

# PSITTAScene

The Magazine of the WORLD PARROT TRUST



Spring 2015

# PSITTAScene

SPRING 2015



## WORLD PARROT TRUST

Glanmor House, Hayle  
Cornwall TR27 4HB UK

www.parrots.org +44 (0)1736 751026

## CONTENTS

- 2 From the desk of  
*Steve Milpacher*
- 4 Orange-bellied Parrot  
*Searching for Answers*
- 7 "Parroting" in the Wild  
*Vocal Imitation in Conures and Galahs*
- 12 The Standoff  
*Grey Parrot vs. Grey Kestrel*
- 14 WPT Donor Recognition  
*February 2014 - February 2015*
- 18 Postcards to the Flock  
*Fun Aboard the Parrot Lover's Cruise*
- 21 Book Review  
*Understanding Parrots: Cues from Nature*
- 22 PsittaNews  
*Parrot News*  
*PsittaScene 2014 Index*  
*WPT Contacts*
- 24 Parrots in the Wild  
*Galah*

Editor: Desi Milpacher  
Layout & Design: Michelle Kooistra  
Production: Karen Whitley

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Joseph Campbell once wrote "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself...," a sentiment that well describes those who truly make a difference in the world. Once again you, our dedicated supporters, have decisively answered our call to action to help save the parrots.

It is heartening to see that parrots matter - to know that so many of you are compelled to take action for their preservation. To 'Become a Parrot Hero' (page 14) is important to a great many, and taking part in their conservation and welfare is a priority. It's both humbling and inspiring to witness this outpouring of support, and compels us at the WPT to work all the harder to advocate for their wellbeing.

The need is great: more than 350 parrot species call the Earth home, and almost one-third of those are under increasing threat from trapping for the wildlife trade, habitat loss and destruction, persecution, disease and introduced species.

Over the decades it has been the Trust's honour to advocate for the world's most vulnerable birds, a job which we perform earnestly at a time when there is much to be serious about.

In this issue of *PsittaScene* we look at some of the great things being done for parrots, and with parrots - like understanding the nuances of parrot communication in Australia and South America, and in Tasmania, where the Orange-bellied parrot fights quietly for its survival. We hope you are inspired by these stories.

We at WPT consider you to be our closest allies and our partners in the fight for parrots. Thank you for so many years of support, dedication and passion. □

Steve Milpacher,  
Director of Operations

## ON OUR COVERS

FRONT **Orange-bellied Parrot** (*Neophema chrysogaster*) rests at Melaleuca, South West Tasmania. See *Searching for Answers*, page 4. © Chris Tzaros - *Birds Bush and Beyond*

BACK Male **Galah** (*Cacatua roseicapilla*) in full display at Lake Joondalup, Perth, Western Australia. See *"Parroting" in the Wild*, page 7. © Georgina Steytler - *Wild & Endangered*



Orange-bellied Parrot © Chris Tzaros

“Thirty years ago, winter counts in Victoria used to record 70-120 individuals. Now, sightings are rare...”

Orange-bellied Parrot—  
***SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS***, page 4



Orange-bellied Parrots foraging at a supplemental feeding table, Melaleuca, Tasmania

## Orange-bellied Parrot: **Searching for Answers**

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

*In the distance, the audible drone of a light aircraft carried towards me. I scanned the horizon, hoping that today was finally going to be the day.*

BAD WEATHER HAD MEANT DAYS OF cancelled flights; this was my last chance to reach Melaleuca, home of the Critically Endangered Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*). The drone turned into a dot, and then into a small plane, which came in to land on the tiny Bruny Island airstrip. I scrambled aboard and we were off on the hour-long flight over the majestic scenery of Tasmania's south coast. Melaleuca's airstrip was even tinier and was as wild and spectacular as I had hoped; wet coastal heathland with large expanses of bare boggy ground and ferns. We disembarked, with some

of the group heading off on the long but popular hike that runs east from here through some remote and beautiful forests. I however had other plans and followed one of the volunteers to a small hide where supplementary feeding is provided for one of the world's rarest parrots. I eased myself in and raised my binoculars – and there they were.

Half a dozen Orange-bellied Parrots were sitting on the table eating the sprouting seed. They were stunningly beautiful, neat and compact little parrots in a mossy shade of green, with a neat

turquoise blue band across the forehead. The males showed glowing orange belly patches as they came in to land on the conveniently provided perches. For several hours, I watched entranced as they potted about, gently squabbling.

It is sobering to think that those half dozen or so birds represent such a significant percentage of the world population. Orange-bellied Parrots have been in serious decline for many years. In the 1900s, flocks of thousands occurred, ranging as far east as Sydney. The species is now confined as breeding



Birds searching for food in the sedges and grasses at Melaleuca

birds to this one area of the Southwest National Park. Incredibly, they spend the austral winter much further north on saltmarshes in coastal Victoria, returning to breed at Melaleuca each October. Each year, fewer return to Tasmania. In 2013, only 19 wild birds remained. Such a tiny population is at enormous risk of extinction and if the birds go from Melaleuca, then there will be no wild Orange-bellieds anywhere.

The threats, as so often, are many and varied. The coastal saltmarshes where these birds used to winter have largely been reclaimed and developed and there are few areas now on the mainland where you can hope to see the species.

Thirty years ago, winter counts in Victoria used to record 70-120 individuals. Now, sightings are rare and in 2014 totalled just 6-10 birds. New plans for expansion at Port Philip, one of the most important remaining sites, threaten the species further. Overgrazing by stock and introduced rabbits has led to erosion in the few

wintering areas that do remain and introduced European finches compete for food with the parrots. On the breeding grounds, competition for nest sites with introduced Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is a major problem. The main migration stopover site on King Island is protected, but lights are thought to be a problem for these birds as they are nocturnal migrants. Disease is also a threat. The species is in serious trouble.

So what is the answer? Statistical modelling suggests that the Orange-bellied Parrot will be extinct within five years at current trends. How can we prevent the loss of such a stunning bird? The challenges are severe and the solutions difficult. That does not mean extinction is inevitable.

There are over 300 birds in captivity. Increased breeding success amongst these birds produced enough individuals to enable a reintroduction attempt at Birch Inlet near Melaleuca, where a second population bred historically. Over 400 birds were released

between 1999 and 2009 and wild breeding occurred. However, both nest productivity and the number of returning birds each following spring were both so low that the reintroduction scheme was abandoned.

For now therefore, the future of the species lies with Melaleuca. Even here, the species is struggling but the volunteers are doing everything they can to prevent the loss of this iconic bird. Every day, researchers put out carefully measured amounts of sprouted seed at bird tables. The amount used is designed to encourage parrots to visit, while still requiring them to feed naturally. By getting the birds close to the hides, researchers record individuals by number and sex. A large percentage of the population is colour ringed, enabling detailed data to be obtained. Nest boxes are eagerly adopted by the parrots and so breeding success can also be measured. During my visit, a pair was using a nest box right by the main hide and the male could be seen visiting to feed his mate.



(Top left) The author, Jonathan Newman (Top right) Making use of the many nest boxes provided

“...if the birds go from Melaleuca then there will be no wild Orange-bellieds anywhere.”

Unfortunately, the main challenge is much harder to address. The mainland saltmarshes beloved of this parrot during winter are in one of the most densely populated parts of Australia. As Melbourne continues to expand, the pressures increase. It is difficult to see how the area of wintering habitat can be increased significantly, but the quality of what is left can be improved. Fencing to exclude grazers, coupled with implementation of the ideal fire regime can improve the habitat significantly. A detailed national action plan has been produced addressing these issues.

Despite conservation attempts, numbers continue to fall. In 2013, with just 19 wild birds remaining, the decision was made to release 23 captive bred birds. Both wild and captive birds bred at Melaleuca that season, rearing 39 chicks. For the first time in the winter of 2014 a captive bred released bird was seen on the mainland! However, releases are only designed to bolster the wild population until the factors causing decline can be addressed. Experience with other parrot species has shown that once the wild population is gone, it can be very difficult to re-establish as captive birds don't have wild compatriots to teach them where food and shelter is, or how to avoid predators. Keeping this tiny nucleus going is vital.

I have heard people say that the cause of the Orange-bellied Parrot is an impossible one. That money and effort would be better spent on species with a more realistic chance of being saved. That the pressures facing this little parrot are just too great. That no amount of energy will solve the problems it faces. Standing in a windswept heathland, watching these iridescent bullets hurtling past I find it difficult to accept that extinction is inevitable. These birds have been migrating backwards and forwards across the Bass Strait for thousands of years. To lose them would be unthinkable. 📖

### About the Project

A recovery team for the Orange-bellied Parrot was first established in 1980. Individuals are being bred in captive breeding programs in Taroona, Tasmania, Healesville Sanctuary, Adelaide Zoo, Melbourne Zoo, Halls Gap Zoo and the Priam Parrot Breeding Centre. WPT supported the program in 2002.

### About the Author

**Jonathan Newman** grew up in the UK with an interest in birds from a very young age. Training as a vet at Cambridge University gave him the opportunity to organise research expeditions to Colombia and the Solomon Islands, both targeting parrots and other birds. Since graduating, he has continued to work with psittacines clinically as well as travel the world birding.

If you would like to learn more or get involved in the Orange-bellied Parrot Project, visit them on Facebook at: [facebook.com/orangebelliedparrotproject](https://facebook.com/orangebelliedparrotproject). Donations to support conservation efforts can be made via Birdlife Australia at [birdlife.org.au](https://birdlife.org.au).

**Recent News:** Read the latest update on Orange-bellied Parrots in **PsittaNews** on Page 22.

# “PARROTING” IN THE WILD



## Vocal Imitation in Conures and Galahs

BY JUDITH SCARL

*At home in an otherwise quiet and seemingly empty house, many pet parrot owners have been startled by a raucous “Hello!” shouted from the next room.*

*Others are confused by the peal of the doorbell or the ding of the microwave coming from their parrot’s cage.*

*What they’re experiencing is mimicry – a form of imitation used by many parrot species in captivity.*





Galah pair, calm but alert, rest on tree stump

MANY TYPES OF PARROT ARE RENOWNED in captivity for their incredible vocal mimicry skills, producing everything from recognizable speech to gleeful laughter, or the bark of the family dog. Alex, a Congo African Grey Parrot studied by scientist Irene Pepperberg, brought parrot vocal mimicry and cognition into the popular press; with his ability to imitate more than 150 words, identify colours, and request his favourite foods, Alex was broadly beloved throughout much of North America. His vocal imitation capabilities became so renowned that when he died in 2007, his obituary graced the pages of international newspapers, including the New York Times and the Economist.

Parrots certainly did not evolve to meow like cats or ask for crackers in captivity, but for a long time, no one knew how parrots were using this incredible vocal flexibility in the wild. A few studies on captive budgerigars, small parakeets native to Australia that are easily held and bred in captivity, suggested that over weeks or months, individual birds could gradually change

their calls to develop group signatures, with males *converging* (systematically changing the features of their calls to become similar to others) more quickly than females. However, with parrots' large home ranges, sharp beaks that make handling difficult, and- in many places- heightened fear of humans brought on by the pet trade, parrot behaviour is notoriously difficult to study, and wild parrot vocal imitation until recently remained an intriguing mystery.

Some of the first evidence of parrot vocal flexibility and imitation in the wild was discovered almost by accident on a swathe of regenerating farmland in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Two animal behaviourists from the University of California at San Diego, husband-and-wife team Jack Bradbury and Sandy Vehrencamp, along with UCSD undergraduates Amy Ritter and Megan Keever, were investigating vocal communication in the Orange-fronted Conure (*Aratinga canicularis*), a small parrot that inhabits open forests, second-growth habitat, and savannahs from northern Costa

Rica through western Mexico. Most parrot species produce contact calls – using vocalisations to communicate and interact non-aggressively with each other, and within and between flocks. Some parrots show evidence of dialects in their contact calls- that is, calls from birds living in the same geographic area produce calls that are more similar to each other than calls from individuals of the same species living more distantly.

Jack, Sandy and their colleagues wanted to test whether Orange-fronted Conures responded differently to calls produced by local versus distant birds, so they broadcast calls that were recorded from regions around Costa Rica to wild conures in Guanacaste. Sure enough, these birds responded more strongly to local calls, suggesting that the subtle differences between local and distant calls were meaningful to them. However, these scientists also found something unexpected and intriguing when they analysed the conures' response calls. Often, when a wild bird responded to the playback, that bird would systematically change



the structure of its own contact call to more closely match the broadcast calls. In longer interactions, after converging with the test vocalization, wild birds would then change their calls again—this time, to become systematically less similar to the playback. This was some of the first evidence that not only were parrots capable of vocal mimicry in the wild, but that this vocal flexibility was demonstrated over the course of an interaction lasting no more than minutes! Even in captivity, many of the imitative sounds produced by parrots are achieved only through careful training or repeated interactions, so this demonstration of such rapid vocal convergence was quite astounding.

### **But what does this rapid call convergence mean to the parrots?**

Beginning in 2003, I delved into this question at Jack Bradbury's lab (now at Cornell University) as a Ph.D. student, teaming up with Jack's post-doctoral researcher Thorsten Balsby. This time, we temporarily contained wild-caught conures in outdoor aviaries to learn

more about how individuals responded to different types of vocal interactions. This setup had the added benefit that we could learn the sex of our test birds; we were able to use blood samples to sex the birds in our aviaries.

We recorded each aviary bird's contact calls when no other conures were present to get a sense of that bird's baseline call signature. Then, we selected sequences of calls from our library of known-sex conure vocalisations to build call sets that changed in relation to our test bird's own contact calls. We played each aviary bird six sequences of calls, three sets each from males and females: calls that converged with our subject's calls, calls that *diverged* (became less similar) from our subject's calls, and calls that did not change in relation to the test bird.

Despite using birds held in aviaries to more closely control experimental conditions, we had to deal with many unexpected interruptions to our playbacks. Often, either our playbacks

or the aviary bird's responses would attract wild birds, and these parrots would perch in nearby trees and call back and forth to our subject, forcing us to abandon our trial. Once, the microphones we set up around the aviary started to fail, one by one – and upon investigation, we discovered a herd of wild peccaries tramping through our study site, tripping over the microphone cables and disconnecting our recording equipment!

After numerous wild animal interruptions, we finally collected enough data for our analysis. We found that the convergent and divergent series of calls did elicit different responses from our test birds. Males called most in response to convergent series of calls and called least in response to divergent series, suggesting that males prefer to interact with birds whose calls change to match their own. Females, on the other hand, responded strongly to both convergent and divergent playbacks, but called less to no-change sequences, suggesting that

An Orange-fronted Conure feasts on fruit supplied by researchers



© Thorsten Balsby



© Juliann Schamel



© Thorsten Balsby

(Left) Male Galah peers out from nest hole (Right) Orange-fronted Conure in research enclosure

their preferred interactions involve calls that change in relation to their own, but the specific direction of change doesn't matter.

Since both males and females responded strongly to convergent series, with males responding more strongly to convergent calls than any other type of interaction, these results suggest that rapid call convergence signals an additional willingness to associate between birds, above and beyond what is signaled by a simple exchange of contact calls.

We also suspect that these rapid, directional call changes may serve to direct interactions to a specific bird. Often, contact call exchanges take place in very noisy environments: when two flocks join together, or when an individual is interacting with a larger flock. Many species of parrots have individual vocal signatures that others, such as a bird's mate, can use to recognize a specific bird, and thus contact calls contain information about a bird's identity. Changing call structure in relation to the calls of an interaction partner may allow parrots to use those individual signatures to address

a specific bird, the way calling out someone's name in a crowded room serves to single out a specific person.

But is this rapid vocal convergence and divergence unique to Orange-fronted Conures, or is this a more widespread communication tool among parrots?

Many species of parrots show some degree of vocal mimicry abilities in captivity, suggesting that vocal flexibility or vocal imitation may be common in wild birds. Also, communication methods evolve to meet the needs of a species' social system, and many parrots have similar social systems.

In many parrots, males and females form long-term pair bonds, but more broadly, most parrots are part of fission-fusion social systems, in which flocks or individuals will join together temporarily and then split apart throughout the course of the day. In this way, birds may regularly encounter and interact with a large variety of other individuals. Rapid vocal flexibility may help parrots to navigate these varied and fleeting social interactions, and thus it seemed likely that other

parrot species could be using this communicative tool.

I decided to test this hypothesis halfway across the world. The majority of my Ph.D. focused on vocal communication and sex differences in Galahs (*Eolophus roseicapillus* - also known as Roseate Cockatoo), pink and grey cockatoos that inhabit most of mainland Australia; my study site, a local park, bordered the eastern suburbs of Canberra. Like Orange-fronted Conures, male and female Galahs form strong pair bonds within a broader fission-fusion flock system.

Unlike the conures, Galahs are sexually dimorphic; adult males have brown irises while females' eyes are pink or red. As part of my dissertation research, I decided to examine whether a parrot species that was only very distantly related and geographically far removed from Orange-fronted Conures used a similar method of rapid vocal convergence in their interactions.

When many people envision scientific experiments, visions of white lab coats, test tubes, safety goggles, and



© Juliann Schamel

Wild Galah forages on the ground with Eastern Rosellas (*Platyercus eximius*)

carefully-controlled environments come to mind. Not so when studying animal behaviour in the wild. For this Galah vocal flexibility experiment, I suspended a single speaker, messily painted green in a half-hearted attempt at camouflage, in habitat Galahs used for both foraging and nesting. I hid in any available bushes with my computer to play back the calls, while my two field assistants roamed through the eucalypt forests around me, ready to sprint frantically but stealthily towards any Galahs that came and called in response to our playback.

We never encountered wild peccaries in the city limits of Australia's capital, but since we were conducting these experiments in public parks, we often received very strange looks from passing bikers, joggers, and dog-walkers as we muttered to ourselves into giant microphones and stumbled around the forest chasing after big, pink, squawking birds.


In each trial, I broadcast either a male call or a female call repeatedly, and when a wild Galah would call in response to the playback, my assistants would record its response as well as

check its eye colour to determine the bird's sex. When we compared Galahs' response calls to our playback, we were thrilled and astounded to find that Galahs also exhibited the rapid vocal convergence that wild conures use during vocal interactions! Over the course of a few minutes, many of our responding Galahs changed the features of their calls to become more similar to the features of the playback call.

To add another layer to the picture, this vocal convergence seemed to be a tool used more between males; birds converged more closely on male calls, and males were more likely to use convergence than females.

These results suggest that far from being an isolated mechanism used by Orange-fronted Conures to communicate, rapid vocal convergence may be a widespread tool used by parrots with a fission-fusion social system. Even the evolution of the verb "to parrot" suggests how important vocal imitation can be for many species of these engaging birds. By imitating other individuals in their social networks, parrots are able to

navigate fast-paced interactions with unfamiliar birds and new flocks.

Our Galahs and Orange-fronted Conures may not be imitating a ringing phone or whistling to the family dog, but these experiments offer some of the first evidence and shed new and intriguing light on how two geographically distant parrot species use their incredible vocal flexibility in the wild. 

### About the Author

**Judith Scarl** received an AB in psychology and biology from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in animal behaviour from Cornell University. Currently, she is a conservation biologist at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, where she coordinates the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz, a 38 state, 9 province initiative across the U.S. and Canada to identify migratory hotspots for a vulnerable songbird. She also directs Mountain Birdwatch, a four-state monitoring project that evaluates high-elevation breeding songbird populations.





## The Standoff

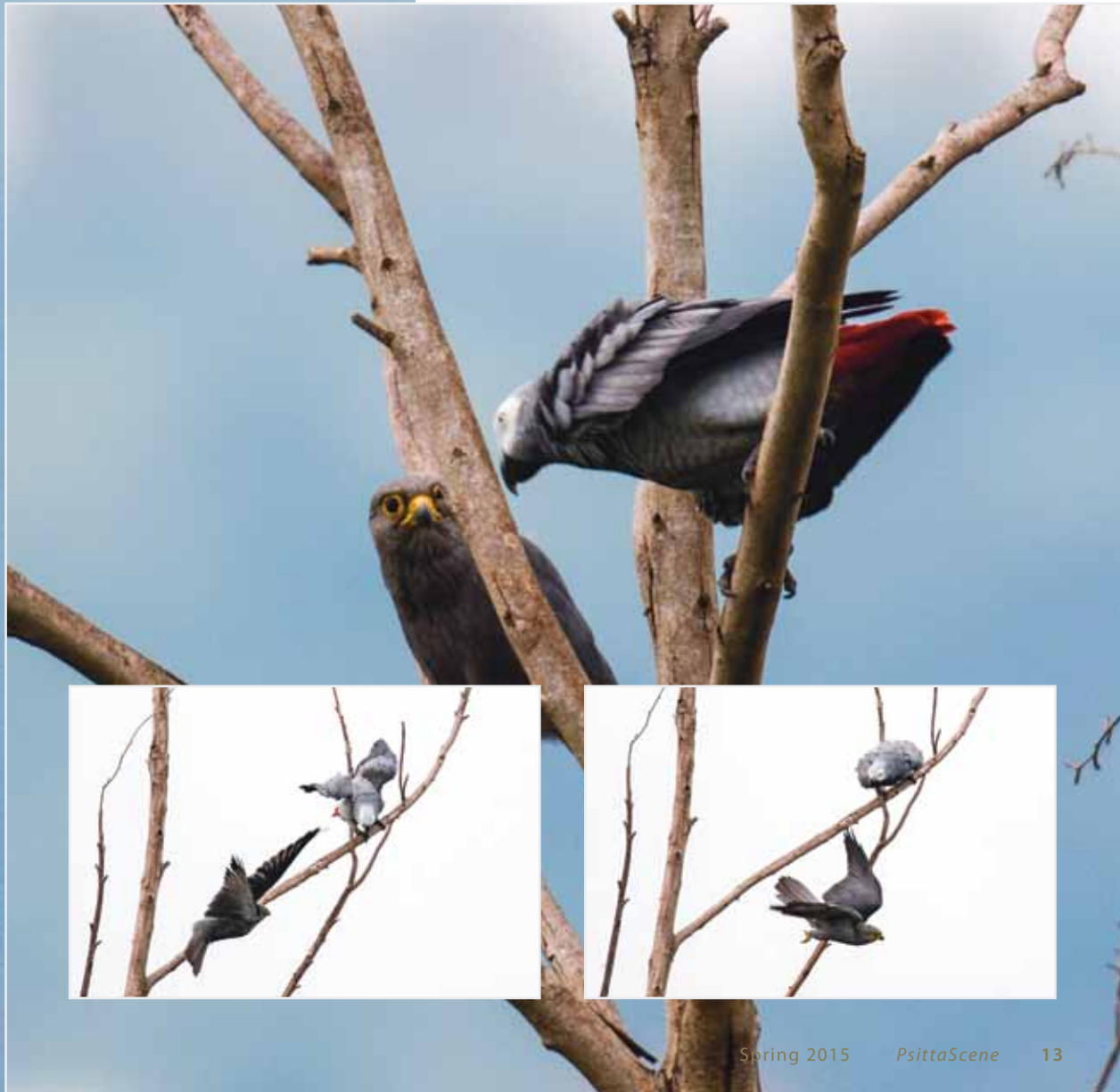
On the outskirts of Uganda's capital city, Kampala, Sherry & Jeremy McKelvie's home is situated overlooking a papyrus and grass swamp, surrounded by Cassia and Eucalyptus trees.

Among their many regular visitors is a Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*), who drops in to sample the seed pods on their Cassia tree. On this particular morning, one of the Greys arrived to find a Grey Kestrel (*Falco ardosiaceus*) on a favoured perch. This being unacceptable, the kestrel was chased off in short order.

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### ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER:

Sherry McKelvie runs her own company selling construction equipment in Kampala, Uganda, where she has lived for 24 years, photographing wildlife in her spare time. View more of her work at [www.sherry-mckelvie.com](http://www.sherry-mckelvie.com).



A serene sunset scene with a warm orange and yellow sky. Silhouetted trees are visible along the bottom edge, and a large flock of birds is scattered across the sky, some in flight and others perched on branches. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

*“No duty is more urgent  
than that of returning  
THANKS.”*

*~ JAMES ALLEN*

# Thank you!

The World Parrot Trust is indebted to those who have contributed to our efforts in the past 12 months. The generosity of our supporters allows us to continue the vital work of saving the parrots of the world.

For continued support of our [Blue-throated Macaw Project](#) we thank **April Sanderson and her family, African Lion Safari, Zoological Society of London, the Keefe Family Foundation, Natural Encounters Conservation Fund, Naples Zoo** and the many individuals, notably: **Evet Loewen, Mary Spease and Svetla Konstantinova.**

For their support of the [Yellow-shouldered Amazon](#) on Bonaire we appreciate the **Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund**, as well as many outstanding individuals including **Alan Malone, Anne Prowse, Beverley Penny & the Crazy Bird Ladies, Brent Sinclair, Cornell Bialicki, David A Landry, Evet Loewen, Fran Vogel, Harriet Standeven, Jim & Shelley Schallert, Judith A Rosenthal, Mary McCombie & Harris Friedburg, Mary P Dougherty, Priscilla Tomasovic, Rachel Cassidy, Randall N Collins, Stephan Boerner,** and the hundreds of individual contributors assisting [Echo](#), WPT's in-country partner.

For aid given to [Great Green Macaw](#) conservation in Costa Rica we give thanks to **Mark and Tom Hagen, the Hagen Family Foundation, Tracy Aviary, Cyndi Miller, David C Murray, Nina B Natelson, Robert McCarthy, Roberta Feldhausen, Stephane Vaudandaine,** and countless other individuals.

[Grey and Timneh Parrot](#) conservation will continue in Africa thanks to the generosity of **SOS (Save Our Species) - IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust, the Keith Ewart Charitable Trust, James Armstrong,** and many other individuals who have given throughout the year. For ongoing sponsorship of the [Lory Conservation Network](#) we recognize **Vogelpark Avifauna and Blackpool Zoo.**

Many champions stepped up for our other [species-specific programs](#), including **Neville & Pamela Isdell (Lilian's Lovebird), W. Leon & Vicki Dunlap (Yellow-naped Amazon) Fran Vogel, Carleton L Briggs**

and **Karen D. Shaw** for their generosity benefitting the [Scarlet Macaw](#), and **The Living Desert and Defenders of Wildlife (Thick-billed Parrot) Clifford & Jane Johnson (Great Green Macaw-Ecuador), The Rufford Foundation, Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund and Evet Loewen (Vinaceous Amazon), Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, Owen Deutsch & Rona Talcott Charitable Foundation and the Isdell Family Foundation (Cape Parrot).**

We thank the **Folke H. Peterson Foundation and Bill & Terry Pelster** for their unwavering support of our work to [end the wild bird trade.](#)

Over the past year we were also honoured to receive extraordinary contributions from the estates of **Mrs M. D. Gilson, Jean Beatrice Ross McGregor and Anita Mills** to support our work in many different areas of conservation and welfare.

WPT expresses its deepest gratitude to these special contributors, who continue to go above and beyond: **DJ Feathers, Downtown Aquarium, Drayton Manor, Eleanor Lloyd Dees Foundation, the Hagen Family Foundation, Liberta UK Ltd., New Mexico BioPark Society, PEAC, Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise Program Fund, Zoomarine (Portugal), ZZYX Foundation, Alexander M Danik, Amy Hammett, Amy Hopkins, Andrea Watson, Ann Tozman, Anonymous, Bill & Gerry Goodman, Bill & Terry Pelster, Bob Brown, Bruce & Pam King, Carol & Gary Cipriano (Parrot Lover's Cruise), Chris Whalen, Claire Cronmiller, Danny Chen, Darlene Carver, Donald Hedges, Elaine B Charkowski, Ellen Gale & Bill Larson, Evet Loewen, Fran Vogel, Ian Sprague, J. Worley, J.A. Manthorpe-Eberle, Jacqueline Gilardi, Jim & Shelley Schallert, Julie Anne Kapito, Kathleen Raffel, Linda Hunter, Malcolm Ellis Memorial Fund, Malinda Chouinard, Mario Recupero, Mark Hagen, Michael Friedeers, Mircea Trofin, Orin & Vicky Oberlander, Otto, Wanita & Marissa Schmid, Patti Shoemaker, Ricardo Charles, Siggys Grima, Steve Carpenter, Twila Y Frieders.**

*... and many more too numerous to mention, but equally important!*

# Thank you!

Our deepest thanks also go out to the donors of this year's *Be a Parrot Hero* campaign. With matching donations provided by an anonymous donor and parrot enthusiasts from around the globe answering our call, we attained our goal and then some. Over the course of 77 days our supporters gave an *extraordinary* \$134,571 (£86,680). These gifts will directly support conservation and rescue activities for the most endangered parrots.

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*Thank you!*



# Postcards to the Flock

*Fun aboard the 2014 Parrot Lover's Cruise*

By Janine Couture & Ian Sprague

Nov 3, 2014

Hi Birdies, you wouldn't believe this ship! The staff, the food, and the amenities are incredible. There was even a parade last night that had an Elephant! Ok it wasn't a real elephant, but it was a real parade! Today we had a seminar with Dr. Sam Williams from Bonaire, who talked about the conservation project he runs called Echo. They are working to protect the parrots on Bonaire, one of the many projects the World Parrot Trust helps. It's nice that because we are all together on the cruise we will have a chance to chat with him in a less formal setting. Have we told you how amazing the food is on these ships? Hope you are being good birdies for the sitter!

Love Janine and Ian



Parade on the Ship!



Evening sunset..

Nov 4, 2014

Today Cassie Malina finished her presentation on the "Secret of Bird Training". We paid particular attention to this presentation so watch out when we get home! It's really cool to be able to talk to professionals about parrots. Every night we go for supper in the dining room and sit with other parrot lovers. We have a blast, everyone gets along so well. After supper we decided to go to the Metropolis theatre to catch a show. They had a two man musical comedy act. They were hilarious! Off to Roatan tomorrow.

Janine and Ian



Snorkeling in Roatan

Nov 5, 2014

Hi Birdies, we had another beautiful day! Today we went snorkeling at Tabyana in Roatan. What a beautiful spot! White sand, warm blue water - just amazing. In between snorkeling and relaxing in the sun we were treated to a huge barbeque complete with live entertainment. While we were snorkeling we saw lots of fish including Parrot fish. The snorkeling lived up to all expectations! After a few hours of the beach we returned to catch another show at the Metropolis theatre. Tomorrow is Belize and the Belize Bird Rescue. We are very excited!

Miss you! Janine and Ian



Dancers in Roatan

Nov 6, 2014

Hi guys, today we arrived in Belize to visit the Belize Bird Rescue. Along the way we saw Turkey Vultures, Snail-Kites and even a pair of parrots - they looked to be Pionus but we can't be sure. Once at the rescue we were greeted by the sounds of the Mealy Amazons, Olive-throated Conures, and White-Capped Pionus just to name a few. We were allowed to wander the extensive grounds and see the parrots who were getting ready for release. So as not to disturb them, we quietly walked a path in the forest until the pens came into view. One pen had several Amazons another had Pionus all getting ready to be set free. So amazing!

Be good! Janine and Ian



Amazons at Belize Bird Rescue

Nov 7 2014

Hi Birdies, today we pulled into Cozumel, Mexico and made our way to Xcaret Park. The park is huge, with all kinds of animals - it's incredible! We were there because they have a world class breeding and release program for Macaws. The first thing we saw as we entered the park were some Scarlet Macaws. It was arranged for us to have the privilege of interacting with some of the "regulars" of the park. When you see these birds flying free amongst the trees and the replicas of Mayan pyramids, it is truly breathtaking! We are going to relax in one of the hot tubs until bedtime. More tomorrow!

Love Janine and Ian



Nov 8, 2014

Today was our last day and we had a great presentation from Dr. James Morrissey of Cornell University on health related issues all parrot caregivers should know about. Today was also the day we found out who won the silent auction items. We unfortunately struck out, but enjoyed the auction knowing the proceeds go to the World Parrot Trust. We always have such a great time on the Parrot Lover's Cruise we are sad to see it end, but hopefully some of the things we have learned will make your lives a bit better. We can also go home knowing that our holiday has helped wild parrots stay safe in the wild. Hope you guys have been good for the bird sitters because we are going to need them when we come again next year!

See you soon! Janine and Ian



#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Ian Sprague and Janine Couture operate Meika's Bird House and Safehouse, a wild and companion bird supply store / parrot rescue in Alberta, Canada.



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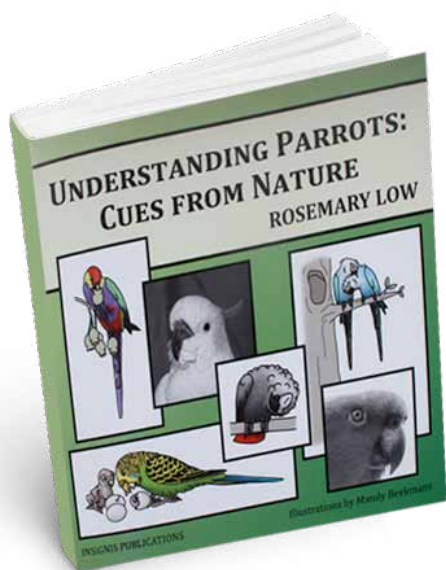
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## Understanding Parrots: Cues from Nature

Author: Rosemary Low

Review by: Roger Wilkinson, WPT Scientific Advisor

This book is aimed at the pet owner and contains much good advice on caring for parrots as companion birds and particularly in ensuring that their owners are able to support the psychological needs of their pets as well as their basic husbandry. That said there is much in this book to enlighten those with a more general interest in parrots and it also would be recommended reading for veterinarians and others who advise on parrot welfare, care and husbandry.

This is a large format paperbound book running to 196 pages, illustrated with numerous black and white photographs. Added to this are a series of twenty charming and often quirky and humorous colour illustrations by Mandy Beekmans, a talented Dutch artist who clearly loves parrots, and has gained insight into their world from volunteering at a bird sanctuary.

The essence of this book is using the knowledge of how parrots live in the wild to help us understand how better to care for them in captivity.

**PART 1: “THE PARTS THAT MAKE UP THE WHOLE”** includes short chapters on the beak, the tongue, the eyes, the feathers, the wings and the feet, and their care. For example, the section on feet features advice

on nail care including filing and trimming, to reduce overgrowth. It might also have been useful to mention providing irregular shaped perching so as to avoid this as much as possible and to better exercise the feet in gripping different shape and size perches.

**PART 2: “PSYCHOLOGY”** includes, amongst other topics, chapters on feather plucking, stress and fear, and aggression and biting.

**PART 3: “BEHAVIOUR”** covers emotional intelligence, problem solving, visual and vocal communication, vocal mimicry, play, territoriality, and roosting behaviour. There is also an additional chapter on lesser-known senses in birds, such as smell.

**PART 4: “WHAT PARROTS NEED”** covers the basics of clean water, air and food, sunshine, the need to gnaw, bathing, environmental enrichment and social companions.

**PART 5: “BREEDING”** has chapters on lifetime monogamy, matriarchal societies, male partnerships, nest sites, laying, incubation, chick rearing and fledging. It also includes information on weaning and on bacterial and parasitic infections of chicks. This section is informative though may be of less practical interest to owners of companion animals than the preceding sections.

**PART 6: “FOODS”** includes accounts of foods and feeding behaviour in the wild, both in their natural habitats and as feral birds in urban areas. Rosemary as in previous chapters uses these observations to suggest how best to cater for parrots’ nutritional and behavioural foraging needs in captivity. She concludes this section with a chapter on food toxicity, sodium and grit that contains much practical advice to the parrot owner.

**PART 7: “STOP AND THINK”** includes chapters on the role of captive breeding in conservation and on the wild parrot trade. In the essay “*Captive breeding is not conservation*” Rosemary justifies her position with regard to captive breeding in aviculture. Of course there are situations in which conservation breeding of parrots has played and will continue to play an important role within holistic government supported conservation plans. But breeding threatened parrots as a hobby is for a host of reasons explained by Rosemary itself unlikely to contribute to species conservation in the wild. □

### Reports Bear Out Unsustainability of the Grey Parrot Trade

The Democratic Republic of Congo's annual CITES export quota is for 5,000 Grey Parrots, but an investigation in 2013 indicated that 12,000-18,000 parrots are trapped annually in Orientale Province (central DRC) alone (See report in WPT's Winter issue of *PsittaScene* 2013). Last year, the coordinator of the Société Civile Environnementale of Sud-Kivu Province (eastern DRC) reported that 54,000 parrots had been exported since 2011. The close relationship between the legal and the illegal trade becomes apparent here: Dealers take advantage of a system that is inadequately monitored. Forged permits are widely used, making it impossible to determine the actual number of birds caught in the illegal trade. These issues make the backing of confiscations, relief for rescued birds and technical help that WPT provides to halt the trade in parrots vitally important. □

### Australia Provides Safe Water for Cockatoos



© Department of Parks and Wildlife

Carnaby's Cockatoos are enjoying an addition at Parks and Wildlife in Kensington – a new bath. This is good news for a number of reasons: During the warmer months, the birds love to drink and bathe in the run-off from irrigation, which pools on roadways. This puts them at great risk from being hit by cars. The bath is a much safer place for them to get a cool, refreshing drink and have a good soak. More safety measures: Signs have been erected around the site warning motorists to look out for the birds and Main Roads Western Australia has also installed signs on the roads leading into the area. □

### Orange-bellied Parrots: Update

2014-15 breeding season at Melaleuca: A minimum of 28 Orange-bellied Parrot chicks from at least 13 nests have fledged, and of the 27 adults released at the beginning of the season, 18 (67%) survived the season in the wild. This is a great result according to Mark Holdsworth, a member of the Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) National Recovery team. After more than 30 years of effort researchers with the team have confirmed that the parrots can breed in the wild and can migrate to the mainland and back - although fewer than half those released have survived. Mark Holdsworth: "There is a slight chance that some of the "missing" released birds have settled somewhere else in the vast Southwest Wilderness where they are happily breeding without detection. This is why observations of banded and unbanded birds on the mainland this winter will be so important." Adults are beginning to disperse from the supplemental feed table, signalling the start of their northern migration - one has possibly been sighted at Port Davey (Spain Bay). □

### Lilian's Lovebird Researcher Receives Award



© Tiwonge Mzumara-Gawa

The population of Lilian's Lovebird, *Agapornis lilianae*, may be as little as 10,000 in the wild. In 2013 WPT began supporting researchers who have now completed exploratory field expeditions, added new distributional records, identified multiple roost sites in Zambia, and had meetings with key partners. One of these researchers, Tiwonge Mzumara-Gawa, recently received the International Young Conservationist Award at the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia. The award recognises Tiwonge's bird conservation work in her native Malawi, which has included some important parrot work. WPT is delighted to be working with Tiwonge, helping bring her skills and experience to bear on the conservation of Lilian's Lovebirds in Zambia and throughout their range. □



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# PSITTASCENE

## 2014 INDEX

## WPT CONTACTS



26.1  
SPRING

- From the Desk of: **Steve Milpacher**
- Island Hopping: Search for the **Red-and-blue Lory**
- Where the Lories Landed: **Red-and-blue Lory** rescue
- Profiles in Conservation: **Carlos Yamashita**
- Hope is the Thing with Green Feathers: **Tasman Parakeet**
- Thank you - **WPT Donors of 2013**
- Parrots in the Wild: **Orange-chinned Parakeet**



26.2  
SUMMER

- From the Director: **Jamie Gilardi**
- What's in a Name? Taxonomy and Parrot Conservation: **Mealy Amazon**
- **Dutch Airforce Squadron: Polly Parrot**
- The Rescue: **Great Green Macaw**
- Cayman's Invasive **Monk Parakeet**
- Thoughts on **Population Control**
- Paradise Found: Great news for the **Yellow-naped Amazon**
- Pet Pages - **A Tale of Too (2) Bites**
- Parrots in the Wild: **Scarlet Macaw**



26.3  
AUTUMN

- From the Editor: **Desi Milpacher**
- Cockatoos in Crisis: **Western Australia's Black Cockatoos**
- The Adventures of Baloo: **Great Green Macaw** in Costa Rica
- Tribute to **Luiz Claudio Marigo**
- Patience the **Grey Parrot's** Return to Africa
- Bananas, the Survivor: **Successful Rescue of a Wild Chick**
- **Lovebirds in the City:** Parrots thriving in urban areas
- Pet Pages: **Why Adoption Makes Sense**
- Parrots in the Wild: **Hyacinth Macaws**



26.4  
WINTER

- From the Director: **Jamie Gilardi**
- Escape to Paradise: **Book Excerpt from Mike Reynolds**
- Celebrating **25 Years in Highlights**
- Wildlife Trade - **EU Trade Ban Timeline**
- Wild-bird Trade | **Then and Now**
- **Looking Forward:** Saving Parrots in the Next Quarter Century
- **Programs & Projects:** WPT impact around the globe
- Unintended Victims: **Lilian's Lovebirds** in Malawi
- Parrots in the Wild: **Slender-billed Conure**

### WEB

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### PsittasScene Editor

Desi Milpacher  
dmilpacher@parrots.org

### Address change:

parrots.org/addressupdate

### MAIN — UK & World

Karen Whitley  
uk@parrots.org

### USA

Glenn Reynolds  
usa@parrots.org

### AFRICA

Rowan Martin  
africa@parrots.org

### AUSTRALIA

Nicholas Bishop  
australia@parrots.org

### BENELUX

Ruud Vonk  
benelux@parrots.org

### NETHERLANDS

Ria Vonk  
netherlands@parrots.org

### BELGIUM

Ronald Coens  
belgium@parrots.org

### BRAZIL

André Saidenberg  
brazil@parrots.org

### CANADA

Michelle Kooistra  
canada@parrots.org

### INDIA

Avin Deen  
india@parrots.org

### ITALY

Cristiana Senni  
csenni@parrots.org

### JAPAN

TSUBASA  
japan@parrots.org

### SWEDEN

Lars Persson  
sweden@parrots.org

### PERU / SPAIN / CENTRAL AMERICA

Rosa Elena Zegarra  
centralamerica@parrots.org

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