Psitta scene

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE
IN PARROT CONSERVATION
AVICULTURE AND WELFARE

World Parrot Trust in action

Vol. 11 No.4 November 1999

Pesquet's Parrot

The Golden Conure

Cape York Palm Cockatoo Study

An Island Diary – Kaka

psittacine (sit'å sîn) belonging or allied to the parrots; parrot-like

Psitta scene

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Cover Picture
Pesquet's Parrot has the dubious distinction of being hunted in Papua New Guinea for its feathers, considered to be more valuable for trading and 'bride price' than those of birds-of-paradise.

The Pesquet's or Vulturine Parrot – a species in need of study

by ANDREW L. MACK, Wildlife Conservation Society.

New Guinea and its offshore islands are home to about 56 species of parrots, of which two are considered "vulnerable" and seven "near threatened." None are considered "critical" or "endangered" by BirdLife International. The solid status of many New Guinea parrots stems from the relatively low human population of the area and extensive intact forests and wilderness areas on the island. One of the species considered vulnerable is the Vulturine Parrot *(Psittrichas fulgidus)*, also known as Pesquet's Parrot to avoid confusion with the unrelated *Gypopsitta vulturina* of Brazil.

Psittrichas is a monotypic genus, highlighting how these birds differ from all other parrots. The genus is sometimes considered a lineage that diverged from other parrots early in the evolution of the family. *Psittrichas* have sparse, short bristle-like feathers on the head, giving them a naked-headed look like vultures. The skin at the base of the mouth extends onto the bill, giving them a tube-like gape. Relatively few birds are kept in captivity and captive breeding has been particularly difficult, due to difficulty of finding a proper diet for chicks. Breeders generally find that chicks require a diet substantially lower in protein than typical parrots, an observation that fits with what little we know about the diets of wild birds (see below). Other than basic morphological information and some observations of captive birds, little is known of these birds in the wild. In the course of various field studies in New Guinea beginning in 1987 Debra Wright and I have been fortunate to make a number of field observations of wild birds and reared three captive chicks and released them. Based on these experiences we have published a couple of technical papers (Mack 1994, Mack & Wright 1998) and summarize what we have learned here. Our hope is to stimulate research and conservation efforts. The key to successful conservation is to identify threats before they are irreversible and develop initiatives that will avert a critical situation.

Specialised Frugivores

The data we have been able to gather, and the observations we have made suggest that these birds are extremely specialised frugivores. We suggest they feed almost exclusively on a few species of fig. At one site during a four year residence, we observed dozens of feeding episodes and all were at two varieties of a single fig species. At another site in three months we observed Vulturines at two other species of fig. Local hunters who know these birds well, tell us that they eat only a few species of figs and all the data from museum collections indicate figs. Among published records, most are of figs, but some ornithologists have observed that the birds also occasionally eat flowers of a couple of species found in the rainforest canopy as well.

Whether these birds are indeed this specialised will need corroboration from more detailed field study. Extreme dietary specialisation among frugivores is uncommon because most fruiting plants bear edible fruits only during certain seasons. Birds need to switch among species as different plant species come into season. However, figs are

At an event like the Goroka Show, a careful observer can find the red and black feathers from Vulturine Parrots and dozens of other species.

unusual in this regard. Different individuals within a population bear fruits asynchronously; in the home range of a Vulturine Parrot there could easily be at least one or two trees in fruit at any one time. Thus, if a frugivore were to specialise on just a few food plants, figs would be the best group to specialise upon.

If these parrots are indeed as specialised on figs as we suspect, it would be wise to assess the effect of logging and other increasing land uses on the figs in question. Birds with narrowly specialised diets are vulnerable to forest perturbations. If the few species of fig disappear with logging, specialist Vulturines might be unable to switch to alternative foods. Dietary generalists are often more flexible in the face of habitat modification because they can switch to other, possibly less-preferred, resources that survive or establish after logging.

Parrots need figs and figs need parrots

The figs Vulturines eat are hemiepiphytes, or stranglers. Hemiepiphytes have evolved an effective strategy to win the competition for light in the rainforest canopy. The seeds of hemiepiphytes must be dispersed by birds (or other arboreal / volant animals), to the limbs of other (host) trees. There they germinate and send roots down along the host tree's trunk. So instead of starting out as a seedling in the deep shade of the forest floor, hemiepiphytes begin as seedlings high in the well-lit canopy. Eventually the growing fig encloses and "strangles" the host tree, whereupon it becomes a free-standing tree. Strangler figs are one of the hallmark images of tropical rainforests. Fig seeds that fall to the ground cannot germinate and grow upward. In fact, experts in fig evolution hypothesise that the sub-group of figs the Vulturines eat actually are evolutionarily specialised on parrot-mediated dispersal because the figs have a hard receptacle wall that parrots can open. Most figs are soft-walled and weaker-billed birds can open them. Thus, quite possibly the figs and parrots are in a fairly tight mutualism; anything that impacts one will ultimately affect the other. The parrots need the figs for food and the figs need the parrots to put their seeds on host tree limbs. It is an example of the incredible complexity of the rainforest that highlights the need for good field research before we can fully understand how to conserve any particular species like the Vulturine Parrot.

Young Vulturine Parrots about 1 year old. These birds were acquired from local hunters who were taking them to the city to sell. They were hand-reared and released back to the wild. We kept a perch with food on the veranda of the house to which they would come for food less and less frequently. After several months they rarely came back to feed, though they would perch nearby.

Hunted for their feathers

Habitat modification and the Vulturine's narrow diet are, however, not the only threat to the species. The bird is largely black, but the belly and wings have feathers that are bright red. These few red feathers could prove the Vulturine's downfall because they are highly prized as trade items and for ornamentation among the many ethnic groups of New Guinea. In some areas Vulturine Parrot feathers are the third most common trade item (after pigs and money). Many groups use the wing feathers, particularly the half red-half black secondaries, in their traditional headdresses. Although westernisation has diminished many customs, the people of New Guinea still maintain many of their traditions and dances, breaking out the special attire for parties *(singsings)*, weddings and other big events.

Even where Vulturine Parrot feathers are not traditionally used, people still trade them, for considerable sums, to neighbours who do use the feathers. Thus, as human population grows and as Vulturines are hunted out of areas, the demand is transferred to those areas where Vulturine populations are still intact. Indeed, with hundreds of small landing strips across the island, the demand for feathers can reach even the remotest part of the island. In many remote areas one of the most profitable endeavours can be the sale of live wild game and feathers because these can be flown more economically than coffee or other produce. Adult birds are either hunted directly or more commonly nest trees are cut down to capture the chicks. These chicks are then raised until their red feathers appear and then sold for a hefty price. This practice undoubtedly slows reproductive success as the nest tree is usually completely cut down or the nest chamber hacked open. If the nesting pair survives, they must find another suitable tree and excavate a chamber. Establishing a new nest would probably delay nesting for a full year because suitable trees are hard to find. The rainforests of New Guinea might be short on nest sites relative to other tropical forests because there are no woodpeckers on the island. Hunters that cut down hollow trees in order to extract cavity-dwelling game exacerbate this shortage.

We desperately need data on how many birds are being traded, how they are hunted and where trade skins are coming from. There is some international trade in Vulturine Parrots, mostly out of the Indonesian side of New Guinea, but the real impact is domestic use by traditional hunters and traders. Thus the fine efforts by conservationists monitoring the international parrot trade will not unveil the extent of Vulturine exploitation and we are reduced to guessing its impact. Furthermore, without basic natural history information on diet, population densities and reproduction we will be unable to determine how vulnerable the species is even if we do obtain data on domestic trade. At the moment we cannot categorically say the species is in serious danger, nor can we be complacent that it is secure. Certainly populations have been extirpated from large areas in recent times.

Management options

If proper study indicates populations are indeed threatened by hunting, then there might be options for management that could both maintain populations and allow the people of New Guinea to carry on their rich cultural heritage. Possibly less destructive methods of hunting could be encouraged or alternatives to Vulturine feathers introduced to the trade. Ideally, we have the opportunity to preserve the traditional use of a wild parrot species and populations of that parrot. These two objectives are often in conflict where human populations are increasing and forest cover decreasing. Solid field research will enable us to determine how to conserve this bizarre parrot without jeopardising the diverse cultural traditions of New Guinea.

The Golden Conure Survival Fund

by GLENN REYNOLDS

What is aviculture? The Webster's Dictionary states that aviculture is, "The rearing or keeping of birds". I have spent the last 22 years of my life chasing the meaning of this word. I, as most of us, started out with only a few small birds. Observing the beauty, the habits, and the intelligence of these creatures mesmerised me and the addiction grew. I have learned through the decades, the more appropriate defining factors separating a bird owner from an aviculturist, are in the knowledge obtained through years of experience managing and raising parrots. More appropriately, aviculture is a collaborative effort of individuals, groups and organisations to compile and disseminate information that will enhance and extend the lives of captive birds and preserve wild populations and the ecosystems that they reside in. The techniques that we have cumulatively learned through captive breeding programmes are now helping to save the rarest species of parrots in the wild. I have found the true meaning of the word aviculture in my association with the World Parrot Trust.

How It Began

In the month of September 1998, I met Mike Reynolds, founder of the World Parrot Trust, for the first time at the IV International Parrot Convention in Tenerife, Spain. My name being Glenn Michael Reynolds and his being Michael Reynolds had inadvertently brought us together: One evening I entered my hotel room and found a package for Michael Reynolds. I wondered; was this a mistake, did someone forget to put my first name on the package, or was there someone at the Hotel named Michael Reynolds? I had been a supporter of the WPT for years but didn't make the association with the name. I was soon introduced to Mike. I thought that our meeting was a fluke but as I think about it today, writing this article for the PsittaScene, it was not a fluke, it was fate.

I had been seeking information on Golden Conures for a web site and had run into dead ends everywhere that I inquired. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Office of Scientific Authority had no viable information on these birds. Upon my introduction to Mike, I inquired about any knowledge he may have on the status of the wild populations of the Golden Conure. He was very interested in my inquisitiveness, as he owned Golden Conures himself, which had just produced their first offspring. After a short conversation about these wonderful birds, Mike said that he would check into the matter and get back to me. I didn't realise that I had just planted the seed that has now grown into the WPT-USA Golden Conure Survival Fund.

A few weeks after the convention Mike emailed me stating that he couldn't find any documented data on the Golden Conures and that as far as he knew there had never been a formal study done on this species. I had previously read that these birds had been considered endangered as far back as 1946. In the United States, because of the rarity of this species, I was required to obtain an endangered species permit prior to ownership. I couldn't understand this dilemma. Why was something considered to be so rare for so many years not getting any help from the conservation community? Thanks to electronic mail Mike and I rapidly agreed that this bird needed our help. We both share a passion for this species and we concluded that the WPT-USA would bear the burden of raising the funds for this project. I volunteered myself as the primary fund-raiser.

I have been informed that only once before in the history of the WPT has there been an independent fund set up for a specific species. It was for the Hyacinth macaw, and that fund was very successful. I have tried to personally absorb any administration costs of this fund so as not to dilute the contributions. Mike started the fund by pledging $20.00 US for each of his seven Golden Conures, and I followed by contributing the same for each that I hold. We are asking that all keepers of this species do the same. Mike challenged the avicultural community for the first private donation of $1,000.00 by offering a dollar for dollar match from the WPT-USA. We received the $1,000.00 donation, from WPT member Susanne Schrader soon after the official beginning of the fund in May 1999.

Young hand-reared Golden Conures

Good Progress

We have come a long way in just a few months. Contributions are now over $7,500. Cyd Riley of Firefly T shirts has produced a stunning Golden Conure Survival Fund T Shirt. Grant Hacking, a world renowned wildlife artist, has agreed to do an original oil painting of the Golden Conure and donate it to the fund. Charles Munn has written the formal proposal for the field project. And I have spent a huge amount of my time writing letters asking for donations and travelling about lecturing on our fund to bird clubs and organisations.

A detailed list of contributors can be found at the end of this article, which was current at the time of writing. I would like to personally thank each and every contributor for helping to make this project a reality. Every donation large or small will go a long way toward the end result of saving this species and the entire ecosystem that it resides in. A few of the contacts I've made have expressed concerns that donating to this project will not help the WPT as a whole,

stating that, this money is specifically earmarked for the Golden Conure Fund. This is a stand-alone fund, which isolates the financial burden of itself from the rest of the WPT funded projects. In turn, it frees up an equal dollar for dollar amount within the WPT International Fund to go toward the numerous other projects the WPT is currently supporting instead of supporting this project; therefore, supporting this fund will indirectly support all of the WPT projects.

Cyd Riley has stated that the Golden Conure T Shirt is a hot seller. She has shipped nearly 200 of them since the first printing in late August 1999. It bears a beautiful Cyd Riley original of the Golden Conure on the front and a map of Brazil highlighting the rapidly shrinking range of the Golden Conure on the back. Cyd very elegantly utilised the space on the back of the shirt for stating what little information we currently have on this species and a tactful plea for help. The T Shirt is now available through the US and UK administrators.

Grant Hacking is a South African wildlife artist who has moved to Isle of Palms, South Carolina, USA. He is world famous for his African wildlife oil paintings. I have seen his work, and it is spectacular. His paintings are as defined as a photograph and usually full of action. The depth of his work is three-dimensional. Since moving to the US, he is shifting his interest to indigenous wildlife and he has also found a passion for parrots. Grant will be doing an oil painting of the Golden Conure and donating it to the project to help generate income. I will try to get a good photo of it upon completion to be printed in a future issue of *PsittaScene.* We have not yet decided whether it will be auctioned off or if prints will be made and sold.

The Proposal

Charles Munn writes; In an application for 'Small grant funds' to American Bird Conservancy (ABC) The Golden Conure *(Guaruba guarouba)*, which also is known as the Golden Parakeet or the Queen-of-Bavaria's Conure, may be the

The beautiful design donated by Cyd Riley of Firefly T-shirts. All profits from this shirt go to the Golden Conure Survival Fund.

most beautiful of the 150 species of New World parrots (its only competition being the four most colourful species of large macaws). Yet it has never been studied in the wild and no data exists about the status of its wild populations. Furthermore, there are no targeted conservation projects for this species or for its rainforest home, which is the eastern part of the Brazilian Amazon. Surely this species should be able to generate support to save itself and large portions of its rainforest home if the conservation community can provide modest funding now to jump-start what should become a self-financing conservation programme supported by visits by photographers, filmmakers, and parrot enthusiasts. Currently, the only way this species is utilised is as a cage bird, but with the support of ABC and WPT, the Golden Conure should become an internationally famous flagship species for the conservation of Amazon rainforests.

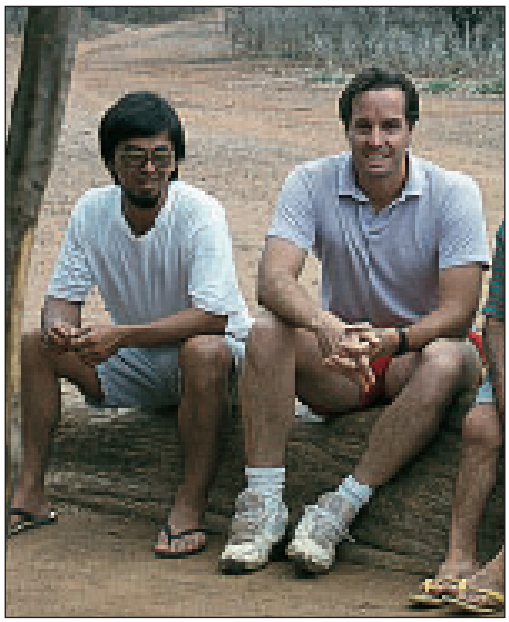
Though found over a large swathe of the Eastern Amazon of Brazil, the species seems to occur at greatest density in the tall rainforests south of Belem in the eastern Amazonian state of Para, particularly in the drainage of the Cupim River. There are enough organised conure trappers in that part of the Amazon that without urgent action, the species could melt away without the slightest analysis of the situation or concerted attempts to save it in the wild. This part of the Amazon is also under great threat from deforestation for cattle ranching and other agriculture as well as from destructive logging, so any incentive or projects to save major portions of this forest are extremely important. Properly studied, protected and visible in the wild, this beautiful parrot species should be able to save considerable tracts of wild forest. The initial funding is critical to start this conservation process.

What little is known of the biology of the Golden Conure suggests that it lives in what appear to be family clans of approximately 8-15 birds. All the birds in one clan travel together all day to forage in the forest and then return each afternoon to play just outside and then finally to roost in a single, conspicuous cavity in the trunk or branch of a large canopy tree. Their fidelity to specific roosting cavities (which also are used for nesting by the adult breeding pair in the nesting season) makes these birds easy to trap.

There are two favoured trapping techniques: One involves erecting a pole with glue-covered branches near a roosting tree and tying a live calling conure near the pole. When the family clan hears the calling conure and comes to investigate they get stuck to the branches. The trapper will then remove them from the branches using water to loosen the glue. The other method involves loosely wrapping a nesting tree with a net to cover the cavity entrance during the night. Pounding the tree will then startle the birds scaring them into the net.

The thrust of this project would be to find and map active roosting and nesting trees. Once identified, appropriate acreage surrounding these trees could be purchased by WPT and BioBrasil Foundation and guarded year round by trained guards. An ecotourism site could be developed, so visitors could take predictably high-quality photos of these amazing birds.

The project would provide for guards and guard dogs to patrol the proposed sites around the clock for the first year. Once trappers have been deterred, the human guards could be reduced in number and guard only during daylight hours. The night-time hours could be adequately guarded by a reduced number of dogs. It may be necessary to erect modest but impassable barbed wire fences around the roosting and nesting trees, eliminating the need to fence the entire tract of land. The purchased tracts could then be patrolled on foot, dirt bike, horseback or by car once or twice a day or several times a week depending on necessity. Once conspicuous and aggressive guarding has been established, bird trappers would



Carlos Yamashita and Charlie Munn are supervising our WPT Golden Conure Project.

Golden Conure in juvenile plumage. *Photo: M. Reynolds*

probably give BioBrasil forests a wide berth and protection costs would drop accordingly.

Ecotourism Development

Income from ecotourism should eventually support year round protection of the mapped out nesting and roosting sites. This project will be modelled after a very successful ecotourism site that BioBrasil has established to protect a large flock of Hyacinth Macaws in Piaui. On June 15, 1999 BioBrasil purchased 2,000 hectares (5,000 acres) of dry tropical rainforest to protect the Hyacinths. From May 1, 1999 through August 15, 1999 the BioBrasil preserve has hosted numerous scientific researchers and photographers, and most recently a TV crew from the Fox-Family Channel. The gross receipts from this camp are about $14,000.00 of which half are profit. It is projected that the income from this camp should be between $100,000.00 and $200,000.00 in the year 2001. This same strategy should work with the Golden Conure in areas identified as feasible and purchased by WPT and BioBrasil Foundation.

The most viable sites for tourism-financed protection of Golden Conure nests would be those that can be reached easily by conventional road or river transport from airports. In practice, Belem and Santarem are probably the two cities most likely to serve as jetports for visitors who wish to predictably see protected Golden Conures.

The objectives of this proposal would be to search for and survey the species and locate roosting and nesting trees in the area of Cupim River south of Bele.

This search would pinpoint the best roost trees in accessible sites, which will allow BioBrasil to unlock earmarked funds that currently are restricted to two activities: One is habitat purchase around the nests of this species and two is implementation of an ecotourism infrastructure. For each dollar that ABC/WPT contribute to the search for roost trees, BioBrasil should be able to access as many as 5-15 dollars of matching funds for purchase of forest tracts and for the installation of permanent guards and a rustic ecotourism site. The matching funds are rigidly restricted to forest purchases and protection of the purchased habitat and cannot be used for the initial research. Thus $5,000 of support from ABC could unlock from $25,000 to $75,000 of restricted funding.

To unlock this funding, the nest tree search must be successful. The potential for ABC's support to unlock 5-15 times as much funding should make this project especially attractive, because it greatly increases the chances that the initial seed money will produce an ongoing, self-funding conservation programme for this amazing, but little-known species.

Symbol of Conservation

The importance to bird conservation would be to show that a bird that is primarily known as a cage or aviary bird could become a symbol of conservation of intact Amazon forest and pay for its own protection in the wild. Of course, if Golden Conure nests can be used to generate protection of the entire forest ecosystem, then this project will have generated protection of about 300 other species of birds as well. The Eastern Amazon forests of the state of Para are under particular attack now by the forces of destruction, and any model projects that can add value to that part of the Amazon is particularly important.

The lack of even the most basic survey data on Golden Conures makes it impossible to design a conservation strategy for the species. All current efforts at conservation of this popular bird focus on captive breeding without regard to the dire situation of the wild population. We feel that the best hope of ensuring the species' survival lies in first surveying and mapping roost trees and then implementing a programme of land purchase and ecotourism to pay for recurrent protection of the sites.

The research portion of this project is slated to be done between March 1, 2000 and June 30, 2000. The best way to evaluate the success of this project is to send an experienced, Portuguese-speaking biologist to visit the identified nest sites after July 1, 2000. BioBrasil has a full-time field staff of four employees working in other conservation projects in Brazil, who can provide advice to the field staff of the conure project.

Help from Brazil's Greatest Parrot Expert

Carlos Yamashita will contribute his field expertise at no charge in order to be able to observe Golden Conure behaviour in the wild. Having Brazil's greatest parrot expert available to help design and execute this project is an enormous opportunity and should greatly increase the chance of success in locating nest sites. Mr. Yamashita is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Campinas. His thesis topic is the genetics of Golden Conure clans, so after the ABC survey project ends, he may wish to visit some roost trees to take small blood samples from a few clans.

Contributors List

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An Island Diary

by GLEN HOLLAND.

Put an Australian, a South African and two Kiwis (one of whom is of half Irish and the other person of half Chinese descent), on an island for two weeks and ... No not the start of a good joke, rather an expedition to capture and transfer female Kaka from Codfish Island to a mainland population at the Nelson Lakes. Project Leader, Ron Moorhouse, is currently studying the success of predator control around Kaka nest sites in relation to fledging success and required the females to boost his mainland study population of 5 breeding pairs and numerous spare males. Ron's assistant Les Morran, Matthew Low, an Australian Vet and I were the other team members. With this combination of nationalities we decided it would be safer to avoid the topics of cricket and rugby!

After checking ourselves for seeds and dirt stuck on our clothing and shoes, and being informed how to ensure we did not carry any rodents in our baggage, we were cleared to leave. Within minutes the chopper was approaching and soon we had our mountain of food, capture equipment and general baggage loaded roof high in the chopper. Twenty minutes later we landed just above the high water mark on the island. A quick flurry of off-loading and the chopper was gone. Immediately thereafter I began to feel that this was somewhere special, a pristine environment and no sound apart from the waves and the birds. While wheelbarrowing the equipment to the hut, we had the first Kaka flying overhead, calling loudly. While wandering around the hut to survey the gas and water supply, I was met by an excited family of brown creeper and a red-crowned Kakariki which remained hidden, chattering continually from a thicket.

The first afternoon and following morning were spent constructing the aviary which was to house the Kaka prior to their transfer.

The following morning we set off to locate and prepare a capture site for Kaka. Firstly we required a gap in the canopy of the forest with tall emergent anchor trees at each end - not too far off close apart and sufficient perching trees alongside the capture site. After hours of searching and then a days work on preparing the site to ensure the net would not snag on surrounding trees, we finally had the first of what would be many sites ready. A laborious process which Ron and Les were obviously well accustomed to, Matt and I were getting rather anxious at having been on the island for a few days but still not having caught a Kaka yet. Finally the conditions were just right - not too much sun, no wind and Kaka calling in the area. Hidden under camouflage nets, Ron turned on the audio system and soon we had the sounds of Kaka echoing through the forest. Almost immediately a group of Kaka arrived to investigate the commotion and suddenly a bird dropped from the canopy straight into the net. The net was carefully lowered and amongst a host of growling and clicking sounds the bird was carefully removed from the net. The rest of the flock became quite agitated and their loud "kraak" alarm calls echoed about us, The large size of the bird and in particular its bill, was indicative that it was a male and he was released. The birds, the forest and our team then settled until the speakers were working again and the air was again filled with Kaka calls. Two tui aggressively chasing each other resulted in one bird in the net. As I approached the bird, Ron shouted "don't need to warn you about its claw!" ... Hang! I thought I had just taken a Kaka out of the net and he is worried about a little tui. I felt my eyes begin to water and the pain was unbelievable as the tui sank its needle sharp claws into my hands, and pierced the quick of my finger nail. After Les "purring" to the bird, while it lay on its back, Ron called us to lower our end of the net. After some discussion it was decided that we needed a recording of the local Kaka dialect which differed considerably from the Nelson Lakes dialect we were using and both differed considerably from the North Island birds with which I was familiar. After a series of capture sites, each of which took a least a day to prepare and the use of the recorded local dialect which Ron managed to obtain we had our four females in the aviary. We had caught a number of birds which were clearly male, their large beaks identifiable even when hovering above us in the nets, but we also released a number of birds which we felt were female but their beak measurements fell outside the parameters for females. One male had a bill length of 58mm, the largest Ron had recorded and he felt that all these birds were possibly a little larger than their more northern cousins. Yellow and red-crowned Kakariki, tui (which I now respected) and bellbirds were all part of the by-catch which were released.

As the helicopter turned us away from the group of friends on the beach, I had mixed feelings of pleasure at the thought of getting back to see my family, a piece of me wanting to remain and some trepidation at what was waiting for me in my in-tray at work. This experience however gave me great insight into some of the diversity which exists in New Zealand.

Kaka at Kapiti Island, New Zealand. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

Illegal Traffic in Brazil's Wildlife

by PEDRO C. LIMA and SAMPAIO DOS SANTOS, CETREL S.A. (photographs by Pedro C. Lima)

Approximately twelve million sylvan animals will simply vanish every year in Brazil due to the illegal traffic of rare and exotic species. International environmental entities estimate that Brazil accounts for US$700 million per year corresponding to 10 to 15 percent of the clandestine market in sylvan animals, responsible for the circulation of US$10 billion per year in the world. Concerning money circulation, the traffic of sylvan animals is exceeded only by the arms and drugs traffic. As in any illegal traffic, the animal trade exploits human destitution, driving the needy and ignorant to this activity for subsistence and causing irreversible harm to the environment, namely the extinction of species. The damage produced by this type of commerce is appalling and eventually irreparable: besides the problems caused to the ecological balance, the sowing of seeds is affected as well as the control of diseases and plagues and the maintenance of the life cycle equilibrium in the diverse ecosystems.

Many animals exported

About 30 percent of the Brazilian sylvan animals captured by the traffickers are sent abroad; the remaining 70 percent are transported to clandestine animal husbandry areas or delivered to collectors, but the great majority of the birds are traded in the street free-markets. The value and availability of the animals depend solely on their rarity. The rarest species are the prime target of the traffickers. International environmental entities estimate that approximately 90 percent of the animals die before they reach their final destination. The death rate is directly linked to the hardships endured by the animals during their transportation from the place of capture to the trading site. The possible causes of death include: starvation, thirst, disease, excessive heat, death by asphyxia in non-ventilated areas, and death by crushing in overpopulated spaces.

With parrots, macaws and parakeets the traffickers will put out feathers from adults to sell as baby parrots. Occasionally they will colour the parakeet's plumage similarly to the parrot's feathers to simulate baby parrots. Among the innumerable ways devised by the traffickers to smuggle birds to other countries is to hide the animals in the false bottoms of trunks, or to fasten them to the lining of the trafficker's suit. The eggs of some species (principally macaws and parrots) are transported in portable hatching incubators instead of the real specimen, thus impeding the identification, control and inspection of the species by the competent agencies.

A pair of Spix's Macaws in Sao Paulo 1992. *Photo:M. Reynolds*

Four stages of trade

The trade of sylvan animals can be divided into four stages:

1. Non-endangered specimens captured exclusively for subsistence and traded in street free-markets and along the roads, especially finches and cardinals. The damage that one single person can do to some species in a given region is powerful. This accounts for the extinction of some species in several areas of our territory, even though they are species not listed as endangered. The extinction of the Blue-fronted Amazon *(Amazona aestiva)* in several areas of the state of Bahia is a typical example.

Critically endangered species

(i) Spix's Macaw *(Cyanopsitta spixii)* has been reduced to one male in the municipality of Curaçá, located in the arid region Bahia. This species has been critically reduced, chiefly due to the illegal traffic. In the early eighties, the only birds captured were the nestling specimens and a few adults. By the end of the decade, all adult birds that inhabited the municipality of Curaçá and neighbouring areas had been captured by several groups of traffickers originating from the state of Piauí. However, illegal capture is not the only element to threaten this species.

(ii) Lear's Macaw *(Anodorhynchus leari)* is the second most endangered species of this region. However the illegal traffic still stands as the major force to threaten the extinction of this blue macaw. We have been informed that more than 50 adult birds have been captured by the traffickers

during the last 5 years, out of an estimate of 130 birds.

2. The second stage is ordering the bird. This activity is generally carried out in residences, street markets or roads. The birds are transported to the selling sites and temporarily hidden in the neighbourhood. The rare species are commercialised with potential buyers in the street markets under the false pretence of buying/selling common birds. In this kind of commerce the birds for sale are usually baby macaws, parrots, toucans and other equally valuable species. The order trade has been developed in the last ten years, exactly when IBAMA started to be active in the street markets.

3. The third stage focuses on rare animals - those birds which are not exhibited in the street markets and are intended for a particular type of buyer. Rare species as well as other special animals are captured upon the request of some Brazilian collectors, who either keep them or export them abroad. The animals can be traded for other rare species, or sold. This traffic is made easy by the lack of knowledge of the airport customs officials on the Brazilian species.

4. The fourth stage is related to the egg traffic of rare species. This is an activity which has been increasingly developed during the last ten years due to several factors. Currently, effective initiatives to eradicate the illegal trade of animals are being intensified at airports in an attempt to stop the bird traffic. Also the project implemented by CITES includes the control of the species in other countries and promotes the repatriation of the birds to their country of origin. Furthermore modern technology has led to improvements such as efficient portable incubators for egg hatching, and balanced food rations developed by international companies, thus rendering the egg traffic more lucrative and a safe alternative.

Another factor which should be taken into consideration is the official sanction of the Brazilian government to the trade of

Not wild-caught, this tame Blue-fronted Amazon enjoys meeting people.

Brazilian birds hatched in captivity. Considering that the traffic of chicks and eggs (especially of the parrot and macaw species) is growing steadily, these two factors can sometimes be used by unscrupulous breeders to legalise chicks and eggs originating from the clandestine market. The procedure is to band these birds afterwards. To avoid this practice, it is necessary to adopt a special legislation which requires DNA testing to determine the parentage of the birds traded in the official market.

Reintroduction programme

CETAS (Sylvan Animals Selection Center - CETREL/IBAMA) was founded in 1997 by CETREL and IBAMA to reintroduce confiscated birds to their natural habitat. Other aims were to develop efficient ways of curing diseases which affect birds and to prevent their dissemination; and to research reintroduction techniques to facilitate the safe release of birds to avoid procedures which could jeopardise birds in the wild. Operating for one full year, CETAS has already received 4,805 birds of 121 different species, many being passerines. When admitted, they receive antibiotics (penicillin and sulfa), vermifuge and vitamins.

Successful reintroduction should include specific procedures such as arranging feeders with different types of food in strategic locations for their first days of freedom. In the next 15 to 20 days the birds will be able to search for food in their new habitat.

Of the birds received, 68 percent have been freed, 11 percent will be set free and 21 percent have died. Of the 22 species ready to be introduced, some deserve to be mentioned: the Blue-fronted Amazon *(Amazona aestiva xanthopteryx)* totalled 105 specimens; 80 percent are young birds ready to be reintroduced to the brushwood covered region (caatinga) inhabited by the species. The adult birds seized from private residences are destined for reproduction and their offspring will be reintroduced to their natural habitat. We have adopted the same procedure for the macaws.

Co-operating organisations

We would like to list all the organisations which are contributing to the eradication of the traffic in our state: IBAMA-BA (Salvador, Teixeira de Freitas and Bom Jesus da Lapa); IBAMA-PI (Teresina); CRA (Salvador and Freitas de Santana); Politica Ambiental (Salvador); Environmental Department of Feira de Santana; Public Ministry of Feira de Santana; State University of Feira de Santana (EEA - Environmental Education Team); FENATEST - National Federation of Safety Technicians of Feira de Santana; Zoological Garden of Salvador; BioBrasil Foundation; WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society); World Parrot Trust; Leari Blue Parrot Preservation Committee; and all anonymous persons who voluntarily donate their birds to CETREL to be reintroduced to their natural habitat.

Lear's Macaws near Curaca, Brazil. *Photo:Claudio Marigo*

Bolivia, Blue-throated Macaws and Macaw Wings for Sale

by SUSAN AND HARRY ARMITAGE

We hear things are getting a bit crowded around Puerto Maldonado and the Tambopata Candamo reserve in Peru these days. Sixteen thousand visitors to Puerto Maldonado last year! We can't stand crowds personally and there are alternatives.... We had heard that there are lots of parrots in Bolivia. Clearly it was time to do a bit of internet research.

Bordering Peru but less densely populated and less frequented by tourists, Bolivia is the next place to go. However once again no-one wants to tell you the facts. There are many large foreign tour firms willing to take you to all parts of Bolivia for the most incredible sums of money, (bearing in mind that this is a third world economy). Information has to be prised from the internet.

A pair of Blue-throated Macaws in the wild. *Photo: H. Armitage*

The department of Beni, home of the Blue-throated Macaw

On the brink of extinction (less than 200 individuals left) this bird is now the target of the world's twitchers. It was known for many years in captivity before Charles Munn located its origin. No-one wants to tell you, but its range is now very discontinuous and lies to the North of Trinidad, capital city of the department. It resembles a smaller blue and gold macaw but the eye patch stripes are blue as is of course the throat.

When we arrived in Santa Cruz the temperature was a sizzling 35˚C with hot gusty winds. After a long night bus journey and several adventures we arrived in the hotter still (43˚C) humid city of Trinidad only 15˚ South of the Equator and an experience all on it's own.

There we met one Lyliam Gonzales, who together with her sister, runs a small travel agency, 'Paradiso'. Lyliam is a parrot nut and with her we were able to see the blue throated macaw and many others. The land in this area is all privately owned but Lyliam is friendly with the owner of the Estancia Cutal and we were able to visit, staying in a log cabin and dining on standard cowboy fare, here cattle is king. The road to Cutal is long, hot, dusty and/or muddy. The palm island where the blue throated macaw are located has no road at all and lies another 30km into the Pampas.

At and around the Cutal we saw six *Ara glaucogularis* and also other parrots including *Ara ararauna, Ara chloropteris, Ara severa*, several different amazons and many parakeets.

What We Discovered

So what did we find out about this highly endangered species, *Ara glaucogularis*?

a. In the past many have been trapped and exported to North America, long after it was illegal to do so. This is less so at the moment due to the fact that they are now extremely hard to find. Prices have fallen as they are apparently fairly easy to breed in captivity. However, a known trapper has been in the vicinity asking questions about blue throated macaw.

b. The grassland surrounding the palm islands where they live and hopefully breed is burned on a regular basis. Should the fire spread into an island (and it could easily) this would be catastrophic.

c. Habitat destruction. Every year the islands become smaller due to burning and browsing by cattle.

d. A well known American Eco-tourism firm is proposing to fly well heeled foreign tourists into the Estancia San Miguel, where the largest numbers of macaws are to be found. This possibility is viewed with alarm by local conservationists.

e. Lyliam Gonzales and 'Armonia' are conducting an education programme of local people and are trying to get the local land owners co-operation to preserve the palm island habitat.

f. Very little research has been done into the blue throated macaw and how it interacts with the far more numerous *Ara ararauna* with which it mingles freely.

Home of the Red Fronted Macaw:

In the border between the departments of Santa Cruz and Cochabamba, there are thought to between 1500 and 2000 Red-fronted Macaws remaining in the wild, so whilst not as critical as the blue throated macaw things clearly are not good. As far as I could find out, only Hermano

Macaw wings on sale in the shop in Trinidad. *Photo: H. Armitage*

Andrés is looking out for the red fronted macaw. It is the only macaw to live in this elevated and arid habitat. As far as I could discover the place to look is near Tambo, not shown on any map I could lay my hands on. We could discover no other details.

The Red-fronted Macaw is known locally as the "Loro Burro" (Donkey Parrot) as it won't speak. It lives in a very different habitat to the Blue-throated Macaw, living in the medium altitude semi-arid scrubland of the Eastern foothills of the Andes. Thorny bushes and trees along with giant cactus dominate the landscape. The temperature can range from sub-zero to 30˚C. Rain usually arrives in the form of tropical storms.

When we arrived in Pampagrande cold rain was falling with intermittent thunderstorms. Hermano Andrés runs a small bunk house with primitive facilities which was where we stayed. However it was a palace compared with how the local people live, in the most desperate of poverty and squalor. There is one small eating house which we used, also from time to time we dined with the good brother's parishioners. The next morning it was still raining, the local river thundered by, heavy with silt and debris. Suddenly however over our heads flew a flock of Red-fronted Macaws, in the near freezing rain close to the cloud base. This is the only macaw I have seen that will fly in such conditions.

The macaws migrate daily from their nesting and roosting places to their feeding places. Hermano Andrés has been keeping track of their numbers and movements for years, however is the first to admit to not having a complete picture by a long chalk. A much wider geographic study has been carried out by Robin Clark.

So what did we find out about the Red Fronted Macaw?

(a) This bird is also protected under CITES, but in the past has been heavily trapped. The method used was to spread nets over bait, when the birds landed their feet became entangled in the nets. Hermano Andrés has been actively promoting the conservation theme so hopefully in his area at least, this activity has been curtailed.

(b) The Red-fronted Macaw nests in cliffs, but many of the nest sites used in the past are now abandoned.

(c) The scrubby trees and cactus where this species feeds is being cleared and burned so reducing their habitat. Needless to say they are not welcome on the farmer's maize crops that replaces it and have been shot in the past (and may still be).

(d) A study was carried out some years ago by ornithologist Robin Clark. Virtually all of his recommendations were ignored, indeed the situation has worsened dramatically since that time.

The Santa Cruz Zoo

We also paid a visit to the Santa Cruz Zoo where we had heard that there are both *Ara glaucogularis* and *Ara rubrogenys*. This indeed proved to be the case, at the time there being eight of the former and between fifteen and twenty of the latter.

At this zoo are kept, mostly in appalling conditions, nearly everything that walks and flies in South America. Here imprisoned in tiny cages are virtually every macaw you can think of, the giant Andean condor and the mighty harpy eagle. Urchins throw popcorn at the rare spectacled bears and jaguars. The maned wolf has died through neglect.

This institution is, according to local conservationists, a clearing house for the rarest of collectable animals, which disappear and are replaced regularly.

Birds and animals confiscated by customs and park officials are sent here, not one has ever been released into the wild.

The Grisly Little Shop in Trinidad

During our wanderings about Trinidad we stumbled across 'La Ganaderia', one of several craft shops to be found in Trinidad.

It has a large stock of goods made from animal parts in which the macaw figures highly. Macaw wings and tails complete were for sale for about £2.00, Macaw skulls were for sale for about 50 pence. Also for sale were head-dresses (not Indian style made from the longer tail feathers but tourist style made from the wing feathers). Other items were made from ocelot and jaguar skins, anaconda and caiman.

I am pleased to say that our webpage report has resulted in an absolute deluge of complaints. Several international organisations have taken up this case and I hope the pressure put on Bolivian authorities will cause them to act.

More headdresses. *Photo: H. Armitage*

Macaw skulls. *Photo: H. Armitage*

Cape York Palm Cockatoo Study

by STEVE MURPHY

Recent genetic evidence suggests that when compared to other cockatoos, palm cockatoos are the most distantly related species. But this may not be that surprising when you look at their suite of quite unusual characteristics. They are the world's only all black-plumaged cockatoo; they perform percussion displays with instruments which they make themselves; they have naked cheek patches which they can conceal or even change colour according to mood; they have a very long, erectile crest; they have a variety of calls including an almost human-like 'hello' and other ear-splitting calls; and they have one of the largest and most formidable beaks of all birds. Despite all of these characteristics, little is known about the biology of wild palm cockatoos. On top of all this, it has been suggested that palm cockatoo numbers are declining in all parts of their range (New Guinea, the Aru Islands and Cape York Peninsula, Australia). All of this meant that when I was given the chance to study these birds as a PhD project, I jumped at it.

The project is based at The Australian National University in Canberra, Australia, and the field work is being conducted on Cape York Peninsula - the only place palm cockatoos are found in Australia. Academic supervision is provided by Dr. Rob Heinsohn and Prof. Andrew Cockburn, and I have an advisory panel consisting of Dr. Stephen Garnett, Dr. Sarah Legge, and Dr. Mike Double. Funding for the project comes from the World Parrot Trust who have generously provided A$30,000. In addition, I have received an Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship, and support from The Stuart Leslie Fund for Bird Research (from the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union).

A rare shot of a Palm Cockatoo in the wild, Cape York area. *Photo: Peter Marsack*

Project Aims

The general aim of the research is to fill the large gaps in our understanding of palm cockatoo ecology. This is so that we may be able to identify any current or potential threatening processes, thus placing ourselves in a better position to manage this species in the future. Specifically, I will be monitoring nest sites for breeding activity, which will help to define the breeding season (if there is one) and allow us to determine the breeding effort and success in the study area. Also, I hope to catch and radio-track several birds to determine how far individuals move, where they go and what they do when they get there. This information will be used to determine home range size (including potentially wide-ranging seasonal forays for food) and time budgets so that we can understand which components within palm cockatoo habitat are essential requirements for survival. I would also like to radio-track newly fledged or juvenile birds to investigate the vagaries of post-fledging survival. The last component of the study will be an analysis of the genetic variation among the remaining populations of palm cockatoos. This will give us information about the past and present relatedness of the populations, thereby allowing us to quantify individual movement between populations.

So far....

As can be imagined, much paper-work and logistical planning has had to go into organising such an ambitious research project. So far, I have been able to obtain all the necessary permits to begin field work and I have also consulted the local Aboriginal people, who I hope to involve in the research. Thanks to the WPT, I have also acquired a field vehicle and much of the necessary equipment that I'll need for working in the field. Together with generous support from the Palm Cockatoo Species Survival Project and the Avicultural Breeding and Research Centre, I am also in the process of importing a stuffed palm cockatoo from the United States which I'm hoping to use as a decoy to catch wild birds. I'm also hoping to use it in territoriality experiments.

But it hasn't been all desk work. Early in July, I and two colleagues from the ANU travelled to Adelaide Zoo to trial a dummy radio-transmitter on a captive palm cockatoo. I decided to trial a 16g tail-mount transmitter which, as the name suggests is glued and stitched to the underside of one of the central tail feathers [see photo]. After three days we checked the transmitter for signs of damage, but it appeared that very little damage was done, which was very promising given the size of that formidable beak! The Zoo has kindly allowed us to keep the transmitter on the bird until it drops off (or is eventually pulled off). In addition to this trial, I and Richard Hill (who is researching southern red-tailed black cockatoos) have been trialing dummy radio-transmitters on captive yellow and red-tailed black cockatoos owned by the Gowland famliy

near Canberra. Thanks to the support from both the Gowlands and Adelaide Zoo, the results of these trials will place myself and Richard in an excellent position to decide which approach to take with wild birds.

I have had two small field sessions so far this year; one in January and another, much wetter one in April. The aims of these two trips were: (a) to choose and then familiarise myself with a study area; (b) to start finding some nest sites; and (c) organise some accommodation. The main area I will be concentrating my efforts upon is a large patch of tropical grassy woodland which has several rainforest-boarded creeks passing through it. It also has a relatively large population of palm cockatoos, and several known nests that Queensland Parks and Wildlife ranger Daryn Storch worked on several years ago. Daryn showed me these and other nests in the April field trip. The last objective - to find accommodation - was fulfilled by the generous offer of local well-known naturalist Brian Venables who has kindly offered his house at Cape Weymouth.

To come....

The first priority of the current field session (which has only just begun) will be to trap and fit radio-transmitters to as many palm cockatoos as possible. We're hoping to catch about 10 adults while they're feeding on fallen fruits, using a flip-trap specially built for the purpose at the ANU. It is possible that palm cockatoos may be moving around, following the fruiting of various trees. By catching birds feeding in areas which have a seasonal supply of food, we should be able to find out whether or not these birds are either residents of the place where they are caught, or do indeed move over large areas to forage. We are also hoping to fit transmitters to breeding birds that we trap in the vicinity of nests. This will be important to determine the home range and extent of any foraging forays that breeding birds make. Eventually, I hope to use these data to understand the relationship between foraging effort and breeding success.

So, in this first report of the Cape York palm cockatoo research project, I am pleased to announce that things are finally up and running. With this progress, especially after achieving my aims from the first two field trips, I'm hoping that it is a sign of great things to come.

Further Reading

Brown, D. M. and Toft, C. A. (1999). Molecular systematics and biogeography of the cockatoos (Psittaciformes : Cacatuidae). *Auk.* 116:141-157.

Forshaw, J.M. and Cooper, W.T. (1981). *Australian Parrots.* Second Edition. Lansdowne Editions. Melbourne.

Palm Cockatoo is anaesthetised before radio transmitter is fitted.

Photos: Steve Murphy

How you can help our Palm cockatoo project:

The World Parrot Trust made a commitment to find A$30,000 (approx. £12,500 or US$20,000) over three years. Our fourth payment of A$5,000 is due in January 2000. Half of this will be provided by our Australian branch, but the rest, about £1,050, must come from our UK funds. Any contributions towards this, perhaps from owners of Palm Cockatoos, or members who simply want to help this excellent project, would be very welcome. Please send cheques to our UK office.

How you can help Pesquet's Parrot

(See pages 2 and 3)

WPT is not currently contributing towards the work on Pesquet's Parrot in Papua New Guinea. This is part of a major long term program funded and carried out by Wildlife Conservation Society in PNG. However, when corresponding with Andrew Mack and his associate Dhananjaya Katju, we asked if there were something we could do to help, and they replied asking if we could supply a good spotting scope and a pair of Leica 10x42 waterproof binoculars. The latter are listed at £689 ($1,100), and the scope would be similar. So here's an opportunity for a WPT member to help fund these essential items. Also, if anyone has any unwanted binoculars, please send them to our UK or USA offices - they are always welcome in any of our field projects. Many thanks.

At last - the PsittaScene Index

Since we published the first issue of PsittaScene in October 1989 we have frequently been asked for an Index of the entire contents of PsittaScene, now up to 40 issues. Such an index would clearly be helpful to scientists and students interested in the ten years work of the World Parrot Trust, together with the many reports of other organisations' parrot conservation activities.

We are pleased to report that our new UK administrator Karen Allmann has celebrated six months with us by producing this long awaited Index. We illustrate a sample of it here, but the whole thing can be downloaded from our website (www.worldparrottrust.org), or you can send us £3 or $5 for a hard copy.

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Paradise Park Newsletter

We illustrate the latest newsletter from Paradise Park, Hayle, Cornwall, UK, where the trust is based and receives much logistical and financial support. This newsletter is designed primarily for Paradise Park's season ticket holders, adopters of birds and mammals (otters, red pandas, marmosets, red squirrels), and supporters of our programme to reintroduce the Chough to Cornwall. This red legged Crow is the 'national bird' of Cornwall, went extinct in Cornwall in 1971, and aviary bred birds will be released to the wild from Paradise Park in early 2000. The park also plans to release a group of eight Red Squirrels bred at the park, also once native to Cornwall, and also not seen in the wild there for nearly thirty years.

Paradise Park would be happy to send a copy of the newsletter to UK residents who send in a SAE (stamped addressed envelope) of 12 inches by 9 inches. Outside the UK, please send £3 or $5 to cover postage and handling.

If anyone would like details of the Paradise Park Animal Adoption Scheme, please ask. The charges for this range between £30 and £200 a year, and many very rare parrots are available, such as St. Lucia and St. Vincent parrots, Keas, Hyacinths, Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Golden Conures, Leadbeaters and other Cockatoos. Please note that these funds go to Paradise Park, not the World Parrot Trust. But anything that helps Paradise Park, also helps the Trust!

New World Parrot Trust Catalog

This is included as an insert in this issue, and we would like to point out that all orders will now be handled from our UK office. We will shortly have this catalogue on our website, and this should open up new opportunities to win funds for the parrots.

If parrots could really speak, what would they tell us?

- Some thoughts for the millennium

The World Parrot Trust believes that these beautiful, sensitive birds would have a sorry tale to tell. Their association with our species has not benefited them, indeed they have been exploited by us for hundreds of years, and especially so in the past thirty years.

It is true that many pet parrots are kept in excellent conditions by devoted people who give them a good quality of life. The birds respond by giving intelligent companionship of a high order.

It is also true that parrots are still trapped in the wild in large numbers and sold for trifling sums of money in local markets. From here they are likely to be traded on to national and international markets. For every bird that survives this process, at least four will die along the way.

If the parrots could speak they would ask to be spared, to be left in their natural homes.

Since the World Parrot Trust was formed ten years ago it has campaigned for a complete end to trade in wild caught parrots. This trade has been reduced, but still continues, and constitutes a threat to the survival of many species. The United States has a 'Wild Bird Conservation Act' that prevents the importation of any wild-caught birds into the US. Unfortunately for the birds, the European Union has no such legislation, and no plans to introduce any. ***The World Parrot Trust is seeking support for a European 'Wild Bird Conservation Act'.***

Hong Kong Bird Market

The trapping and importation of wild-caught parrots is not only cruel and wasteful, it is no longer necessary. This is because the hobby of aviculture has developed its skills to the point where it can breed in captivity all the young birds needed to supply the growing demand for pets. What is more, these aviary-bred parrots are likely to become more satisfactory pets because they are accustomed to humans.

PARROTS NEED HELP

...to survive in the wild
...to thrive in our homes

A WORLD PARROT TRUST CAMPAIGN

www.worldparrottrust.org

Would the parrots speak in favour of this development? We believe they might, provided the highest standards of bird breeding and pet keeping are achieved.

The aims of the World Parrot Trust are the survival of parrot species in the wild, and the welfare of captive birds. We have now launched our 'PARROTS NEED HELP to survive in the wild, to thrive in our homes.' campaign. This is intended to focus public concern on the parrots and their problematical future.

The new IUCN/SSC PARROT ACTION PLAN (largely funded by The World Parrot Trust) states that 89 of the 350 species of parrot are threatened. The World Parrot Trust has provided funding for the conservation of 37 of these threatened species. These projects are ongoing, expensive, and represent only a fraction of the situations needing help.

We seek the concern and practical assistance of everyone who recognises the special charm and importance of the parrots, and the extreme threats to their survival.

In particular, we strongly believe that everyone who keeps parrots should accept a share of responsibility for helping fund the survival of parrots in the wild. Even more so, the businesses that benefit from parrot created income of at least $10 Billion a year worldwide should put substantial sums back into the conservation of these birds.

The parrots would demand nothing less. But let's face it, parrots cannot really speak. The World Parrot Trust tries to speak on their behalf, and so does John Cleese in our 'Live Parrot Video'.

He says: 'Can we really accept the extinction of these beautiful creatures? The parrots desperately need our help, so please support the international conservation work of The World Parrot Trust.'

A final thought:

IF WE CAN SAVE THE PARROTS, WE MAY YET SAVE OURSELVES

Psitta news

News Study: Rain forest fading faster than thought

by JEFF DONN, Associated Press

Brazil's Amazon rain forest is being destroyed or badly damaged more than twice as fast as previously believed, according to a study that relied on airplane surveys and on-the-ground interviews instead of satellite images.

The researchers said their method more accurately measured the effects of logging and burning in the 1.3 million-square-mile rain forest.

"It's perhaps even more frightening", said Bill Mankin, Director of the Global Forest Policy Project of two major environmental groups. "It's going to creep up on us, and people may not even be crafting a solution because they don't realise there's a problem."

The study was carried out largely by ecologist Daniel Nepstad of the Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts and colleagues at the Institute of Environmental Research in Belem, Brazil. They interviewed 1,393 wood mill operators and 202 landholders, and checked the effect of fires from an airplane at 1,104 sample points.

Their findings were published in recent issue of the journal Nature.

They concluded that analysts who study satellite images are missing much of the damage from logging and fires set to clear land for farming or pasture.

Nepstad put the loss at 17,000 square miles last year, or three times the official Brazilian estimate of 5,7000. But 1998 was an especially bad year because of El Niño drought conditions. He estimated that in an average year, actual damage is at least twice the official, satellite-based estimate.

Nepstad estimated that 217,000 square miles, or 16 percent, of the original rain forest has been spoiled over the years.

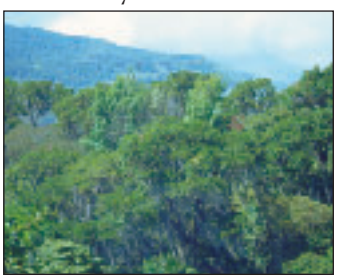
The findings trouble some scientists and environmentalists because perhaps a third of the world's plant and animal species live in the rain forest.

"As we lost species, we don't know which one is the critical one, the keystone species that results in the whole system falling apart", said Robert Sanford Jr., a University of Denver ecologist.

The researchers also worry about huge quantities of carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere from the fires and rotting wood left by loggers. Carbon dioxide is thought to cause global warming.

Also, some scientists fear that damage to the rain forest, which gives off enormous amounts of water vapour and keeps the ground from drying out, could throw the Earth's climate out of balance.

The researchers called for more judicious logging, more prevention of accidental fires and curbs on roads, power grids and water systems.



Going, going....

News: The World's Rarest Bird

Report from San Francisco Chronicle by JACK EPSTEIN

The Spix macaw, a 2 foot long bird with dark blue plumage, grey-blue head and bright yellow eyes, was thought to be extinct in the wild until discovered nine years ago by a Birdlife International expedition (40% funded by the WPT - Ed).

The last of the species is a male believed to be at least 13 years old. Although he is the last of his kind the wild, he is not alone. World-wide, there are 44 Spix macaws that have been smuggled out of Brazil or born in captivity.

Spix macaws have always lived near Curaca, a backland's town of 6,000 inhabitants located along the south bank of the Sao Francisco River.

In the denuded landscape, the sole survivor engages in a daily survival routine, foraging for food among cactus, sage and prickly, stunted trees known as caatinga. Each day, he flies off at daybreak to a treetop nest to pick up his female companion of the past eight years, a green Illiger macaw.

They spend the entire day searching for food, flying an average of 24 miles on their forays.

"When it comes to finding food, he has more patience than any human being I know", said Jorge Souza Rose, who has monitored the bird's movements by foot, jeep and bicycle since 1991 and considers himself the Spix's "bodyguard".

When the avian couple return at sunrise, the Spix waits until his mate enters her nest in a caraibeira tree before flying to his bachelor digs inside a cactus bush. To date, the Spix and the Illiger have produced infertile eggs.

In 1995, biologists decided to mate the male Spix with a female of his own species. Since the female Spix had been raised in captivity, scientists put her through an intensive seven-month training to build up her flying stamina and help her adapt to a new diet of seeds from local trees before releasing her into the wild.

Although the female was eventually accepted by the Spix and the Illiger as an equal partner, she vanished just seven weeks later. Her whereabouts remained a mystery until a goatherd recently admitted that he had witnessed her death but kept it secret for four years for fear that the project would end.

The female Spix, he said, had collided with an overhead wire.

Most recently, biologists placed nine Illiger chicks in the nest to see if the Spix and Illiger would make adequate parents. The couple immediately began feeding the baby macaws and teaching them how to fly and find food.

In March, the young Illigers set off on their own and are now monitored via radio collars.

Editor's comment:

Information on Spix's Macaw is hard to get, and although we cannot guarantee the accuracy of this article we thought it worth printing. We also have an unconfirmed report that Birds International in Manila, Philippines, have offered to return six young aviary-bred Spix's Macaw to Brazil, to join the single male in the wild. If correct, Mr. De Dios is to be congratulated on moving this vital project forward.

Funds from WPT - Italy

A group of members of WPT Italy visited Paradise Park in September, and brought with them a substantial donation of £1000 to go toward WPT's fund for Lear's Macaw. Most of this was collected by Giancarlo Macchiavelli, who is currently building some very large aviaries

At Paradise Park (l to r): Karen Allmann (WPT Admin.), Audrey Reynolds, Mike and Judy Owen (WPT Australia), Cristina Ratti, Cristiana Senni, Giancarlo Macchiavelli (WPT Italy).

for breeding macaws, and asked the materials suppliers to contribute towards WPT.

News from WPT - USA

by GAIL BUHL

A third of the world's parrot species' are declining. Some are very endangered, like the Hyacinth macaw featured in the World of Birds Show at Minnesota Zoo. Even though in the wild, these parrot live halfway around the world, in the show we talked about how the people of Minnesota can do something to help. All of us can recycle more, reduce what we use and reuse materials more effectively. This helps us locally but helps global habitats by reducing pollution and habitat destruction. People can also support conservation organisations like the zoo, or organisations like the World Parrot Trust.

The World Parrot Trust (WPT) was founded in 1989. They designated August as World Parrot Month. What they strive to do is raise funds to donate to people / organisations that are doing field conservation work directly helping parrots in the wild. To date, they have contributed to projects in 22 different countries helping 37 different species of parrots. One of the other goals of the WPT is to promote the welfare of individual parrots kept in captivity by providing funding to educational programmes and promoting high standards in the keeping of parrots.

The Bird Show staff decided that one direct way we can help is not only promoting World Parrot Month in our show, but to "walk the talk" and try to raise money for the organisation. I am happy to say that the people in our audiences really responded by helping us raise $671.61. The show of support was very encouraging for conservation. It was wonderful for us to see that people seemed to be concerned and happy that they could contribute at least a little to the solution of some of the problems facing parrots in the wild.

Gail Buhl fundraising for WPT at Minnesota Zoo.

Smugglers trap Nigeria's Endangered Grey Parrots to Brink of Extinction

Earth Times News Service by ABIODUN RAUFU
26 September 1999

Lagos, Nigeria. Until recently when the people of Ikodi village raised alarm about the rapid rate at which African Grey parrots were being smuggled out of Nigeria, the illegal export of the colourful bird had largely been going on for years unnoticed. Each parrot sells for at least $500 on the international pet market, most ending up in Europe, particularly Scotland which is regarded as the main base of the international market in African grey parrots.

The parrot, *Psittacus erithacus*, is mainly found in the swamps and mangrove forests of West African countries like Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Liberia. In Ikodi village, which is locally known as parrots paradise, on the south-eastern coast of the country, the grey birds with a scarlet tail can be found on the bank of Orashi River.

The exact number of parrots


An African Grey Parrot

there is not known. But the parrots which live on the clustered tall palm trees of the community's forest is estimated to run into several thousands. The tall palm trees protect the birds from predators, while the trees' clustered nature gives them a sense of communality.

The poachers having failed to induce the Ikodi people to trap the parrots for them went to the neighbouring villages where they hired young men to raid the Ikodi community forest to trap the parrots. The trappers are paid about N1,00 (about US$10) for each parrot. The result has been violent clashes between the trappers and the Ikodi villagers.

One such clash recently left two Ikodi youths dead. Efforts by the Ikodis to get justice has so far been unsuccessful as local authorities have been unwilling to get involved. "My appeal is that government should come to our aid," says Chief Wilberforce Aleme, the embattled head of Ikodi village.

Meanwhile, the poaching of the parrots continue unabated as the poachers attempt to satisfy the high demand for the birds. The African grey parrot is valued as pet because of its beauty and intelligence which is reflected in its unusual ability to mimic human beings.

Mike Pugh of the London-based World Society of the Protection of Animals (WSPA) who has been on the trail of wildlife smugglers says unscrupulous local officials are bribed by smugglers to provide the necessary clearance papers. Pugh also says he discovered that the airport through which most of the wildlife are exported out of Nigeria is the Aminu Kano International Airport in the northern city of Kano. "At the airport, I saw a man carrying a crate being prepared to export five chimps, one gorilla and, in a separate compartment, 250 African grey parrots." says Pugh. The poachers' gain is however Ikodi's loss as the poachers' activities threaten the community's local economy which is based on the conservation of the parrots.

Though the villagers are mainly farmers and fishermen, they also sell feathers of the parrots which fall off naturally to augment their income. Each feather is sold for N15 (about 15 cents) to middlemen who come to the village to buy the feathers in bulk to resell to people for ornamental purposes and as vital ingredient in making local drugs for a number of illnesses. Easy accessibility to the parrot's feathers has reduced poverty in Ikodi and no one goes hungry when all it takes to feed is to walk into the community forest to pick feathers.

Local people are forbidden by age-old custom from killing the birds or felling the trees on which they live. Bush burning near the parrots' habitat is also prohibited. The villagers conserve the birds also because of the tourist potential. "We want this settlement to be made a tourist attraction in conjunction with the community," says Chief Aleme. "If we have a road, water and light, those who want to see these birds can come easily in and out and see them."

Nigeria has a 14 year old law which prohibits poaching or trading in endangered species. But so far no one has been successfully prosecuted under the law which prescribes six-month sentence without option of fine if caught. While calling for immediate government intervention, ERA recently called for the use of forest guards into the parrots abode, prosecution of poachers responsible for the recent killing of Ikodi youths, and enforcement of the law on endangered wildlife.

In addition ERA "calls for international pressure on the Nigerian government to take steps to live up to its commitment as a CITES signatory".

Letter

from TOM MARSHALL, Leesburg, to Joanna Eckles WPT USA

I just received my renewal notice yesterday and decided after much thought to "bite the bullet" and renew as a Life Member. I certainly support the goals and programs of WPT and I think it makes sense to make this type of commitment at this time.

This decision has a great deal to do with the long time respect and admiration I have had for Editor and Board Member, Rosemary Low. I think that Rosemary Low, more than any other individual, has had the largest single impact on the practice of aviculture and the growing concern for the conservation of parrots in the wild.

I was 'hooked' on breeding parrots and their conservation after first hearing Rosemary Low speak on endangered Amazon parrots at the AFAConvention in San Diego, California in August, 1981 and after reading her Endangered Parrots, published in 1984.

The work of Charlie Munn, Carl Jones and Paul Butler, et. al. with World Parrot Trust association has sold me on the job WPT is doing. In addition, I enjoy reading WPT's accomplishments in the PsittaScene and I am in complete agreement with the philosophy behind the creation of 'A Manifesto for Aviculture'.

In the United States, I believe 'responsible aviculture' is, in part, supporting the American Federation of Aviculture (legislation), World Parrot Trust (conservation) and the Psittacine Research Project, Univ. of CA at Davis (research), and learning all I can about the two pairs of White-bellied and two pairs of Black-headed Caiques I keep as breeders, companions and as prototypes of all 300+ species of parrots in the world.

Sincerely, Tom Marshall

Volunteer work requested

Eighteen year old Sarah Gaskin is keen to take part in a parrot conservation project before she starts university in October next year. She would like 'front line' experience. In addition to parrots, she is interested in rainforest ecology. Anyone who can offer her work is invited to contact her at 25 Granville Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EU, UK.

The Avicultural Magazine

Edited by Malcolm Ellis, covers the keeping and breeding of a wide range of birds including, of course, parrots. It is published four times a year by the Avicultural Society, which has a worldwide membership that includes most of the top aviculturists (a name for bird keepers coined by the first editors of the magazine back in 1894). Subscribers also include the leading zoos, bird gardens, conservation organisations and research institutes.

A recent issue included accounts of breeding the Bearded Barbet, a trip to see the Bali Starling, hand-rearing a Superb Fruit Dove at London Zoo and the husbandry and breeding of the Papuan Mountain Pigeon at Vogelpark Walsrode. While for parrot enthusiasts there have been articles on breeding the Whiskered Lorikeet, the biology and husbandry of the Purple-bellied Parrot, and captive breeding programmes for the Red-browed Amazon. No. 4, 1999 will be devoted largely to a review of parrots bred in zoos in the USA, and will include lists of all the species bred, the numbers and the zoos in which they were bred.

The Membership Secretary is Stewart Pyper, 21 Primrose Hill, Nunney, Frome, Somerset BA11 4NP, England. UK membership is £18 per year, and overseas membership £21, in sterling.

Honour for Paradise Park

The prestigious **'GOOD BRITAIN GUIDE 2000'** has chosen Paradise Park (home of The World Parrot Trust) as **'Family Attraction of the Year 2000'** for the County of Cornwall. This is the UK equivalent of Florida in tourism terms, and means the park has beaten over 300 competing attractions.

Here is what they said:

To See and Do

CORNWALL Family Attraction of the Year

HAYLE SW5537 **Paradise Park** Plenty for families at this colourful place, the headquarters of the World Parrot Trust. Since the park first opened in 1973 they've successfully bred over 200 species of birds from all over the world. Some of the beautiful current residents are showcased to spectacular effect in the huge Parrot Jungle, a splendid mix of waterfalls, swamps and streams, and in their daily free-flying show (usually at 12.30pm). Star of the show is Sam the Cockatoo, who's been trained to collect coins from volunteers and pop them into a collecting box for the charity. For another splendid show, try feeding some parrots in the new Australian aviary - 40 rainbow lorikeets swoop down for the nectar that you can buy for 50p at the shop. As well as rare and exotic birds they have lots of animals, including their own otter sanctuary with entertaining feeding times twice a day; they usually pick out volunteers to help, and if it's your child's birthday you can usually fix it in advance so their name will be called out. Other highlights include penguin feeding shows, and a daily display of eagles, owls and falcons. Times for these are displayed at the entrance, or you can find them in advance on the park's information line. More animals to feed at the Fun Farm, though they limit sales of feed so that the animals don't stuff their faces all day. There's a big adventure play area decked out as a mock fort, with an adjacent picnic area, and quiz trails with badges as a prize at the end. Adults may prefer the Victorian walled garden (lovely clematis arches in May) or the pub that brews its own real ale, and there's a narrow-gauge railway rattling gently through the grounds. Though there's a good deal of shelter, this isn't really somewhere to come on a wet day. Meals, snacks, shop (and plant sales), mostly disabled access; open every day; (01736) 751020; £5.99 (£3.99 children 4-14). You can usually get good-value return tickets.

Book Review

by ROSEMARY LOW

Arinos big journey – by Lars Lepperhoff and Rosmarie Wüthrich

What better way could there be to foster an interest in parrots among children than by creating the character of Arinos, a Blue and Yellow Macaw, and making him the subject of a children's story book? Our Swiss representative, Lars Lepperhoff, aviculturist and macaw breeder, has done just that. Alas! the book is in German - so only German speakers will benefit. Nevertheless it is a real benefit for no similar type of book exists in the German language.

It tells the story of a macaw who was hand-reared by Indians and sold to a dealer. The Indians needed the money because the destruction of the rainforest had left them impoverished. Arinos was exported to Europe and ended up in a pet shop - as thousands of his kind had done before him. One day a family visited the shop and the son called Peter persuaded his parents to buy Arinos.

It was not long before his new family realised that Arinos was bored and lacking in stimulation. They built a big aviary in their garden and bought a mate for Arinos. At last the macaw was contented - but he had suffered a lot on his journey from the rainforests. The moral is there: only buy captive-bred parrots. With its imaginative and colourful pictures on every other page, this book will give pleasure and a first hint of environmental issues such as deforestation.

Arinos Grosse Reise (ISBN 3 85580 393 5) is published by Blaukreuz Verlag Bern. It costs Sfr 25/DM 26.50.

Working for Parrot Conservation and Welfare Worldwide

The World Parrot Trust was founded in 1989 as UK Registered Charity No. 800944. International expansion has been rapid and the Trust now has linked charities and support groups in Africa, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Scandinavia, Spain, Switzerland and the USA.

Funds raised for the parrots have now reached £1,000,000 ($1.6M) and have been used to initiate and support conservation and welfare projects in 20 countries for 37 species of parrot. Despite this wide-ranging activity, the Trust is run on a volunteer basis, with only two part time administrators worldwide. This uniquely cost-effective approach is made possible by substantial financial and logistical support donated by Paradise Park, the UK home base of the World Parrot Trust.

The objective of the Trust is to promote the survival of all parrot species and the welfare of individual birds. It pursues these aims by funding field conservation work, research projects and educational programmes. The Trust seeks to promote the concept of 'responsible aviculture' where the interests of the parrots themselves are given priority over commercial, political, career or other human concerns. The World Parrot Trust and its members wish to be recognised as the 'True Friends of the Parrots', and to win over the majority of aviculturists, pet owners and scientists to its point of view. The task is huge – our resources are limited. We need the commitment of everyone in the 'parrot community': those who keep, breed, study and protect the parrots. Beyond those special interests, we look for support from everyone who understands the crisis facing the world through the loss of biodiversity. We aim to continue using the special charm of the parrots to win the hearts and minds of thoughtful people everywhere.

Michael Reynolds
Founder and Hon. Director
World Parrot Trust

Mike Reynolds meets 'Pablo', a hand-reared Echo Parakeet released to join critically endangered wild Echoes in Mauritius.

Join us

If not already a member, please join. Receive our PsittaScene newsletter, know that you are actively contributing towards our aims and projects.

Help fund our Projects

We are currently supporting parrot conservation, education and welfare projects in 20 countries. Your generosity towards the parrots could help us expand current schemes and start new ones.

Aims of the Trust

The survival of parrot species in the wild, and the welfare of captive birds.

These aims are pursued by:

Educating the public on the threats to parrots.
Opposing trade in wild-caught parrots.
Preserving and restoring parrot habitat.
Studying the status of parrot populations.
Encouraging the production of aviary-bred birds.
Creating links between aviculture and conservation.
Promoting high standards in the keeping of parrots.
Supporting research into veterinary care of parrots.

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

SUBSCRIPTION RATES (please tick)

- ☐ UK and Europe (Single) £15
- ☐ UK and Europe (Family) £20
- ☐ Fellow (Life Member) £250/US$400 Corporate (Annual)
- ☐ All overseas Airmail £17/US$25 (or equivalent currency, payment by Visa/Mastercard preferred)
- ☐ Plus donation of £/US$ .....

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Or join us on our website: www.worldparrottrust.org

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Central: http://www.worldparrottrust.org
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

Meyer's Parrot

Poicephalus meyeri

by LOUISE WARBURTON

Meyer's or Brown Parrots are Africa's most widely distributed parrot species. They are found in six geographical variations, ranging across Central Africa, south to the northern tip of South Africa. The race found in Zambia is the *Poicephalus meyeri transvaalensis.* Observations showed there to be considerable colour variation between individuals, some having a yellow crown, others with very little yellow at all.

The Meyer's in the photograph were seen coming to drink in Katue National Park, Zambia, in late September. The drinking flock eventually numbered eight, and they were joined by Long-tailed Starlings and Black-cheeked Lovebirds. In the Nanzhila region Meyer's parrots were commonly observed, usually in flocks of 4 or 6 birds calling noisily as they flew between feeding trees or to water. They were found across all the regional habitat types which covered grassland plain, miombo, mopane and riparian vegetation and were often observed feeding on the sausage fruit of the *Kigella africana* tree, Combretum seeds and Julbernadia pods. Local people report that flocks of over 40 Meyer's visiting their maize fields at crop-ripening is not uncommon. Little is known about their ecology in the wild; it would certainly be very interesting to study the factors behind this species' success.

Listed as a CITES II species, Meyer's Parrot is not considered to be globally threatened, although numbers in northern South Africa and parts of Zimbabwe have been considerably reduced by habitat destruction.

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