PsittaScene

The Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Winter 2013

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World Parrot Trust

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From the Chairman

We have dedicated this issue of ***PsittaScene*** to the parrots of Africa and our work to learn about and protect them. Firstly, let me tell you about a new member of staff. For many years Dr. Rowan Martin has impressed us with his scientific, academic and organisational skills, and I'm please that he is now serving the World Parrot Trust as Manager of our Africa Conservation Programme. His appointment will greatly increase our capacity in this area and is an exciting step forward for our on-going work in Africa.

Rowan played a key role in coordinating a review of the state of research and conservation of parrots in Africa and Madagascar (p5). He was also present for a historic workshop recently held in Monrovia, Liberia. The workshop was organised by BirdLife International on behalf of the CITES secretariat, and brought together representatives from a number of countries with the common goal of strengthening the monitoring and regulation of international trade of Grey and Timneh Parrots. Participants from government, NGOs and academia presented the findings of pilot studies of survey methods, trends in populations and patterns of legal and illegal trade. Although significant challenges remain, by the end of the workshop delegates from Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon had already begun the task of drawing up national management plans: identifying, prioritising and assigning responsibilities for the key projects to be implemented.

African Grey and Timneh Parrots figure prominently in any African parrot discussion. They are iconic throughout the world and under much pressure at home. We are honoured to share stories from some of the key people working to protect their future. We catch up with a group of Greys at their release after a long journey back to freedom. We shine a light on the trapping pressure these parrots face and on the little known Timneh Parrot. We also bring you the latest news of the Cape Parrot in South Africa and we introduce you to the fascinating life of wildlife activist Ofir Drori, a stand out conservation and welfare hero.

Lastly we offer you thanks for your support which makes this work possible. Best wishes for a happy holiday season.

Alison Hales

On our Covers

FRONT **African** Grey Parrots *(Psittacus erithacus)* look apprehensive and relieved at the same time on their first day of freedom in over 3 years. The birds were confiscated in an illegal shipment in Bulgaria. After years of waiting, they were released in Uganda. See Wild Flights page 10. © Charles Bergman

BACK Cape Parrots *(Poicephalus robustus)*, the female above, are found only in South Africa. They are threatened and range nomadically in search of certain fruits in season. See Cape Parrots page 20. © Rodnick Biljon

© Jimmy Vangenechten

[Female Red-bellied Parrot]

© Mike Bowles

The Parrots of Africa

By Rowan Martin

What we know, what we don't, and why it matters

KNOWLEDGE of the status of populations and the threats they face is essential for effective conservation. However, often the information that decision-makers need simply does not exist or if it does, it is not readily accessible. In recognition of this, the Parrot Researcher's Group of the International Ornithologist's Union (pg 7) initiated the process of reviewing the state of research and conservation of the world's parrots; outlining what is known, identifying the existence of critical knowledge gaps and highlighting areas of conservation concern.

Here is a summary of the challenges and opportunities that exist for conserving parrots in Africa and Madagascar and surrounding islands.

[Senegal Parrot]

AFRICA. Just saying the word conjurs up images of colossal wildlife and vast primeval landscapes. Elephants strolling nonchalantly across endless savannahs. Chimpanzees swinging deftly through ancient jungles. Shoebill storks wading awkwardly through swamps. But if you look carefully at these pictures you might just also spot a flock of Meyer's Parrots roosting in a Jackalberry tree or an African Grey whistling from the top of a palm. Parrots are an integral part of many African landscapes and without them the picture would be far from complete.

But this story-book caricature is only one side of the continent. Africa is developing fast. Economies and populations are booming and as they do, demands on resources are increasing. Habitats are disappearing or becoming increasingly degraded and unable to support the parrot populations they once did. Elsewhere, large volumes of parrots harvested for the pet trade have impacted populations. With these changes come challenges, but also opportunities for parrot conservation. Awareness of the fragility of ecosystems is growing, as is the information to inform appropriate actions.

THE PARROTS OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR belong to five genera *Agapornis*, *Coracopsis*, *Poicephalus*, *Psittacus* and *Psittacula*, the first four of which are endemic – found nowhere else on earth. In part, it is their uniqueness that makes Africa's parrots so important. Depending on which book you read these genera comprise of between 23 and 26 species. To some degree this uncertainty reflects how little we still know about parrots on the continent and how slowly these birds have been to give up their mysteries.

THE DEARTH OF INFORMATION on wild African parrots may come as a surprise given how familiar some species are in captivity. African Greys, Senegal Parrots and several Lovebirds are among the most popular of all avian companions, yet some of these species haven't been the focus of a single field study to date. Recent efforts to address this shortfall have begun to fill in some of the knowledge gaps, but there remains much to be done.

Over the past decade or so there has been a large increase in the number of field studies on African parrots, with projects focused on Lillian's Lovebirds (*Agapornis lilianae*) in Malawi, Black-cheeked Lovebirds (*A. nigrigenis*) in Zambia, Rüppell's Parrots (*Poicephalus rueppellii*) in Namibia, Meyer's Parrots (*P. meyeri*) in Botswana, African Greys (*Psittacus erithacus*) in Cameroon, Brown-necked (*P. fuscicollis fuscicollis*) Grey-headed (*P. fuscicollis suahelicus*) Cape Parrots (*Poicephalus robustus*) and Rosy-faced Lovebirds (*Agapornis roseicollis*) in South Africa. We now know much more about the ecology of these parrots, with information on the nest characteristics, diets, flocking behaviour and vocalisations. Much of this work has been spearheaded by the South Africa-based Centre for African Parrot Conservation. Despite these advances there has been a strong geographical bias in research effort, with populations outside of southern Africa receiving little

[Yellow-fronted Parrots]

attention. Despite these advances there has been a strong geographical bias in research effort, with parrots outside of southern Africa receiving little attention.

Taxonomy is an important tool for conservation. Priorities are often determined on a species by species basis. Recent work has supported the idea that African Greys and Timneh Parrots *(Psittacus timneh)* comprise two distinct species – with important conservation implications. Timnehs, restricted to fragments of lowland forest in a handful of West African states, have received little research or conservation attention to date. Their newly realised status has served to highlight the threats these remaining populations face as well as differences from their more widely distributed cousins. Work is also underway to resolve whether genetic differences between South Africa's Cape Parrots and their Grey-headed and Brown-necked cousins merits their recognition as a distinct species (p20). A lot of unresolved questions remain, and further research, using the latest genetic techniques, is bound to throw up a few surprises - and hopefully settle some long-running debates.

The development of bird "atlases" for a number of countries has also yielded valuable information on distributions of several species. Bird atlas projects take a systematic approach to describing species distributions by dividing up areas into a grid and determining the presence or absence in different areas. Such information can be incredibly valuable, providing guidelines for current species distributions, baselines against which range changes can be assessed, and foundations upon which to investigate the drivers of species distributions. Atlas data now exist in some form for 21 of the 48 sub-Saharan states and several additional projects are underway including in Tanzania, Ghana and Angola. Soon, there will be some distributional data for nearly all of countries of Southern and East Africa. Despite these advances, there remain some large holes in our knowledge – notably the majority of central and West Africa. In addition, most atlas data is more than 10 years old and much of it more than 20. As a result its value for assessing the current distribution of populations is limited, although it provides some great opportunities to assess trends over time.

> *"Striking a balance between conducting more research and taking action before it is too late is one of the biggest challenges conservationists face."*

Distributional data can often be misleading, particularly when collected on a coarse scale. A change in density from trees dripping with parrots down to the last lonesome individual will not necessarily be reflected in a change in distribution – if there's still a bird in that grid square then that grid square gets coloured in. Over the past few decades, biology's top statisticians have been developing ever more sophisticated methods to estimate densities. Density can then be used along with knowledge of distribution to estimate total numbers. Despite advances in methods and technology, the biology of parrots still makes estimating absolute densities extremely challenging. Factor in that in many areas where parrots live there is a lack of infrastructure and other limits on access, and the grail of reliable population estimates increasingly appears unobtainable.

Getting a handle on relative abundance is somewhat easier. By ensuring repeated surveys maintain the same level of effort

[Black-masked Lovebirds]

[Fischer's Lovebirds]

it can be possible to determine whether populations are increasing or declining. Such information is critical for knowing if a population may be becoming threatened or for monitoring the success of conservation initiatives. Monitoring programmes currently exist for just a few of Africa's parrots, including Cape Parrots in South Africa, Lesser Vasa Parrots (*Coracopsis nigra*) in the Seychelles and African Greys in Kenya, and there is a desperate need to effectively monitor populations elsewhere.

In the absence of such data (more often than not the situation we face in Africa) we can sometimes use crude alternatives for getting a sense for what is happening to populations. Observations on group sizes, numbers of birds in roosts, or simply the frequency of sightings can give an indication of the status of populations and how these have changed. This kind of information is often hard to access – hidden away in dusty tomes; early field guides, exploratory trip reports, government reports – and its potential to detect subtle changes is limited. Still, in some instances it can provide indications of trends over time and can be valuable where decisions-makers have little else to work with.

The fate of African Greys in Ghana provides a useful example: early government reports described roosts of 2,000-3,000 Greys; by the early 1990s surveys reported 700-1,200; five years ago field ornithologists working in the region considered a flock of just over 30 exceptionally large. No flocks approaching this size have been reported since. The collation of this kind of information can be key to identifying problems.

> *"Whilst more research and monitoring will enable conservation actions to be refined and improved, waiting until we have all the answers may mean we wait too long."*

Although understanding the status of populations is important for determining where actions are needed we also need to identify the threats and understand how best to address them. Research that informs conservation in this way is critical but can also be costly, time-consuming and at times extremely challenging. Striking a balance between conducting more research and taking action before it is too late is one of the biggest challenges conservationists face.

Uncertainty and Action

There is clearly a need to find out more about the continent's parrots. Some species, such as Niam-niam Parrots (*Poicephalus crassus*) and Swindern's Lovebirds (*Agapornis swindernianus*), are almost unknown and our knowledge of distribution remain little more than loosely drawn circles on a map. For others such as Senegal Parrots (*Poicephalus senegalus*) and Fischer's Lovebirds (*Agapornis fischeri*), some of the most traded birds of all, virtually no data on population trends exist. The unenviable task of determining what level of trapping, if any, might be sustainable can be little better than educated guesswork.

For other species, we know enough to be concerned. More research should go hand-in-hand with conservation actions to address likely threats. For example Yellow-fronted Parrots (*Poicephalus flavifrons*) are restricted to Ethiopia's remaining fragments of afromontane forests. Actions to address ongoing degradation of their habitat should be complemented by research into limits on populations and their current distribution. Whilst more research and monitoring will enable conservation

[Meyer's Parrot]

actions to be refined and improved, waiting until we have all the answers may mean we wait too long.

The good news is that the conservation fortunes can be turned around. In 2007, one of the most threatened birds in the world, the Echo Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) was taken off the Critically Endangered list (the highest threat category that exists on the IUCN Red-List). Thirty years ago only a handful of wild pairs were in existence but today populations are counted by the hundred. This success story was the result of bold conservation actions accompanied by systematic research. More recently the discovery of Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease has been cause for concern but the same approach has improved understanding of the virus, its management and the threat it poses with important lessons for conservation elsewhere.

Africa is a diverse continent and addressing the threats to the continent's parrots requires a diverse approach working at multiple levels. Agreements under international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) can be a critical first step. However turning such agreements into meaningful action can be far from straightforward in a continent where there are many competing priorities. Local capacity needs to be built to enable countries to protect their wildlife. Often it is the daily decisions of those who live alongside parrots and whose fate is intricately tied to the birds around them that can have the biggest impact. Awareness of conservation problems needs to be improved, alternative livelihoods developed, and the next generation armed with the tools they need for the future.

Only with this range of approaches will we ensure that parrots continue to be a part of African landscapes and that the picture remains complete.

Working together for parrots

The Parrot Researcher's Group (PRG) is a network of individuals and organisations that aims to promote research and evidence-based conservation of parrots.

The group has recently been appointed as Research Coordination Committee on Parrots (RCCP) of the International Ornithologist's Union.

The PRG/RCCP supports an on-line forum, an on-line library of over 2,300 peer-reviewed articles and other documents, organises conference symposiums, the publication of special issues of research journals and regional reviews of research and conservation priorities.

PRG Secretary: Juan Masello - jmasello@wcs.org

Dr. Rowan Martin is the Manager of the World Parrot Trust's Africa Conservation Programme. He recently coordinated a review of the state of research and conservation of parrots in Africa for the International Ornithologist's Union Parrot Researcher's Group.

Welcome

The World Parrot Trust is pleased to welcome **Dr. Rowan Martin** to our staff as manager of the WPT Africa Conservation Programme (WPT-ACP). Rowan will be leading the development, management and implementation of the programme, promoting its vision and objectives, participating in strategic partnerships, fundraising, supervising related projects and providing technical assistance.

Rowan first became involved with WPT during his doctoral studies on the breeding behaviour of Yellow-shouldered Amazon Parrots (*Amazona barbadensis*) on Bonaire while based at the University of Sheffield, UK. Between 2009 and 2013 he held a Postdoctoral fellowship at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. While in South Africa Rowan became involved in African parrot conservation, co-ordinating a review of the state of research and conservation of parrots in Africa for the International Ornithologist's Union Parrot Researcher's Group. The findings of this review (p4) provide a road map for the WPT Africa Conservation Programme.

Rowan is an ecologist with a strong interest in evidence-based conservation and the management of threatened species and ecosystems. His research has focused on understanding the drivers of behaviour and the consequences for populations, as well as the effects of climate change on birds. He has worked on a number of field projects in Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Panama, Nicaragua and the Caribbean and has travelled extensively throughout Southern and East Africa.

WPT Africa Conservation Programme

This issue of *PsittaScene* is dedicated to African Parrots, the many charismatic and iconic species that are as integral to the African landscape as elephants, lions and giraffes. Although several species are among the most popular companion birds, surprisingly little is known of these species in the wild. Where information does exist, often the outlook is dire and there is an urgent need to increase not only research but conservation efforts in the region. In response, the World Parrot Trust has initiated the Africa Conservation Programme which will build on current achievements and work to safeguard African parrots into the future.

Current efforts will continue including assisting local partners to enforce wildlife trade laws and ensuring confiscated parrots are managed responsibly and returned to the wild. In addition, we will develop the programme in a number of new directions.

We are developing new research and conservation programmes to provide the knowledge needed to best conserve populations while at the same time taking action to address immediate threats.

Some species such as Niam-niam Parrot remain virtually unknown and there is a need to collect even the most basic data on their status. Other species, such as Yellow-fronted Parrots in Ethiopia, are restricted to tiny areas, which are vulnerable to human encroachment. Yet others, such as Senegal Parrots have been among the most heavily traded of all CITES listed birds. There is an urgent need to determine the impact of trapping on populations and what actions are needed.

We are developing education programmes to engage the people that live alongside parrots in their conservation. We will also continue to work to ensure that decisions made under international conventions such as CITES are based on the best available information. Currently export quotas for all African parrots lack adequate scientific underpinning. It is critical that, in the face of uncertainty, appropriate decisions are made.

There is much to be done, but with your help and Rowan's expertise, we are excited about future possibilities for Africa's parrots.

"The 500 African Grey Parrots case proved to be one of the most interesting in terms of high level corruption and complicity. Fighting corruption for 6 days non-stop got us some victories – one top dealer behind bars and most of the parrots are already free. I want to use this case revealing how corruption works at high levels. We are talking about a half a million dollars worth of contraband."

~ Ofir Drori, Last Great Ape Organization

Conservation Hero | Ofir Drori

Wildlife laws only work to protect wildlife when they are enforced. In many countries, effective laws exist but they are simply ignored. Corruption goes to the highest levels; animals of all kinds suffer unimaginable fates at the hands of people and those responsible walk away with fortunes and no penalties. All over the world, this scene plays out again and again.

We chose to honour Ofir Drori as our Conservation Hero for his unprecedented work against wildlife trade in Africa. Ofir, Founder and Director of LAGA (the Last Great Ape Organization), has carried a wave of change with him into Africa. We recognise Ofir for the thousands of animals he and his colleagues have saved from the brutality of trade and the long list of criminals they have brought to justice.

Describing his leap from a journalist covering a story on bushmeat trafficking to a renowned anti-poaching genius, Ofir explains:

"In a remote small town with extensive ape trade, I was led to an infant survivor of the bushmeat trade - a baby chimp, tied up, abused and sick, in a dirty room. His eyes were like those of human babies, but nobody seemed to notice. It was horrible and I knew that if I did nothing, he would die. When the local authorities refused to act, I bluffed the poachers into handing over the captive chimp. I untied him from his ropes and hugged him. In seconds he was transformed to a baby and he clung to my chest like it was an island of safety. He would have died before reaching the third year of his life; now he got the chance to reach 50, the chance to outlive me. I named him Future, because that is what I wanted to give him and what I want to give his species.

Future had to live with me for the first months before he could join an ape family in a proper shelter. That special day I saved Future was the day I decided to stay and pioneer a Wildlife Law Enforcement NGO fighting to save the last great apes from extinction."

Of course where there are orphan chimps, elephant parts, pangolin scales and leopard pelts there are also parrots, alive and in parts, in trade and suffering the effects. LAGA has rallied for parrots too, instigating the confiscation of thousands of Grey Parrots and working with WPT and local organisations to see those birds through rehabilitation and release. The best news of all is that the LAGA model is now being replicated throughout Africa, a powerful force supporting local authorities to enforce their existing anti-poaching legislation.

Please visit our online links (psittascene.org) to learn more about the fascinating life and work of Ofir Drori.

African Grey Parrot release, Cameroon, 2008

Wild Flights

By Charles Bergman

ALL DAY LONG, THE BIRDS EYED US WITH EVIDENT DISTRUST. You could see it in their clear yellow eyes – the knowing looks of fully aware creatures. They flocked together at the back corner of the temporary aviary – squawking, whistling, chortling. We had come to this island in Lake Victoria, in Uganda, to set them free, but they seemed to want no part of it.

It was an historic moment: the first time ever that parrots that had been smuggled out of Africa were confiscated, returned to the continent, and set free. Sadly, however, these parrots had good reason to be suspicious.

The seventeen African Grey Parrots in the aviary had spent the last three and a half years in the global wildlife trade, suffering one trauma after another at the hands of humans. Illegally captured, probably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they were flown to Lebanon, given fake papers, and finally busted in Bulgaria by a sharp-eyed customs official.

It would take years for the World Parrot Trust to locate a suitable country in Africa for the return, and get all the bureaucratic paperwork done. Which brought us – and more importantly, the birds themselves – to this strange waiting game on Ngamba Island in Lake Victoria. Ngamba Island seemed an inspired choice for the release – 100 acres of pristine forest, remote from the mainland, and already protected as a sanctuary for abandoned and orphaned chimpanzees (See *PsittaScene* May 2013).

The years-long ordeal in captivity took a heavy toll on the parrots: 108 were confiscated in Europe, most in terrible shape. Many died soon after, and in the end, only 23 survived the wait. Of those, seventeen were healthy enough for release on this fateful day. Such is the toll that the wildlife trade and captivity take on parrots.

But their day had finally come. So meaningful was the moment that Dr. Jane Goodall, one of the most prominent and effective advocates for animals in the world, was on hand to do the honors of opening the aviary door. Famous for her epoch-making research on chimpanzees and their cognitive abilities, Dr. Goodall traveled to Ngamba Island to highlight the plight of parrots in the wildlife trade. "Wild parrots don't do well in cages," she had said to us the night before.

Dr. Goodall told a story of meeting a Grey Parrot living in Brooklyn, New York. This parrot, named N'kisi, had seen nature documentaries featuring Dr. Goodall and her chimpanzees. When they met, N'kisi greeted her. "Hi Jane," he said. "Where's your chimp?"

For such smart and sensitive creatures, what must all the suffering of the trade mean?

> It was a moving moment to pull the string that opened the door of their acclimatization aviary. The 17 parrots have adapted to their freedom amazingly well. It is, indeed, a pathetically tiny number when one considers the hundreds of thousands that have been stolen from the wild, but it symbolizes the huge efforts being made to curb the illegal trade and return the birds to their rightful habitat.
>
> ~ Dr. Jane Goodall

Dr. Goodall draws a crowd. A small army of African journalists, from television and print, made the early morning trip to the island for the release. Perhaps they were expecting a dramatic event, a great photo op for the cameras – an open door, a flurry of wings, a sudden rush of grey and red as a flock made its dash for freedom.

But the parrots had their own ideas. If they were talking amongst themselves, I'm pretty sure what they were talking about was us. "We know you're out there," they seemed to say, "and we're not coming out."

The hours dragged on. The press left. The dignitaries left. Dr. Goodall left to catch a flight. Finally, Rowan Martin, my student Nev Granum, and I took a break for dinner.

After dinner, with the red African sun sliding into Lake Victoria, we went back to the aviary.

(Facing page) Dr. Jane Goodall joins WPT's Rowan Martin to open the aviary door for 17 African Grey Parrots that, after a long ordeal, made their way home. After much preparation, their release on Ngamba island in Lake Victoria, Uganda, was a rewarding experience for all. (Above) The first birds investigate the open door and soon the open branches near their acclimatization cage where they had gained strenghth for wild flight.

"Look," Rowan said, "two are out." An ornithologist with the World Parrot Trust, Rowan supervised the entire release and did a great job for the parrots.

Sure enough, two cool grey birds with crimson tails sat on a platform just outside the hatch opening. As we watched, they took off. Wings flapping loudly, they sagged toward the ground. We gasped. One worry about the release was that the birds weren't strong enough for free flight after three-plus years in cages. Thankfully, they skimmed some low bushes, lifted above the fence of the compound, and settled into a far tree. By then, we were cheering.

That evening we watched five more parrots emerge from the aviary. They spent their first night in years outside a cage.

The next day we were at the aviary early for a magical African morning. The sun flashed in peach and pink on the clouds over Lake Victoria and the chimpanzees were hooting and screaming as they ate breakfast. The parrots were calling too, back and forth between those outside and those inside the cage. Two birds were already in the bare branches nearby and one bird was on the platform outside the aviary. It climbed a branch, tight-roped along the chord used to open the hatch, and flew to the two parrots in the branches.

I watched as one small group – four parrots – flew above the canopy of the forest, on shallow wing beats, disappearing as they explored the far side of their new home. It was impossible not to feel your heart soar with the parrots in these first wild flights. After centuries of taking parrots out of the wild, finally we're doing the right thing – bringing them home.

By the end of the morning, all but three parrots were free.

I watched as one bird flew up to a bare snag above the chimpanzee compound. The low morning sun warmed its soft grey feathers, flashing on its white face. Its view was the vast panorama of Lake Victoria and the forested island. After so much trauma, what must this view have meant to this parrot? Could it see on the horizon, a new future for parrots in Africa?

Such a poignant moment, for us and, more importantly, for the parrot – so smart, so knowing, and then suddenly, so unexpectedly free.

Charles Bergman has had a long interest in parrots. In the early 1990s, he wrote a story for *Audubon* magazine about his adventures undercover busting parrot smugglers. More recently, he wrote a cover story for Smithsonian magazine on macaw poachers in Latin America, and joined Dr. Gilardi on an expedition to Guyana to discover the last known wild flock of Sun Conures. Freeing Grey Parrots into the African wild has been one of his most satisfying wildlife experiences ever.

By Paulo Catry

The Timneh Parrot (left) differs from the more widespread African Grey Parrot (p12) not only in tail and beak colour but also in range (very small) and scientific attention (very limited).

Africa's Other Grey

Domingos and his brother guide us through the forest while parrot whistles and loud calls pierce the high canopy. The men whisper to each other in the local Bijagó dialect used on Canhabaque, understood by little more than a couple of thousand people on Earth. Threatened language, spoken by former hunters of threatened birds. Alarmed, the birds move incessantly above our heads before disappearing. But we've spotted their nest, and Domingos is going to climb it, not to poach, but to gather precious knowledge to help their conservation.

If you have ever heard of Guinea-Bissau, a small West African nation, the odds are that deep poverty, military instability and other unpleasant realities are part of the image you have of this forgotten land. Independent of the bad press, Guinea-Bissau is a country of fascinating cultural and biological diversity, friendly people, and a place where one can work and travel rather safely! Despite the relative weakness of public institutions, Guinea-Bissau has a functional network of parks and reserves. It is also the home of one of the few known breeding populations of Timneh Parrots (*Psittacus timneh*) left on earth.

Thousands of Timnehs have been sold and are owned as pets yet these birds are virtually unknown to ornithologists. Recently split from their brighter cousins, the Grey Parrots *(Psittacus erithacus)*, Timneh Parrots have not historically attracted much attention and nobody has systematically studied them in the wild. This inattention may be why few people have noticed that they are now virtually gone from their natural West African range.

Grey Parrot and Timneh Parrot range across equatorial Africa

Timnehs are currently classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN, but this classification is likely a major understatement of their worrying conservation status. Without data, of course, we can't prove this suspicion. Like so many West African forest inhabitants, Timneh Parrots are victims of a cocktail of factors, where poaching, wildlife trade, rapid habitat destruction, fast human population growth and persistent poverty are major elements contributing to a huge biodiversity crisis.

There are no Timneh Parrots on Guinea-Bissau's continental territory which has apparently been the case for at least several decades. Whether they were extirpated by past harvest for the bird trade or their absence is "natural" is anyone's guess. But not far offshore, in the Bijagós (an archipelago made of some 88 islands), Timneh Parrots can still be found. This is the extreme western limit of their global range. Here, parrots have been trapped and traded to the point of extinction in several of the main islands. They are now rare and only seem to nest on smaller uninhabited islands.

In the late 1990s, the first enquiries on the status of Timneh Parrots in Guinea-Bissau were made and provided a precious first, but rather coarse, picture of their status and distribution. From the start, it was clear they were

(Right) The base of an existing water tower was modified to serve as a large cage to house confiscated parrots while they are recovering before release. (Below) The island of João Vieira, Guinea-Bissau: home to an apparently healthy population of Timneh Parrots.

scarce and localised in the archipelago, and the subject of some trade. Around this time, the first two national parks (Orango NP and João Vieira – Poilão NP) were created, not just on paper, but de facto. Most conservation work and regulations initially concentrated on the marine environment, as these are parks with an important marine component. But soon IBAP (the national Institute for Biodiversity and Protected Areas) started increasing attention to terrestrial taxa too, and to parrots in particular.

The island of João Vieira occupies less than a dozen square kilometres (4.5 mi^2) yet holds the densest and apparently healthiest Timneh Parrot population in Guinea-Bissau. Its similarly sized neighbour, Meio, also has many parrots. Elsewhere, parrots are now scarce, although some other important sites may still remain undiscovered.

Due to the persistent action of a few expert parrot hunters who travel from island to island in search of their prey, the comparatively few Timnehs left remain under threat. This risk prompted IBAP and its partners to attempt to identify these individual poachers and bring them to change sides and support conservation work. One of the most proficient hunters, Seco Bacar, was recruited by a Spanish NGO (CBD-Habitat) to work with IBAP on some of the first census work on João Vieira National Park. He enjoyed the experience, made a great contribution, and then accepted a job on a CBD boat that provides logistical support for an ecotourism initiative. This was the first indication that expert parrot hunters could be diverted from their activity if given adequate incentive.

Despite progress in the past decades including important census work, the successful involvement of Seco, and surveillance by park rangers discouraging poaching in critical nesting areas, much remains to be done. Last year, when WPT realised that the Bijagós presented a great opportunity for the conservation of Timneh parrots, work on behalf of the species had stalled. Previous actions had been discontinued and IBAP was paying more attention to other (also important!) conservation priorities, such as sea turtles and sharks. Rumours were that some hunters were still active, and next to nothing was known about parrots on islands away from those protected by the parks.

A small project was quickly drafted and with the financial support of WPT and the coordination by IBAP, new activities were

(Above) Former parrot hunters were recruited to assist in the monitoring of nesting sites and to actively protect nests, while diverting them from poaching. Here, climbing a 50m tall tree without the help of any rope. (Right) Incisions made by poachers on the bark of a tree in order to reach a nest.

launched. One of the main priorities was to recruit another parrot hunter, Domingos Soda da Cunha, to help gather basic biological knowledge on João Vieira, and support surveillance on the nesting areas. Hamilton Monteiro, an enthusiastic Guinea-Bissau ornithologist was invited to be part of the team, as were Mohamed Henriques and Quintino Tchanchalam, two young national biologists. Besides collecting data and improving surveillance, other actions included building nest boxes to be experimentally placed in central nesting areas and building a small recovery centre for parrots that may, in the future, be apprehended from poachers and traders.

In the past, parrots used a variety of trees to nest, including easily climbed palm trees. Nowadays, they only use really tall trees. Last March, when I first visited the main nesting area on João Vieira, I was stunned when Domingos Soda da Cunha pointed to the high branches of a 50-60 m (180 ft) tall tree and told me he was going to check the nest near the top. It just seemed too high and too dangerous. But there he went, using nothing but vines and sometimes jumping from one tree to another at the level of the crowns. He carried a short rope as a support, but actually never used it. Spectacular as it was, I could not help feeling worried for Domingos' safety. Clearly one of the many remaining needs for future work in the Bijagós includes training in tree climbing techniques and associated safety procedures!

An awful lot remains to be done. Our knowledge of the biology of Timnehs remains fragmented. We need to better understand the most limiting factors (besides poaching) for the Bijagós population, including the importance of the availability of suitable nesting sites. We also need to describe the distribution and abundance of the parrots away from the parks, and better survey and protect small isolated islands that still hold nesting pairs. Many of those islands are sacred, in the local tradition, and this status can help in establishing strategies for more effective protection.

We need also to launch a campaign for the apprehension of any Timnehs illegally held by private individuals. The Bijagós people have many traditions that have helped to conserve natural resources. Traditional powers and the elders need to be engaged in the effort for conservation. We also believe the strategy of recruiting the best poachers (there are few of them!) must continue. These are generally young men from poor communities that are keen and ready to hold any job opportunity that gives them stable revenue.

Nothing is easy in Guinea-Bissau, but the progress made so far suggests a brilliant opportunity to conserve Timneh Parrots. Affordable levels of investment have already resulted in positive impacts, but these efforts still need to expand and become more sustained. This is our next challenge!

Dr. Paulo Catry is a Portuguese zoologist who has been involved in research and management of protected areas in Guinea-Bissau for nearly two decades. With the support of WPT and the MAVA Foundation he is currently helping IBAP to better understand the status and needs of Timneh Parrots and to develop effective conservation actions for the species. At IBAP, this work is coordinated by Aissa Regalla and Castro Barbosa.

Congo's quintessential parrot

By John Hart

I AM ALWAYS ATTENTIVE when I encounter a flock of parrots whether deep in the forest or among the mosaic of gardens in settled landscapes. Even in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) sprawling capital, parrots, whose daily range we can only imagine, roost every evening in tall trees bordering the Congo River. The presence of parrots is almost invariably heralded by their calls. I always try to determine who is flying by… "Is there a Red-fronted in that flock? Will I get a lucky glimpse of the little known Niam-niam?"

The Grey Parrot *(Psittacus erithacus)* is Congo's quintessential parrot. Not only is it widespread throughout the country, but its large size, sociality and amazing diversity of calls makes it the most prominent of country's five species of parrots. Grey Parrots have what the Congolese term, *"tabia"*, charisma.

But charisma has not always been to their advantage. Congo's Grey Parrots have been targeted for capture and trade for decades, most likely for more than a century. For most of this time locally based trappers captured only modest numbers of birds. There was scant concern for the impact of this exploitation on what was assumed – and what appeared – to be a never-ending supply of birds occupying the country's vast rain forests.

The trade grew over the years. Based on CITES quotas well over 100,000 parrots may have been exported from DRC over the last two decades. While the impact of this exploitation was certainly not negligible, it seemed, even to experienced observers, that limiting the capture and trade in Grey Parrots was less urgent than many other emerging conservation issues.

As in other such cases, dynamics can change quickly. A rude awakening occurs.

This awakening came for me in March 2011 on the Lomami River in central Congo when I joined field staff on a visit to a remote clearing in an area slated to become a new national park. We had discovered this pristine clearing two years earlier and named it *Parc de Perroquets* for the scores of African Grey Parrots that descended to the ground every morning like clock work.

As our dugout canoe approached *Parc de Perroquets* we were taken aback to see several small dugouts and a crudely constructed raft at the landing. Smoke rose from a camp on shore and a scratchy cassette recording of a Congolese rumba band blared incongruously.

We landed and walked up to the camp where 6 people greeted us nervously. My consternation turned to shock when I saw two makeshift wooden cages filled with squawking and screeching Greys. We did not have any park guards with us, but I produced a research permit from the Congolese National Parks Institute and asked to be introduced to trappers' leader. A slight fellow stepped forward

African Grey Parrots at a forest clearing in Odzala National Park, Congo-Brazzaville. While we do not yet know the composition of the soils the parrots ingest or what minerals are in the water they drink we know that clearings like this are rare and precious. Greys sometimes congregate by the hundreds alongside a variety of other wildlife.

looking ill at ease. He identified himself as Didi and handed us an ID card for the *"Association d'Oisolier du Congo"* (Congolese National Bird Capturers Association), an outfit I had never heard of before. He then produced a photocopy of an out-dated CITES permit authorizing export of 300 parrots on behalf of a pet trading business in Singapore. Didi's cages held over 90 parrots by his own count.

I asked if he was aware that he was in a proposed national park and that his trapping operation was illegal. He claimed that his possession of a CITES permit allowed him to catch birds wherever he could.

At this point, I pulled out my satellite phone and dialed the park's warden. I had no authority to arrest the trappers and release the birds but I could threaten arrest by park guards if they arrived. I knew that this was unlikely as we were days away from the nearest patrol post where there was no communication. We ourselves were heading in the opposite direction, but I was emphatic in warning the trappers that a team of guards could be mobilized shortly. There was little more we could do. We pushed off. The calls of the captured parrots were the last sound I heard as we rounded a bend in the river.

We returned three weeks later to find the camp abandoned. A village downstream told us that a raft of parrots had passed in the night without lights, an unusual and risky move. They had heard the cacophony of the screeching birds.

We inspected the abandoned camp. Didi had added a third cage, so he likely had well over 100 parrots when he left. Sadly, there were no signs of the hippos that also used the clearing. A small flock of parrots flew over during our visit but did not land.

Clearings in the rain forest, such as *Parc de Perroquets* attract the most spectacular and largest aggregations of Grey Parrots in DRC. Some clearings clearly have attracted parrots for a very long time and are also visited by other birds, mammals and insects. Not all species frequent the same clearings, and in some cases, such as the *Parc de Perroquets,* Grey Parrots are the only birds known to gather. These parrot clearings are rare. We have discovered only half a dozen in the thousands of kilometers we have walked and dozens of clearings we have inspected in our years of surveys in Congo's wilderness forests.

My first experience of a parrot clearing was unforgettable. It was at *Mehwa* in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in 2005. Nature photographer Reto Kuster, who was led to the site by local Mbuti Pygmies, first documented *Mehwa* clearing earlier that same year. *Mehwa* has, arguably, some of the largest gatherings of parrots, and at the time of its discovery, was one of the least disturbed parrot clearings in Central Africa. On my first visit, sitting on the edge of the clearing in a makeshift blind,

(Clockwise from top left) Setting up camera traps to monitor Grey Parrots in a forest clearing; Illegally captured Grey chicks for sale; Captured Greys awaiting transport; Large congregations gather near forest clearings where they descent to drink and eat soil; Bait birds tethered to branches lure other birds in.

I was privileged to witness hundreds of Grey Parrots and thousands of Green Pigeons *(Treron calvus)* flying to and fro and coming down to drink at a series of small springs in the center of the clearing. The birds were so packed that I could not see the ground beneath them as they jostled, postured, threatened and pushed to reach the edge of the water. The air was filled with the din of their calls.

After my initiation in 2005 and the sad events of 2011, we turned our attention back to parrot clearings in July 2013 for a four-month investigation based in two provinces, Maniema and Orientale. Our objectives were to evaluate methods for monitoring parrot numbers and to provide a first assessment of the commerce in parrots out of Kisangani, one of the key hubs in the trade of Grey Parrots in DRC.

Our surveys produced few observations of parrots away from aggregations, even in remote, un-settled forest. Grey Parrots appear to be uncommon over large areas of otherwise suitable rain forest range in central DRC. When we discussed our findings with local villagers, we were sometimes told of larger and more frequent flocks in the past in some areas where we had encountered very few.

Our research on trade added to our concerns about declining parrot populations in DRC. We interviewed and accompanied parrot trappers including several who specialized in catching birds within the city limits of Kisangani, as well as trappers who climbed for fledglings at a nesting colony 120 km (75 mi) south of the city. Several local buyers or *"négociants"*, who buy parrots from trappers and ship them to exporters in Kinshasa, also provided us with information and the opportunity to witness transactions. Finally the loadmaster for the single air freight company that transports parrots from Kisangani to Kinshasa collaborated by keeping a log book of parrot shipments.

Our results were sobering. The volume of trade was much higher than we anticipated. Based on a two month survey by the air transport company, including one month when captures were legally suspended, but during which time parrots continued to be shipped, we estimated about 800 parrots per month were leaving Kisangani for Kinshasa by air. At this rate, and just considering this one transit point, the numbers of birds that arrive in Kinshasa and are exported to international markets likely far surpass DRC's CITES quota of 5,000 live birds annually.

Just as disturbing were the figures that emerged on mortality. Our sample of urban trappers averaged 24% mortality at the site of capture in the 3 weeks we surveyed with them. All the trappers interviewed stated that mortality was higher when fledglings were taken from their nests or where birds were captured at remote sites and required prolonged transport to reach Kisangani.

Mortality continued right up the trade chain, with négociants reporting from 10-40% losses. Mortality at the final step, in the air transport cargo crates, amounted to over 10%. All told, 45-60% of captured birds are likely to die before

All told, 45-60% of captured birds are likely to die before they even reach Kinshasa for export.

they even reach Kinshasa for export. Given this rate of mortality, the monthly air transport figures we recorded represent from 12,000-16,000 birds annually or 2-3 captured birds per 100 km2 (40 mi²) in Orientale Province.

No African Grey Parrot population, even in the vast forests of eastern DRC, can withstand this kind of off take for long. The question is how to stop this uncontrolled and destructive trade before the country's Grey Parrot populations are reduced to tattered remnants.

Improvements in the care of captured birds to reduce mortality are clearly needed, but as long as Congolese trappers believe the solution to a dead bird in the hand is to find another in the bush, the slaughter will continue.

What is really needed is to reduce the numbers of Greys captured. At present both captures and trade are controlled and monitored minimally at best. Most monitoring of the trade is at a local level where authorities benefit by taxing trappers and négociants access to birds. Effective control of trapping is unlikely to occur at this level. Protection will require concerted efforts by provincial level authorities in collaboration with the National Parks Institute.

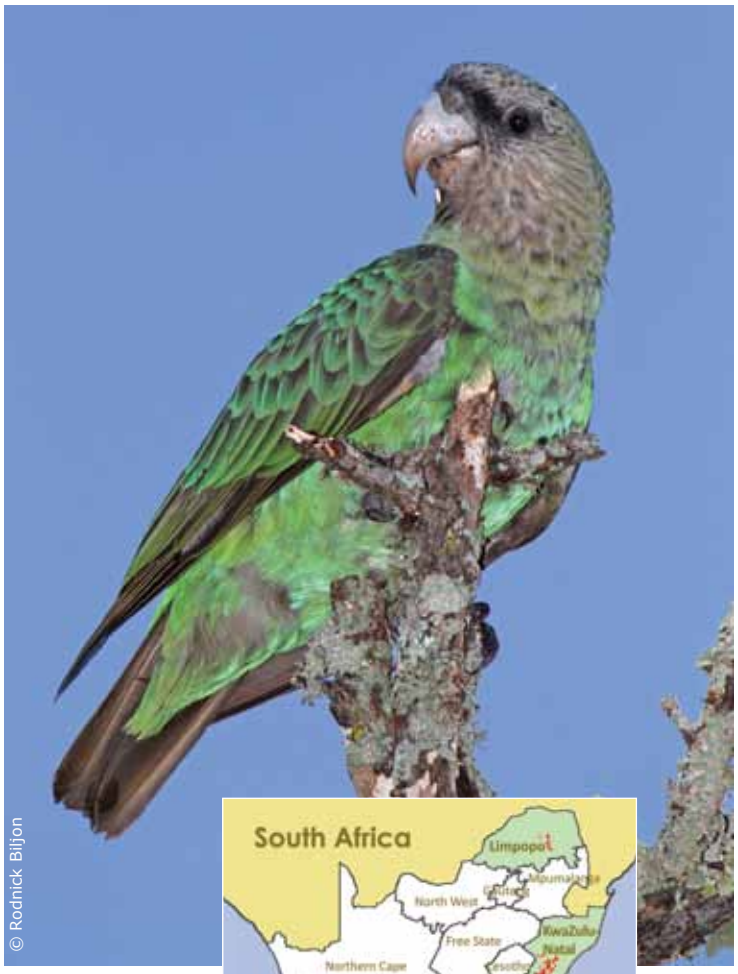
Exports represent the largest and most lucrative trade in Grey Parrots. Thus the only feasible means to reduce capture rates in DRC is to reduce foreign demand for wild caught birds. The conservation of Congo's African Grey Parrots is in the hands of parrot lovers around the world who must lead a campaign against the purchase of wild caught birds.

Unless this happens, Congo's charismatic African Greys will soon become a fading memory over much of the heart of their range in Central Africa.

Postscript. *In November 2010, over 500 African Grey Parrots were confiscated from illegal trappers by DRC's Ministry of Environment at South Kivu's provincial airport and placed at the Lwiro sanctuary* (PsittaScene, November 2010). *A month after they were confiscated, the Lwiro birds were seized from the sanctuary by armed government officials and returned to the illegal trappers who shipped them by air to Kinshasa. Two days later 730 Greys died on a commercial flight from Kinshasa to Durban. In 2010, the Lwiro birds were transported under the same CITES document that Didi presented to us after we accosted him on the Lomami in March 2011.*

Dr. John Hart is the Scientific Director for the Lukuru Foundation in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. The DRC parrot study was a collaboration between the Lukuru Foundation's Tshuapa, Lomami, Lualaba (TL2) Project based in Kinshasa and SOS Nature, based in Kisangani with support from Birdlife International. Online visit www.bonoboincongo.com.

Cape Parrot | A South African Endemic



Cape Parrots are found mostly in 3 South African provinces - the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and a disjunct population in Limpopo Province in the north. Conservation efforts include tree planting, habitat protection, community education and research into disease and genetics.

Cape Parrots (*Poicephalus robustus*) are endemic to South Africa and populations are threatened with perhaps less than 1,600 in the wild. Previously, this forest specialist had a more extensive distribution, but it is now mainly restricted to patches in a mosaic of afromontane forest in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and a disjunct population farther north in the Limpopo Province. Factors contributing to the parrot's decline vary in their effects at different locations and include: the loss or change in the quality of their preferred forest habitat, food and nest-site shortages, illegal poaching for the pet trade, disease (especially Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease virus), avian predators and accelerated climate change.

As food nomadics, Cape Parrots move between forest patches tracking irregular fruit availability. Their preferred foods are the fruits of yellowwood trees (*Afrocarpus/Podocarpus* sp.) which produce fruit unpredictably with fruiting events sometimes separated by long intervals. Consequently the parrots cannot rely on a particular patch of yellowwoods fruiting annually. During the remainder of the year Cape Parrots feed on other forest fruits with kernels. When forest fruit is scarce, they make foraging trips to other forests and / or visit food sources outside of forests including commercial orchards, and gardens.

Movements and seasonal changes in the feeding patterns of Cape Parrots highlight the importance of conserving networks of indigenous afromontane forest patches. Understanding the feeding behaviours which drive the parrots' movements between and out of forest patches is essential for planning effective conservation strategies.

Furthermore, it is critical to understand the threat posed by Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) and how it may act in synergy with other processes such as changes in food availability and an increasingly severe climate.

Prof. Colleen Downs, University of KwaZulu-Natal

The World Parrot Trust has been supporting work to save Cape Parrots since the mid 1990's. Here we highlight four major projects and the people who make them happen. All are dedicated to advancing our knowledge of this important species and taking action to protect the birds and their unique and imperiled habitat.

Cape Parrot Big Birding Day

The Cape Parrot Big Birding Day (CPBBD), a national census of Cape Parrots, has been held annually since 1998. The CPBBD involves large numbers of volunteers who monitor numbers of parrots from fixed vantage points. In addition to providing critical information to inform conservation the CPBBD also engages local communities and youth in the study and protection of one of their very special and unique birds

Although the primary aim of the annual CPBBD is to estimate population numbers in the wild, it has also provided valuable insights into other aspects of Cape Parrot ecology. Information on movements and seasonal changes in the feeding patterns have served to highlight the important role of indigenous forest patches. Volunteers for the CPBBD also collect data on a variety of other threatened species in both forests and the adjacent grasslands generating data on the wider health of these ecosystems.

In 2013 at least 225 volunteers were posted at 84 localities in the three provinces. Despite poor weather, two counts yielded 1182 and 1317 parrots. The maximum number of Cape Parrots seen in each of the areas covered suggests that there were at least 1402 parrots in the wild on the CPBBD in 2013.

Prof. Colleen T. Downs and Lorinda Hart
School of Life Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal

People, Parrots and the Trees of Life

The Cape Parrot Project aims to mitigate all current extinction threats to the Endangered Cape Parrot using community-based conservation action guided by quality empirical research. Three years of data collection in the Eastern Cape Province suggest that severe outbreaks of PBFD virus in the wild population could be linked to a food resource bottleneck between January and March each year.

CPP have now planted 22,000 indigenous trees, erected 258 nest boxes and established 35 micro-nurseries. The establishment of three new forest reserves has also been scheduled.

In 2014, they will be pioneering new techniques to improve access to natural food resources at suitable feeding sites using vocalization playbacks to manipulate the local movements of large flocks. The aim is to encourage parrots to use depleted Afromontane forest patches that local populations are unable to effectively investigate for potential feeding sites.

Better land management is supported by teaching local communities how to grow, care for, and plant indigenous trees in and around critical Afromontane forest patches.

The next goal is to plant 1 million indigenous trees and erect 1,000 nest boxes along the Amathole Mountain Range with local communities by 2023.

Dr. Rutledge S. Boyes,
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Limpopo's Last Cape Parrots

Concerns over the presence of PBFD in populations in the Eastern Cape Province and KwaZulu-Natal highlighted the potential importance of a tiny population, isolated by over 800 km (500 mi) in the far north of South Africa.

In response to disease concerns a systematic monitoring programme was initiated in 2012. Early assessments suggest the population could be fewer than 100 individuals with the largest single flock containing 30 individuals. Importantly a number of younger birds have been seen – a positive sign for the future.

Although no clinical signs of PBFD have been observed, the presence of the virus in this population has been confirmed using genetic tests of blood and feather samples.

In addition to monitoring, an educational program has been established to engage school children with the conservation of parrots and other forest birds. As part of the programme children participate in planting indigenous trees around schools. At certain times of year Cape Parrots feed in and around villages and in the future these trees may well become critical resources for Cape Parrots and other wildlife.

David Letsoalo, Kurisa Moya
Prof. Craig Symes, University of the Witswatersrand

Cape Parrot Genetic Research Project

There remains much debate over the Cape Parrot's taxonomic status. While some texts and authorities recognize it as a distinct species, others consider it a subspecies of *Poicephalus robustus*, along with the Grey-headed Parrot *(P.r. suahelicus)* and the Brown-necked Parrot *(P.r. fuscicollis)* whose ranges extend through southern, east and west Africa. As taxonomic classification has a number of important implications for deciding conservation policy, employing the latest tools and techniques to resolve this debate is imperative.

The main aims of the genetic study are to establish the genetic relationships between populations of Cape Parrots and their nearby relatives, to determine the genetic diversity of the regional population, and to test the efficacy of certain genetic markers for identification of suspected illegally-obtained birds as to their region and population of origin and parentage.

Preliminary results indicate Cape Parrots are genetically distinct from Grey-headed and Brown-necked Parrots suggesting treatment as a distinct species could be justified. Additional genetic samples of all three will enable more robust conclusions to be drawn. Parrots from the Eastern Cape Province appear to have high levels of genetic diversity within sub-populations, suggesting little danger of the negative effects of inbreeding.

Riël Coetzer, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Riël's PhD supervised by Dr. Sandi Willows-Munro, Profs Colleen Downs and Mike Perrin.

Thanks...

The Gilson Bequest

Mrs Mary Denise Gilson, who died on the 9th September 2012, spent much of her life caring for a wide variety of animals and was a devoted parrot owner. She demonstrated her love of animals in her choice to support wildlife charities in her Will, including a substantial Legacy to the World Parrot Trust.

We are grateful to WPT member Mr Barrie Ashford, a long standing friend of Mrs Gilson and Executor of her Will for his assistance with her Estate, and for the photograph and background on Mrs Gilson, her husband Stanley and their companion Blue and Gold Macaw Harold.

Mr Ashford first met Mrs Gilson, who was known as Denise, when she lived in Stapleton near Bristol where her husband was a General Practitioner. The couple had been involved in a serious car crash in Austria, which necessitated Denise being flown back by air ambulance to England. Living nearby, it was fellow macaw owner Mr Ashford and his Mother who nursed her back to health, also looking after Harold. The two macaws would meet occasionally, shout at each other from their respective gardens and it was after one of their meetings that Harold laid an egg.

In the 1970s the Gilsons moved to Trebarvah House in Constantine, Cornwall and Mr Ashford visited them, along with his macaw Magoo. Both in good health in 2007 when the photograph was taken, Dr Gilson died in 2008 and Mrs Gilson carried through their concern for the natural world and wish to benefit animals in her Will.

We are very grateful to the Gilsons and will ensure that their gift will benefit the parrot family and shape the Trust for years to come.

News

Parrot Husbandry Volunteers Needed

Come and help the rehabilitation and release of illegally captured or injured parrots in the Caribbean. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon Parrot is a protected species and Echo, an NGO on the island of Bonaire, is dedicated to their conservation.

At our modest facility we can be found raising poached chicks that have been confiscated, rehabilitating injured birds (typically collisions with cars), training overweight ex-pets or just looking after our resident captive and released flocks. But that's not all, we also carry out research, habitat restoration and outreach activities. Committment required is a minimum of 2 weeks and up to 3 months is possible.

Echo
PARROTS AND PEOPLE

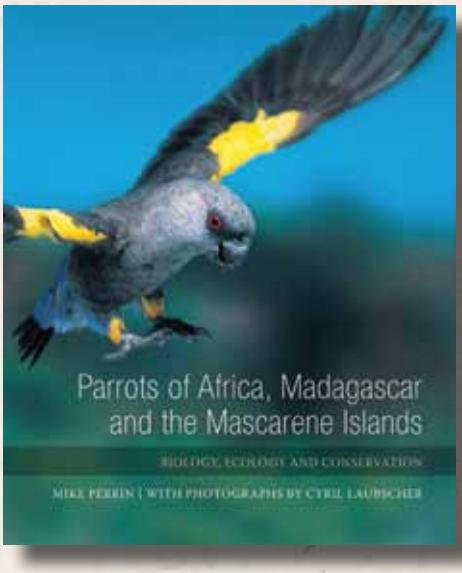
info@echobonaire.org
www.psittascene.org

Scarlet Macaws released

In late September, 6 Scarlet Macaws were released at Parque Arqueologico Ruinas De Copan, a National Park and Mayan Heritage Site in Honduras. This was the 3rd release at this location. Two of the birds were captive raised, two were rescued from poachers, and two were rehabilitated, long-term, pet birds. The birds joined 25 other free flying Scarlets that now call the park home. Over 100 visitors cheered on the birds' release, including the US Ambassador, Lisa Kubiske (foreground) who opened the flight. WPT and HUGO BOSS-BOSS Orange are sponsors of this ongoing project

Book Review by Rowan Martin

Parrots of Africa, Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands: Biology, Ecology and Conservation by Mike Perrin



The parrots that inhabit Africa, Madagascar and the Mascerene islands are a fascinating and diverse group and deserving of the in-depth treatment they receive in the new volume by Mike Perrin. Prof. Perrin, Director of the Research Centre for African conservation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, has been researching Africa's parrots for over 20 years and has supervised numerous projects lifting the lid on the secret lives of many species. He is well positioned to pen this book, which summarises the findings of much of his and his student's research as well as that of others working in the field.

The book is divided into two distinct parts. The first consists of 10 chapters each covering a different aspect of biology, ecology and conservation. Each chapter includes ample background to the subject on which it is focused and key points are illustrated with examples and case studies. For specialists and readers with an insatiable interest there are numerous figures and tables describing research findings many of which are reproduced from the primary scientific literature. The second part consists of a series of species accounts, each accompanied by range maps and numerous photographs. These photographs, some of which capture aspects of species' behaviour, set these accounts apart from those that exist elsewhere in the literature.

Although this book is written at a college-level there is something in it for anyone who is interested in the ecology and conservation of parrots. As a one stop reference for African parrots it is a welcome addition to parrot literature.

Events

IAATE 2014

February 5-8, 2014
Dallas, Texas USA

The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE) 22nd annual conference will be held in Dallas, Texas with field trips, workshops, speakers and networking events.

IAATE was founded to foster communication, professionalism, and cooperation among those individuals who serve Avian Science through training, public display, research, husbandry, conservation, and education.

www.iaate.org

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