

PsittaScene



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A Rare Western Ground Parrot
In Search of Blue-headed Macaws

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Psitta Scene

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fromthedirector

Great news: It's been one year since the EU permanently ended wild bird imports, something we at the World Parrot Trust campaigned hard for. Better yet: Over ten million wild birds have been spared since late 2005 when the initial temporary import ban went into effect. And the news is positive in exporting countries as well.

Nicaragua was once the largest exporter of wild parrots from Central America. Now a temporary ban on exports has not only stopped international trade, it has also drastically reduced the trade in parrots within Nicaragua as well. Wild parrots for sale in city markets were common in the past, but today are all but gone.

Similarly, South America's largest exporter, Argentina, recently announced a zero export quota for parrots in 2008. This step will save tens of thousands of wild parrots this year, and will hopefully continue in years to come. In their correspondence with the CITES Secretariat, Argentina expressly complained that the EU import ban was directly responsible for this policy change as the ban eliminated their primary market. This kind of cascading effect of the EU's decision is precisely what we have been hoping for and predicting for many years - eliminating demand eliminates the supply and thereby protects millions of wild birds.

Consequently, there are now only two major exporting countries in the western hemisphere - Guyana and Suriname. We're hoping to focus on these countries in the coming months and years. Having recently returned from an initial visit to Guyana, I'm delighted to report that this remarkably unspoiled country is working hard to package itself as a "green" nation. We're eager to work with partners there to encourage a more progressive policy on wild bird exports as well.

Trade in wild birds will never completely end but the trends in these major markets are deeply encouraging. We'll keep you posted!

Jamie Gilardi
Director

onourcovers

FRONT The Western Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus flaviventris*) is a rare sight indeed. In fact, no photographs of an unrestrained bird existed until one fateful day in the outback of Australia. We are proud to share the exciting story and the best photographs ever taken and published of the species. © Brent Barrett

BACK Bottoms up! Escaping up a tree, this Blue-fronted Amazon (*Amazona aestiva*) provides a comic moment for quick-thinking photographer and parrot researcher Brent Barrett.

One fateful day ...

... a Western Ground Parrot walked out of the bush and into the history books

Article and Photos by Brent Barrett



One of the hard lessons in conservation, and in life, is that no matter how hard you bend your mind around a problem, you may still end up without answers. Luckily, once in awhile a seemingly random event opens a window to your wildest dreams and brings long-sought answers that no amount of grappling or technology can produce. Just such an event befell me in the outback of Western Australia during the Western Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus flaviventris*) breeding season of 2005.

Until the 5th of October in that monumental year, there were no known photographs of a wild unrestrained Western Ground Parrot. No nests had been located since 1914 and very few food plants were known. Daily activity was inferred from one radio tracking project in 1989. On all levels the Western Ground Parrot was an enigma that guarded its secrets well.

In February 2004 I published an article in *PsittaScene* introducing this critically endangered parrot to the world. During the previous spring

the government conservation agency of Western Australia had employed me to help locate, capture and translocate these birds in order to create a new sub-population within their historic range. Our team encountered very few birds in the two known populations. A third previously reliable population seemed to have disappeared completely. This was a grave situation. The recovery project moved from a population translocation mission into one of search and protect *in situ*. There were simply too few birds and too many unknowns to attempt a translocation.



During the next two years the same questions continued to arise with no answers. How do Western Ground Parrots successfully breed in the presence of terrestrial and avian predators? What do they eat? Where do they live? It was a staggering list of unknowns for a species of this modern age living within a developed country like Australia. We knew very little about our intriguing feathered friend. This was to change, but we would have to be patient.

We now know that the curious Western Ground Parrot lives a life quite unlike most other parrots with the exception of the Kakapo (*Strigops habroptilas*) and the Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*). It does not fly in large noisy flocks and display brightly coloured plumage. Its call is subtle and un-parrotlike, easily mimicked by other birds with whom it shares its home range. It flies only in the cover of semi-darkness in the small hours of dawn and dusk, choosing to do

all its calling during this time of stealthy movement. By day it walks amongst the undergrowth foraging for food and, like most arid land birds, roosts in the shade during the heat of the day. Its nesting behaviour is as cryptic as its everyday life. The male and female meet 400 m (1300 ft) from the nest site, arriving simultaneously and silently. In this "mate-feeding arena" the male regurgitates food for the female to pass to the chick(s) in the nest. The male then goes to sleep nearby while the female returns silently to the nest. They are the last outback bird to call and it is well past sunset when he finishes feeding her. He does not appear to roost near the nest which is not very typical for parrots. While no nest has ever been found I know these behavioural facts to be true simply because I am the only living person who has witnessed them with my own eyes.

One fateful day in the spring of 2005 changed the lives of the conservation community of Western Australia. In this harsh and scratchy snake-infested land I made the most unlikely friend - a breeding-age male Western Ground Parrot I named Charlie. As it stands, almost every photo that exists of this enigmatic species is of Charlie. How can this be?

Don't be fooled by what you know of parrots befriending humans. This was a scientific expedition - no food was offered, Charlie did not sit on my shoulder or sleep in a cage. In fact, nobody has ever touched or handled a Western Ground Parrot since 1989. Charlie simply tolerated my presence and over time allowed me to approach within 1 m (3 ft) of him. This was completely unusual for this species. Many top ornithologists have waited 20 years in the hope of glimpsing a Western Ground Parrot. Due to their low numbers and curious behaviour of walking briskly through the undergrowth before they are



The vast dense and unforgiving habitat that the Western Ground Parrot inhabits makes it easy to imagine why it has been so hard to locate and observe these secretive ground-dwelling parrots. Many experienced birders have searched in vain for this unusual bird. The luckiest may be rewarded with a burst of green and the blur of a tail before all evidence disappears in the undergrowth.



even detected, they remain one of the most elusive bird species in Australia. Should you happen to surprise one, it bursts into the air flying in a zigzag motion for 100 m (330 ft) then drops quickly to the ground and runs into obscurity. This very quail-like behaviour earned them the name "Button grass quail" and the respect of many hardened birders. One could say they had seen a Western Ground Parrot but only describe the blur of its tail as it rapidly vacated the area.

So why was Charlie different? The answer lies in consistency. In the historic surveys of 2004, the sub-population, which included Charlie, was discovered and mapped. That same year the team camped nearby and monitored what we could of the breeding season. A recently fledged juvenile was located by following a previously unknown call. I snapped a poor quality photograph and finally the Western Ground

Parrot was in the news. This was the first juvenile to be seen since 1913. The following year we mounted a large scale monitoring program in the same breeding area. Slowly we encountered more and more new calls, birds were sighted with increasing frequency and we built up a picture of activity and a simple understanding of the local dialect. Over time the birds started to tolerate us more and go about their normal lives. Still, we simply could not get close to them despite hiding in bushes, playing back various calls and walking in long human chains through the bush. Glimpse after blur is all we saw. Then one day it happened. A bird responded to playback within a low open area of the vegetation. With camera in hand I stalked it through the undergrowth for 1 hour until Charlie walked into the history books and into my heart. The photos made headlines and appeared in local magazines and papers. They are the first of their kind, but they meant more than that. Here

was our chance to show the local community how beautiful and special this parrot was and how worthy it was of conservation. In 2004 I had to hand draw the pictures for the *PsittaScene* article, the only photo clearly shows the fingers wrapped around the neck of the captive bird. We had entered a new age. The following breeding season I returned from my apparent retirement in New Zealand to work one last field season with the goal of finally finding a nest. I had taken the photos that helped publicity - I doubted that chance would come again. I had seen a juvenile after chance events that were not likely to re-conspire. Nothing prepared me for what was to occur.

At first the season was slow, the bush silent. No birds were recorded in that first week. Had they done their famous vanishing act? Had we disturbed them too much the previous season? Slowly we encountered more and more birds. We



Perseverance pays off as "Charlie" eventually allows closer and closer observation. He remains cautious in the open but begins foraging naturally, leading to the discovery of completely unknown food plants and a better understanding of the species' habitat needs. Continued encounters over subsequent days began to unlock some of the many mysteries of the species daily life.



zeroed in on these birds slowly, taking more risks, hiding under camouflage nets metres from the calling areas. We triangulated the calls and in the day searched the area by hand. Still we encountered no nest, no chick and no roost. Time passed quickly and we were running out of season. How could we find the nest if we couldn't find the adults? Then one night we saw them flying in silently from opposite corners of a clearing. Twice they landed meters from me in the dying sunlight. Meanwhile something strange was happening by day. We consistently encountered a Western Ground Parrot using call playback. The first time it moved briskly ahead of us as we crashed through the undergrowth. Every time we lost track of it I played a call on the loud speaker and it would stop and respond. We managed to

follow it for an hour, and towards the end it started foraging as it walked. Could this really be happening? Over four subsequent events, some lasting up to 2 hours, two things changed: Charlie stopped acting aggressively towards the speaker and we got better at following him. He began to exhibit normal behaviour, even feeding in front of us. That led to the identification of 20 new food plants and a new understanding of habitat requirements. On many occasions he stopped to roost in the shade for 30 min while I crouched just 2 meters (6.5 ft) away. We videotaped all his behaviours, took hundreds of photographs and recorded him using every known call except one. This missing call was later discovered to be a female-only call. Still we could not find the nest. Could Charlie be convinced to lead us there?

One day we located Charlie out of the usual feeding area. We searched the area and heard the distinct call of a juvenile. We enticed Charlie to lead us to within 50 m (165 ft) of his chick and we searched the entire area by hand. This was 400 m (1300 ft) from the "mate-feeding arena" where we had been videotaping Charlie and his mate. We finally found Charlie's juvenile but only because he lead us to the area where it was hidden. I was then able to photograph this two week post-fledge juvenile before it flew away and was never seen again. However, due to its consistency in the area, over subsequent nights, we know the nest site was very close. Despite all of these amazing events a nest of the Western Ground Parrot has not been found in nearly 100 years. That's one mystery that still awaits us.



The ultimate reward – following "Charlie's" every move, Brent Barrett, Francesca Cunninghame (pictured on page 4) and 2 others have another stroke of luck. They locate his chick which is just two weeks post-fledging. After this photograph was taken, the chick flew into cover and they remain the only people who have ever seen a juvenile of this species.

to Wean or not to Wean



Perhaps no other avicultural issue in recent years has stirred such controversy and emotional debate as the sale of not-yet-weaned psittacine chicks by breeders and bird shops - and for good reason!

When undertaken irresponsibly, the transfer of a helpless young parrot in the midst of its hand-feeding phase can result in a host of serious problems. Insufficient or imbalanced nutrition can cause stunting, poor feathering, skeletal deformity, vitamin excess or lack, even kidney and liver damage. Unclean habits or exposure to foreign microbes may bring on disease, fungal infection, sour crop, etc.; while improper feeding technique can result in burnt crop or food aspirated into lungs.

This issue's contributor EB Cravens has bred, trained, raised, kept and rehabilitated more than 75 species of psittacines during the past twenty plus years. His emphasis on natural environments for birds, the urging of babies to fully fledge during the extended weaning process, and the leaving of chicks for many weeks inside the nest box with their parents in order that they may learn the many intangibles of their species, have succeeded in changing for the better the lives of so many captive parrots. He has written extensively for magazines all over the world and on the internet.

For more advice from parrot experts visit www.parrots.org > Forums, Experts & Bloggers



Hand feeding is a complicated process involving changes in chick privacy, formula, schedule and flight environment.

IN ADDITION, incalculable emotional stress and behavioral abnormalities are sometimes brought on by neglect, frequent hunger, and hand-feeding routines which ignore basic principles of nurturing.

Psittacine chicks are extremely hardy. Their power of endurance and will to survive are obvious to anyone who has hand-raised even a few chicks. But, by the same token, it is apparent in the avicultural world that some inexperienced or neglectful hand-feeders make a practice of doing only enough in their role as surrogate mothers to keep the chicks alive and growing. They neither excel nor flourish, and of course, never reach maximum healthy pet potential.

Breeders, bird brokers and retail shops that make a habit of selling unweaned parrots to such inexperienced hand-feeders are acting irresponsibly. In some cases, the end result may be death. With the tools, techniques and

knowledge available in psittaculture this day and age, the loss of any healthy chick due to faulty handling by an unpracticed new owner trying to cope with the intricacies of hand-feeding, is a sad failure.

Blame rests both with the insensitive seller of the bird, and the foolish-minded buyer! Is it any wonder so many veterinarians, parrot behaviorists, and conscientious bird breeders are now going on record with the hard line stand: "No more selling of unweaned parrots?"

'Tis interesting to consider just exactly what the motives are behind selling an unweaned chick...

One of the most common motives is haste. Various hand-feeders' round-the-clock workload is tremendous with so many chicks in the nursery and on the way. Stress and the burden of too many psittacines at a facility nearly always results in forfeiture of advanced natural

parrot-keeping methodologies. Quality of life for breeding pairs suffers, while the emotional needs of fledglings are imperfectly fulfilled.

A second reason for the desire to sell unweaned psittacines is, of course, money. Aviculturists are hesitant to keep the neonates around for weeks at a time, when someone else is willing to do the work.

Thirdly, parrot chicks not yet self-feeding are bought and sold in the U.S. because that is what certain customers think they want. This is a fallacy promoted by some parrot sellers. They try to convince customers that unweaned chicks will "bond" better and be friendlier than weaned birds. In fact, already weaned and fledged psittacines, when properly raised, are much less trouble and much better adjusted when they move to the new home.

FOR MANY YEARS I CHOSE TO SELL some of my eight and ten week old hand-feeding chicks to the reputable exotic bird store where I worked as manager for seven years. The owner is a more experienced hand-feeder than I, who has raised to weaning hundreds of hookbill pets, of dozens of species. I trusted Feathered Friends of Santa Fe and knew my chicks would get premium care there. But, I no longer do this as I now believe that parrots are more confident and well-rounded if they grow up the first 16 weeks or more at our aviaries around the parents who hatched them.

CERTAIN AVICULTURISTS prefer to wholesale all their young chicks to "brokers" who are experienced at handfeeding and weaning parrots before reselling them. Once again, when all parties involved are responsible, there should be no reason for a chick to be in physical danger. However, think about when a chick is moved from its dark secure nesting box to the breeder's nursery, on to a broker for handfeeding, then to a pet store for sale and finally to the new owner's household. This is five major changes in its life, all in the span of four or five months. Not only is this difficult for the parrot to assimilate, but if not done flawlessly at each step, it can leave lasting emotional trauma on a chick. Stable childhood is a critical ingredient in making a contented psittacine pet!

It is not unusual to see single dark "stress bars" on a bird's plumage marking the exact progress of pinfeather eruption when abrupt environmental change took place. If a chick must be transferred, extra care, love and nurturing are essential. Hatch and nursery files and all up-to-date information on the psittacine should be included with the transfer, along with a supply of the exact formula being handfed at the time. Moving a helpless chick to a new "habitat" is risk enough without the new owner immediately making a switch in food.

FINALLY, THERE ARE THOSE CASES when non-professional hand-feeders - that is, inexperienced pet store personnel or a novice pet owner - purchase an unweaned chick. This is where 95% of serious problems arise. In many instances the new owner is simply unfamiliar with the species being purchased. For example, all too many aspiring aviculturists seem to think if they have handfed a cockatiel or lovebird in the past, then they have the know-how to properly raise and wean an amazon parrot or African Grey. Not so, and believe me, one neonate amazon or conure is not the same as all the others. There are early-wean chicks and late-wean chicks and reluctant feeding chicks and chicks with no feeding motion whatsoever. There are those that are always too warm or fidgety, and those that are afraid of the light and those that simply will not stay put in their holding basket in between feeds...

THE KEY HERE IS KNOWLEDGE. And not just reading knowledge, but hands-on practice.

If there are those of you out there who are contemplating raising a medium to large unweaned psittacine of a kind you have never worked with before, seek out and get aid from experienced handfeeders who have raised that same species many times. Ask questions, talk nutrition, note weaning time periods and behaviors, and learn, learn, learn.

By the way, some lethal diseases such as polyoma virus are serious nursery pathogens much more likely to take the life of an unweaned chick. Waiting as long as possible to acquire your new pet while regularly visiting with it as it is being weaned, is to a customer's advantage.

THE BREEDER OR SHOP that chooses to sell an unweaned parrot has far greater responsibility. Such sellers must know when to say "absolutely not" to the transfer of an unweaned chick into an inappropriate handfeeding situation. A new owner with a fulltime job who plans to take the chick back and forth to work could be one such case. An owner that has not yet purchased a cage is another.

Many other undesirable situations can be created by the sale of unweaned chicks. For example, since many breeders discount birds sold unweaned, a purchaser may merely wish to get a



The interspecies socialization chicks receive at a professional site can be invaluable to later pet homes.



Why would a pet buyer want to take a chick home early? So much learning comes from being with its brothers and sisters.

parrot at a cheaper price. Such a monetary motive is suspect when considered in the light of the amount of time and commitment needed to hand-feed a parrot to full weaning.

Another situation I've seen is when a couple must share handfeeding duties, but one individual is "beak shy" of a parrot's bite. This situation occurs most often with large macaws that pump very strongly at formula implements.

A DESIRE TO BOND TIGHTLY with one's new pet hookbill is frequently given as a reason for an owner to undertake handfeeding. This is an erroneous concept. Young psittacines are NOT bonding when they attach themselves strongly to the person holding the feeding syringe. This is not a permanent emotional tie. Just as in the wild, a chick does not "bond" with its mother/father. The quality and depth of the owner/psittacine friendship is determined after weaning when the parrot pet begins personality formation and thinking for itself. Bird dealers who coerce unaware buyers into handfeeding with this false play are to be avoided.

While my recommendations are clearly against inexperienced owners taking on the job of hand-feeding, there is a time I consider ideal for them to step in. The early playful development phase (I call it the "puppy phase") is a joy for owners to experience. This phase does not normally begin until some two weeks before expected weaning

and it continues right up through the fledging phase. Ninety-nine percent of the unweaned psittacine chicks sold through our shop back in Santa Fe were transferred to their new owners at this late phase. At that point, the birds are 90% fully feathered, down to two-plus feedings per day from a warm bowl with the fingers and are consuming nuts, seeds, veggies, pellets and other weaning foods. Being off the syringe, they are safe from aspiration and crop burn dangers. This phase is much more enjoyable and has the benefit of taking place when the fledgling is flying around and can come to you and the familiar food dish on command. This is the ideal time at which a new owner may begin feeding duties of the pet.

On a side note it is important to mention that wherever a parrot is weaned should provide enough space for that bird to complete its full flight training. Weaning goes hand in hand with proper fledging. Young psittacines need lots of enclosed room to develop proper musculature and advanced flying skills.

WHEN WE PREPARE TO SEND A BIRD HOME, we instruct buyers to visit their new chick regularly for ten days to get it used to their voice and touch. The two weeks prior to departure, owners arrive at afternoon feeding time, and are given instruction and practice in feeding their chick warm mush with their

fingers. Any difficulties are ironed out before the bird leaves the shop!

When the psittacine is finally picked up, a list of care considerations, weaning foods, sterility and safety concerns, etc. is reviewed and given the new owner. Full contact information is shared along with instructions to call and report in after 24 hours. The chick is brought back in for a progress visit after 3 days. Weaning can be a particularly difficult time. On several occasions we had chicks brought back to us after 48 hours because they were not eating well enough in their new environment.

So, it can be seen that the selling of an unweaned parrot does not absolve the seller of responsibility concerning the living creature. Once this is understood, and with strong cooperation between seller and new owner, such a transfer can be successfully accomplished only at the end of the hand feeding phase.

But as already mentioned, as a pet parrot buyer, there is really no great advantage to taking the bird home early. Visit it often and leave the weaning to the professionals who have been raising the chick for weeks. Stability and patience are the key to producing the finest of new pets.

You will not be disappointed with the outcome.

With aloha, EB



In search of the most mysterious macaw

By Toa Kyle

COMING AROUND A BEND IN THE RIVER I hear a bird call that I instantly recognize as a parrot but it still feels slightly unfamiliar to me. I ask my field assistants to paddle the canoe to the nearest river bank so I can get a visual. The bird I hear must be a chick as it is calling repeatedly in a grating manner, no doubt begging for a meal. Finally I see them, a group of three Blue-headed Macaws (*Primolius couloni*) leaving a riverside perch for another further downstream. Sure enough, it is an adult pair with a single chick in tow, flying slightly behind its parents, still calling incessantly. This is the first good look I've gotten of the species almost a week into a survey I'm carrying out in the Ucayali region of the Peruvian Amazon. It's an extremely rewarding experience for me as the Blue-headed Macaw was the sole remaining macaw species I'd yet to see in the wild.

THEY ARE PERCHED IN A TALL TREE on the border of a small abandoned agriculture plot, called chakras in Peru. The vegetation in the plot is extremely tangled and overgrown. It takes what feels like an eternity to cut my way through to get closer to the birds. Luckily they're still nearby. I hide behind a large tree to observe them for several minutes. Blue-headed Macaws are the least studied species of macaw which adds to the rush of watching them this close. Unfortunately I get greedy and try to take some photos. One of the birds spots me and they quickly fly off into the forest away from the river. Part of me is tempted to keep following them but I'm doing survey work which dictates that I return to the boat and continue downstream in search of other Blue-heads. The nature of the work requires that I cover as much ground as possible in a confined period of time. Stopping to explore is rarely an option.

CONCERN FOR THE STATUS of the Blue-headed Macaw in the wild has been gathering momentum in recent years for several reasons. Rare in the aviculture community, birds fetch thousands of dollars in Europe and North America. Given that the per capita income in Peru is only US\$7,600, there are obvious motives for the intensive trapping of the species. Compared to the distribution of most other macaw species, Blue-headed Macaws are restricted to a relatively small area in the south-western Amazon,

principally the south-central Peruvian Amazon with additional records in neighbouring areas of Brazil and Bolivia (see map). We have already witnessed other macaw species with restricted distributions such as Glaucous Macaw (*Anodorhynchus glaucus*) and Spix's Macaw (*Cyanopsitta spixii*) go extinct in the wild so the Blue-headed Macaw merits our attention. Also, surprisingly little is known of the natural history, habitat requirements and population size of this species, so there is an urgent need to conduct surveys throughout the entire range of the species to better understand its conservation status in the wild.

It may seem curious that in the 21st century we still don't know what these birds feed on and an active nest for the species has yet to be described. Considering where they are found this should not come as a surprise. This particular region of the Amazon contains some of the last truly wild forests on the

planet. There are still tribes of uncontacted indigenous peoples in parts of the Blue-headed Macaw's range and human population densities are relatively low. This past May many international news agencies featured a story of photos taken by small plane of members of an uncontacted tribe in western Acre, Brazil, well

The Blue-headed Macaw (above right) occurs in eastern Peru, extreme western Brazil, and northwestern Bolivia. The least studied of all macaws; its population is thought to be declining though estimates are difficult due to low density and extremely remote habitat.





Photo: © Luiz Claudio Marigo

within the distributional range of Blue-heads. Given the remote nature of much of this region, conducting research is both logistically challenging and expensive. Another possible explanation for the paucity of information on this species may simply be due to its rarity in the wild. There is an ongoing debate concerning how many Blue-headed Macaws exist in the wild. Some researchers argue that due to large areas of intact habitat within the species range there may be up to 50,000 birds in the wild. Others take a more cautious approach pointing to the scant number of published records for the species as being indicative of a much smaller population, possibly less than 3,000 mature individuals. Do we know so little about Blue-heads because there are so few of them or because where they reside

is difficult to access? Questions such as this can only be answered by putting people in the field where Blue-headed Macaws are thought to exist. With this in mind I set out for the Ucayali River last fall in search of these poorly known birds. This fieldwork was supported by the World Parrot Trust and Natural Encounters Conservation Fund.

I CHOSE THE UCAYALI for several reasons. Although it is situated in the central portion of the range for the Blue-headed Macaw it has received relatively little attention from biologists. Most of the information we have about Blue-heads comes from the Madre de Dios region of south-eastern Peru, famous for its large macaw licks and pristine nature. By contrast, the capital of the department of Ucayali - Pucallpa - is connected to the Pacific coast via a paved highway making it the main logging center in Peru. Unlike Madre de Dios, Ucayali has

relatively few protected areas which provides an opportunity to observe how Blue-heads fare in forests that are experiencing varying levels of anthropogenic disturbance.

The Ucayali River is one of the main tributaries of the Amazon River that originates in Peru. The river is simply too wide to conduct macaw surveys from and roads are virtually nonexistent. I rented motorized canoes from locals to navigate smaller tributaries. These long wooden canoes are called peke-pekes in Peru in tribute to the loud noise they make. The motor for peke-pekes is much better on gas than an outboard motor but comes at the cost of the assault on your eardrums. I quickly learned that in order to adequately survey areas with this type of boat I needed to turn the motor off and move downstream by paddle. I was accompanied by a driver and a puntero or "pointer" who would occupy the bow of the boat to watch for sand bars or submerged trunks of fallen trees. On numerous occasions we'd hit stretches of low water and need to get out and push the boat along while wading through the river. When rivers were not navigable I'd conduct land based surveys, walking along trails utilized by hunters. These are some of the most biodiverse forests on earth so I was always rewarded with observations of some spectacularly coloured insect or bird I'd never seen before during these walks.



Photo: © Toa Kyle

A peke-peke is a motorized canoe used to survey remote rivers for Blue-headed Macaw. An indigenous Asháninka youth serves as the "puntero" - using a long pole to avoid obstructions. Toting your own gasoline is essential in surveying isolated areas where none is available for sale.

There are an estimated 25,000 to 45,000 Asháninka Indians remaining, mostly in Peru. The largest indigenous group in the Peruvian Amazon, they are predominantly an agricultural society, growing manioc, plantains and papaya. Traditionally the Asháninka, men, women and children paint their faces using the bright red crushed seeds of the Achiote fruits.



Photo: © Toa Kyle

THE FIRST TRIBUTARY OF THE UCAYALI

I visited is inhabited exclusively by communities of Asháninka Indians. This surprised me at first as I'm not used to being in contact with indigenous people when I'm conducting field work elsewhere. In Brazil, for example, most indigenous people live on reserves which are closed to outsiders, especially foreign researchers. This isn't the case in Peru where native communities are for the most part left to fend for themselves. Most of the Asháninka communities had their own peke-pekes but very few had gasoline to run them. When our canoe was travelling upstream by motor, people would come running out of their houses to get a look at the lucky people with gas. Needless to say they were surprised to

see me seated in the middle of the boat staring out of binoculars. Some of them were dressed traditionally and had red achiote dye on their faces making them just as fascinating to me as I was to them. Large parts of the Blue-headed Macaw's range are inhabited by indigenous peoples therefore providing a unique opportunity to collaborate on conservation activities. Like macaws, these people are still dependent on the surrounding forest for their sustenance and have a vested interest in its preservation. I have always admired the keen senses these people possess in the wild. My Asháninka assistants were initially unfamiliar with the call of the Blue-headed Macaw but quickly learned it and would often detect birds before I did during the survey. Although I initially came to this region in search of a poorly known bird, on my departure I also found myself concerned with the future of the many indigenous communities I visited in light of the threat posed by encroaching loggers, miners and petroleum surveyors.

catch birds to eat. Unfortunately they'd either forgotten or neglected to remove the nets meaning that any birds that did become entangled would eventually die there. Most of the licks I was told about during the course of the survey were being exploited either for trapping or hunting. There is an urgent need to better protect birds and mammals that frequent clay licks in Peru though admittedly implementing this protection would be difficult. In Madre de Dios tourism has been used successfully to protect licks. Unfortunately, in Ucayali ecotourism is virtually unknown.

As I got closer to Pucallpa there were fewer indigenous settlements along the tributaries of the Ucayali, instead they were populated by mestizos (mixed European-Native blood) and logging operations. On the whole, Blue-heads were absent or viewed infrequently in these types of areas relative to those with minimal logging. In fact, overall parrot diversity was predictably lower in areas being actively logged. Of the five areas surveyed, three had Blue-headed Macaws though at one site birds were observed only once over the course of four days.



Photo: © Toa Kyle

I VISITED A CLAY LICK near the first tributary I surveyed one morning and was disappointed to see nets placed over it. Large numbers of parrots assembled above it in the early morning hours but luckily no birds descended to ground level to feed at the lick. My guide said that members of another community had placed the nets there to

(L) Wild caught animals, mostly parrots, are sold in an open market in Pucallpa, the capital of Ucayali department. Although the sale of wildlife is technically illegal in Peru there appears to be little enforcement of this law.

(R) A net on a clay lick is evidence of hunting and trapping at these wildlife gathering spots.



Photo: © Toa Kyle



Photo: © Toa Kyle



Photo: © Sam Williams

The Golden-collared Macaw (*P. auricollis*, left) and Blue-winged or Illiger Macaw (*P. maracana*, right) are the two other macaws in the *Primolius* genus. They are predominantly green, smaller macaws that replace one another geographically in central S. America. *P. couloni* has the smallest range of the three.

BY FAR THE BEST AREA for Blue-heads I visited was in the Purus region. Only 4,000 people live in this extensively forested area, most of whom are indigenous people belonging to eight different linguistic groups. Located in the southeast corner of the department of Ucayali near the Brazilian border, Purus was also the most logistically difficult area to survey. All of the rivers here flow east towards Brazil and Bolivia and therefore isolate the region from the Ucayali River which flows north towards Pucallpa. Residents are almost totally dependent on infrequent cargo flights from Pucallpa to bring in food and supplies. Gasoline was selling for US\$15/litre (US\$60/gallon) when I was there. Anticipating this I purchased all my gasoline in Pucallpa to be flown in to Purus after my arrival. While I waited I hitched rides with traders who would travel upriver to trade goods with native communities in exchange for plantains and yucca. I was able to

see Blue-heads on a daily basis during these trips, usually in small family units of two to five birds. Purus is apparently rich in mahogany trees so to better protect this rapidly disappearing hardwood species, the Peruvian government had recently implemented a ten year moratorium on all logging activities in the region. Bad news for the frequency of cargo flights carrying supplies to residents (and carrying timber back to Pucallpa) but good news for the forest and the Blue-headed Macaw found there.

ALTHOUGH PRELIMINARY, MY STUDY SUGGESTS an extremely local distribution of Blue-headed Macaws in the Ucayali region though the reasons behind this are likely more complicated than simply the presence or absence of logging pressures. As often happens with research, I found myself with more questions about these birds at the end of the study than at the beginning. Though I was able to identify areas with small populations of Blue-headed Macaw, I still failed to collect important data on food resources and habitat preferences. It is a future goal for WPT to assist in implementing studies into the basic ecology of these birds to better understand why

they are found in some areas and absent from others. Ideally more surveys can be carried out in other areas of the species distribution, notably western Acre in Brazil and northwestern Bolivia.

Although some of the forests where Blue-headed Macaws are distributed remain intact, their future is deeply uncertain. In recent years the Brazilian government has attempted to curtail illegal logging operations in the Amazon which is good news for birds found on that side of the border. However, such a policy will likely create a greater demand for timber from neighbouring forests in Peru and Bolivia where environment protection agencies are understaffed or even nonexistent. In addition, the first highway to connect Brazil to the Peruvian coast, via Acre and Madre de Dios (the Transoceanica Highway), is nearly complete which, coupled with increasing gas exploration in the Peruvian Amazon, will undoubtedly add to a decline in available habitat for these birds. It is important that we intensify our efforts to better understand the conservation requirements of these enigmatic parrots.



Photo: © Toa Kyle



Photo: © Toa Kyle

(L) The campsites used while surveying macaws consist of simple palm leaf shelters constructed on sandbars. (R) Logging is active on many of the tributaries being surveyed. With no heavy machinery, most logs are floated downstream to the Ucayali River then by barge to sawmills in Pucallpa. Many don't make it downstream and end up collecting in big piles.

More Greys Released...

...For the full story
see PsittaScene
February & May 08
and parrots.org >
current projects >
African Grey

Update from Felix Lankester, Limbe Wildlife Center (LWC)

Back in December 2007 we rescued 1,220 illegally trapped African Grey parrots. Approximately 700 birds were released almost immediately. The remainder of the parrots had damaged feathers from the glue that was used to catch them or from being purposefully cut by the hunters. Each of these injured parrots was treated in January 2008 with the help of a veterinary team from the World Parrot Trust, and they have been recuperating ever since. Now, four months later, some of these parrots have shown, through their ability to fly strongly in the flight cage, that their plumage has recovered enough to begin the final release phase.

However, these will be different from the previous releases, as, rather than taking the selected birds to a nearby forest to be set free, we have decided to simply open their flight cage and allow them to fly off in their own time. The decision to opt for this LWC-based "soft-release" strategy was taken after we saw how well a few parrots who had escaped from the flight cage were doing living free. On Sunday 18th May, the roof of one of the flight cages was peeled back and the first batch of 12 recovered parrots were freed. The sight of a flock of parrots flying strongly through the trees of the LWC is a truly wonderful sight, all the more so when one considers the absolutely appalling conditions in which they arrived 6 months ago.



The Battle Continues

By Fidelis Pegue Manga excerpted from The Post (Buea 12 May 2008)

Two "notorious" parrot capturers, Roger Atangana and Ignace Onana were recently arrested and detained pending trial, for illegally trapping African Grey Parrots. The duo is responsible for the capture of over 5,000 parrots each year in Lobeke National Park and its buffer zone, in the East Province. Their arrests were orchestrated by local forest and wildlife authorities, in collaboration with the gendarmerie, facilitated by WWF.

Atangana was arrested in his house after a scuffle which resulted in his being shot in the arm. Onana was arrested while attempting to capture parrots in a forest clearing inside Lobeke (right). They have been operating in complicity for over 10 years. So far this year they are suspected to have slaughtered some 1,000 parrots, exporting the heads and tails for alleged medicinal purposes, according to wildlife authorities.

Eighty percent of parrots exported from Cameroon are captured in Lobeke which harbours a significant population of Grey Parrots. About 15,000 birds are taken out of the region every year, though almost half of this number perishes in transit due to poor handling.

Capturers mostly transport the birds in the night to avoid the numerous law enforcement control posts. The African Grey Parrot is a Class A (totally protected) species in Cameroon and can only be captured upon obtaining a special authorization from the Ministry of Forest and Wildlife.



WPT Launches African Grey Fund

Imperiled species gets a helping hand

Formerly widespread over equatorial Africa, the Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) is now threatened throughout much of its natural range and is disappearing from many countries. Wild populations are in decline due to poaching, capturing for the domestic and international pet trade, habitat destruction, and from land use resource conflicts. WPT's SAVE THE GREYS FUND has been launched to help these charismatic and popular beautiful parrots to survive. The fund's objectives are to protect wild Greys by:

Ending the trade in all wild caught African parrots

Parrot populations across Africa have suffered continued losses for decades due to capture for the pet trade. One of the hardest hit species is the Grey Parrot. During the period of 1994-2003, over 359,000 wild-caught individuals were reportedly exported from range states and have most recently suffered from trade for traditional medicines. Our efforts will continue to encourage regional governments and local NGOs to endorse trade bans, support efforts to capture poachers, and to enforce wildlife laws.

Aiding rehabilitation and release efforts for confiscated birds

When local efforts succeed in stopping illegal wildlife trade confiscated birds are often left in need of housing and rehabilitation before they can be reintroduced to the wild. With over 20 years of experience, we at the WPT are uniquely positioned to provide veterinary assistance and advice on appropriate care to aid these birds.

Encouraging sustainable alternatives to parrot trapping

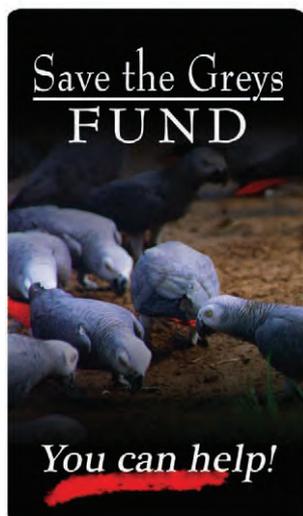
The trade in wild caught parrots continues due to high demand. This trade creates an income for individuals and local communities, which benefit from the trade. When enforcement efforts succeed in halting the trade, alternative sources of income must be sought for these communities to permanently alter their reliance on income from the parrot trade. We will work to help find sustainable alternative sources of income that help protect parrots.

Re-establishing wild populations in suitable areas of their former range

Grey Parrot population declines have been noted in many Africa countries. Although suitable and protected habitat may remain in national parks and reserves often no birds remain. We will work with local governments and NGOs to re-introduce recently confiscated parrots into former range areas to re-establish the species in suitable and protected environments.

Raising awareness for the plight of wild Grey parrots

We will continue our efforts to educate in local communities and by increasing international attention to the plight of these parrots.



We need your help

Your support and caring are crucial to our efforts to save African Greys. We have already made an impact in the rescue and rehabilitation of 1200 confiscated Greys in Cameroon. Please help us to continue this important work - find out what you can do to help!

www.parrots.org/savethegreys

...to learn more please visit [www.parrots.org / savethegreys](http://www.parrots.org/savethegreys) or contact us directly at our UK or US office

Leaving Wild to Save a Species

By Kaitlin Studer



Photo: © bowles/erickson www.amazornia.us

Traveling through the rainforest of Belize on unmarked roads so rutted our heads hit the ceiling of our vehicle, we made our way to the pine savannah only getting stuck in the mud twice. I was part of a team of students and professors in search of the endangered Yellow-headed Amazon (*Amazona oratrix*). Accompanied by Ivan Gillett, the "Programme for Belize" ranger in charge of the recovery program for the Yellow-headed Amazon, we trekked the savannah in search of potential nesting sites among the Caribbean pine trees. Ivan explained some of the problems he faces trying to save this parrot from extinction. We came to a tree that had been cut open with a machete leaving a gaping hole two feet below the nesting cavity entrance. Ivan explained, "This hole was made to grab chicks, pulling them out from the bottom of the nest. If they [the poachers] try to reach into the cavity they risk getting bit." A 2nd hole was evidence that this tree had been poached twice. "Yellow-headed Amazons will start at the top of the Caribbean pine tree and work their way down as each nest becomes unusable," Ivan explained. Poaching has largely contributed to the decline of the Yellow-headed Amazons' population. Yellow-headed Amazons are very popular in the pet trade because they can learn to mimic human voices very quickly. The pine savannah in the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA) is home to the only viable population of Yellow-headed

Amazons left in Belize. This is where I worked for two weeks in December 2006. The goal of this initiative was to learn about the Yellow-headed Amazon so that I could create educational materials for the rangers to distribute on the periphery of the RBCMA. This project was funded by the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity at Defiance College, in Ohio, USA.

Ivan and I returned to the savannah a few days later and walked until we came to a tree that was completely cut down. Last season, during nest monitoring, Ivan recorded three healthy chicks in a cavity in this tree before stopping his survey for the night. When he returned the next morning, the tree had been cut and the chicks were gone. Worse than losing the brood was the loss of this fairly new nesting tree.

Poaching is not the only problem impacting the Yellow-headed Amazon. In some areas of Belize the parrot is being killed because local people consider it a pest. Yellow-headed Amazons eat the fruit from cashew trees, impacting a source of income for many Belizeans. The parrots' population is also threatened by habitat destruction as a result of frequent fires. Pine savannah ecosystems benefit from infrequent natural burns. Repeated burning damages some Caribbean pine trees and also destroys many Yellow-headed Amazon nests. Last year when the Pine Savanna in the Rio Bravo was burned to allow for easier hunting, over 15 Yellow-headed Amazons' nests were destroyed.

During our conversations Ivan also mentioned that poachers sometimes bring children along



Photo: © Kaitlin Studer



Photo: © Robin Kratzer



Photo: © Kaitlin Studer

Caribbean pines (above) in Belize bear the scars from poachers seeking Yellow-headed Amazons (top). Kaitlin Studer, here with project leader Ivan Gillett, wrote a children's book to help raise awareness and local pride in order to protect the amazon.

“That was a pivotal moment for me and the moment I knew I needed to write a children’s book”

because they can reach into the nesting cavities easier than adults. That was a pivotal moment for me and the moment I knew I needed to write a children's book. I wanted to focus on the importance of protecting endangered species and specifically to inspire children to leave Yellow-headed Amazons wild. That night I lay awake crafting the words in my head that would convince young readers to move away from a practice that they had grown up around and move toward protection of the parrots. Finally I got up and began jotting down notes so that I could remember the details of Ivan's account as the foundation for the book.

I started to write the book the day I returned from Belize, even though it was two days before Christmas. I was driven. The section about the poachers was difficult to compile. I had to be sensitive to the possibility that my readers may have family members who are, in fact, poachers. I didn't want to alienate my readers, but I still wanted the text to be informative, truthful, and powerful. I began to contemplate a title that would clearly articulate the challenge that the book was posing to the readers. The goal of the book was to inspire readers to leave wild animals wild, thus the title - *Leaving Wild*. As the book was being edited and printed I found myself thinking about what else I could do to educate the Belizean children about their environment. I knew I needed to get them interested and excited about their own backyard ecosystem, and what lives in it. I knew that engaging people with their environment would lead to an increased appreciation for the parrots and thus reduce poaching. It was at that point that I decided to earmark the proceeds from the sale of my book *Leaving Wild* in the U.S. to create field packs for bird watching. Each field pack would contain binoculars, a field guide to Central American birds, and a water proof notebook.

When we arrived at the research station the following year (December 2007) I was nervous and eager for Ivan to see *Leaving Wild*. He was very pleased with the book and happy that there were enough copies for all of the children in the schools we were going to visit. We

distributed field packs and books and I was able to talk to the children in the schools about the parrot and explain to the teachers how to use the field packs and how to incorporate them in their classes. In addition, I created a Yellow-headed Amazon awareness poster which we displayed in public areas on the periphery of the parrot's habitat. During that trip I also conducted research on the biodiversity of different land use areas to provide information that could be used by the rangers of the Rio Bravo to convince people to reduce the practice of slash and burn on the periphery of the rainforest.

One evening Ivan and I went out with the rest of the team of Defiance College students and professors to see the parrots fly in for the night. Ivan wanted me to talk to the group about the problems the parrots face. I showed them how to look for potential nesting sites and challenged them to find a viable nesting site for the Yellow-headed Amazon. They pointed to the large Caribbean pine tree nearby. As we walked up to it I recognized it as the poached tree Ivan had showed me the year before. As we walked around the tree I explained that the large holes were not made by the parrots but rather by poachers in order to steal chicks from their nest. Their facial expressions were exactly like mine was when I first saw the tree - devastated and almost in a state of disbelief. Several of the students talked to me that night about poaching. They said they had no idea that this was such a huge problem. Seeing for themselves they gained an appreciation for my passion to spread the word and educate people about this serious problem.

The Yellow-headed Amazons' population will not increase, nor will that of any other endangered species, if people are not educated. It only takes one person to make a difference so please help to spread the word to save a species from extinction. And as my children's book ends,

“Always Remember to Leave Wild”

Kaitlin Studer is a senior biology major at Defiance College in Ohio, USA. For more information about her book *Leaving Wild* or her Belize initiative please contact her at leaving.wild@gmail.com



Photo: © Robin Diers



Photo: © Pam Gibson



Photo: © Mary Ann Studer

Every child in three different schools received a copy of Kaitlin's bilingual book *Leaving Wild*. Field packs with birding supplies and awareness posters were also distributed.

Psitta News



Parrotevents

Parrot Behaviour, Training and Enrichment Workshop, 13th & 14th September 2008 - Hayle, Cornwall

Feedback from previous Workshop:
I have just returned from attending the first course for parrot owners run by the World Parrot Trust and Paradise Park Wildlife Sanctuary, and I would like to recommend it to other readers. The 2-day course covered four main topics:

- 1 - Interpreting avian body language
- 2 - Positive reinforcement techniques
- 3 - Problem behaviours
- 4 - Environmental Enrichment

The course was 'workshop' in style, with classroom presentations - discussion of video case histories and some 'hands-on' with the beautiful residents of Paradise Park. The staff were very welcoming and helpful. I came away with many new ideas and many old assumptions challenged.

I would recommend this course to anyone who is serious about giving their parrot the best possible quality of life."

Kerry Wilkins

To book your place for the upcoming training contact Karen Whitley in our UK office or book online at www.parrots.org - tel 01736 751026 email uk@worldparrottrust.org



Parrotnews

"Norwegian Blue" discovered

The fictional dead Scandinavian parrot that an unhappy customer tried to return in a famous Monty Python TV sketch may have a 54-million-year-old real-life ancestor.

An ancient bird found on Denmark's Isle of Mors has already been nicknamed the "Danish blue" in honor of the fictional "Norwegian blue" parrot featured in the 1970s British comedy show.

The fossil—a large wing bone called the humerus—represents the oldest and most northerly remains of a parrot ever discovered, the study authors say. Parrot fossils are scarce, because their small, light bones tend to be destroyed before they can become fossilized.

The discovery suggests that parrots evolved in the Northern Hemisphere before branching into wildly diverse species in the southern tropics. Today no wild parrots live in northern Europe, but the newfound Danish blue would have flown over a decidedly more lush and tropical Scandinavia—one that resembled the habitat of modern parrots.

Source: *Matt Kaplan for National Geographic News, May 23, 2008*

Eclectus Parrots Released

In February 2008, ProFauna Indonesia received a tip about six Eclectus parrots (*Eclectus roratus*) being smuggled from Maluku to Sulawesi. They advised the forestry department which foiled the trafficking attempt. Unfortunately, the government officers did not arrest the perpetrator who claimed that the parrots were gifts, but did seize the birds.

ProFauna believes the man is a professional smuggler since he cruelly crammed the birds into water pipes. Eclectus parrots are protected under Wildlife protection law. Trade is prohibited and offenders will get a maximum of 5-years in jail and Rp. 100 millions in fines.

With funding provided by ProFauna, the government officers released the parrots in a forest in Maluku within a few days. ProFauna also assisted the officers in a four-day post release observation and continues to urge the government to enforce the law in order to curb the illegal trade and deter the perpetrators.

Source: *Profauna News - March 2008*

Surveysays

We invite you to participate in a short survey to help us find out more about our community.

- ✓ Who are you and what matters to you most?
- ✓ What kinds of communications do you find most useful from the World Parrot Trust?



Our goal is to create an active community devoted to saving parrots and that meets your needs for information, communication, and action. Your anonymous responses will go far to help us plan our outreach efforts for the coming year.

Enclosed in this issue of *PsittaScene* you will find a short survey. It will only take a few minutes to complete and return. Better yet, complete the survey online at www.parrots.org/survey.

Thanks in advance for your help and participation!



Toyko parrot rescues himself

Police rescued an African grey parrot from a roof near Tokyo. After spending a night at the station, he was transferred to a nearby veterinary hospital while police searched for clues. He kept mum with the cops, but began chatting after a few days with the vet.

"I'm Mr. Yosuke Nakamura," the bird told the veterinarian. The parrot also provided his full home address, down to the street number, and even entertained the hospital staff by singing songs. "We checked the address, and what do you know, a Nakamura family really lived there. So we told them we've found Yosuke."

The Nakamura family told police they had been teaching the bird its name and address for about two years. But Yosuke apparently wasn't keen on opening up to police officials who said "I tried to be friendly and talked to him, but he completely ignored me."

Source: <http://www.foxnews.com>



Kakapo on display

Thousands of people from throughout Southland were oohing and aahing over six green parrots at the weekend. Southlanders were invited to see the newest additions to New Zealand's small but increasing kakapo population. Only 91 Kakapo, including the chicks, remain.

The Department of Conservation offered a public viewing of Kakapo and about 3000 took the opportunity to see the six parrots at the Invercargill Workingmen's Club yesterday. People waited in queues before being ushered into a room with a glass-fronted enclosure featuring the six young Kakapo surrounded by ferns, tree stumps and flax.

Source: <http://www.stuff.co.nz>

Thankyou

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their support during the last few months when several parrot events took place to benefit the World Parrot Trust.

Living and Learning with Parrots (LLP)

Distinguished behaviourist Dr. Susan Friedman hosted several dozen registered participants in an 8-week online training course focused on teaching the principals of parrot behaviour. Students are urged to donate a minimum of \$50 to a worthy bird cause and the World Parrot Trust was once again the recipient of this generosity. Funds raised exceeded US \$2,000.

Future sessions of the LLP course are scheduled and interested participants can learn more by visiting the website - www.behaviorworks.org.

Phoenix Landing Foundation

On May 10, 2008, this non-profit group, which provides educational programs on proper bird care, hosted a full-day event with guest Steve Martin of Natural Encounters Inc. Proceeds from a silent auction were donated to the Trust and totaled US \$1500.

Conference: Understanding Behaviour

A successful conference held in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada. Forty-five participants from ten US states and 3 Canadian provinces took part in the highly interactive event, which featured operant trainer Bob Bailey, behaviourist Dr. Susan Friedman, PhD, and positive reinforcement trainer Phung Luu. The event, hosted by Pat and Lorne Phillips, also featured a raffle with proceeds being donated to the Trust. Funds raised totaled CDN \$800.

ThePerchStore.net

This online retailer of parrot products kindly donated a percentage of all their sales to WPT for the months of April, May and June 2008. Donation received totaled US \$785.

Online

Main: parrots.org

Languages: Dutch, Finnish, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish

Japan: worldparrottrustjapan.org

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Parrots in the Wild

