

PsitttaScene



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*Special - Confiscations
and Releases*

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August 2011

Psitta Scene

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from the director

Creating each issue of *PsittaScene* is a curious, exciting, and unpredictable process. We never know where we'll end up, which articles will come through, and how the finished product will look. This issue contains a unique collection of stories which dovetail beautifully to illustrate how activities like captive breeding, confiscations, rehabilitation and release all come together to save parrots - promoting their welfare, aiding the recovery of threatened species and ending trade in wild birds.

The release of Great Green Macaws in Costa Rica is especially thrilling. Our partners at The Ara Project have been working toward this momentous occasion for many years. As the much anticipated release day approached, we held their pages and awaited news. The first stage of the release went ahead on schedule and according to plan. Although the bird's parents were confiscated many years ago, this work fits perfectly into our FlyFree campaign. It helps stop trade and provides hope for a new population where these macaws have been driven to extinction. We are pleased to share this exciting news and to keep you updated as the releases continue.

In contrast to that carefully planned effort, the news and call-to-action in Bonaire came out of nowhere; another appalling confiscation creating another parrot care emergency. Luckily Sam Williams and his team were on site, eager and able to stabilise a chaotic situation so these 112 birds could land safely on their young feet. Better still, when news of these birds went out through the WPT network, the outpouring of support was truly remarkable. People from around the world contributed donations, chick rearing formula, and long hours. Not only did we meet our fundraising target in the first 24 hours, but one of our long term supporters, Phoebe Green Linden, dropped everything and flew all the way to Bonaire just in the nick of time. We're deeply inspired by Sam and Phoebe's accounts of the ups and downs there, and we're sure you will be too.

At the World Parrot Trust we are grateful to be in a position to be able to help so many parrots in so many places around the world and you, as our members and supporters, make it all possible. Thank you!

Jamie Gilardi

on our covers

Front Captive breeding and release are conservation tools never attempted with the highly endangered Great Green Macaw (*Ara ambiguus*) - until now! These birds are now at the end of a nearly 2 year process starting with the selection of a release site and ending in a new beginning for them as they fly free into the Costa Rican jungle. See page 4. © Steve Milpacher

Back The Derbyan Parakeet (*Psittacula derbiana*) is one of the few parrots known to be found in South Eastern Tibet and is one of the rarest *Psittacula* species on the Asian mainland. This species' status was recently uplisted to 'Near Threatened' due to its capture for the local cage bird trade. Our first online photo contest featured stunning photos of many of India's 11 parrot species. The winners are featured on pages 10-11 © JDG.



PERFECT 10



BY ALLAN TAYLOR

“That’s a Mountain Almond tree and that’s a Mountain Almond and

The local landowner pointed out the trees as we stood on a ridgeline in the lush forests on the south Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. The jungle spread inland and the ocean stretched away behind us and the almost constant chatter of parrots came out of what seemed like every tree. We craned our necks to look at these incredible trees towering over the canopy and a surge of excitement came over us – it was December 2009 - we might just have found the site for the first ever Great Green Macaw release. Further investigation and lengthy discussions confirmed our instincts – it was perfect!

The Ara Project is a Costa Rican non-profit organisation that breeds Scarlet (*Ara macao*) and Great Green Macaws (*A. ambiguus*) in captivity for the sole purpose of release into the wild. The project has released around 100 Scarlet Macaws in 3 locations over the past 15

years, including our 8th release of 10 Scarlet Macaws at Tiskita completed in May this year (See *PsittaScene* 23.2, May 2011). This year sees not only a brand new Scarlet Macaw release site but also our first ever Great Green Macaw release.

The protected Mountain Almond tree (*Dipteryx panamensis*) is the Great Green Macaw’s preferred food source and nesting tree.

Fortunately, logging of the “Almendro montana” has been banned because of its critical importance to the macaws.



© Allan Taylor



© Allan Taylor

that's another...”

PREPARATION AND MOVING

A year of fundraising and we were finally ready to go. Sufficient funding from The World Parrot Trust and two Costa Rican sponsors have allowed for construction, which began in January 2011, of the new aviary and a house for the on-site biologist. Immediately we started the process of selecting the chosen 10 for the first release.

A large group of suitable birds was whittled down to 10 spanning ages 3 to 7 including 5 males and 5 females; 5 hand-reared and 5 parent reared birds. The 10 were immediately separated from the larger flock into a quarantine aviary, causing a degree of consternation within the flock. Blood samples were taken from each bird and sent to Avian Biotech in the US for disease testing. The results came back clear of all diseases and parasites. A minimum of 28 days isolation and they would be ready to go.

March 27 was the date chosen to transport the macaws to their new home. Moving 10 macaws 200 miles may sound straightforward but it required a huge team effort. The day began early. At 3:30 am the birds were caught up and put into their travel cases for the trip. These birds are amazing – they barely even complained despite the

rude start to the day. A small convoy left the breeding centre in Alajuela, near the capital San Jose, and headed up over the volcanoes that divide Costa Rica before dropping down onto the plains that characterise the Caribbean side of the country. Before 10 am the trip was complete and the carry cases were placed into the new aviary.

Calmly, the birds started edging out of their boxes and flew onto the perches in their new home. A few wobbly landings apart, all 10 birds were fine. Once all 10 were settled on the perches, a good feed was put out and all their worries were forgotten. The greens were on the first step to freedom.

ADAPTING

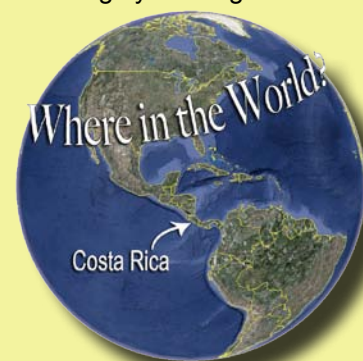
Prior to release, several key challenges awaited the 10 macaws. Firstly – the surroundings. Trade the cars, aeroplanes, dogs, people and karaoke bars of Alajuela, for monkeys, hawks, vultures, ocean, forest, free flying parrots and the warm and sultry climate of the Caribbean! Secondly – the food. The macaws at the breeding centre have their food prepared for them, with as much grown on the site as possible. It is topped up with a mix of rice and beans and fruit purchased at the local market. Little or none of this food will

GREAT GREEN MACAW (*Ara ambiguus*)

Great Green Macaws have declined alarmingly in recent years due to poaching and deforestation, in particular the cutting of Mountain Almond trees.

Once prevalent throughout the entire Caribbean half of Costa Rica their range has declined by as much as 90%. Recent conservation efforts have stabilised numbers with less than 300 birds and an estimated 25-35 breeding pairs remaining in Costa Rica.

The Ara Project is charting new and exciting territory with the first release of Great Green Macaws in the world. These 10 birds are the first of their kind to be bred and raised specifically for release. Years of conservation efforts to preserve habitat and nest trees and reduce poaching have paid off to allow for an exciting new chapter for this highly endangered macaw.





© S Milpacher

“Little or none of this food will be available to them in the forest...”

be available to them in the forest, so one of the challenges for the on-site biologist is to teach the macaws the nuts and fruits available locally.

The first few weeks in the release aviary were a period of settling in for the macaws whilst they got used to their new surroundings. Inquisitive as ever, the macaws watched everything but soon discovered that, as the new kids

on the block, they were being watched too. A troop of howler monkeys were equally amazed by their new neighbours and stayed in trees watching the birds for three days – their harrowing call was the first of many new and unfamiliar sounds.

Familiar with the odd vulture or kite in Alajuela (which still caused a considerable uproar) we hadn’t considered the incredible hawk migration

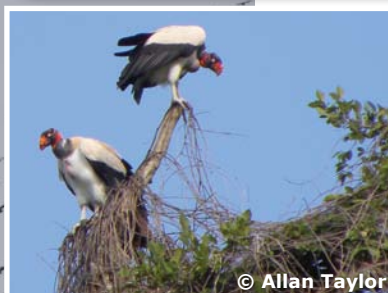
that would be underway at this time of year in this part of Costa Rica. Literally millions of migrating hawks and vultures funnel through the Caribbean coast twice annually. The sight of not just an occasional vulture or hawk but waves and waves of thousands flying overhead was all too much for the birds at first. They would need to get used to this spectacle as it is going to be a twice yearly part of their lives. On one hand, the migrants are not looking for food and on the other, the macaws, once free, will soon learn who’s boss. Their huge bill and overall bulk combined with acrobatic ability means the hawks are more wary of the macaws than the other way round!



© Alex Ash



© Allan Taylor



© Allan Taylor

A whole array of new stimuli awaited the birds upon transfer to the pre-release aviary. Millions of migrating raptors as well as the locals – monkeys and vultures to name a few – are all part of the macaw’s new world.

Essential new skills include: opening the incredibly hard Mountain Almond nuts (left) and learning the other seeds, nuts and fruits (and their associated trees) that will mean survival to the released macaws.



© Allan Taylor

FORAGING

The macaws were held in the release aviary for over 4 months. One of the key processes during this period is to teach the birds all the food they need to eat to survive unaided in the wild. The key food source for a wild Great Green Macaw is the nut from the Mountain Almond tree. Plentiful for 6 months of the year, the problem is not finding plenty to eat, but in opening these incredibly hard nuts, with shells as hard as rock. Used to softer fruits at the breeding centre, the jaw muscles of the birds were barely strong enough to open the nuts. Only one or two of the birds were proficient at this daunting task. Initially we aided them by crushing the nuts with a hammer to give the birds a taste for the delicious seed within. They loved it! Two months into the adaption period all 10 birds were happily opening the nuts that only a few creatures on earth are adapted to eat. They were not so happy when the source of these nuts dried up by the end of May. This period however was the ideal opportunity to teach the macaws all the other seeds and nuts which will help them thrive in the area year round. The number of trees containing fruit in this area is incredible and it is interesting not only to collect the foods we know the macaw eat in

other parts of their range but to watch the local parrots and see what their favourite foods are. We introduced these new foods whenever possible by putting in branches with the fruits still attached thus giving the birds the opportunity to associate the food source with the type of leaves on the tree. With some of the canopy trees this is all but impossible as the nearest braches can be 20 or 30 metres (65-100 ft.) up!

FINAL PREPARATION

After almost four months in the cage a discernible change came over the macaws. They started to show signs of frustration at being stuck in the aviary – they wanted out. Large groups of parrots such as Mealy and Red-lored Amazons (*Amazona farinosa* and *A. autumnalis*) regularly stopped by to eat in the trees and chatter loudly. When they flew past the cage the macaws called with frustration. It was time to teach the macaws their final lessons by showing them the small release box in the aviary and the feeders that would serve them outside the aviary. The feeders would initially be used to supplement their diet post release. At each feeding the release box was opened from inside the aviary and filled with food. At the same time, the feeders outside were lowered and

small amounts of food put on them. The macaws watched everything and seized the chance to explore a new part of the cage. One of the external type feeders was erected inside the aviary since it would become part of their daily lives once free.

The first 10 Great Green Macaws we have ever released and that have ever been officially released anywhere in the world were ready to go.

RELEASE

The morning of Monday 8th August was sunny and warm. Around the release site there was a sense of excitement for all and nervous tension for some. This was the day. The first two Great Green Macaws were going to be released, not only by The Ara Project, but anywhere in the world. The chosen birds were RM363 and 64. They were chosen carefully, being in good condition, bold and hopefully intelligent!

The first step in the release was to get the correct birds into the release box at the same time. However, after patiently trying for an hour with no luck, we decided to release the birds individually one immediately following the other. Now things moved quickly as RM363



© Chris Castles

“Around the release site there was a sense of excitement for all...”

got in the box. He was left to settle and munch a few more almonds before we opened the release box door. We also made a show of putting more food up on the feeders surrounding the aviary. Around 10:15 am we opened the door and he was straight out. He hopped onto the feeder and started silently munching almonds as if he did this

every day. Only 5 minutes later RM364 was in the release box calmly munching almonds. Ten minutes later we opened the door. Ever so slightly more hesitant she sat on the flap, had a scratch and a nervous wipe of the bill before hopping onto the feeder herself. It was a truly amazing start.

The birds ate and preened for an hour before scampering around on the roof of the cage – much to the bemusement of the remaining 8. Chris Castles, one of our Co-Directors, turned around smiling and said “that’s what we like – no drama, all quiet.” Incredibly, 10 seconds later RM364 flew off away from the aviary. It was beautiful to see the colours of this bird as she circled round in the back valley before disappearing out of sight around the corner. Apart from a small squawk from RM363 everything went quiet. Whilst it is great to see the birds fly free, this is the real danger period for them. They can go into shock and if they fly well out of range of the aviary they can even get lost and die.



© Chris Castles

© Allan Taylor

Raised from the start with one purpose – release – these macaws learned skills and developed bonds that helped them stick together and adjust to freedom when their lucky day arrived.



Photos © Chris Castles

The first Great Green Macaws ever released into the wild, RM363 and 364, seem strong, smart and certainly relaxed. They spent their first week of freedom exploring the release site area and returning to feed, preen and roost.

A search of the immediate area revealed nothing and without her calling it is very difficult to find even these most brilliantly coloured birds. We followed the line of her flight but had no luck. She was gone. Or so we thought. Around 3:30 pm we heard the smallest squawk some 100 m (330 ft) along the ridge. We froze and listened intently. Then we heard it again and we were certain it must be her. We hustled towards the noise and saw her! I am not sure who was most pleased – us or the wayward macaw! She was perched low down in the undergrowth and when she saw us she started calling loudly. This alerted the birds in the aviary and RM363 and everyone was happy. Following some tentative but high level flying both birds manoeuvred their way back to the trees above the aviary for a welcome nights rest, if probably a slightly restless one.

The next 3 days passed in much the same vain with RM364 exploring more and more around the site. It was hard to tell whether the forays were by choice or not but every day new skills were learnt. All 4 feeders needed to be negotiated and one of the most difficult skills to learn was the stop. For one thing, the trees around the release cage are huge. Dropping down to the feeders is a completely new skill. Stopping from such speeds

was also something totally new and a few practice runs were needed. To see RM363 drop vertically 20 m (65 ft) onto the cage without flapping his wings – just gliding using his tail as a brake – is something that will live long in the memory.

The birds also needed to learn about the local wildlife up close and without the release cage as a barrier. One night poor RM364 thought she had an ideal spot to settle but that was before she caught the eye of a couple of passing juvenile howler monkeys. They thought it would be amusing to grab her tail! Another lesson learnt as she bolted out of the trees and decided on a new roosting site!

As week one draws to a close it is “so far so good” for these 2 magnificent birds. Now we are all ready to start releasing the next 8 and look forward to all 10 gracing the lush forests where they belong.



Allan Taylor is from the UK and joined The Ara Project as field biologist in 2008. Having completed the 7th Scarlet Macaw release at Tiskita in 2009 he is now overseeing the Great Green Macaw release site in Manzanillo.

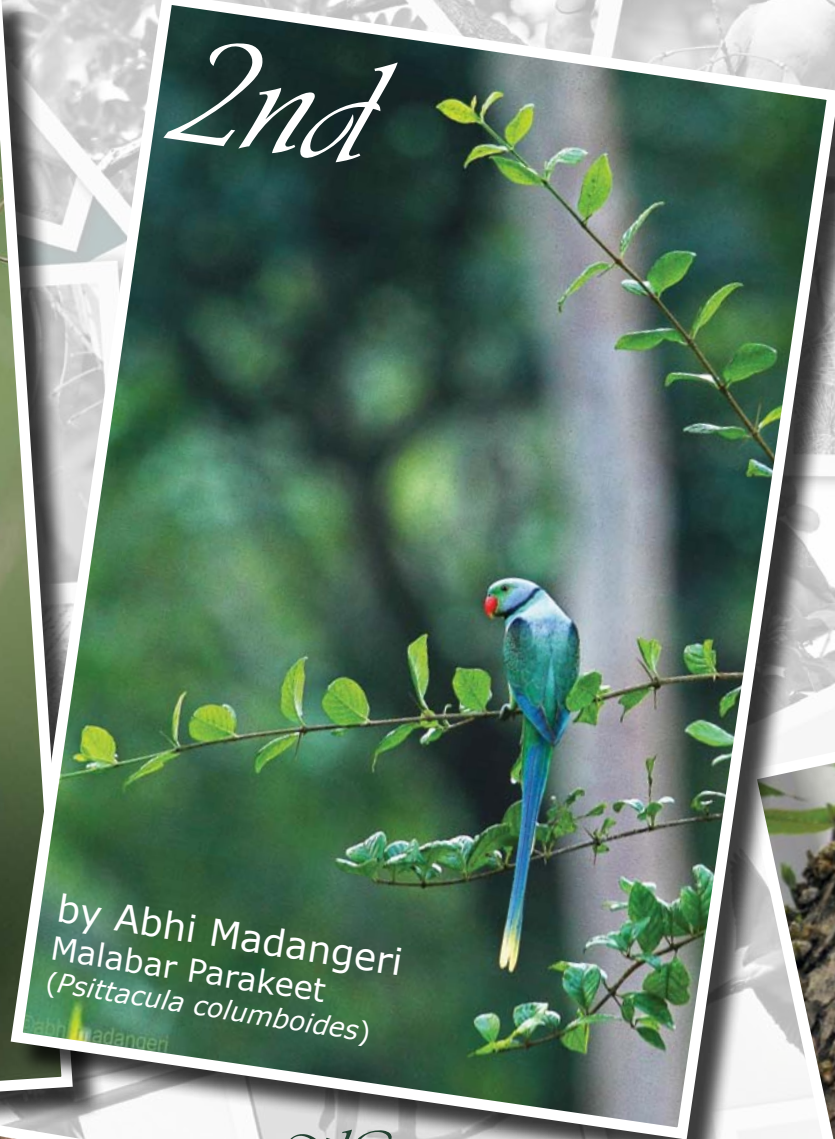


Photo contest *Indian Parrots*



1st

by Bishanm
Plum-headed Parakeet
(*Psittacula cyanocephala*)

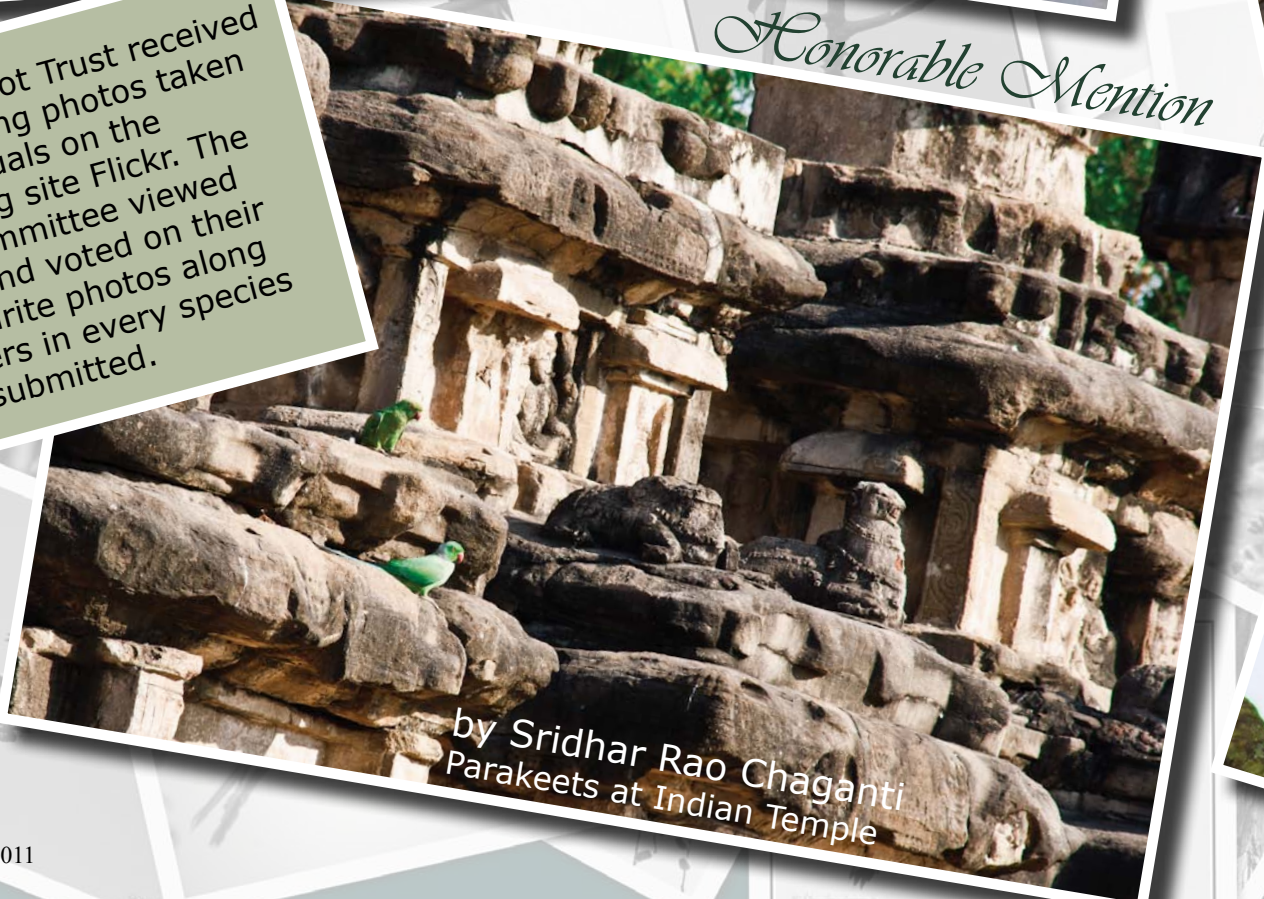


2nd

by Abhi Madangeri
Malabar Parakeet
(*Psittacula columboides*)

The World Parrot Trust received 136 outstanding photos taken by 56 individuals on the photo-sharing site Flickr. The selection committee viewed all photos and voted on their top 3 favourite photos along with winners in every species category submitted.

Honorable Mention



by Sridhar Rao Chaganti
Parakeets at Indian Temple

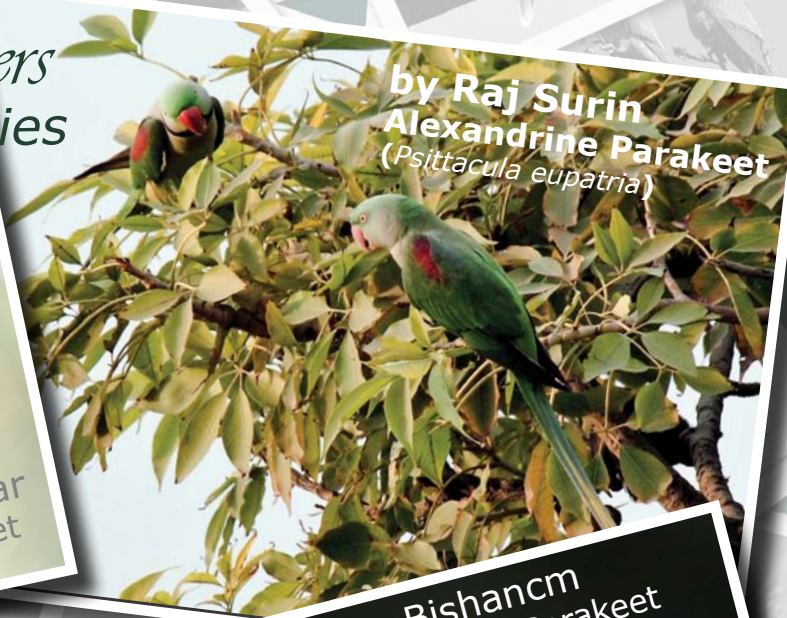
3rd

by Bishancm
Vernal Hanging Parrot
(*Loriculus vernalis*)



Winners
by Species

by Raj Surin
Alexandrine Parakeet
(*Psittacula eupatria*)



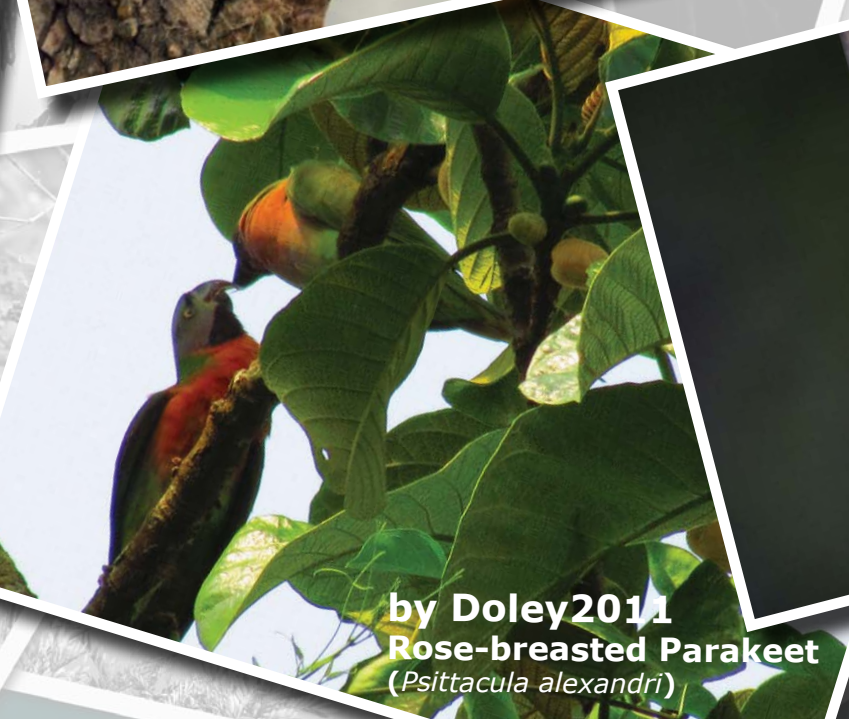
by Dr Pankaj Kumar
Slaty-headed Parakeet
(*Psittacula himalayana*)



by Bishancm
Ring-neck Parakeet
(*Psittacula krameri*)



by Doley2011
Rose-breasted Parakeet
(*Psittacula alexandri*)





Box by Box

Article and Photos By Dr Sam Williams

“Can you be at the police station in 15 minutes?” How little did I appreciate the ramifications of what Elsmarie Beukenboom (Director of STINAPA, the NGO that manages Bonaire’s national parks) was asking. Before I knew it I was in a convoy of STINAPA and police pick-ups on my way to a remote farmhouse. Dogs on chains “greeted” us as we quickly moved into the premises. Overcrowded cages I’ve seen before. Crocodiles in a dog carrier I’ve not. But then the unmistakable sound of a begging parrot chick drew us into the house where on top of a small table were nest boxes and shoe boxes full of parrot and parakeet chicks. It was unthinkable.

After years of inspecting wild parrot nests I have a romanticised perspective of the pungent aroma that is the consequence of parrot chick digestion. When I opened one shoebox from the table the stench of ammonia that hit me was sickening. Desperate chicks begged from the wire covered holes of wooden boxes. Every crop was empty and almost every bird was so skinny their breastbones poked out.

As we drove away with the pick-ups full of boxes and cages I began the job of co-ordinating the rescue. Jose, an incredibly dedicated parrot conservationist from Spain, was initially unreachable because he was checking

wild parrot nests in the hills. Next I called my good friend Nat. At first he thought I was joking but then quickly dropped everything to find fruit, a blender, cardboard boxes and to muster the troops. I went with the parrots to the Echo field site and began disassembling the simple life I lead in order to create a hand-rearing centre. Life as I knew it was over!

Thankfully, all 112 birds were fed and re-homed to clean boxes where their rehabilitation for release began. The smallest chick is “Sid” (far right) who arrived at just 10 days of age.

As the sun set that first night the Echo team and willing volunteers arrived. Working with oil lanterns and head torches we peeled, chopped and blended. Spoons were bent into shape and then we fed and transferred over one hundred skinny little birds into clean boxes. Project volunteer Dianne quickly learned to hand feed. Her girls Sanda (16) and Kelsey (14) worked without pause, as did our friend Maine. The emotion and energy in the room was tangible. It was almost midnight before we could retire, exhausted but satisfied.





Echo

parrots and people

On Friday, July 1st, Echo - a World Parrot Trust FlyFree partner - received an emergency call for help from STINAPA (Stichting Nationale Parken Bonaire). Following a tip-off, STINAPA seized a group of 112 parrots from an illegal trader.

The birds are Yellow-shouldered Amazons (*Amazona barbadensis*) and Brown-throated Conures (*Aratinga pertinax xanthogenia*). They are native to Bonaire and were believed to be bound for Curacao to be sold into the pet trade. Many were close to perishing, and one had already died. With no time to spare, Echo staff began caring for the parrots and worked through the night by lantern to save them. The birds were in a terrible state, and desperately needed feeding after being kept in appalling conditions and without food for several days. Out of the 112 birds about 90 chicks required one-on-one care.



To keep up with the rescue effort or to support Echo to get these parrots back into the wild visit:

- Sam's blog
- Echo's dedicated rescue website
- Echo's facebook page

All on: www.psittascene.org

Special thanks to:



Poached from their nests, these native Bonairean parrots were confiscated before they could be smuggled off the island.

The next morning I woke at 6 am and by the time a cup of tea was ready Jose was up too. Then Dianne and the girls returned and we did it all over again. The situation was far from ideal. Our system was primitive and the birds were not used to being fed by people. It took us over three hours to complete the feed, which didn't leave much time to organise all the other things we needed to sort.

The birds came to us at all different ages. The youngest, "Sid," was less

than 10 days old. The oldest were near fledging. We needed to separate them according to their needs. We have a release aviary from which other illegally captured parrots have been successfully released. "Fat Sally" and "The Darling" were plucked from the aviary in order to make room for the older juvenile parakeets and three parrots. Giving those independent birds more space felt great. As more help arrived we were able to adapt cages to accommodate a few weaning birds. This gave them the space to pick at fruit, seeds and pulses – a





Full and developing nicely, this endangered Yellow-shouldered Amazon will join other lucky chicks in the pre-release aviary as it fledges. These birds have a hopeful future because authorities acted quickly and a devoted team stopped everything to take them in. Stay tuned for release news.

nice thing to see. We were finished earlier that second night but between feeding, preparing housing and feeding again, it was another very long day. By the time crops were full and Jose and I were sitting with a cup of tea we were beyond tired.

Slowly but surely we made progress: new boxes for the birds; better lights for the room; syringes rather than spoons for feeding. But these were small details and each night it became more apparent that we couldn't keep this up! It was Jamie Gilardi who first suggested we find a room in town. Two days later we moved into a free-for-the-summer classroom of an after school education centre courtesy of Jong Bonaire. The wonderful director Elona has welcomed our crazy ideas and made it possible for the rescue to really start moving forward.


Having dependable electricity, lights, tables and chairs made so much difference. Being in town made it easier to find volunteers and allowed new people to get involved. Two Bonairean boys – Gideon Goedgedrag and Rayen Seraus – who are involved with Jong Bonaire joined our team. They love working with the parrots and they are proving to be willing workers when it comes to all the other, less exciting but important tasks involved with keeping the rescue going. Thanks guys!

So far only one bird, a parakeet, has died in our care. We were immediately concerned about him on Day 1 but he died before Day 2. We are pleased no others have left us that way. Three other parakeets left us on separate occasions but only when they took advantage of open cage doors. All flew over to the release aviary. I caught one pre-dawn while he was napping, and Jose caught another because it had a hermit crab stuck on the end of his beak! The third hangs out on top of the aviary along with "Harry," a released parrot who only flies when the Crested Caracara family flies over. It seems there's little point trying to catch this parakeet.

So we've crossed the first milestone – triage is over and all the birds are progressing. Now I am terrified we will get a disease outbreak or bacterial infection. Phoebe Green Linden will arrive tomorrow and I look forward to having someone with (much) more hand rearing experience who can make further improvements to our improvised facility. The next obvious challenge stage is dealing with imprinting and the association between humans and food. Tonight I dressed up in an old bed sheet and put a bag on my head to try out a new

look. I'm sure with a little tweaking we'll create something that works!

It is important to avoid imprinting because (of course!) we intend to release these parrots back into the wild once they are rehabilitated and independent. We've already done a successful parrot release (more about that next time) and we're confident these birds will be able to be go back to the wild. If we can find the right fit, we are hoping to foster some of the younger Yellow-shouldered Amazon Parrots into wild nests. That will make it possible for them fledge with the other chicks hatched this season. It's a shame they were taken from nests in the first place!

STINAPA's rapid response to this situation allowed them to seize these birds from illegal traders. By working together with STINAPA it has been possible for Echo to rehabilitate the birds and save many from death or from lives of confinement. The dedication of the Echo team and volunteers has been tremendous. I am extremely proud and owe a huge thanks to everyone involved. 

Dr. Sam Williams' love of parrots goes back to his childhood in Yorkshire, England. He has worked with Echo Parakeets on Mauritius, Lear's Macaws in Brazil and now heads Echo and the Bonaire Parrot Project.



© Ann Phelan

Beak by Beak

By Phoebe Green Linden

In less than a second, they cover my body – flapping, yelling, fluttering, jostling for space, climbing up and down my arm, feet tangling in my hair – 35 hungry fledglings all trying to be the first one fed.

It's breakfast here in Bonaire, a small island off the northern coast of Venezuela, where divers and snorkelers from around the world come to explore underwater wonders. But my delights are in the air – or, right now, dangling from my shirt, climbing my legs and screaming in my ears saying, in baby conure speak, “I'm hungry!” “Me first!” “More now!” “Where's mine?”

To manage the chaos, we human volunteers segregate the fledglings and take only a few at a time from the indoor aviary to the feeding tables where syringes full of warmed donated formula await the eager chicks. The fledglings left behind scream piteously, but we know they'll all be fed. We also know the concept of “waiting,” even a few moments, is foreign to these boisterous, pushy, adorable wild babies who look like giant butterflies and sound like an avian heavy metal rock band tuning up at full volume, discordant, amplified, deafening and endearing.

One person stands by the blender, readying syringes in hot water; another

prepares fruits; someone else chases a flighted escapee around the classroom where we've set up a make-shift nursery, complete with two working fledgling aviaries. At the feeding tables, however, calm prevails. One by one, with patience and careful attention, each chick is fed their fill, washed carefully with a warm wet towel and tucked away into a clean box where they blessedly, if momentarily, nap. This continues until all the fledglings are fed. Then, we clean the aviary – it's unbelievable how much mess they've made since dinner last evening! Bits of food, chewed up leaves from their fresh perches and the equivalent of a blender full of poop litter the floor.

But still, it's not yet peaceful in the nursery. Oh no, there remain 12 Amazon chicks, honking away, ready for their breakfast and 20 more un-flighted (but fully-voiced) conures begging for food. We continue on, box by box, beak by beak. At every feeding, more conures fledge, so they transfer from boxes to the flight. The pile of empty syringes mounts, another blender full of food

is consumed and a pile of clean towels diminishes as messes are mopped up from tables, floors, hands and hair.

After nearly 3 hours, there is relative quiet.

We human volunteers pause and look around – there's formula (and worse) on our shirts, in our hair, and down our shorts. Tiny scratches cover our arms. Regardless of how many towels we've already used, the floor is slippery with goo and there's clearly about an hour of clean-up still to do. Involuntarily, we start to laugh, but not too loudly. We don't want the chicks waking up!

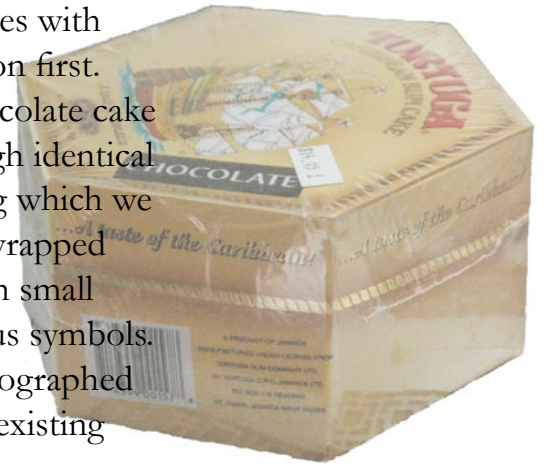


Phoebe Green Linden, M. A. is co-owner of Santa Barbara Bird Farm in California. When she heard about the situation on Bonaire she made immediate arrangements to help – bringing with her decades of rearing experience to assist these chicks. Phoebe also volunteers for World Parrot Trust as an Expert available to answer your questions on parrots.org.

Mission Easter Egg

By Petra Stefan, Vienna Zoo

When we opened the suitcase, three chocolate cake boxes with factory packaging and price tags attracted our attention first. Carefully we opened the first box. In it we found chocolate cake from Jamaica...nothing suspicious there. The second box, though identical outside, was a different story. Immediately we saw cotton batting which we began removing very carefully. Among the cotton, individually wrapped in protective paper, were dozens of parrot eggs. We opened each small package with caution and found the eggs labelled with mysterious symbols. We listed each egg individually and weighed, measured and photographed it. We re-numbered all the eggs because we couldn't decode the existing markings. The two chocolate cake boxes contained 56 eggs.



In addition to the cake boxes we found a strange round package wrapped in plastic. It was a carved coconut monkey souvenir. Suspicious now, we wondered – was this a hiding place for eggs too? Carefully we tried to remove the cap of the monkey to no avail. Only the base could be the entrance to the treasure. Sure enough, as meticulously packed as the chocolate boxes, we found 18 parrot eggs inside the monkey.

THIS CASE BEGAN for the Vienna Zoo on April 13th when our curator Anton Weissenbacher was informed that a smuggler would arrive at the Vienna Airport three days later. The customs authority got a tip that parrot eggs

might be hidden in his luggage. On Saturday April 16th the suspect arrived and customs officials found 74 parrot eggs hidden in his suitcase – all easily detected on the fluoroscopic image.

Blue lights flashing, customs officials brought the suitcase and the smuggler to Vienna Zoo.

After unpacking we were allowed to question him. We got few answers except that the eggs might be from green parakeets in Jamaica. He gave no information about how the eggs could survive the transport. He did say he was doing this for the first time and “wanted to give it a try.”

We stored the eggs in an incubator and began an extensive search of the literature. We suspected they were Amazon parrot eggs. That left us with two possibilities – *Amazona agilis* and *Amazona collaria* (Black-billed and Yellow-billed Amazons) – the only two endemic Amazon species in Jamaica. However, we had to raise them to be sure.

ON MONDAY APRIL 18TH, the time had come. The first two chicks hatched. We have never seen such small parrot chicks before since all our parrots breed naturally. We sent photos to Matthias Reinschmidt, curator at Loro Parque and specialist in the hand rearing of parrot chicks. He confirmed that they could, in fact, be Amazon parrots. The next days were very exciting with 3 to 5 chicks hatching per day! The incubators were full and there was no end in sight. Just 19 days after the first hatchings we had 54 parrot chicks. The remaining 20 chicks died in the egg during transport.

For the first 10 days we fed the chicks 11 times per day. We used Quiko Hand-Formula as rearing food and added Lactobacillus PT 12 once per day. We

A fluoroscopic image of a carved coconut monkey reveals 18 parrot eggs. Another 56 eggs were concealed inside 2 cake boxes (above).



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The ultimate Easter basket arrived at Vienna Zoo when 74 confiscated parrot eggs arrived at their door. The eggs were intercepted at the airport after being smuggled from Jamaica to Slovakia.



© Anton Weissenbacher

started at 3 am. The next feeding was at 6 am and then we fed every 2 hours until midnight. We put the chicks into metal bowls individually for the first 5 to 7 days to retain control over defecation. Soon after, we decided to keep them in pairs. We coloured the feathers of one chick per group so we could tell them apart.

TO TRACK DEVELOPMENT, we weighed the chicks each day before the 6 am feeding. Some chicks progressed better than others. At 14 days of age, one of the smaller chicks suddenly developed white wings. Again, we asked Matthias Reinschmidt for advice. He suspected anaemia and recommended an iron supplement and vitamin B. We followed his advice but the chick did not recover. Within a few days 8 chicks died with the same symptoms. The pathology noted intestinal bacteria. Unfortunately only one of those white winged chicks survived, possibly because it already was a little larger than the others.

The remaining chicks developed very well and were soon getting too big for the incubator so we moved them into bigger boxes. After four weeks and

The mystery unfolded as the eggs hatched one by one into demanding and mischievous Yellow-billed (middle) and Black-billed Amazons (bottom).

hundreds of hours of nurturing, the “unknown green parakeet eggs“ had become 21 *Amazona agilis* and 24 *Amazona collaria*.

OUR LAST STEP was to habituate the chicks to cages. On the second day in the cage they started to eat carrots, apples, seeds and bread, showing us that they were ready to eat solid food.

OUR FUTURE PLAN is to create a captive population of these two endangered parrot species by keeping some at Vienna Zoo and placing the others at zoos that can ensure good and professional housing conditions.

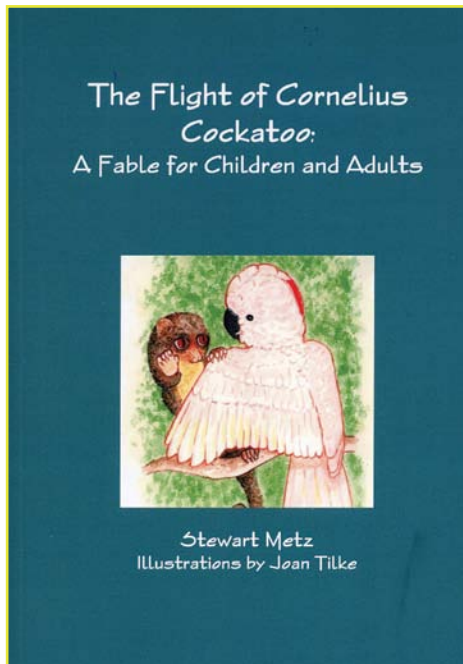


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> > Book Reviews By Desi Milpacher



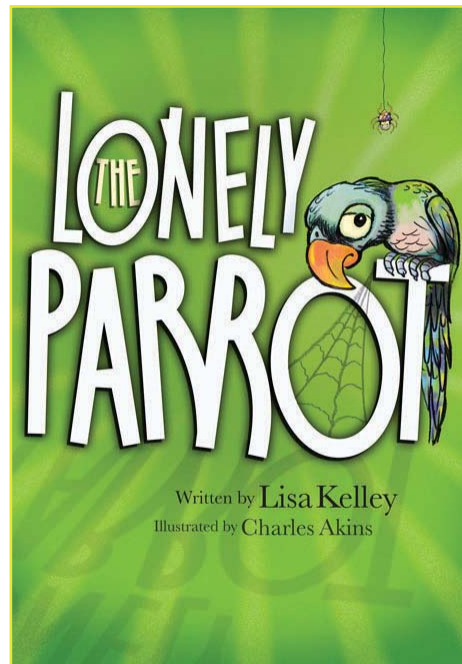
Stewart Metz's story of a brave cockatoo on a mission is at once entertaining and instructive.

The tale, which features the odyssey of Corky (Cornelius), a Moluccan Cockatoo from the island of Seram, is the sort of page turner that will keep children engaged from start to finish.

The trip our hero undertakes is out of desperation: humans are crowding out the animals on their small island home, and it is up to Corky to strike out and find the clan a new country.

This tale has two good lessons: loyalty to one's friends and conservation of the natural world. It also does an unusual thing: it doesn't make mankind a black-and-white enemy. It deals with the often-grey world of conservation. In this case, desperately poor people trying to eke out a living in hard conditions – and their need to turn to the natural world for survival.

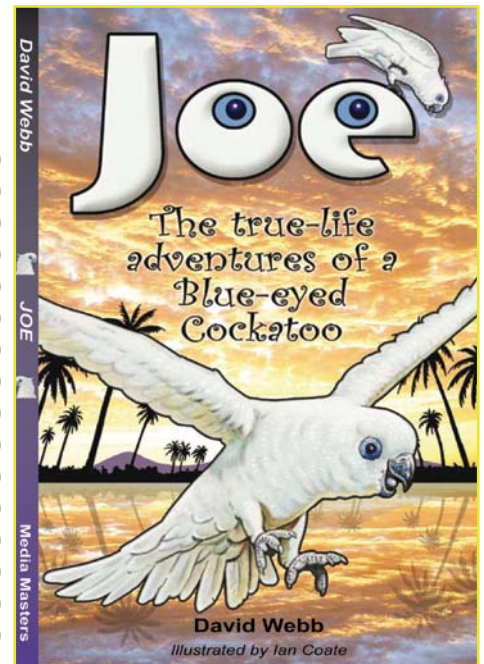
It also offers solutions – an all too rare occurrence in today's polarized world. In sum this is a story that all people, big and small, can take to heart - and perhaps practice a little in the real world.



The Lonely Parrot is a vibrant, engaging story told with fun, bold graphics that will absorb the young mind (particularly the animal-loving one) while delivering a moral lesson for young and old alike. Jojo, a young companion parrot, is brought into a family and showered with attention, toys and love for the first couple of years...until life moves on for his human keepers. This is a common occurrence with companion parrots and one that is rarely viewed from the bird's perspective. Jojo's loss of companionship and subsequent loneliness are palpable.

Our youth contributor, Torianna (age 10) still loves a good picture book. She enjoyed this one because of the immediate empathy she felt for Jojo. She was worried about him and anxious to find out what happened. She also liked that "the author showed up in the book." This is a story with a lesson that has rarely been explored in this format – the responsibilities of bringing a potentially long-lived pet animal into the home and the consequences of not being able to provide for all of its needs. Fortunately for our hero there is a happy ending.

All in all, a fine book for both the ethical lesson and the sweet charming story.



The first thing I liked about Joe was the fact that it's a true story – a tale of a pet cockatoo with an excess of personality who has many adventures; some serious, some comedic. The story itself is a sweet one, but the truly interesting part is what happens to Joe after years with his beloved family. That tale is contained in the epilogue and we'll say no more here.

The text is aimed at ages 9 to 12 and does oscillate between child-like and a little more grown-up. The illustrations are charming, and while at first I wished for a little more colour, I concluded that the black-and-white sketches suited the book fine. It's a gentle tale of the human-animal bond.

Adults and children alike will enjoy the story. Torianna, aged 10, liked the story and the fact that it wasn't your average volume for kids. She enjoyed the fact that Joe learned from his experiences, and that the book was descriptive and had different points of view. There were also some new facts to learn about this cockatoo and the unique part of the world he came from – in my opinion, one of the more important reasons for reading any book. The reader can enjoy it both for the truth and the tale.

New! A place to find everything else!



Exclusively for readers of *PsittaScene*, find all the great information, photos, and resources that we couldn't fit into this outstanding issue.

- More Great Green Macaw photos
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- More Jamaican parrot chick photos
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Parrots in the Wild

