PsittaScene

Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Spring 2017

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World Parrot Trust

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ABOUT THE WPT

Capture for the live-bird trade, habitat loss and other factors put wild parrots at risk. One in three parrot species are currently threatened in the wild.

As a leader in parrot conservation and welfare the World Parrot Trust works with researchers, local organisations, communities and governments to encourage effective solutions that save parrots.

Since 1989 the WPT has grown to become a global force that moves quickly to address urgent issues and support long-term projects for parrots. WPT has led projects in 42 countries for 66 species of parrot.

CHARITY INFORMATION
United Kingdom: # 800944
United States: EIN 62-1561595
Canada: BN 89004 1171 RR001

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

Printed by Brewers — Part of the Martin Luck Group
Tel: 01326 563424

CONTENTS

ON THE COVER

Researcher **Erica Pacifico** carefully handles a curious **Lear's Macaw** *(Anodorhynchus leari)* chick down inside a deep, narrow nest crevice at Canudos Biological Station, Biodiversitas Foundation, Brazil. She wears a face mask to protect her from dust and droppings.

During the 2016 expedition the project team discovered that the rare macaws had returned to a historical breeding site after an absence of four decades.

Read more on ***Page 5, Lear's Macaw Research & Recovery.***

Photo © Dorivaldo Alves

A message from...

Steve's desk

This issue of *PsittaScene* has me thinking about the amazingly dedicated and talented individuals around the world who we work with to help save parrots. Their tenacity and determination are admirable.

Team members at the Lear's Macaw Project crawl deep into bat-filled crevices to find the rare nestlings to examine and band, and brave encounters with Africanised bees. Volunteers in Costa Rica helping Scarlet Macaws sometimes find themselves in a fix up a tree with no way down, and need rescuing by others.

In Bolivia where the Blue-throated Macaws are, the seasonal rains come in a deluge, leaving project workers having to variously wade, slog or at worst paddle themselves through the water for months of the year. And then for all of them there are the insects – some friendly, others looking for a meal from a warm-blooded mammal.

These people endure some of the trickiest conditions on the planet, all to help wildlife. But they gladly do the work that is sometimes disappointing but at other times deeply rewarding and inspiring. We at WPT, and the parrots, are forever grateful.

Steve Milpacher,
WPT Operations Director

What will be *your* legacy?

Let your dedication to parrots live on.

Leaving a legacy gift to the World Parrot Trust through your estate may be one of the easiest and most fulfilling contributions you will ever make.

Visit our website at ***parrots.org/legacy***
or contact an office nearest you *(see Page 27.)*

Lear's Macaw Research & Recovery

Over the last decade researcher Erica Pacífico and her team have worked with the last remaining Lear's Macaws. Their latest expedition, supported by WPT, was one of discovery and renewed hope for these special birds.

In the north-central Bahia region in Brazil these remarkable blue macaws, whose calls sound somewhat like American crows, live a challenging life. They nest in the deepest crevices of high cliffs, away from all but the most determined of predators, where they raise one or two chicks in a good year. They endure harsh, dry conditions, and are under threat from human interference and habitat loss. But in spite of all this, these tenacious birds have begun to recover.

Since 2008 Erica Pacífico and her team have completed seven expeditions at the Canudos Biological Station of Biodiversitas Foundation, the last refuge of the Lear's Macaw. There they have uncovered new information on foraging and breeding behaviour, and how the environment they live in affects these birds. In 2016 the team set out on a 45-day expedition with six volunteers, five researchers and three local guides to continue the work.

Here is their story — and that of the macaws — in pictures.

**Photos taken on location at Canudos Biological Station, Biodiversitas Foundation.*

© Maíra Fessardi

The Year's Work:

Breeding success monitoring

In the past year the project team has observed 35 nests in 4 breeding sites, health checking and banding 47 Lear's Macaw nestlings in 31 nests. In addition, they conducted a study of the parent birds' acceptance of a new banding method, now in use because of the difficulty in reading the numbers on the old bands. With the new bands it is hoped that juvenile macaws can be more easily sighted with binoculars and scopes.

Nestling disease studies

André Saidenberg, DVM PhD and WPT's Brazil Program Manager, and Marcos V. R. Marques, DVM PhD have collected fecal and blood samples from the macaws' nestlings to study diseases that could affect the population.

Survey of chicks in new areas

In 2016, the researchers were able to examine nestlings from a nest in the Baixa do Chico area for the first time. Macaws had disappeared from here in the 1970s but now about 60 birds are back in the area breeding. But pressures continue: there is ongoing disturbance at the site by farmers driving back and forth with their equipment. Because of this, it is believed that the macaws changed their roosting site to another, quieter place on the same road. The local Indian community asked the team to put up a 'do not disturb' sign advising people to avoid this path during the macaws' resting time.

© Fernanda Lacerda


© Fernanda Lacerda

© Fernanda Lacerda

Field work team and volunteers of the nest study at Canudos Biological Station of Biodiversitas Foundation. From left to right: (back row) João Carlos Nogueira, Máximo Cardoso,Thiago Filadelfo, Fernanda Lacerda, Roberta A. Cunha, Angela Prochilo. (front row) Cesar Leite, Erica Pacífico.


© Fernanda Lacerda


© Roberta A. Cunha

Researcher Erica Pacífico and assistant Máximo Cardoso rappel down a steep rock face to work with Lear's Macaw nestlings.

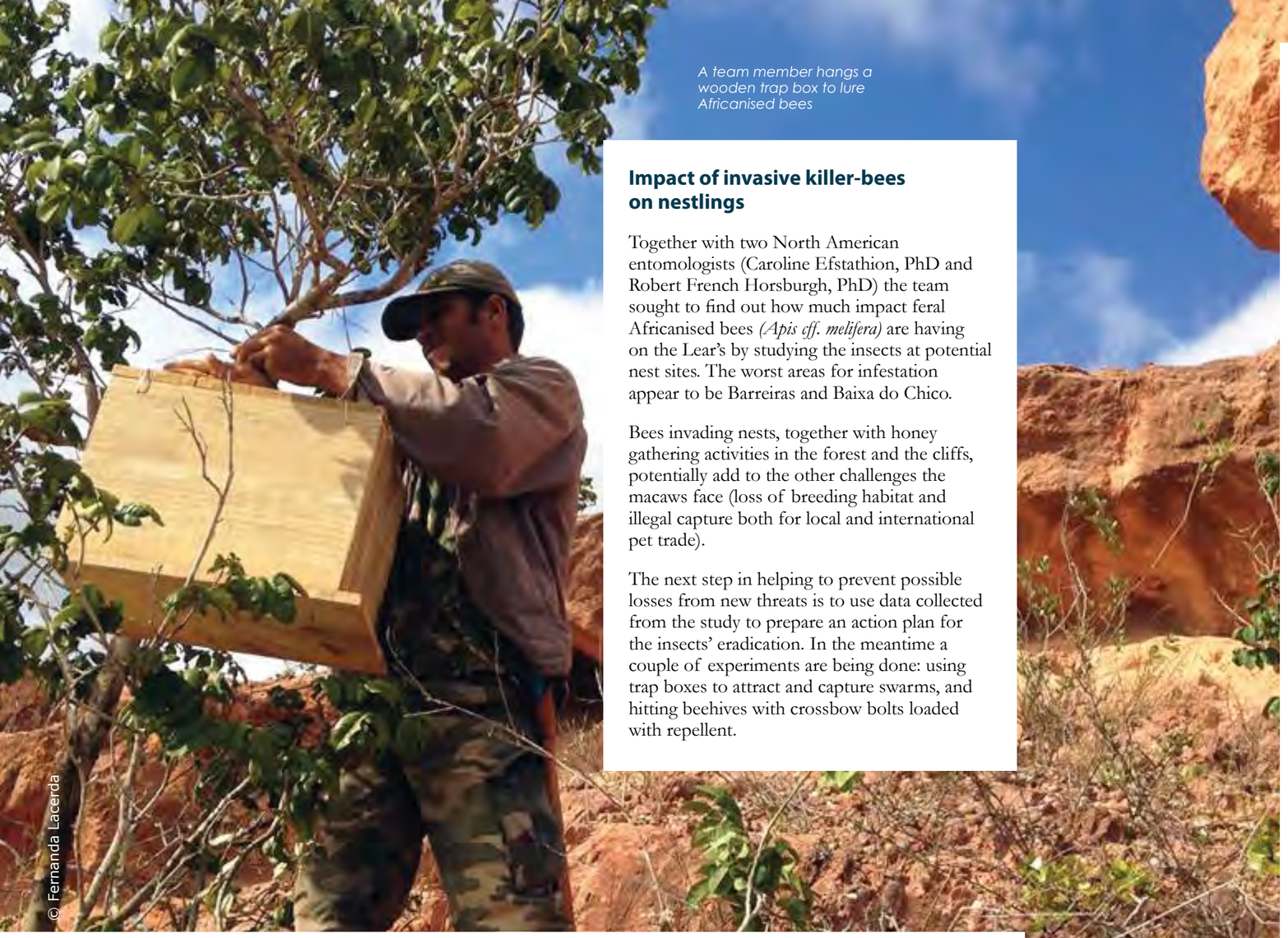
Lear's Macaw
(Anodorhynchus leari)

World population:
< 1,200

Where found:
The wild population is confined to the Raso da Catarina plateau, NE Bahia, Brazil. Found in dry, rugged caatinga (thorn scrub) terrain. Mostly in areas with *Syagrus coronata* palms.

Threats:
This species is threatened by habitat loss, hunting,and illegal trapping.

Ecology and Behaviour:
These macaws are seen in noisy flocks outside of the breeding season. Roosts are in weathered crevices near the top of sandstone ravines. Foraging is before dawn, roosting at dusk.



A team member hangs a wooden trap box to lure Africanised bees

© Fernanda Lacerda

Impact of invasive killer-bees on nestlings

Together with two North American entomologists (Caroline Efstathion, PhD and Robert French Horsburgh, PhD) the team sought to find out how much impact feral Africanised bees *(Apis cff. melifera)* are having on the Lear's by studying the insects at potential nest sites. The worst areas for infestation appear to be Barreiras and Baixa do Chico.

Bees invading nests, together with honey gathering activities in the forest and the cliffs, potentially add to the other challenges the macaws face (loss of breeding habitat and illegal capture both for local and international pet trade).

The next step in helping to prevent possible losses from new threats is to use data collected from the study to prepare an action plan for the insects' eradication. In the meantime a couple of experiments are being done: using trap boxes to attract and capture swarms, and hitting beehives with crossbow bolts loaded with repellent.

Biologists suit up to search for the aggressive insects.

© Erica Pacífico

Repellent-loaded crossbow bolt lodged in bee hive.

© Roberta A. Cunha

Volunteer biologist Roberta A. Cunha organizes biological samples collected from Lear's Macaw roosting sites at the Canudos Biological Station of Biodiversitas Foundation.

© Erica Pacífico

Preparing feather samples

© Máximo Cardoso

Sampling for foraging ecology and population genetics studies

Coupled with observations of the birds' foraging behaviour the researchers discovered and catalogued 24 new food items, which they sampled with more than 800 feathers found in roosting sites (a method known as non-invasive sampling) to study the Lear's Macaw's diet. They also collected 300 feathers for DNA testing (for genetically identifying individual birds), and 200 fecal samples for a seed dispersal study in collaboration with the Museu de Ciencias Naturales de Madrid.

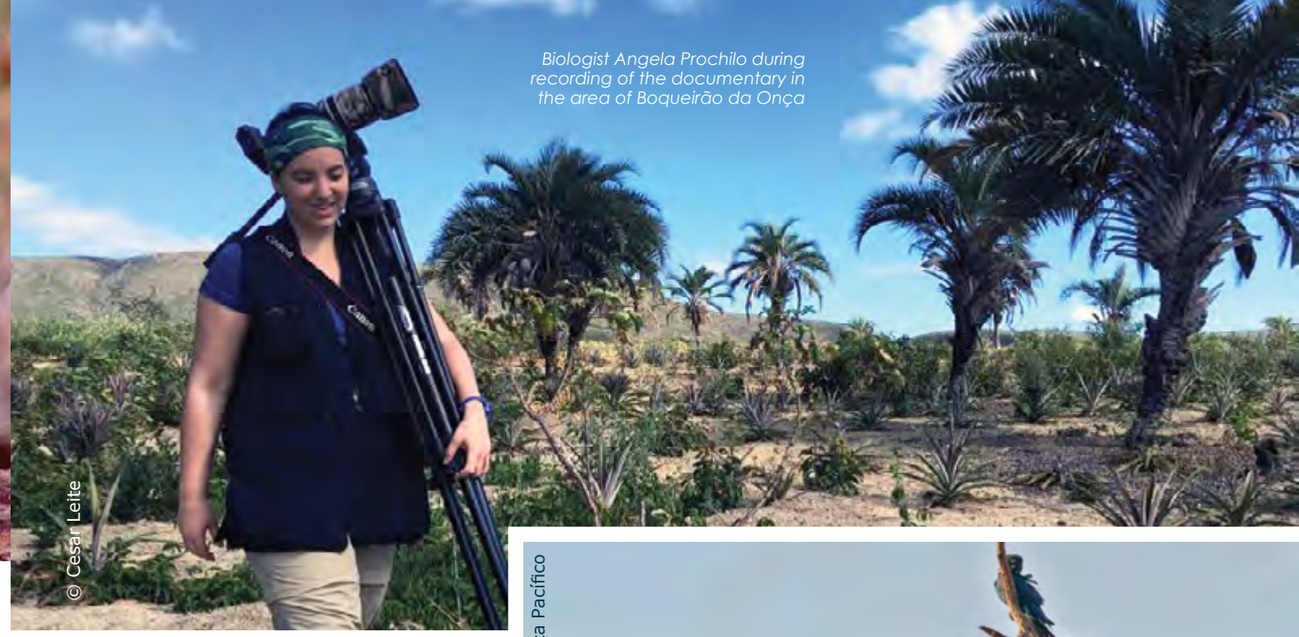
Cataloguing seed samples

© Thiago Filadelfo

Habitat quality study

The team traveled 1,500km, visiting the municipalities of Campo Formoso, Umburanas, Sento Sé, Morro do Chapéu, Andorinhas, Uá-Uá and Euclides da Cunha. On this trip the team learned of two additional locations (Queixo Dantas, in Campo Formoso, and Gruta dos Brejões, in Umburanas), and also found a new roosting site in Barra do Tanque (Euclides da Cunha), where they counted 147 macaws.


© Marcus Vinícius Marques


Biologist Angela Prochilo during recording of the documentary in the area of Boqueirão da Onça

© Cesar Leite


The team interviewed dozens of elderly locals to gather information on historical Lear's Macaw areas

© Roberta A. Cunha

Review of Boqueirão da Onça site as a release area

The Onca site is a *caatinga* (dry scrub) forest fragment measuring 900,000ha from which the macaws disappeared in the 2000s. The last expedition done by Fundação Biodiversitas in the region counted about 30 macaws. Local residents describe a historic population of over 100 macaws. Now the area hosts only two non-breeding birds.

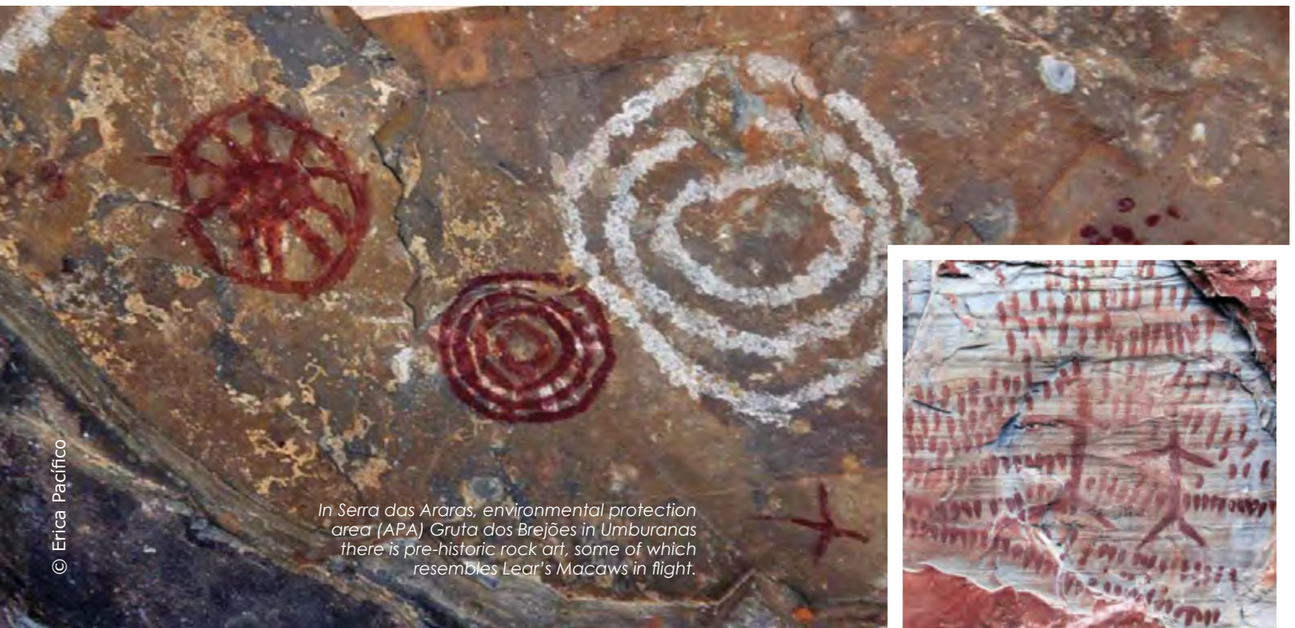
A future aim is to identify both refuge and foraging areas for the Lear's Macaw and implement a program for recovering the population by releasing captive-bred macaws in the area.

Documentary filming and interview

Biologists Angela Prochilo and Cesar Leite accompanied the team in 2016 to document the challenges of field work and conservation for Lear's Macaws. The documentary is part of Angela's Master's project with BBC Wildlife, in partnership with photographer João Marcus Rosa (Nitro Imagens, Belo Horizonte), and co-funded by the World Parrot Trust.

Researcher Erica Pacífico also took part in an interview on the Barreiras countryside area in Canudos municipality, and the conservation of Lear's Macaw foraging sites. Produced by Pierre Alonso and Eliomar Almeida.


© Erica Pacífico


In Serra das Araras, environmental protection area (APA) Gruta dos Brejões in Umburanas there is pre-historic rock art, some of which resembles Lear's Macaws in flight.

© Erica Pacífico

In recognition:

The study of Lear's Macaw population dynamics is ongoing since 2014 with support from Fundação Biodiversitas (FB), Instituto Arara Azul (ITA), and Centro de Estudos de Migração de Aves (CEMAVE-ICMBio). Coordinated by Erica Pacífico, M.Sc., biologist and PhD student of the "Ciências sem Fronteiras" Program, CAPES, and also of the Conservation Biology Department of the Doñana Biological Station (EBD-CSIC), in collaboration with the Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo (MZUSP), and with the Laboratório de Genética Molecular de Aves da Universidade de São Paulo (LGEMA). Field work funded by the World Parrot Trust (WPT), and Toyolex Veículos Concessionária. Laboratory work funded by Loro Parque Fundación.

CAPE PARROTS HOLDING ON
in the Woodbush Forest

BY DR. ROWAN MARTIN, WPT-AFRICA PROGRAM DIRECTOR

In the far northeast corner of South Africa, a small fragment of afromontane forest clings on to the steep slopes of the Drakensberg escarpment. Majestic Yellowwood and Matumi trees reach above the canopy of the Woodbush forest, with the lichens and epiphytes cascading over branches like the waterfalls that tumble through the ravines below.

This pocket of subtropical forest hosts a number of specialised bird species, among them Cape Parrots (Poicephalus robustus robustus) at the extreme north end of their range.

© Anton Kruger

Natural Forest at Magoebaskloof © Hannes4 | Dreamstime.com

ONCE CONNECTED WITH THE MORE EXTENSIVE forests to the south, ancient climate change and more recently logging has left these birds separated from other populations by several hundreds of kilometres.

Only a tiny fraction of South Africa's afromontane forests now remain, scattered in fragments along the Drakensberg escarpment and the Eastern Cape. Isolation has left its mark on the genetic make-up of the Cape Parrots in Limpopo's Woodbush forest. A recent study has revealed this population to be genetically distinct from Capes found elsewhere. The research supports the idea that isolation is a relatively recent phenomenon and raises the question of how long these parrots can hold on.

With the global population of Cape Parrots estimated at no more than 2,000, protecting this forest fragment and the unique parrots that make it their home is a conservation imperative.

With the help of the World Parrot Trust (WPT), in 2013 local bird experts David Letsoalo and Paul Nkhumane initiated a field project aimed at understanding more about the Cape Parrots of the Woodbush forest and raising awareness in their area about their significance for conservation. David and Paul work as bird guides at Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge and have an in-depth knowledge of the area and its birds. They also have strong links with local communities and are deeply passionate about conservation.

David, Paul and the WPT teamed up with Professor Craig Symes of the University of Witwatersrand, who has conducted extensive research into closely related Grey-headed Parrots *(Poicephalus robustus suahelicus)* in the region, to establish a monitoring project. Through systematic surveys of key sites, the project aims to track population trends, and understand the drivers of seasonal movements and the interplay between Capes and other species. Nesting sites have been identified and efforts are being expanded to study areas further afield, building an increasingly detailed picture of how the parrots utilize the dramatic surroundings.

The area's steep slopes, covered in dense forest, are intersected by few roads and tracks. Only time and tenacity will uncover the deeper secrets of these fascinating birds. There remains much to learn, like the location of important nesting and roosting sites.

Like many parrots, the Capes' movements track seasonal shifts in the availability of food, with the birds gathering together in large flocks when trees are in fruit. Feeding sites can be highly predictable and one of the best chances of seeing large flocks of Cape Parrots is during fruiting season on one particular pecan and macademia nut farm at the base of the Magoebaskloof valley. Although historically, nut farmers in South Africa have persecuted Capes as pests, the owners of Amorentia estate have a much more enlightened view.

Far from persecuting the parrots, they have sought to support them by providing nest boxes encouraging them to breed nearby. When a group of international tree-climbing experts visited the area in 2014, estate manager Wynand Espach saw an opportunity to harness their skills to expand their nest box programme.

Joining forces, the group 'Explore Trees' was born and has since gone on to assist conservation projects for Timneh Parrots in Guinea-Bissau (*see 'Climbing High for Timneh Parrots',* PsittaScene *Summer 2016*) and Lear's Macaws in Brazil. Following efforts to discourage bees from taking over the nest boxes it is hoped that Cape Parrots will soon take up residence. Lessons learned here could be invaluable for boosting breeding populations elsewhere in their range.

Recognising that the future of Woodbush forest and the magnificent trees which support Cape Parrots lies in the hands of the next generation, David Letsoalo has driven the development of an outreach programme in the region's schools. Through the assistance of the World Parrot Trust over 100 children have been treated to David's passion and enthusiasm for the forest and its birds. A variety of games and other activities have provided opportunities both inside and outside the classroom for children to learn about the close association between the Woodbush forest's ancient trees and its most charismatic birds. Planting trees around their school has given these future 'guardians of the forest' a personal stake in parrot conservation, making an impact on the area that will extend beyond their own lifetime. Following initial successes, the outreach programme is set to continue.

Although the population remains small and the situation precarious, the diversity of conservation efforts for Capes in the Woodbush forest bodes well for their future. As more is learned through painstaking research, efforts will be further refined and targeted where they can impact the most. Perhaps the best reason to have hope is that these efforts are driven by passionate local people intent on inspiring the conservationists of tomorrow.

*The World Parrot Trust would like to thank the many donors - particularly the **Isdell Family Foundation**, **Ilana and Sean Mercer, Paula Feldman, The Bridging Peace Foundation and Fran Vogel** - for their generous support of Cape Parrot conservation. Additional thanks to **David Letsoalo**, **Paul Nkhumane**, **Lisa Martus** and all at **Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge** (a great place to base your trip to see Cape Parrots!)*

Magoebaskloof Forest © John Karwoski

Cape Parrot AWARENESS:

A Grassroots Effort

David Letsoalo is a Bird Guide at Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge in the Woodbush forest of Magoebaskloof, Limpopo - the second largest indigenous forest in South Africa. Here he speaks about inspiring the next generation of conservationists:

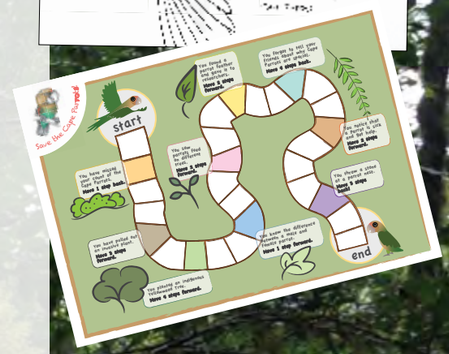
"Cape Parrots are beautiful, sociable and intelligent birds and I feel a surge of excitement every time I see them flying over or balancing in the tree-tops to forage for forest feasts. Whether they are preening or grooming each other, foraging or excavating a nesting cavity, they are a fascinating and entertaining species. I have been studying the parrots - in association with the World Parrot Trust and the University of Witwatersrand - for 2 years, and am the co-ordinator of the annual Cape Parrot Count in Limpopo, so I have had many opportunities to observe how they communicate and take care of their young. There is already pressure on the species due to Beak and Feather Disease, but they are also under threat from nest-robbers who take the chicks to sell.

I am passionate about these birds and their conservation, as are many in my community. The various groups in the Magoebaskloof, Haenertsburg, Tzaneen, Kudu's River Valley and Politsi have an ongoing interest and commitment to preserving them.

The Cape Parrot Educational Project has focused on many school children, in particular *Lerato Combined School* and *Hlalefa Primary School*, which are situated near to where the Cape Parrots come to forage for pecan nuts in season. So it is relevant to these kids to understand why they should celebrate these birds and help to protect them.

In a series of dynamic lessons, using tailor-made games, puzzles, activity cards and stickers to inspire and interest the kids, the message of the importance of this species and their conservation has been brought across. And through competitions and prizes, fun activities and planting trees for the school, the kids become more actively involved and the increased awareness should result in increased ownership and protectiveness.

The project is making a difference, one child at a time, and ensuring that Cape Parrots are a feature of the skies above Limpopo for generations to come."



*Special thanks to **Aeri Wittenburgh** for volunteering her time and expertise to assist with the graphical design of educational resources, **Trevor Hardaker** for kindly sharing his photos and **Nicholas Bishop** for designing the Cape Parrot cartoon now adorning classrooms throughout the area.*

ARE CAPE PARROTS A SEPARATE SPECIES?

...and does it matter?

Researchers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal recently analysed genetic samples from throughout their range of Cape Parrots with the aim of settling a decades-old debate over their taxonomic status; should these birds be considered a species in their own right, or are they merely a subspecies of a parrot variously described as Brown-necked or Grey-headed Parrots, (*Poicephalus robustus fuscicollis* and *P. r. suahelicus*) widely spread throughout southern Africa?

This is not a trivial question and draws on discussions over the definition of a species, which have occupied taxonomists since the time of Darwin.

The categorisation also has significant ramifications for conservation. As conservationists strive to efficiently allocate resources, indices such as the IUCN Red List are increasingly influential for deciding what gets saved – **and what doesn't.**

Cape Parrot © Anton Kruger

The new research suggested that the most recent common ancestor of the two parrots lived between 2.17 and 2.67 million years ago in the late Pliocene to early Pleistocene epoch. This period saw great changes in climate, where grasslands and forests were expanding and contracting, which likely led to isolation and divergence of populations.

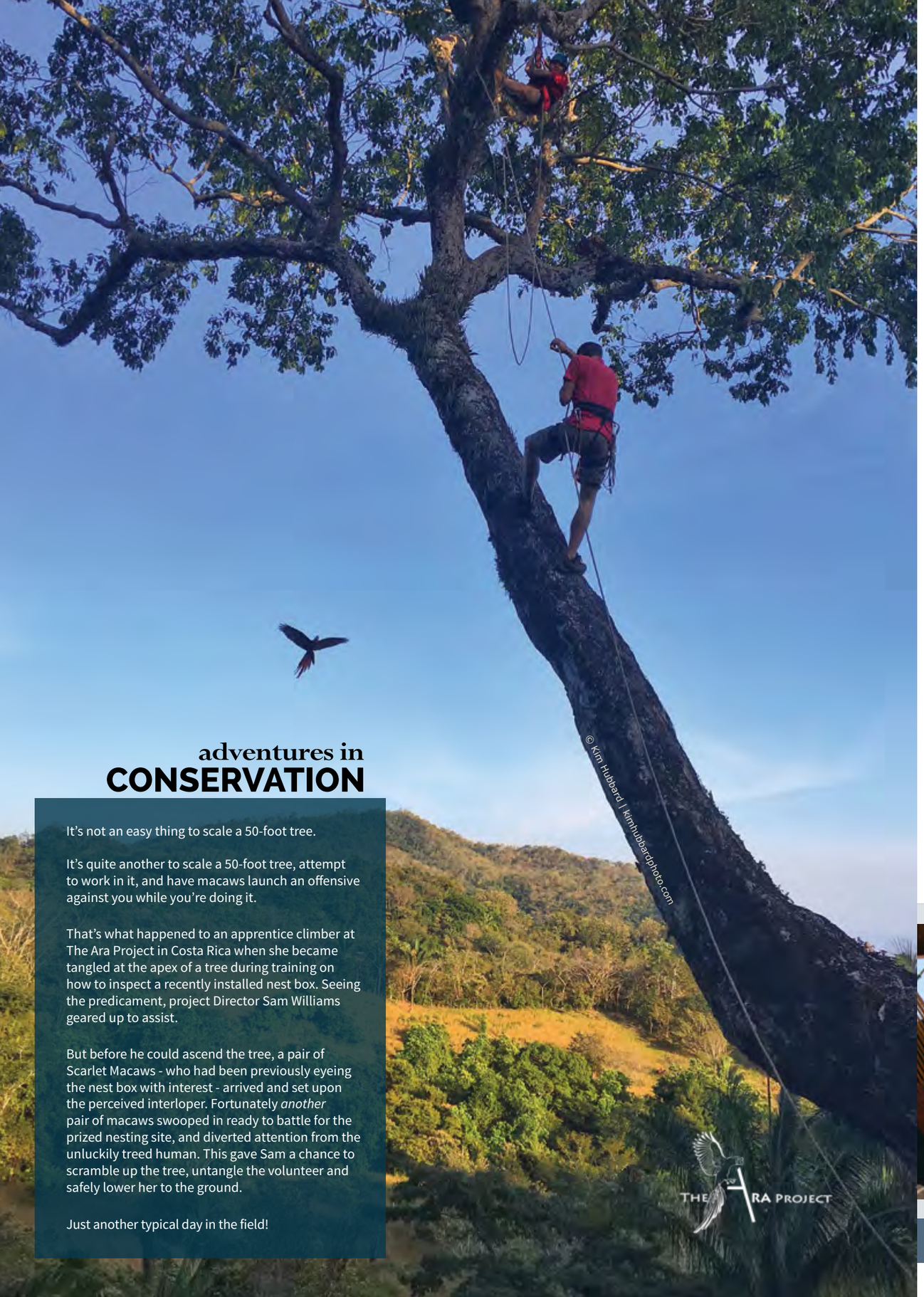
This new information paved the way for the acceptance of Cape Parrots as a distinct species by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), in 2016.

It also prompted BirdLife International, the IUCN Red-List authority for birds, to take a closer look at the differences in morphology, vocalisations, ecology, behaviour and the degree of geographic separation between putative species.

This is the criteria under which many species splits were evaluated for the recently updated *Checklist of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo *et al*. 2014). Following this re-evaluation it was determined that Capes are sufficiently different in plumage (greener head, darker wing coverts and flight feathers, less extensive red on the head of females) are smaller (markedly smaller bill) and have distinctly different calls from *suahelicus/fuscicollis* to be recognised as a distinct species.

Cape Parrots will now have their threat status evaluated for the IUCN Red-List of Threatened Species.

The iconic 'Green and gold' Cape parrots have, for some time, been considered Endangered on the South African Red Databook and are fortunate to have many passionate individuals and groups like the World Parrot Trust, The Cape Parrot Project, The Cape Parrot Working Group, Explore Trees, BirdLife South Africa and others working for their protection in South Africa.



adventures in CONSERVATION

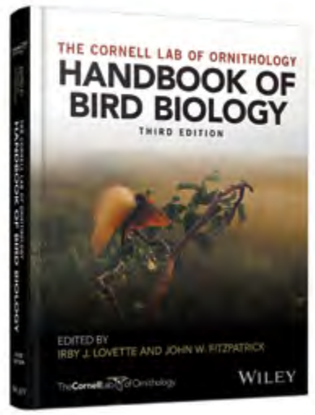
It's not an easy thing to scale a 50-foot tree.

It's quite another to scale a 50-foot tree, attempt to work in it, and have macaws launch an offensive against you while you're doing it.

That's what happened to an apprentice climber at The Ara Project in Costa Rica when she became tangled at the apex of a tree during training on how to inspect a recently installed nest box. Seeing the predicament, project Director Sam Williams geared up to assist.

But before he could ascend the tree, a pair of Scarlet Macaws - who had been previously eyeing the nest box with interest - arrived and set upon the perceived interloper. Fortunately *another* pair of macaws swooped in ready to battle for the prized nesting site, and diverted attention from the unluckily treed human. This gave Sam a chance to scramble up the tree, untangle the volunteer and safely lower her to the ground.

Just another typical day in the field!



Cornell Lab of Ornithology Handbook of Bird Biology – Third Edition

Irby J. Lovette and John W. Fitzpatrick
John Wiley and Sons, 2016

Since its first publication by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in 1972, the *Handbook of Bird Biology* has been enthusiastically embraced by bird (and parrot) watchers and university students alike, and is now in its third edition. And what an edition.

The weighty (both in heft and information) tome is accompanied online by Cornell's Companion Media Library. Contributors from all over the world – the experts in ornithology – have all collaborated to present the latest information available.

There are an abundance of graphs, colour plates, illustrations, a large main glossary, with shorter glossaries within chapters for easy reference, and copious references at the end of every chapter for further research. There's even an electron micrograph featured here and there, in case you want to view things at a cellular level.

The text is advanced, but clearly written. There is a lot to absorb, but it's never boring: one particularly remarkable chapter is *Feathers and Plumages*. The diversity of birds' feathers and down is astounding, with their different structure, types, function, and of course, colours. Another engrossing chapter is *Avian Flight*.

Although not strictly about parrots, there are examples throughout *(see page 77 on the colour sex differences in Eclectus Parrots, and page 140 for Budgerigar colour morphs.)* Moreover, it's a great way for parrot enthusiasts who wish to broadly understand their lives – diversity and classification, evolution, feathers and plumages, flight, anatomy and physiology, foraging and food, mating and social behaviour, vocal behaviour, breeding, migration and dispersal, ecology of populations, bird communities and conservation. This book literally delves into everything related to birds – take a look at the energy requirements of a Budgerigar flying at different speeds in a wind tunnel. Now *that's* detailed.

Parrot lovers interested in the inner and outer workings of their favourite birds will be eager to get their hands on this thorough text: chock-full of data, and interesting and unusual facts.

Order your copy online:
academy.allaboutbirds.org/textbook

A BANNER YEAR:

Progress for Blue-throated Macaws

BY *José Antonio Díaz Luque, WPT Bolivia Program Manager/ Blue-throated Macaw Project*

A year in which a field project achieves nearly everything it sets out to do is a good one. For the Critically Endangered Blue-throated Macaw it is doubly important: with less than 200 individuals in the wild, every good year counts.

In its native Bolivia the Blue-throated Macaw *(Ara glaucogularis)* has been in a holding pattern: breeding difficulties, a shrinking home range and heavy harvesting for the wildlife trade brought its population to precariously low levels in the 1980s. In 2002 the World Parrot Trust began supporting key efforts for these beautiful macaws in the Beni region of Bolivia. During the next decade the Blue-throated Macaw Project collected new data on the birds' ecology and ongoing threats to their survival. Inventive measures were put into place to protect the birds, but their population levels have remained stubbornly low, mainly because the number of reproductive pairs is still very low. To add to that, in climatically and environmentally poor years no attempts to breed are made at all.

> "The result was the eventual fledging of *eight new chicks* into this fragile population ... an extraordinarily high success rate."

That fact pushes our team to carry on our fieldwork with increasing urgency year after year. The latest in our series of efforts with the Project was in 2016: in fifty-nine days of surveying we managed to map a wide range of Blue-throated Macaw habitat, among other important tasks. A large focus of our search this time was a new area, the Big Lakes region in NW Beni. We highlighted this particular location because it had the potential to support Blue-throated Macaws, and locals had reported seeing the birds here. Since no one had explored there before we weren't at all certain we'd find them.

We completed an initial trip in May, together with a group of institutions including CIBIOMA, CLB and the Natural History Museum of Santa Cruz, spending ten days exhaustively searching 215km of road along Amazonian and dry forest, 35km of lakeshore by boat and 18km of interior forest on foot. The massive effort proved fruitless, but there are other promising portions of the region to be surveyed.

Then, a break: late in October 2016, after a more detailed 735km trip by motorbike, we located an undocumented group of at least ten adults in the Municipal Protected Area of the Great Tectonic Lakes of Exaltación. The group was new to science, but people living there have known about the birds for more than two decades. Though apparently the population has always been small, the locals did see it double during those years.

Breeding struggles, then...

The Blue-throated Macaw suffers from issues in *recruitment*: a failure of parent birds to raise chicks, for whatever reason, and get them into the wild so they themselves can begin breeding. That's where we intervene, giving them the means to successfully incubate, hatch and raise their babies to adulthood.

As difficult as the situation sometimes is, this past year there was fantastic news: we found three wild Blue-throated Macaw nests, ***all with eggs***. So we immediately took some critical steps: to prevent climbing predators from reaching the nests we fitted metal cones, with a minimum of disturbance, on all nest trees to protect them during the vulnerable incubation and chick-rearing period. We also lightly pruned one of the trees to prevent access to the nest from nearby trees.

Despite our overall success in protecting nests we have sometimes encountered cases of nest-robbing by unknown natural predators. Predator detection is difficult at any time but is especially so at night, so the team installed motion-sensitive cameras at each of the three nests to see what was happening. We checked the cameras every 10 days for images and to replace batteries.

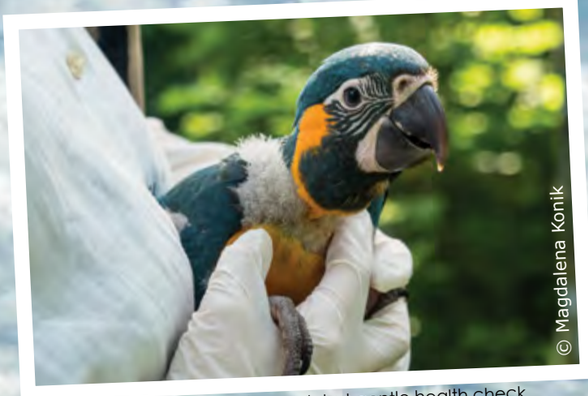
The nest protection worked; we had no predation at any of the nests monitored.


© Blue-throated Macaw Project

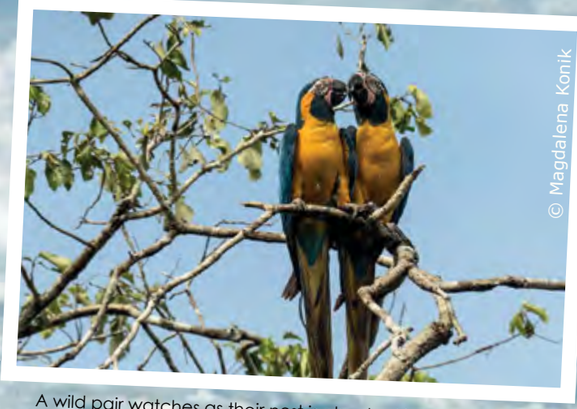
A team member clambers up a tree to check on a nest box

© Blue-throated Macaw Project

Education + engagement = pride in one's local wildlife


© Magdalena Konik

A youngster receives a thorough but gentle health check


© Magdalena Konik

A wild pair watches as their nest is checked by the WPT team

The result was the eventual fledging of ***eight new chicks*** into this fragile population. This is an extraordinarily high success rate, which we attribute to the protective measures installed.

Macaws Need Trees

Blue-throated Macaws' lives are inextricably tied to trees – Motacú palms, in particular. *Attalea phalerata* is extremely important for foraging and breeding. Unfortunately, they and other tree species like the Curupaú (*Anadanthera colubrina*) are disappearing. The value of these trees to the macaws cannot be overstated, so their continued loss is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

To begin to remedy this, the team has begun working with the Biodiversity Research Center and Environment - Centro de Investigación en Biodiversidad y Medio Ambiente (CIBIOMA) to establish a plant nursery with the capacity to produce 5,000 plants every year for habitat restoration, and build a tree nursery at the Blue-throated Macaw Conservation Centre. We have found that out of the ten species of plants in the area, six provide food and three nest trees.

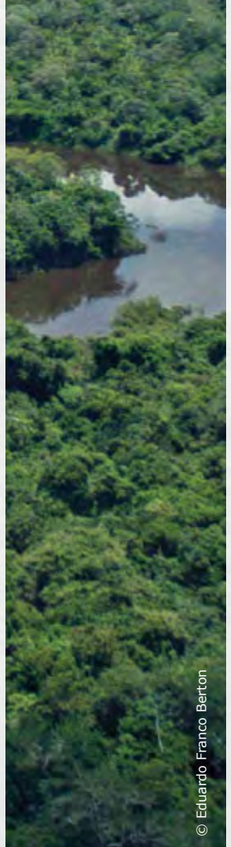
Using this vital information we set to work planting out **1,508 native tree seedlings with over 90% establishment success,** for a total of 15 hectares of renewed forest habitat, a good first step.

We are planning on an extensive effort in this area in the coming years.

Communities:
Awareness and Involvement

Blue-throated Macaws aren't the only ones living in the area; there are people, too. In the birds' range we identified 16 important rural communities based on their relationships with the macaws, because there is always the potential for interaction, good and bad, between the two.

The solution is to educate and involve people. The project team has developed materials to create awareness among communities over the years, and this past year we presented conservation-themed education programs to over 2,800 people (mostly children), giving the greatest priority to those who live in close proximity to the macaws. The program in the rural schools are separated into eight different education modules. The children take part in a Parrot Quiz at the beginning and end of each cycle of modules, to see how much they have learned about the birds. In addition, we reached a significant amount of people at festivals and other events. In the near future we look to hire local people to work at the Pampas del Yacuma Local Reserve, encouraging another level of inclusion in the world of the macaws.


© Eduardo Franco Berton

Captive Breeding and Release:
a New Frontier for Blue-throats

The Project has made good progress on a new area of action – captive breeding for release into the wild. It's an idea that has required much thought and planning for captive and wild birds alike. Our conclusion, gained from valuable past experience in releasing other parrots, is that it can be a viable means of increasing a wild population in trouble.

At the Conservation Centre, first established in October 2012, construction of new breeding and flight aviaries has been completed in preparation to receive birds currently settled in the US, UK and Canada. The hope is to eventually start new wild populations with careful reintroduction of appropriately screened captive-raised birds.

Looking Forward

In the future the Blue-throated Macaw Project looks forward to further developing these current actions, as well as expanding the program into important new areas in the north and north-east part of their range, where there is hope in finding new populations. Our restoration program will grow as well, and our plans to create a new protected area in the south of the species' range have come to fruition.

If all continues to go well, we will have more encouraging news to share in the upcoming months. Our sincerest thanks go to the many supporters and foundations that make this possible.

Blue-throated Macaw project

Partners:

Over the past 12 months, the World Parrot Trust has strengthened its ties with the following: Dirección General de Biodiversidad y Áreas Protegidas; Centro de Investigación en Biodiversidad y Medio Ambiente (CIBIOMA); Fundación para la Conservación de los Loros en Bolivia (CLB); Centro de Biodiversidad y Genética de la Universidad Mayor de San Simón (CBG-UMSS); Instituto de Investigación de la Facultad de Ciencias Pecuarias (IIFCP); Facultades de Ingeniería Agronómica, Veterinaria y Zootecnia de la Universidad Autónoma del Beni José Ballivián; Secretaría de Medio Ambiente del Gobierno Departamental del Beni; Centro Ecoturístico el Tábano Campestre; Honorable Alcaldía Municipal de la Ciudad de Trinidad; Honorable Alcaldía Municipal del Municipio de Loreto; Honorable Alcaldía Municipal de Santa Rosa del Yacuma; Honorable Alcaldía Municipal de Exaltación, Federación de Ganaderos del Departamento del Beni y Pando (FEGABENI).

FREE AT LAST:

Release of Rescued Maroon-bellied Conures

Article by Silvana Davino
Photos © ASM Cambaquara

Release Area ASM Cambaquara is on the island of Ilhabela, off the Atlantic coast of Brazil. Officially founded in 2014 by Pablo Melero and Silvana Davino, staff and volunteers rescue and rehabilitate Amazons, conures, Brotogeris parakeets and other birds from a variety of situations. Thanks to their dedication, 25 conures recently made their way back to the wild.

Release area Cambaquara has been receiving rescued conures since 2013. Most of the time, the chicks are removed from the nests that are located under the tiles of houses during the September-March breeding season, because the birds tend to damage the electrical wiring and people consider them to be too noisy during the night.

As we were worried about the increase of incoming chicks that needed to be hand reared and rehabilitated for release, we created the extension for the existing project calling it 'Conure Rehabilitators', and local Sandra Tellefsen Pietzchke accepted the challenge as the first candidate. She has been getting more and more familiarised with the species and so far has successfully raised three clutches up until the moment where they start to wean and try solid foods.

This year however has been different as we have received fewer conures than expected. We didn't receive our first clutch until the end of October. We attribute this reduction to a number of factors: the delay in the Spring season and an increased awareness among local people as a consequence of educational campaigns presented in March 2016.

We worked together with The Environmental Department of the City of Ilhabela on a presentation explaining that the removal of chicks from their nests is an environmental crime, and it appears to have been successful to a degree. The rescued chicks go through several care stages before getting to the actual release: first they live in a cardboard box with heating, then go to a smaller cage where they learn how to feed themselves. After that, they go to two-metre smaller flights, where they learn how to fly and finally to the large aviaries, where the clutches are grouped in a flock. There they learn their skills in order to go back to the wild.

The release took place after 12 days of constant rain, on a sunny Sunday. In total, 25 Maroon-bellied Conures *(Pyrrhura frontalis)* were released from four different clutches. It is always a joyful moment and they are always curious. The doors are opened, and little by little, they start to leave the enclosure and explore the surroundings. At that moment they make an exquisite vocalisation. Then they start to go farther, climbing on the trees, discovering new textures. Suddenly, they all fly off at once but quickly come back to hang around the flights and feeding stations. They repeat this over and over, each time flying just a little further.

More than a month since the release they are still coming back to the feeders, which are maintained with fruits, seed and water, and keeping their connections with each other as siblings. But they are also mingling together in a single large flock, flying over the skies of Cambaquara.

It is a moment to be celebrated with birds achieving their freedom and the partnerships of the people working together for this cause. Thanks to our volunteer Sandra, the representatives of the Environmental Police, the Environmental Department of the City of Ilhabela, the Instituto Ilhabela Sustentavel NGO, Ilhabela State Park and keeper Eduardo. This work is partly funded by the World Parrot Trust.

**See PsittaScene back issues Summer 2015 and Summer 2016 for more on ASM Cambaquara.*

(opposite page) Freedom! ***(top left)*** Hand-feeding one of the chicks. ***(bottom left)*** Birds being encouraged out of the aviary with food. ***(top right)*** Observers witness the release. ***(middle right)*** Released birds at one of the feeding stations. ***(bottom right)*** Foraging on local foods.

Fiordland Kaka population soars with massive bump

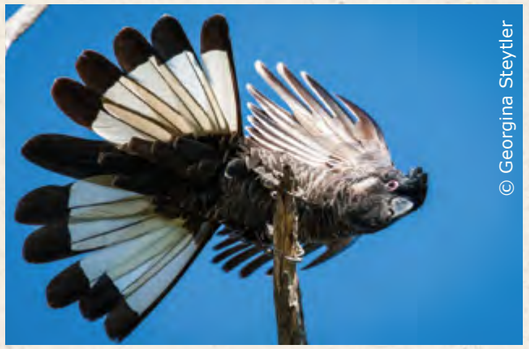
There is good news for at least one Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) wild population: scientists have recorded a jump in numbers in a Fiordland forest on New Zealand's South Island. Twenty times more juveniles and four times more females have been found, a good sign of recovery for the species, listed by IUCN as Endangered. The current statistics bode well for continuing stability of this population, as historical numbers were very skewed toward male birds. The recent boost means that the male-to-female ratio has begun to balance out once more, helping to normalise breeding.

Read more at:
tinyurl.com/zs6po28

Aruba has named the 'Prikichi' as national bird

Responding to a plea by Aruba Bird Conservation, the Council of Ministers on Aruba on 7th February 2017 approved a proposal to declare the 'Prikichi', or Brown-throated Parakeet (*Eupsittula pertinax arubensis*), Aruba's National Bird. The subspecies occurs only on Aruba, and it is hoped that raising its profile will boost awareness of it and Aruba's other endemic animals.

Read more at:
tinyurl.com/z5xvk4y



Carnaby's Black Cockatoos continue to struggle

According to Birdlife Australia, Perth's northern population of Carnaby's Black Cockatoo (*Zanda latirostris*) has dropped by 53% since 2010. The decline is due to clearing and non-restoration of the Gnangara-Yanchep-Pinjar pine plantation forest in the city's north end, where the birds feed and roost. The cockatoos began using the pine in this area as a food source after the loss of their traditional Banksia woodlands. Officials have acknowledged the decline of the cockatoo population and are planning measures to protect the species, including creating of hundreds of artificial nesting hollows and planting 5,000ha of pines.

Read more at:
tinyurl.com/jbd2nvk

Tribute to Linda Nelson Wittkoff

Written by Emily Robinson

On February 5th of this year the parrot world lost one of its true heroines, Linda Wittkoff, who passed away at the age of 79. In 1999 Linda and her husband bought a precious slice of Atlantic rainforest near São Paulo in Brazil which later matured into the Lymington Foundation. Here Linda facilitated the hatching and nurturing of threatened species such as Golden Conures, Hyacinth Macaws, and even Harpy Eagles. In 2005 Lymington became host to two Spix's Macaws, Flor and Presley, the famous bird who surfaced miraculously in Colorado in 2002 and who lived under Linda's loving companionship until his death in 2014.

It was my very great privilege to visit Lymington in 2012, where I was astounded by the unfailing energy with which the 75 year old Linda attended to the physically arduous tasks of caring for their many charges. I witnessed first-hand her devotion to Presley the Spix's Macaw and the many other birds in their care, some rescued from tragic situations. I also had the terrific joy of observing the newly released population of Vinaceous Amazons, a reintroduction project collaboration between Lymington, the World Parrot Trust, and the Brazilian Institute for Natural Resources (IBAMA). But what impressed me most of all was the untiring energy, passion and deep love that Linda brought to the cause of parrot conservation—a love which carried her through this Sisyphean task, against seemingly impossible odds. If there is such a thing as a life well lived, Linda lived it. She will be missed.

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PARROTS IN THE WILD:

Grey Parrot *(Psittacus erithacus)*

"**Morning drama in the garden!** One of our regular Grey Parrot visitors was minding his own business when the Black-and-white-Casqued Hornbills (*Bycanistes subcylindricus*) decided to take over his prime perching spot.

The parrot stood his ground for a bit, and they almost appeared to have a friendly chat — or maybe they were trading insults? — before he eventually left the hornbills to it."

*Photo © **Sherry McKelvie***
Wildlife Photography
Kampala, Uganda