

# Psitta scene



News about parrot conservation,  
aviculture and welfare from  
*The World Parrot Trust*

No. 1  
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## Introducing The World Parrot Trust

The extraordinary thing about The World Parrot Trust is that it has only recently been created. When you consider that specialised trusts have existed for many years to further the well-being of wildfowl, hawks, pheasants, cranes and others, it is strange that a parrot charity with global conservation objectives has not previously emerged.

It is even stranger when you consider that at least 50% of all aviculture is devoted to parrots, and that this order of birds has for centuries fascinated man with its outstanding beauty, variety, intelligence and character.

What has prevented the earlier development of such a charity? I believe it may be the simple fact that parrots are considerably more valuable than the vast majority of other avicultural subjects. This financial element, sometimes very substantial, can cause friction between aviculturists, and is a source of dismay to conservation bodies.

Another reason for the late arrival of this trust may well be the sheer enormity of the task. The World Parrot Trust intends to work for the survival of all parrot species, and the welfare of every individual parrot. Like every charity, its aim is to raise funds for its cause, and expend them in the most effective way to achieve its objectives. The trustees intend that The World Parrot Trust shall be a 'broad church': a meeting point for everyone interested in the survival of parrots in the wild, and their welfare in captivity. All people of good will are welcome:

aviculturists, conservationists, zoo people, pet parrot owners, school children and the general public.

Let me make it clear that the trust springs from an avicultural and zoological background. It recognises aviculture as an absorbing and legitimate hobby, the pursuit of which brings joy and fulfilment to sincere people worldwide. Where the keeping of parrots as pets is concerned it will seek to educate pet owners to provide their birds with the best possible conditions. Over the next few years it will hope to see the pet trade supplied almost exclusively with aviary-bred birds, and a consequent severe reduction in the capture and mass shipment of parrots from the wild. The legitimate provision of small numbers of birds for captive breeding programmes will be supported. The trust welcomes the IUCN Policy Statement in support of captive breeding, but will constantly remind aviculturists that the statement concludes by saying: "Captive breeding programmes ... need to be co-ordinated internationally according to sound

biological principles, with a view to the maintaining or re-establishment of viable populations in the wild".

What can the conservation community expect from the World Parrot Trust? At first, perhaps simply a contact point where zoos and aviculturists can discuss the scope for their participation in recovery plans for the most rare species. Zoos internationally have accepted the importance of the joint management of captive animals for the benefit of the species concerned, but the world of aviculture in general has some way to go before it accepts that its rare and endangered species are virtually being held 'in trust', and may eventually lose their monetary value. It is our hope, however, that enlightened aviculturists will feel well compensated for their financial loss by the conservation gain they will create through their generosity of spirit. We hope for a new wave of concern for the future of these wonderful birds which will rally aviculturists worldwide behind essential conservation measures.

In the fullness of time, and in conjunction with established international conservation bodies, the World Parrot Trust will expect to be closely involved in action plans to preserve endangered species. Even now, only weeks after its acceptance by the Charity Commission, the trust has been able to provide significant financial help to the Mauritius Wildlife Appeal Fund to help the efforts to save

the Echo parakeet, now reduced to only twelve or fifteen specimens. You might think it a little early for the trust to be dispensing its modest resources, but we aim to show that we are completely serious about helping the survival of parrot species.

The trust intends to build up a substantial membership internationally, and will provide members with a membership certificate, car sticker, regular newsletters, and the satisfaction of knowing that they are contributing to the survival and well-being of the parrots.

A Board of Management is in process of being formed, and invitations are being extended to appropriate avicultural, conservation and zoological bodies to join the trustees as members of this board. It is anticipated that the National Federation of Zoos will provide a member of the trust's Board of Management, and the hope is that many zoos will be interested in helping the trust achieve its objectives. At a time when the justification for zoos is being questioned in some quarters, this joint conservation initiative will demonstrate that zoos are aware of their responsibilities and the special contribution they alone can make.

Michael Reynolds  
Hon. Director

October 1989



Johnny Morris, well known for his 'Animal Magic' TV Programme, helps to raise awareness of the plight of the parrots.

**“psittacine**  
(sit'ā sīn) Belonging  
or allied to the  
parrots; parrot-like”



# DEVASTATION of the RAIN FOREST

Flying over the rain forests of Brazil and Paraguay in South America, little can be seen of the devastation taking place there. Not until one travels by road is the extent of the ravages of the forest made visible. Recently I journeyed all day along a road cut into what was once a living rain forest, on both sides of the road as far as one could see the forest had been felled and burned.

If the destruction was carried out in the name of progress and the native forest people benefited from its loss, then those of us who care about the preservation of the rain forest would be more tolerant of its loss to the world. The fact is that when the white man comes burning all before him, the forest people, and all the creatures unique to that particular rain forest, lose their habitat. The forest man loses his home, his way of life and his identity, he swells the numbers living in the shanty town-ships one comes across everywhere.

The creatures of the forest are sacrificed, parrots in particular suffer, they can be seen in the market places, crate upon crate of injured birds to be sold for the pot.

In the rain forests there are vast quantities of plant life yet to undergo valuation for medicine. Some plants have already given us the means to treat conditions that were once untreatable. The rain forest surely belongs to all of mankind, the greed of a few should not destroy forever what is considered the lung of the world. Once destroyed it cannot be reinstated and is lost to the world forever.

The forest man has known for generations that he can grow his maize in a small clearing only once, the impoverished soil must be given back to the rain forest after each small harvest. These little gardens are soon reclaimed by the forest with no harm done.

The white man has yet to learn this, his education is at great cost to the forest, its inhabitants and to the rivers of South America. Grazing land replacing the forest is soon turned into barren wasteland, the top soil is washed away, silting up rivers. The Panama canal, like the rivers, has become unnavigable because of silt washed down from what was once living rain forest.

Because of the complexity of rain forests, their survival holds different meanings for many of us. One of the commercial aspects is that while farmers, especially those in the U.S.A., are being turned from their land, unable to meet mortgages, the world is being flooded with cheap beef from areas that were once living rain forests.

Those of us who are concerned over the way the forests are being stripped of their flora and fauna are uneasy over the decline of many of the South American parrots. Recently I travelled with a friend for several days into the rain forest of Paraguay to study a group of vinacea amazon parrots, which fed along the mud flats of a silted up river. The Paraguay indians we lived with there survive on what they collect in the forest. During the time we lived with them they found no meat, the food which they shared with us was boiled roots, maize

meal and for us the occasional egg. River water was not boiled, one drank it with all its mud and debris.

Animals usually killed for food such as land turtles, monkeys and wild pig have all been driven away. The acrid smell of burning was with us everywhere we went. Our guide pointed to left and right as we made our way through the forest throughout the day, indicating what was not possible to see, that this way and that the forest was felled and burned.

To see large macaws, amazon parrots and other birds flying overhead is indeed thrilling, later watching the vinacea amazon parrot feed we were saddened to learn that in 1978 the flock was 8,000 strong, in 1985 it was down to 5,000. Trapping has since further reduced the flock to just a few hundred birds. Soon after we left the area, many more were taken and sent to Europe.

Leaving behind the peaceable forest people and returning to civilization we wondered what we could do to save what remains of the world's rain forests. The more I scrubbed at the black grime that coated my body the clearer it became, the rain forests should not be looked upon as the world's larder, it should not provide us at its cost with cheap beef, nor should we strip it of its rare plants and animal life. If we want to devote our time to the care of tropical birds, etc., we must demand they are not taken from the rain forests, but are captive-bred.

Laws made prohibiting the taking of threatened parrots from the forest are just not working, the trapper can and does take birds of one country and send them into another country for easier export. Europe is awash with imported, supposedly protected parrots.

Only a small number of those devoted to the care and preservation of the parrot will see at first-hand the destruction of its habitats, it is a sight that leaves a lasting impression. If enough parrot-enthusiasts worked together, we could make our collective voice heard.

The countries losing their rain forests are too poor to maintain them without help, they need our help, yours and mine, we can all of us give our mite and it will count, but the real wealth should come from industry. Those damaging the world environment with oil pollutants, acid rain, etc., should put back a percentage of their profits into the survival of the rain forests.

Enough funds world-wide could be raised to protect the rain forests and all their inhabitants.

A.A.J. Stoodley



*John Stoodley and friend in Paraguay.*

# WHY PARROTS NEED OUR TRUST

"WHAT can I do to aid the conservation of parrots?" is a question I have often been asked by concerned aviculturists. My reply always seemed inadequate. From the avicultural viewpoint there can be no conservation without co-ordination — and no co-ordinating body existed. Now we have one: The World Parrot Trust.

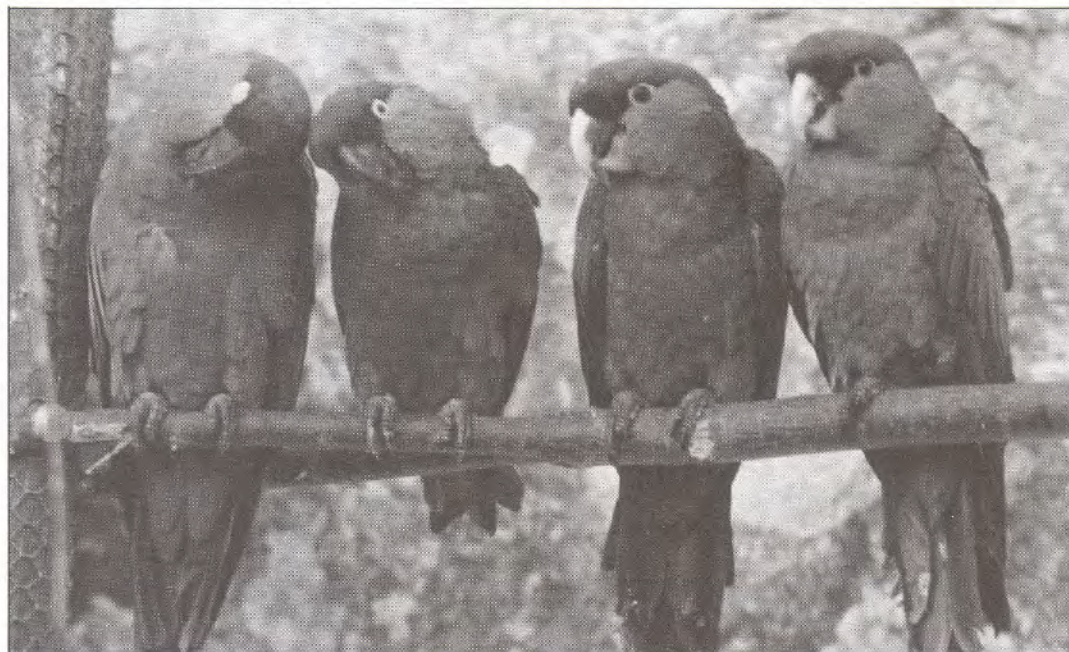
Until very recently, there has been little exchange of information between ornithologists — those fortunate enough to observe parrots in the field over a long term — and aviculturists. Papers on field work, including those on status (rare, endangered, vulnerable, etc.) tend to be published in scientific journals only. As a result, many aviculturists have no idea which parrot species are rare or declining in the wild and therefore deserving of the concerted attention of aviculturists. Via this newsletter, members of The World Parrot Trust will be kept informed, not only of the status of rare species, but of the results of other field studies. In this we will have the valuable assistance of the International Council of Bird Preservation and their Parrot Conservation Officer, Tony Juniper.

In addition, this magazine will run a series of articles, one per issue, featuring an endangered species (those on Appendix 1 of CITES), covering its natural history and, of course, where appropriate, avicultural aspects also. In each issue we plan to cover a wide variety of topics and to include news and opinions from members all over the world.

One of the aims of the trust is to promote a higher standard of care for pet parrots. We will also aim to educate the public on the most suitable species to obtain as pets and, most importantly, why they should be seeking birds which have been bred in captivity — not taken from the wild. The next issue of the newsletter *Psitta-Scene* will contain an article on this subject. Free reprints of the article will be made available to members on request, so that they can pass them on

to any friends considering the purchase of a pet parrot.

There is no point in "preaching only to the converted": the message of the trust must be spread more widely. The newsletter could be very effective in this respect and we urge members to show it to as many people as possible. A modest start is a necessity — but we aim to make the newsletter a widely-read and influential publication on the subject of parrots. Likewise, the trust must become the body to which parrot



*Thickbilled Parrots; bred at Paradise Park, U.K. Proud parents on left, young (with light-coloured bills) on right.*

lovers from all over the world turn for help and information.

One of its main purposes will be to raise funds to support the conservation of endangered parrots. Here we will expect to work in conjunction with major conservation bodies to ensure that funds raised are used in the most effective manner. Conservation bodies such as ICBP and IUCN are aware of far more worthwhile bird conservation projects than they are able to fund. Regrettably,

with each passing year, more bird species are added to the endangered list which currently numbers more than 1,000. Already there are so many that only a few can be assisted with formal conservation projects. With the funds raised by The World Parrot Trust, more psittacine conservation projects will be launched and some existing ones will receive additional support. The Trust will take advice from other organisations but it will be up to its members and trustees to decide which projects will be supported.

We hope that members will do more than pay their annual subscription — that they will play an active role in fund-raising, in making their views known in the newsletter, in making the Trust aware of field studies and other research that can benefit parrots and that members who are aviculturists, zoo curators or keepers, will, through the trust, co-ordinate their parrot-breeding programmes for the rarer species.

In this regard the trust can play a unique role which no other organisation has yet effectively carried out, and one for which there is a desperate need — that of putting breeders of parrot species which are rare in captivity in touch with other breeders of the same species so that an exchange of stock — and of information — can occur. The

Parrot Trust. More importantly, why do parrots need a trust devoted to their interests? The principal reason is the habitat destruction which is most serious in the tropics and in areas of rainforest. Many species of parrots are exclusively forest-dwellers and cannot adapt to other types of habitat. Others occur in a variety of environments and can adapt fairly well to partially cleared habitat — in the short term. In the long term their numbers will decline dramatically because of shortage of nesting sites.

Lack of suitable nesting sites will perhaps emerge as the most important reason for the decline of many parrot species. When more experience has been gained, it may be possible to provide additional nest sites or improve and repair existing ones, such as has been done with the highly endangered Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*). Some such projects, to improve the breeding success of threatened or endangered parrots, would be relatively inexpensive to set up.

Each rare or endangered species has a different combination of problems to cope with. Often these cannot be identified until field studies have occurred, thus funding such studies is very important. Lack of funding is the principal reason why, to date, field work has not been carried

out on mainly highly endangered species. In most cases, such studies undertaken a decade previously could have led to the decline of the species being halted or reversed — provided that the finance was available for biologists to work with it.

These are just some of the reasons why aviculturists need The World

*continued overleaf*

It is almost inevitable that further field work will reveal that some species which, today, are common and well-known in aviculture, are fast declining and very vulnerable, or even endangered, in the wild. Aviculturists will then be in a strong position to ensure the survival of such species, at least in captivity. However, if that species is not already well represented in aviculture, and is scattered in small numbers throughout a number of collections, the co-operation of everyone caring for it will be essential. This will mean, in some cases, passing on birds — without any monetary exchange — to those who are judged to be the most competent to breed them. In such cases the role of the trust will be extremely important. One factor — and one factor only — will have priority: the welfare of the species concerned.

In some cases parrot populations have declined due to excessive trade,

often in conjunction with deforestation. Unfortunately, in recent years we have had a number of examples from Indonesia, a highly regrettable one being the Moluccan Cocktao (*Cacatua moluccensis*). Its export into Europe is now banned by the EEC due to its declining numbers in the wild. Unfortunately, no such controls exist in the USA. During the period 1985 to 1987, 19,712 Moluccan Cocktaos entered the USA. During the same period, 1,536 were imported into the UK — still too many. There is a limit to the number of people who can properly house these large and sensitive cocktaos. In the USA this limit was exceeded years ago, with the sad result that the Moluccan is almost the cheapest cocktao and many adult birds are doomed to a life of stress in a small cage by people who do not understand them.

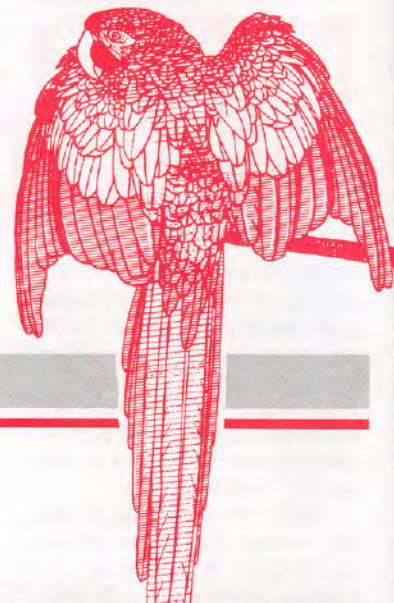
The World Parrot Trust is critical of the mass export of wild-caught

parrots and will oppose this trade. There can be no justification — in my personal opinion — for the export of a species which has declined drastically in the wild when thousands have already been exported. And they most certainly should not be captured solely to be kept as pets.

The World Parrot Trust recognises the immense joy that millions of people obtain from keeping a parrot and it will do all it can to assist pet keepers, provided that their pets are common species or have been reared in captivity. Many pet owners feel ultimately that their pets should be given the opportunity to breed — and thus another dimension of parrot-keeping opens up for them.

Each one of us can by some means aid the future of that extraordinarily wonderful family of birds, the parrots... We cannot do it overnight but by giving our time, knowledge, sometimes money — and always enthusiasm — we can find a way.

Rosemary Low



# World Parrots In Crisis

It is now clear that the threats to the world's parrots have taken on the proportions of a global ecological crisis. A review by ICBP shows that around a third of these beautiful birds are thought to be of concern. In the last year ICBP has been stimulated by the worsening situation for the parrots to take major steps towards the expansion of its parrot conservation programme. The organisation has a long history of work with endangered psittacines, notably in the Caribbean, where ICBP has — for example — been involved with educational projects and more recently with land purchase on the island of Dominica.

However, in October of 1988 the ICBP Parrot Specialist Group met at Curitiba in Brazil and produced a draft of a comprehensive Action Plan for neotropical parrot conservation. A full-time Parrot Conservation Officer has been appointed with a remit to develop and implement this plan and it is



St. Vincent Amazon Parrot.

hoped that work may soon begin on the development of a similar plan for other regions — especially south-east Asia.

It is perhaps surprising that one of the best known groups of birds is also amongst the most threatened. A recent checklist of threatened parrots compiled by ICBP includes over seventy species which are thought to be in immediate danger; if species classified as near threatened are included, the total number in need of consideration for conservation efforts exceeds one hundred. Nearly a third of all parrots! However, conservation planning by ICBP and other organisations recognising the threat is gathering momentum. A more detailed version of the neotropical Action Plan is now nearing completion and a document will be produced which contains a brief review of the conservation status of each species, identifies the main threats and determines the most appropriate actions to be taken for the conservation of each parrot. A recurrent theme with regard to the last point is the collection and updating of reliable information. Paradoxically, one of the best-known group of birds in captivity remains one of the least-known in the wild. Nearly all species which have been held in captivity have been bred, but our knowledge of the requirements of most parrots in the wild, their productivity and even their distribution is very poor.

For many rare and threatened parrots, the paucity of good field data is why it has not been possible to assign the accurate Red Data Book categories of Extinct, Endangered, Vulnerable, Rare or Indeterminate; instead the less descriptive terms of "Threatened" and "Near Threatened" are used for most species which are either declining, rare or facing extinction. Also, the situation for the world's parrots seems to have been steadily deteriorating for the past decade and further explains why only thirty are included in the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book of 1979. Since then it has become clear that the list is incomplete and many more warrant inclusion in the Red Data Book.

Those parrots thought to be in sufficient danger to be contained in the ICBP Action Plan tend to share similar threats, the prime pressures being the international trade in live parrots and the loss of suitable habitat. For some species, aboriginal hunting pressures and the keeping of birds for pets by locals pose additional stress. As might be expected, those species most in danger are the larger, slower breeding birds, those with restricted ranges — such as the large number of single island endemic species — and some of those popular in trade. Obviously the nature of the main threats will vary between species, and with the data available at present it is not always

possible to determine which pressure is most important. Even so, the information that is currently available has enabled ICBP to identify regions where the threatened parrots are clustered and this will form a useful basis for the development of geographically-based conservation programmes.

The main clusters are in the Caribbean, south-eastern Brazil, the northern Andes and in south-east Asia and the Pacific. The situation for rare parrots seems to be most acute at present in the Caribbean where twelve of the fourteen species which are unique to that region are in serious danger. Many are reduced to tiny relict populations surviving in tiny fragments of suboptimal forests. These birds are extremely vulnerable to any kind of catastrophe such as a storm or outbreak of disease, indeed, it is possible that the recent passage of hurricane Hugo could prove to be a major contributory factor in bringing about the extinction of the Puerto Rican Parrot, a species already reduced to perilously low numbers (as few as twenty seven in 1987). A situation similar to the present state in the Caribbean seems to be developing in Indonesia where a series of island endemic species are rapidly declining, and in some instances approaching extinction, as forests are logged or burned and the birds suffer the unrelenting attention of trappers.

The parrot crisis has been brought about through a complex interaction of economic, political and cultural forces which must be addressed in both the native lands of the parrots and in the more developed countries which often stimulate the pressures that have brought about the drastic declines observed recently. Success in overcoming these problems will involve a multi-faceted approach employing expertise from a range of disciplines. ICBP plans to implement a series of regionally based integrated conservation programmes but will start with projects closer to home. One of these will be concerned with the import of ICBP Action Plan species into the EEC member states, another will raise awareness of the global threats to parrots and highlight the role of the consumer in the purchase of captive-bred birds for pets.

Tony Juniper

# Hope For THE LAST ECHOS

## THE CONSERVATION OF THE ECHO PARAKEET FROM MAURITIUS



Appeals board used successfully at Paradise Park, U.K. in 1989. The World Parrot Trust would like to place more of these in zoos for 1990.

One of the world's rarest and most endangered birds is the Echo Parakeet, *Psittacula eques*, from Mauritius, which the World Parrot Trust is involved in trying to save. Mauritius is, however, best known for the Dodo that became extinct sometime in the 1660s. There are also many other species which have disappeared, and it is our job to try and stop the Echo Parakeet joining them. We do not know exactly how many birds have already gone, but it is at least seventeen species. The early accounts suggest an island vibrant with bird life, and flocks of parrots, grey, green and multi-

coloured species, were described. One of the largest parrots ever to exist, the flightless broad-billed Parrot *Lophopsittacus mauritianus*, was found on Mauritius. However it regrettably disappeared very early on in the history of the island and we know precious little about this extraordinary bird.

Several of the islands of the Indian Ocean had their own endemic forms of *Psittacula* parakeets. There was a parakeet on the Seychelles (*P. wardi*), Rodrigues (*P. exsul*), Reunion (*P. eques*) and Mauritius (*P. eques echo*). All of these are now extinct

except the beautiful Echo Parakeet of Mauritius which tenuously hangs on to survival in the remnant upland forest of the island. As the last surviving species of this group it is of very special importance.

The Echo Parakeet is similar to the Ring-necked Parakeet but is a bigger, heavier bird (about 160g) and is a darker, brighter green. It has a shorter, broader tail and has broader, more rounded wings. It also flies with slower wing beats. The adult male has a beautiful black and pink blaze on either side of the neck forming an incomplete collar. The male has a red beak and the female a black beak. Museum taxonomists used to consider the Echo Parakeet a race of the Ring-necked Parakeet *P. krameri*, but no one now holds that view since they are so very different in ecology, behaviour, vocalisations and morphology. Echo Parakeets and Ring-necked Parakeets are found in the same forest but they rarely interact and they have never hybridised.

Many conservationists have felt that the Echo Parakeet is beyond saving and some even claim it's not worth the effort. However, when one sees the very last birds in the Black River Gorges rapidly flying and circling over the forest canopy, the question that comes to mind is not should we save the Echo Parakeet, but how do we save this unique bird?

Only 12-15 Echo Parakeets remain and only three females are known. The population has been reduced by habitat destruction and the increasing impoverishment of the remaining forests by habitat degradation. Introduced weedy plants

take over from the native trees and shrubs and simplify the whole forest. In the 1970s a World Bank-financed project cut down perhaps one half of the parakeets' habitat and unwittingly chopped down most of the remaining trees of the "Tatamaka" *Calophyllum parviflorum*, a very important food species for the parakeets during winter months. The poor parakeets had the carpet pulled out from under them. The population crashed from about 50 birds in the early 1970s to just a handful in the early 1980s, all confined to a block of forest of about 50 sq. km. During the late 1970s and early 1980s there was little breeding activity and few, if any, young were produced. During the last five years or so the situation has improved a little and it appears that the remaining birds are adapting to other foods including the introduced guava and there have been a few breeding attempts. All is not lost and there is still a good chance that we can bring the parakeet back from the brink.

During the last decade many conservationists have wracked their brains to try and come up with a solution to save the Echo Parakeet. We have argued incessantly about the best way to proceed and all now feel confident that careful management of the wild population and captive breeding offers the best hope.

We intend to look after the few remaining birds and manage them very carefully. Our first priority is to get the birds to take additional food which we hang in trees where the parakeets feed. We have experimented widely at this over the years and have managed to get the parakeets to sample chillies,

grapes and apples, but we have yet to be able to get them to regularly return for food. Our eventual aim is to feed the parakeets daily on a bird table. Once we are able to achieve this the parakeets would not have to spend a large percentage of their time foraging as they do now, and would have enough surplus reserves to breed.

Not all the pairs breed and some apparently fail to find adequate nest-holes. Careful studies over the last 16 years have shown that of those that do attempt to nest, only about 40% of pairs will eventually fledge young. The reasons for this are mainly competition for the nest-holes. Breeding birds may be usurped from their homes by Ring-necked Parakeets or Common Mynahs and we also suspect that a variety of predators take the eggs and young. To add to their problems non-breeding males may interfere with breeding pairs and totally disrupt them.

To increase the chances of breeding we poison rats around nest sites. We provide hollowed out logs and nest-boxes for the parakeets to use and keep them free of competitors.

In an effort to increase the productivity of the wild birds we intend to remove first clutches of eggs and rear them in captivity under Ring-necked Parakeets. Hopefully the wild birds will then lay a replacement clutch. To build up our captive stock we may also catch some of the surplus non-breeding male parakeets. There is every hope that captive breeding will work. We have kept Echo Parakeets in captivity in the past and although they did not live long enough to breed there is every indication that they can be kept and bred in captivity.

What is the long term hope for the parakeets? Provided we can get these birds out of their present population bottleneck there are many possibilities for managing the wild population indefinitely, perhaps by using some of the ideas suggested above. If we succeed in building up a large enough captive stock they could be released on other islands in the Indian Ocean where there is suitable habitat but no parrots, such as on Reunion or Christmas Island. The case of the Echo Parakeet was once considered hopeless but the more we look at the situation the more optimistic we become that something can be done to save this species.

An important contribution from the World Parrot Trust will be put towards the management of the wild birds. This is a joint project with the government of Mauritius, the Mauritius Wildlife Appeal Fund and the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust.

Carl G. Jones



## INTERNATIONAL ZOO VETERINARY GROUP

The 10th Annual Conference of the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) convened in Seattle between 10th-16th September. AAV is a huge organisation with over 2,500 members and there were some 500 delegates at the meeting. Reflecting the

membership of the organisation, the vast majority of the delegates were North American veterinarians who work with birds in specialist or general practice. Various European countries were also represented, with a particularly strong contingent from

German universities, reflecting the high level of interest in avian disease in that country. Your correspondent was, as usual, the only British veterinarian in evidence.

AAV is an influential and highly organised body and these strengths were reflected in the quality of the meeting. Besides twenty-eight hours of main sessions covering a huge range of topics in avian medicine, there were basic medicine programmes, a whole day for avian veterinary technicians, a conservation session, a veterinary seminar for aviculturists, practical vet-labs to learn new techniques on cadavers, a visit to the Point Defiance Zoo with a boat ride through Puget Sound and, finally, a dinner dance themed to the Wizard of Oz!! A number of prominent aviculturists were present and contributed to the meeting, including Richard Schubot,

Gloria Allen and Jesus Estudillo Lopez from Mexico. Richard Schubot's Avicultural Breeding and Research Centre provided generous sponsorship to the meeting.

It is very difficult to pick out particular papers from such a wide range as the programme included, but some generated particular interest. Robert Clipsham from California identified some very clever and effective techniques for beak repair and surgery and indicated how beak problems are much more akin to those of the equine hoof than the human tooth. Jim Stewart from U.C. Davis outlined advances in the husbandry and medicine of ostriches, prompted by the boom in ostrich farming in the U.S.A., which has raised the price of a breeding pair of ostrich to \$100,000 plus! Virus diseases of psittacines were a constant topic, including the use of

human anti-viral drugs in Pacheco's disease, and further studies on the newly-isolated unique type of virus which is the cause of Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease. A whole session was devoted to the improved diagnosis and treatment of psittacosis, but it remains clear that there is still no perfect test and still no guaranteed treatment, although new antibiotics are very promising. The evening conservation session concentrated mainly on the problems caused to wildlife by the Exxon Valdez oil spill, in which dozens of U.S. veterinarians were involved in cleaning thousands of birds and sea mammals.

The problems of trade in wild psittacines were not avoided and Jorgen Thomsen of WWF Traffic U.S.A. gave an alarming account of the staggering numbers of birds imported annually into the U.S. It was gratifying to see the support which he was prepared to give to captive breeding for the pet trade and the co-operation which conservationists have had from AAV in studying these problems. He was followed by Susan Clubb of Pet Farm Inc., who outlined a proposal for extensive improvements of the U.S.D.A. avian quarantine system. To a British veterinarian it certainly seemed to need some improvement. No vet who visits U.S.

quarantine is allowed to see birds for three days afterwards, yet there are no biological filters on the air outlets from the quarantine rooms.

Perhaps the most interesting paper, however, was given by a psychologist, Irene Pepperberg, who has trained an African Grey Parrot over a period of 12 years not only to talk, but to ask questions, make demands, identify objects, shapes and concepts and thereby provide some fascinating insight into the "thought-processes" of a parrot.

The Seattle area is remarkable for wildlife and zoological collections, and the Seattle aquarium with its sea otter and seabird displays, the Woodland Park Zoo with its new elephant and gorilla enclosures and the Point Defiance Tacoma Zoo with its superb new marine mammal and polar bear exhibits make a visit to the Pacific Northwest a must for the animal lover. Next September it's Phoenix, Arizona, which promises to be equally rewarding.

Andrew Greenwood,  
MA, Vet MB, MRCVS



## WHAT CAN ZOOS DO FOR

# Parrot Conservation?

I am very pleased to have been asked to write for the first issue of the World Parrot Trust Newsletter on the subject of what zoos can do to help parrot conservation. The aims of zoos are in

many ways clearly paralleled by those of the World Parrot Trust. I will expand and talk around the objectives of the trust as I believe they particularly apply to zoos.

*continued overleaf*



*A 12-week old Buffons Macaw bred at a British Zoo in 1974. A world first, perhaps? Let us know.*

The first aim of the World Parrot Trust is to educate the public about the threat to parrot survival and to seek their interest and concern. Some zoos are already doing this but less well than they could. Nobody learns about parrot conservation by walking past a row of aviaries where the only information presented is the name of the species and perhaps also a map of its distribution. What is needed are well-thought out campaigns to educate the public to the perils facing parrots in the wild. For the majority of threatened species the main problem is loss of habitat. This appears to be especially the case for mainland neotropical parrots. However, Robert Ridgely, in his article in the Proceedings of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) Parrot Working Group, notes that for four species of Macaw and two Amazons it is direct persecution by the capture of birds for the international bird trade that threatens them. This also needs to be presented to the zoo visitor — many of whom may be tempted to become a parrot-owner after their trip to the zoo. Both points are clearly and simply addressed by the colourful *Amazona* parrot poster produced by Wildlife Conservation International and available from the New York Zoological Society, Bronx Zoo. That poster illustrates many *Amazona* species and subspecies and succinctly states 'Amazon Parrots are vanishing because of large-scale destruction of forests and capture for pets'. The potential of zoos for educating large numbers of visitors should not be underestimated and will shortly be addressed by the National Federation of Zoos of Great Britain.

The second aim of the World Parrot Trust addresses the single most important issue, that is habitat conservation. Zoos must inform their public about the importance of habitat conservation. What other action may zoos take? Zoos like Jersey lead the way in bringing together captive propagation, field research and political representation to encourage habitat preservation by the host country. This attitude of concern for both the species and its habitat is well shown by the re-naming of the Wildfowl Trust as the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. Although few zoos have either the financial resources or expertise to engage directly in habitat conservation some significant fund-raising efforts have been made by zoos including the recent 'Parrots in Peril' promotion organised by the National Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Zoo Federation). The proceeds of this were donated to the ICBP as a contribution towards the costs of a study of Imperial and Red-necked Amazons on Dominica. The third aim of the World Parrot Trust is to gather and disseminate



*Education and, hopefully, inspiration. This young man will not readily forget this encounter at a zoo with a Goffin's Cockatoo.*

information on the status of parrot populations in the wild and in captivity. The Zoo Federation currently do this for all captive parrots held by Federation members. The numbers of parrots bred by the world's major zoos are listed annually in the International Zoo Yearbook. Zoos also help in gathering information by encouraging members of their staff to organize surveys for particular species and by ensuring that reports on particular species are sent to those conducting the surveys. It helps to ensure that questionnaires are carefully constructed and not full of requests for non-essential information. Dissemination of information is achieved either by reports written for popular or more specialised journals and the organisation of meetings for those interested in captive breeding. A recent meeting organised by the zoo-based Association of British Wild Animal Keepers and held at Chester Zoo attracted a large number of private aviculturists to the mutual benefit of both communities.

The World Parrot Trust advocates effective controls on the international trade in parrots, and its replacement by captive bred birds. These views are supported by the majority of zoos which are determined to establish captive populations of the

parrots in their care. Space is preferentially given to endangered or vulnerable species and most zoos now aim to hold two or more breeding pairs of selected species rather than single pairs or individuals. Two or three pairs are not enough to form the basis of a self-sustaining population and often several zoos work together with mutually selected 'target' species. This has recently been extended, as for example in the UK with the Scarlet Macaw, on a national basis to involve many zoos and private aviculturists. Zoos here have taken on the roles of regional studbook keepers, an onerous but necessary task that lays the groundwork for future breeding programmes. The two internationally recognised 'studbooks', those for Spix's Macaw and for St. Vincent Amazons are also compiled by Zoo personnel.

The World Parrot Trust also aims to encourage co-operation in the breeding of parrots by private aviculturists and zoos. We should not pretend that there are no differences between zoos and private aviculturists. Sadly there has often been too little co-operation in the past with divisions based on petty jealousies and compounded by the high monetary value placed on rare species. However, where zoos and private aviculturists have worked together on a personal

basis the fruits of co-operation have been well worthwhile.

Zoos have often been criticised by the private sector for failing to breed as many parrots as some private aviculturists. Zoos, by law, must keep records and must publish annually a list giving numbers of birds held, numbers hatched, those that did not survive, deaths and transfers to other collections. Private aviculturists rarely publish comparable lists and it is difficult to fairly compare successes and failures between the two communities. However there is no doubt that within the avicultural community there are experienced parrot breeders who have consistently greater success than many of the best zoos. It is with these breeders that the captive future of many parrot species may depend. Zoos can and do breed parrots, but they must also be concerned with the exhibition of and interpretation of the birds to the public. Nonetheless the success of the zoo community must be acknowledged; a recent International Zoo Yearbook lists more than 180 species and subspecies of parrot having been bred in zoos in 1987 alone. The development of hand-rearing techniques for parrots was pioneered amongst others by San Diego Zoo and considerable veterinary research, including the investigation of



techniques for semen cryopreservation and artificial insemination have been undertaken by research institutes such as that based at London Zoo. Where the zoo community scores is in its ability to manage populations through co-ordinated breeding programmes, taking advantage of their access to the specialist knowledge of professionally qualified small population biologists. Zoos, however, rarely hold, even as a community, enough individuals of any species to run a self-sufficient breeding programme. Aviculturists rarely have access to the skills of experts on the genetics of small populations nor the organizational structure to co-ordinate breeding programmes. Working together must be to the benefit of both groups.

Many aviculturists would argue that they do not need to involve themselves in breeding programmes. Consider all the Australian parakeets which have been established without such programmes. That is a valid point for those species which have always had a good number of enthusiastic followers and a good founding

population. However, what of those species which were less fashionable and others which perhaps were always difficult avicultural subjects? Where now are the Carolina Parakeets and Paradise Parrots which were once held by aviculture? Both zoos and private parrot keepers failed with these two species. More recently large numbers of Moluccan and Goffins Cockatoos have been imported but few people have bred from them. These are two of the species which have been noted by the Zoo Federation Parrot Group as being of special concern and may benefit from direct breeding programmes, with initial efforts being concentrated on the Moluccan Cockatoo.

Because of the long-term continuity of most zoos, often linked to a charitable status, many of the larger conservational organizations find it easier to work with the structured zoo community rather than private individuals. Zoos can in this way form a bridge between these bodies and the vast body of private aviculturists who may then find themselves involved in

and actively contributing to internationally recognised programmes for endangered species.

The World Parrot Trust also aims to promote high standards in the keeping of parrots as pets. This relates to their concern for the well-being of individual parrots but not to conservation. Zoos on a daily basis answer many queries regarding parrot-care and acquisition. By recommending that people carefully consider the pro's and con's before purchasing a parrot as a companion animal; and by underlining the superiority of captive-bred birds as pets zoos can and should influence the consumer market. Zoos may also help parrot conservation by carefully considering their options before disposing of their surplus stock. Clearly it is better that valuable birds be placed with experienced parrot-breeders rather than sold off to the highest bidder.

Finally the World Parrot Trust aims to encourage research projects. Specific mention is made of research on the veterinary care of parrots and on the preservation of genetic diversity.

Both these aspects are supported by zoos. The American Species Survival Plans (SSPs) and European Breeding Programmes (EEPs) have been drawn up specifically to manage the genetic diversity of the species concerned. Recent zoo-based veterinary research includes that at London Zoo on the development of clinical haematology as an aid to diagnosing diseases in psittacines.

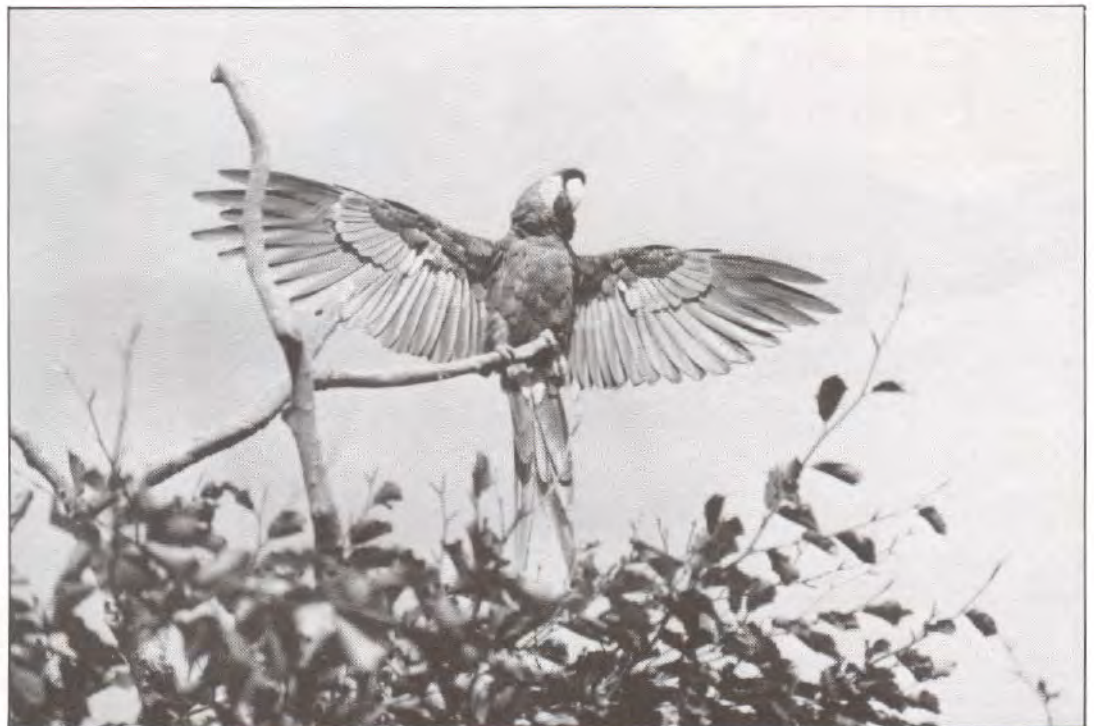
In summary zoos can play important roles in parrot conservation indirectly by informing their visiting public about the plight of the parrots and their habitats, and directly through the engineering of well co-ordinated and scientifically based captive breeding programmes involving both zoos and the private sector.

Roger Wilkinson

## International News Round-Up

### PERU

In Peru, a programme to breed Scarlet Macaws and release their young into the wild is being set up. Organised and funded by Paul Beaver of Amazonia Expeditions Inc. Co., he has, for some years, taken people on expeditions into Peru. Mr. Beaver has funded a number of scientific research projects,



Scarlet Macaw.

# International News Round-Up

continued

anthropology and medicinal plant studies.

Advisor to this project will be Leigh-Anne Stennett, former curator of Sunken Gardens, St. Petersburg, Florida. She has extensive experience in breeding macaws at Sunken Gardens and in her own collection. From her comes the news that the breeding stock will consist of handicapped macaws which could not be released back into the wild after being confiscated by the Peruvian Government. They were removed from people attempting to smuggle them out of the country.

Their eventual offspring will be parent-fed with a minimum of human contact, and eventually released near the Pacaya-Samiria Natural Reserve, about 100 miles up the Amazon from Iquitos. It would be a pointless project releasing macaws in many areas of South America — but Peru has probably the best remaining macaw habitat in the whole of the continent. Many areas of the neotropics still have much intact forest — but the macaws have gone...

We hope to bring you news of the progress of this project in a forthcoming issue.

## CHILE

The Lesser Patagonian Conure (*Cyanoliseus p. patagonus*) is a common bird in aviculture — although it is declining in the wild. It is considered as an agricultural pest and much of its habitat is now being used to grow crops. However, in Argentina it is not yet endangered. In Chile, where the sub-species *byroni* occurs, the situation is more serious. The Greater Patagonian Conure, as this race is called, once occurred throughout Central Chile. Now there are two populations, the main one being in the south of the central provinces, where 85% of the population is found. Last year it was reported that only ten breeding locations are known to survive and two of these were due to be inundated as a result of the construction of a hydro-electric dam and reservoir. The birds nesting in the area due to be flooded were being caught and relocated.

Captive breeding could obviously be a very important safeguard for this sub-species — but it has always been very rare in aviculture. In the UK it is probably held in only one collection, Rode Tropical Bird Gardens in Somerset, where it has bred in the past. This year two young were reared in

the breeding centre of Palmitos Park, Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands. Two young were also reared in 1987. There must surely be others in captivity — but where are they? Rosemary Low, now curator of the breeding centre, would like to co-ordinate a breeding programme for this handsome conure so that in-breeding is avoided. Palmitos Park is fortunate in having several unrelated birds — a total of 12 in all.

## U.S.A.

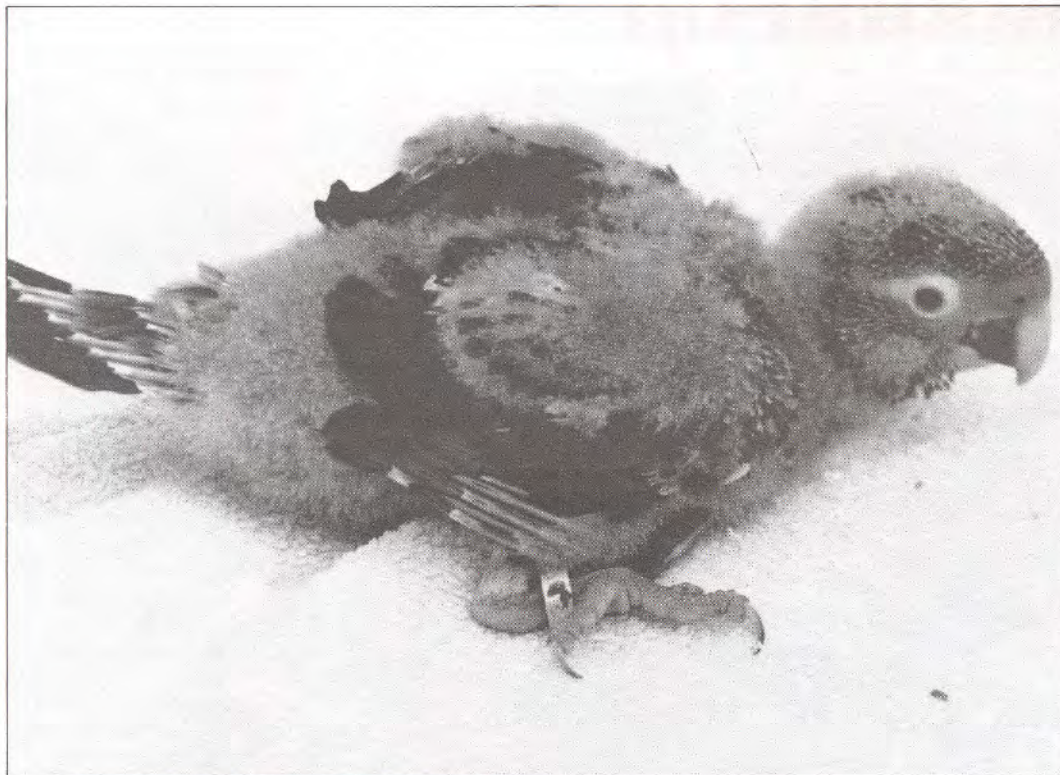
Nashville, Tennessee is to have a zoo. Property has recently been secured and its construction is expected to take five years. The Zooboosters organisation has already worked for four years to obtain permission and funds. Members of the local bird club are working very closely with the Zooboosters. One of them states with optimism: "We hope to have the best psittacine display in the country!"



## AUSTRALIA

Finally, on a lighter note, an Australian breeder has found a unique use for a feather duster! His Eclectus deserted the nest leaving a four week old chick inside. It was removed for hand-rearing — with some reluctance as the breeder had no experience of hand-feeding. It was placed in a cardboard box heated by a light bulb with a towel over the top to help retain the heat. But it would not settle down and continually walked around the box, pecking at the sides. The breeder was "at his wif's end" wondering what to do when it dawned on him that the young Eclectus was missing its mother. So out he went and bought a large ostrich feather duster. He cut a hole in the side of the box and pushed the handle through from the inside, leaving the duster part in the box. Within two minutes the young Eclectus was sound asleep in the middle of the feathers.

The moral of this story is ... that someone who has been hand-rearing chicks for years would probably not have thought of this. After a few dozen or a few hundred chicks we are in danger of becoming blasé and our reactions stereotyped. But a beginner solved a problem in a very effective way...



One of the Greater Patagonian Conures, parent-reared at Palmitos Park, this year.



# Urgent Message From THE WORLD PARROT TRUST:

*Please* stop the  
parrot holocaust"

Are we making too emotive a statement? We don't believe so, since we now know that over 70 of the world's 330 species of parrot are seriously in danger of extinction, and many more are threatened. The dictionary defines 'holocaust' as a 'wholesale sacrifice of life', and that is precisely what is happening to the parrots.

Loss of their habitat is the most widespread threat. The destruction of the rain forests, home to perhaps two-thirds of the world's parrots, is continuing virtually unchecked, and the birds lose their nest sites and feeding areas.

The next threat is capture for the pet trade. Every year hundreds of thousands of parrots are taken from the wild, handled and shipped in cramped and cruel conditions, leading to the death of as many as four out of five. Survivors are likely to end up as wild and unsatisfactory household pets. They may live for twenty or more years, never losing their fear of humans.

What is to be done? The World Parrot Trust can add its voice to the many calling for urgent action to save the rain forests and other habitats, and

will seek funds to invest in protected reserves for parrots, and to pursue research projects in the field. It will also support the further development of breeding of parrots by aviculturists and zoos around the world, whose successes in recent years have established 'zoo-banks' of numerous species of parrots in captivity. These provide an invaluable element of insurance against the possible loss of species in the wild.

There is, however, one immediate action which could be taken to improve the parrots' prospects of survival. This is to put a ban on the mass shipment of wild-caught parrots from one country to another. By 'mass shipment' we mean any consignment of more than ten wild-caught birds. By allowing the limited shipment by air of up to ten birds in one consignment, the generally enlightened and fulfilling hobby of aviculture will be assisted in establishing further aviary-bred species from which tame and hand-reared birds can be supplied to satisfy the pet trade. Such parrots usually make excellent 'companion birds'.

What would be eliminated by a tightening of the present lax

regulations would be the kind of shipment which the writer has seen recently in a bird importer's warehouse: over ten thousand parrots packed tightly into cages, kept at a high temperature and full of antibiotics to keep them alive.

That shipment and many others like it were and are perfectly legal. The World Parrot Trust has now written to the Department of the Environment, the European Commission, the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) to ask them to press urgently for a tightening up of the CITES regulations affecting parrots. (CITES - Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species.) At a meeting last May with the influential International Council for Bird Preservation, the World Parrot Trust put forward its proposal for limiting shipments of parrots to ten per shipper, per species, per year. Though no doubt imperfect, this proposed formula seems to the trust to be a means of maintaining aviculture - which we support wholeheartedly - while preventing these superbly beautiful and intelligent birds from being available as a 'trade commodity' thus accelerating their decline into extinction.

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**The World Parrot Trust  
ask all who care about the  
parrots to support its call for  
urgent international action to**

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**Help Save The  
Parrots Of  
The World**

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For further information please  
contact:- Michael Reynolds,  
Hon. Director, World Parrot Trust.  
Tel: (0736) 753365

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*Michael Reynolds  
with his pet of 20 years standing,  
"Susie" the Umbrella Cockatoo.*

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# HOW YOU CAN HELP

## *The World Parrot Trust*

1. Please communicate. Let us have your comments on 'Psitta Scene', the objectives of the World Parrot Trust, and any other parrot-related matters. Let us know of any projects we might be able to consider.
2. Articles and news items would be appreciated. Send them to Rosemary Low, Editor, 'Psitta Scene', World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 4HY, U.K.
3. The trust aims to establish support groups worldwide. If you can help with this, write to Michael Reynolds, Hon. Director, World Parrot Trust.
4. Members are very welcome. Please consider joining the trust, and recruiting friends and associates.



### Yes, I wish to join THE WORLD PARROT TRUST

Complete this form and send it to us with your introductory membership subscription of £10. We'll be grateful for any additional donation to help us get off the ground. In return we'll keep you informed of our work and progress by regular newsletters, and send you a Membership Certificate and Car Sticker.

Name .....

Address .....

Please enter the name and address of any friend who might be interested in joining the trust.

Name .....

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Subscription of £ .....

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Total Remittance £ .....

Please post your form and cheque, made payable to  
**THE WORLD PARROT TRUST,**  
REGISTERED CHARITY No. 80094

The World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House,  
Hayle, Cornwall TR27 4HY, U.K.

### AIMS OF THE WORLD PARROT TRUST

The objective of the trust is to promote the survival of all parrot species and the welfare of individual birds.

- a By educating the general public worldwide about the threat to parrot survival, and seeking their interest, concern and support.
- b By action to protect and preserve the natural habitats of parrots worldwide.
- c By gathering and disseminating information on the status of parrot populations in the wild and in captivity.
- d By advocating effective controls on the international trade in wild-caught parrots, and its replacement by captive-bred birds.
- e By encouraging co-operation in the breeding of parrots by aviculturists and zoological institutions, and better liaison between the captive breeding community and conservation bodies, with the aim of creating self-sustaining populations of endangered species.
- f By promoting high standards in the keeping of parrots as pets.
- g By encouraging research projects, i.e.: the veterinary care of parrots, and the preservation of genetic diversity.
- h By any other means that may be appropriate.

