In our May 1997 article we included an extract from a letter sent to IBAMA in March 1997, and it is relevant to re-print this here:

"In our opinion this is the most prominent and threatened of all parrot species currently under pressure from international trading activities.

The confiscation of two young Lear's Macaws at the Paris Orly airport last July was reported globally, and we believe it is generally agreed that at least 19 birds were stolen from the wild population in 1996. With an estimate of around 120 birds in the wild, it is obvious that, without a solution being found, this species could follow the pattern of Spix's Macaw and be

COVER PICTURE

We are most grateful to Roland and Julia Seitre for providing us with a set of photographs of Lear's Macaw. This striking head shot of Lear's has captured the slight green tinge that is sometimes seen in the plumage of this bird, and clearly distinguishes if from the Hyacinth Macaw.

Lear's Macaw Photo: Roland Seitre

Dr. Carlos Yamashita checking Hyacinth Macaw Chicks.

effectively extinct in the wild within a very few years.

We have a copy of an excellent 'Action Plan for Conservation of Lear's Macaw' compiled by the Special Working Group in 1994. The Action Plan states on page 10: 'Capturing wild animals is also quite common in the region; they are smuggled to zoos, collectors and aviculturists all over the world. A. leari is certainly one of the most coveted species, since it is very rare today. It is believed that with the sharp decline in the natural population of Cyanopsitta spixii, hunters will turn to A. leari, which will require an increased inspection effort in its area of occurrence on the part of the appropriate agencies'.

There are no proposals in the Action Plan on how to deal with the root cause of this loss of birds from the wild populations, which as we all know, is the continuing demand by unprincipled collectors, both outside Brazil and within.

We realise that our organisation has no official mandate to make proposals relating to what is clearly primarily a national concern for Brazil, but nevertheless, our eight years of involvement in global parrot conservation, and our substantial financial commitments to work with Brazilian experts to help six parrot species, encourage us to offer what we think could be a suggestion to assist the survival of Lear's Macaw.

That is that Brazil might bring up the question of international trade in Lear's Macaw at the forthcoming CITES Conference of the Parties in Harare, Zimbabwe in June 1997. Your government could ask for stronger enforcement measures from all CITES signatories, especially those that may have been - no doubt without their knowledge - involved in illegal movements of this macaw.

If Brazil were to ask its fellow CITES members at the COP to pay especial attention to traffic in this species, we think it would improve vigilance by all countries and agencies. It might also have the effect of generating funds from major international conservation foundations for the in-country proposals made in your Action Plan. At the same time, you might want to make it clear that there is no possibility of an amnesty being declared for illegal holders of Lear's Macaw, but that all diplomatic and legal means would be used to secure the return to Brazil of illegally held birds.

This proposal aimed at choking off international demand for Lear's Macaw is given extra significance by a report from today's press which quotes your President Fernando Henrique Cardoso as saying at the 'Rio Plus Five' Conference: 'We don't have the means to stop deforestation. In those regions, there's hardly any presence of government capable of imposing the law'.

With these difficulties to contend with inside Brazil, would it not be a good idea to make every effort to attack the 'demand' side of the equation as well as the 'supply' side? We hope you may find our comments of some interest.

Please be assured that our desire to help parrot conservation is closely followed by our wish to work with the appropriate authorities in all countries."

We received no reply to that letter, but in July this year an international press release was issued by IBAMA. It seems likely that our 1997 proposal may have helped stimulate this useful action. Here is the press release in full:

IBAMA Press Release

Brazil reports that the endangered Lear's Macaw is threatened by illegal bird collectors
14 July 1998.

Brasilia - The Lear's Macaw (Anodorhynchus leari) is one of the world's most endangered species. Occurring only in the semi-arid northeastern region of Bahia in Brazil, its area of occupation was only located in 1978 by a team led by Dr Helmut Sick (who was one of Brazil's best known ornithologists). Due to habitat alteration, hunting and capture for the illegal trade, the species is facing a very critical situation - the populations of Lear's Macaw have been reduced to less than 130 individuals in the wild. The illegal capture of these birds for trade has been recognised as one of the most important factors in the species' decline.

The rarity and precarious status of the Lear's Macaw in the wild has accorded it the highest level of protection provided under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora - CITES. Brazil has been a party of the CITES Treaty since 1975.

In addition to being a party of CITES, Brazil has strict domestic legislation prohibiting the export of wildlife species. The Brazilian Wildlife Protection Act of 1967 prohibits the commerce of wildlife and products or objects that implicate their capture, pursuit or destruction. According to this law, it is considered illegal to keep Lear's Macaws in captivity. It is important to note that since the legislation came into effect, Brazil has never issued any permits for the export of this species.

In 1992, the Brazilian Government created a Working Group today called Committee for the Preservation of Lear's Macaw. This Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of the conservation management plan for this species, which includes habitat protection, anti-poaching efforts, field conservation, research and educational programs.

Legal protection and the involvement of a number of institutions have contributed to the conservation of the Lear's Macaw in Brazil. Contributing organizations have included the Brazilian Institute for Environment and Natural Renewable Resources (IBAMA), National Fund for the Environment - FNMA, Sao Paulo Zoological Foundation, Biodiversitas Foundation, Busch Gardens (USA), Houston Zoological Gardens (USA). Other groups that have supported conservation efforts include the World Parrot Trust (UK), the Wildlife Conservation Society - WCS (USA) , CETREL S.A. and PETROBRAS - the Brazilian Oil Company.

The Brazilian wildlife authorities of IBAMA, in collaboration with state and local municipal agencies have been conducting a major campaign against the poaching in the region. Successes

Guard at Rara de Caterina Photo: Roland Seitre

include the arrest in 1995 of a smuggler called Paraiba, who was caught with a Lear's Macaw in his possession. In early 1998 the field team was able to observe a poaching attempt and apprehend the infractors in the act of placing the nets for the capture of the birds. In May of 1998, eight more birds were confiscated from an aviculturist called Zezao in northern Brazil. Despite increased security and ongoing efforts to control poaching, the Lear's Macaw populations are still threatened. Many birds are still taken from the wild by trappers going to a few illicit collectors of rare species.

Unfortunately, Lear's Macaws are also being smuggled internationally from Brazil. In 1996 two birds that did not have any legal documentation or permits were confiscated from Mr Lawrence Kuah Kok Choon at an airport in France. The French governmental authorities collaborated fully with the Brazilian conservation effort by repatriating the birds to Brazil. Sadly, one of the birds died at the French airport before it could be returned to Brazil.

In an international effort to conserve this species, the authorities in Singapore confiscated two Lear's Macaws from a private collection, of Mr Lawrence Kuah Kok Choon, the same infractor of the episode in France. This issue and the eventual disposition of the birds is now being addressed by the Singaporean legal system. Also this year, the British government confiscated three birds from a collector in Yorkshire. The Brazilian Government has requested the repatriation of all of these birds.

There is an expectation that both the Singaporean and the British governments will support the conservation of this species by acting quickly to repatriate the confiscated birds to Brazil, following the example of the French government and according to the CITES regulations. It is hoped that these governments will access the heaviest penalties possible under their laws and jurisdiction against the infractors.

The position of the Brazilian Government and the Lear's Macaw Committee is that all undocumented and illegal birds should be confiscated by the authorities of the country in which they are found, and be returned to Brazil as part of the conservation program. As there have been no official permissions for legal export of Lear's Macaws from Brazil. All repatriated birds, as well as those confiscated in Brazil, will be evaluated for possible return to the wild or for participation in a coordinated captive management program.

There is a strong national commitment to the preservation of the Lear's Macaw in Brazil, as has been demonstrated by a recent grant of $200,000 to the project by the National Fund for the Environment - FNMA. In conjunction with project collaborators, this major grant has facilitated the protection of the area against poaching, supported field research, habitat restoration, conservation and educational programs.

The conservation of endangered species and the preservation of the world's biodiversity is a responsibility that all governments must take seriously. The illegal trade in rare and endangered species is a problem that has crossed national boundaries and can only be addressed through cooperation and support of all parties.

Contacts in Brazil:
Maria Iolita Bampi
Chief, Department of Wildlife
Diretoria de Ecossistemas
SAIN - Av. L-4 Norte
Edificlo Sede - IBAMA
70800-200 - Brasilla/DF - Brazil
(Phone): 55-61-225 8150
(Fax): 55 61-316 1067
(e-mail):
mbampi@ibama,sede.gov.br

Luiz Francisco Sanfilippo
Chair of the Committee for the Preservation of Lear's Macaw
Av. Miguel Estefano 4241,
04301-905 - Sao Paulo/SP - Brazil
(Phone): 55-11-276 0811
(Fax): 55-11-276 0564
(e-mail): aves@zoologico.com.br

Reactions to the Press Release

This initiative by Brazil was well reported in the UK press, and the following extract from a national paper is typical:

Brazil wants rare Macaws seized in British raids

Brazil is demanding the return of three of the world's rarest birds, which are being held at a secret location in northern England.

The Lear's macaws were seized in raids by Customs and Excise investigators on houses in Northallerton and Driffield, in Yorkshire, four months ago.

In an attempt to save them from extinction, Brazilian authorities are attempting to track down and repatriate all rare native parrots smuggled out of the country and sold to private collectors and pet dealers. The campaign reflects efforts by wildlife-rich developing nations to get back the rare and endangered animals and plants that have been taken from the wild over recent years.

The Lear's Macaws in Britain were found after an investigation into an international network of bird dealers that covered Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Britain. Three men were arrested in the raids and released on police bail while the haul is being evaluated.

This UK case is still under investigation, and will be reported in PsittaScene as it develops. The situation of the two birds held by the Singaporean authorities seems unlikely to be resolved soon. We understand that the person who imported them claims they were brought out of Brazil before 1967. The authorities therefore need to prove that the birds are less than 31 years old. WPT has offered its expertise to try to settle this issue, but progress seems slow. The return of these birds to Brazil - which the World Parrot Trust supports unequivocally - is likely to be delayed for some time.

Questions for Brazil

We have asked for updated information from Brazilian sources but have not received anything in time for this issue. It would be helpful to have the answers to a number of questions, for example:

- What facilities are available in Brazil for any returned Lear's Macaws?
- How many Lear's have been confiscated in Brazil?
- Have any prosecutions resulted?
- How is the FNMA funding of $200,000 being used?
- What is IBAMA's evaluation of the effectiveness of the guarding activities?
- Are IBAMA and Biodiversitas willing to work with other Brazilian and international organisations?

Sadly, we have to report that we hear nothing from IBAMA, and receive only negative responses from a spokesperson on Brazilian wildlife issues who works in the USA. It seems that, despite the substantial funds provided by WPT for the conservation of parrots in Brazil (over $60,000), there are those who are more interested in perpetuating political disagreements than pursuing conservation. Fortunately it is quite practicable, and indeed enjoyable, for WPT to work directly with Fundacao BioBrasil, a recently established conservation NGO based in Salvador, Bahia. This city is only a few hours drive away from the location of Lear's Macaw, and is better placed to provide support for this macaw than groups based more than a thousand kilometres away.

This brings me to the latest news, reporting the discovery of a third population of Lear's Macaw. Here is a report and a request for funding from Richard Hartley, a volunteer with BioBrasil:

Request for funding to protect newly discovered populations of Lear's Macaw and exploratory missions to find other unknown populations

by RICHARD HARTLEY

Background

The dwindling population of the Lear's Macaw (Anodorhynchus leari) has caused alarm in conservation circles, particularly among groups concerned with the global well-being of psittacids. The gravity of the situation has galvanised conservation NGOs and government agencies to enact programs that assure the continued protection of the known populations in the region known as the Sertao in the Brazilian state of Bahia. Most of the attention has been focused on the population of approximately 119 Lear's near the town of Canudos. A permanent staff member of IBAMA, the federal government's environmental protection wing, has been installed in the region and the planting of the licuri palm (Syagrus coronata), whose nut serves as the primary food source for the macaws, has recommenced. An agronomist has been contracted to oversee the transplanting of the palms. Supervision of the project rests in the hands of the National Lear's Committee with Fundacao Biodiversitas acting as the non-governmental caretaker.

Informants in the area, however, have alerted Fundacao BioBrasil to the potential of further significant populations of these macaws. A population of 30 has been confirmed in a previously undocumented area, east of Canudos. Rumours, corroborated by physical evidence (the remains of the shredded palm nuts) point to the strong possibility of a population of 50 birds in the western Sertao and an unspecified number in Bahia's neighbouring state of Pernambuco to the north.

The confimed newly discovered population is still extremely vulnerable to trappers given that all official efforts are focused on the Canudos population. This area contains some of the most preserved Caatinga vegetation, typical Lear's habitat, and there is a strong likelihood that additional populations of birds live in the immediate vicinity.

Plan of Action

BioBrasil Foundation has embarked on a two-pronged strategy aimed at protecting existing known populations and launching a vigorous search in the field for new populations.

The 120 birds in the Canudos area are currently the exclusive target for conservation by the National Lear's Committee. The foundation intends, therefore, to concentrate its protection efforts on the 30 birds in the newly discovered population. This would entail the construction of lodging for guards contracted to protect the birds and the installation of a short wave radio system for daily contact between the site and BioBrasil's president in Salvador, Pedro Lima. Trapping activity would be immediately relayed to Dr. Lima who in turn would inform IBAMA.

Bahia, Northeast Brazil: Lear's nesting sites. Photo: Roland Seitre

The team entered this dirt road near Petrolina and travelled on it for four hours, leading them to the site of the Lear's Photo: Gil Serique

A team from BioBrasil is due to undertake an expeditionary field research trip to an area west of Canudos where strong evidence of the bird's presence exists. Spearheading the research will be Dr. Lima who will be accompanied by Luiz Carlos Lima (no relation to Pedro), a reformed trapper and BioBrasil consultant whose inside information is pivotal to the success of the project. Mr. C. Lima is considered to harbour extensive knowledge about and contacts in the bird trade but is keen to share this knowledge with the foundation for the sake of the bird's conservation and improvement of his image.

Long Term Outlook

Once more populations of Lear's Macaw are found and subsequently protected, BioBrasil plans to implement a specialised ecotourism program that offers as a guaranteed attraction one of the world's rarest parrots. BioBrasil's successful ecotourism efforts with the Hyacinth Macaw in the state of Piaui, where over 60 Hyacinths are lured to one spot for observation from a hide less than 15 meters away, were inaugurated last year. Small rustic lodges have been constructed as accommodation and two birding groups from the United States have already visited the site. The idea would be to replicate that experience in the areas with Lear's populations.

The success of such an endeavour would ensure the self-sustainability of the Lear's protection efforts and thereby embody the principles underlying BioBrasil's mission in environmental protection.

Budget

Construction of lodging for Guards in new locality: US$ 1000

Two expeditionary trips to find new populations (car rental, gas, and miscellaneous costs for food etc): US$ 2500

Purchase of two short wave radios and solar panel: US$ 2500

Total funds solicited US$ 6000 (already funded by WPT)

A group of Lear's Macaws at one of the 'new' locations. Photo: Pedro Lima

Accounting

Responsibility for accounting and monthly progress reports is entirely in the hands of BioBrasil Foundation. In addition, following completion of the expeditionary trip occurring this week, BioBrasil will provide photographs and first hand accounts and recommendations of future strategies from the trip's participants.

To add to this good news, we can say that a further expedition, funded by a new donation from World Parrot Trust UK, is about to explore an area in Pernambuco, the state just north of Bahia. There have been strong reports of further populations there, and we expect to have more to inform you about in the February 1999 PsittaScene.

Fascinating history

We have had the good fortune to receive some photographs of Lear's Macaw from Roland and Julia Seitre, distinguished wildlife photographers, conservationists, and veterinarians. It is their shot on the front cover of this PsittaScene. They also sent us a most interesting article describing some of the history of Lear's Macaw and its discovery by Professor Helmut Sick. Although written in 1992, this article is a useful addition to these notes on this critically endangered macaw.

Lear's feed off the palm right in front this house, despite the fact that there are six children running around. Photo: Gil Serique

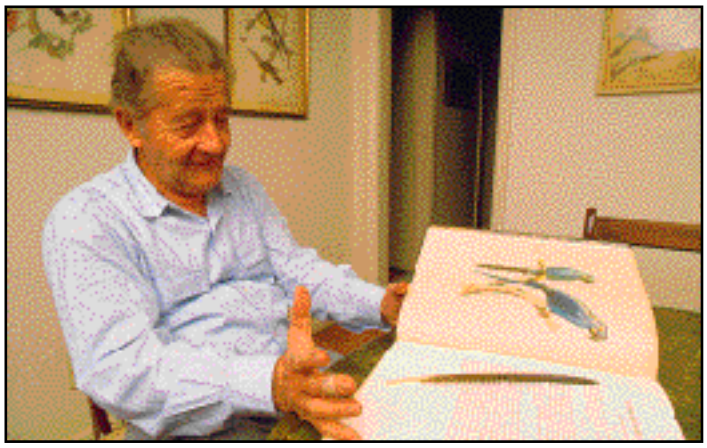
LEAR'S MACAW (Anodorhynchus leari)

by ROLAND SEITRE

The story of Lear's Macaw has been one of the great omithological mysteries. First painted from a captive bird by the famous British illustrator Edward Lear, the species was described a few years later (in 1858) by Charles Lucien Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew. The scientist had recognised, from Lear's painting and from a specimen at the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, a different bird from the regular (in those times) Hyacinth and Glaucous Macaws. All these birds were coming through the trade and, if the origins of Glaucous and Hyacinth were rather clear, that of Lear's was a total mystery. The unusual bird appeared from time to time in a shipment of blue parrots from Brazil and that was it.

The situation remained the same during all the 19th and most of the 20th century, except that Glaucous Macaw, in the meantime, became extinct. Brazil had then been reasonably explored and it was unbelievable, at least thinking from outside this country, that such a large, vocal and conspicuous bird, as macaws are generally known to be, could have remained unfound. Therefore, it was either suggested that the 'species' was made of aberrant birds or, eventually, that they were only hybrids between Glaucous and Hyacinths. An omithologist had already been looking for the unknown blue bird since 1954. This hybrid theory, printed in 1965, only stimulated him as he could not believe it for a second. His name, Helmut Sick, will be attached to the story of the Lear's forever. Prof. Sick studied ornithology in the Berlin Museum with Prof Stresemann and was sent to Brazil in 1939 to look for Crax blumenbachii, the curassow of the Atlantic forest and for a ground cuckoo restricted to Espiritu Santo. He was supposed to stay only three months but got stuck because of the war. After five years in South America, he could not come back any more, in love with fabulous Brazil, its diverse flora and 1600 species of birds. He stayed there all his life.

He joined, as a naturalist, the first expedition to cross Central Brazil from Amazonia to the Cerrado, by the Roncador-Xingu-Tapajos river Systems. It was quite an adventure from deep swampy jungles to the forested savannahs of the high plateau. He also accomplished other expeditions. Wildlife, in those times, was abundant and, as far as blue macaws were concerned, Hyacinths were often to be seen. Gradually, Helmut Sick got himself involved in tracking the Lear's especially after 1950, when another famous Brazilian omithologist told him he had found a pet specimen in a fazenda of Pernambucco state. But this bird had apparently been bought in Bahia. Other information was collected and analysed: an aviculturist of Treresopolis had a live bird he claimed being from



Prof. Helmut Sick Photo: Roland Seitre

Lear's Macaw in flight. Photo: Roland Seitre

Amazonia, in the Rio Negro region; in Joazeiro, a border city between the states of Piaui and Bahia, 'black' macaws coming from the north or the south were sometimes sold. Nevertheless, all this was quite puzzling due to the confusion with Hyacinths and even Spix's.

Prof Sick decided to explore this immense region of North-East Brazil, still a large 'white spot' on the vast omithological map, as no one had ever collected there. This is a place of extreme poverty, very different from the general image of Brazil, with few roads or tracks. The land is dry and holds a short, bushy and thorny vegetation. Trees grow only in dry river beds. Rains can be totally absent for months or even years. People speak a basic Portuguese and have suffered deeply from civil wars, revolutionaries and bandits up to the 20th century. Moreover, the Sertao has been a place of chronic famine at all times.

Five expeditions lead by Prof. Sick explored localities where blue macaws had been reported. On some occasions, Hyacinths were found, nesting in rock cavities among cliffs. The last expedition, during summer 1978-1979, was the most tenuous. At the height of the warm and dry season, in the suffocating heat, lacking water and almost stuck in the sand, Prof. Sick and his companions were offered by a hunter, on 29th December, a few feathers. The unmistakable blue colour of these was the first authentic proof that the species still existed in the wild, and in this region of Brazil. The man said he had killed the bird only few weeks earlier to eat it. This is a common attitude among natives in macaw's country. Boosted by this finding, the team found the energy to continue and was rewarded on 31st December, by the sight of a few birds flying. For the first time ever, omithologists had seen the bird in the wild and the locality of the rare bird had been discovered. A mystery had been unfolded after more than 120 years of puzzling.

Contrary to what might have been said or written, this was not a 'rediscovery', but a genuine 'discovery'. For the scientist, it also initiated an intellectual fight that was to end only with its own life: to prove his finding he had to shoot one of these birds, an act which the scientist in him understood but which the conservationist and extremely life-attached man he had always been deeply abhored. All the same, he had to publish the locality of the collection but then this was vital information for the poachers. Only a few tens of birds were found. Not only was it time (maybe already too late!) to locate the colony, but it was then very urgent to give it local protection rapidly enforced by local authorities in the Reserva do Raso da Catarina.

Today the population is estimated to number about 60 birds divided into two colonies which inhabit large sandstone cliffs where they roost every night, away from predators Arriving at dusk, they leave at dawn and their raucous calls echo among the stones. Their main diet consists of the small nuts of the licuri palm (Syagrus coronata). 450 producing palm trees are said to be necessary for each bird which also feed on numerous fruits of trees and shrubs. Bird distribution certainly used to be much wider, as indicated by their presence forty years ago on the other side of the Rio Sao Francisco, in Pernambucco. It is also difficult to understand why they were not found in other parts of the range of the licuri palm, which is huge, basically from the Nordeste states down to Minas Cerais. Although deforestation has been very severe, licuris are usually kept in the pastures as shade for cattle and eventually food for humans. Therefore, plenty of feeding habitat appears to be left but maybe not as many nesting sites, although stone cliffs are not so rare either.

Hunting was also a problem but now that the bird is a state monument, people are aware of its rarity and proud of it. Unfortunately, so far numbers do not appear to have risen and genetic abnormality such as crooked bills or tails have been reported as a consequence of inbreeding. In captivity, about 15 birds are legally kept but most are very old and captive breeding has been very poor so far. Therefore, maintaining the free population is more than essential. Prof. Helmut Sick left us in 1991, just as the English version of his excellent book on the birds of Brazil was ready for printing. This will also keep his name for posterity but no doubt that he would be more satisfied to know that the bird to which he dedicated most of his life still roams and will keep on roaming free in the vast expanses of North-East Brazil.

WHAT FUTURE FOR LEAR'S MACAW?

We have some notes from Dr. Charles A. Munn, the leading authority on macaws in the wild. He writes as follows:

'There are between 100 and 200 confirmed sightings of Lear's Macaw in the wild. The main threat to the survival of this species is continual illegal trapping from the location of the first known population at Toca cliffs. This is a vulnerable site, and many Lear's macaws have been netted over the past two or three years and sent to Rio or Sao Paulo for specialist collectors. Some birds are traded on to international destinations. The second, more remote population has also been raided, and climbing ropes have been found there.

To take control of this situation and ensure the survival of the macaw, we need to pursue two priorities:

First, work co-operatively to make sure the macaws are effectively guarded.

It is high time the various interested parties resolved their differences and set about providing reliable and co-ordinated guarding for all Lear's populations.

Second, put in hand essential biological studies.

Knowledge is strength, and we are woefully short of the essential information about all biological aspects of Lear's Macaw, for example: nesting ecology, ranging pattems, food requirements, population dynamics. If we could secure this information we would be better able to evaluate management techniques, such as those employed with the Echo Parakeet in Mauritius, that might help accelerate recruitment to the threatened and dwindling population of Lear's Macaw.

I have high hopes that the new Committee for the Preservation of Lear's Macaw, under its chairman Luiz Francisco Sanfilippo, will have the wisdom and determination to use all available resources and skills to save this remarkable bird from extinction.'

Charlie Munn

Inspirational Speakers in Tenerife

Rosemary Low reports on the 4th International Parrot Convention

Paul Butler - he always walks away with the "best speaker" award. Photo: R. Low

EVERY four years there is a gathering of importance which dwarfs all others in the parrot world - the convention hosted by Loro Parque. It brings together parrot enthusiasts from all over the world. In September the fourth meeting in the series was attended by 750 people from 36 countries - a truly international affair. They gathered to enjoy the unparalleled collection at Loro Parque, the company of like-minded enthusiasts (especially during the excellent social programme), and of course, to listen to the papers presented by experts in their field. Twenty speakers from 12 countries read papers on aviculture, veterinary medicine, field work and conservation.

In this report I will not describe the papers on avicultural subjects as most of the authors have already published articles which describe their topics in various magazines. Here I will give credit to the work of those researchers who are involved with endangered species. All confined themselves to the single species with which they work.

Especially memorable was the paper by Niels Krabbe of the Ecuador and Zoology Museum of the University of Copenhagen. He spoke on the status and conservation of the Yellow-eared Conure (Ognorhynchus icterotis). One of the least known of neotropical parrots, it was formerly widespread in Colombia and western Ecuador. At least four populations existed until recently, but two of these are now believed to be extinct. The remaining two have undergone a severe decline and currently may number no more than 24 and 19 birds.

This large conure is closely associated with wax palms, using them for roosting and nesting. Earlier reports that it feeds on the fruits were apparently incorrect. Its food includes various seeds and flowers. The frequent movements of the small flocks between different valleys during the year make this a difficult species to study.

According to Niels Krabbe, unlike most birds threatened with extinction, loss of habitat may not be the primary cause of its

The critically endangered Yellow-eared Conure.

decline. A confiding species, it roosts communally, rendering it vulnerable to persecution. Most families near a traditional roost in Ecuador had shot these conures for food. Despite this, the birds continue to use traditional roosts, typically a wax palm with an extensive view

At the end of his presentation Mr Krabbe showed a short film of Yellow-eared Conures in a wax palm. It brought a lump to my throat - knowing that I was looking at a species which may be extinct in a few years.

Alan Hesse (of dual British and French nationality) who is based in Bolivia, works with the endangered Blue-throated Macaw (Ara glaucogularis). It was almost unknown in the wild until 1992 when a small population was discovered by Charles Munn. This macaw is found in an area of only 7,000 sq miles (18,000 sq km) which is devoted totally to free-range cattle ranching. The estimated wild population is of only 50 to 100 birds. There are five different sites, each with a population of fewer than 20 birds. The macaws live in scattered forest islands which are surrounded by seasonally flooded savannah.

The only hope for the macaw's survival is co-operation by the farmers who own the land. In October 1997 an agreement was made with them, to help protect the species. However, too much publicity could be detrimental to the macaw's survival, so local people are educated and asked to watch over all the fauna in the area. Illegal trapping is the main threat to the macaw. Alan Hesse told me that steps are currently being taken to make sure that confiscated birds will not re-enter the illegal trade. Contrary to earlier opinion, there is no evidence that it was loss of habitat which caused the catastrophic decline.

A proposal will shortly be made to the director general of Biodiversidad to pass a law which would result in the prosecution of anyone holding CITES 1 species in Bolivia, except those birds already identified (by micro-chipping or closed ringing) as being legally held.

Marc Boussekey from the zoo of St Martin-la-Plaine in France is a speaker who always holds the audience's attention. His work with the endangered Red-vented Cockatoo in the Philippines is widely known and has been featured in these pages on several occasions. In Tenerife he spoke also of the experimental colony breeding aviary for this cockatoo which was constructed at the zoo in 1997. It is a huge enclosure built over ten outdoor aviaries which communicate to ten indoor

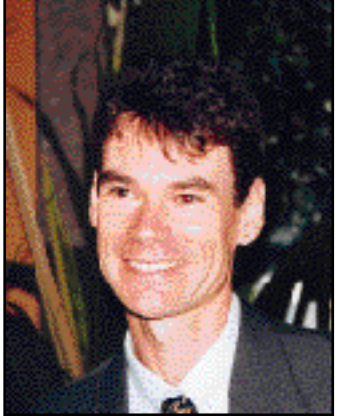
Marc Boussekey spoke on the Red-vented Cockatoo. Photo: R. Low

cages connected by a long welded mesh tunnel.

As soon as a pair starts to show nesting behaviour the pair is shut in a small outdoor aviary. In 1997 two pairs laid five fertile eggs, three of which hatched. At the end of the breeding season, the birds were housed together again.

Amin Brockner from Germany spoke on a species which is unknown in aviculture, the Rusty-faced Parrot (Hapalopsittaca amazonina). Found in the Andes, it is believed to be one of the most endangered of neotropical parrots. Recent research indicates that this species is, in fact, three species. It is feared that one of them (H.fuertesi) has recently become extinct in the wild. All the Hapalopsittaca parrots are rare or extremely rare and occur in very

Amin Brockner Photo: R. Low



Dr Frank Lambert - senior conservation adviser for BirdLife's Indonesia Programme Photo: R. Low

isolated regions. Widespread destruction of habitat is the main threat to their existence.

Dr Frank Lambert is an internationally recognised ecologist specialising in tropical ornithology. He currently works for BirdLife International as senior conservation advisor for the Indonesia and Asia Programme. He spoke on conservation priorities for parrots in Indonesia. Seventy seven species occur there, including some of the least known in the world (eg, Black-lored Parrot and Wallace's Hanging Parrot). There are 14 threatened species - all endemic. Trade and habitat loss have caused their decline. In much of Indonesia, most areas outside of protected forests have been logged or are due to be logged in the next ten years.

One of the threatened forms is the Citron-crested Cockatoo from Sumba. Mr Lambert mentioned that in the recently published Species Action Plan for Yellow-crested Cockatoo (PHPA/BirdLife 1998) taxonomic investigation was recommended as a priority. It may be that the Citron-crested Cockatoo is sufficiently distinct to warrant treatment as a separate species. In this case, both it and the Lesser Sulphur-crest would be considered threatened. A recently-declared national park should help to protect the Citron-crest. However, in Indonesia (as elsewhere) even national parks have been logged! Reduced populations of parrots survive in logged areas, but the main problem is that the large trees are selectively removed, leaving the larger parrots without nesting sites. Another problem is that logged forests are more susceptible to fire. There are massive and widespread fires in many parts of the archipelago, not only in Borneo where the fires made headlines throughout the world this year. Yet this is nothing new. In Borneo, at least 4.5 million hectares of forest were burnt during the drought of 1982/83. Mr Lambert said that in the long-term, the establishment of new protected areas, and better management of existing ones, will provide a sound basis for the conservation of Indonesia's parrots. But one wonders how many species will be lost before this occurs.

Participants at this meeting were fortunate to be able to listen to two of the most charismatic people in bird conservation. Coincidentally, both are British: Carl Jones and Paul Butler. Paul is a very hard act to follow. It is a foregone conclusion that the "best speaker" vote (a feature of this convention) will go to him. He holds the audience spellbound with a mixture of wit, enthusiasm and dynamic personality. As director of RARE Centre he re-created his campaign on the islands of St Vincent and Dominica, with the endangered parrots there, and has gone on to repeat his innovative work in nine more Caribbean countries and, more recently, in the Pacific.

Paul created the concept that conservation can be fun. He and his team go to the schools dressed as the rare parrot (or other species), give out badges and posters and find countless ways of generating national pride in the flagship species.

Paul Butler uses song and dance to bring home his message. Those attending the convention heard snatches of typical songs, some of them composed and sung by leading rap or rock artists. Paul provides a conservation manual (Promoting Protection through Pride) so that local counterparts throughout the world can follow his highly successful education programme. A fictitious target species is featured in a number of sample exercises. (Conservation workers can obtain this through RARE Center for Tropical Conservation in Philadelphia).

Fifteen or 20 years ago the outlook for most of the parrots of the Caribbean was "very bleak". One researcher said that the St Lucia Parrot would be extinct by the year 2000. If Paul Butler had not gone to St Lucia in 1977 as a member of a research expedition that researcher might have been right. Paul stayed - and revolutionised conservation education.

Carl Jones (winner of the World Parrot Trust's Carolina Medal for conservation and a founder and director of the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation) deserves special mention. He has been working with the Echo Parakeet and other critically endangered birds on Mauritius since 1979. The Echo population had at that time crashed to only three known pairs. Today there are in the region of one hundred Echo Parakeets.

As part of a full programme of social events, those attending the convention were treated to a trip around Tenerife on the ferry Banaderos. Photo: R. Low

Hours of observation have revealed that the breeding unit consists of one female with up to three males; the additional males are subservient. Eggs are laid between September and December in relatively large tree cavities. Clutch size is normally one to three. At hatching chicks weigh 8.5g to 11g. They grow to a peak of about 170g at about 45 days and fledge at about 63 days, weighing approximately 150g. Usually one or two young fledge.

Nesting success of non-managed birds is poor; only half or less than half of pairs which lay eggs fledge young. Chicks have been taken by rats, killed by tropical nest fly larvae and by heavy rain flooding the nest cavity. Therefore intensive management has been necessary to ensure increased survival rates. This includes enhancing or modifying existing nest sites. Nest linings are treated with fungicide and insecticide and changed every three days. Early interception occurs should the nest show signs of failure, resulting in the removal of eggs for hatching or chicks for hand-rearing. Alternatively, chicks are placed in the nest of a pair incubating infertile eggs. This has been successfully carried out with chicks of six and seven days.

In his paper on Information and Ignorance concerning the world's parrots, Dr Nigel Collar commented on "the highly depauperate state of biological knowledge of parrots at the end of the twentieth century". He said the reasons were that these birds are slow-breeding (slow to generate data), wide-ranging (difficult to follow, to study them), unpredictable, nonterritorial (difficult to identify individually) and highly cryptic when perched (most of the day). "Parrots behave in a way that is calculated to defy the scientific investigator and they represent everything that is anathema to the fast-track academic research study."

This reminder should have made us even more indebted to those individuals who shared their often hard-won knowledge. It was a privilege to listen to people who have made such a positive and personal contribution in the sphere of bird conservation.

Carl Jones with a valued member of his team - Kirsty Swinnerton Photo: R. Low

Psitta scene

The Conservation Status of African Parrots

Part 2 – Lovebirds and Psittacula Parakeets

by ROGER WILKINSON (Photographs by ROSEMARY LOW)

Grey-headed Lovebird or Madagascar Lovebird Agapornis cana

The Grey-headed Lovebird is endemic to Madagascar . Forshaw (1989) indicates these lovebirds have also been introduced to Mauritius, Rodrigues, Comoro Islands, Mahe in the Seychelles, Zanzibar and Mafia Islands. More recently Dowsett and Dowsett-Lemaire (1993) have rejected some of these records indicating established introductions only in the Seychelles and the Comoros (see also Dowsett and Forbes- Watson 1993).

On Madagascar Grey-headed Lovebirds are found over much of the island but are absent from the central plateau, rare in the east and commonest near the coast (Juniper and Parr 1998). The nominate Agapornis c. cana occurs commonly over much of the island intergrading with the darker A. c. ablectanea which occurs in the arid south-west.

The 1997, 1996 and 1995 export quotas for A. cana were each set for Madagascar at 3500 birds. Although apparently still common it would be prudent to monitor whether this regular harvest is having any effect on population levels.

Grey-headed or Madagascar Lovebird

Red-faced Lovebird or Red-headed Lovebird Agapornis pullaria

The Red-faced Lovebird is widespread but often patchily distributed in moist savannah and secondary forest in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, all countries from Ghana to Cameroon then south to Angola and east to Uganda and Tanzania. It also occurs in Ethiopia. Red-faced Lovebirds are generally frequent and locally abundant in Congo and Ethiopia but may be uncommon elsewhere. Grimes (1987) reports this lovebird to be now uncommon in Ghana whereas last century it was common in coastal villages. Similarly it is noted as uncommon in Nigeria (Elgood et al 1994). Two subspecies are recognised (White 1970, Fry et al 1988) with the eastern A. p. ugandae having a paler rump.

Although no exports were listed for 1989 or 1990 some 2000 Red-faced Lovebirds were reported to be exported from Tanzania between 1983 and 1988 (Edwards and Broad 1992). The annual export quotas for Togo for 1995, 1996 and 1997 were set at 1000 birds. In Nigeria where field records are not numerous caged birds are surprisingly offered for sale in main towns (Elgood et al 1994). There is no official international trade from Nigeria.

Because of its behaviour of nesting in arboreal ant and termite nests and terrestrial termite mounds the Red-faced Lovebird is biologically interesting but appears not to be of immediate conservation concern. However with its patchy and localised distribution any information on areas of occurrence and population sizes, especially from those countries where it continues to be traded or has recently declined, would form a useful baseline against which any future changes could be assessed.

Red-faced Lovebirds

Black-winged Lovebird Agapornis taranta

The Black-winged Lovebird is endemic to highland Ethiopia including the Rift Valley. It is reported to be frequent to common from 1800-3800 m in Olive, Juniperus and Podocarpus forest, sharing its range with the more restricted Yellow-fronted Parrot Poicephalus flavifrons. Black-winged Lovebirds are uncommon in lower altitude grasslands and are rarely found below 1400 m. Trade levels are uncertain. None are listed under the CITES export quotas for Ethiopia for 1995 to 1997 but the species is trapped for local markets and does appear in international trade. Both Collar and (1997) Juniper and Parr (1998) note that Black-winged Lovebirds are regarded as minor crop pests and may become targets for chemical sprays used against bird pests. This was also noted for Yellow-fronted Parrots. Being a restricted range species it would be useful to have estimates of the current distribution and population size of Black-winged Lovebirds to assist future monitoring. Surveys of this species may be conducted together with those for Yellow-fronted Parrots.

Black-winged or Abyssinian lovebird. Photo taken by kind permission of R. Low & R.& V. Moat from Parrots in Aviculture

Black-collared Lovebird Agapornis swinderniana

The main populations of Black-collared Lovebirds occur in primary and secondary rainforests from Cameroon and Gabon east through Congo and Zaire to extreme west Uganda. This distribution includes A. s. zenkeri and the eastern A. s. emini both of which have red suffusion (stronger in zenkeri) behind the black collar of the nape in contrast to this area being buffy yellow in A. s. swinderniana. The status of

Black-collared Lovebirds is incompletely known but they are considered frequent in Gabon, eastern Zaire and Uganda (Fry et al 1988). The nominate A. s. swinderniana is restricted to three isolated pockets in West Africa; knowledge of population sizes and the status of this subspecies and its forest habitats in Liberia, Ivory Coast and Ghana is needed. Thiollay (1985) in his review of the birds of the Ivory Coast records Black-collared Lovebirds in Tai National Park (seen twice!) and notes "may also be on Nimba".

Rosy-faced Lovebird or Peach-faced Lovebird Agapornis roseicollis

Rosy-faced Lovebirds are found in dry woodland and sub-desert from south west Angola south through Namibia and into South Africa. The Angolan subspecies A. r. catumbella is smaller and more brightly coloured than the nominate form. These lovebirds nest colonially and roost in the communal nests of Sociable Weavers Philetairus socius and White-browed Sparrow Weavers Plocepasser mahali; as well as in holes including those in walls and the eaves of buildings, even in large towns. There is a feral population of Rosy-faced Lovebirds on the Cape Peninsula, South Africa. Rosy-faced Lovebirds are reported to be locally common and, near water, even abundant (Fry et al 1988).

Yellow-collared Lovebird or Masked Lovebird Agapornis personatus

This is an East African endemic naturally restricted to central Tanzania but with feral and hybrid populations elsewhere in Tanzania and also in Kenya. Yellow-collared Lovebirds are locally common in central Tanzania from where they have been trapped for export since the 1920s.

Over 5000 A. personatus were reported as exported from Tanzania in 1983 but only 700 from then until 1990 (Edwards and Broad 1992). Although this species was banned from trade in 1991 by the Tanzanian authorities some 112 were exported from Dar es Salaam in 1994 (Rosser and Milliken 1995). Juniper and Parr (1998) suggest Yellow-collared Lovebirds may be declining in numbers as a result of over exploitation for the wild bird trade.

Feral populations of these and Fischer's Lovebirds have existed for over fifty years in Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Mombasa. More recently East African aviculturists are reported to have released hundreds of captive-bred hybrids into the wild; the feral lovebirds, estimated at Lake Naivasha as over 6000 birds in 1986, now seriously compete with native hole nesting birds. Although some of the lovebirds at Lake Naivasha appear to be nearly pure personatus most of them are hybrid (Zimmerman et al 1996). Hybridisation may in the future pose a greater threat to wild lovebirds than did the previous trade. This would deserve serious study with the aim of producing recommendations for management if this was determined to be desirable or feasible.

Fischer's Lovebird Agapornis fischeri

Fischer's Lovebird is another East African restricted range endemic centred in Tanzania but with an apparently recent expansion west into Rwanda and Burundi (Fry et al 1988). Feral populations often hybridising with Yellow-collared Lovebirds Agapornis personatus occur in a number of locations including Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Mombasa, Nairobi, Athi River, Naivasha and Isiolo.

Reported relatively recently as common, often abundant (Fry et al 1988) the volume of trade in A. fischeri (averaging over 5000 per year in recorded exports from 1983-1990) caused sufficient concern to recommend a ban on exports from Tanzania and merited the birds inclusion as "near-threatened" in Birds to Watch 2 (Inskipp and Corrigan 1992, cited in Rosser and Milliken 1995, Collar et al 1994).

Recent surveys (Moyer 1995) indicate that there has been no range reduction but that perhaps only ca 50,000 sq km of its 136,000 sq km range may offer suitable habitat. There has however been a drastic reduction in population as evidenced by low densities outside protected areas and some incursions into protected areas by illegal trappers. The total population is now estimated at about 290,000 - 1,000,000, perhaps a tenth of its historical population (Moyer 1995).

Provided that the approximately 100,000 Fischer's Lovebirds in protected reserves remain adequately protected Agapornis fischeri is in no danger of extinction. Sustainable harvesting may be considered after 2001 if the present trade moratorium results in population recovery. Moyer (1995) suggests this will require further research into the ecology, population biology and distribution of A. fischeri in order to determine capture quotas as well as periodic monitoring of population levels.

Nyasa Lovebird Agapornis lilianae

The Nyasa Lovebird occurs as isolated populations in southern Malawi, Zambia and northern Zimbabwe (Fry et al 1988) and is also recorded for Tanzania and Mozambique (Dowsett and Forbes-Watson 1993). Like the closely related Black-cheeked Lovebird, with which it is sometimes considered conspecific (see next account) it is largely restricted to areas of Colophospermum mopane woodland, avoiding the moister adjacent Brachystegia woodland. Loss of habitat, as for example in the Kariba basin is probably resulting in an overall diminution in this species range and numbers (Juniper and Parr 1998). Fry et al (1988) note that although some populations are locally very abundant that Nyasa Lovebirds are popular as cage-birds and their numbers can be drastically reduced by trapping. Collar (1997) also considers that overall the species total numbers are not large and the population is susceptible to trapping.

The 1997 CITES export quota for Nyasa Lovebirds was set for Mozambique at 100 "ranched" specimens. As noted earlier when discussing the licensing of trade in "ranched" Brown-headed Parrots Poicephalus cryptoxanthus from Mozambique this new development for trade in wild-taken parrots deserves further investigation. Trade should continue to be monitored.

Black-cheeked Lovebird Agapornis nigrigenis

The Black-cheeked Lovebird is endemic or near-endemic to southern Zambia where it is restricted to Colophospermum mopane woodland. Fry et al (1988) also include Zimbabwe (Victoria Falls) and north-east Namibia within this species range. Dowsett and Forbes-Watson (1993) regard the Black-cheeked Lovebird as a Zambian endemic with the species now locally extinct in Zimbabwe and previous reports from Namibia and Botswana requiring confirmation. Dodman (1995)

Fischer's Lovebirds

Black-cheeked Lovebirds

African Ringneck, male

suggests that between February and June, Black-cheeked Lovebirds may spread more widely in search of ripening millet and sorghum possibly then visiting the Caprivi region of Namibia. Fry et al (1988) consider the species to be local and uncommon within its limited range and in the dry season the lovebirds were only observed close to rivers (Dodman 1995). The Black-cheeked Lovebird's total range was previously estimated as about 6,000 sq km (Collar and Stuart 1985) but more recent surveys in south west Zambia suggest that although mopane woodland occupies some 5,500 sq km the core area for A. nigrigenis is only 2,500 sq km (Dodman 1995). The total population is estimated at about 10,000 with a northern sub-population of about 3,800 and southern sub-population of about 6,200 birds (Dodman loc.cit.).

Some recent authors (e.g. Fry et al 1988, Short et al 1990) treat nigrigenis as conspecific with lilianae but morphological and ecological differences suggest these are better considered as full species (Dowsett and Dowsett-Lemaire 1980, 1993). Although the Nyasa Lovebird is also stenotopic in its association with Colophospermum mopane the two allied species are presently kept apart by the block of unsuitable miombo Brachystegia woodland running along the Zambezi escarpment. However there is a possible threat of hybridisation with feral Nyasa Lovebirds Agapornis lilianae (Juniper and Parr 1998).

Black-cheeked Lovebirds were previously heavily trapped for the international trade with for example 16,000 caught over four weeks in 1929 (Moreau 1948). Presently trapping is small scale and only for local consumption (Dodman 1995) and would not presently appear to endanger this species. Louise Warburton is currently researching the biology of Black-cheeked Lovebirds with the aim of examining the feasibility of sustainable harvesting (Perrin 1996). Studies of the biology of this lovebird should be supported in that information gained would be useful should conservation management be required in the future. However I have serious reservations about using this information to support international trade. Because of its small range and population the Black-cheeked Lovebird is the only mainland African parrot included as endangered or rare in Birdlife/IUCN lists of threatened birds (Collar et al 1994, Collar and Stuart 1985). Black-cheeked Lovebirds are widely bred in captivity and relatively inexpensive. Although heavily traded in the past there is no present threat from commercial trade and reviving this trade, albeit for sustainable yield, could itself present significant risks to this species survival.

Ringneck or Rose-ringed Parakeet Psittacula krameri
The Rose-ringed Parakeet is widely distributed through the savannah zone of sub-saharan Africa from Senegambia and Guinea Bissau in the west through Mali, Niger, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic east through Sudan to Uganda and northern Ethiopia. Most of this range is occupied by the nominate P. k. krameri which intergrades with the eastern P. k. parvirostris of eastern Sudan and Ethiopia. Introduced feral populations of P. k. borealis occur in Natal and of P. k. manillensis in Egypt (Fry et al 1988).

These parakeets although popular as cage-birds remain frequent to abundant over most of their range and are found in a wide range of habitats. Flocks of hundreds or sometimes thousands may concentrate at food sources including crops of sorghum, millet and lentils.

The 1995 export quota for Senegal was for 12,000 individuals but those for 1996 and 1997 were each raised to 25,000 birds. Although the effect of this trade is unknown given that this is a common pest of cultivated crops it would be unrealistic to oppose it on conservation grounds. Nonetheless any information on trade and its effects on local populations would be informative.

Echo Parakeet, Mauritius Parakeet or Mascarene Parakeet Psittacula echo (Psittacula eques)
Critically endangered (Collar and Stuart 1985, Collar et al 1994), the Echo Parakeet is endemic to Mauritius where it survives as a tiny population in the upland forest in the south west of the island. There is disagreement over the relationship of the Mauritius population to the extinct Reunion form eques (Dowsett and Dowsett-Lemaire 1993) but this debate is not relevant to current conservation needs.

From the 1970s to the middle 1980s the ten or so surviving birds seemed to have little or no breeding success (Collar and Stuart 1985, Jones 1987). Suggested reasons for this include habitat loss, hunting pressures, competition from introduced birds (including Rose-ringed Parakeets Psittacula krameri), nest predation from introduced Crab-eating Macaques Macaca fascicularis and cyclones. From about 1990 to 1997 the population increased from about 15 to about 90 birds with thirteen pairs then present in the wild (Greenwood 1997, Low 1997). This recovery has been the result of a concerted conservation programme, managed by Carl Jones, including captive breeding and release (Murray 1997). There can be no doubt that this programme should continue to retain priority funding and support.

Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful to Mike Perrin for information on current studies of parrots supervised from the Research Centre for African Parrot Conservation, University of Natal, Stuart Taylor for information on Brown-headed Parrots, Clive Barlow for information on parrots in The Gambia, Eric Hilton for reports on Yellow-faced Parrots in Ethiopia, Nigel Collar for prepublication accounts for all African Parrots and Phil McGowan for prepublication material from the Global Parrot Action Plan.

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The 'Pet Bird Report' Convention

by MICHAEL REYNOLDS

The Pet Bird Report

This is my third attempt at writing a report on this convention, which took place in Oakland, California on 9th to 11th October 1998. The reason why it's difficult to get started is that I find myself looking through copies of the 'Pet Bird Report' so that I can try to convey to readers the unique quality of this publication, and the organisation behind it. I then get caught up in reading the articles, and two hours later I realise I've run out of time. So first let me tell you about the 'Pet Bird Report' (PBR) and its editor, Sally Blanchard, and then we'll get around to the recent convention.

The PBR is now subtitled 'The Companion Parrot Magazine' and this describes it well. Owned and edited by Sally Blanchard, it was launched eight years ago and has now reached issue No. 41. In its 92 pages it covers a wide range of subjects likely to be of interest to its subscribers, who now number in excess of 10000. The emphasis is on how to achieve successful parrot ownership, where the pet bird and the pet owner both enjoy a satisfactory quality of life. No stone is left unturned in pursuit of this ideal, and the cornerstone of the process is the correct analysis of 'parrot behaviour'. This may be a new concept to some bird keepers outside the United States, but it is well established as an important part of keeping pet parrots in the US.

Sally Blanchard is the undisputed queen of behaviourists, and anyone who has heard her speak at a convention or bird club meeting will understand why. She really does have a total grasp of what is going on in the complex and fertile brains of those birds, and her skills as a teacher enable her to put across her solutions in a manner full of impact, common sense, and humour. I am certain that Sally, together with her associated behaviourists and staff, has done a great deal to make life better for many thousands of pet parrots in America.

Sally Blanchard and her friend Spikey le Bec at the PBR Convention.
Photo: The Amazona Society

That does not mean, however, that there is any sense of complacency at PBR. On the contrary, there is a clear understanding of the misery experienced by a substantial percentage of pet or companion birds. At the PBR convention I was given the opportunity (as a member of a panel of speakers which included leading 'parrot rescuers' Julie Murad of the Gabriel Foundation, Bonnie Kenk of PEAC, and Sybil Erdin of Oasis) to talk about the work of the World Parrot Trust, and I concentrated on our concern for the many poorly kept birds and the need for 'parrot rescue'. (See our edition of PsittaScene for May 1998). When I said that for every knowledgeable parrot owner in the US there must be a thousand who have little idea of the needs of their bird, I was quickly corrected by the audience and panel, who thought that 10,000 or even 100,000 would be a more accurate figure.

It is sad to hear this, especially since the same statistics are likely to apply globally. All the more reason why our new World Parrot Trust campaign 'PARROTS NEED HELP to survive in the wild, to thrive in our homes' should be supported and widely promoted in order to educate those who need to know much more about parrots and their needs.

There is little doubt that the 300+ delegates to the PBR Convention are the elite of the companion parrot world in the United States. They really care, not only about their own birds, but also about the rest of the parrots in the US, which were informally thought to number as many as 5 Million. Unlike this publication PsittaScene, which is not interested in carrying advertisements, the Pet Bird Report carries many, for such products as cages, toys, books, videos and other publications, the services of behaviourists, foods, bird breeders, lighting etc. Especially interesting is the fact that every advertised product must be specifically tested and approved by PBR.

The articles and features cover a wide range of interests, and recent subjects included: 'Avian adolescence', 'Hyacinth Macaw Conservation', 'Aggression and Parrots', 'Give your parrot a job', 'No more Perch Potatoes', 'Great-billed Parrots: breeding and pet potential', 'Stalking the Wild Amazons', 'Creative Parrot Keeping'. PBR also prints some articles from PsittaScene, for example our May 1998 article suggesting 'Guidelines for Parrot Rescue.'

The PBR Convention was a great success, and I was especially struck by the friendly, enthusiastic and non-political atmosphere. I am grateful to Sally Blanchard for the opportunity to speak about the aims of The World Parrot Trust, which seemed to be well accepted and understood by the audience. With the help of Yvette de Leon who set up our booth in the well supported sales area, we signed up more new members than at any other convention.

If you would like more information about the Pet Bird Report, or to become a subscriber, visit their web site at: http://www.petbirdreport.com. You could also write to: The Pet Bird Report, 2236 Mariner Square Drive, Number 35, Alameda CA 94501-1071, USA.

Visit to the Pantanal Area of Western Brazil

by HAROLD ARMITAGE

An eye-catching telephone kiosk in Corumba Photo: H. Armitage

Matto Grosso do Sul

Following our trip to Peru my wife and I decided to go to the Pantanal area of Western Brazil in order to see the Hyacinth Macaw (locally known as "arara azul"). We first went to the Southern end - Corumba/Campo Grande/Miranda. It is possible to stay at a couple of expensive "pousadas" (country hotels) in the area, the most costly being the "Caiman" or slightly cheaper the "Arara Azul" but this isn't our style or price bracket.

We contacted "Colibri Pantanal Safari", a small tour/expedition firm based in Corumba, and made some tentative arrangements explaining the situation and saying we were particularly interested in seeing the "arara azul". They said there was absolutely no problem in this, how many did we want to see? We had read of the work of Nieva Guedes. She was known to them; they would contact her. They quoted a price of $700 for a three day expedition to include 4x4 truck, driver/cook, mechanic and English speaking guide. All accommodation (tents, hammocks, bunkhouse, mosquito nets and food) was included. We agreed to this.

After a surprisingly agreeable journey, we arrived in Corumba to be met at the bus station by one of the "Colibris" and shepherded to a cheap hotel they had arranged for us. We then went to make our detailed arrangements with them.

Nieva Guedes and her work is well known to "Colibri" as they regularly take tourists to the area where she works. They had already been in touch with Nieva. However, she now refused to entertain us, the reason given being that we didn't speak Portuguese (which she knew from the start). We then had a long discussion with Claudine during which was mentioned the schoolhouse at the Fazenda Alegria referred to in magazine articles and on an Internet web page. She and several of the guides present stated positively that there was no schoolhouse at the Fazenda Alegria. After much discussion we decided to include the Alegria on our trip.

The Pantanal is an almost level alluvial plain; the natural vegetation varies from scrubby forest to marshland. The soil is extremely poor and water is never far below the surface. On most maps it appears as a blank space however in reality it is carved up into vast fazendas (ranches) mostly owned by absentee landlords. There are roads and tracks to all parts, some of them are elevated making them theoretically all-weather. The many bridges are in a poor state. In the wet season the Paraguay river rises and inundates hundreds of square miles. The fazenda buildings are located on patches of high ground. Cattle is the game and many hundreds of square miles of the Pantanal have been destroyed to provide grazing. The process continues. Fire is the tool; in the dry season fires are set to improve the grassland and destroy the forest. There is a resident manager and dozens of cowboys employed at each fazenda all dressed like John Wayne (minus the gun but plus large knife a la Crocodile Dundee!)

Hyacinth Macaws observed by the Armitages in the Pantanal area of western Brazil Photo: H. Armitage

The expedition was well organized, not strenuous, but not for wimps. Many of the roads were just parallel ruts; the owners of the fazenda are extremely wealthy and usually have their own helicopter or light aircraft. We visited five nest sites and saw in total 19 Hyacinth Macaws, several Greenwings, Amazons and lots of smaller parrots. At the Fazenda Alegria, which is quite remote but extremely palatial, we asked through our guide about any facility used by Nieva Guedes. They knew Nieva and said she used to go there - but not recently. They knew nothing about any facility she had there.

We then went to a satellite ranch, the Fazenda Manduve. They lent us a cowboy who showed us a nest hole about ten miles from the ranch. There was a metal tag on the tree and climbing ropes were still attached. We saw the owners of the hole. Magnificent they were, rising into the sky when they saw 'us'. They were a richer blue even than that, trumpeting their alarm call, ARA ARA ARA Argh. It would be a dreadful thing if they were lost. We also saw four near the ranch house feeding on the ground, going through the cow dung for seeds. We saw innumerable other birds, crocodiles, anteaters, cats and deer, to mention just a few.

On the last day there was heavy rain and the most violent thunderstorms I have ever experienced. We beat a hasty retreat to escape the rising Paraguay river. On the way back we called at the Pousada Arara Azul, where in fine weather, there are many Hyacinth Macaws to be seen, also nest holes. However, due to the rain we saw only a bedraggled pair. Once again the management said Nieva used to call regularly. She had no facility there. When we returned to Corumba, Claudine telephoned Nieva. Nieva agreed that there was no facility at Fazenda Alegria. Claudine had done further research and said she could take us to sites that even Nieva did not know of.

In conclusion I would say that I am extremely concerned about the "arara azul" in the wild. Their nest holes are perfectly easy to find (they are such a noisy bird). Some of the nest sites are quite remote but some are next to major highways. All are easily accessible. At present no-one is looking after their interests. The local people consider them, along with the Jabiru Stork, to be the insignia of the Pantanal. Indeed there are "arara azul" telephone kiosks and 20ft (6m) murals in Corumba. However the concern seems to be more with the exploitation of the tourist potential than with the macaws' conservation. The people with the power are the wealthy landlords who own the Pantanal.

Matto Grosso

We had discovered on the Internet that the "arara azul" was also to be seen at the Pousada do Pantanieros on the Transpantaniera Highway in the North of the Pantanal.

After our visit to Corumba we caught buses to the capital of Matto Grosso, Cuiaba, which lies immediately to the north of the Pantanal. There we intended to contact Joel Sousa, another Pantanal tour operator. We needn't have bothered! He found us within thirty seconds of our setting foot in the hotel. In ten minutes we were booked on a standard trip which covered the places we wanted to visit. There were four other tourists with us. We travelled in a VW "combi", brand new. His tours are excellent; how he does it for the money, I don't know. His brother Josue conducts the trip and speaks good English. Joel rounds up the tourists. Competition is totally cut-throat, I now know what it feels like to be a hunted man! It was a three day trip, staying at the Pousada Pixiam and the Pousada do Pantanieros.

The northern part of the Pantanal is far wilder than the south. Fazendas are smaller and some at least are run by resident farmers. Once again cattle is king. The Pousada Pixiam had lots of small parrots. We went on a river trip during which a wild fish eagle was persuaded to snatch a fish from the end of a ten foot pole. Giant river otters tried to climb in the boat with us to get the fish we were hand feeding them with. I swear it's all true! Elsewhere if you see a giant river otter at two hundred yards you can count yourself lucky. Bird life was incredibly abundant (although no "arara azul"). The dawn chorus would waken the dead, unless you've been drinking cacheça the night before, in which case you're probably better off dead.

The next day as we arrived at the Pousada do Pantanieros. The first thing we saw was a group of "arara azul" feeding noisily in the trees right next to it. We abandoned the rest of the group and remained at the Pantanieros and spent the time watching them through our telescope. We saw at least 15. The owner, who loves them dearly, said he thought there were 60-70 birds in all and nine nest holes (we saw two of them) on his property. They were extremely wary and ignored the locals; we could observe them satisfactorily only with our telescope.

On the way back from the Pousada Arara we saw a group of six in a tree right next to the road. They were extremely bold, as interested in us as we were in them. They sat in the tree eyeing us with beady eye, chortling and gurgling to one another. When we left them, a couple pursued the bus "buzzing" it before sweeping off into the trees. We did not have time to investigate the Pousada Arara, it had large signs on the gate depicting the "arara azul".

Foz do Iguaçu

We also visited the famous waterfalls and the gigantic Itaipu dam project both of them stunning in their magnitude. On the way back from the cataract we visited the "Jardin dos Aves". They have about two hundred parrots there including many of the large macaws. Some are kept in enormous aviaries (about 200ft x 50ft and 30ft high) which the public can enter through double doors. Some of the large macaws are extremely tame and the "trusties" are allowed to fraternise with the public, both inside and outside the aviaries. There were a couple of "arara azul" and although they were in fine condition, I could not help but compare them with those I had seen in the Pantanal. It will be a sad day indeed if the air no longer resounds to their wild calls.

The back gate to Fazenda Alegria Photo: H. Armitage

Visiting the Pantanal

It's no big deal to visit the Pantanal yourself and no great expense. Travelling from Wales it cost us £1500 in total per person (four weeks). This included the cost of our private expedition and all airfares.

Brazil has a bad press in the first world, much of it undeserved. We travelled by bus. The buses are superb, as good or better than UK buses, new, spotlessly clean, and well driven. They leave precisely on time. The main roads are excellent for example the main road from Sao Paulo is a sixteen lane highway. Hotels are good and cheap and breakfast is often included at a quarter of the UK price. Restaurants/grills are also spotless and very cheap. In fact the place reminds me of Germany in that respect. (It's best for first worlders to drink only bottled water, easily and cheaply available.)

Required reading:- Lonely Planet's book on Brazil.

Tour operators:

- Colibi Pantanal Safari (Claudine), Rua Joaquim Murtino 971, Corumba, Matto Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Tel/Fax (067)231-3934 Most European languages spoken. US$700 for three day private expedition.
- Joel Safari Tours (Joel Sousa) Hotel Presidente, Av. Getulio Vargas 155A, 78005-600, C Cuiaba, Matto Grosso, Brazil. Tel/Fax (065)623-4696 / (065)624-1386. English is spoken. US$166 per person for standard three day excursion, everything included.

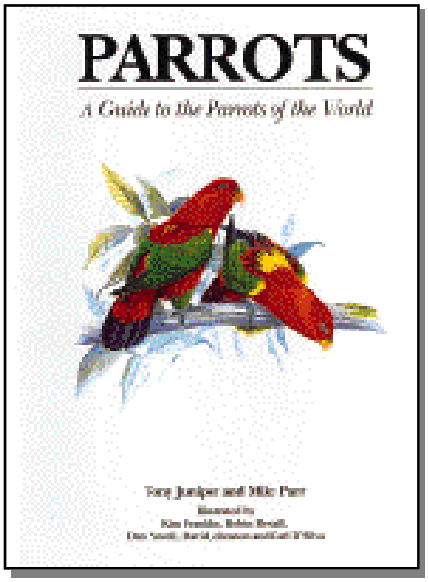
I found both of theses operators really excellent and tremendous value for money.

On the other hand you can just turn up. These people can fix anything!

Cowboy with transport Photo: H. Armitage

Book Review

Review by Peter J.S. Olney
Senior Editor of the International Zoo Yearbook, former Curator of Birds, Zoological Society of London and former Director of the Federation of Zoos of Great Britain & Ireland.



PARROTS : A GUIDE TO THE PARROTS OF THE WORLD
TONY JUNIPER AND MIKE PARR. 1998. Pp. 584, 88 colour plates, distribution maps, text figures. Robertsbridge: Pica Press. £35.00. ISBN 1-873403-40-2

When I became Curator of Birds for the Zoological Society of London nearly 30 years ago, parrots formed a substantial part of its large and varied collection. Some of the birds were rare in the wild or rarely seen in captivity, some were very old with aged plumage, but all, thank goodness, had been identified by my able predecessor, John Yealland. I can now confess that at that stage of my curatorial career I was not always completely confident in my identification of some of the new arrivals, especially those thought to be subspecies. I imagined somewhat naively that parrots, being such familiar birds, would be relatively easy to identify but I soon found out that there was no easy and comprehensive identification manual or, at that time, apart from Otto Finsch's Die Papageien (1867-68), no authoritative and up-to-date work devoted to the natural history of the entire parrot family. There were a number of folio productions, such as Gould's Birds of Australia (1840-69), which provided beautiful but not always accurate pictures with minimal text; there were a number of useful field guides and avicultural books, though many were, for identification purposes, inadequate and badly illustrated; museum skins and photographs were often difficult to locate and use. Personal help from ornithologists and aviculturists was welcome but I always felt that I ought to have been able to make my own judgements. My dented confidence bounced back when in 1973, Joseph Forshaw and the talented artist William Cooper, published their splendid Parrots of the World, a comprehensive survey of the current knowledge of the family with, for the first time, illustrations of all the species and the more divergent subspecies. Now in its 3rd edition (1989) it remains an invaluable and highly respected work. A joy to possess, but for identification purposes the size, weight and layout, are definite disadvantages.

What was needed in the 1970s, and not only by me, was a book specifically designed to assist in the identification of the 352 species contained within the family and one which included at least a summary of the available information. A book which would enable birdwatchers, field-workers and those involved with parrots in captivity or in trade, including wildlife trade law enforcement personnel, to identify accurately species and subspecies/races. In 1989, two ICBP (now Birdlife International) workers, Tony Juniper and Mike Parr, proposed such a book and though it has had a long gestation they have now produced exactly what was needed - a comprehensive, concise, up-to-date (to 1997) and readily usable identification guide.

The book follows the now familiar contents format adopted by Pica Press in its deservedly popular series of family monographs. Introductory sections cover topography, origins and evolutionary relationships, classification, natural history, conservation status, threats, and captive breeding and these are followed by condensed accounts of the 352 species. One thousand colour illustrations on 88 plates depict all species; adults, sex differences if any, immatures and the majority of what are considered in the text to be valid subspecies/races.

Scientific names follow Sibley and Monroe (1990,1993), with minor modifications which are in line with several recent authors. Many species of parrot are known by a number of different English names and some of those used in this book are not always easily recognisable. Some of the alternative names are listed but it would be a good thing if everyone used a standardised set of common and scientific names and I would recommend this book as the one to follow.

The introductory sections though shorter and with less coverage than this book's only possible rival, volume 4 of the Handbook of the Birds of the World (1997), are well written digests of current knowledge. The sections on conservation status, threats, and captive breeding are particular valuable and thought-provoking.

The text for each species covers identification, voice, distribution and status, ecology, description, sex/age differences, biometric measurements, geographical variations, and references. There are notes where there remain uncertainties in taxonomic standing. Each species account has an excellent, clear distribution map, though this needs to be read and checked with the species ecology section.

Each account is a useful and concise distillation of available information (which has grown considerably in the last twenty years). Often, however, the short reference list at the end of the account shows how little is still known about many species. The decision to have the source references at the end of each account rather than citing authors within the text is, I think, a mistake and annoyingly frustrating. Full references are collected into an impressive bibliography at the end of the book.

The colour plates and the short caption texts which summarise distribution and highlight diagnostic features will certainly be a great help in identification. Birds are shown perched and in some cases also flying, and on the same plate are drawn to the same scale in relation to one another. A useful addition for relating the bird to its actual size is a line drawing of the familiar budgerigar at the bottom of the text page drawn to the same scale as those birds on the facing coloured plate. Five talented artists have produced excellent paintings, and though most are somewhat static, all are fine for the task of identification. Those birds with some background of habitat are, to my mind, the most successful and I wish there had been more.

This book lives up to our expectations and hopes and all concerned are to be congratulated, particularly the authors and artists for their skilful use of material, and Pica Press and those responsible for the production and design. Editors are rarely acknowledged but it gives me particular pleasure to recognise the characteristic proficiency of Nigel Collar.

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An Ultramarine Lory Nest in the Marquesas Islands

by MIGUEL A. GÓMEZ-GARZA and CARLA ELIZOND / Fundación ARA, México

The Marquesas Lory (Vini ultramarina) is one of the most beautiful parrots in existence. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most endangered. Although apparently in the past its geographic distribution was broad, today the range of this species is extremely limited, restricted to several islands of the Marquesas archipelago, in the French Polynesia.

According to Forshaw (1989) the species is found in the Nuku Hiva, Ua Pou and Ua Huka islands. When we visited Nuku Hiva in September 1993, we were told by local residents that this species had not been seen for two or three years, coinciding with Collar (et al 1994) who mentions that this species is possibly extinct on that island. Although unfortunately we did not spot this bird on Ua Pou, according to local residents it is very rare and is seldom seen on the hillsides. The dramatic situation of this species on the two islands is undoubtedly a result of the introduction of rats (Rattus rattus) unknowingly carried by ships from one place to another.

However, the lory population is relatively stable on Ua Huka, perhaps because rats have not settled on that island.

On September 28, 1993, while walking in the Hane Valley, in Ua Huka, we stopped in an area densely covered by coconut palms, 2 km from the shore and close to the sea level. In this place, from the distance we heard the soft and repetitive monosyllabic sound made by the lories, until finally 20 birds of this species appeared. During 30 minutes they remained in couples, feeding on the nectar and flowers of the palms. One of these couples entered into their nest, formed by a channel in the base and sheath of a palm leaf. Fortunately, the palm was small and located in a lower level of land, allowing us to approach and stand in front of the tree. Soon we heard the typical sound of chicks being fed. One of the birds that had entered into the nest came out and remained outside, while the other continued feeding the chicks. After 5 minutes, the other bird came out of the nest to meet its partner and receive food by regurgitation.

Although all the other lories dispersed, this couple remained in the palm for approximately 2 hours. During this period of time, one of the birds entered and came out of the nest another three times, feeding the chicks for about 5 minutes at a time. To avoid disturbing the birds and considering the fragility of the nest, we refrained from approaching further.

Vini ultramarina in the wild. Ua Huka. The nest is on the left side of the birds
Photo: Miguel A. Gómez-Garza

Not far away, the birds were seen eating ripe mangoes (Mangifera indica) and the flowers of an Acacia sp. tree, probably introduced. Local inhabitants are familiar with the lories, which they call "Vitti", and they seem to enjoy the presence of the birds.

The program for the translocation of this species to the island of Fatu Hiva has been in place since 1992, sponsored by the Delegation of the Environment for French Polynesia and the Zoological Society of San Diego, in hopes of establishing the Marquesas Lory in its new habitat in the neighbouring island. This effort will increase the chances for survival of one of the most beautiful and interesting birds of the South Pacific.

Ua Huka, Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia Photo: Miguel A. Gómez-Garza

COMPETITION – Win the big lory book!

The long-awaited Encyclopaedia of the Lories by Rosemary Low was published last month. It is a mine of information - the largest study of one group of parrots ever made by a single person. An exciting and colourful book, it contains 175 colour photographs in its 432 pages. There are maps, diagrams and dozens of tables showing the weight development of chicks. We have two copies to give away to members. For a chance to win one, just name the species depicted below (Bird A and Bird B). Send your answers on a postcard, please, with your name and full postal address to: Lory Quiz, PsittaScene, World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HY, U.K. by 6 January 1999. The winners will be the first two correct answers pulled out on that date. The answers to the questions and the names of the prize winners will be published in the February issue.

Bird A

Bird B

Encyclopaedia of the Lories is available in the UK from Insignis Publications, P.O.Box 100, Mansfield, Notts NG2O 9NZ, UK. Fax: +44 (0)1623 846430. The price is £46.50 post free in the UK and £51 post paid in Europe. Airmail postage outside Europe is extra.

Psitta news

Cuba

Dr. James Wiley of Grambling State University, Louisiana, USA, reports as follows on the Cuban Conure (Aratinga euops):

Xiomara Gálvez and her team of biologists are making tremendous progress on the study of the status and distribution of this parakeet. This year we concentrated on the little-studied area of Oriente, where we were able to assess parakeet and parrot populations. In addition, Xiomara and her group have been collecting good data on the biology of the parakeet, as needed to develop biologically sound conservation programmes for the species. Of particular interest during the study period has been the parakeet's diet and reproductive biology. Also, we have made a special effort toward understanding its position in Cuban ecological communities, especially those greatly altered by man.

In 1998, as in 1997, we conducted a Conservation Festival as part of our efforts to inform and "convert" the local public to supporting the drive to conserve the Cuban Parakeet and other endangered species. This year's Festival was in Jaguajay and, like earlier events, was a spectacular success. The public (e.g., school children, hunters, citizens) participated in the inventory of parakeet populations centred on the north-central coast of Cuba, then enjoyed a community festival in celebration of conservation and the parakeet.

Cuban Conure Photo: R. Low

Plans are moving ahead for re-introducing the parakeet in the Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Pines), where the species was exterminated nearly a century ago. We have laid the groundwork for such an effort through baseline studies of potential nest cavity and food availability, predator and competitor threats, and potential release sites. In addition, Xiomara has led a public education programme that began in December 1995 with the first Conservation Festival (a report of which is in press in Bird Conservation International). That festival was founded on the participation of the public and we had more than 300 local residents manning survey stations during a one-day inventory of the parrot and crane population on the island. This year (November 1998), we will have a follow-up festival at the request of Isla residents. All of this is quite exciting, because now we are getting tremendous public interest in, and support of, local conservation programmes.

The efforts of the 1998 field season will be continued into 1999. We will be concentrating our studies of parakeet biology in the BelÈm National Ecology Area, Camaguay, in east-central Cuba. Efforts there will be concentrating on characterising nest habitat, including nest cavity characteristics, as well as the behaviour and ecology or the parakeet. Additional areas will be surveyed to add to our pool of knowledge about the parakeet's distribution and status in Cuba. Another festival is planned for February, this time to be centred in the Zapata Swamp, an area of importance for many of Cuba's endangered species, including the parakeet.

Pending the outcome of the data collection in 1999, we may begin preparing manuscripts describing our parakeet findings late next year, but certainly by the following year. The support that the Canadian World Parrot Trust have generously afforded Xiomara and her team is greatly appreciated, as it has allowed her to make tremendous gains in knowledge and to use that knowledge in developing an effective management program for Cuba's psittacines.

Echo Parakeet Update

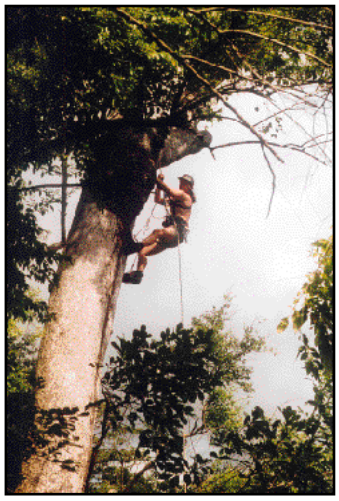
from Grant Harper ('Harpo'), Project Leader, 1998/99 at 8 October, 1998

There are currently eight nests. Five have eight chicks at various stages of growth, and three have eggs. Two wild chicks have already been transferred to the aviaries at Black River, where they accompany the two chicks that have been hatched from three harvested eggs. We expect at least four nests to produce clutches in the next week or two.

The most interesting news thus far has been pairing of a two year old captive reared release bird with a wild male. She ('Gabriella') has produced an egg which unfortunately, but not surprisingly, is infertile. We hope to foster a chick to her in the immediate future. This nest is a turning point for the Echo Parakeet project, showing that the release birds can become functioning members of the wild population, and bodes well for the future of the release program and the species as a whole. We have also found a pairing between a one year old female and a four year old male, both banded as chicks on nests. This pairing may give us some baseline information on sexual maturity, depending on whether they produce a clutch or not.

The recent purchase of a portable incubator has taken a lot of the guesswork and uncertainty out of chick transfers, and is a valuable and long awaited addition to the team!

Dale Jackson leaves us tomorrow to go back to Paradise Park after his six week secondment here. The Echo team and Dale have both learnt a lot while he has been here, and he's been a valuable, hard working and easy going member of the team. It would be good to see him out here again at some stage.



Dale Jackson in Mauritius

The Echo Goes Techno with Help from Panasonic

by Amber Delahooke and Rob Sullivan

The Echo Parakeet Project in Mauritius has taken on a new technical dimension with the introduction of a nest camera! The camera will be used to record every going-on in the nest cavity of a wild pair of Echo's, (Corner Pair), throughout this breeding season. It should hopefully lead to important discoveries about the problems facing the young chicks in the nest; revealing the extents to which they are begging for and receiving food, the role of the extra males in the population or perhaps the intrusion of exotic competitors such as Indian Mynah birds. We are hoping to set up another system in the Captive Breeding Centre to compare the wild and captive Echos, the results of which will be used as the basis for Emma's Masters degree.

We are very grateful to Panasonic for donating the heart of the system, a 12V Panasonic timelapse VCR (worth £895) which can be programmed to stretch a 4 hour tape over 24 hours. It is nestled safely in a parrot proof case that is air and watertight and will be hidden away from the nest tree.

Many thanks are also due to the New Zealand Department of Conservation for all their help and advice, especially Paul Jansen and Murray Douglas, who have developed extensive field camera systems for monitoring the

Kakapo among other endangered species. Following their lead, we have managed to put together a similar battery-powered field system, which should stand up to the rigours of life in the field.

Earlier this year while working on the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation's Visitor Centre we produced a programme for Channel 5's Eco-Warriors about the Echo project and the World Parrot Trust. A compilation of three Eco-Warriors about the various Mauritius projects is now being shown to tourists in the Ile Aux Aigrettes Visitor Centre. We recently returned with Luke Gallie of Two Hand Productions to film a documentary about the experience of three UK and three Mauritian competition winners as they explore and take part in different aspects of the project. This will be shown on Boxing Day afternoon on Channel 5 and will feature Pablo and his recently released friends flying in to visit the visitors! As a result of this film we were able to donate £500 towards the system, camera and casings, etc, and put it together to take it out to Mauritius. WPT have paid for the batteries.

We believe that this research tool will bring a new dimension to the cutting edge nature of the work in Mauritius and will hopefully serve as a model to other restoration projects around the world.

New Zealand

Programme aims to lift Kaka numbers

Conservation Minister Nick Smith has announced a new captive breeding trial programme for Kaka in the Nelson Lakes National Park. The programme was to start in October and would see five female Kaka moved from Codfish Island to the park plus other females held in captivity to breed. Once chicks had fledged they would be re-released into the wild. Dr Smith said surveys over recent years had shown female Kaka numbers in particular to be plummeting, which had serious implications of the survival of the mainland enclave.

Donations

The World Parrot Trust has received a number of important and very helpful donations in the past month. These include £10,000 ($16,500) from a member in Switzerland who wishes to remain anonymous. This donation is a direct response to several funding requests in the August 98 PsittaScene, and substantial amounts are directed to helping our planned 'Parrot Sanctuary and Education Centre' at Paradise Park, the Moluccan Cockatoo and Echo Parakeet projects, and the new 'Happy Parrot' leaflet intended to advise new pet parrot owners on the special needs of parrots (this will be published soon, and we will include a copy in each PsittaScene for February 1999).

We have been very fortunate in having the support of Steve Martin of Natural Encounters Inc. Every year Steve and his organisation stage a special bird show at the Texas State Fair in Dallas, Texas, in October. This year we were chosen as the conservation group to receive a donation, and a cheque for $10,000 has been received by World Parrot Trust USA. More details and photos in the next issue.

The artist David Johnston has been helping WPT for many years, notably with his superb painting of Lear's Macaw from which a few signed, limited edition prints are still available (£38 or $65 inc. postage, from WPT-UK office). Some of David's work has been used for a series of parrot plates and sculptures, and he generously arranged for WPT to receive a royalty payment on each one. A recent payment of £1,000 has been received, bringing the total from this source to over £10,000. Readers may be interested to know that David recently ceased his teaching career at Blackpool School of Art, and will concentrate on his wildlife paintings. He actually drove a car to the Tenerife convention (yes, a ferry was involved), received much acclamation for his remarkable work, and sold everything he took there.

Cloudcuckooland

Of all the parrot rescue places we have heard about, this one seems most seriously deserving of help from the rest of the 'parrot community'. Here, Marcia Kolb maintains many damaged and traumatised parrots that might be regarded by some as not worth the trouble. Marcia, herself disabled, doesn't think so. Some help to meet her feed bills, or help from one of the big parrot food companies, would be a godsend. Visit their website at www.cloudcuckooland.com or write to Cloudcuckooland, P.O. Box 789, Castle Hayne, NC 28429-0789, USA.

Car Sticker

You will find a car sticker inside this PsittaScene. Please use it inside your car window. Let us know if you need more stickers for friends, fellow club members, or others who may want to join our WPT campaign.

OOPS!

A printer's error occurred (twice) in the August issue of PsittaScene. In the book review on page 19, in the second paragraph, please read 'Cockatoos' for 'Cuckoos'.

WPT NATIONAL CONTACTS

United Kingdom
Sarah Graham, Administrator,
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 4HY
Tel: (44) 01736 753365 Fax: (44) 01736 756438
email: uk@worldparrottrust.org
Mike Reynolds email: worldparrottrust@compuserve.com

USA
Cynthia Webb, PO Box 341141, Memphis TN 38184
Tel/Fax: (1) 901 873 3616
email: cwebb@wsp1.wspice.com

Benelux
Peter de Vries (Membership Sec.), Jagershof 91,
7064 DG Silvolde, Netherlands
Tel: (31) 315327418 email: heiko.pjdevries@tref.nl
Belgium enquiries: Romain Bejstrup (32) 32526773
Netherlands enquiries: Ruud Vonk (31) 168472715

Canada
Mike Pearson, PO Box 29, Mount Hope,
Ontario L0R 1W0
Tel: (1) 905 385 9500 Fax: (1) 905 385 7374
email: cwparrot@worldchat.com

Denmark (Scandinavia)
Michael Iversen, Hyldevang 4 – Buresoe,
3550 Slangerup
email: wpt@image.dk

France
J. & G. Prin, 35 Rue de la Fassiere, 45140, Ingre.
Tel: (33) 2 38 43 62 87 Fax: (33) 2 38 65 90 60

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

Germany
Jürgen Oertel, Einsiedel, Pappelweg 6,
D-09123 Chemnitz

Italy
Freddie Virili, via Matarus 10, 33045 Nimis, Udine.
Cristiana Senni, email: wpt.italia@flashnet.it

Australia
Mike Owen, 7 Monteray St., Mooloolaba,
Queensland 4557.
Tel: (61) 7 54780454 email: mowen@peg.apc.org

Africa
V. Dennison, PO Box 1758, Link Hills,
Natal 3652, S. Africa
Tel: (27) 31 763 4054 Fax: (27) 31 763 3811

Spain
Andrés Marin and Ana Matesanz,
C/La Majadita no 16 Guinate, Maquez,
35541 Las Palmas, Spain
Tel: (34) 928 835745 email: a.marin@lpa.servicom.es

WPT Web Sites:
Central: http://www.worldparrottrust.org
USA: http://www.funnyfarmexotics.com/WPT
Canada: http://www.worldchat.com/parrot/cwparrot.htm
Italy: http://www.mediavillage.it/wpt
Denmark: http://www.image.dk/fpewpt

Parrots in the Wild

Psitta scene

The Vasa Parrot

Caracopsis vasa

by KIRSTY SWINNERTON and CARL JONES

In June 1995 and 1996 we visited the limestone outcrops and gorges of Western Madagascar as members of scientific expeditions. Daily we saw Vasa Parrots and took photographs on 17 June 1995 near the village of Bekopaka next to the Manambolo river. It was one of 12 birds feeding on the unopened flowers of a Kapok tree. Several fairly large flocks were seen including one of 50-60 in a Zub-zub tree. They were feeding on the cherry shaped fruit, eating the fleshy fruit and then breaking the stones with a loud cracking noise to get at the seeds. In both years we had several observations of them feeding in these trees which are clearly important food sources. We even saw two birds in a low herbaceous Tsingaka feeding on the tiny seeds. Late one afternoon we saw several dozen apparently feeding and roosting in the mangroves at the mouth of the Tsiribihina river. This is one of the most easily seen birds in Western Madagascar, and we commonly saw them around villages, in secondary forest and scrub, in lightly wooded savannah and especially in riverine woodland. Tame birds with clipped wings were kept by a few villagers as pets.

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