Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

PsittaScene

Twenty Years Saving Parrots

www.psittascene.org

August 2009

Volume 21 Number 3

Psitta Scene

World Parrot Trust
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall,
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www.parrots.org

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Production: Karen Whitley

Printed by Brewers of Helston Ltd
www.brewersgroup.com

fromthechairman

Back in the 1960's, when the trade in wild birds was rampant and captive breeding was in its infancy, my father, Mike Reynolds, looked beyond the horizon and saw looming threats to the survival of many parrot species. He later founded the World Parrot Trust to save rare parrots from extinction and help captive birds live long, healthy and happy lives.

This year has been a very proud one for us as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Trust, and the second anniversary of the EU trade ban - an event which seemed so unlikely to happen in those early days but which, I'm happy to say, my father lived to see.

Last month, I had the great pleasure of meeting up with many of you to celebrate these milestones and enjoyed your company for a couple of wonderful days at Paradise Park in Cornwall.

Looking back over the past two decades, it is impossible to retrace every one of our many steps in a few short pages – but hope you enjoy reading the highlights in our retrospective, which starts on page 9 of this issue of *PsittaScene*. We have now supported the recovery of dozens of parrot species in the wild, helped to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of captive birds around the world, and spared millions more wild parrots from the cruelties of the wild bird trade.

As the Trust has grown in size and scope, we continue to look to the future and our focus remains on what is best for the parrots.

We thank you for coming along on all or part of this journey with us, and hope you share our pride in what we have accomplished together.

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Alison Hales
Chairman

onourcovers

FRONT Scarlet Macaws (*Ara macao*) in a dramatic descent on Tarcoles Beach in Costa Rica. Historically ranging from the southern United States to southern Brazil, this species is now confined to pockets of its former range. See Saving Mayan Macaws, page 13. © Jim McKendry

BACK A reason for hope: Maroon-fronted Parrots (*Rhynchopsitta terrisi*) return to the El Taray Sanctuary, an area destroyed by forest fires in spring of 2006. The reserve, located in the Sierra Madre Oriental mountains of Mexico, was the largest known nesting area for this endangered species. © Steve Milpacher

Photo: © Adrian Azpiroz

Who's Who? & How We Know
Genetics & Conservation

By Adriana Rodríguez-Ferraro

The heat was stifling on that May afternoon. I thumbed through the instruments in my toolbox as my assistant and I sat on the curb and waited. We had driven for hours through dusty arid scrub on bumpy roads to this classic little Venezuelan town. Suddenly we were surrounded. Everyone was talking at once. Most of the group of about 40 people were children who screamed and asked a lot of questions. Immediately I saw that they had what I wanted – parrots. But these were not any parrots; these were Yellow-shouldered Amazon Parrots.

The Yellow-shouldered Amazon (*Amazona barbadensis*), is restricted to dry habitats in an otherwise humid environment. All existing populations are threatened by either habitat destruction or illegal poaching, or the combination of both factors. Populations are isolated from each other by the more humid habitats they do not use. This situation makes them highly susceptible to local extinctions because once a population is extirpated it is very unlikely that wild individuals will re-colonize the area.

I was there to examine whether the remaining populations of the Yellow-shouldered Parrot have any type of contact among them; that is, if individuals are still able to migrate and breed among populations. The answer to this question is essential to the long term protection and management of the species. To answer it I needed to study the parrots' genes. The movement of individuals from one population to another is very difficult to observe and record in any other way.

Not long ago, genetics and conservation biology were completely separate fields within biology. Nowadays genetics is an important tool in the conservation of endangered species. My study involved genetic analyses of a special type of DNA (mitochondrial DNA), and it was based on the premise that if a population has been isolated for a long time, the individuals living in that area will share the same DNA, which will be different from the DNA of individuals living in other areas. Conversely, if breeding occurs among members of different populations, then a similar DNA composition will be present in those populations.

The Yellow-shouldered Amazon is restricted to 7 existing populations in Venezuela and nearby islands. Inhabiting arid pockets in an otherwise tropical area means populations are isolated from one another. Sampling these populations to determine their relatedness will help researchers determine whether they breed among populations.

Photo: © Francisco Encinas

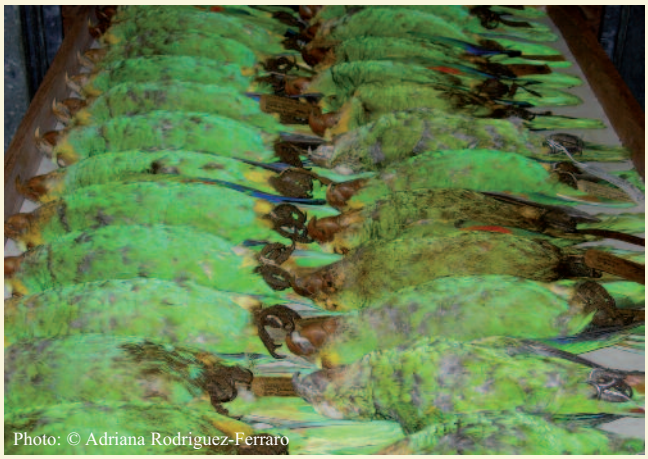

Photo: © Adriana Rodriguez-Ferraro

DNA had to be extracted from parrot tissues, so my project had two phases: the fun one, in the field where I collected the samples, and the tedious one, in the laboratory, where I extracted the DNA and conducted the analyses. During three breeding seasons (2005-2007) I visited five of the 6 existing populations of the Yellow-shouldered Amazon in northern Venezuela (the other one is in Bonaire, belonging to the Netherland Antilles); two in the western part of the country (Falcón lowlands and Paraguaná Peninsula), and three in the east (Píritu, Araya Peninsula, Margarita Island). In all these areas I collected blood and two tail feathers. Sam Williams and Rowan Martin (University of Sheffield, UK) kindly sent me blood samples of parrots from Bonaire, and Miguel Lentino (Phelps Ornithological Collection, Venezuela) allowed me to take samples from museum specimens from La Blanquilla. In this case, the sample consisted of a tiny bit of toepad.

The collection of the samples in the field was very interesting and entertaining. From past experience on the Yellow-shouldered Amazon project on Margarita Island I designed my project such that samples would be collected from parrot chicks while they are still in the nest but more than 2 weeks old. To get good and reliable results, I needed to sample at least 20 individuals from each population and only one chick per nest. Using samples from siblings would introduce a bias since they share the same mitochondrial DNA. So, I had to find at least 20 nests in each area. This design was no problem on Margarita Island where all the nests are known. I simply went to the main breeding area with the project field assistants, they climbed the nest trees quickly, took one chick, passed it to me, I took a small amount of blood from the wing vein and two growing feathers from the tail, and then the chick was put back in the nest. With their skill and experience I collected 10 samples in a single morning.

However, it was not as easy in the other areas where Yellow-shouldered Amazons live. In these areas I contacted local people who were familiar with the natural areas and the parrots. In all cases they helped me find some nests, but we were unable to locate 20 different nests in each area. As I needed as many samples as possible for my study, I tried a different approach. I decided to use adult parrots kept in captivity if the parrot came from nearby areas. Keeping parrots as pets is not illegal in Venezuela, where wildlife law is very ambiguous. Trade is illegal but possession is not. In each town I went door by door explaining my project and asking people for permission to take blood from their pet parrots. They saw me as the weird outsider woman looking for parrot blood and started asking a whole array of questions, such as "Is my parrot going to be hurt?" to "Are you studying AIDS in parrots?" Some people simply denied my request whereas others were really excited to collaborate in a scientific project. Some sent me, always escorted by a child, to the house of parrot owning relatives or friends. Many times I found myself sitting in the living room or the backyard of a family I just met as they offered me coffee and told me the story of their pet: where it was found, who brought it home and when, its favourite food, and which words it could repeat.

EVEN AFTER PARROT OWNERS agreed to help, I still had to collect the sample. Parrot owners will understand that this was not easy! Most of the parrots kept as pets in Venezuela have had their flight feathers cut on one wing and roam free in and around the house. Sometimes the parrot was on a tree in the backyard and it had to be taken by its "favourite" person into the house. In most cases that person had to be found somewhere in town! In fewer occasions, the parrot was in a cage, whose size ranged from tiny to enormous, each presenting its own difficulties.


Photo: © Adriana Rodriguez-Ferraro


Photo: © Adriana Rodriguez-Ferraro


Photo: © Adrian Azpiroz


Photo: © Adriana Rodriguez-Ferraro


Photo: © Adrián Azpiroz

Blood samples for DNA analysis were taken from chicks in wild nests where possible. When that best-case-scenario wasn't feasible, samples were taken from pet birds in local communities and, in some cases, from museum specimens.

Working with adult parrots was difficult because they got stressed very easily, which never happened with chicks. I collected small samples very quickly to limit distress in the parrot and its owner. One of the most enriching experiences of my project was to meet so many very nice people who did everything possible to help even though they did not know me and probably did not understand why I needed parrot´s blood!

A VERY SAD PART of all my travels was the trade I witnessed of this species. The fact that most houses have at least one parrot and that our visit to that small town so quickly attracted a crowd of people and their parrots shows that Venezuelan authorities are not taking enough measures to stop the trade. Even though in most of the towns the selling process is very secretive and people were suspicious when I asked about the parrots, it was not difficult to get information about who was selling parrot chicks and where. In Falcón chicks are sold very openly at the sides of the main road from Coro to Maracaibo, so it is evident that local authorities do nothing to stop this threat.

AFTER ALL THE FUN I HAD COLLECTING THE SAMPLES, I spent a year in the laboratory conducting the analyses. Instead of parrots and interesting people I was surrounded by tiny test tubes, sophisticated machines, and expensive (and even in some cases) toxic chemicals. The results from the analyses indicated that each population of the Yellow-shouldered Amazon has its own genetic identity, and it is most evident for the ones in Falcón lowlands and the island of Bonaire. This finding confirms the idea that the populations are isolated both geographically and reproductively, even though 3 out of 54 (5.5%) of the genotypes identified in this study were shared among different populations. The parrots of Margarita Island have the lowest genetic diversity of all populations.

> The results confirm that these populations are isolated by geographic barriers and do not interbreed.

THE YELLOW-SHOULDERED AMAZON has experienced population declines across its distributional range in the last century and some populations (i.e., Aruba, Netherland Antilles) have gone extinct. The results derived from this study may be used as baseline information to develop management efforts focused on this species. Any initiative to manage this parrot should strive to maintain the genetic identity of each population. Thus, all the populations must be protected in order to preserve the genetic potential of the species as a whole. Additionally, this information may be used to guide releases of confiscated parrots, translocations, and even reintroductions of individuals in areas where the Yellow-shouldered Amazon is locally extinct.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am especially grateful to A. Azpiroz, F. Encinas, A. Tejeda, A. Medina, and local guides for helping me during fieldwork. Funding for this project came from the World Parrot Trust, the Association for Parrot Conservation, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Neotropical Bird Club, the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, the Rufford Foundation, the Whitney R. Harris World Ecology Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and the American Museum of Natural History.

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Amazon Territory

Article and Photos
By Rowan Martin

Years of watching Yellow-shouldered Amazons on Bonaire has led to some exciting and unexpected encounters. The birds sometimes engage in extended aerial confrontations when territory is disputed.

Over three years investigating the breeding system of Yellow-shouldered Amazons (*Amazona barbadensis*) on the island of Bonaire I was lucky to spend hundreds of hours watching the behaviour of pairs around their nests. Time and again I marvelled at how aggressive these wild parrots could become towards other parrots. At other times I would be shocked; parrots can get downright nasty.

Almost every day I saw interactions between nesting pairs and "others." Whether these other parrots were hapless passersby or intruders intent on taking over a nesting cavity, I could never be sure, and things never got too serious as long as a respectable distance was maintained (50 m – 150 ft or more). Pairs would display to each other, emitting guttural gurgles accompanied by tail-fanning and wing-raising, revealing splashes of red under-wing feathers.

At times the tension visibly increased. Individuals would fly at and displace others from their perch (often a cactus on Bonaire), and proceed to land in the exact spot of the displaced bird. From my human perspective this behaviour looked like a symbolic assertion of dominance. You could almost hear them: "This is my patch, do you hear me? Mine!"

Now and again things would really escalate with pairs physically pursuing intruders away from the nest area. They would fly in circles, backwards and forwards, up and down, each trying to outmanoeuvre the other. These dogfights were accompanied by guttural squawks that reverberated around the cliffs. Occasionally claws and beaks grappled in mid-air clashes; pulled feathers would gently float to the ground.

> "Occasionally claws and beaks grappled in mid-air clashes;

The Bonaire Lora project was recently featured in Audubon Magazine.

One bird displaces a rival on a favoured prickly perch. It may not look very comfortable but often it's the best option available in this arid climate.

After inspecting a nest one day I found myself right in the middle of such a dispute. The parrots involved were apparently so preoccupied with each other that they didn't notice me sneaking up with my camera, or perhaps I was the least of their worries. These guys had a serious fight on their hands...

Why fight?

The big puzzle is to figure out what exactly they are fighting over. A lack of suitable nest sites is often assumed to be an issue for parrots, but actually identifying how nest site availability limits breeding is fraught with difficulties. In some populations there is little aggression between pairs despite many pairs not breeding. On Bonaire the limestone cliffs are riddled with holes and many, which appear suitable for nesting, go unused. Indeed some cavities that produced three of four chicks one year were left empty the next.

On Bonaire, Yellow-shouldered Amazons nest in loose aggregations, perhaps as a result of using social cues to identify good nesting spots. It could be something akin to sheep syndrome in humans – if others are nesting there, then it should be a good area; or, taken further – if others are successfully breeding in that nest cavity then maybe it's worth fighting for. Studies of other birds have found that by manipulating social cues pairs can be tricked into nesting in areas they didn't previously use.

We still understand surprisingly little about why parrots use one nest site but not another. If we can get closer to an answer we may be armed with a powerful conservation tool for boosting parrot populations the world over.

pulled feathers would gently float to the ground ”

See http://www.audubonmagazine.org/features0907/greentravel.html

World Parrot Trust staff, trustees, members and supporters came together for 2 days of 20th anniversary celebrations in June/July 2009

Clive, Jill and Paradise Park's Louise and Mark discuss enrichment items created during the workshop

Sam Williams shares his research

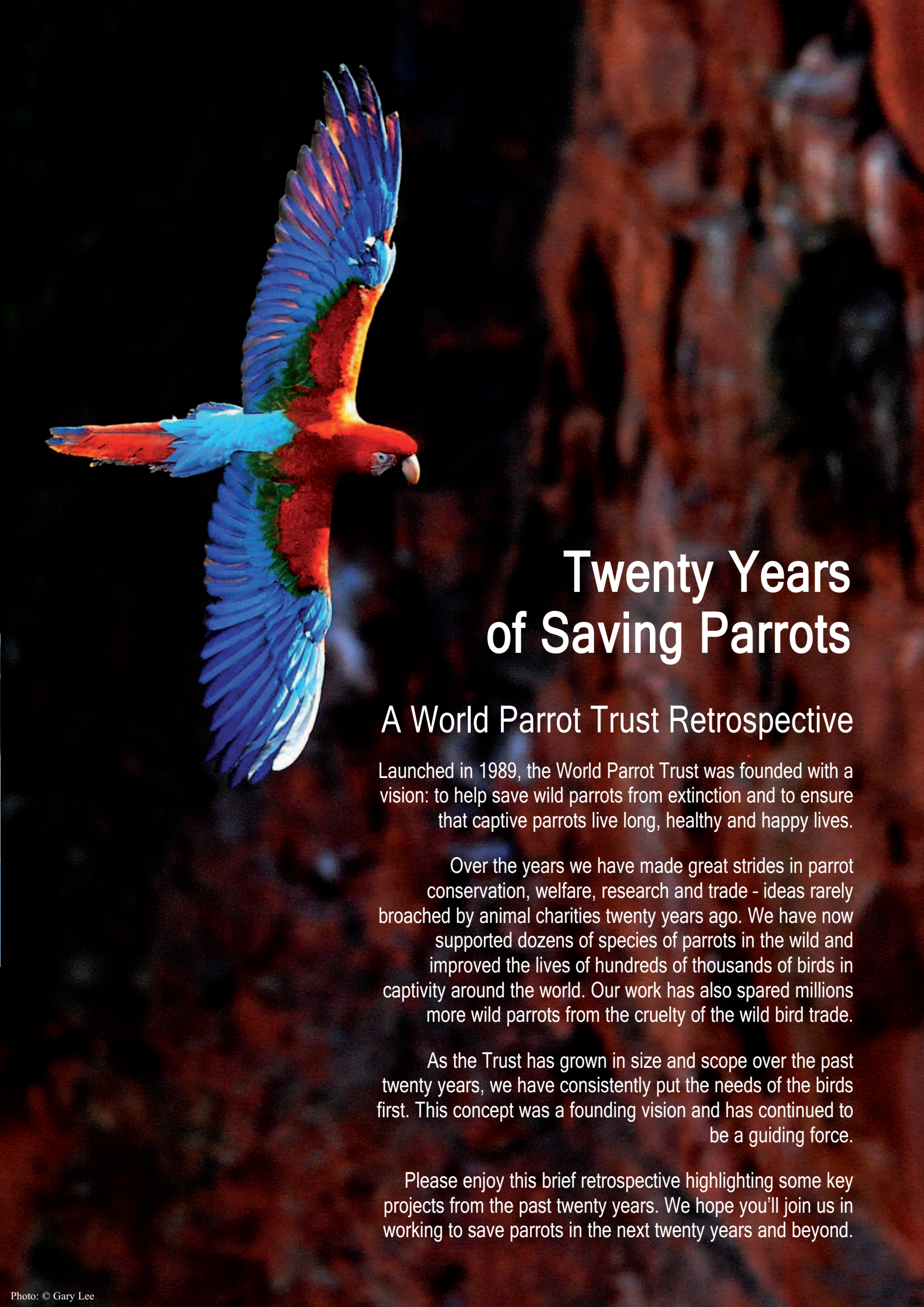
Maureen and Billy (Galah) help support WPT

Dot gets a preening

Social time for Ria, Ruud, Louise, Cristiana, Chris and Diane (back)

Olly the Green-wing Macaw in the Free Flying Bird Show

James enjoys feeding the Lorikeets



Twenty Years of Saving Parrots

A World Parrot Trust Retrospective

Launched in 1989, the World Parrot Trust was founded with a vision: to help save wild parrots from extinction and to ensure that captive parrots live long, healthy and happy lives.

Over the years we have made great strides in parrot conservation, welfare, research and trade - ideas rarely broached by animal charities twenty years ago. We have now supported dozens of species of parrots in the wild and improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of birds in captivity around the world. Our work has also spared millions more wild parrots from the cruelty of the wild bird trade.

As the Trust has grown in size and scope over the past twenty years, we have consistently put the needs of the birds first. This concept was a founding vision and has continued to be a guiding force.

Please enjoy this brief retrospective highlighting some key projects from the past twenty years. We hope you'll join us in working to save parrots in the next twenty years and beyond.

Conservation

Hope Restored for Echos: 1991-present

By the 1980s the worldwide population of the Echo Parakeet had been reduced to 12 birds or less. The World Parrot Trust took this seemingly un-saveable species as our 1st major project. With the financial backing of the Trust and others, Dr. Carl Jones and his team on Mauritius have since raised the population to about 330 individuals. In 2007 the species was down-listed from "Critically Endangered" to "Endangered" – an astounding feat and a first for any species of parrot.

Photo: © Dennis Hansen

The Parrot Action Plan: 2000-2004

The enormous task of crafting a Parrot Action Plan fell to some of the most accomplished minds in the parrot world. Underwritten, orchestrated and published by WPT and IUCN in 2000, this publication profiles the world's rarest parrots, identifies the issues facing their survival, and provides recommendations for their conservation. The plan has guided researchers and conservation managers in designing suitable strategies to save parrots globally.

Rarest Wild Macaw: 2001-present

The wild population of Blue-throated Macaws may number less than 200 birds with fewer than 10 pairs known to breed each year. This key WPT project began in 2001 and over the years has resulted in improved nest sites and chick survival. Each year we have fielded a team to carry this project forward. We continue to study every aspect of the macaws' lives and refine techniques such as actively protecting nest sites from poachers and predators and designing and installing artificial nest-boxes to encourage breeding. We have also been working with the Natural Encounters Conservation Fund to develop captive breeding efforts to help rebuild the wild macaw population.

Photo: © Gonzalo Daniele

Thick-billed Parrot: 2002-present

WPT has supported Monterrey Tech University's translocations, radio tracking, conservation planning, and nest-box construction for the endangered Thick-billed Parrot for many years. This important work has shed light on the problems facing this beleaguered species of the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains in Mexico, and has helped focus current and future efforts to save it from extinction.

Too many to count: 1989-present

Since its inception in 1989, the Trust has also supported vital conservation and research programs aiding: **Conures:** Patagonian, Golden-plumed, White-necked, Yellow-eared, and Cuban; **Macaws:** Red-fronted, Lear's, Hyacinth, Great Green, Spix's, Scarlet, and Blue-winged; **Amazons:** Mealy, Black-billed, Lilac-crowned, Yellow-billed, Yellow-headed, Yellow-naped, Green-cheeked, Mealy, Cuban, Red-spectacled, Red-necked, Red-tailed, Imperial, St. Lucia and St. Vincent; **Lorikeets:** Kuhl's, and Ultramarine; Red-vented; **Cockatoos:** Red-tailed Black, Goffin's, Citron-crested and Moluccan; **Other parrots:** The flightless Kakapo, Black-cheeked Lovebird, Yellow-faced, Cape, Red-faced, Meyer's, Grey and Seychelles Black Parrot.

Research

The Vibrant Palm Cockatoo: 1996-2000

The rare and flamboyant Palm Cockatoo is found in Queensland and New Guinea. WPT funded research by Steve Murphy to assess population, diet preferences, reproduction and man-made threats facing this species. Ground-breaking studies with all-day nest watches and in-nest, infra-red video surveillance revealed the Palm Cockatoo to be a highly specialized feeder with a low breeding frequency, compared to other parrots in the same area.

A Golden Opportunity: 1998-present

The Golden Conure is threatened by poaching for the pet trade and habitat loss in eastern Brazil. Since 1998 the WPT has supported research on this stunning and uniquely social species by 3 different biologists – Carlos Yamashita, Toa Kyle and Thiago Orsi. Their body of work has included mapping nest sites, observing and documenting group behaviour, and analysing blood samples to determine the degree of relatedness among members of small flocks and has greatly aided our understanding of the species' social biology. The Trust has raised over $100,000 (US) for Golden Conure research and conservation by establishing the Golden Conure Survival Fund, the brainchild of WPT-USA Administrator Glenn Reynolds.

The Caribbean's Gem: 2004-present

The Yellow-shouldered Amazon survives with small groups on four Caribbean islands and small populations on the mainland of Venezuela. We recently funded a genetics study by Adriana Rodriguez-Ferraro to determine the relatedness among these isolated populations. We have also supported biologists Sam Williams and Rowan Martin in their Ph.D. studies which have focussed on the reproductive biology of this little-known Amazon on the island of Bonaire where it is threatened by intense poaching and drought pressures. As part of an awareness program we supplied "Happy Healthy Parrot" brochures in

Photo: © Luiz Claudio Marigo

Photo: © parrotwatch.org

Dutch to island residents and helped procure rings (bands) to facilitate a government run amnesty program to monitor the island's captive parrots.

Searching... 1989-present

WPT has also supported searches for populations of reportedly extinct species. Sadly, a 1998 survey found the Glaucous Macaw to be extinct in the wild, and extensive searching for the Red-throated and New Caledonian Lorikeet turned up no new sightings. Through these searches we gained new insight into how a parrot species may become extinct and how to prevent further loss. Most recently, we have supported biologist Toa Kyle in studying the elusive Blue-headed Macaw in the remote rainforests of Peru.

Advocacy

Power to the people (and parrots)!

In Mexico, the Trust partnered with Defenders of Wildlife to launch an educational programme featuring posters and comic books depicting endangered parrots in an effort to halt the local bird trade. In Costa Rica we are supporting an awareness program in schools to teach children the value of parrots in their community and to stop the local trade there.

On May 31st, 2004 we organized World Parrot Day in London. This day of quiet demonstrations, banners and the antics of Superparrot (aka Nick Reynolds, of Paradise Park) culminated in a march from Trafalgar Square to Downing Street where we handed over a petition with 33,000 signatures calling for a ban on the importation of wild caught birds into the European Union. Eventually the petition's signatures reached 40,000, and it played an integral part in the ban that followed. Ultimately over 230 non-governmental organizations and thousands of individuals joined the fight – a feat of international cooperation that has now spared millions of birds annually.

Sustainability

Encouraging local people: 2000-present

Another World Parrot Trust hallmark is our use and support of innovative means to protect parrots and aid people who share their environments. Trapping parrots is sometimes a means of supporting a meagre income. Unfortunately it is almost always unsustainable and when the wildlife disappears from a certain area, both people and ecosystem suffer.

In Guyana where local people trap and sell parrots into the pet trade they also carve elegant parrot sculptures out of locally produced natural balata, or latex rubber. WPT is helping to support a sustainable industry by selling these detailed figurines. Doing so helps replace the income trappers and their families formerly derived from harvesting wild parrots.

The Trust has recently embraced a similar project in Peru to help indigenous people protect their parrots and their forests. In partnership with a local organization, Peru Verde, WPT supports the creation of Arpilleras (appliquéd fabric wall hangings) made by over 100 indigenous artisans. The hangings, marketed and sold by WPT to the international parrot community, depict life in the rainforest for both man and animal. The concept is simple, yet effective: Peru Verde buys crafts from the community's artists and the community protects their local parrot clay licks while learning, and passing on, the importance of these areas to macaw conservation.

Education

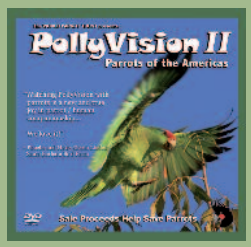
Creating awareness

Educating local people about wild parrots has remained central to our efforts and has taken a wide variety of forms.

In the early 90's we created four Parrot Education buses in Central America. Paul Butler of RARE originally approached us with the idea of an educational bus for the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. It would travel all over the island, visiting schools and other locations, telling the story of the endangered St. Lucia parrot and what could be done to save it. WPT's Paradise Park team, led by David Woolcock and Nick Reynolds, refurbished a bus, fitted it with dynamic educational displays, and shipped it out on a banana boat to the island's forestry department. It was a great success, and resulted in similar buses being provided for the neighbouring islands of Dominica and St. Vincent, and also for use in Paraguay. As a result, Paradise Park and the World Parrot Trust were awarded the "Zoo Conservation Award for Excellence" by BBC Wildlife Magazine.

Enriching lives

Created with behavioural stimulation and education in mind, the DVDs Pollyvision I and II and Where the Greys Are are some of the Trust's most popular items. Featuring remarkable footage of parrots in the wild, the DVDs are as educational and enriching as they are entertaining – to parrots and humans alike.



Educating parrot caregivers

The breadth of our outreach has grown with the times. In 1989, the World Parrot Trust's inaugural year, we launched our quarterly magazine *PsittaScene*. Now in its 20th year, we haven't missed an issue. *PsittaScene* goes to WPT members and supporters and is used by parrot researchers and enthusiasts worldwide to stay informed about the latest research, projects and news from the parrot world.

Thousands of copies of our "Happy Healthy Parrot" brochure, a short and snappy guide for new and aspiring parrot owners, have been distributed worldwide.

These outreach efforts have expanded to the Internet where parrot enthusiasts and caregivers learn from our monthly email newsletter, *Flock Talk* and from WPT's new 7000 page educational website at www.parrots.org. Combined, these electronic and print resources enjoy a readership of more than 250,000 people per year.

Welfare

The Trade Ban

Realized in July 2007, the Wild Bird Trade Ban in Europe was launched and led by the Trust. The unsustainable harvests, disease risk and high mortality of birds in the trade made this a clear priority for the Trust and kept us focused even when it seemed impossible. The ban now saves over four million wild birds each year and has dramatically reduced the risk of avian diseases entering importing countries.

Having realized this goal, we have now shifted our trade work to a country-by-country approach. We are now developing key working relationships with regional organizations in Southeast Asia, Mexico, Africa and South America. By targeting key markets accountable for much of the remaining bird trade, we hope to end this cruel and destructive practice in the few remaining locations where it still occurs.

Singing the Blues

The trade in wild caught Blue-fronted Amazons has had a devastating effect on the species. Our research has determined that governing practices regarding the collection of these parrots are frequently violated and we have informed officials in the US and the UK that harvest numbers are not sustainable, refuting previous claims. We will continue to support the gathering of clear documentation of the trapping practices to provide importing countries with up-to-date, accurate and independent information.

Photo: © Erickson/Bowles www.amazornia.us

For the Greys

Our Save the Greys Fund started in 2008 to help end the trade in wild caught African parrots, to encourage sustainable alternatives to parrot trapping, to rehabilitate and release confiscated birds, to re-establish wild populations in suitable areas of their former range, and to raise awareness of the plight of African parrots.

In Cameroon, Grey Parrots are a special focus in the illegal trade in wildlife. In 2008, WPT worked with the Last Great Ape Organization (LAGA) and Limbe Wildlife Centre to provide emergency assistance for over twelve hundred wild African Greys that were being illegally smuggled out of the country. We supplied urgently needed funds and veterinary help in the first days of the crisis and ongoing help in subsequent weeks of rehabilitation and treatment. In the end more than seven hundred of the birds were released back into the wild.

20th YEAR
WORLD PARROT TRUST

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The Future...

With the help of members and supporters from around the globe the World Parrot Trust has consistently accomplished conservation, education and advocacy on behalf of parrots for over two decades. We have achieved lasting results for the preservation of parrots, people and ecosystems and look forward to building on these successes in the next twenty years and beyond.

Photo: © Gary Lee

SAVING Mayan Macaws

By Colum Muccio

SAVING PARROTS CAN BE RISKY BUSINESS. Ask Hyron Peñante. Hyron is an officer of the Guatemalan Green Police. He was shot by poachers as he confiscated two recently-hatched Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) chicks in 2003. Luckily, Officer Peñante survived his wounds and even attracted international recognition for his heroics, receiving the Disney Conservation Hero Award in 2004. The chicks became part of a breeding program that will contribute to the conservation of these birds, which are highly endangered in this region.

THE STUNNING SCARLET MACAW is one of the most emblematic species of the Mayan forest and figures prominently in Mayan mythology. The Mayan culture is one of the oldest and proudest in the world and has its roots in the lowland forests shared by the modern-day states of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. This lowland culture mysteriously disappeared around 800AD – a result usually attributed to mismanagement of natural resources, famine or climate change. Now, the Mayan Macaw (*A. m. cyanoptera*), the subspecies of Scarlet Macaw in this region, is facing an eerily similar fate.

Scarlet Macaws face all-too-common threats from encroaching agriculture and habitat loss as well as more sinister pressure from poaching and nearby narcotics trafficking.

The Scarlet Macaws of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize are referred to as Mayan Macaws in reference to the historic Mayan culture in this region. These birds make up one of the few remaining genetically viable populations left in Central America.

THIS POPULATION IS TRULY PRECARIOUS and its protection is given added urgency when you consider how many populations have already disappeared. This "shifting baseline" phenomenon refers to the gradual decline in a species or ecosystem that occurs mostly unnoticed over time but which leads to an alarming result if viewed from a historical perspective. Early European explorers reported large, raucous macaw flocks flying overhead in the northern Guatemalan region of Peten as well as on the Pacific coast plain. Today, however, things are much different. Ironically, the Scarlet Macaw is not considered critically endangered because there are pockets of stable populations in Latin America. Yet, according to estimates by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), only 500 individuals survive in the tri-national area and that number is steadily declining.

TO MEET THIS IMMINENT THREAT, conservationists, originally from Guatemala, Belize and Mexico came together in 2000 to form the Macaws Without Borders or Guacamayas Sin Fronteras (GSF) consortium. Funding cuts have resulted in the withdrawal of several of the original members of the consortium and a resulting decrease in cross-border collaboration. Still, GSF Guatemala continues strong with the joint collaboration of WCS, the Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Association (ARCAS – a Guatemalan NGO), Aviarios Mariana (a private breeding facility), and the Guatemalan government's National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP).

THE THREATS FACING THE SCARLET MACAW and the other wildlife of the Mayan forest are many and varied. Habitat loss is a serious problem. The Mayan Macaw nests almost exclusively in the "cantemo" tree, (*Acacia glomerosa*) a species that grows near rivers or lakes – areas first targeted by illegal land invaders for their slash and burn agriculture. These large emergent trees often reach 40 meters (130 ft.) in height and form cavities that are ideal for macaw nests. Unfortunately, Africanised bees, forest falcons and kinkajous often predate or displace macaws. Though they usually don't reach the crowns of the trees where macaws nest and feed, fires set by slash and burn agriculturalists convert vast tracts of land in the Mayan forest to savannah each year.

NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN THE AREA is a force to be reckoned with and can only be dealt with by the Guatemalan army and police. These gangs often move into an area with "their" people and "give" them tracts of land and assault weapons in exchange for protection of clandestine airstrips. Newspaper reports claim that one local drug lord has control over 20,000 hectares (49,000 acres) primarily in protected areas in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (MBR). Vast areas of the Mayan forest are off-limits to conservationists because of these cartels. Research teams have even been kidnapped and harrassed. Together with land invaders, human smugglers and an all-pervading frontier mentality, the question of Peten's overall governability is openly questioned.

LOCAL "GUACEROS" OR MACAW POACHERS continue operating in the MBR despite: limitations on cross-border trade posed by international anti-trafficking conventions; threats to the poultry industry and human health posed by wildlife-borne diseases such as avian flu, West Nile virus and Newcastles Disease; and, the macaw's precarious status in the region. These guaceros stake out and claim active nests. When the eggs hatch they remove the chicks and transport them to market. Guatemalan authorities do a relatively good job of trying to control this traffic, but rumors that macaw chicks can fetch US$300-$600 (Q2,500 – Q5,000) on the black market continue fuelling the illegal trade.

Captive breeding may help augment the wild population in the future. Extensive education in local schools is already helping macaws as children educate their parents to leave macaws wild.

GIVEN THE CRITICAL STATUS OF THE MACAW in the region, WCS organized a workshop in Peten in November 2008. Macaw experts from the U.S., El Salvador, Peru and Guatemala came together to formulate a detailed strategy to optimise GSF's limited resources to save the remaining Mayan Macaws. Environmental education was pointed out as key component in the overall strategy. This fact was born true when a local guacero, pressured by his daughter and the director of the local school, was convinced to leave a macaw nest with chicks in peace and allowed the chicks to fledge. WCS and ARCAS will continue their environmental education efforts throughout the MBR, especially focusing on strategically important communities near nesting sites. Combined with these educational activities, ARCAS and CONAP continue efforts to control wildlife trafficking. Each year ARCAS receives 2 to 4 birds seized from traffickers at its Wildlife Rescue Center.

MOST LIKELY, SCARLET MACAW NESTS have been stripped of their chicks on an annual basis for the last several decades. Given this lack of recruitment of fledglings into the wild, biologists fear that the remaining breeding population is quickly aging its way out of reproductive viability. In response, workshop participants suggested experimenting with techniques to increase recruitment of the Mayan Macaw population. One technique that was discussed was removing and hand-feeding second or third chicks from wild nests. These chicks usually cannot compete with their older siblings and end up starving to death. Another technique discussed was the reinforcement or augmentation of the wild population by releasing captive-bred birds. ARCAS and Aviarios Mariana are currently breeding macaws for these possible future population reinforcement activities. Of course, these birds have to be carefully screened to ensure that diseases are not introduced into the wild.

WHATEVER IS DONE, it is absolutely crucial to protect the roughly 30 active wild nests remaining in the MBR. This is becoming an increasingly difficult task given the instability in Peten and calls for close coordination between NGOs, CONAP, the police and army. WCS will continue its nest monitoring and predator control efforts in the Laguna del Tigre park, focusing principally on one important nesting site in El Peru. ARCAS will contribute to provide veterinary expertise for these efforts. For the control of Africanised bees, the non-toxic pesticide Permethrin will continue to be used. For the control of forest falcons, double-chambered artificial nests will be used, and video cameras have been installed in nests to monitor predation (See http://www.wildlandsecurity.org/el_peru.html for videos of nest predation). Together with ARCAS, WCS hopes to establish a volunteer program to bring highly qualified volunteers to monitor and protect wild macaw nests and to assist in population reinforcement and environmental education activities.

HELP US ENSURE that the Scarlet Macaw doesn't go the way of the lowland Mayan culture and that it remains a living symbol of the Mayan forest! If you'd like to participate or contribute in the conservation of the Mayan Macaw, or if you'd like to participate in the nest monitoring program, contact us at arcas@intelnet.net.gt.

Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) range

from the FORUMS

EB Cravens is a regular expert on parrots.org. He brings over 20 years of experience with more than 75 parrot species to your most pressing questions.

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

From Rodney J Semones
Virginia, USA

I have had my 7 year old Grey Sparkle for 2 years now. Sparkle will not bathe. She is terrified of baths and spraying. I have tried allowing her to take a bath at her leisure. I have tried taking her into the shower with me to no avail. I have even tried giving her leaves of lettuce with lots of water on it and she will have nothing to do with it.

She keeps her skin in great shape through preening and her skin is not dry. I just worry she needs a bath. I am at ropes end on this one. Does anyone have any ideas that might help Sparkle get over her fear of baths? Any help at all would be appreciated.

Photo: © Darlene Parker

From EB Cravens
Hawaii, USA

It has been my experience that many African parrots will not bathe in their water dish and if not trained young, can be afraid of hoses or spray bottles. Your lettuce leaves attempt was on the right track, but a more positive way to bring out your Grey's instincts would be to get a good sized, thick leafy bough of some soft-leaved tree – not oak for example, but more like elm or poplar or plum. When she is accustomed to perching in the branches or being near them on her perch, get a spray bottle filled with warm water and spray the leaves near her but not on her. Concentrate on feet level and spraying a VERY LIGHT mist up in the air to sprinkle down on the leaves and a bit on her head and back. Make imitations of her most joyous sounds while you are doing it and go about it very patiently. If she backs off, stop misting her and just do the leaves until they are soaked. Then go away and let her react. This procedure has coaxed many of my timid bathers to begin romping through the wet leaves on their own.

If you take her into the shower, just put her up on a wet stable towel on the shower curtain pole and let her watch you and soak in the damp warm air and the humidity – even that is good for her. She may eventually become comfortable enough that you could gently splash her a bit and get her used to water as nothing to fear. Again choose a happy "shower noise" to show that this is supposed to be fun!

Good luck and keep us posted on her progress.

your LETTERS

From Barry Fass-Holmes
San Diego, CA

Do the authors of the phylogeny study have evidence addressing the question of whether Spix's Macaw is more closely related to other macaws or to conures? If so, which is it?

From Tim Wright
New Mexico State University

Our latest phylogenetic trees suggest that the Spix's Macaw is in a clade that also contains some of the other genera also termed macaws, including *Ara*, *Orthopsittaca* and *Propyhurra*. In general though, the terms conure and macaw are of fairly limited taxonomic value, as a couple of different clades contain both conure and macaw genera. Even some of the typical genera appear to be faulty; primary among these is the genus *Aratinga*, which has members in a couple of different clades and will probably require taxonomic revision.

Stay tuned as we continue to sort out these interesting family relationships!

From Phoebe Linden
Santa Barbara, CA

Congratulations on latest issue of *PsittaScene* which causes me to be behind schedule due to becoming engrossed in phylogeny and its story ("All in the Family: The Parrot Family Tree," pp 8-11); I could not put it down. I want the [parrot family] tree tattooed on my forearm, or perhaps made into a T shirt. Great work.

My flock loves the cover image by Hugo Cobos! Lots of eye pinning and flaring when I showed it to the hens.

"Amazon Voices," pp 4-5 is an informative article with one comment that prompts response: "These parrots are good learners, and in captivity, they can learn to mimic." Yes, captive amazons mimic, but this statement is limiting because they also create novel noises and multiple riffs which can be embellished and changed up for truly inimitable results. Plus, some noises our beloved amazons make are definitely NOT heard elsewhere on this planet: freaky variations that may start solo but end up with 6 - 8 voices. Pure creative energy, vocally expressed.

Like their wild cousins, captive parrots create vocal variations that help foment new relationships and stretch social boundaries.

This is not a criticism of the article or research in any way, but merely a friendly parry from the vocal non-imitative flock who keeps me captive.

From Jamie Gilardi
World Parrot Trust Director

Many thanks! We're always thrilled to get feedback on *PsittaScene*. I think in the case of the amazon article, these researchers probably haven't had the long term experiences with captive birds that you have. In any case, I'm sure they'd agree with your comments and more.

In addition to the creativity you mention, I'm always deeply impressed when parrots seem to understand human social interactions with such sensitivity ... especially when they know a punch line is coming and start to laugh before the people do!

We got a lot of comments (all positive) about the phylogeny story ... Great stuff!

Dear Alison,

I am writing to thank you for the lovely 20th anniversary celebrations. It truly was a delightful two days.

Every minute was total pleasure. The lectures and a crowd of folk who obviously care for and love parrots made the whole experience one of sheer delight.

Then include the lovely Paradise Park setting where between lectures we could wander amongst the enclosures and enjoy the birds and watch the flying displays; add in the coffee breaks, lunches with real Cornish food and a superb barbecue backed by the local jazz band; and top it off with access to a gang of real professionals who have made parrots their mission and their life.

I never made a better investment in my life. I shall never forget WPT20. Thank you all for the experience.

Yours sincerely
Nancy Hurworth, Hampshire, UK

send your letters to joanna@worldparrottrust.org
or to the most convenient of our postal addresses listed on page 19

Psitta News


Photo: © Luiz Ortiz Catedral


Photo: © The Dominion Post

Parrotevents

Parrot Lover's Cruise

October 24 to November 1, 2009

Join parrot enthusiasts on an 8 day fund-raising cruise aboard the Carnival Freedom sailing from Ft. Lauderdale to Mexico, Costa Rica and Panama.

☎ Carol Cipriano, 570-226-2569
baldmantravel@gmail.com
www.parrotloverscruise.com

Parrotnews

Kakapo News

As anticipated, the 2009 Kakapo (*Strigops habroptilus*) breeding event proved to be the most productive since management began in the early 1980's. This can be attributed to an exceptional masting (fruiting) of rimu trees on Codfish/Whenua Hou Island, (New Zealand) coupled with the fact that the number of breeding-age females has almost doubled since the last major masting/breeding in 2002. Twenty one breeding-age females existed in 2002 compared with 38 now. From January – April 2009 a team of up to ~35 Department of Conservation staff & volunteers has been on the island to manage/monitor breeding. On Sunday 8th March an egg in "Margaret Marie's" nest hatched – bringing the global Kakapo population to 100!! The post-breeding tally is 124 birds!

Don Merton


Photo: © Don Merton

A Conservation First

The return of Red-crowned Parakeets or Kakariki (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*) to Raoul Island after 150 years is sparking hopes of similar success stories closer to home. The noisy birds were once common on the remote island about 1000 kilometres north of New Zealand but fled after settlers in the 1800s brought pests such as rats, cats and goats. Between 2002 and 2004 the Conservation Department carried out a $1 million pest eradication project, targeting cats and rats. Now the pests have been eradicated and Kakariki are back. The natural recolonisation from a satellite source population is a first for parrot conservation and the first colonisation of a parrot species after removal of invasive predators.

Paul Easton - The Dominion Post,
http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/

Egg Smuggling Racket Cracked

The eggs of endangered Australian Glossy Black Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) are among those sought by international collectors. An international crime syndicate based in northern Victoria is making millions of dollars smuggling endangered and exotic bird eggs in and out of the country. The syndicate, whose members include well-known licensed bird keepers, uses couriers wearing specially-modified vests and underwear to carry up to 500 exotic bird eggs into Australia every month, with a courier able to carry 30 to 50 eggs at a time. Customs national manager for investigations Richard Janeczko said wildlife smugglers preferred bird eggs to live animals because they were easier to smuggle.

Mark Russell,
http://www.theage.com.au/

Poisoned Kaka released

A gravely ill young female young Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) found paralysed and near death in a Wellington, New Zealand gutter has been nursed back to health and returned to the wild. The bird was found by two passers-by, and taken to the animal hospital at Wellington Zoo where she showed signs of neurological damage but no obvious injuries.

Veterinarians suspected heavy metal poisoning but luckily, the x-rays showed no metal fragments in her intestinal tract. The bird bounced back to full health and was freed in the 225-hectare sanctuary two weeks later.

The Kaka, a native parrot that is fascinated with manmade objects may have become sick after munching on items such as galvanised iron, lead nails and lead flashings, which are commonly found on roofs.

Dave Burgess - The Dominion Post
http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/


Photo: © aaardvaark | Creative Commons 2.0

Photo: © Howard Morris

1st Grade Parrot Lovers

Each spring 1st grade teacher Jenna Morris shares her passion for birds with her students at Hugo Reid Primary School in Arcadia, CA. She starts by bringing her pet Cockatiel, Coco, to school every Friday. From Coco's visits students develop a deep love for birds. (Coco even goes out for fire drills!)

Birds become the focus of many activities as students learn to do basic research, to create a computer slide show, make comparisons, write bird math story problems and do descriptive writing assignments. They sketch and paint birds, do a shape art project and make clay sculptures of birds. Students also learn about animal adaptations and research endangered birds. Eventually, after a thorough process of research, reporting and discussion the students vote for one bird species to support for Earth Day. When the votes are tallied, the excitement is high!

For the past 3 years, Mrs. Morris' class has chosen a parrot as their special bird. They have raised donations, typically by doing extra chores at home, and supported 3 different World Parrot Trust projects: the Thick-billed Parrot this year and the Great Green and Blue-throated Macaw projects in previous years. They have a lot to be proud of and they pass on their knowledge and good citizenship towards endangered birds by displaying oil pastel sketches and interactive writing posters at their school Open House at the end of the year.

World Parrot Day - India

Environment Society of India President S.K. Sharma organized a World Parrot Day celebration on 30th May 2009 in Chandigarh, India. The festivities included a painting and quiz contest, installing nest boxes, and planting mango and guava trees. Speakers focused on protecting and restoring a local sanctuary and urging people to cooperate with wildlife authorities against the illegal trade in parrots and other birds. About 50 students and teachers marched through the city and sanctuary with signs that said "Parrots Need Help – Save the Sanctuary."

Photo: © S K Sharma

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Parrots in the Wild