Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

PsittaScene

In this Issue

Echo Parakeets come back
Enrichment for pet parrots

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contents

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fromthedirector

Many assume the World Parrot Trust is much larger than we are. While we pride ourselves in being wide in scope, in reality there are just a handful of us scattered thinly around the globe. We chuckle at the mail addressed to "editorial department," "personnel office" or "purchasing manager" because we all wear several of these hats at any given time.


Michelle

Michelle Cook has been an essential part of this small team for many years, handling membership from our UK office. We've grown very fond of her and were all concerned and saddened when she had to take leave to help her family in Wales earlier this year. It soon became clear that she wouldn't be able to return anytime soon and we worried about finding a replacement as capable and cheerful as Michelle.


Diane

With considerable luck, we found Diane Cottle. She comes from Norfolk, via Spain and brings many years of experience and training in accounting and related fields. Michelle kindly returned to Hayle to train Diane, helping her hit the ground running and ensuring a smooth transition. For those who have the pleasure of corresponding with Diane, you'll find her friendly and wonderfully competent. We are very happy to welcome Diane to our midst.


Steve

Diane is not the only new person on board. We first met Steve Milpacher as a motivated WPT member back in 1989. In recent years it became increasingly clear that he had more to offer our team than we could have imagined. After successfully restructuring the Canadian World Parrot Trust, Steve formed a team of volunteer web designers to build www.birdsareforwatching.org - our collaborative website about the bird trade. Later they tackled the gargantuan task of rebuilding our main website, now www.parrots.org. Steve's skills and contributions are invaluable to our mission and we are happy to welcome him full-time as our Director of Business Development.

As our staff are all so crucial to making the Trust effective, we're sad to lose great people like Michelle, and yet lucky to have both Diane and Steve with us now. Please join us in welcoming them to the World Parrot Trust team.

Jamie Gilardi
Director

onourcovers

FRONT A lone Echo Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) is no longer so alone in its island home on Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. (c) Jason Malham

BACK A male Meyer's Parrot (*Poicephalus meyeri*) feeds a female on eggs. See the next *PsittaScene* for an update on this African species. (c) Steve Boyes

Echos Come Back)))

By Jason Malham

The sound of wing flapping in the leafy canopy reveals Echo Parakeets bathing in the wet foliage. At first just one or two birds are visible. But as the eye becomes accustomed to their amazing camouflage, more and more parakeets materialise until fifteen or twenty birds can be seen. Their method of bathing is rather comical to observe - in one fluid movement they dip their head down under the outer tips of the leaves, allowing the water to run down over the head and neck, then the chest and belly is thrust down onto the foliage and rubbed along the leaves whilst flapping the wings simultaneously. The birds systematically work their way around the tops of selected, nice bushy trees becoming absolutely bedraggled in the process.

Not very long ago such a sight was only a dream...

Photo: © Christopher Kaiser

Just over a decade ago the Echo Parakeet was considered the Rarest Parrot in the world.

It was a moment of great excitement to see a single Echo fly over this same clearing.

Photo: © Dennis Hansen

The clearing is Plaine Lievre, known to many as "camp." It is the largest field station managed by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and the location of the first efforts to save the Echo Parakeet from extinction. Camp is still the main location of Echo work, and it has been an integral part of the amazing success story that is the Echo Parakeet Programme...

Since those dire first years there has been huge progress in the recovery of this species. Just this year we have achieved one of our major goals with the announcement that the Echo Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) has been down-listed from Critically Endangered to Endangered! Never has a parrot gone from the world's rarest to being down-listed - and in less than 10 years at that. With a current population estimate of 330 birds, the programme has surpassed many people's expectations - even our own. This success certainly didn't happen overnight. It has been due to years of hard work by many passionate and dedicated people. Without the team effort of the field staff, hand-rearing and release staff, office support staff etc., success would not have been forthcoming. Every person that has been involved with Echos over the years deserves a big pat on the back, and we should all feel proud of what has been achieved!

Success aside, it's important to remember that the Echo Parakeet is still very much endangered. Three hundred and thirty birds is really not that many. The recent emergence of Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) in the Echo population has been a major complicating factor in their recovery. The disease has been visibly prevalent in the Echo Parakeet population since the beginning of the 2004/2005 breeding season when five or six released birds were observed with initial clinical signs of the virus. Screening the population is now a major priority of the Echo programme.

We are in a very unique situation in terms of disease research. Eighty percent or more of the birds are individually colour ringed. We know the ancestry of most of these birds and many can be studied over the longer term. We have been monitoring the

Photo: © Simon Tollington

"Achilles," an Echo Parakeet with severe PBFD.

development of PBFD since its apparent outset. There is a long list of questions we want to answer, such as:

- What proportion of the population is encountering the disease?
- For how long has the virus been in the population?
- Are Ring-neck Parakeets a source or reservoir for the virus?
- What is the mortality rate?
- What happens long-term to birds that overcome the disease?

A major component of the research this season is testing the Ring-necked Parakeet population for prevalence of PBFD. We aim to test 50+ birds.

At this stage we are not certain what the long term impact of the virus will have on the species. However, we are learning more each season as we obtain more test results and continue long-term observations of individuals. The provision of supplementary food has been a huge aid in our aim to closely monitor as many birds as possible. More than 50% of the population now takes supplementary food and many birds can be seen on a daily basis.

While PBFD in the Echo population may seem all bad news, there are some good notes. There are a number of birds which have developed yellow feathers and then recovered after the following seasons moult. The majority of these birds have been shown to carry antibodies. We had one female which had yellow feathers and some feather deterioration, testing PCR positive with the active virus. A year later she had recovered and now looks completely normal! So it definitely appears that some birds, including fully infected individuals, are overcoming the virus. This is great news.

Having worked on the Kakapo (*Strigops habroptilus*) in New Zealand, I joined the Echo team as Programme Coordinator in August 2001. Back then I was saying, "Yeah, I am just gonna do the one season and then move on…" Then halfway through that first season the Echos were definitely getting under my skin. I started thinking, "Well, ok, I'll come back next season and *then* I'll move on…" And so it went - my catch cry became - "Yep, this is my last season…honest…" Six years later I am still here. But, this season (2007/08) is my last season, and I will leave with many great memories and feeling very happy with what we have achieved during my time here.

I joined the programme at a great time because many of the intensive management techniques had already been tried, rat prevention measures and supplementary feeding procedures were well developed. The first nest box had been used by an Echo and cavity modifications had been developed to good effect. Also, recruits from the previous seasons were just beginning to reach breeding age. We capitalised on all of this and made additional small improvements and over the next few seasons the Echo population pretty much skyrocketed.

Never has a parrot gone from the world's rarest to being down-listed - and in less than 10 years at that.

We were able to cease the very intensive management of the breeding birds after 2004/05 because there were enough birds breeding and enough chicks fledging to ensure the continued growth of the population. In 2005/06 the programme moved into the less intensive "minimal management" regime. This had been a medium term goal but we achieved it about one season earlier than expected. Minimal management focuses only on protecting nest sites, providing nest boxes, and providing supplementary food. All clutches and broods are left intact. Chicks doing poorly are not rescued and there is no hand-rearing or releasing.

Photo: © Sarine McPherson

The Echo Parakeet

- Is the last of 4-7 Psittacula parakeet species that once existed on Western Indian Ocean Islands. Now found only on Mauritius, they once lived on the islands of Seychelles, Reunion and Rodrigues as well.
- Is most closely related to the Indian Ring-necked Parakeet. The Echo is slightly larger, a darker green and has more rounded wings and a shorter broader tail.
- Breeds from August to January. It usually lays a clutch of 2-4 eggs that hatch after 22-23 days. The young leave the nest after about 50-70 days. One or two young typically fledge from successful (unmanaged) nests.

After centuries of habitat destruction only about 1.27% of Mauritius' native forest remains. The remaining native forest is degraded as a result of past forestry practices and by the invasion of exotic plants. The degraded forest has had two major impacts on Echos. A reduction in abundance and variety of fruiting endemic trees has meant a shortage of food during the chick rearing period in some years. In addition, slow regeneration of trees has lead to a decrease in the number of old trees which the birds rely on for nesting cavities.

Predation of Echo nests by highly arboreal Ship Rats (*Rattus rattus*) and Crab-eating Macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) has had a significant impact. Indian Mynahs (*Acridotheres tristis*) predate eggs and chicks and aggressively take over nest sites. The introduced Indian Ring-necked Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) is exceedingly common on Mauritius (possibly numbering more than 30,000!) and competes with Echos for nesting sites and probably food. Ring-necked Parakeets are a potential source of PBFD and we are currently researching the relationship between the incidence of the virus in Echos and the abundance of Ring-necks.

Photo: © Jason Malham

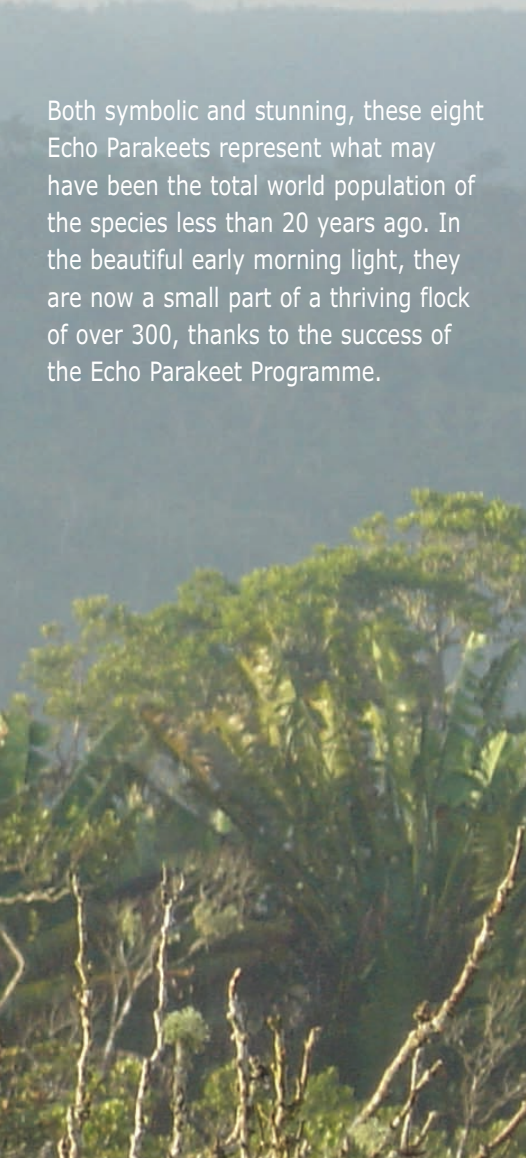
There are problems facing Echos from almost every angle, all of which contributed to the massive population decline in the first place. In the late 1980's it was blatantly obvious to people like Project Leader Carl Jones that unless something was done immediately, the species was on the fast road to extinction. Conservation efforts to recover the Echo Parakeet were actually initiated by the Forestry Service & International Council for Bird Preservation in the early 1970s and intensified by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF) and the Mauritius Conservation Unit in 1987. During the early years the recovery programme focused on learning why the species was so rare and why it was not breeding well. From the mid-1990's management was intensified and techniques such as double clutching were attempted.

Photo: © Christopher Kaiser

Re hydration for a rescued malnourished chick was sometimes required.

By 1997 the management regime focused on addressing the major problems facing Echos. Initial emphasis was placed on protection of nest sites (from predators, competitors and weather); manipulation of wild broods (downsizing and upsizing); regular examination of active nests and weighing of chicks; rescuing sick or underweight chicks; provision of supplementary food; hand-rearing and releasing juveniles back to the wild. Nest boxes were tried with little success at first. Then in 2000/2001 a bird named Gabriella became the first Echo in history to use an artificial nest box (she was also the first released Echo to breed in the wild). The next year four birds laid eggs in boxes. During that period the nest boxes were huge. They leaked and were very heavy and difficult to erect. Over the next few years (2003-05) we developed a new nest box design which is light, compact, water and monkey-proof and very attractive to Echos. Up to twenty new boxes have been placed in the field every season since 2001/02. Boxes are placed in easily accessible areas to aid our management.

The number of breeding birds has risen significantly in the last few seasons as new recruits reach breeding age. In the 2001/02 season 16 females laid 40 eggs, and 21 birds fledged in the wild. We also released 18 birds into the wild that season. Fast forward to the 2006/07 season where we did no intensive management - no rescues, fosters, hand-rearing or releasing. There were 60 nesting attempts by 57 females (three birds recycled after losing their first clutch), with 160 eggs laid and 72 chicks fledged! There has been a corresponding increase in the use of nest boxes. In 2006/07



Both symbolic and stunning, these eight Echo Parakeets represent what may have been the total world population of the species less than 20 years ago. In the beautiful early morning light, they are now a small part of a thriving flock of over 300, thanks to the success of the Echo Parakeet Programme.

we had 65 boxes in the field, and 41 were used (eggs laid) by Echos!

A small captive breeding population is maintained at the Gerald Durrell Endemic Wildlife Sanctuary in Black River township. At the peak of intensive management up to 14 chicks were produced there in a season. Some of these were used in brood manipulations in the wild (e.g. fostering in nests where infertile eggs had been laid) but most of them were released to boost the wild population.

As the Echo population has grown there has been a logical increase in the number of known nesting attempts. With minimum management (no chicks rescued and hand-reared), the proportion of nests that fledged at least one chick has remained relatively consistent (50-65%). However, fewer chicks are fledging per nest attempt because those that would have been rescued in the past now die within the nest. A very interesting bonus of minimal management has been that some pairs (all but one being supplementary fed), have been able to fledge more chicks than in the past. In the last two seasons we have had several pairs fledge three chicks each. Last season we had an exceptional case of a pair fledging four healthy chicks! This is probably the first time such an event has occurred for hundreds of years - since the arrival of predators and the degradation of the forest. In the early years of intensive management, broods of more than two chicks were downsized without question, so there was never an opportunity for more than two to fledge.

The 2004/05 season was our last year of intensive management. It was a culmination of everything we knew about manipulating nests and maximising the survival chances of as many fertile eggs as possible. Some of the techniques we used included:

- Re-hydrating malnourished chicks for 24-48 hrs in the hand-rearing nursery before placing them in nests in the wild or captivity.
- Downsizing broods from 3 to 2 or 1.
- Swapping broods to ensure siblings within the nest were a more even size.
- Bringing eggs that were developing poorly into the hand-rearing nursery so they could be monitored and assisted through hatching.
- Giving females with poor or infertile eggs dummy eggs to keep them broody until chicks were available for them to foster.

The chick transfer techniques we used during this period were highly refined. Using the Curfew brooder (kindly provided by the WPT) some chicks were kept for 6 or more hours before being placed in new nests. All chicks being transferred were given regular feeds of warmed Lactated Ringers solution to aid their hydration.

Taking tiny helpless chicks in our care for fostering was always very satisfying for staff. Transferring the chicks often involved a crazy journey sometimes including a two hour jeep ride followed by an hours walk into the remotest most rugged parts of the Black River Gorges to a nest. Once there we waited until the female exited, allowing us to place the new addition into her nest. Only strong healthy chicks were fostered and we were successful in almost every attempt. The only unsuccessful foster attempt I remember was with a female who, having laid infertile eggs, was well past her normal incubation term (25 days) and lost her broodiness. She didn't accept the chick. Fortunately we had a second female to use and it just meant the chick spent an afternoon being toured around some of the national park en route to its new home! The second female readily accepted it. One of our aims was to fledge plenty of parent-reared chicks and fostering helped ensure this goal was met.

Photo: © Shane McPherson

Supplemental feeding sometimes results in large healthy clutches that would not have survived in the past. Still, this rare nest with four chicks was an unexpected treat.

The recovery and down-listing of the

ECHO PARAKEET

is a tribute to the memory and vision of

MIKE REYNOLDS

By Carl G. Jones
Scientific Director, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation

When I first started working on the Echo Parakeet in 1979 it was so endangered and its problems seemed so intractable that conservationists refused to fund its conservation. I was repeatedly told that the species was un-saveable. In the early 1980s we knew of only 8-12 birds, of which only two or three were females. The population was breeding very poorly and in most years no young birds were fledged. At this time we did not know what was limiting the population and we suspected that the remaining birds were old. The situation was desperate.

It was Mike Reynolds and the World Parrot Trust that came to the rescue. Mike thought the Echo Parakeet was an ideal species for the Trust to work on, to pursue the ideals of parrot conservation. He told me these were the sorts of cases that the World Parrot Trust was set up to help.

Not just content to provide money to help run the conservation work, Mike and his whole family took a real interest in the work. He and Audrey visited the project to see first-hand how the project functioned and how the Trust could help more effectively. Their son Nick came out to help with the field work as did Kirsty and Dale from Paradise Park. They also sent Pete Haverson who spent many years working on our conservation programmes and headed the Echo Parakeet field work for awhile. When we had problems with the health of our captive birds, Mike arranged for Vet (and World Parrot Trust trustee) Andrew Greenwood to visit as our veterinary consultant. Andrew not only sorted out our veterinary problems but helped upgrade our management and hand-rearing. The World Parrot Trust also provided some support for Emma Ridgeway who analysed much of the data we collected on the parakeets.

An important lesson we have learned is that there is no quick fix when it comes to saving species like the Echo Parakeet. We are grateful to Mike Reynolds for the vision and commitment to begin and to the World Parrot Trust for the long-term support to continue. The down-listing of the Echo Parakeet is a great achievement in the history of parrot conservation and holds many lessons for the future.

The Echo Parakeet Team in 1997.

I have too many great memories from our "intensive management days" to write about them all, but a few stories give you an idea of the kind of work we did over those years.

Zoe is one of my favourite Echos. She is a release bird and a Camp resident with a nest box on the edge of the clearing, only 20m from the hoppers (feeders). She is a rather staunch bird around the hoppers, quite happily sending any other Echos trying to use "her" hopper on their way. And yet with people she is lovely - very passive and gentle. One day I was weighing her chicks which were only a few days old. We always wait for the female to leave the nest, usually to be fed by the male, before we access the clutch or brood. I was hanging in my harness, in front of the nest box, with Zoe being fed by Cassidy in the branches only a few metres away. The little Echo chicks are normally pretty vocal and as I weighed the first one Zoe could hear it grumbling in my weigh container. She was very curious and hopped down the branch and up onto my shoulder. My first thought was "Argh she's gonna nail my ear!" but I gave the chick its routine health check while Zoe stayed perched on my shoulder, making soft mewing calls and peering down at the chick! There was no sign of aggression towards me or agitation. It was a really nice moment for me.

A few of us have fond memories of the day a couple of the team went to the Styx cavity (we name all our nest sites and chicks based on various themes) to discover two dead chicks and one very cold abandoned egg. An introduced African Land Snail (*Achatina spp*) had gotten into the nest (8 m - 26 ft - up a tree) and smothered the chicks, asphyxiating them with slime. The female, Lagavulin, abandoned the nest. We thought the cold egg was a goner, but decided to take it to the hand-rearing nursery just in case. I took the brooder in the jeep and met Anna and Shiva on the main road nearest the nest site. Anna excitedly told me about how the egg had become a little warmed as they carried it to meet me and that it was beginning to hatch! What a surprise. We all made the one hour

Protecting natural nests, aiding chicks and providing food hoppers and nest boxes has helped the Echo population rebound dramatically.

Photos: © Shane McPherson

drive to Black River and then watched in amazement as Ryan, the hand-rearing coordinator, assisted the chick from the egg in a matter of minutes. Despite this ordeal the chick was fine. Four years later Brimstone, as we named her, is breeding for the second time.

I always loved watching the males come into the nest sites down in the gorges. When the Echo chicks are young there is often a wait of 4 or more hours between feeds, when the male comes in to feed the female. Sometimes you would wait for hours to access the nest and weigh the chicks. So it was always a feeling of relief to hear "wack...wack...wack..." (My impersonations of calls are not good! But it's a little like a duck quack only a bit higher in pitch) as the male came in. But the best part was actually watching him. He would come in at great speed from way up the hill, wings folded back and doing a huge high speed spiral down to the nest tree. Only at the last second would he flare out to land in the canopy. I love watching birds fly and it's always a thrill to see such displays of mastery.

The techniques that we used to restore the Echo Parakeet are transferable to endangered parrots elsewhere. It is therefore no surprise that personnel who have worked on the Echo Parakeet project have worked, or are now working, on Kakapo, Spix Macaw, Lear's Macaw and some of the endangered Caribbean amazons. By consulting widely and encouraging a free exchange of information between projects, new techniques are more easily developed and refined. While species like the Echo Parakeet are going to require some long-term help, their story is a success and an inspiration. During a time when more and more species are becoming rarer, this is an encouraging example that bucks the trend.

The conservation of the Echo Parakeet has been a collaborative effort. None of the great success the programme has experienced would have been possible without funding and logistical support. We are indebted to the many supporters over the years.

Special thanks to: the National Parks and Conservation Service of Mauritius, volunteers who worked with the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, the World Parrot Trust, Ireland Blyth Limited, Chester Zoo, Kaytee Products Inc., Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Dr Andrew Greenwood and his colleagues at the International Zoo Veterinary Group, North of England Zoological Society, the Parrot Society and Loro Parque Fundación.

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.

This issue's contributors: David Woolcock is the Curator at Paradise Park, and a professional member of IAATE (The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators) and Louise Pellow is a Keeper at Paradise Park.

Enriching lives: One parrot at a time

By David Woolcock

It is said that "Variety is the spice of life." How true that is! We all relish the variety in our lives do we not? So why do so many pet parrot owners seem to think that a cage with a perch, a bowl of food and a bowl of water is sufficient to keep a parrot amused and contented? I do not know the answer, but I do know that enrichment can make a huge difference to their pet's quality of life.

There are many excellent parrot toys on the market from a plethora of companies. The one thing that most of them have in common is that they are usually pretty expensive. They not only cost you a small fortune but the prices also cause you to skimp on your pet. You can't provide what you'd like to give as often as you'd like to give it.

For many years here at Paradise Park we have been developing and trying all manner of enrichment ideas for our birds. Louise Pellow, one of our senior keepers, has championed the cause of parrot enrichment over the years. She never fails when it comes to simple, effective, inexpensive and enjoyable enrichment ideas.

But what exactly is it that we are trying to achieve through enrichment?

ENRICHMENT CAN reduce the occurrence of abnormal behaviours that a pet bird displays. For example, feather plucking can often be lessened or even eliminated through the use of enrichment devices.

ENRICHMENT CAN increase the range of natural or wild behaviours that your bird demonstrates. The most obvious example of this is foraging. Instead of feeding once a day with a bowl full of food, you can present food in a way in which your pet has to "work" to find it - just as it would in the wild.

ENRICHMENT CAN help your bird to use the environment in which it lives in a more positive way. A large cage or aviary is great - if the bird uses the space. You might give it a reason to use the floor by providing a dust bathing area. Provide plenty of perches, ropes etc. to encourage the bird to use more of its enclosure. Give it secluded areas to take refuge if it should feel the need. Just because your bird only uses parts of its environment on the odd occasion, don't think those areas are less important than frequently used areas. The best analogy is that of your own house - no doubt you have a living area, an eating area, a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom at the very least. Although the majority of your time is spent in the living area and the bedroom you would find it difficult to function if somebody removed your bathroom or your kitchen simply because you spent less time there!

Cardboard tube rattle.

Egg box surprise.

Having a variety of simple enrichment ideas on hand helps you vary your offerings and keep things interesting.

ENRICHMENT CAN also increase your pet's ability to deal with challenging situations and the everyday stresses of life in a more normal way. The broader the range of experiences and situations your pet is exposed to, the less likely it is that he or she will find novel situations frightening or distressing.

Is enrichment just toys and food treats? Most certainly not. Enrichment can be divided into five categories:

Social enrichment is direct contact with people - you, your family and friends - as well as interaction with other birds and pets in your home. Telling your dog to sit or saying goodbye with a kiss are typical responses to a social environment. Another form of social enrichment is non-contact. Leaving the radio on whilst you are out or playing a bird DVD such as PollyVision provides auditory or visual stimulation.

Occupational enrichment involves exercising the mind or the body. Try to stimulate your bird's mind by giving it challenges to overcome. Hide its food in the environment or present it so that decisions must be made. Exercise the body by providing more room to fly or more areas to explore and climb around.

Physical enrichment is related to the complexity and size of the enclosure or environment in which your bird lives, in addition to the elements contained therein. Physical enrichment also includes elements on the outside of your pet's cage, such as a toy or treat on the roof that can only be accessed by hanging upside down from the top of the cage.

Sensory enrichment stimulates the senses - be it auditory, visual, olfactory, tactile or taste. The sound of rain (or the vacuum!) often triggers a bathing response in birds. The sight of a bird of prey silhouette might elicit an alarm response. The texture of a rag toy may encourage your bird to preen the toy as it might preen a partner in the wild.

Nutritional enrichment includes not only the type of food offered but also the way it is delivered or presented. Try hiding a treat in a clean egg carton. Destroying the carton to get to the treat is a little like stripping away pieces of bark to reach a tasty morsel. Instead of feeding once a day, feed several times in small amounts, maybe even in different places around the house if your bird has safe free access.

Choices, choices

To decide what forms of enrichment to give to your bird, first research your pet's species in the wild. Use books, magazines, the internet (parrots.org), wildlife programmes, zoo keepers and other parrot owners. Perhaps you might even be lucky enough to go see your species in the wild for yourself!

Ask yourself about the basic conditions birds like yours live in and how they are adapted for survival. What type of habitat do they live in? What do they feed upon? How do they spend their time? Are they adapted for a particular food source or way of life? How much time do they spend on the ground? Answers to questions such as these may give you some enrichment ideas more suited to your pet's species.

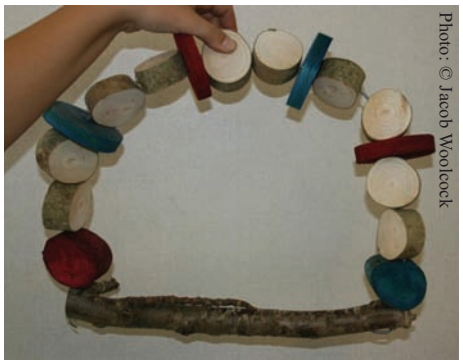
Don't be afraid to experiment and don't be tempted to discard an idea because "my bird won't do that." You may be surprised. It is also very easy to slip into the trap of giving the same enrichment time and time again because "he really likes that." The same enrichment day after day becomes routine. Why not write enrichment

Blue-throated Macaw taking the 'Pine Cone Challenge'.

Somebody once said,

"*The cure for boredom is curiosity.*
There is no cure for curiosity."

Have you ever met a parrot that is not curious?



Large chewable swing.

Stuffed walnut shells.

ideas onto cards and then randomly select a card every day. This technique will help you vary your enrichment and not get stuck giving only what is most popular with the bird or easy for you.

Safety first!

Many people are apprehensive about toys because they are unsure what items are safe to use and what are not. We always recommend that if you are in doubt, don't use it. Always err on the side of caution. However, there is a huge variety of safe everyday enrichment ideas. When we run enrichment sessions during our parrot workshops, Louise spends at least two hours demonstrating the items that we use on a regular basis. These sessions have proven extremely popular and we have begun to upload some of the ideas onto the web in the form of worksheets. This format allows us to add new ideas on a regular basis. It also allows us to add video clips of some of our birds using the ideas described. To visit our enrichment website simply go to: www.parrottraining.org.uk and choose the enrichment tab.

Safe, Everyday Enrichment Items

- Cardboard toilet roll tubes (no adhesive residue please)
- Cardboard egg cartons
- Rawhide chews
- Large buttons (for smaller birds)
- Dried pasta shapes
- Various coloured napkins
- Old fashioned wooden clothes pegs (one piece - no metal spring!)
- Wooden craft sticks
- Wooden spoons/spatulas
- Whole cuttlebone
- Natural fibre rope
- Branches such as apple, willow, sycamore, beech, oak, pear
- Plants such as nasturtiums, buddleia, fuchsia
- Baby/toddler-safe toys such as teething rings, rattles and baby safe wooden blocks.

The list of food treats is even more extensive. Why not experiment with food colourings, natural flavourings, pasta and rice mixes, various pulses, steamed or boiled vegetables, sprouted seeds and pulses?

This is just the beginning - there are plenty more things to try. Be creative and have fun. Both your life and that of your pet will be enriched.

RESERVE STATUS

parrot colony aims for legal protection

By Dr. Juan F. Masello, Biol. Mauricio Failla, Pablo Giovine and Dr. Petra Quillfeldt

Photo: © Mauricio Failla

We still recall our first trip to El Cóndor. In October 1998, around 3am, we stopped for refueling in a petrol station along National Route 3, the internationally famous road crossing Patagonia from North to South. One member of the petrol station staff was visibly bored and looking for a bit of conversation. He asked for the purpose of our trip and we started talking about our research plans on the Burrowing Parrots. He was very surprised and said something like "Why do you want to study them? They are useless... They don't even talk!" This was a common attitude held by people we met during our first two field seasons in northeastern Patagonia. Nobody was concerned about the parrots. Nobody was aware of the problems that affected the colony at El Cóndor. Nobody imagined its immense value. Not even us.

Photo: © Mauricio Failla

In northwestern Patagonia, Argentina the largest parrot colony in the world is home to over 35,000 active Burrowing Parrot nests.

During our first two years not many people were aware of the Burrowing Parrot Project (BPP, or Proyecto Loro Barranquero in Spanish) - our research and conservation project on the Burrowing Parrots (*Cyanoliseus patagonus*) of northeastern Patagonia, Argentina. However, from the start we began to realize that this wasn't just another parrot colony - this was something special. The Burrowing Parrot colony of El Cóndor is the largest known parrot colony of the world, with an average of 35,000 active nests and spreading along 12.5 km (7.75 mi) of cliffs facing the South Atlantic Ocean.

We started to tell the bird's story to some local people and colleagues. Local television and newspaper coverage began to build followed by CNN news. In 2003 we started to work with the World Parrot Trust. An urgent priority was to find ways of reaching as many local people as possible. We started the educational campaign of the BPP and developed a series of lectures for children between the ages of 8 and 12 at schools of Viedma, El Cóndor and San Javier (a city and two villages close to the parrot colony) during 2004. Nearly 700 children were reached in that opportunity and more than 200 children came to the colony for guided visits. The experiences they had proved to be so strong and vivid that we decided to continue the lectures in the region. These lectures mobilized the local children to a poster campaign focusing on the tourists visiting the region.

Also during 2004 and early 2005 - with funding from the World Parrot Trust (the main contributor), Fundación Patagonia Natural (FPN), and the Wild Fauna Division of Río Negro - road signs advertising the parrot colony were set up at the major roads of El Cóndor. Two of the signs guide the public to the colony and the other two provide information regarding the breeding biology of the species and the main features of the colony. These road signs, which have attracted local, regional and even national attention, are now a kind of landmark to which people refer when they give directions to places in El Cóndor! Although other road signs have been victims of graffiti and vandalism, the parrot road signs have not. We like to interpret this as the message having reached deep into the local people.

Although we wanted to extend the lectures to other schools, a series of problems in the schools and the community have sidelined this effort. As an alternative we started to look for ways of reaching the children through informal channels. We discussed several possible alternatives and decided to produce a leaflet about the El Cóndor colony. If the children were not going to be allowed to learn about the parrot colony and the nature around it at school then

¿Do you know?

we would try to teach them from the bakery, the pharmacy, the supermarket, the post office, and the petrol station. Working with the same designers who had previously designed the road signs, we kept the style simple and familiar - mimicking the road signs so people would associate both media with one message. The leaflets contain basic aspects of the breeding biology of burrowing parrots, remarkable aspects of the colony at El Cóndor, its threats, and ways of cooperating with our conservation efforts. The leaflet proved to be a great success! We distributed over 10,000 in nearby cities and at

Photo: © Juan Masello

Photo: © Pablo Giovine

Photo: © Mauricio Failla

Photo: © Mauricio Failla

Spreading awareness and knowledge about the colony through leaflets, posters and site visits, a new generation is taught to protect this unique natural wonder.

important local and regional ecotourism destinations. We think that ecotourism can be a complementary effective way of adding even more value to the colony and getting support from some still sceptical local representatives for the creation of the Nature Reserve at El Cóndor.

The leaflets were designed so they could also be used as posters. An additional 1,000 leaflets were used as posters and displayed at the university campus in Viedma and in the show-windows of 300 shops, 8 hotels, and 10 Internet cafés of Viedma, El Cóndor and Carmen de Patagones. For a small city like Viedma this meant almost everywhere!

With the experience gained in our 2005-2006 fieldwork and the feedback received from colleagues and the public, we prepared an improved second version of the leaflet during 2006. Thanks to additional funds from the WPT-Spain it was also possible to produce a specially designed poster. A brilliant picture from Bill Conway, a key BPP supporter, inspired us. During our 2006-2007 field seasons, a total of 8,000 leaflets and 3,000 posters were distributed again in Viedma, El Cóndor, Carmen de Patagones, Puerto Madryn and Buenos Aires. But this time we extended the campaign into the upper valley of the Río Negro river, where the economic centre and the largest cities of the region are found: Roca, Cipolletti and Neuquén.

Even by the end of 2003 attitudes were changing. A taxi driver of Viedma, a city 30 km (18.5 mi) away from the parrot colony, asked us "Do you know? We have here the largest parrot colony in the world!" And by now many realise the value of this colony, the dangers that threaten it and the necessity of an effective legal protection.

¡We have the largest parrot colony in the world!

In December 2004, through some local representatives, we presented an Act Proposal that, once approved, will declare the colony at El Cóndor a Nature Reserve of the province of Río Negro, in Patagonia, Argentina. Support for our proposal has been growing, even from the part of the regional press. In November 2006, the most influential newspaper in the region published an article concerning the necessity of protection of the colony and the importance of the approval of our Act Proposal - a very promising sign.

What will the year 2007 bring? Will this be the year in which the colony is declared a Nature Reserve? We still need to work hard in order to gain agreement regarding our Act Proposal among most local representatives. It is not going to be easy: this is an electoral year in Argentina and politicians are focused on other subjects. But in any case, the educational campaign should continue. Now that most local news media are starting to understand our message we are trying to intensify our presence in newspapers, radios, TV, Internet, etc. This work is on its way.

Keep informed about the BPP through *PsittaScene*, parrots.org or our web page at:
http://orn.mpg.de/masello
Your feedback and support is very much needed!

news from the field...

Swan Song in Blue-throat Land

an excerpt from a parrot blog for parrots.org
By Toa Kyle

September 10, 2007
The 2007 Blue-throated Macaw (BTM) field season is well underway. I've just finished orientating our new project coordinator. After four field seasons here in Bolivia I am moving on to other projects. My replacement is an Argentine, Igor Berkunsky (of Ukrainian descent if you're wondering about his name). He did his PhD studying Blue-fronted Amazons (*Amazona aestiva*) in the Argentine Chaco for five years and is ideally suited to take the reins of the BTM project. He's worked with over 130 nests and the field conditions of the Chaco should making working in the Llanos de Moxos (where Blue-throats are found) a cake walk. Temperatures in the Chaco can get up to 45 ºC (125 ºF) at midday and water is so scarce, field workers have to use second hand bath water to wash dishes.

The past month has been a whirlwind tour of showing Igor as many Blue-throats (*Ara glaucogularis*) and nest trees as possible in the field while introducing him to important contacts and dealing with the bureaucratic side of things in town. August is usually one of the driest months of the year in terms of field conditions though 2007 has proved to be an exception. This year will go down as an El Niño year which in this part of Bolivia means rainfall was heavier than normal. The main river in our study area, the Mamoré, flooded extensively in March causing humanitarian crises in many populated areas and killing thousands of livestock, the main economic activity in the region. Even in August some areas were still flooded, necessitating the use of horses to get around, something we don't normally do until November.

It's hard to say how the flooding will effect this breeding season. On the one hand, increased rainfall should translate into more fruit production and thus more food resources available to Blue-throat breeding pairs. On the other, things appear to be more out of whack compared to previous years. For example, in August it's not unusual to find large Barn Owl chicks (*Tyto alba*) in nest cavities also occupied by macaws later on in the year. This past month we found two Blue-throat nests occupied by Barn Owls but the females had only recently begun incubating.

Also, a larger proportion of nest cavities had been taken over by Africanized bees compared to past nesting seasons. This complicates our work as one of the goals of our project is to provide as many nest cavities as possible to prospective Blue-throat nesting pairs. It's difficult to say if the increase in bees and delay in Barn Owl breeding are a result of the increased rainfall or due to other factors but they may result in fewer nesting attempts by Blue-throats this year (unless we "clean out" the bees like we did with one successful nest last year). On the bright side of all of these concerns for the effects of El Niño is that we already have an active nest. This nest began incubating the first week of August, the earliest active nest I've seen in five field seasons.

It was always interesting to inspect the numerous nest boxes we put up last season. Many of them were occupied by bees (the bane of my existence last month!) but a few were full of Black-bellied Whistling Duck chicks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*). One of them plummeted to the ground the first time I opened the side door to the box to see who was inside. Was it hurt in the fall? Not a chance. These ducklings are anatomically designed to weather such a fall as they are still incapable of flight by the time they exit the nest. Hence the origin of the term "rubber duckies."

The highlight from the field last month was in the 7 Islas areas. This was our most successful area from last season with three chicks fledging in late December. Of course I was interested to see how many of those chicks had survived thus far. Early one morning Carmen Silva (a volunteer

For this and other parrot blogs please visit:

from last year who is a now a paid field assistant this season) and I were walking down to the end of a forest island when we were stopped dead in our tracks by the sight of several Blue-throats in a tree ahead of us. It was comical how we both started counting out loud to ourselves, "Four. No! Six! No! Seven! There's seven here!!!". We'd already seen four other Blue-throats in other areas that morning so there were at least 11 birds around. A small miracle given how rare Blue-throats are. Examining facial feather line patterns, which are unique for each Blue-throated Macaw, I recognized two birds as the pair which had fledged two chicks last season. Sure enough there were two chicks perched above them. I was so happy. They'd both made it this far.

It's a bit hard to put into words how I felt when I saw those chicks. In essence they represent what our project is all about, hope for the future for this species in the wild. At the same time because I've spent four field seasons working with Blue-throats, many memories, good and bad, drifted over me as I watched them that morning play and clown around with one another.

Since I'm leaving the project it is perhaps expected that I reflect on whether or not I've made a difference with my time here in Bolivia. Having a morning like that one in 7 Islas is reassuring on many levels. In my opinion we are a long way from having Blue-throats fully recovered but during my time with this project I feel we've identified many aspects of their breeding ecology we can manage more successfully to help get more chicks into the wild each season. I've communicated as much of this knowledge as possible to Igor during our month together and now where our project succeeds or fails lies with him. From what I've seen from our time together, the future of Blue-throats is in good hands.

That's Igor checking out a potential BTM nest.

So what's next for me? I'll be heading over to Peru to look for Blue-headed Macaws (*Primolius couloni*). I did my thesis work in the Peruvian rainforest in 1999 and 2000 and truth be told, I have never seen jungle as rich in wildlife as there since. It's going to be a welcome home coming of sorts.

Blue-headed Macaws are the least studied macaw, and incidentally the only species of macaw I've yet to see in the wild. There's a pressing need to get a better sense of where the species is distributed as well as basic elements of their natural history; what they feed on, their nesting habits, etc. I read recently that due to their rarity, they fetch almost US$3,500 each on the black market in Peru, so I'm also curious to learn about trapping pressures, if at all possible. I don't expect to answer all of these questions with the relatively short time I'll have to study them but given how little is known about these birds, any information I can collect for them will help. The photo, to the right, of Blue-headed Macaws was taken at a clay lick in Peru by a colleague of mine, Luis Claudio Marigo. God willing I could take pictures like his!

Off to a great start

from Igor in Bolivia

October 17, 2007

Just a month into the Blue-throated Macaw nesting season Igor Berkunsky wrote with good news: the Blue-throats are off to an early and promising start this season with chicks in 4 of 6 active nests (the other 2 with eggs) and all hatched chicks surviving. We are cautiously optimistic as we've seen conditions change dramatically in short order but we hope to have even more good news to report in the next the next few months.

www.parrots.org > forums, bloggers & experts

THANK YOU wpt trustees

Dr Andrew Greenwood - WPT Trustee/Board 1989 to 2007

Dr Charles Munn III - WPT Trustee/Board 1994 To 2007

Andrew Greenwood was a highly skilled young vet in the 1980's when it was common practice to surgically sex parrots, and he would visit Paradise Park to carry out these procedures. It was fascinating to assist, and vital to know whether the birds were male or female - especially after having kept "pairs" together for many years only to discover that they were in fact two females.

Mike Reynolds had started to talk about how he thought that there really should be a specialist organisation to help the parrots - one which would protect rare species in the wild, and promote excellence in captive care. It was on one of Andrew's visits that he became drawn into this subject. Andrew's scientific background and extensive knowledge of parrot biology and medicine was an ideal match for Mike's enthusiasm and avicultural background. So, history was made, and Andrew became one of the founding Trustees of the World Parrot Trust when it was established in 1989.

It was soon after this that Mike met Carl Jones, and they talked about the dire situation of the Echo Parakeet in Mauritius. This became the first conservation project which the Trust was able to assist. Andrew visited the island, giving vital early advice on the remaining population of just 8-12 individual birds. This founding population was destined to become hundreds within a decade. The intensive conservation project resulted in a remarkable reversal of fortune whereby the species was downgraded from Critically Endangered to Endangered - a story covered in this issue of *PsittaScene*!

Among others, Andrew visited New Zealand to see the Kakapo and the Caribbean for the St Vincent Parrot, bringing his wisdom and that of his specialist "International Zoo Veterinary Group" (www.wildlifevetsinternational.org) in Yorkshire, UK, to bear on the problems facing each species. We are most grateful that Andrew continued to give his time to the World Parrot Trust as a Trustee for an amazing seventeen years - until his reputation as a leading zoo vet built him a punishing globe-trotting schedule, which allowed little time to carry on with this extra responsibility. We are still privileged to be able to call on him for advice when his encyclopaedic parrot knowledge is needed.

We would like to thank Andrew for all his efforts throughout the world for the parrots.

Charlie Munn introduced himself on the phone to Mike Reynolds one day in 1989 and the two immediately hit it off. Their mutual affection for the parrot family and in particular the blue macaws created an instant rapport.

That first call was a long one. Charlie had read an early issue of *PsittaScene* and wanted to know more about the World Parrot Trust. Mike had heard about the work of the "macaw man" and was eager to hear about the pioneering field work he was undertaking in Brazil. Charlie's insights into the biology, status and distribution of many of South America's most distinctive birds like Hyacinth and Lear's Macaws were based on his solid scientific research. His instinct that their conservation would ultimately rely on making personal contacts in locally important areas was already evident. It wasn't long before Mike asked Charlie if he would share his expertise with the World Parrot Trust by becoming a Trustee.

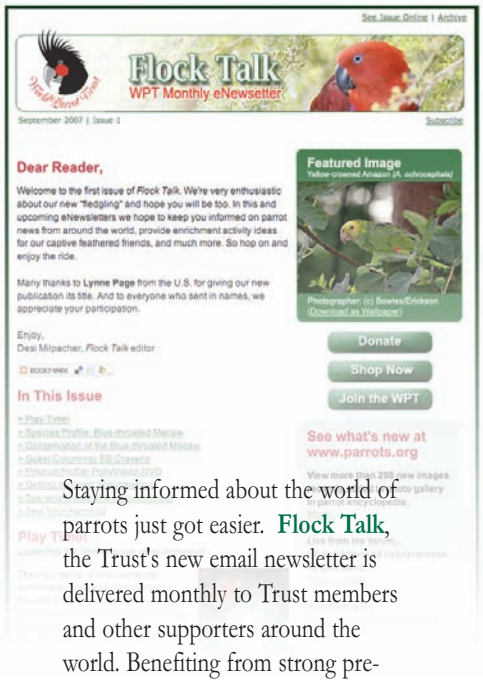
Charlie has been at the forefront of macaw research and conservation projects, including developing artificial nests which allow nesting activity to be monitored and supporting or raising chicks which would not otherwise have survived.

In Peru, Charlie recognised the importance of clay licks, and discovered many not previously known to science. He even discovered a new species of parrot at one clay lick in Manu. Hunters had targeted birds which gathered at the clay licks, but Charlie's work transformed the sites into brilliant opportunities for ecotourists and photographers - creating jobs and income in impoverished areas. He saw that a secure future for entire eco-systems including parrots, but also everything from frogs to big cats, lay with giving local communities the opportunity to benefit from protecting forests from unsustainable hunting or logging. His non-profit "conservation through eco-tourism" model broke new ground. Now wildlife-enthusiasts can visit remote areas in Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica and elsewhere for a unique and ethical experience. For more information see www.tropicalnature.org.

In Brazil, he started an organisation (Biobrasil) and began focusing their conservation efforts on the Lear's Macaw. Soon after WPT began supporting this work, Biobrasil discovered the world's largest Lear's nesting area and facilitated its protection, which has proven essential for the species recovery. Charlie also spearheaded a fascinating expedition into the former territory of the Glaucous Macaw, sadly only confirming that this beautiful bird was indeed extinct.

The Trust has benefited greatly from Charlie's perspective on parrot conservation issues, and from his persuasive public speaking abilities. We have appreciated his uncompromising dedication and thank him for his support over so many years.

Psitta News



Staying informed about the world of parrots just got easier. **Flock Talk**, the Trust's new email newsletter is delivered monthly to Trust members and other supporters around the world. Benefiting from strong pre-launch interest, the inaugural issue contained engaging articles about parrot care, enrichment, conservation efforts and breaking news. Product reviews and an interview with a leading avian researcher also provided readers a quick and informative read.

Based on the great response to this first issue all Trust members will now receive a copy as a member benefit.

To ensure you receive your issue, please email uk@worldparrottrust.org or visit www.parrots.org and click this link:

Parrotnews

Alex the African Grey

Science's best known parrot died on September 6th, aged 31.

Dr Irene Pepperberg bought a one-year-old African Grey parrot at random from a pet shop in 1977. Thus began one of the best-known double acts in the field of animal-behaviour science.

Dr Pepperberg and her collaborators at the University of Arizona began teaching Alex how to describe things, how to make his desires known and even how to ask questions. By the end, said Dr Pepperberg, Alex had the intelligence of a five-year-old child and had not reached his full potential. He had a vocabulary of 150 words. He knew the names of 50 objects and could, in addition, describe their colours, shapes and the materials they were made from. He could answer questions about objects' properties, even when he had not seen that particular combination of properties before. He could ask for things--and would reject a proffered item and ask again if it was not what he wanted. He understood, and could discuss, the concepts of "bigger", "smaller", "same" and "different". And he could count up to six, including the number zero (and was grappling with the concept of "seven" when he died). He even knew when and how to apologise if he annoyed Dr Pepperberg or her collaborators.

There are still a few researchers who think Alex's skills were the result of rote learning rather than abstract thought. Alex, though, convinced most in the field that birds as well as mammals can evolve complex and sophisticated cognition, and communicate the results to others. A shame, then, that he is now, in the words of Monty Python, an ex-parrot.

Source: Sept 20, 07 http://www.economist.com/obituary

Bird viruses hit Australia

Scientists claim at least three deadly contagious bird diseases have by-passed Australia's quarantine controls and will spread to native parrots and cockatoos.

One of the newly arrived contagious bird diseases is Pacheco's virus, which kills birds within 48 hours and is thought to have caused the deaths last year of 46 Orange-bellied Parrot chicks at a captive breeding aviary in Hobart.

The other two recent arrivals are Proventricular Dilatation Disease known as Macaw Wasting Disease and an avian Papilloma Virus.

Source: http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/

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Parrots in the Wild