PsittaScene

The Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Spring 2014

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World Parrot Trust

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In Appreciation

I have had the great privilege to work for the World Parrot Trust for over seven years. Time after time, year over year, I am reminded of how special the people are that support the WPT. We are all deeply appreciative of the response to our year-end call to action. Once again, committed and passionate parrot enthusiasts have exceeded our expectations in their dedication and desire to help save parrots – in this case the parrots in Africa.

More than 25 parrot species call Africa home, and many are at increasing risk for extinction. The need could not be more urgent for Grey and Timneh Parrots, Lilian's Lovebirds, Cape Parrots, and many other species whose status in the wild remains largely unknown, and for whom time is running out.

Because of the response of our many dedicated supporters and our matching sponsors, Pamela and Neville Isdell, the Bridging Peace Foundation and two anonymous contributors, we have come together to secure a brighter future for African parrots. Through the WPT-Africa Conservation Programme, we aim to begin new research and conservation programmes, to help parrots escape the wild bird trade, and to spread the word about Africa's endangered parrots through education and outreach. It is a daunting job but our committed field scientists and collaborators are up to the challenge.

We can't thank you enough for being part of this group of thoughtful and steadfast followers. All of us at the World Parrot Trust wish you the best for the coming year.

Best regards,

Steve Milpacher
Director of Operations

ON OUR COVERS

FRONT A **Tasman Parakeet**, or Norfolk Island Green Parrot *(Cyanoramphus cookii)* is a Critically Endangered species endemic to Norfolk Island off the coast of Australia. Hope for this species comes with a host of concerned conservationists taking action. See Hope is the Thing with Green Feathers, page 14. © Luis Ortiz-Catedral

BACK **Orange-chinned Parakeets** *(Brotogeris jugularis)* visit feeders and play together at a lodge in Costa Rica. Photographer Steve Brookes leads tours to parrot watching destinations several times each year through his company *Wild Parrots Up Close*.

> “Our mission was to determine the status of the Red-and-blue Lory’s remaining population.”

Island Hopping

Article and photos by Mehd Halaouate

Traveling to remote islands in Indonesia, especially to the islands of the Moluccas, has become an annual event for me and my colleage Bob Jackson. Usually we have no prepared plans. We meet in Bali and decide which island to travel to, taking into consideration the unusual and stunning parrot species endemic to these islands.

Since 2010 we have explored Buru Island and the Sula and Seram Islands and we have marveled at an amazing variety of parrots, lories and lorikeets. Some, like the Sula Hanging Parrot *(Loriculus sclateri)*, were literally everywhere we went and birded. Others, like the Blue-fronted Lorikeet *(Charmosyna toxopei)*, eluded us on Buru. Still others like a party of six Red-flanked Lorikeets *(C. placentis)* flying fast and low along a forest track in Seram were a brief thrill! What a sight!

This year was different. We had a very specific mission. After checking flights, birds and travel notes, our plans took shape. We were off to the Talaud Island group, the northern-most islands in Indonesia and closer to the Philippines than Sulawesi. Nice and remote!

A photogenic "pet" Red-and-blue Lory in Beo City, the capital of Karakelang. This island is believed to be the stronghold of the species' remaining population.

OUR MISSION was to determine the status of the Red-and-blue Lory's *(Eos histrio talautensis)* remaining population.

Traveling to these islands is far from straightforward with little information to guide us in most cases. We decided to travel to Manado in North Sulawesi then on to Melanguane on Karakelang Island in the Talauds via flight or ferry.

Karakelang is the largest of the Talaud Islands and the apparent stronghold of the remaining population of the species. We had been told that there were also a few remaining in the wild on Salebabu and Kabaruang islands south of Karakelang.

It is always interesting to go to markets in the cities we visit. As we waited for our ferry in Manado we walked the aisles looking for pet birds. We found only one – a Black-capped Lory *(Lorius lory)*. The owner wouldn't allow photographs.

After the overnight ferry ride, we met our contact Anto who arranged for us to stay at the home of the chief of police - the safest place to be in Beo, the capital of Karakelang.

Anto is very knowledgeable about the birds of the island having worked for Birdlife Indonesia for several years. He connected us with Michael Wangko, the foremost authority on the island when it comes to the species and their whereabouts. Michael has also worked for Birdlife for many years. More importantly though, he was involved with Action Sampiri (the local name for the Red-and-blue Lory) in 1995-97 with Jon Riley. Jon brought the world's attention to the plight of the Red-and-blue Lory. Consequently the species was listed onto CITES Appendix I as Endangered. In the late 1990s Michael and Jon toured several English cities giving talks about the Red-and-blue Lory. Michael was involved in the groundwork for the species during Jon Riley's long stay on both Sangihe and Talaud Islands.

Michael took command straight away. We went in search of the Red-and-blues on motorbikes, heading east to a disturbed forest patch with gardens of cloves and coconuts. Before long we started hearing the lories flying high over the canopy. We counted a total of 21 birds before the rain disrupted our plans.

That night over delicious grilled fish and vegetables we discussed the Red-and-blue Lories' situation on the island. Michael filled us in regarding the population in the wild and the research needed to assess the numbers after so many years without any substantial attention. Since 2006 no fieldwork has been conducted with the lories as a focus species. According to Michael's previous work, there are ten known roosting trees used by nearly the entire population of the species. Two of those trees are situated in a forest patch in the south of the island and the other eight are in the north near Beo. These trees were the reason for our visit. Michael added that no less than 200 birds have been seen coming to roost and in some cases the number exceeds 400. Counting them is not easy! Michael explained that they use handheld clickers and the numbers are approximate, erring on the low side.

These special roosting trees are always close to a river and their trunks are smooth and slippery to deter climbing predators. The trees belong to three different species and not all of them are used for feeding or nesting.

With just a few known roosts and continued illegal capture for the international pet trade, these lovely birds need serious attention..

Finally we were off to see for ourselves. We woke up at 4:30 am and went by motorbike first to a coconut plantation with plenty of bushes at the edge of the road. Michael informed us that this area was the playground of the Talaud Rail *(Gymnocrex talaudensis)*, locally called Tu-a. This is one of the species that is ranked very high in many birdwatcher's lists.

After several minutes of silence by the roadside the rails started crossing from one side to the other, moving slowly at first with easy steps and keeping an eye on us before dashing across. We counted eight birds - two pairs and a family group of four with what looked like two juveniles. What a wonderful sight to start our day.

After leaving the rails, we were fortunate to encounter five uncommon, special and stunning parrot species – besides the lories we spotted the Golden-mantled Racquet-tailed Parrot *(Prioniturus platurus talautensis)*, Great-billed Parrot *(Tanygnathus m. megalorhynchos)*, Blue-naped Parrot *(Tanygnathus lucionensis talautensis)* and Blue-backed Parrot *(Tanygnathus sumatranus sanghirensis)*. What more could we ask? Such amazing parrot sights in such a short time!

Now we turned our attention to the target species of the trip: the Red-and-blue Lory. Another 40 minutes by motorbike on mostly asphalt roads brought us across the island to the village of Bantane on the eastern coast. Upon arrival we asked the head of the village for permission to visit the roost tree area. Discussions ensued about the purpose of our visit and we were eventually allowed to go ahead as planned. Another hour and a half and no less than seven river crossings brought us to the end of the motorbike's reach. From the river the climb to the roosting tree was very tough on slippery mud with few trees as handholds. The thought of doing the same when going down in the dark haunted us! Yet after a 30 minute climb we got to the top in the fading light. We settled down facing the famous tree and waited. The first birds to land on the tree were Yellow-eyed Imperial Pigeons *(Ducula concinna)*, an uncommon species for this island.

Red-and-blue Lory *Eos histrio*

A striking parrot found in the Talaud Islands of Northern Sulawesi, Indonesia. It prefers forest and cultivated areas in elevations up to 1,250m (4100ft) and lives on a diet of pollen, nectar, fruit, insects and flowering coconut palms. Red-and-blue Lories are most commonly seen flying in groups of up to ten, with larger numbers gathering together in noisy roosts. At one time the species was abundant but now is confined almost exclusively to the island of Karakelang in the Talauds, where a population of between 8 and 20 thousand lingers. Agricultural encroachment and tree harvesting compounded by illegal trade is driving population numbers down rapidly, necessitating an IUCN Endangered listing and CITES Appendix I designation.

Where the Lories Landed

Article and photos by Lena and Mehd Halaouate

As the sun set, the lories started showing up. They flew around and paused on the neighbouring branches before landing on the roosting tree. They seemed very cautious of predators in and around the tree. Their calls took over the forest, drowning out the insects and frogs. It was deafening – an amazing spectacle to witness. When told about the tree and the numbers of birds we had been skeptical. Now I believe Michael's conclusion that their numbers have been conservative. Nothing could diminish the joy of experiencing the wonderful sight and sound of the roosting tree, not even the mosquitoes or the difficult trip back down! It was spectacular especially considering that this species is extinct on the neighbouring island of Sangihe.

The long walk back to the motorbikes and the asphalt road was a blur. We arrived back in Beo exhausted but thrilled. Without even hitting the showers we were invited to Michael's house for plenty of good food.

The next day we headed for a site on higher ground to scan the surroundings for birds. Again we saw more than 20 Red-and-blue Lories along with several other bird species as we enjoyed our last birding on Karakelang Island. With some exciting birding ahead of us and some stunning sights and sounds behind us we left with our spirits high.

World Parrot Trust | FlyFree and LCN

FlyFree
www.parrots.org/flyfree

The trade in wild caught birds has imperiled dozens of species around the globe and caused the suffering and loss of millions. Building on WPT's decades-long efforts to end this destructive practice, in 2009 we launched FlyFree, a program to rescue many of the birds caught in the trade and return them to the wild.

LCN
savelories.org

That same year, we founded the Lory Conservation Network to connect zoos, bird parks and lory exhibits around the world with effective conservation programs to save lories. Network participants work with parrot enthusiasts, researchers, local communities and government leaders.

Karakelang is the biggest island in the Talauds and the release destination for the confiscated Red-and-blue Lories.

Situated on an Indonesian black sand beach, Tasikoki Wildlife Rescue and Education Centre is a haven for wild animals. From orangutans to parrots to crocodiles, the centre takes in a remarkable variety of animals rescued from mankind's continued disturbances. It is perfectly positioned to rehabilitate confiscated animals and to aid authorities in dealing with the criminal activity associated with animal trade.

As it happened, we arrived just as 95 confiscated Red-and-blue Lories were being admitted and assessed. They had endured heartbreaking conditions: crammed into two crates, the birds were malnourished and had had their flight feathers damaged or removed. They had been covered in a honey solution to keep them quiet during transport. Thankfully, help was in store. All the right people were on hand first to ensure their confiscation and then to orchestrate their care.

We were visiting the Centre specifically to explore possibilities for collaboration between the World Parrot Trust and Tasikoki, where the lories landed. Perfect timing!

Dr. Willie Smits (a naturalized Indonesian) built Tasikoki in the late 1990s, along with a number of other wildlife rescue centres. It is located in Northern Sulawesi, an Indonesian province on the northern tip of the island of Sulawesi – a well-established route for wildlife smuggling to the global market. Tasikoki is well-placed not only to fight this smuggling but also to rehabilitate confiscated animals.

Those two lory-filled crates pretty much sum up what native wildlife is up against in Indonesia. This vast archipelago is hard for conservationists to patrol, but easy for smugglers to work by boat. A poor rural population compounds the problem. Generally that's where the birds are and the local people benefit from helping smugglers catch wild birds or from simply selling companion birds outright.

(left) Red-and-blue Lories confiscated in the Talaud Islands now have a chance for freedom.

Initially 111 birds were confiscated in the Talaud Islands, where this species is endemic. The Filipino smuggler was arrested. Once at Tasikoki, the surviving lories were examined, treated for worms and given a vitamin supplement before being released into a ready-made quarantine to eat and bathe. As soon as they have recovered from their ordeal they will be moved into a flight cage and the releasable ones will be prepared for their return to Karakelang Island in the Talauds.

Circumstances were aligned in favor of these beautiful little birds. The local forestry department representative got good information leading to their confiscation. Tasikoki was able to take them in immediately – not an easy task with 95 lories given their special needs. Our timely visit helped too. We were able to immediately secure emergency funds from the Lory Conservation Network and the World Parrot Trust's FlyFree program. Those funds covered 3 months of lory feeding and the construction of a simple portable aviary that can be used first at Tasikoki and later as a habituation enclosure at the release site. Our mission was a success! This is indeed the beginning of a great collaboration.

On behalf of the Red-and-blue Lories we would like to thank supporters of the World Parrot Trust and members of the Lory Conservation Network. Stay tuned for word on the birds' return to the wild.

Mehd Halaouate is the Indonesian project manager for the World Parrot Trust where, among other projects, he has been helping to assess and protect the small remaining population of Yellow-crested Cockatoos. In addition, he holds a managing position with the Begawan Bali Starling Breeding and Release project in Bali. He and his wife Lena also run Birding Indonesia, guiding bird-watchers to remote islands in Indonesia.

Profiles in Conservation | **Carlos Yamashita**

A Blue-fronted Amazon release in 2010 was in part a result of Carlos' work pushing for enforcement of trade laws in Brazil.

Carlos Yamashita is one of the foremost ornithologists in Brazil. His body of work is unmatched and his relationship with the World Parrot Trust and our projects goes back over two decades. We are grateful to Carlos for all he has done for parrots and are honored to profile him here as a conservation hero.

Q How did you first start working on parrots?

I first got involved with parrots as a child travelling with my parents. Later, as a geology student at the University of Brasília, I had the opportunity to visit the cerrado (savannah) in Central Brazil on numerous occasions and to meet many Latin American colleagues. I remained very curious about parrots and their habitat, and changed my undergraduate major to Biology. After graduation, I was invited to work in the Pantanal National Park with the Brazilian Bird Banding Program.

Q What role did WPT play in your early work?

In the late 1980s and early 90s, I was part of a team with Charles Munn and Jorgen Thomsen to evaluate a population of Hyacinth Macaw (*Anodorhyncus hyacinthinus*) for CITES. That project was partially funded by Michael Reynolds who of course founded the World Parrot Trust. In the years following, many of my field projects were funded by the Trust including: The first wild Hyacinth Macaw nest boxes; the Lear´s Macaw project; the Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*) project; and, Golden Conure population surveys.

Q Can you talk more about Golden Conures?

The Golden Conure's (*Guaruba guarouba*) range along the banks of the Amazon River is severely affected by deforestation. The species will probably remain in some protected areas but there are many forest patches where it is now absent.

There are large patches of fragmented forest available in eastern Pará with no Golden Conures. These are prime areas for reintroductions. However, there is no source of birds to colonize these areas if we do not generate new source populations through captive breeding.

In captivity the species breeds very well! Within a brood, not all siblings have the same behavior: some are very tame and peaceful, others are shy and scared... and so on. I am sure there are many lineages with good fitness that increases their potential as founders for new populations which will eventually join surrounding populations.

Establishing new groups of Golden Conures in areas of their distribution where there are forest fragments, large park landscapes, or reforested areas is a good option. Golden Conures have a high fidelity for the nest and territory and therefore they don't necessarily need a very extensive area of habitat to thrive.

Photos by
Carlos Yamashita

Carlos' images, like these Patagonian Conures in Argentina, are used throughout this profile.

Q How important are releases for threatened Brazilian parrots?

I am very optimistic about releases and believe they are definitely a useful tool to establish new parrot populations, especially for species that have a limited distribution.

We also know that the history of many parrot species is strongly connected to the presence of humans. Good places for humans to settle are often ideal for large seed predators such as amazons and macaws due to the availability of water, good production of fruits and shelter.

Before the European colonisation in the Americas, there is evidence of extensive trade routes with species such as the Scarlet Macaw being traded between a variety of native tribes in Central America, Mexico and the southern United States. In some cases, parrots involved in this commerce may have escaped captivity and colonised new landscapes. For several species scientists cannot explain the geographic pattern of distribution without this human interference.

Q How else could releases help parrot conservation in Brazil?

One good idea is to replace the now extinct Glaucous Macaw *(Anodorhynchus glaucus)*, which once lived in Rio Grande do Sul (Southern Brazil) and Argentina with Lear's Macaws *(Anodorhynchus leari)*. Much of the Glaucous' historic range still contains the palms that were their food source. The trees are there producing seeds with no macaws to disperse them. Based on fossil evidence and museum skins, *A. glaucus* and *A. leari* don't differ much in size and probably not in body weight either. There was only a slight difference in feather coloration. These two birds likely shared a common ancestor only a few thousand years ago. In fact, fossils of *A. glaucus* have been found in Minas Gerais (SE Brazil), fewer than 1,000 km (620 mi) south of the current Lear's habitat in the Northeast.

Luckily the range of the Glaucous includes some areas which are protected, including cliffs where they were documented nesting. If released in these areas, confiscated and captive bred Lear's could recolonise the Glaucous' historic range, filling their ecological role and creating a new and hopefully healthy population.

Q We have written in *PsittaScene* about the Vinaceous Amazon release in Brazil. What do you think are next steps for this species?

The release of Vinaceous Amazon Parrots (*Amazona vinacea*) has been a great success. There is already at least one pair that successfully fledged chicks in the wild. The next step is to increase the numbers of both sexes, making it possible for more pairs to eventually form an effective population. Since not all pairs become part of the effective population, the next step will be to assess the fitness of the fledglings and their ability to colonise new landscapes.

For a release, it is important to quickly increase numbers as much as possible. More individuals enhance the chances of the population surviving and growing. It should also be noted that even the non-breeding individuals are valuable and worth releasing because many have good skills for flocking, foraging, and to give alarm calls when predators appear. Even sedentary individuals that congregate with the group around the site are useful for a population to succeed in the wild.

Q What will successful parrot conservation in Brazil entail?

We need to focus on restoring natural systems which are severely impoverished. Naturally, many eggs and chicks can be lost due to brief events that last just a few hours or days such as too much rain, flooding, more damp years, ectoparasites, etc. By managing these, breeding success can be enhanced and more chicks can fledge successfully. And of course, every individual has different aptitudes, skills and behaviors. I have no doubt that among them there will be groups that manage to establish successfully.

We need to revise our thinking about the role of parrots in nature and their effect on the landscape. Many people consider parrots as seed predators, which is true, but there's more to the story. In the wild, parrots often carry seeds in flight from one place to another and many fruits fall to the ground before the bird finds a suitable place to land and feed. The "seed predation" also affects the landscape and contributes to a species' expansion or retraction. It is a gradient with extremes – the predator eats some of the seeds and wastes a lot. Those they drop become available for other animals. In some cases, those animals will disperse the seeds, in other cases the seed will grow where it fell.

When a release is performed one is making an investment in the recovery of the whole ecosystem. For instance, the caatinga of Brazil is a semi-arid region which is home to several well known species such as the Lear's and Spix's Macaws (*Cyanopsitta spixii*). This habitat has suffered five centuries of exploitation. There are currently several palm groves that are not being utilized by the Lear's and that could be managed in order to attract the birds.

Similarly, vegetation has returned to places that were previously completely devastated. For example, quality food items are available on site at many Mayan ruins making them good options for reintroduction of species such as Scarlet Macaws *(Ara macao)*, Military Macaws *(A. militaris)*, Mealy Amazons *(Amazona farinosa guatemalae)*, Yellow-headed Amazon *(A.oratrix)*, White-fronted Amazons *(A. albifrons)*, and Red-lored Amazon *(A. autumnalis)*, etc. Currently there are reintroduction projects underway at Mayan sites in Copán (Honduras) and Palenque (Mexico).

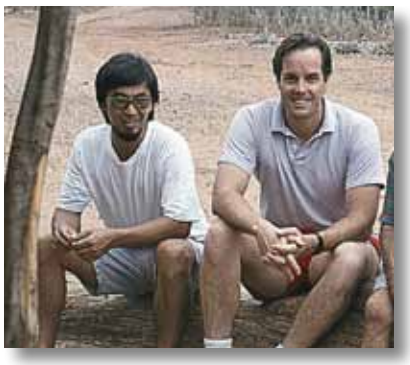
Humans have a long history with parrots, and now it's up to us to decide if that relationship is going to be positive or negative for parrots and for people.

Special thanks to André Saidenberg for translation assistance.

White-eared Conures (*Pyrrhura leucotis*)

Peach-fronted Conures (*Aratinga aurea*)

Mitred Conures *(Aratinga mitrata)*



Carlos Yamashita (L) and Charlie Munn (R) were responsible for many of the most important Blue-throated Macaw discoveries in the 1990's.

Checking Hyacinth Macaw chicks (1998)

Carlos' Blue-throated Macaw legacy | by Jamie Gilardi, WPT Director

An early mentor of mine had an odd-but-useful expression: "You always forget what you didn't know." Having been immersed in Blue-throated Macaw conservation for well over a decade, it's hard to recall that scarcely more than twice that far back, we didn't even know where to find this bird in the wild! And that's just the start of "what we didn't know." Just over twenty years ago, macaw researcher Charlie Munn posed as a filmmaker to locate wild Blue-throats for the first time. Shortly thereafter, Carlos Yamashita joined fellow Brazilian Yuri de Barros to thoroughly explore the Beni department of Bolivia and completely demystify this spectacular species.

In their seminal publication in the scientific journal *Ararajuba*, (see www.psittascene.org) Carlos and Yuri shared a vast array of fundamental findings: Blue-throats are clearly distinct from the much larger Blue-and-yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*), they live in an ecosystem with no fewer than 20 (!) other parrot species, while they eat a varied diet of fruits, seeds, flowers, and stems, they're primarily a specialist on one species of palm fruit – the motacú . After covering a phenomenal amount of ground and doing detailed habitat analysis, they determined exactly the kinds of forest the Blue-throats use and need most, the seasonality of their favorite foods, and the availability of nest trees. They even noted honeybees displacing macaws from former nest sites!

And with typical Yamashita thoroughness, they explored in depth what was known about the commercial trade in this species and estimated that some 1,200 Blue-throats were likely exported in the 1980's alone – note that that's about ten times what remains today in the wild.

Of course it's natural to think of Carlos as a "Brazilian parrot expert," as he's contributed so much to our knowledge of and the conservation of that country's many parrot species. But his interests and contributions go well beyond Brazil's borders, and conversations with him are just as likely to venture overseas to cover Australian, Chinese, and African parrots. In the end, our ability to hit the ground running in working to save the Blue-throats was only possible due to his outstanding and comprehensive early work on this species in Bolivia.

“Hope” is the thing with feathers

By Emily Dickinson 1830–1886

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Tasman Parakeet (Norfolk Island Green Parrot) © Luis Ortiz-Catedral

Hope is the thing with ***green*** feathers

Article and Photos by Luis Ortiz-Catedral

The rain is almost imperceptible. At times, more mist than rain. Everything around me has a thin, watery film. Tiny droplets fall continuously; their drumming on the leaves above my head is the only noise I can hear in this fortress of trees, palms and ferns: the Norfolk Island National Park forest. The tree canopies overhead match the grandiosity of Florentine or Venetian Churches and inspire no less awe. Also impressive is the location of this forest: some 1,300 km (880 miles) off the coast of Australia, it is a tiny dot in the vast Pacific Ocean.

The rain goes on. My fingers are getting cold. I have been sitting quietly for over an hour, watching a tree cavity some twenty meters (65 ft) uphill. A hot cup of coffee would be nice. Suddenly a green flash and muffled wing flapping catch my attention. A male Tasman Parakeet *(Cyanoramphus cookii)* approaches the tree cavity and perches next to the rim, calling softly. From the dark opening, a female emerges. Both fly to a branch some thirty metres away and the female whines, soliciting food from the male. This ritual is very familiar. I have seen it countless times in closely related species in the last 10 years. Still, it fascinates me like the first time I saw it.

While the pair is away, I finally have a chance to inspect the cavity. It was modified many years ago to allow access to the nest chamber through a perfectly camouflaged cover. Wide sheaths of thin metal were also added above and below the cavity. They create a slippery surface that prevents introduced rats from reaching the entrance. Such simple modifications have a profound impact on the survival of an entire species. Without metal sheathing, nesting females and their broods would be predated. Without removable covers, valuable information about the nesting habits of the species would not be obtainable.

As I remove the cover, a well-known scent fills my nostrils, a scent not at all unpleasant. Parakeet nests have a powerful musky smell, heightened perhaps by the elevated moisture. I can't help but think of this nest as the *inner sanctum* of this place.

At the bottom of the nest chamber I find two eggs. They are indeed precious, belonging to a species that, once abundant, has now become precariously rare. After seven months of searches, this is one of only four active nests of Tasman Parakeets known in the wild. I cannot determine if these eggs are fertile or not. They have been laid in the last three days and I suspect incubation has not yet begun. This parakeet and related species often lay large clutches. Some females begin incubating on the first egg. Others wait until the entire clutch is laid.

After writing notes and re-attaching the nest cover, I return to my post and wait for the female to return. Once she re-enters the cavity, her mate (until now calling softly next to her) leaves the area, as silent as when he arrived. He will return in a few hours to feed her once again. Unravelling the mysteries of endangered parakeets is a gradual process requiring a lot of patience.

The rain continues, yet I can tell it will stop soon. Sunbeams break through

(left) A Tasman Parakeet sits in a classic Norfolk Pine. This rare gem faces all the typical conservation issues associated with island life. Efforts to survey the population and bolster its success are underway.

the canopy, making the understory sparkle. I leave the area quietly and start the long hike out. About an hour later, the rain has stopped completely. Drops keep falling from the tree canopy, their drumming gradually replaced by a loud bird chorus. This is indeed a beautiful place. But make no mistake: something disturbing stirs under this apparent harmony. A silent battle common to many islands around the world: the battle between introduced and native species.

With the exception of two species of bats (both probably now extinct), Norfolk Island had no land mammals. The vertebrate fauna of the island was composed mostly of birds, save two species of reptiles and two species of freshwater fish. The arrival of humans to the shores of Norfolk Island has changed forever its ecological and evolutionary history. Humans brought with them cattle, cats, chickens, dogs, goats, mice, pigs, rabbits and rats. They also introduced blackbirds, rosellas, doves, finches, quails, sparrows, starlings and thrushes. Yes, quite a formidable army of exotic species all needing resources in limited supply: nesting sites, food and shelter. And humans need food, shelter and farmland too... the mighty Norfolk Island Pines have provided large quantities of timber for centuries now. Imagine the pressure of these changes on the local flora and fauna. When humans first arrived on the island, the majority of the land (some 34 km^2 / 13 mi^2) was covered in subtropical forest. Nowadays, nearly 90% of such forest is gone.

In general, native island species are poorly equipped to withstand the assault of introduced species and large-scale changes in their habitats. The Tasman Parakeet is so rare that some of the 2,000 or so people living on Norfolk Island have never seen it, even though the species sometimes visits orchards in search of green peaches. "They get a blissful look in their face when they eat them," says Mera Martin as she pours me a cup of tea. We are sitting at the Highlands Lodge, Mera's house right next to the boundary of the Norfolk Island National Park. Mera is in her late

Tasman Parakeet

Cyanoramphus cookii

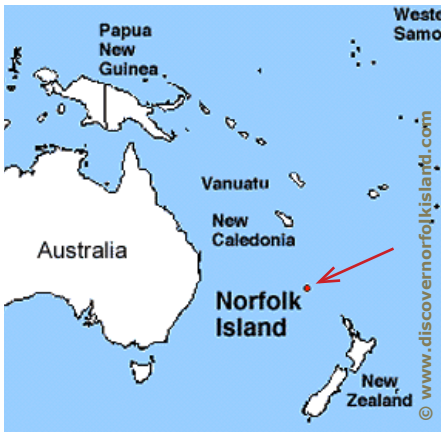
Norfolk Island, Australia

Critically Endangered

Population size: 46-92 Individuals

Threats: Predation by introduced mammals; competition for nesting sites by introduced cavity nesters; biased sex ratio towards males.

Current actions for conservation: Creation of safe nests; control of introduced mammals and birds; development of a translocation strategy to Phillip Island.



Norfolk Island (Phillip Island in the background) is located nearly 900 miles off the coast of Australia. After centuries of pressure from land clearing and introduced species, a long list of endemic birds are now extinct.

seventies. She witnessed the decline and recovery of Tasman Parakeets, and their decline again. "I used to see them in the garden, right next to that tree."

On my first visit to Norfolk Island (July 2013), I was commissioned by The Nature Conservancy, BirdLife Australia and Island Conservation to conduct a Tasman Parakeet survey. This survey was prompted by concerns from members of the Norfolk Island Flora & Fauna Society and the Norfolk Island National Park about dwindling numbers of parakeets. Although I was familiar with other *Cyanoramphus* species in New Zealand, the Tasman Parakeet was a mystery to me. I had only limited clues as to where to find them within the confines of the Norfolk Island National Park. But that soon changed. I learned that if you want to find "Green Parrots" as they're known on Norfolk Island, you better ask Margaret Christian. Margaret has been a resident for over 30 years. She knows the park, the plants and the birds like the back of her hand.

"I saw a Green Parrot on the ground at the Mount Bates track and Mount Pitt intersection" Margaret tells me. Also "Two Green Parrots at Cavendish Apartments just below Alice's." I map these observations. Slowly a rough distribution is starting to appear, not from technical reports or scientific papers, but from the observations of those who care about the parakeets.

After four weeks of surveys, I produced a tentative estimate of 46 to 92 individuals. But here is the kicker: of these, only 12 are females. Given that Tasman Parakeets are monogamous, this finding suggests that the global breeding population of this species (assuming all females are paired up) is unlikely to exceed 24 individuals. To make matters even worse, all of these breeding pairs exist only in a single forest patch some 3.5 km^2 (1.4 mi^2) in size – a precarious balance indeed. The difference between existence and extinction can be a single stochastic event: A virulent disease, a fire, a cyclone, a sudden increase in predation rates and they are gone from the world forever. In fact, with so few individuals, why has the species not disappeared altogether?

In the late 1980s, even fewer breeding pairs existed: only four. Emergency actions were taken and the species recovered to about 200-300 individuals by the year 2000. Those actions were implemented by the Norfolk Island National Park service and included rat-proofing of natural nests, a captive breeding program and large-scale trapping of cats and rats. Also, culling of non-native nest competitors such as Crimson Rosellas *(Platycercus elegans)* took place. These birds are known to destroy eggs and even nestlings and then take residence in the nests.

These combined actions prevented the extinction of the Tasman Parakeet and were celebrated worldwide as an example to mirror on other islands. The cat and rat control has continued as has the maintenance of safe nesting sites to some extent. Nevertheless, after some good years and a most optimistic prospect for Tasman Parakeets, the population decreased once again. Why? The answer is not simple. Multiple factors have played a role in the most recent decline. So, what has changed?

The Tasman Parakeet is called the Green Parrot by Norfolk Islanders. A symbol of hope for the native ecosystem, this species has benefitted from careful interventions at nest sites along with reduction of nest predators and competitors.

Forests change. The vegetation surrounding nesting sites of parrots and other cavity nesters play an important role in nest productivity and in some cases, even nestling survival. Tasman Parakeets explore multiple cavities before choosing one that suits them for nesting. This process can take months. The aspect of the nest entrance, its size, the height from the ground, inaccessibility to predators, moisture levels, distance to foraging grounds, depth of the nest chamber, current supply of suitable nest sites; all these features play a role in nest selection. The formation, maintenance and destruction of optimal nest sites is a highly dynamic processes.

On Norfolk Island, three species of cavity nesters are in conflict over the available nesting space: Tasman Parakeets, and two non-native species, the European Starling *(Sturnus vulgaris)* and Crimson Rosella. These birds do not build nests. Rather, they explore potential cavities until the right site is found. Competition for nesting space is not taken lightly and conflicts at the nest among and between species occur often.

"Suboptimal nests are death traps" Derek Greenwood tells me. Derek, a local resident of Norfolk Island, has studied Tasman Parakeets for many years and no one knows an optimal nest better than he does. Using everyday building materials (wire, woodchips, concrete, and dirt) Derek creates rat and cat-proof nests that blend so well in the forest landscape that sometimes it is hard to tell them apart from natural nests. Gradually, Derek's nests, commissioned by the Norfolk Island National Park, are increasing in numbers, easing the fierce competition for nesting space.

Still, motion-sensitive cameras installed near nests have shown that rosellas and starlings visit these sites even when Tasman Parakeets have occupied them for some time. While these intrusions have not been shown to result in nest failure, the risk is simply too high. Thanks to the cameras we now know that breeding Tasman Parakeets are vulnerable to disruptions by introduced species at various stages of their nest cycle. And we're learning other intricacies too. So far, the three nests monitored with cameras have fledged eight chicks in total. Of these, only two are females. Although the information is limited, it seems that the shortage of females starts at the nest. "In this nest, only the female enters to feed the chicks" Abi Smith, of the Norfolk Island National Park service, mentions casually as we look over nest monitoring data. Bingo.

Previous studies in New Zealand parakeets suggest that males and females differ in their food provisioning strategies. While females appear to distribute food more evenly within a brood, males tend to feed larger and more mobile chicks, which are usually males. Would the same thing be happening with Tasman Parakeets? The only way to find out is to closely monitor every single nesting attempt and identify ways to improve female survival. Abi suggests that perhaps supplementary feeding or nestling cross fostering could help maximise the production of females and their survival. These efforts have proven successful in other species and will be tested here. But things need to be taken a step further to ensure this

> *"The global breeding population of this species is unlikely to exceed 24 individuals."*

species' survival with minimal human intervention in the long run.

In an ideal world, a founder group of Tasman Parakeets should be transferred to a site free of rodents and cats, and with plenty of nesting sites and minimal competition from introduced bird species. As it turns out, one such place exists: Phillip Island.

Phillip Island is a small (1.8 km^2 / 0.7 mi^2) uninhabited island located approximately 6 km (3.7 miles) off the coast of Norfolk Island. It is a harsh place but one with great potential. Vastly eroded due to decades of grazing by goats, pigs and rabbits, topsoil is a rare commodity. Plants have to make do with the thin layers of soil that accumulates among rock crevices. There is a considerable vegetation cover given the circumstances. Goats, pigs and rabbits are long gone, removed by people who saw the potential of this place to become a sanctuary for wildlife. Gradually, native plants and a functioning ecosystem are coming back, aided by the crew of the Norfolk Island National Park.

In a sheltered valley at the far end of the Phillip Island, there is a solid stand of 65 Norfolk pines. Liz Whitwell, Matt Upton (both New Zealand conservationists) and I measure them and estimate the abundance of female cones. The seeds of this species are the staple diet of Tasman Parakeets in winter months. Nearly 60% of the trees in this valley bear fruits. In places, their trunks are buried under a meter or so of red soil, allowing for other native plants to germinate. Besides Norfolk pines, we have identified 16 species of plants that Tasman Parakeets eat.

Would a flock of Tasman Parakeets find enough resources to settle on this island? Yes. Experiences elsewhere have shown that *Cyanoramphus* parakeets can establish in challenging environments. They have a generalist diet and can even nest on the ground providing rodents and cats are not present. Why have they not colonised Phillip Island yet? I suspect it is because of their low density, which reduces the likelihood of dispersing juveniles venturing beyond the confines of the forest. A lot of groundwork is underway and needs to be completed before a translocation of juvenile Tasman Parakeets to Phillip Island can be planned. If a founder group can be successfully established, their offspring will likely settle as well.

For now, the incredible support from various agencies and tenacious volunteers has made it possible to enter a new stage in this project. Besides being one of the rarest parrots of the world, the Tasman Parakeet is an important component of the rich native ecosystem - an iconic endemic species treasured by the inhabitants of Norfolk Island. For me it is also a symbol of hope.

Luis Ortiz-Catedral (PhD) was born in Guadalajara, Mexico in 1977. Since 2004, Luis has studied the biology and conservation of island birds, particularly parrots. Currently he conducts research in New Zealand, Australia and the Galapagos Islands. He is a lecturer at the Institute of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, Massey University in New Zealand.

The research on Tasman Parakeets is being supported by The Nature Conservancy, BirdLife Australia, Island Conservation, Norfolk Island Flora & Fauna Society, Parks Australia-Norfolk Island National Park, The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, The Parrot Society of the UK, Massey University and The World Parrot Trust.

Thank you

The World Parrot Trust exists today because of the extraordinary contributions of individuals and organizations around the globe. We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to those who have contributed to our efforts in the past 12 months.

For continued support of our Blue-throated Macaw Conservation project in Bolivia we thank the **Natural Encounters Conservation Fund**, the **International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators, Paignton Zoo Environmental Park, London Zoo, Shared Earth Foundation, Tropical Butterfly House**, and the **Naples Zoo**.

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We appreciate special sponsors this year including the **Nashville Zoo,** and **Phoenix Chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers** and **Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong, Fota Wildlife Park, William Haddon Charitable Trust, The Walker 597 Trust, Harold Schessler, Alan Gross, Ellen M. Selden, Judith A. Bergfield** and the organizers of the **Think Parrots Conference.**

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And the **Isdell Family Foundation, Ilana Mercer, Minnesota Zoo** and dozens of individual contributors, for sponsoring parrot conservation work in Africa.

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In memory: This year we were honoured to receive contributions from the estates of **Margaret Cook, Donald Clarke, Mary Denise Gilson, Colin Sausman, Elizabeth De Ville** and **Enid Marshall.**

Thank you

In memory of Kivu...

My sister, Tina, recently lost her African Grey, Kivu. For 18 years, Kivu was Tina's beloved friend and companion. He was at the heart of all our family gatherings, observing everything going on while keeping up a hilarious running commentary. Kivu and Tina had a profound connection. They loved and depended on each other. It was an amazing thing to observe and made me realize that every bird like Kivu is an interesting, incredibly intelligent individual, worthy of our deepest respect. The idea that birds like Kivu and his fellow parrot species are highly endangered is abhorrent to me. I send my donation to you in honor of Kivu who was a great soul. We are blessed to have had him in our lives and will miss him... forever.

~ Glenn Close, Actress, Producer and Humanitarian

Thank you

Save Africa's Parrots Donors (as of January 2014)

For their matching gifts to the **Save Africa's Parrots Campaign**, we would like to express our sincere and deepest gratitude to **Pamela and Neville Isdell,** the **Bridging Peace Foundation**, and **two anonymous donors**, as well as to **Dr. Jane Goodall,** founder of the Jane Goodall Institute & UN Messenger of Peace, for her special message and kind support!

To everyone who contributed individually to this campaign (right): In only 69 days these individuals contributed US $121,441 (£74,430) in matched funds. This outstanding level of giving will directly and immediately support the conservation of several species of parrots in Africa.

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The Kramers, of DJ Feathers Aviary, whose annual event "Pictures With Santa" raised funds and attracted dozens of new WPT members.

Carol and Gary Cipriano for their dedication to ensuring the success of WPT's Annual Parrot Lover's Cruise – now in its 6th year - as well as all of the wonderful passengers who have enjoyed the cruise and helped raise funds to save parrots in the Caribbean.

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African Grey Parrots © Dana Allen

NEWS

First Kākāpō eggs in three years

Kākāpō Recovery has discovered two Kākāpōs nesting on Whenua Hou/ Codfish Island – the first time in 3 years.

The two known nests belong to Lisa, an experienced hen, and Tumeke who has bred before but had infertile eggs. Unfortunately, two of the four original eggs were found to be infertile, one died and there is one left (Lisa's) still viable at the time of printing. There were also three other new eggs laid to other hens

Kākāpō breeding on Whenua Hou is triggered by the amount of rimu fruit available on the island. It's the food mother Kākāpō feed their chicks and although it seemed patchy in places the females were obviously convinced there was enough around to raise their chicks.

Kākāpō Recovery programme manager Deidre Vercoe Scott said it was the


© Kākāpō Recovery

first time since 2011 that Kākāpō had nested and, despite the late start to the breeding season, it was unfolding better than expected. "From a conservative estimate of five to ten nests at the beginning of the season, the team is now preparing for the possibility there could be up to fifteen."

The current Kākāpō population is 124, up from a low of 51 in 1995. There has been no breeding during the past two summers because of poor rimu crops.


© Kākāpō Recovery

Adopt a Kākāpō

Kākāpō Recovery has selected 14 birds from the current population of 124 for symbolic adoption. Adoption donations fund health management, supplementary food and annual transmitter changes. You'll receive updates about your Kākāpō each year.

Each donor receives a kuddly plushie! What better way to have your very own Kākāpō?

Help Fortune-teller Parrots

In India, wild caught Ringneck Parakeets are used as fortune-tellers - drawing bits of paper that "predict the future". WPT is assisting the VSPCA (Visakha Society for Protection and Care of Animals) in their efforts to confiscate, rehabilitate, and release the parakeets caught in this cruel and illegal practice. WPT will match all donations up to $3,000 to repair VSPCA bird facilities severely damaged by strong cyclones last year. Donate online (visit ***www.psittascene.org*** for links).


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EVENTS

Parrot Lover's Cruise 2014

Western Caribbean
November 2-9, 2014

Departing from Galveston Texas, you'll visit the Isle of Roatan, Honduras, Belize City, and Cozumel Mexico. On-board seminars and special excusions make this a spectacular cruise for all parrot enthusiasts. Speakers include Dr. James Morrisey, Natural Encounters behaviour and training expert Cassie Malina and Dr. Sam Williams.

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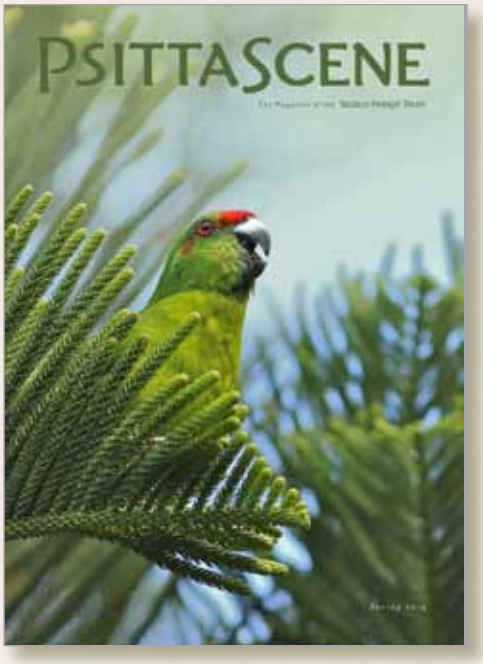
Read more online with easy links to all the websites in our articles, news and events.



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OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer Field Assistant

Blue-throated Macaw Conservation Center, Beni Department, Bolivia

The Blue-throated Macaw Conservation Center needs full-time volunteer field assistants starting in May 2014 for a reintroduction project to benefit the Critically Endangered Blue-throated Macaw *(Ara glaucogularis)* in the low-land savanna of Moxos, Bolivia. Details online at ***www.psittascene.org***.

PsittaScene

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