Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Psitta Scene

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Cayman Islands Parrots

www.psittascene.org

May 2010

Volume 22 Number 2

Psitta Scene

World Parrot Trust
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall,
TR27 4HB, UK.
www.parrots.org

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Printed by Brewers part of the Martin Luck Group
www.martinluck.co.uk

fromtheeditor

The World Parrot Trust of today is a product of the information age – connecting researchers, authors and our members in a variety of latitudes and languages. We may never meet or even speak to our *PsittaScene* contributors in person. They tell us their stories electronically; firing documents, photos, questions and answers in invisible arcs from Peru and Australia, Brazil and beyond. Karen and I then pull things together between the South of England and the Midwestern US as if we were across town or across the room.

The world is indeed shrinking both in terms of our connections to each other and our footprint on the land. Human development has impacted parrots in a variety of ways. Our ingenuity has also given us more ways than ever to connect, share information and mobilize efforts to help these captivating birds.

Technology connects us to our extended family of representatives and translators working in other countries. These volunteers now translate *PsittaScene* into 7 languages every issue. It's heartening to know that so many people care so much about parrots. We love bringing their stories to you.

Technology also allows you to have a voice and we want to hear it! What do you like this issue? What surprised you? What questions do you have or clarifications do you need? Drop a note by email; visit us on Facebook; open a discussion on our parrots.org Forums; or contact us in person directly or through your WPT representative of choice (page 19). We always look forward to your input!

Joanna

Joanna Eckles
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onourcovers

FRONT A blackened palm is evidence of fire during an extremely dry breeding season last year. Most parrots, including this pair of endangered Blue-throated Macaws (*Ara glaucogularis*), skipped breeding altogether. This season they hatched one of two eggs and the population overall grew by 14 birds (see page 4). © Gonzalo Daniele.

BACK All over Brazil birds confiscated from the illegal pet trade languish in rehabilitation centers because there are few programs in place to return them to the wild. Thankfully the efforts of a few committed individuals are changing that trend. This radio-collared Blue-fronted Amazon (*Amazona aestiva*) samples a wild fruit just after release (see page 6). © jdgilardi.

> The World Parrot Trust's objective for the critically endangered Blue-throated Macaw is to maximize the reproductive output of wild pairs....
> Mother of Invention, page 4

Mother of Invention

Some say "necessity is the mother of invention". A clear necessity and the World Parrot Trust's objective for the critically endangered Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*) is to maximize the reproductive output of wild pairs. Our recovery plan is quite straightforward as well – to identify the species' limiting factors and respond to each with solutions. During the past breeding season (2009/10) we believe we have reached our maximum level of both manipulation and monitoring.

One of the first limitations identified for Blue-throats was a lack of suitable nesting cavities. We responded by introducing nest-boxes. After several attempts, we finally identified different nest-box models that the birds would accept. We have tried vertical and horizontal boxes; wooden and PVC; with large entrance holes and small ones. Macaws showed interest in almost all models, but they laid eggs mostly in wooden, vertical boxes with large entrance holes. Since 2007, 4 pairs have used nest-boxes in seven different attempts. Now we have set up boxes in all the areas where Blue-throats are breeding. Nest-boxes are safer than natural nests as they don't flood and experience lower predation rates. We still have problems with bees, but we have found that bees abandon the nest-boxes, especially those made of PVC, after a short period of 2-3 months.

The causes of nest failure have included flooding, predation and botflies. We have almost solved the flooding problem by identifying the most risky nests and using drainage holes at the bottom of the cavity. In some nests we have installed roofs to keep water out of the cavity. No nests have flooded since 2008.

Predation has historically been the main cause of nest failure. It has also been historically hard to deal with because of the difficulty in positively identifying the predators. During the last breeding season we installed anti-predator defenses in every nest. Those defenses included installing metal flashing around tree trunks and pruning back nearby branches. Thanks to the volunteer's efforts, we also maintained a high level of daily monitoring. In order to identify the visitors and potential predators during the night, this season we installed surveillance and trap cameras. In some nests, we used surveillance cameras inside the nests. Those cameras revealed intense activity of other animals at Blue-throated Macaw cavities. The most common neighbours are cockroaches, frogs and bats.

[1] A 2 month old Blue-throated Macaw chick is quickly and carefully weighed, measured and checked over while parent birds [2] look on. [3] A 2-year old juvenile remains with its parents and suppresses their breeding during the last season. [4] An adult Blue-throat perches on the edge of a nest cavity in a burned palm stump. [5] This is a family of five – a rare sight only documented for the first time on this project in January 2008. All five remained together as a family group until the arrival of 3 more eggs in January 2010. All 3 of those chicks hatched and fledged this season.

Photo © José Antonio Díaz Luque

Blue-throated Macaw

Ara glaucogularis

By Igor Berkunsky

In order to maximize the parent's ability to defend their nests we also sought to reduce the time they needed to be foraging far from the nest. We did this by offering bunches of motacú palm nuts near some of the active nests. This was the first year in the history of Blue-throat nest monitoring with zero predated nests.

Botflies are still a problem. The only nest we lost this year was because the two chicks were infested early by botflies. Fortunately we had a veterinary volunteer with us and she was able to conduct necropsies. She found botfly larvae inside the body cavity of the two dead chicks which died very young – five days after hatching. We saw botflies in 2007, but they attacked the chicks at 45 days old. Because the chicks were older and larger, it was possible to remove the larva without hurting the chicks. Unfortunately in this case, the damage was faster and more serious due to the chick's small size.

Another important cause of low reproductive output is brood reduction. Brood reduction occurs when weaker, later hatching chicks die because they are out competed by the first chick. It is a common consequence of hatching asynchrony in parrot species. Unfortunately, to raise only one chick per clutch is not really helping the recovery of the Blue-throated Macaw. Since 2007, and thanks to our manipulation, no chicks have died because of brood reduction and we have increased the average number of fledglings per nest from one to two. As a result of daily monitoring, we now identify those chicks that are not growing normally and help them by hand feeding. In some cases we need to hand raise chicks for one week.

During the last three years, 20 new Blue-throated Macaws have successfully fledged. We are still seeing most of the fledglings from the 2007/08 season. In half those cases the young are still with their parents, and those parent birds have not yet returned to breeding.

Unico, the lone surviving chick from 2008/09, is in captivity due to a wing deformity and is still waiting for a companion. He has some injuries on his breast because of his flight difficulties. He has problems landing and continues to receive extra help and training. Our veterinary volunteer takes care of Unico and has been focusing on improving his diet by offering motacú fruits.

All of these actions are making a difference for the Blue-throated Macaw. In the last two breeding seasons we have lost only one nest per season. We will continue to use these techniques to maximize fledgling success in the future. With management actions in wild nests working well, now is the time to incorporate more conservation actions. During the last two years we have been intensively working on the repatriation of some individual Blue-throats from the US to Bolivia. We are still working through the paperwork to obtain final authorization and we are hoping to move the first birds before the end of the year.

We also need to better understand how this species is using the habitat. The Beni savannahs remain flooded for six months every year, making it impossible to follow the flocks during the non-breeding season. As a result, we have no information about bird movements. To know where the birds are during the rest of the year will help us to propose protected areas for Blue-throats. We hope to start a monitoring project to track the birds' movements during the breeding and non-breeding season.

By the Numbers (2009-2010)

- 12 Blue-throat pairs monitored
- 2 Pairs that haven't bred in 2 seasons due to their 2-year old fledglings (above)
- 8 Nests with eggs
- 20 Eggs laid
- 4 Eggs that didn't hatch
- 16 Chicks hatched
- 9 Chicks fledged
- 5 Chicks due to fledge at last check from four nests
- 2 Chicks died from botfly infestation
- 8 Seasons WPT has been studying, protecting and supporting wild Blue-throats

The World Parrot Trust Blue-throated Macaw project has been on-going since 2002 and has resulted in a wealth of knowledge about the species' limitations in the wild and the most effective ways to bolster their population.

>> www.parrots.org/bluethroats.

Back to Nature

Throughout the country of Brazil, a growing number of people and organizations have been releasing parrots and other birds which have been confiscated from trade. In some cases, these are relatively common species such as the Blue-fronted Amazon (*Amazona aestiva* - left), and in other cases the species are globally threatened such as Red-browed Amazons (*Amazona rhodocorytha*) and Gold-capped Conures (*Aratinga auricapilla*).

The two biologists interviewed here, Carlos Yamashita and Vincent Kurt Lo, along with their colleague Luiz Francisco Sanfilipo, have spearheaded much of this work as part-and-parcel of enforcing trade laws in Brazil.

Carlos and Vincent have been friends with each other and with the Trust for decades. Their innovative and committed work on behalf of the birds of Brazil has positioned them as leaders in the effort to rehabilitate and release confiscated birds - getting these charismatic native species back to nature.

Support for this work was made possible by generous donors to WPT's FlyFree program.

>> www.parrots.org/flyfree

◀ In March 2010 Blue-fronted Amazons from the Brazilian Wildlife Center Associação Bichos da Mata (ABM) were released in southern Brazil in the seasonal wetlands known as the Pantanal.

Insights from Carlos Yamashita

Translation by Soraya Lysenko

How and when did you get involved in working with confiscated birds?

Even though I have lived since childhood in the city of São Paulo, I always enjoyed being in the field, among wildlife. Since I was young I have done volunteer work with birds and traveled as much as I could to observe them in the wild.

Working with confiscated birds is part of my work as an employee for the Brazilian environmental agency – IBAMA (Instituto Brasileiro de Meio Ambiente e Recursos Naturais Renováveis), where I have been working since just after graduation from Universidade de Brasília in the early 80´s. After 3 years as the Director of the National Park of Pantanal, I coordinated a new program banding migrating birds in Brazil. The program was to study the bird's migration and help in their conservation and still exists today. In 1987 I left the program and began work in several conservation programs and law enforcement. The aim of those programs was not only to enforce conservation laws but also to analyze the status of the species, their biology and the best way to manage them in wild. Some of the most significant projects focused on populations such as the Hyacyinth (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*), Lear's (*Anodorhynchus leari*) and Spix's Macaws (*Cyanopsitta spixii*).

Do these confiscated birds come from individual's homes or from shipments?

IBAMA is a federal entity and therefore, its focus is on birds confiscated as part of illegal shipments. Depending on the season and region the number of birds tends to be very high. However, in Brazil we have several different levels of public entities in charge of enforcing the environmental policies of the state and the cities. In the case of individual birds at homes, the state and local police will confiscate a bird when it is reported to them.

How long does it take to get a healthy bird ready for release?

It will depend on the species. For example, passerines may take less than a month, up to 3 or 6 months. On the other hand, the rehabilitation of a macaw will take at least 3 months or even years depending on the bird's feather condition and health.

Are you able to keep tabs on the birds after release? Do they tend to stay close?

Most of the birds will stay close to the release aviary for a certain period of time. According to what I have seen so far, I would say that 20% start to explore the area and roost outside the aviary immediately after the release. Some leave the area immediately.

Monitoring and keeping tabs on released birds is a very difficult and expensive process. We officially started releases in 2005 by launching a technical protocol with the minimum requirements for the creation of a release area and for the actual releases. In that same year, IBAMA coordinated the release of birds of several species to an area in Bahia (northeast of Brazil). Since then, IBAMA is trying to keep accurate data on the releases and their results.

It is also important to mention that one of the requirements of the technical protocol is that each of the release areas has to send regular reports to IBAMA reporting the number of birds released and tracking data.

Are releases a useful tool for both endangered and common species?

Intensive trapping of the most commonly traded species (*Amazona aestiva, Amazona amazonica, Ara ararauna*) can lead to "empty forests". In view of that, why not "fill in" those forests by releasing confiscated parrots?

Also, releasing "common species" is a good way to develop methodologies that can be employed for endangered species. Through these procedures we can learn more about the biology of the species – their habitat, the environment, landscape improvement, the demography, colonization, extinction and other factors that may impact their survival.

IBAMA meeting São Paulo

On March 8th 2010, the wildlife authority for the state of São Paulo (IBAMA SP), Associação Bichos da Mata (ABM) and the World Parrot Trust (WPT) held a workshop in São Paulo to bring together all those involved in rehabilitating and releasing parrots to present their work, and share their knowledge and ideas. Much of the day focused on the specific methods used to rehabilitate and release birds as well as the monitoring of the bird's survival and reproduction after release.

From the WPT were our Brazilian representative, Andre Saidenberg, and Director, James Gilardi, who presented the work of FlyFree partners in Indonesia, India, Africa, and Central America. The *PsittaScene* team (Joanna Eckles and Karen Whitley) worked with Andre to format all the content for a 64 page publication of articles on releases and related topics. Andre took on the monumental task of translating all the English articles into Portuguese in time for the meeting.

In all, the meeting was extremely well attended with many stimulating exchanges throughout the day. Opportunities were explored to develop initiatives of this kind for new species in new areas.

▲ A crowd assembled prior to the release of the Amazons, including the head of IBAMA and Head of Tourism for the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso. Araras Ecolodge (owner in center facing L) played a key role in making the release a success.

◀ A pair of Blue-fronts at the release site in the pantanal. Some of these birds have been in rehab for 8 years and strong bonds have already formed among pairs like this one.

▼ After release, birds adjust to their new surroundings. Notice the antennae from a radio collar on the bird on the left. The other bird clearly displays the temporary non-toxic ink used to enable visual tracking after release.

Have infectious diseases been a problem for the confiscated and released birds?

Infectious diseases among confiscated birds are caused by poor nutrition and bad sanitary conditions and cause the rehabilitation of the birds to take more time and cost more. Treating the bird properly will control the diseases in general. It is a matter of making a choice between treating or other methods, like euthanasia. In my view, euthanasia is a way of closing your eyes to an important problem – an easy solution that may not work for long-term. Losing individuals through euthanasia may have strong impacts on the species that are survivors of a long evolutionary history.

Parrots do have a very complex ecological history and most of the Neotropical species are very local, meaning that most of them are very specialized in terms of food as a consequence of their habitat. They are relics of a paleoclimatical and vegetational succession. They have lost their habitat due to human pressure and faced a strong decline in their population due to trapping.

Considering the disease question for the released birds, I imagine Hyacinth, Indigo and Glaucous Macaw flocks foraging on the ground in the savanna landscape shaped by Giant Sloths and Mastodons, beetles feeding on Megafauna manure that contains large seeds, bacteria, algae, viruses plus the "pristine" fauna of nowadays. In such a very complex environment, parrots have survived many waves of diseases that appeared and disappeared in the long run – and the birds are still among us.

My conclusion is that diseases are an important consideration but have to be balanced against the good potential that releases have to increase the metapopulation that works as a source of parrots. Furthermore, releases can also call attention to habitat restoration.

Parrots are long-term tree seed predators and among them, few species are grass or herb seed predators. Living in a successional phase vegetation for a long term, parrots belong to long time evolutionary radiation as seed predators and therefore they have an energetic high cost. At least, we need to have some respect for those old inhabitants of the planet.

Can you foresee releases of any new parrot species in Brazil?

Releasing birds depends on the availability of release areas. Many important factors must be taken into consideration for each species. Does the species occur in that particular area? Is the area protected? Is there cooperation of the owner and local population? Even for a common species like the Blue-fronted Amazon, selecting a release area can sometimes be difficult.

We will work to release any of the species in captivity if the right release area can be found. This is especially true for some endangered species like the Vinaceous Parrot (*Amazona vinacea*) that lives in highland of mixed forest of Brazilian Pine. In this particular case we have birds ready to be released but so far we haven't found a good area for them.

Trade of goods had been part of humanity and that's also true for the New World: the Mayan, Anasazi trails, South America pre-Incaic city-states to Inca Empire, Inca trail, Aruak/Caribean through dugout canoe colonization of what is currently called the Caribbean Sea from the Orinoco River to South Florida.

Considering that trading activities led humans to populate every single corner of the globe, we can find interesting interactions between parrots and mankind, some of which are positive. Human-made palm groves in the ancient site known as "Black Earth" are now occupied by Hyacinth Macaw (Southern Amazonia and Paraguay basin) and by the Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*) in the Llanos de Mojos. The human sites benefited both species. Human colonization has also had negative impacts, as with the Red-fronted Macaw (*Ara rubrogenys*). During the Inca Empire almost all creek areas were transformed into crops and the macaw's feeding site disappeared in the dry valley.

Humans can work as "regulators" – good or bad – and it depends on us which choices or ethics we are going to make or follow for the future of the parrots that have a very long history to teach us.

Endangered Blue-throated Conures ▲ (*Pyrrhura cruentata*) from the Atlantic forest near Rio de Janeiro. A group released in the 1970's were the first confiscated parrots ever returned to the wild in Brazil. Another release is currently being planned.

WPT's Brazilian representative Andre ▶ Saidenberg tracks three radio-collared Amazons post-release. Knowledge of the survival and movements of released birds is invaluable to the success of future programs.

Rehabilitated birds progress through ▼ multiple stages of learning and conditioning and eventually into the pre-release aviary at ABM.

Insights from Vincent Kurt Lo

Translation by Andre Saidenberg

How would you summarise the problem of trade in Brazil?

Brazil is a privileged country with many native parrot species. However, Brazil is currently unable to protect this rich biodiversity. We have been witnessing constant poaching of some of the severely endangered and endemic species such as the Red-browed Amazon (*Amazona rhodocorytha*), Red-tailed Amazon (*Amazona brasiliensis*) and Vinaceous Amazon (*Amazona vinacea*) among others (page 11). Although one cannot see the immediate impact of these captures because population censuses may show population stability, the implication for future generations is a silent threat.

Poaching is affecting the recruitment of younger generations and these populations are ageing. Without our notice they are getting closer to collapse due to the absence of younger individuals. We hope that another example such as the Spix's Macaw is not going to be necessary to exemplify this crisis. Partnerships with experienced NGOs of other countries, like the World Parrot Trust, are welcome and necessary to turn this problem around.

How do the Brazilian government and NGO's work together on this problem?

Only government authorities can confiscate illegal wildlife. Unfortunately the government rehabilitation centers don't have the capacity to receive and rehabilitate the enormous volume of confiscated parrots. Just in the Sao Paulo state more than 30,000 wild animals are confiscated every year in addition to 80,000 in other parts of the country. A great number of these are parrots. Therefore NGOs are important both in receiving confiscated animals but also for those that are found injured or delivered by citizens. Unfortunately environmental authorities in Brazil have not yet made the release of confiscated animals a priority.

Do the local people get excited about parrots being released near them?

Many landowners are aware of the importance of releasing parrots back into nature and they have been very supportive even if they know the parrots might attack their crops. They like to give interviews, and are very proud when environmental authorities visit their properties. Release areas must be carefully chosen and the landowners must be contacted in advance to make sure they don't rely on crops for most of their profits. Usually there is great involvement of the landowners, relatives, and neighbours to protect the released birds, and report sightings of birds or poachers. IBAMA, as an institution, is a strong symbol that attracts attention and media reports.

Have there been problems with released birds getting shot or trapped?

Shooting cases are rare. Most frequently we deal with people capturing the birds as pets. On a few occasions released birds have been captured because they were still getting acclimatized with their surroundings and still had not completely lost their "pet traits". However, supporters of the release project have denounced these actions and the people responsible.

In Brazil, how well known are these rehabilitation and release efforts?

The vast majority of the population knows it is illegal to keep wild animals. However, there are no strong incentives to release confiscated birds and news about the rehabilitation and release efforts is not widespread. Releases occur mostly due to local or personal initiatives of a few technical staff, rehab centers, and NGOs in a few states. There is not a national policy to motivate and develop releases.

Rehabilitation and releases in Brazil still suffer many barriers and prejudice. These efforts lack resources or very basic structure most of the time. There is little consistency in procedures and some confuse releases with the introduction of invasive species. There has also been strong pressure in the last few years by veterinarians over an excessive fear of spreading disease.

We have an urgent need for greater involvement from universities and zoos. While releases are an important conservation and awareness tool, the general public is unaware that they are a possibility. People who own illegal wildlife often state that their animals cannot survive in the wild. Some magistrates accept this argument and decide to leave the animals with the people who are actually breaking the law, without knowing about the possibility of rehabilitation and reintroduction. Poachers are also unaware of these projects.

▼ Sun Conures (*Aratinga solstitialis*) are another endangered species among many at ABM. These birds have the potential to be released in the Brazilian state of Roraima.

Do these efforts deter people from capturing and trading wild birds in Brazil?

Many efforts have had some effect including recent initiatives by São Paulo state, release areas created by IBAMA, reintroduction of endangered species, publishing results, compiling information in journals, and organizing meetings with staff from rehabilitation centers and release areas. There have been TV reports, more release areas being registered, people voluntarily delivering their animals for release, and more effective enforcement actions. However, returning animals to the wild is still a very slow process when you consider the number of confiscated animals.

Unfortunately, under Brazilian law, people involved in environmental crimes are rarely arrested. The maximum penalties are fines, but arrest is unlikely and therefore the criminal process is converted into community service. This ends up being an incentive to continue capturing and selling wild animals. Preventive education work is still necessary to deter people from desiring wild animals as pets. There are not strong incentives for environmental awareness programs by the environmental department from the Brazilian government, which end up fighting only the consequences and not the primary cause. We are trying to develop a campaign to fight the wild animal trade but this is only through the personal initiatives of a handful of staff technicians. This is why we need partnerships with NGOs and private institutions.

I would like to congratulate the World Parrot Trust for your special concern for this fascinating family of birds – the parrots – and for your support of projects in many countries. This work goes beyond international boundaries in a common goal of protecting parrots. It unites countries and professionals of different disciplines to alert authorities, media and the public about the need of each individual to do their part – not buying wildlife, denouncing the illegal trade and creating incentives for watching birds in their natural habitat.

These stunning Vinaceous Amazons (*A. vinacea*) are slated for release in the Atlantic forests – possibly in the same area as the *Pyrrhura cruentata* (p. 9).

Except for the Blue-fronted Amazons, all of the species in these pictures are globally threatened and were confiscated in trade shipments. These Red-tailed Amazons (*A. brasiliensis*) are being rehabilitated for release south of São Paulo.

ABM has already successfull released over 100 Red-browed Amazons (*A. rhodocorytha*) and their methods are slowly being implemented on a wide variety of species in Brazil and abroad.

CAYMAN PARROTS
a future hanging in the balance

Article and Photos
By Kristan D. Godbeer

Photo: © Hillary Horvat

I came to the Cayman Islands as a postgraduate student in early 2007. One of my first experiences involved surveying parrots on Grand Cayman – ten days parrot-watching on a tropical island – it was a dream come true! But when we happened across a new housing development, our survey team received a sharp reality check.

Although the pristine primary forest appeared strong and permanent, the ancient pinnacled limestone floor and tall robust trees were easily overwhelmed by the relentless gouging of a bulldozer. We caught sight of a pair of parrots feeding their young on the limb of a lofty fig tree over-hanging the recently wounded landscape. I couldn't help but wonder what the future held for these birds. Parrots have inhabited this forest for millennia, but how much longer will they continue to thrive?

The Threats > Deforestation

During the last thirty years, Grand Cayman has seen rapid population growth and development; around half of the 197 km^2 (76 mi^2) island habitat has now been modified. The northern and eastern forests are the current strongholds of the parrot, but only about 7% of tropical dry forest is protected.

In 2004 Hurricane Ivan caused flooding over much of Grand Cayman. This provided the impetus for a new real estate market to develop on Cayman Brac with homes rapidly appearing on the elevated plateau. New roads and sub-divisions have further penetrated the forest over the subsequent years, threatening fragmentation of the interior. One has visions of deforestation akin to Grand Cayman, but Cayman Brac is much smaller, just 38 km^2 (15 mi^2). Again only a small portion (ca. 5%) of forest is protected, through National Trust for the Cayman Islands (Trust) ownership of the Brac Parrot Reserve.

The Cayman Islands are located in the Western Caribbean and consist of three low lying tropical islands: Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac, and Little Cayman. The Islands have seen rapid development and significant loss of primary habitat. They are home to two distinct parrot populations: the Cayman Parrot (*Amazona leucocephala caymanensis,* **far left**) of Grand Cayman and the Cayman Brac Parrot (*A. l. hesterna,* **left**) . While concerted efforts have been made to safeguard these birds, they continue to decline. Environmental degradation, poaching and lack of effective enforceable environmental legislation undermine their protected status and threaten their continued existence.

Presently, a development in the Cayman Islands does not legally require an environmental impact assessment. No law protects any species of flora, and primary forest continues to be cleared on all three islands.

>Conflict with Farmers

For visitors and wildlife lovers, parrots are colourful, charismatic birds, and a joy to encounter. For some residents however, the parrots are noisy, mango devouring garden pests. The most influential and vocal protests emanate from local fruit farmers. During the last mango season, which incidentally coincided with a general election, farmers once again began airing their frustrations. These complaints were manifested in news articles, in which some farmers called for compensation or culls. One suggested catching the parrots and putting them in a large aviary, where tourists could go to see them. These articles came as no great surprise to those of us familiar with this highly contentious issue. But a few astonished and alarmed eyebrows were raised in the international parrot community and my inbox was quickly filled as a result.

Conflict with farmers is a major conservation concern. Despite being protected by law, parrots continue to be shot. One farmer openly admits to shooting over one hundred each year. The "parrot issue" has become a political hot potato, and to my knowledge, to-date no one has been prosecuted for shooting. The incumbent government is honouring its election manifesto of increasing road access to inaccessible property for farmers. Opening up of otherwise inaccessible primary habitat to farming will, in-turn, lead to further conflict with resident parrots. There is a real sense of urgency in local conservation circles. A solution which serves the interests of local farmers, and improves protection and preservation of the parrots, must be agreed.

Any farmer, anywhere in the world may be expected to show animosity towards a pest devouring the "fruits of their labours". Considering that Caymanian farmers have to overcome very adverse conditions in order to grow their crops, it comes as no surprise that the frugivorous parrots are often viewed with contempt. To be fair, some farmers appear to be prepared to try non-lethal tactics. Scaring devices have been employed in the past, and a local wildlife rescue group is currently experimenting with a new sonic scare device. Parrots, however, are intelligent birds, and farmers will have to be very proactive in varying the stimuli, if habituation is to be avoided.

Caymanian farmer, Mr. Otto Watler, a well known local advocate for parrot preservation, has a very different outlook to his aggrieved peers. He accepts there will be crop losses, but he feels that nature provides, and therefore he can afford to "give that little bit back to nature, so that my children and grandchildren will have the parrot in their skies".

Despite the parrots' tarnished reputation, there still exists a degree of affection for them. After all, the parrot was voted the National Bird of the Cayman Islands. They also appear on numerous Cayman Islands commercial media and tourist souvenirs. Most visitors hope to see a real one.

A Cayman Parrot guards its nest entrance in a dead Black Mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*) which readily form coveted nest cavities. These parrots also use old woodpecker nests in Royal Palms (*Roystonea regia*) which grow along the edge of seasonally flooded forest, and they nest in interior dry forest and shrubland. Brac Parrots however, are restricted to nesting in xeromorphic forest, where the West Indian Cedar tree (*Cedrela odorata*) provides cavities. This tree is declining, possibly due to an introduced insect pest. Furthermore, a lack of woodpeckers on Cayman Brac may also reduce cavity availability.

> Nest Poaching

Many captive Cayman parrots can be seen on the porches of private homes. Apparently it is an old tradition to own a Cayman Parrot. Traditions can often be viewed as rights, and any threat to tradition has the propensity to stir up deep-rooted issues. But the Cayman Islands have changed. What may have once been common practice is no longer sustainable. People recognise that their parrots deserve protection and, since 1989 it has been illegal to interfere with or possess one. Nevertheless, wild parrot chicks continue to be taken from their nests. Parrots in captivity before the current protection law was enacted have been grandfathered in under the law. This along with unregulated captive breeding has complicated enforcement. Therefore, the onus remains on the legal authorities to prove a parrot was taken from the wild, making the law in its current state practically unenforceable.

> Hurricanes

The Cayman Islands are frequently hit by hurricanes. In 2004 Hurricane Ivan devastated Grand Cayman. In 2008 both Gustav and Paloma hit Cayman Brac. Paloma developed to category four (144 mph), caused severe structural damage to many homes and impacted natural habitats – stripping most of the vegetation of its foliage, and felling many trees.

Fortunately, the Department of Environment (DoE) began monitoring the Cayman Brac parrot population the summer prior to this event. Subsequent surveys confirmed a population decline of around fifty percent, leaving 250 -300 birds. The Brac parrots have survived three category 4 hurricanes and numerous smaller events since 1932. However, current deforestation and other anthropogenic perturbations may impact natural resilience and hamper the ability of the population to recover without assistance. Unfortunately, people may point to the hurricanes as a driver of parrot decline beyond their control, an argument aimed at defending rather than acknowledging the compounding effect of unsustainable human activities.

Conversely, hurricane damage highlights the inadequacy of current protected areas, and the need to avoid complacency. The Brac Parrot Reserve was severely damaged by the storm, whilst western portions of the forested bluff suffered less damage. The parrots need a robust series of protected areas across Cayman Brac, as a buffer against stochastic events.

Conservation Action > Early efforts

Conservationists in the Cayman Islands have been aware of the numerous issues threatening the parrots for some time. Local ornithologist Patricia Bradley has lobbied tirelessly on behalf of the parrots since the 1980s. Finally the parrots were removed from the Game Bird List in 1989. This reduced the incidence of shooting, and automatically gave the parrots protected status. All wild birds are currently protected under our Animals Law.

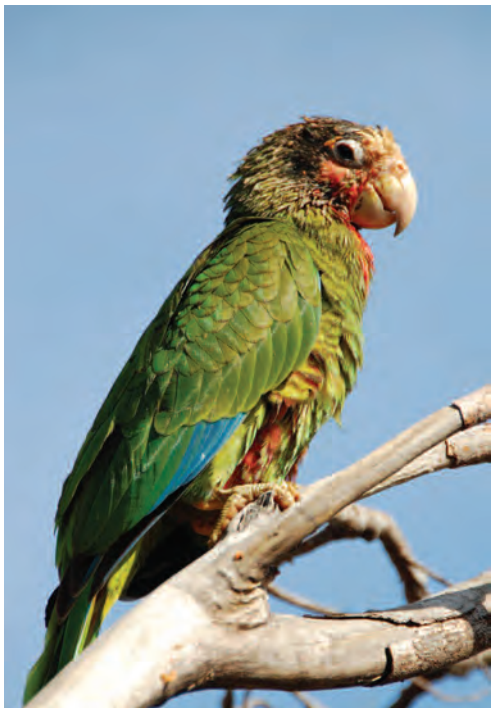
Cayman Parrot chicks recovered from poachers. Antiquated laws make anti-poaching difficult to enforce.

Photo: © Mat DaCosta-Cottam

Hurricanes can dramatically impact parrot habitat and food reserves. The Brac Parrot Reserve was stripped bare during Hurricane Paloma in 2008, and the parrot population saw a fifty percent decline. This pair of critically endangered Brac Parrots survived but less than 300 fly free. Current deforestation may impact natural resilience and hamper the ability of the population to recover. Unfortunately, people may point to the hurricanes as a driver of parrot decline beyond their control, an argument aimed at defending rather than acknowledging the compounding effect of unsustainable human activities.

> Parrot Reserve

The Trust was formed by a group of concerned residents in 1987, and is the Cayman Island's primary environmental NGO. Under the National Trust Law (1987), the Trust can declare land in its ownership inalienable. This protects the property in Trust ownership, permitting the formation of protected areas such as the Mastic Reserve, Grand Cayman's parrot reserve.



In 1991 Mr. Donald Pennie donated 100 acres on Cayman Brac to the Trust. This was the first component of what has become the Brac Parrot Reserve. A further 180 acres were anonymously donated in 1994, almost tripling the size of the reserve. The parcels were not contiguous however and it wasn't until 2005 that a narrow 86 acre strip of land connected the two areas. Funds were donated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and matched by the Cayman Islands Government to secure this land which was then donated to the Trust, consolidating the reserve.

> Terrestrial Ecology

Caymanians are traditionally a seafaring people, deriving much of their sustenance from the sea. The habitat and lack of soil made farming extremely difficult for early settlers and "the bush" continues to be viewed as hostile, oppressive, and an obstacle to be overcome: improvement takes precedence over conservation.

The history of environmental protection on the Cayman Islands has a similar history. The government has a sizable marine science team and created a system of actively patrolled marine protected areas in 1986. Conversely, government protection of terrestrial habitats has lagged behind.

An ailing Brac Parrot hangs on in the aftermath of Hurricane Paloma when forest trees bore little fruit.

Fortunately, the Department of Environment (DoE) now has a "Terrestrial Ecology Unit." It is relatively new and small: comprised of myself and Dr. Mat DaCosta-Cottam. We are charged with environmental monitoring and protection on all three Cayman Islands – quite a challenge for two people. Fortunately, while our size requires us to wear many hats, we receive active support from local volunteers and project partners, and active international visiting scientists.

Presently, government "Animal Sanctuaries" count for just 0.5% of total land area. These sanctuaries provide safe havens for resident wetland flora and fauna, and important habitat for many migratory riparian birds. Unfortunately, until we acquire contiguous mangrove and forests these reserves have little value for parrots.

Some localities have already been designated as "Important Bird Areas" (IBAs) by Birdlife International. Whilst IBA status highlights an area's importance for endemic and restricted

A Cayman Parrot feeding on the fruits of a Red Birch (*Bursera simaruba*), a common tree and an important food source for the parrots. Habitat management plans on the Cayman Islands include the restoration and enhancement of native habitat to benefit parrots and other species.

range avian species, the majority of the Cayman Islands' IBAs are privately owned with no legal protection.

The parrot populations of the Cayman Islands are threatened with extinction. Urgent action is required to conserve them. In response, a National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) has been completed and includes accurate vegetation mapping of the three islands along with Species Action Plans for endemic species including both parrot populations. Habitat management plans, a system of protected areas, the modification of existing planning laws, the introduction of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), and the encouragement of native landscaping in developed areas have all been proposed. A draft "National Conservation Law" has been on the table since 2000, but has yet to be accepted. Once passed, this law will give parrots the protection they require. It will also facilitate the creation of a system of government administered terrestrial protected areas.

The DoE has begun new research to determine population numbers and to provide a platform for long-term population monitoring. Further research will centre on the degree of current habitat loss and future projections. Our vegetation maps will facilitate the quantification of suitable breeding and foraging habitat.

Future effort will utilise our research for practical conservation initiatives – habitat protection, artificial nest cavities, improvement of secondary habitat, public education and environmental awareness (see www.caymanparrots.com). To combat the poaching of parrot nests, the DoE plans an amnesty period, where parrots can receive identification tags and certification as part of a protected bird registration programme. This will allow an avenue for people who possess pet parrots to fall on the correct side of the law and will strengthen the future capacity for law enforcement.

The history of the Cayman Parrots is similar to the stories of many island endemic species. The human settlement of the Cayman Islands has

been a complex and conflicting process with many years of over-exploitation. Recent years have seen a slow growing public awareness of the benefits of a healthy terrestrial environment and the position of the parrots within it. We hope to ensure that generations of Caymanians continue to enjoy sharing these small islands with their unique wildlife.

Kristan D. Godbeer is a Research Officer within the Terrestrial Ecology Unit of the Cayman Islands Department of Environment.

New at Parrots.org

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Psitta News


Photo: © Perth Zoo

Parrotnews

Rare species found

Two rare and threatened animal species have been rediscovered in the Maria River area in New South Wales, Australia.

Local wildlife groups have confirmed sightings of the Eastern Ground Parrot and the Long-nosed Potoroo in the area around Maria River.

Local wildlife expert Bernard Whitehead has captured images of both species using infra-red and night-vision cameras. "We haven't had documented evidence of the ground parrot in this area since the 1970s," he said.

The ground parrot is about the same size as a rosella and does fly, but spends up to 90 per cent of its time in the undergrowth. It is one of only three species of ground-dwelling parrots in the world, the most famous of which is the New Zealand Kakapo. The potoroo, a small hopping marsupial, is considered vulnerable throughout Australia and is rarely glimpsed in the wild.

Source: http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest

Storm affects rare cockatoos

Dozens of endangered Carnaby's Black Cockatoos were treated at Perth Zoo after being injured in a violent storm in late March. The zoo treated 23 wild cockatoos. Four had died or had to be euthanased. Most of the injuries were caused by hail, with the birds suffering broken wings, legs, head and beak injuries. In total, 36 cockatoos are thought to have been killed during the storm. Only 40,000 remain because of widespread forest clearance.

Found just meters away from this car under a gum tree stripped of leaves, these Rainbow Lorikeets (below) were casualties of the same golf ball (plus) sized hail.

Source: The West Australian and Chris Nortcott


Photo: © Chris Nortcott

Florida bird smugglers

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) arrested four South Florida men, in three separate cases, for illegal possession of migratory birds. FWC officers released 20 captive birds – 19 Indigo Buntings (above) and one Northern Cardinal.

Indigo and painted buntings are migratory songbirds that winter in South Florida. They are prized for their colourful plumage. Some migrate north in the spring, others make a year-round home in the Sunshine State.

With their numbers declining because of habitat loss, these beautiful birds face an additional ugly threat: the exotic pet trade.

The buntings, protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, are frequently trapped and sold. FWC continues to break up these rings and release the captive birds back into their natural habitats.

Source: http://www.wctv.tv/home/headlines

Inmemory

John Strutt

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of free flying parrot pioneer John Strutt.

John touched the lives of many people and made great contributions to wildlife conservation, yet as a deeply modest man it was hard to convince him of his achievements. Unlike any other collection of African Greys, amazons, macaws and cockatoos John's birds were kept at liberty at this home in Cumbria, England. He took great delight in seeing his birds free and would tell fascinating stories about the different individuals. An unlikely hero, John's courage to keep parrots in a different way should be an inspiration for us all to continue exploring and improving the lives of companion birds.

By: Sam Williams

John Strutt with an African Grey he flew free for years. It came in to have tea every morning, then to John's shoulder for a snuggle before flying off. The Grey took his tea on the floor.

Bestwishes

Oskar Spencer Michael Reynolds

Audrey and Nick Reynolds celebrate the arrival of Nick and Lisa's son Oskar born May 3rd, 2010

Parrottrips

2010 Parrot Cruise: Southern Caribbean

November 7 - 14, 2010 ■ Sailing from San Juan, Puerto Rico

Join us on the 2nd Annual Parrot Lover's Cruise, one of the most spectacular cruises for parrot enthusiasts, and support parrot conservation at the same time. Leave your worries behind and relax in the Southern Caribbean to discover some of the bluest waters and best sightseeing in the world. Educate yourself with onboard parrot seminars by experts and visit exotic ports of call where you may get a chance to see wild parrots!

With three exclusive shore excursions, parrot lovers will look for:


Photo: © Sam Williams

- Puerto Rican Amazons in Puerto Rico,
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Starting at USD $765 | £532 – includes onboard seminars by Steve Martin and Steve Milpacher and a donation to the World Parrot Trust.

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Optional extension to June 11

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More to come!

www.parrots.org/parrottrip

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Photo: © Ali Hales

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Parrots in the Wild