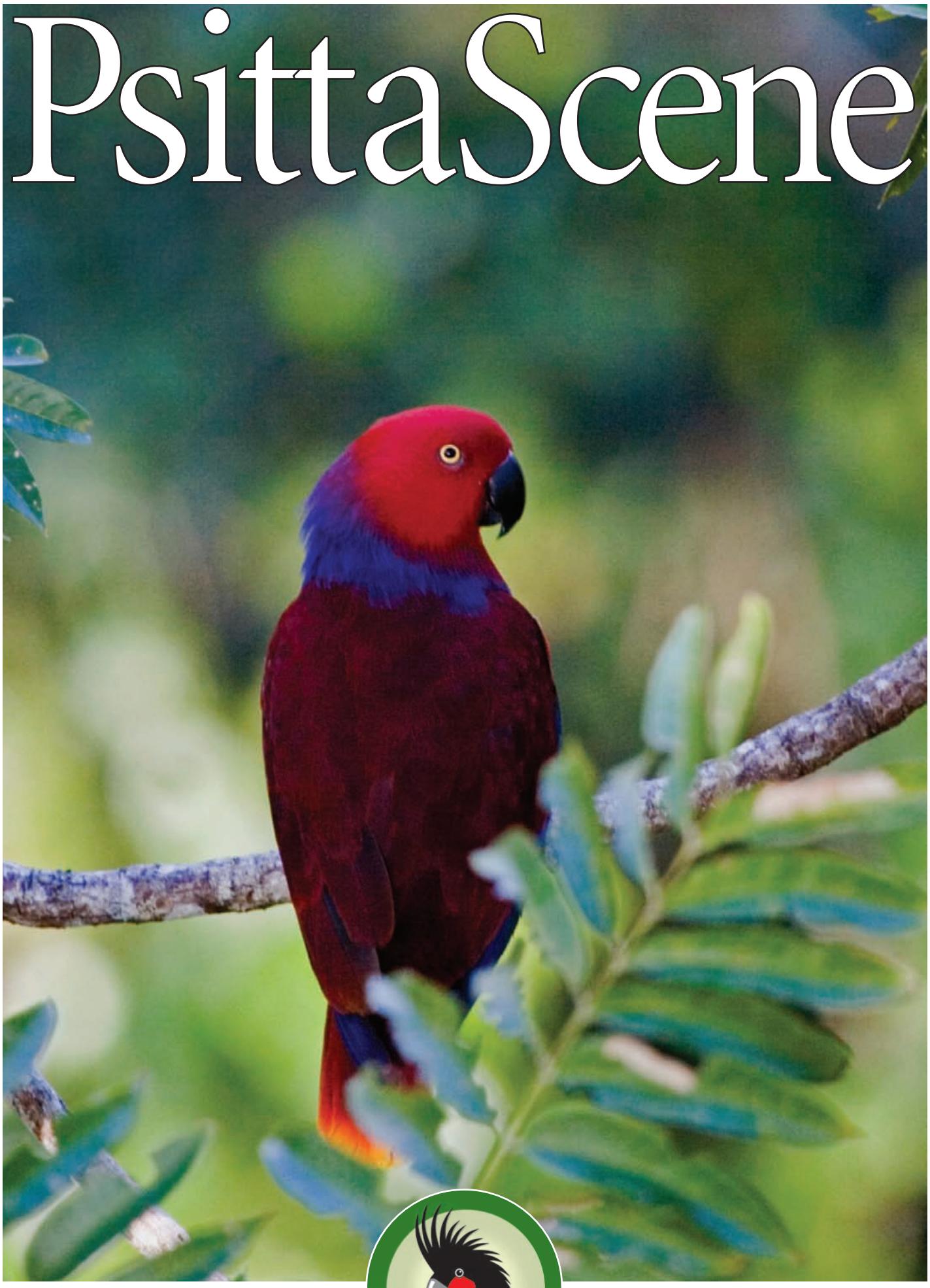
Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

PsittaScene



In this Issue

Mexico's Maroon-fronted Parrot
Step Up: Command or Request?

August 2007

Volume 19 Number 3
Psitta Scene

World Parrot Trust
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall,
TR27 4HB, UK

CONTENTS

Editor: Joanna Eckles
Production: Karen Whitley

Printed by Brewers of Helston Ltd
www.brewersgroup.com

fromthechairman

Parrot conservation is as much about people as it is about parrots. Some of these people tell their stories in this issue of *PsittaScene*. There are those who volunteer months of their time to do really hard work trekking to parrot nests to contribute behavioural observations, as in Mexico with the Maroon-fronted Parrot. Others recognise the urgent need for community involvement in conservation and have devised innovative ways to bring the parrots to life, as with the Yellow-naped Amazon in Costa Rica. We hope you enjoy all these places, their people and their parrots.

For your parrot at home, we explore one of the most used, and perhaps abused, of behaviours - stepping up on the hand. Believe it our not, how you handle this basic behaviour could make a big difference in your parrot's life.

We are also announcing five exciting projects we are funding through our Action Grants programme. They are our way of following up on the Parrot Action Plan, which identifies parrot species in most need of conservation work, and helps us make choices about where to spend precious funds. Your support as World Parrot Trust members make these grants possible, and they illustrate the breadth of work being done to help parrots survive in the wild.

A final note to recognise that the permanent EU ban on the import of wild birds came into force on the 1st July. The great conservation and welfare benefits for the parrots are surely reward enough for everyone involved, at WPT and the many other organisations who helped to bring it about, but I'm pleased to let you know that the Trust has also been short-listed in the 'Campaigning Team of the Year' category in the UK Charity Times Awards.

Alism

Alison Hales
WPT Chairman

onourcovers

FRONT Simple elegance - a female Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*) in the Seram rainforest. This Indonesian island is a last stronghold for some of the country's most endangered parrots. Eco-tourism brings hope to parrots and people in the region. See "*A Moluccan Treasure*" (p13-15). (c) Mandy Andrea

BACK Maroon-fronted Parrots (*Rhynchopsitta terrisi*) and Thick-bills (*R. pachyrhyncha*) used to be considered one species. Researchers, including volunteers, are uncovering important aspects of this rare species' biology in order to ensure its long term survival. (c) Fernando Cerre

Mexico's Maroon - Fronted Parrot

By René Valdés Peña and
Gabriela Ortiz Maciel

Photos by Fernando Cerra

Observations of the Maroon-fronted Parrots reproductive biology, diet and parasitism were essential to the study.

The Ecosystems Sustainable Management Program (PMSE) from Tecnológico de Monterrey, in Mexico oversees the Maroon-fronted Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta terrisi*) project. This long term study started in 1995 and over the years we have been able to identify almost all important nesting areas and study basic aspects of the species' biology such as breeding, diet, home range and habitat use.

In 1947 the Maroon-front, a former subspecies of the Thick-billed Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*), was named as a separate species. It is listed as "vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List. The population is estimated at approximately 2,000-4,000 individuals occurring in an area less than 20,000 km^2 (52,000 mi^2). Maroon-fronts inhabit temperate forests in a limited range of the Sierra Madre Oriental in the north-eastern Mexico in the states of Nuevo Leon, Coahuila and Tamaulipas.

The Maroon-fronted Parrot nests in cavities and crevices of high limestone cliffs. To date the most important nesting cliff for the Maroon-fronted Parrots is El Taray Sanctuary, located in Coahuila state. Pairs arrive at the breeding areas between April and May, egg laying occurs in July and chicks fledge between mid and late October, though sometimes fledging lasts into November. Once nesting season ends, parrots fly to the southern part of their range to spend the winter.

Though we have tried it is almost impossible to access nest cavities. Nest monitoring is carried out through direct observation of nesting cliffs in order to estimate the number of breeding pairs as well as chicks fledged per nest. The parrots feed on pine seeds, which are especially important during the breeding season. They also eat agave flowers, fruits and soil from clay licks.

The main problems these parrots face are habitat destruction due to logging activity, fires and agriculture, as well as occasional poaching for the pet trade.

This past year two wildfires destroyed 2,000 hectares of pine forest, including El Taray Sanctuary. For this reason one of our research goals during the 2006 field season was to investigate the effect fires had on the parrot's population as a whole. To date we are looking for funds to restore burned areas by involving local people in reforestation, flora and fauna monitoring and soil erosion prevention. Since forests regeneration is very slow, adequate conservation strategies have to be implemented to preserve these temperate forests as parrots as well.

The Volunteering Program

Year after year PMSE recruits volunteers from all over the world. Since the beginning of this project we have had volunteers from the US, Canada, Spain, Guatemala, Hungary, and of course Mexico, mainly undergraduate and/or graduate students in biology or environmental sciences. With a minimum stay of a single month, volunteers increase their knowledge of wildlife and habitat management, and learn real-life conservation strategies. They have the unique opportunity to be close to the Maroon-fronts - one of the most northern parrots in the world that lives up to 2,000 meters above sea level. Volunteers enjoy the friendship and team work that is part of every day in the field. They also help to contribute a huge amount of data on the ecology and conservation of this rare and special parrot.

For more information contact: Programa de Manejo Sostenible de Ecosistemas. ITESM. Cedes 5º piso CCA. Av. E. Garza Sada 2501 sur. CP. 64849, Monterrey, N.L. Mexico.

Web page:
http://uninet.mty.itesm.mx/1_8_1_1.htm.
E-mail: ravp@itesm.mx

Volunteer researchers enjoy intimate encounters with the parrots along with stunning scenery on their daily treks to observe nests.

A Volunteer's day in the field

By George Oláh and Lauren Morgan-Outhisack

As volunteer field assistants we were proud to be selected from a number of applicants to be part of Monterrey Tech's research project on Maroon-fronted Parrots. We came from around the world - Lauren, a biology student, arrived from California, USA; and me (George) as a zoologist from Hungary. Being part of the research team, exploring the beautiful country and studying these amazing birds was an experience we will not forget.

Our duty was to visit these cliff nests in the mountains and make reproductive behavioural observations documenting cavity usage by reproductive pairs. While in the field, we slept in a tent and sometimes at local peoples' homes. The most exciting part of the project was that every day we travelled to another location in the mountains. Normally, we spent 10 days in the field and 4 days in Monterrey for data entry, provisions and relaxation. The next 10 days in the field we would go to a new site. This usually meant that no given nesting cliff was visited again for 4 weeks. When nesting cliffs were revisited, a different observer would monitor the cliff. There were usually multiple cliffs in an area and most days we worked alone.

Our average morning started at around 7:30 a.m. to the sound of Brown-backed Solitaires and Elegant Trogon as well as other birds singing and calling. We ate breakfast after quickly packing up the tent and our sleeping gear. As the truck was reorganised to make the necessities accessible, we grabbed the data sheets and food that we needed for the next seven hours. Then we all packed into the truck and were off. René would drop us off at the cliffs that we would be watching for the day. This daily routine was slightly different when we observed the cliffs at El Taray. On those mornings, we were up and driving the bumpy, narrow dirt road by 7:15 am. After that we hiked up to the nesting cliffs through a steep field of rocks, boulders and burned vegetation. The hike would start out cold until the sun rose, heating things up and telling us that the parrots would be active soon.

At the end of this hike our official day started, usually around 8:10 am. Most days, we would not have to walk very far before reaching our observation post for the day. After finding the perfect "comfortable" vantage point, it became a waiting, watching and listening game. With busy sites, counting and tracking of birds usually started shortly after 8:20. Collecting all the necessary data involved counting the birds, keeping track of pairs and solitary birds, recording which cavity in the cliff face individuals went in, and recording the time they enter and exited, as well as how they did this. A continual visual vigil was not always kept, mainly for the sake of our necks. A "rest" was possible because you could always hear the screeching, talking chatter of the parrots long before you could see the specks of their body in the sky. This routine would continue until 5 pm, when we were picked up and loaded into the truck for the trek to our next camp site. Once there we would unload our sleeping gear, set up the tent and start making dinner. Dinner at around 6:30 pm was our one "real" meal of the day and it was usually consumed within minutes. After dinner we would wash the dishes and play a couple rounds of cards. Most nights we would hit the hay around 10 pm to be well-rested for our next day. The highlight of our work was to see the parents flying together with their chick(s) just a few meters from our observation points.


Photo: (c) Chris Dahlin

BEYOND THE SCIENCE

parrot conservation through education in Costa Rica

By Christine Dahlin

When I flew in to Costa Rica in January of 2006 I was both thrilled and terrified. I was finally beginning my PhD project researching wild Yellow-naped Amazons. It was the experience of a lifetime; watching parrots every day in field sites abounding with other wildlife such as monkeys and iguanas. Yet I was responsible for my first field project in a foreign country and I didn't want to screw up!

Soon nesting season was in full swing and my assistants and I were ecstatic when the first chicks hatched. They were tiny, pink and naked except for a few feathery tufts. They were still adorable, however, and we eagerly anticipated our next visit. That visit brought an awful reality; the chicks from all seven nests we were observing were gone. My doctoral advisor, Dr. Timothy Wright, had documented high rates of poaching for the pet trade in the mid-1990's, and sadly the situation appeared unchanged. In Costa Rica, although poaching is illegal, there is not enough money allocated to the national park system to adequately control poaching and poachers are skilled at evading detection. The fact the poaching has continued unchecked for so long was too much for us; we needed to do something to help the parrots.

In response to the poaching, members of our laboratory at New Mexico State University, including Dr. Wright, fellow doctoral student Alejandro Salinas-Melgoza, and myself, have partnered with the World Parrot Trust and the Area de Conservación Guanacaste (ACG) to develop a multi-pronged conservation strategy focused on the three species of parrot being poached in Guanacaste province, the Yellow-naped Amazon (*Amazona auropalliata*), White-fronted Amazon (*Amazona albifrons*) and Orange-fronted Parakeet (*Aratinga canicularis*). The heart

Viewing an amazon nest with the cavity camera.

of this effort is an education program designed to instill community pride in the parrots and foster a desire to conserve them by teaching students parrot ecology and appropriate conservation strategies.

Our program began in Escuela Irigiray, the school closest to our study site. Overall, we had six main components to the program, including nest adoption, a mural, education materials, nest visits, a parrot art exchange program and nest protection. We began with a nest adoption component. In February 2007 children "adopted" four Yellow-naped Amazon nests, to learn the disastrous impacts of poaching. If nests fledged the World Parrot Trust donated $100 to the school. If the nests were poached the money was redirected to conservation efforts in the ACG. We designed the component such that the more people refrained from poaching, the more the community would benefit. Our efforts were a partial success; two nests were successful and two nests were poached.

While the nest adoption got underway, I painted a parrot themed mural in the gathering hall at the school. It is already a source of parrot pride for the community. It depicts the dry forest ecosystem of northern Costa Rica and all three parrot species that live there. Children were involved throughout the program, and contributed by painting their hands onto the adjacent walls, which also say "Protect the Parrots" and "Love the Parrots" in Spanish.

We also created education materials including a

Chris Dahlin and students listen to Yellow-naped Amazon calls.

Powerpoint presentation and parrot worksheets, which members of the Wright laboratory co-designed with ACG education staff including Rosibel Elizondo. Main points of the education module include:

1. Basic ecology of dry forest parrots,
2. Why parrots are special and should be protected,
3. Why parrots are at risk: poaching and deforestation,
4. What kids can do to help: e.g., Do not buy or own a parrot.

Students also visited an actual nest with chicks and viewed the nest with a nest camera, while at the same time learning why chicks should stay in the wild. During the nest visit they learned about our scientific research and practiced their parrot call imitations.

Children reinforced the information they acquired through the program by drawing a picture of Yellow-naped Amazons and writing a message about them. We had beautiful sunny days to sit and draw our parrot pictures outside beneath the trees. My mother, Deb Dahlin, an art teacher, facilitated an exchange of drawings and messages with her 6th grade students at Elmcrest Elementary in NY State.

We decided it was vital to increase nest protection in tandem with the educational aspects of the program, so we partnered with the ACG to begin our first year of nest monitoring. We showed park rangers where all our nests were so they could monitor them throughout the nesting season and they intercepted one poacher on their first day on patrol.

Our first effort was a mixed success. Students' were very enthusiastic throughout the program and thrilled to learn about the parrots. However, poaching continued in 2007 in our field site. In 2008 we will extend our program to more schools and plan to expand the nest adoption component generously sponsored by the WPT. The ACG also plans to bring our parrot education presentation to schools throughout northern Costa Rica. We are confident that with the partnership between the WPT, the ACG and NMSU our program will begin to meet its primary objective of reducing levels of parrot poaching. We also hope our program can serve as a model for other education programs directed at parrot conservation throughout the world.

5th and 6th graders wearing their WPT wrist bands with NMSU researchers and ACG staff in front of the mural.

WPT ACTION GRANTS 2007

Our Action Grant program began in 2002 with the award of four grants for projects on the conservation of the world's globally-threatened parrots as outlined in the Parrot Action Plan. We are proud to continue this tradition with the award of five new grants.

Dispersal, habitat use and population connectivity in the threatened Yellow-naped Amazon of Costa Rica

The Yellow-naped Amazon (*Amazona auropalliata*) is considered endangered throughout its range. It is listed in Appendix I of CITES and the long term status is regarded as critical according to the Parrot Action Plan. Many populations of the YNA occur outside of protected areas, making them vulnerable to poaching and isolation through habitat loss.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, I propose to study movement dynamics of the YNA in the Guanacaste Province of Costa Rica to elucidate the importance of maintaining connectivity between populations in protected and non-protected areas. Individuals will be tracked from two non-protected populations and one protected population in Costa Rica for two years. Information acquired on parrot movements will enable us to identify movement patterns between key habitats, and areas used by parrots to breed and roost in both protected and non- protected areas.

Second, I propose to develop an innovative GPS-based tracking package, which will enable us to evaluate parrot movements along with traditional radio-telemetry techniques. Development of the GPS package will not only be advantageous in this study, but it will also be of value to other studies on parrot movements as it will lead to a better understanding of spacing biology of parrot populations. For example, this new technology could be used to gather information on species that undergo long distance migrations. Tracking these species with traditional radio- telemetry techniques is especially difficult.

Third, local awareness of YNA conservation status and the impacts of poaching will be raised through educational programs in one of the non-protected areas with a high YNA poaching rate. The program will consist of a school-based education module targeting protection of nests and a web-based camera for monitoring nestling behaviour (p 6-7).

>> Alejandro Salinas, Department of Biology, New Mexico State University (aletz@nmsu.edu)

Phylogeography of the Burrowing Parrot: What is the conservation status of its sub-species in Argentina and Chile?

Burrowing Parrots (*Cyanoliseus patagonus)* are colonial parrots found in South America. Three sub-species are proposed for Argentina and one in central Chile. In Argentina, the conservation status of Burrowing Parrots was studied for the last time in the late 1970s. No information is available and no monitoring has been carried out since, with the only exception of a single colony of *C. p. patagonus*.

This species has suffered a clear decline since the early 19th century due to trapping for trade, hunting, conversion of grassland to croplands and persecution as crop pest. They have difficulty re- colonising a region once they disappear, making them fragile in a global sense. Their cliff-nesting breeding habitat requirement also makes this species potentially vulnerable and may promote genetic isolation and differentiation among populations.

The analysis of genetic diversity is becoming a key facet of conservation biology. There is a recognised need to identify genetic discontinuities and identify populations of conservation concern.

Given long enough, isolated populations such as *C. p. bloxami* in Chile may evolve into separate subspecies or even species. Many populations isolated by habitat fragmentation, however, will not persist for long. As a consequence, different populations could require separate management or different conservation efforts.

We propose a phylogeographic study of Burrowing Parrots based on sequencing DNA from molted feathers. The first part of the project will consist of finding appropriate genetic markers. Following this, the aims of this study are to:

1. Characterize the proposed sub-species using DNA sequences,
2. Determine sub-species genetic diversity,
3. Reconstruct phylogeographic history based on genetic findings,
4. Determine if the genetic differences between the Chilean and Argentinean sub-species warrant the revision of their taxonomical hierarchy

>> Juan F Masello (masello@orn.mpg.de, juan.masello@gmx.de), Petra Quillfeldt, Gernot Segelbacher

Conservation of the Cape Parrot and associated remnant afro-montane forest (South Africa)

The Endangered Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*) is endemic to South Africa. The population is highly fragmented and only lives in Afromontane *Podocarpus* forest patches. Cape Parrots are dietary specialists feeding primarily on the endocarps of *Podocarpus* fruits. Nests are almost always secondary cavities high up in dead forest trees, usually *Podocarpus* species. Low reproductive rate and poor breeding success make the species demographically susceptible to declines in their numbers. Selective felling of *Podocarpus* species for the furniture industry and capture of nestlings for the avicultural market has pushed the species towards a wild population which numbers less than 1,500 individuals. There is an urgent need for the development and implementation of conservation strategies for both the Cape Parrot and the Afromontane forest. Before such strategies can be developed and implemented, baseline data on the forest ecosystem dynamics and the impact of harvesting on the Cape Parrots distribution needs to be collected. This data will then be used to inform the development and implementation of these strategies, as well as providing baseline data for the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and revision of these strategies.

To develop a Species Action Plan for Cape Parrots and their associated forest habitat. Our objectives are:

1. To provide alternative development opportunities for the communities living close to the forests within the Parrot's range in order to enhance the livelihoods of adjacent communities.
2. Develop an environmental education programme.
3. To set up a comprehensive national policy on the conservation and sustainable use of the Cape Parrot in captivity and the wild
4. To reduce the ongoing legal felling of Yellowwood trees within the Cape Parrot's range
5. To study Cape Parrot movements, social organisation, breeding biology, status as a crop pest, disease and habitat quality in terms of Cape Parrot requirements
6. Enable the CPWG to develop an infrastructure to realise the objectives of the action plan.

>> Colleen T. Downs, University of KwaZulu-Natal (downs@ukzn.ac.za)

Translocation of the Kuhl's Lory from Rimatara, Austral Islands, French Polynesia to Atiu, Cook Islands

The fossil record and oral traditions show that the Kuhl's Lory (*Vini kuhlii*) was formerly a native bird on most of the Southern Cook Islands. It was much prized for its small red feathers, which were used for chiefly adornments and for decorating ceremonial headdresses. Until recently, the Kuhl's Lory survived only on Rimatara and in the northern Line Islands, where it was introduced in historical times. It is listed in the IUCN Red List as Endangered, because of its small population and limited distribution.

It is believed that if invasive ship rats should ever invade Rimatara, the endemic Kuhl's Lory would soon become extinct in its natural range. The CRES Applied Animal Ecology Division is working with Cook Islands Natural Heritage staff to increase quarantine procedures and awareness to prevent the introduction of the ship rat and to establish a backup population of Lories on an island within its former natural range, namely Atiu in the Southern Cook Islands.

Staff mist-netted 27 Kuhl's Lories, maintained them in field cages and sent them to Atiu for release. The process included health evaluations of each of the birds as well as a general surveillance and evaluation of the health of the avifauna on the island. Approximately one year post-release, staff will participate in a collaborative island-wide survey to determine numbers of release birds, reproductive activity, distribution and habitat utilisation and cultural implications. Also, it is our hope to do a survey of the human community on Atiu to ascertain their knowledge of the birds, their feelings about the re-establishment of the species on the island and their perspective for future conservation of the species.

>> Zoological Society of San Diego, Ministry of Environment, FP and Cook Islands Natural Heritage Department. c/o Alan Lieberman, Conservation and Research for Endangered Species, San Diego Zoo, (alieberman@sandiegozoo.org)

Conservation genetics of the Yellow-shouldered Parrot

The Yellow-shouldered Parrot (*Amazona barbadensis*) is a globally threatened species affected by the illegal pet trade and habitat loss. This species is patchily distributed throughout the arid zones of coastal Venezuela, and on the islands of Margarita, La Blanquilla and Bonaire. A conservation program conducted on Margarita Island since 1990 has compiled substantial information about the biology of this parrot, but data on genetic patterns is lacking.

Genetic diversity influences the ability of local populations to survive and to thrive. The populations of this parrot are small and probably isolated as its range is currently restricted to specific arid lands in northern Venezuela and the nearby islands. As habitat destruction is rampant in most of the areas where this parrot still survives, it is critical to determine the genetic identity of each of these populations before they are extirpated. To address the lack of genetic data for the Yellow-shouldered Parrot, blood and feather samples will be collected from parrot nestlings from all of the extant populations of the species, and tissue samples (especially from extinct populations) will be obtained from museums. Mitochondrial DNA analyses and complementary lab work will be conducted at University of Missouri-St. Louis. Those will be used to determine what population genetic parameters are important to conservation biology, such as the genetic variation within and among the population, the gene flow between populations, and the genetic distinctiveness of geographically-isolated populations. As a result, we can identify the most genetically distinctive populations and those populations can be given higher priority for conservation. Additionally, if individuals are translocated from one area to another within the species range, mtDNA analyses can be used to develop guidelines and to avoid undesirable consequences such as the erosion of the species' overall genetic diversity.

>> Adriana Rodríguez-Ferraro, Dept. of Biology. University of Missouri-St. Louis, USA (arppf@umsl.edu)

P·E·T Pages

PsittaScene's PET Pages help you provide the very best for your bird by focusing on Parrot behaviour, Enrichment and Training.

Step Up: Command or Request?

By Barbara Heidenreich, Good Bird Inc

I was asked once "If you could teach people one thing to help them work with their parrots, what it would be?"

Without hesitation I replied, "I think the thing that would make the most difference for the birds would be if their caregivers really learned the difference between the 'Step up' **command** and the 'Step up' **request**."

It has been reiterated for years in the companion parrot literature…your parrot must *obey* the step up *command*! Obey and command. For me these words carry strong implications. I visualize a parrot with no desire to step up onto the hand being forced to comply. This force usually involves maneuvers such as pushing a hand into a bird's chest, quickly scooping a bird onto the hand, or peeling toes off of a perch. For a positive reinforcement trainer such as me this is a very unpleasant picture. Why? Certainly those strategies can work to get a bird on the hand. However, the process of training through force involves strategies that rely on aversive experiences. Pushing a hand into a bird's chest, scooping it up or otherwise forcing it onto your hand are uncomfortable experiences for a parrot, no matter how you look at it.

Fallout from force

There can be serious repercussions with lasting effects from using force or aversive stimuli to gain cooperation. One of the most common results of forcing a bird onto your hand is a parrot that learns to bite in response to the presence of a hand (the aversive stimuli). The important word in that sentence is "learns". Parrots are not hatched with an inherent aggressive response to hands. This behavior is learned through repeated exposure to unpleasant interactions involving hands. Often as a last resort, a parrot bites in an effort to deter the persistent pushy hand. Should the bite produce the desired results (the hand going away) the bird quickly learns that biting works! More importantly, it will be likely to use it next time a hand invades its space.

Parrots can learn to bite hands that are used to force behavior.

This is not to say one should ignore a bite to dissuade the aggressive behavior. I can't tell you how many times I have heard people say "take the bite" so the bird learns you won't back off. That can be quite painful and very unnecessary! A more trust building approach is to avoid a bite in the first place by heeding the parrot's body language before it considers biting. Typically a parrot will present body language that indicates discomfort well before a bite is landed. By

This issue's contributor, Barbara Heidenreich, has been a professional in the field of animal training since 1990. She owns and operates Good Bird, Inc., (*www.goodbirdinc.com*) providing behaviour and training services and products to the companion parrot community.

carefully observing body language and making adjustments so that the bird remains as comfortable as possible, a sensitive trainer can gain cooperation without prompting aggressive behavior.

The same can be said for fear responses. Many of you have met a parrot who will step onto an arm or shoulder, but will do everything in its power to avoid a hand. Again it would be an odd adaptation for a parrot to come into this world with an innate fear of hands. More likely the bird's experience with hands taught it to fear them.

A positive approach

It can be challenging to retrain a parrot to step up onto a hand for positive reinforcement after it has learned aggressive behavior (and/or fear responses) towards hands. The good news is that it can be done. This is particularly important to note as so many birds are often given up, ignored, or worse after being labeled "a biter" through no fault of their own. It is always sad for me to encounter a parrot that has learned aggressive behavior. The bird's experience could be so different if the people in its life had been given the opportunity to learn about positive reinforcement.

Having worked in free flighted educational bird programs for years it was quite a shock when I first discovered the thousands of parrots that had fear responses or showed aggressive behavior towards hands in the companion parrot community. Those training flighted parrots for programs have been raised on a positive reinforcement approach to training. Flighted parrots can easily choose to leave should a trainer resort to negative reinforcement to force a bird to step up onto the hand. Therefore negative reinforcement and its drawbacks are usually not a part of the training strategy.

The companion parrot community, on the other hand, has traditionally been fed advice that heavily promotes the use of negative reinforcement. This in turn has led to a plethora of troubled birds. Fortunately an important opportunity awaits companion parrot caregivers. With positive reinforcement training finally coming to the forefront, parrots and their owners now have hope. No longer do parrots have to obey. Instead they can learn that stepping up results in desired consequences. They can learn to look forward to stepping up!

Positive vs negative

Change can be difficult. Those accustomed to using negative reinforcement to train birds often present solid evidence as to why there is no need to consider other strategies. These arguments include the statement that negative reinforcement works! This is true. Negative reinforcement does work. However, a conscientious caregiver needs to consider more than effectiveness. The process of learning through negative reinforcement is not a pleasant one. Negative reinforcement is also sometimes called escape or harassment training. The animal complies to avoid the aversive experience - not exactly a trust building process. In addition, negative reinforcement training strategies create a bare minimum required response. Animals only do what is necessary to avoid the aversive experience.

There is also the misconception that negative reinforcement will create faster, more reliable responses. It should be noted that quick, efficient, reliable, repeatable responses can also be attained with positive reinforcement.

Some argue that in an emergency the bird must step up quickly. In a true emergency, such as the house is on fire, you do whatever is required to ensure your parrot is safe. The problem is that sometimes the lines get fuzzy on what constitutes an emergency. Being late for work is not an emergency requiring me to abandon my positive reinforcement training strategies. In the long run I will get more reliable performance of

Fallout from forcing parrots to step up

- Many birds now bite as a result of being forced to step up
- Many birds are given up due to biting problems
- Many birds show fear responses to hands and flee to the back of their cages
- Many birds are relegated to cages with little attention or enrichment because they learned to bite or are afraid
- Many birds suffer fates worse than this because they have learned to respond to force with aggressive behavior and/or fear responses

Trainers that work with free-flighted birds rarely if ever use negative reinforcement or aversive stimuli to train.

Photos: (c) Barbara Heidenreich

Using positive reinforcement to train your bird to voluntarily step up builds trust and understanding.

the behavior if I take the time to commit to using positive reinforcement even when it is slightly inconvenient to me. In my experience there is no real justification for the use of negative reinforcement to get a bird to step up.

Give your parrot a choice

A key component of training with positive reinforcement is giving the bird choice. Rather than forcing oneself on the parrot, the goal is to teach the parrot that choosing to come to the caregiver results in desired consequences. These consequences can be food treats, head scratches, toys, attention, etc. Identify what the bird likes and use this to reinforce approximations towards the desired goal behavior of stepping up onto the hand.

An easy way to teach a parrot to move in a desired direction is to train the bird to orient its beak towards a target. The target can be any chosen object. The target can then be gradually positioned closer and closer to the hand identified for the step up behavior. The hand should remain stationary and in a position that allows the bird to step on easily. The goal is not to move the hand towards the bird, but for the bird to voluntarily move toward the hand by following the target.

A bird that has an unpleasant history with hands may show signs of apprehension or aggressive behavior as it ventures closer to the hand. Generously reinforce the frightened bird that dares to move in closer. If it shows aggressive behavior, gently remove the hand and any positive reinforcers for just a few seconds. This shows the bird that its body language was understood and acknowledged. It also removes the opportunity to gain positive reinforcers. When this strategy is paired with reinforcement of the desired behavior (stepping closer to the hand), the bird can quickly learn to increase calm behavior and decrease aggressive behavior without the use of aversives. Over time the bird will be reinforced for moving closer and closer to the hand. When it touches or maybe even raises a tentative foot towards your hand it can be praised and reinforced generously. Eventually, through this process, the parrot can learn to voluntarily step up onto the hand to earn positive reinforcers.

While the bird is learning to step up, you can use the targeting behavior to help direct the parrot

for basic husbandry duties. This helps you avoid resorting back to negative reinforcement training strategies to move your bird during the re-training process.

Conclusion

Ultimately we all want what is best for our parrots. We also hope to have an incredibly rewarding relationship that is truly one of the joys of sharing your life with a companion animal. The result of training your parrot using positive reinforcement is a bird that eagerly anticipates interacting with you. Empowering your parrot with the opportunity to choose and showing sensitivity to its behavior will foster trust. A great place to start in building that relationship based on trust is by training "step up" using positive reinforcement. If there is one thing you change in your handling strategy, make it this. Move over step up **command**…here comes the step up **request**.

Barbara Heidenreich is the owner of Good Bird Inc (www.GoodBirdInc.com). She can be reached at PO Box 684394, Austin, TX 78768 USA, info@goodbirdinc.com or 512-423-7734.

A Moluccan Treasure

Conservation of endangered Indonesian parrots

Text and Photos by Mandy Andrea

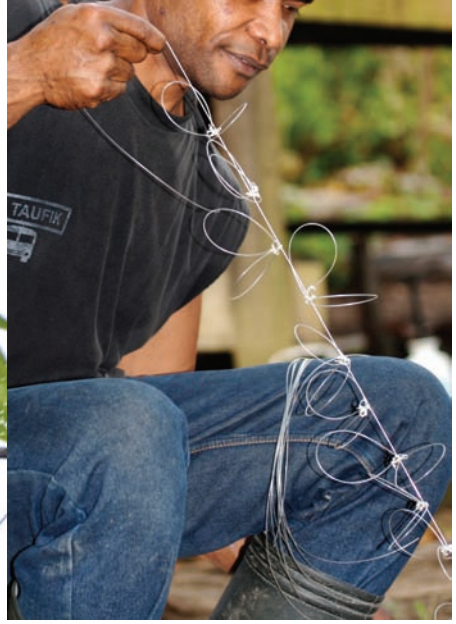
Tree houses always invoke such a juvenile sense of glee in me. They are cozy and secretive - a place from which one could look on other people through spy glasses. Now imagine a tree house in the middle of a vast wild rain forest. You could imagine you've become another little member of this untamed world - for a while.

▲ Seram Island as seen from the the Masihulan "tree house" platform. From this bird's eye view, guests can observe birds that fly by or just underneath.

▲ Guests emerge through the jungle canopy at 35 m (115 ft) overlooking a sea of trees and continue skywards to reach the platform.

I have been in such a place. However, instead of spying on people, it was the birds of Seram I was after. Seram is an Indonesian island of the Moluccas, historically known as the "Spice Islands." Much of it still pristine, Seram is part of the rapidly shrinking tropical rain forest that is the other air purifier of our planet. I visited this place as a participant in The Indonesian Parrot Project's (IPP) eco-tour. A highlight of the trip is the trek from the village of Masihulan into a part of this rainforest where clove, nutmeg, coffee and cacao trees still grow wild. Our destination - the IPP platform built 46 m (150ft) up in a majestic ironwood (*Intsia bijuga*) tree. The forest's highest layer consists of emergent trees that tower singly or in small clusters up to 60 m (200ft) in height. The platform is built in the limbs of such a tree.

A male Eclectus left hanging after a playful flying romp with a female on Batanta, West Papua.



Soni, an ex-trapper who now works for IPP, demonstrates the fabrication of a trap lined with nooses.

We hear the noisy chattering of Moluccan
unison through the trees. It is not until e

▲ Peering through the dense foliage, we caught glimpses of what appeared to be attempts at nest takeover first by a pair of hornbills, and the next day by a pair of Eclectus.

◀ The female Eclectus, being more aggressive than the male, is the doorkeeper.

Cockatoos strip the area surrounding the opening bare of bark and plant growth to prevent easy access by predators such as lizards.

Red lories before they appear into view. Just as quickly they disappear, swerving in tight vening that the much-anticipated call of a Salmon-crested Cockatoo reaches us.

Once heard on many islands of Middle Molucca, and hence their common name, the Moluccan Cockatoo, they are now believed to exist in the wild on Seram only.

We hear the call again, this time answered by another in the vicinity. We start to hear the vocalizations of other cockatoos as they take their time making their way to their roosting tree, its top visible from our platform. The first cockatoo emerges, traversing the distance between trees, but is too soon hidden again in the foliage. Minutes later it is followed by another. In twos or threes, ethereally white, eight arrive at the roosting tree as darkness rapidly falls. We too prepare to hunker down for the night high above the forest to rise at the break of dawn to observe the birds begin a new day.

The Indonesian Parrot Project aims to conserve and protect the wild parrots of Indonesia. They run a Rehabilitation Center and Sanctuary and work with local communities to protect parrots. IPP has also established programs to instill pride, especially in schoolchildren, in the unique avifauna of their homeland and to develop awareness of the deleterious effects of poaching and provide alternatives.

Mandy Andrea now serves on the Board of Directors for the IPP.
For more information visit:
www.indonesian-parrot-project.org

Every day, one or two Palm cockatoos visited a tree right in front of our guesthouse on the island of Batanta, West Papua.

NEW EXPERTS at www.parrots.org

Seeking the advice of world-class parrot specialists has become much easier with the addition of three new experts who will contribute their specialised knowledge to the 'Ask an Expert' section at www.parrots.org.

Noted avian veterinarians Dr. Brian Speer and Dr. Ellen Cook, and Australian parrot behaviourist Mr. Jim McKendry join an impressive panel of parrot experts who have volunteered their time to answer questions from WPT members. They are joined by renowned specialists in parrot behaviour, care and conservation, including E.B. Cravens, Dr. Susan Friedman, Phoebe Green Linden, Steve Martin, Jamie Gilardi along with several others.

WPT members can "Ask an Expert" by logging on to the website, selecting a specialist and entering a question. Responses appear a short time later and are archived and categorised by subject matter and author.

This gathering of professionals is available only to WPT members and represents a wealth of knowledge on avian care. We look forward to benefiting from the collective wisdom of our participants.

Dr. Brian Speer and friends.

HOME
ALL ABOUT PARROTS
GET INVOLVED
FORUMS & EXPERTS
SHOP TO SAVE
PARROT NEWS
WORLD PARROT TRUST INFORMATION
DONATE
BECOME A MEMBER
ABOUT US
OUR WORK
OUR PUBLICATIONS
OUR PARTNERS
PRESS KIT
CONTACT US
SPONSORS
Paradise Park
EngineHosting
Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium
BECOME A SPONSOR

Thanks to the many thousands of you who have already visited the site and a special invite to those who haven't - please have a look. As a World Parrot Trust member, you are entitled to many special website benefits.

Member Extras

Visit the Member Extras page to discover great new things all about parrots. Desktop wallpaper, video clips, and eCards are just a few of the interesting resources you'll find. Visit again and again because we frequently add new items.

Desktop computer "wallpaper" available for downloading - Twenty plus images wi

We have a lot of work to do.

SEARCH: GO

WPT MEMBER'S LOGIN

Username

Password

Remember Me

Login

- Forgot your Password?
- Become a Member

The word is out and the response has been exceptional. Everyone wants to see what's happening at our new online home. Visited by thousands of parrot enthusiasts every month, www.parrots.org is fast becoming "THE" place to visit.

Learn

- Research your favourite parrot with the complete Parrot Encyclopedia and Reference Library. Members have access to over 400 pages of additional information (18 years of research published in *PsittaScene*) found in species-specific profiles.
- Interact with parrot researchers and explore a day in the life of one of our Parrot Bloggers.

Contribute

- Join our Global Discussion Forums and participate in conversations that are for members only. Grab a coffee and join the conversation at the Blue Parrot Cafe or find a promising new career or volunteer opportunity in these member-only areas.
- Tell the world about your upcoming parrot event when you submit a posting to the Events Calendar.
- Get Involved - where you can sign up as a volunteer, learn how you can promote the trust, and take action to help save parrots.

th more added each month.

To sign in:

Members gain access to parrots.org resources by "logging in" to the site. Use the "Member's Login" area located in the sidebar of every page.

On your 1st visit enter your Username (your WPT member number found on your *PsittaScene* label or membership card) and your Password (your email address).
If your login fails, complete the form at www.parrots.org/members and we will email your information.

If you forget your password we'll send it to you. Click "Forgot your password?" on this sidebar.

We look forward to meeting you online at www.parrots.org.

eNewsletter and naming contest

Following the successful launch of our new website, the World Parrot Trust is proud to announce the launch this August of our new monthly online magazine.

The eNewsletter will be sent at no charge to both WPT members and non-members by email. Intended as a quick read to stay informed, this resource will be a fun and stimulating way to stay up-to-date on the world of parrots. Mini-profiles about your favourite species of parrots, advice on captive parrot care, product reviews and website updates are just the start. We'll also include breaking new stories about parrot conservation, personal interviews and advice from leading parrot experts along with entertaining games and contests to test your Parrot IQ.

To start it off on the right foot (or perhaps claw) we are launching the magazine with a naming contest.

Visit www.parrots.org/newsletter to subscribe and enter your suggested name. The winner and official name will be revealed in the online magazine's first issue and in the next *PsittaScene.*

Psitta News

Parrotevents

Parrot Behaviour, Training and Enrichment Workshop, Cornwall

Designed for the pet parrot owner, or prospective pet parrot owner, who would like a more rewarding and fulfilling relationship with their bird. This two-day Workshop will give the attendees the basic methods and tools required to teach their birds using positive reinforcement. The next Workshop run by World Parrot Trust and Paradise Park is to be held at Paradise Park, Cornwall on 15th and 16th Sept 2007. Anyone interested in receiving information or joining the Workshop please contact Karen on 01736 751026 or visit parrottraining.org.uk.

International Symposium on Pet Bird Nutrition

"Trends in feeds and products for pet birds" October 4-5, 2007, Hanover, Germany www..petbirdnutrition.com

Parrotnews

Parrot Pampering Day

This free workshop held at Paradise Park (Cornwall, UK) in July celebrated the start of the permanent ban on the import of wild birds into the EU. It was a fun way to highlight this issue and the needs of pet and aviary birds. Ten park visitors joined Keeper and Enrichment expert Louise Pellow to make toys and treats for Paradise Park's birds. Louise, along with Curator David Woolcock, brought examples of all the materials and foods they use and showed guests how to put them all together into colourful treats and toys appropriate for various types and sizes of parrot. The highlight of the day was delivering the creations to the aviary and meeting the birds.

Indonesia seeks deal on wildlife

Indonesia is urging its neighbours to unite in a regional effort to combat the illegal wildlife trade. It is hosting a meeting of ministers from the 10 members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) to discuss the trade. The meeting is the second of Asean's Wildlife Law Enforcement Network, set up in 2005 to fight the illegal exploitation and sale of fauna and flora from some of the world's most important wildlife habitats.

Indonesia's wildlife protection laws are some of the best in the region, and can serve as a reference for other countries. The problem lies in enforcing those regulations. The meeting is designed to promote co-operation between countries and international bodies such as Interpol to stop the illegal trade in animals.

According to the environmental group ProFauna, more than 95% of the animals sold in markets here are taken directly from the wild, with rare endangered species fetching the highest prices.

Officials say the illegal animal trade in Indonesia was worth more than $16m (£8m) in 2005, and many environmentalists believe that trade is growing in line with illegal logging of the country's forests.

Source: by Lucy Williamson BBC News, Jakarta http://news.bbc.co.uk

Rare Parrot photographed for the first time

Adriana Tovar and Luis Eduardo Urueña, researchers of the Colombia-based nonprofit Fundación ProAves, found and photographed the extremely rare Perija Parakeet (*Pyrrhura caeruleiceps*), of which only 30 to 50 individuals likely survive. These photographs are the first ever taken of the species.

Deforestation and wildfires for agriculture and grazing have denuded much of the birds' habitat, conservationists say. The parrot that is distinguished by its bright blue fronted head and white breast may also be threatened by illegal trade in the species.

"As more and more remote areas are being settled, the Perija Parakeet reminds us how important it is to conserve as much natural habitat as we can" said Paul Salaman of the American Bird Conservancy.

Paradise Park staff and visitors enjoy pampering the parrots with homemade treats and toys.

The Perija Parakeet of Columbia.

"Who knows what wonderful biodiversity is being destroyed before it has had a chance to be discovered?"
Source: http://www.proaves.org June 2007

Ex-parrot sighting in Qld sparks interest

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service says the discovery of a rare bird in outback Queensland will probably attract worldwide scientific interest.

Rangers found a dead Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*) - one of Australia's rarest birds - in the Diamantina National Park in the state's far south-west late last year. The last reported sighting was 1990.

Keith Twyford from Parks and Wildlife says the parrot is classed as endangered, but the most recent discovery has sparked big interest.

"I suspect it is of international significance, we haven't got that level of interest just yet but it wouldn't surprise me if we did," he said.

"There's been calls from all across Australia coming into the Queensland Museum and into our office so there's an enormous amount of interest from the 'twitchers' [bird watchers who focus on 'collecting' new species] out there and the scientific and conservation community as well, so it's a very, very exciting find."

Mr. Twyford says more surveys will now be done. "Before the big wet that you've had out west we had park rangers and park scientists working through western Queensland looking for Night Parrots," he said.
Source: http://www.abc.net.au

Boy learns parrot fashion

An autistic boy who could not speak has learned his first words with the help of his family's pet parrot. Dylan Hargreaves, four, has severe learning difficulties and had never uttered a single word but after listening to macaw Barney, he can now say "Night, night", "Dad", "Mum", "Ta", "Hello" and "Bye", reports The Sun. And experts think he is close to his first two-syllable word.

Mum Michelle, 33, said: "Barney has changed our lives. Before he arrived, Dylan would try to speak, but the sound came out as a noise. Then we got Barney and, a few months later, Dylan began to talk. It was only the odd word, but I could clearly understand what he said. Every time I gave the bird something to say, Dylan started trying to say the same thing. I think it's because the bird says things slower than me, which helps Dylan understand. Now when I put him to bed he says, 'Night, night, mum'. It means the world to me."

Michelle reckons her son's first two-syllable word will be Barney, because he loves his pet so much. Speech therapist Dr Hazel Roddham of the University of Lancashire confirmed: "If there's some enjoyment, a child is more likely to learn. And presumably this parrot has attracted the boy's attention."
Source: http://www.ananova.com

wpt contacts

Online

Main: www.parrots.org
Germany: germanparrottrust.org
Japan: worldparrottrustjapan.org

Main - UK & World

Karen Whitley, (Admin)
Glanmor House,
Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HB UK.
Tel: (44) 01736 751026
Fax: (44) 01736 751028,
uk@worldparrottrust.org
Diane Cottle, (Mem) admin@worldparrottrust.org

USA

Glenn Reynolds,
PO Box 935,
Lake Alfred, FL 33850, USA.
Tel/Fax: (1) 863 956 4347
usa@worldparrottrust.org

Africa

Dave Dennison
Po Box 32, Link Hills, Natal 3652, South Africa
Tel (27) 31 763 4054
Fax (27) 31 763 3811
africa@worldparrottrust.org

Australia

Linda Adam,
Sydney, NSW Australia.
Tel: (61) 2 8901 4207,
australia@worldparrottrust.org

Benelux

Jacques Gardien, (Mem)
Laan van Tolkien 51,
5663 RW Geldrop, The Netherlands.
Tel: (31) 40 2850844,
benelux@worldparrottrust.org

Netherlands

Ruud Vonk (31) 16 847 2715

Belgium

Ronald Coen (32) 3 314 44 83
coens@worldparrottrust.org

Canada

Michelle Kooistra,
4377 Gordon Drive,
Lakeshore Rd., Kelowna, BC,
V1W 1S7, Canada.
Tel: (1) 250 863 3200
canada@worldparrottrust.org

Italy

Cristiana Senni,
C.P.15021, 00143 Roma, Italy.
italy@worldparrottrust.org

Spain

Gemma Cruz Benitez,
C / Enrique Granados, 5 ch. 4, 28290 -
Las Matas, Madrid, Spain.
Tel: (34) 619 847 414
spain@worldparrottrust.org

Sweden

Dan Paulsen,
Talluddskviar 22 D, S-621 41 Visby, Sweden.
sweden@worldparrottrust.org

Parrots in the Wild