PROMOTING EXCELLENCE
IN PARROT CONSERVATION
AVICULTURE AND WELFARE

Psitta scene

The World Parrot Trust

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CAROLINA MEDAL AWARDED TO THE ECHO PARAKEET TEAM

In our February 1997 edition of *PsittaScene* we announced the World Parrot Trust's intention to make an annual award of The Carolina Medal for 'outstanding achievement in parrot conservation'. The WPT trustees considered that such an award would benefit the parrots, first, by encouraging initiatives in this rather specialised area of conservation, and second, by providing an opportunity to publicise the plight of the parrots around the world.

The Carolina Medal can be won in four different categories: 'Research & Management', which effectively covers most field and veterinary activity; 'Education', which is capable of including a wide range of educational activities, targeted at schools, the media, bird keepers etc; 'Avicultural Endeavours', which opens the door for many conservation-minded aviculturists; and 'Welfare Practices', an opportunity for all concerned about how parrots are treated.

When the WPT trustees came to reviewing the potential award winners, it seemed clear that, for the first Carolina Medal at least, the winner was likely to come from among those people and organisations working on preserving threatened parrot species in the wild. Apart from the parrot field projects supported by the World Parrot Trust itself, there are many other projects around the world which have merit and deserve encouragement. Quite a few of these, however, suffer from shortages of funds or expertise, either of which tend to remove them from contention for an award.

Every year the WPT receives invitations to fund a variety of parrot-related field studies, most of which have considerable value in terms of gathering ornithological data. Quite often, however, these studies do not lead on to valid conservation action of direct benefit to parrot species. Pure ornithology is often funded by large charities and institutions which are not

The Echo Parakeet Team 1997/98 (left to right): Sarah Jane Barbe, Arantxa Laliandi, Marc Pierard, Andrew Smart, Audrey Reynolds, Malcolm Nicoll, Mike Reynolds, Lance Wollover, Kirsty Swinnerton, Grant Harper, Carl Jones, Pete Haverson, Mike Thorsen, Nick Reynolds, Kathryn Murray, Kirsty Jenkin, Frederique de Ravel

"**psittacine** (sit'å sîn) Belonging or allied to the parrots; parrot-like"

If we can save the parrots, we may yet save ourselves © WPT

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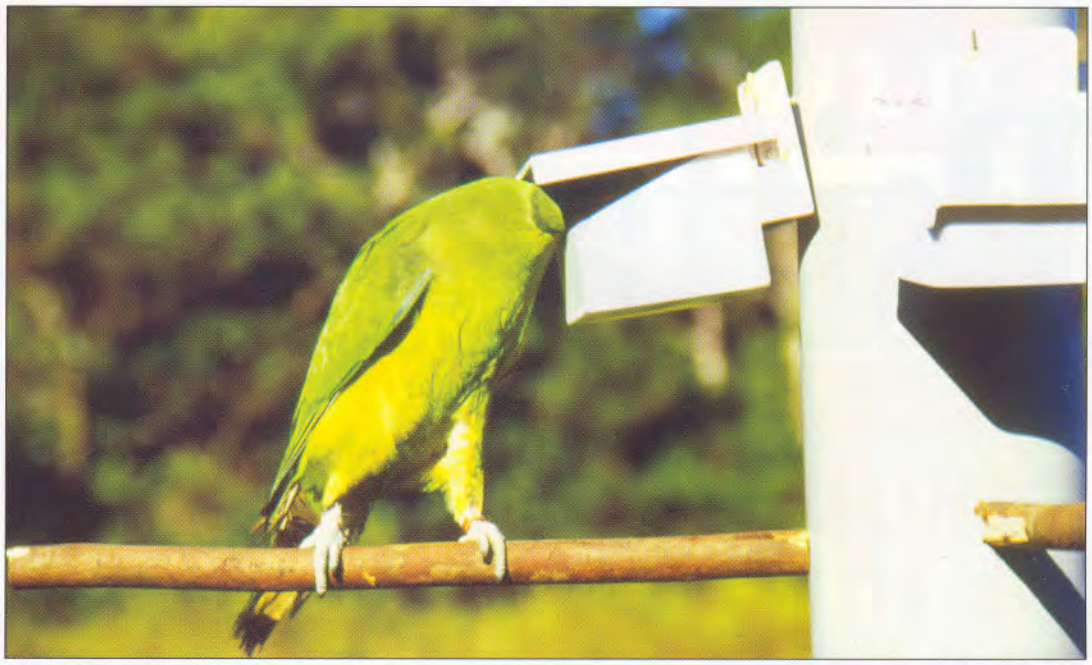


Echo Parakeet feeding from the supplemental hopper. *Photo: Kathryn A. Murray*

necessarily interested in the parrot conservation and welfare objectives listed in the 'Aims of the World Parrot Trust' (see page 15 for a reminder). As a result of exposure to many applications for funding which fail to meet our criteria, we have learned to identify those projects that undoubtedly deserve to receive the limited and precious project funds available to the World Parrot Trust.

ECHOS HIGH ON LIST

High on the list of such projects is the ongoing work in Mauritius to rescue the Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques*. It has received financial support from the Trust since 1990, and continues to be our single most important commitment. Under the direction of Dr. Carl Jones, an international team of experts and volunteers has laboured mightily to bring the Echo Parakeet from a low point of 8 to12 birds in 1987 to a total of 80+ by the end of 1996.

This has been achieved by effective 'management'. This describes an array of methods designed to enhance the prospects of breeding success for the parakeets. For example, when it became clear that rats were depredating nests, biologists with expertise in trapping exotic rodents were brought in. When it was found that chicks were being attacked by tropical nest fly maggots, every wild nest with chicks was checked every day and its nest material replaced with new material containing an appropriate insecticide. In 1996 first clutches were removed and successfully incubated and hand-reared. Several of the wild pairs re-cycled. Double clutching will continue with the most prolific pairs, and every effort is made to ensure that each pair fledges at least one young. When a hurricane struck Mauritius in 1996 the team went out and removed chicks in danger of being lost, and brought them in to the Black Gorges aviaries to be reared. Other techniques employed include habitat improvement, supplementary feeding, and nest cavity improvement.

This level of wildlife management can only be achieved by exceptional experience, intuition, and leadership. Carl Jones has demonstrated these qualities previously in Mauritius, first by bringing the Mauritius Kestrel from only 4 specimens to over 450 – 500 birds today, and then by saving the Pink Pigeon from extinction. In 1991 there were only 10 wild pigeons, but by late 1997 there were 330 free living birds. If he had not been in a position to start work on the Echo Parakeet it is very likely that this bird would now be extinct.

UNANIMOUS CHOICE

For all these reasons and more, the trustees of The World Parrot Trust were unanimous in choosing to award the first ever Carolina Medal to Carl Jones, together with all those who have worked with him on the conservation of the Echo Parakeet.

The team has benefited from the input of many talented personnel. The management of the captive birds has been led by Kirsty Swinnerton, Frederique de Ravel and Regis Lam. The work in the field has been developed by Kevin Duffy, Tim Lovegrove, Rachel Shorten and Mike Thorsen, and the release work was pioneered by Kathryn Murray. So many others have contributed to the conservation work that it is not practical to list them all.

The management and conservation of the Echo Parakeet is a joint project of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and the National Parks and Conservation Service, Government of Mauritius. The work in 1996/97 was sponsored by UNDP, World Parrot Trust UK, World Parrot Trust USA, Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada, International Aviculturists Society, and Mauritian Wildlife Foundation. Sponsors also included the Iris Darnton Foundation, International Zoo Veterinary Group, Zeneca UK, the Parrot Society (UK), The Keith Ewart Charitable Trust and other supporting organisations and individuals.

It is planned to present the Carolina Medal to Dr. Carl Jones in London during 1998. In the meantime, the World Parrot Trust invites nominations from any source for an award to be announced in November 1998. Closing date is August 1 1998. Please write for more information and nomination forms to Jo Pagan, Administrator, WPT, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall UK, TR27 4HY.

The careful but innovative development of the Echo Programme was well illustrated between 1995 and 1997 by a series of trial releases. Other parrot releases have often not been successful, and this is a vital area for psittacine conservation, where it is essential we discover and refine release techniques. See Kathryn Murray's article on the next two pages.

Captive-reared Echo Parakeets Released to the Wild

by Kathryn A Murray

An Update from the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation

The Echo Parakeet has been the subject of intense activity for several years and is the World Parrot Trust's longest running project. This year a landmark was reached when three young Echo Parakeets were released to the wild. Two of these birds were reared from harvested eggs and one was captive bred. These three parakeets are hopefully the first of many and will help to boost the severely depleted wild population. They will also provide a reservoir of trained birds that will readily take supplemental food, use nest boxes and accept other forms of beneficial management. Hopefully they will encourage the wild birds to do the same. The release of Echo Parakeets was only attempted after two years of preparation using Ring-neck Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) as model species.

For the first release every factor that could possibly go wrong had to be considered. To try to eliminate potential problems a trial release using the Ring-neck Parakeets was tried between October 1995 and January 1996. Ring-neck Parakeets are an introduced species on Mauritius and are frequently seen flying around in small flocks within the National Park.

TRIAL RELEASE WITH RING-NECKS

Three groups of Ring-neck Parakeets differing in age, group size and degree of tameness were released using a soft-release technique, developed for the Pink Pigeon in 1987 and adapted for this release. The basic principle is to release birds about 15 minutes before dusk so the birds are thinking of going to roost. Hopefully they will roost close to the aviary. The next morning small amounts of seed are sprinkled inside the release hatches where the birds may see them. On their return the birds are re-captured and released later that day about 30 minutes before dusk. This process is repeated, bringing forward the daily release time until the birds are spending the majority of their time outside the aviary. This process allows the birds to travel and explore away from the aviary in stages, hopefully avoiding the loss of birds. On re-capture they are rewarded with sufficient amounts of food so that the aviary is constantly reinforced as a place to return to.

Eleven out of the fourteen Ring-neck Parakeets were successfully released. From these releases we established: that the first group is the hardest to establish; a small group size is preferable; the younger the birds are after fledging the better and that tameness should be encouraged for the first group or two. The birds were not very tame, they would come to a call but not allow you to touch them.

They were released into an area in the south-west of the National Park called Bel Ombre, or 'Beautiful Shadows', where a small population of wild Ring-neck Parakeets are frequently seen. Three pairs of Echo Parakeets are also known to breed in that area. Of the eleven released Ring-neck Parakeets, seven are still resident and one pair may breed this year. One of these birds went missing and three others were removed for various reasons.

The released birds are still being studied. They will be monitored so that we can see how they adapt, whether it is possible for them to breed in the wild and successfully rear their young despite being captive-bred and hand-reared.

PRODUCTIVE SEASON

The 1996-1997 breeding season was the most productive of recent years for the wild Echo Parakeets. The population reached its highest since monitoring began in 1973, with a total of between 76 and 87 individuals. Unfortunately, out of twenty one chicks produced in the wild only three fledged naturally, and the other eighteen had to be rescued and taken into captivity for rearing. However, this gave the captive population a huge boost and increased numbers to 23 birds; 2 adult males, 4 adult females, 3 sub-adult males, 9 juvenile males and 5 juvenile females. At last there were enough to try a release! The release group therefore consisted of three birds that were surplus to genetic requirements of the captive population. They were screened for a number of diseases and were healthy when released.

Before releasing our young birds to the wild we wanted to put them through a course of pre-release training so that the chances of them being lost would be minimised. We released them from a small enclosure into a much larger flight, 20.15m x 5.0m x 3.65m high. This allowed me to get to know the birds well and to test some of our release techniques. Each bird had a small bell attached to one of its tarsi. These are high quality brass and silver bells used by falconers on small falcons and can be heard over a considerable distance.

Each individual was trained to walk onto a digital scales balance to be weighed. The Ring-neck Parakeet releases showed that catching the birds regularly with a net and weighing them in a bag made them very nervous. Since the Echo Parakeets were weighed every couple of days we did not want them to avoid the release aviary and the handler. They were all trained to come to a whistle and the words 'Come on!' During the Ring-neck Parakeet releases birds were initially confused by how to get in and out of the release aviary via hatches. Once they learnt how to do this they soon became wary of being caught up. We wanted to teach the Echo Parakeets how to use the release hatches. This was done in the pre-training using the hatch between the flight and the aviary. We did this by feeding them only in the small aviary and closing the hatch behind them. They soon learnt they could get out again and the hatch would never remain shut for long. Soon they were confident enough to fly in and out of the hatch and no longer crawled up and down the wire. The flight also gave them the opportunity to build up their flight muscles. They definitely needed it as they were flying just a metre off the ground!

The three birds on the release platform. *Photo: Kathryn A. Murray*

Echo on release platform. *Photo: Kathryn A. Murray*

Echo feeding in the wild. *Photo: Kathryn A. Murray*

SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING

Most importantly they were trained to recognise and feed from food dispensers. The original design was based on a Kakapo hopper. Only after slaving away to make our own and the release was almost over did we hit on the idea of asking Don Merton, who heads the Kakapo project for the Department of Conservation in New Zealand, if he would donate some spare Kakapo hoppers! He willingly obliged and provided smaller versions to suit the parakeets. Some new MWF team members from New Zealand, ex-Kakapo field workers themselves, transported them over. The birds quickly learned to feed from the new dispensers.

The small feeding stations were attached to the top of a pole with a perch system below each one. For ease of management the individual components are detachable and the entire hopper can be easily moved from place to place. So now the Echo Parakeets and the Kakapo have the same dinner service!

On the 13th July the three birds for release were packed up in boxes and transported to the release site in the back of a 4WD jeep.

The release site, called Plaine Lievre, is situated in an area of upland evergreen forest. It was ideal for this release because there is an established field station with a release aviary. The field station is used mainly by Pink Pigeon, Mauritius Kestrel and Echo Parakeet field staff. Several Echo Parakeet pairs are found in and around this area.

Following a very wet and windy acclimatisation week, when the birds thoroughly enjoyed themselves with endless rain-bathing, the weather improved and I decided it was time to see if the months of preparation had paid off.

ECHOS FLY FREE

It did. Within two weeks all three birds were at liberty and they were allowed to come and go as they pleased. No problems were experienced and the release went exactly as planned. They spent a lot of time foraging in nearby trees sampling everything they could. They were quite partial to the bounteous amounts of guava and privet berries, which was interesting because both these species are introduced and are choking the native flora. They dutifully returned to the aviary and the supplementary feeding hoppers daily.

The bells on the birds proved to be a major bonus allowing me to locate the birds quickly within the trees. Their green colour blends so well in the trees that they are almost invisible to the eye, especially if they are not moving much, or calling. All three remained within the close proximity of the release area making my job of following them easier.

Within three months they had ventured up to 1km away to a Conservation Management Area called Brise Fer. It consists of a 27 hectare fenced area, weeded of exotic plant species. Most of the Plaine Lievre released Pink Pigeon population resides there and it is known to be a favoured feeding site and roost area of wild Echo Parakeets. We hope that there will be some integration between the release and wild birds in the near future. The release birds are being encouraged to feed in this area with the use of supplemental feeding stations and who knows, it may not be too long before a wild bird is seen feeding with them.

A time-partitioning study is being developed at the moment to help assess the release birds adaptation to being 'free'. All the birds will be intensively monitored just like the release populations of Mauritius Kestrels and Pink Pigeons. The success of this coming breeding season dictates how the next releases will proceed. Three members of staff from Paradise Park are all helping with the Echo Parakeet breeding season, both in the wild and in captivity. The release group is being encouraged to remain loyal to the release site to act as decoy birds for future releases. This will also remove the need for birds in future releases being quite so tame. To help with future releases it would be advantageous to build a release flight alongside the release aviary. Training would then not be quite so intensive and birds can train themselves to go into and out of release hatches and build up their muscles prior to release. Any donations towards the release flight would be greatly appreciated.

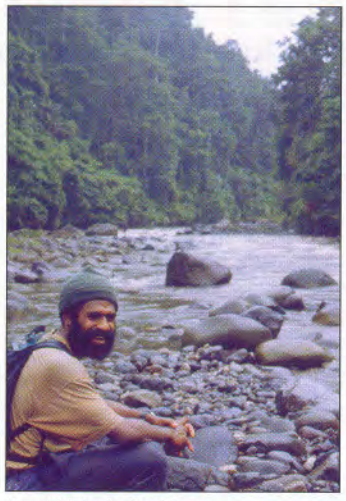
MWF would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this programme, including the World Parrot Trust (UK and USA), Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada, the National Parks and Conservation Service, Mauritius Government, United Nations Development Programme, International Zoo Veterinary Group, the Parrot Society (UK), International Aviculturists' Society, the Iris Darnton Foundation and many other organisations and individuals. The UNDP provided funding for the new Echo Parakeet release aviary.

'Pablo', the most tame of the three released Echos. *Photo: M. Reynolds*

More News on Palm Cockatoos

by Stephen Garnett

A few issues ago I described a project that is to be undertaken on the Palm Cockatoo with help from the World Parrot Trust, the New York based Wildlife Conservation Society and the Queensland Department of Environment. As part of this work I was recently host of the Research and Conservation Foundation of Papua New Guinea in the remote Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Crater Mountain consists of 270,000 ha of magnificent rainforest in the headwaters of the mighty Purari River. The owners of this land, the Gimi and Piotura people, have agreed not to hunt in some parts of their country and to refuse access to the rapacious logging companies that are causing so much damage elsewhere in New Guinea. In return they are being helped to set up local low impact businesses and are being employed to help researchers like me.



Local biologist Paul Igag.

Captive Pesquets Parrot. As a chick this bird was raised almost completely on sweet potato.

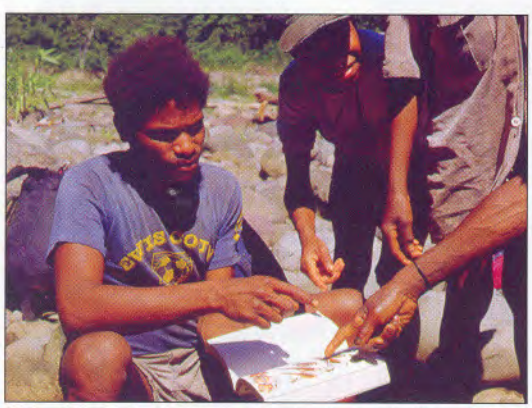
I began my visit in the little village of Haia, twisting out of the misty hills onto a little airstrip cut into the hillside above the Nimi River gorge. I was met by local biologist and field co-ordinator for the WCS, Paul Igag, and felt immediately that here was a man who could get things done. Within half an hour of my arrival Paul had arranged guides for a five day trip around the forest to look for Palm Cockatoos and to examine the prospects for research in the region.

Two hours after alighting from the plane I was being led through the jungle searching for 'mitoio', the local name for the Palm Cockatoo. The path was by no means easy. Slender slimy logs spanned swift and dangerous streams. Sometimes the track followed the stream itself, from boulder to slippery boulder, or else it offered mere toeholds up and down the sides of precipitous ridges. No easy bird watching stroll this! To my surprise the first parrot I saw was a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, the next a Rainbow Lorikeet, both familiar from very different habitat in Australia. But as the canopy closed over I needed ears more than eyes. Deep wing beats turned out to be a hornbill. Tiny screeches came from a tree so tall that I had to lie flat on my back to see the Red-sided Lorikeets through a telescope. My guides were extraordinary. Hushed hand signals led me to a pair of Electus Parrots, 'anari', in a low vine, a silent pointing finger drew my unaccustomed eyes to a distant 'kavare', Pesquet's Parrot. Finally, to the delight of my guides, we heard the ringing calls of a Palm Cockatoo approaching over the trees. It was evidently just as keen to look at us and perched nearby, peering querulously with one eye then the other, dipping its extravagant crest in a salute.

In the two weeks I was there I heard many Eclectus and Pesquet's Parrots and Palm Cockatoos. I saw Palm Cockatoo nests in the dead hosts of strangler figs and was shown many of their foods. They eat well, do Palm Cockatoos. With their mighty bill they can cut into seeds no other animal can reach and are rewarded with large seed full of energy-rich fats. One fruit contained a brilliant orange aril so oily it could be spread like butter. Another was so delicious it makes my mouth water even as I write, a fruit with a kernel four times the size of a brazil nut.

Three things impressed me or were impressed upon me by my experience at Crater Mountain. The first was the knowledge of my guides, the second the enthusiasm of my companion, Paul, and the third the physical demands of the country and how difficult it would be for conventional research in such a rugged landscape. In view of these I am hoping the project in New Guinea will in fact be conducted largely by the Piotura and Gimi people themselves. In return for a set fee they will be responsible for finding and monitoring nests of not just Palm Cockatoos but also Pesquet's Parrots and Eclectus Parrots. In this way funds for the project will be spread throughout the community rather than to just a few employees. The results will be assembled and checked by Paul Igag back in Haia. The Palm Cockatoo work Paul will use as part of a Masters project through an Australian university while data on the other two species will be incorporated into research by University of Florida's Greg Pryor, who is working on Pesquet's Parrot, and the Australian National University's Rob Heinsohn who has recently started work on Electus Parrots. The results, I hope will be basic information on the nesting productivity of these parrots in an undisturbed rainforest, vital data if these species are to be conserved.

The research will also help raise the profile of a most important part of the world, for despite the wishes of the people, Crater Mountain is by no means immune from development. On its northern borders the Australian mining giant, BHP, has recently found promising gold deposits. Though keen to improve its environmental image in Papua New Guinea, any mine will have a major impact in such an untrammelled environment. Then, on the southern boundary, Malaysian logging companies have been setting up deals to take out large volumes of tropical timber. The more people know of the importance of the area to Palm Cockatoos and other tropical parrots the more careful these companies will be about exploiting it.



Stiben Turoi and other Piotura men found many familiar species in my bird book.

One of the many fruits eaten by Palm Cockatoos in the rainforests of Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

STATUS AND ECOLOGY OF THE LILACINE AMAZON IN SOUTH-WEST ECUADOR

by Britta Kunz and Dr Michael Abs (Translated from German to English by Franziska Vogel)

The range of the Lilacine Amazon *Amazona autumnalis*, one of four subspecies of the Red-lored Amazon, is confined to the West of Ecuador. Observations on Lilacine Amazons made in recent years revealed that the birds concentrate exclusively on the Cordillera of the Chongon Colonche close to the coast. It extends to a maximum altitude of 832m between 1°40' and 2°10' south as well as 80°20' and 80°47' west. Average temperatures reach from 20°to above 23°; rainy and dry seasons are distinct. The rainy season lasts from December until May, the average annual quantity of rainfall lies between 250 and 1,000 mm. Higher up the vegetation is influenced by fog precipitation. Correspondingly the type of natural vegetation varies from deciduous drywood to pre-montane fogwood. The originally extensive forests of Western Ecuador had already been reduced by 1988 to 3% of their former area.

First estimates on the status of *Amazona autumnalis lilacina* revealed 100 to 500 individuals (Benitez, 1992). Lambert et al. (1993) classify the status as 'endangered'; the population is presumably the smallest of all *Amazona taxa* on the continent. Statements about ecology and the breeding biology of the Lilacine Amazon have been almost completely lacking until now and were based mostly on interviews, or observations of birds in captivity. Therefore, further investigations about the range, ecological demands and causes that endanger this species seemed imperative.

Research into wild populations of Lilacine Amazons was carried out as part of a thesis in order to diminish the existing gaps in the information and to permit effective conservation of the birds. It took place from the beginning of January until the end of May, 1994.

SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION AND METHODS

To record the total population size, a census was carried out at different vantage points along the coastline of the Cordillera between Guayaquil and Puerto Lopez from January 7 - 28 1994. As a result of these observations and with regard to logistic considerations, the investigations of the following months concentrated primarily on two areas:

1. Bosque Protector Cerro Blanco

The focal point of the investigations was centred on a private conservation territory of 200 ha (an additional 1,100 ha has been purchased) at the south-eastern foothills of the Cordillera Chongon-Colonche, some 16km to the west of the city of Guayaquil. It extends to altitudes between 120m and 420m. The natural vegetation is partially deciduous but in the more humid climate of the valleys the trees remain evergreen. About one third of the conservation territory consists of primary wood or forests, only marginally disturbed. The rest consists of more disturbed woodland and secondary vegetation of strong bush growth. A small area of the conservation territory is opened to visitors under expert guidance. The remaining territory is accessible only for research purposes.

The tidal forests of the mangroves begin about 2km south of the conservation territory, and extend into the south-east of the gulf of Guayaquil. The investigation area covered about 250 ha. Confined by waterways, impenetrable parcels of land are formed by the mangroves; these can be circumnavigated during high tide. By installing pools for crab breeding, the resources of the mangroves have been decimated to a high degree, including the investigation area.

2. The Commune

Comparative observations took place in a territory which encloses about 3000 ha in the central part of the Cordillera Colonche (the Commune). Due to reasons concerning the conservation of this species, we refrain from publishing the exact geographical location, because it is in non-guarded territory. The altitudes extend from 80m to 460m. South of the territory is a valley with a village settlement, partially accessible to agriculture, which extends to a latitude of about 3km. The adjoining mountains are partially used for farming, and trees are felled. The territory lies in one of the driest sectors of the Cordillera chain with an average annual rainfall of 500mm - 800mm (Valverde 1991). The variety of vegetation extends from deciduous to pre-montane cloud forest.

Seeking out roosting sites each evening shared by many parrot species offers a good opportunity for population counts. From the beginning of February until the end of May, Lilacine Amazons were watched from particular vantage points during their flights to and from common sleeping places; during these observations, the numbers of birds, time and flying direction of the registered individuals were noted. By observing the routes of the recorded birds, the team tried to locate roosting sites and daytime whereabouts. In successful cases, the number of birds present at various times and at different days was established; as well as the duration of their stay, in order to show spatial and temporal dispersion of the Amazons in the investigated territories. A lookout was kept for predators and possible competitors.

The opportunity to observe wild breeding pairs of *Amazona lilacina* was offered for the first time. Any sort of approach towards the nests (necessary to measure eggs and chicks) was deliberately abandoned, because the birds proved to be very shy; the consequences of possible disturbance could not be assessed. Therefore the investigations were confined to observations from a reasonable distance. The collected data was evaluated statistically.

1. RESULTS AND ESTIMATES

Only two populations have been found; they consisted of at least 327 individuals at the end of the breeding season. A total of only 400 - 600 individuals is considered as

Lilicine Amazon. *Photo: R. Low*

realistic, also with regard to earlier investigations and undiscovered populations in other remote territories.

2. SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL DISPERSION

In the investigation territory of Cerro Blanco a distinct spatial separation of sleeping places and daytime whereabouts was perceived. The sleeping places were found in the mangroves to the south of the conservation territory. Shortly after sunrise the Lilacine Amazons moved from there in flocks on various routes into the conservation territory of Cerro Blanco and into adjoining areas in the north. During these flights the flocks consisted, as a rule, of four to seven individuals; at the most 90 individuals were observed together.

At the roosting sites, the Lilacine Amazons dispersed into several areas of mangrove land. The largest number of Lilacine Amazons amounted to 195 individuals who concentrated on one single piece of land after the end of the breeding season. The daily migration between conservation territory and the mangroves can be explained by the fact that the mangroves compared with the deciduous area offer little variety of food but the mangroves offer better protection against enemies.

As breeding habitat, the mangroves south of Cerro Blanco do not come into question due to the small diameter of the tree trunks. There being no mangroves within reach of the second investigation territory, the Commune, potential roosting sites and daytime whereabouts coincide there. Lilacine Amazons moved at daybreak into the northern mountains and returned the same evening. Some birds stayed all day in the southern section of the observation territory too. Meeting places and sleeping trees could not be found and seemed to change according to the observed flying routes, as in Cerro Blanco. The observations of sizes and structures of a flock did not diverge substantially from the results in Cerro Blanco.

3. NATURAL ENEMIES

At least three 'larger' species of birds of prey are reputed to be enemies of other amazon species in the investigation territories, observations only exist regarding flight reactions to the Grey-backed Hawk *Leucopternis occidentalis*. The Grey-backed Hawk is also endangered. However, a successful attack was not observed. A bigger danger is probably presented by potential nest predators like snakes, rats and felines.

4. BREEDING BIOLOGY

Two nests in Cerro Blanco were studied intensively. Unfortunately it started with a failed rearing of chicks in nest no. 1 due to unidentified causes. The pair in nest no. 2 successfully reared one chick. Other families which were observed from April on also included as a rule just one chick, two having rarely been sighted. Feeding of fully fledged juvenile birds could be observed until the end of the investigation period.

CONSERVATION MEASURES

The proceeding destruction of habitat and the parrot-trade are, in our opinion, the main causes of the decline of the Lilacine Amazon. Annual trapping severely disturbs the age structure of populations which is important for propagation, and in a very short time could decimate the small numbers down to a level from which it can no longer recover. The continuation of investigations and the conversion of results into conservation measures is planned. In order to secure the long-term survival of these parrots which roam through large territories, regionally limited conservation measures will not suffice.

The situation of the Lilacine Amazons can be improved by putting additional areas under conservation, by setting up nest guards and similar measures. But there is no point if large measured changes do not occur simultaneously. This applies above all in regard to the netting together of territories where the Amazons live in order to ensure an exchange between populations. In view of the enormous population pressure in Ecuador and the economic situation of most people, conservation measures must meet the economic demands of people. Projects are to be supported which offer the inhabitants of Cordillera an alternative source of income to woodfelling, and which promote the reforestation and conservation of habitat.

Probably more difficult is the supervision of the bird-trade which brings the traders and trappers more money than they would be able to earn otherwise. The trade ultimately reflects only the demand for parrots as pets and here changes of attitude have to come into action beyond the frontiers of Ecuador.

New WPT Leaflet

Since being founded in 1989 the World Parrot Trust has produced a number of leaflets intended to persuade people to join the Trust and help fund its work for the parrots. Now we feel it is time for a new leaflet designed to appeal to pet owners, aviculturists, conservationists, and all concerned about the survival and welfare of the parrots.

A copy of the new leaflet is inserted in this issue of *PsittaScene*, and we hope our readers will find ways of using it to recruit a new member for the Trust. If you can distribute a quantity of them at a bird club meeting or show, any other event, or inserted in another publication, please ask us for more copies. (Commercial sponsors are being invited to help fund reprints.)

The initiatives of the WPT have been widely imitated by other organisations, and this is good for the parrots. Since, however, the World Parrot Trust does not have the substantial commercial backing available to some competitors, it needs to put its best foot forward in presenting its advantages:

1. WPT always gives priority to the interests of the **parrots**, over human concerns.
2. As an organisation created and run by aviculturists, WPT has a commitment to speak out in the interests of **responsible aviculture.**
3. Only WPT keeps its members informed about the realities of the parrot world,without fear or favour, through its *PsittaScene* magazine, edited by Rosemary Low.

To increase its ability to influence and fund parrot conservation, the World Parrot Trust urgently needs new members. More than any other group, existing members can help us achieve this. So please use our colourful new leaflet, and GO FOR IT!

WPT MANIFESTO HELPS AVICULTURE IN NEW ZEALAND

by Michael Reynolds

Readers may remember that we sent out a copy of our 'Manifesto for Aviculture' with the February 1997 issue of *PsittaScene*. We also sent it to the CITES Management Authorities in the 140 countries that support the convention, and to a long list of government bodies, conservation organisations, and general and specialist media. The main purpose was to make a statement on behalf of our hobby, to provide a balanced and more favourable view of aviculture.

It had not occurred to the World Parrot Trust that the Manifesto might have value as a direct means of assisting aviculturists in a political struggle, but this is what has happened in New Zealand.

Here is a letter from NZ member Dawn Stewart to our editor, Rosemary Low:

"Dear Rosemary

Please convey this 'BIG THANK YOU' to the World Parrot Trust, for the recent publication of 'A Manifesto for Aviculture'. The New Zealand Parrot Society sent a copy to all members, and it has been put to very good use. A recent 'Trade in Endangered Species Amendment Bill', if it had been accepted in parliament in its original form, would have ended aviculture in New Zealand. No one could have afforded the costs involved, many would lose jobs and businesses.

The Manifesto was sent to many members of parliament to fight for aviculture, and to press the case for captive breeding our endangered parrots. Also thanks go to Rosemary Low who backed us up with information, which resulted in newspaper articles the following day.

In conclusion, you may have gathered from the above, those with parrot interests in New Zealand have been working overtime. One good thing to have come of all this is that many people have worked together in countries world-wide to help save parrot breeding from becoming extinct in New Zealand. Many may not even realise this fact!

On behalf of all parrot lovers in New Zealand - and our parrots of course, our grateful thanks for your support and help in our hour of need.

Dawn Stewart."

UNHAPPY RELATIONSHIP

From my own brief visit to New Zealand two years ago, and other contacts, I can confirm that the relationship between 'the authorities' and aviculture is not a happy one. It seems that a history of illegal bird movements between New Zealand, Australia and the rest of the world has resulted in the NZ Department of Conservation taking a jaundiced view of aviculture as a whole. As we have said in the Manifesto and elsewhere, responsible aviculturists should not be made to suffer for the excesses of a few irresponsible individuals.

Roto and Iti with keeper. They were rescued when the hen was killed by stoats near lake Rotoiti Nelson. Landcare Research brought these two males to Orana Park, Christchurch, to handrear in April, 1995. *Photo: Alan Hodkinson*

Kaka sitting atop a Punga Tree Fern Log. *Photo: Alan Hodkinson*

LETTER FROM MINISTER

Here is a letter from the NZ Minister of Conservation, the Hon. Dr. Nick Smith:

"Dear Ron and Dawn Stewart,

Thank you for your recent letter about the conservation of South Island Kaka and Kakapo.

As my previous correspondance has indicated, my department continues to focus research and management effort on reversing the decline of South Island Kaka populations on the mainland.

Captive breeding may safeguard populations in the short-term but, without a safe habitat in which to return these birds, and unless we have developed successful reintroduction techniques, little benefit is gained in the long-term. In the meantime, the population is safeguarded in the confines of Codfish Island. The South Island Kaka co-ordinator is presently assessing the outcome of a release programme for captive-reared North Island Kaka. Should this technique be successful in establishing birds back into the wild, the need for a South Island Kaka breeding and release programme will be reassessed.

Thank you for your views on Kakapo management which are also noted.

Yours sincerely
Nick Smith
Minister of Conservation."

Not much encouragement there. Very disappointing for New Zealanders who would like to be able to breed their own native birds, as a contribution towards their conservation, and also just for the thrill of it, with no financial motivation whatever.

It must surely be possible for the authorities to select a group of experienced aviculturists who could be entrusted with a small number of important birds such as Kaka and Kea, and be expected to increase their numbers as insurance against the perils faced by the wild populations. All the birds would remain the property of the NZ government, and offspring might well be candidates for release at some time in the future when we have learned how to do this with captive bred birds. (Do not think this will not be achieved - see the encouraging article on the release of Echo Parakeets in this issue.)

BACK TO THE MANIFESTO

Returning to the general subject of our 'Manifesto', we can report that it was well received by some other bird conservation organisations, but we did not get a single response or acknowledgement from any of the 140 CITES Management Authorities. We will punish them by sending it again with a letter asking for their reactions and comments.

New Zealand's Vanishing Parrots – South Island Kaka

by Dawn Stewart

I thought your readers may like to know what this bird looks like and some of its habits and history. As it is becoming increasingly endangered in all areas of the South Island, where it still survives.

Although New Zealand's parrots are not the most colourful in the world, their friendly, lively and clownish endearing habits make up for this. The S.I. Kaka is the most colourful of all our species as its colour range includes white, yellow, orange, red-scarlet, brown and green. This parrot weighs around 900g. and is about 45cm. in length. A feature of Kaka is also its colourful red underwing display when flying. Its strong beak can tear off tree bark and can quickly demolish a large rotting tree trunk, in order to find Huhu grubs (very large white grubs eaten by Maori). The Kaka voice is loud, harsh, and grating, but they also have a very melodious call, as well as a whistling call. Foods are fruits, flowers, pollen and nectar, grubs, seeds and green food.

SEMI NOCTURNAL

Kaka have a prominent place among our birds and are like Kea, semi-nocturnal. They are usually quiet and sit in large tree canopies, where they are difficult to see during the day. When flying they utter their loud screams, as if pronouncing their joy of living. Their tongues are brush or lory-like with which they collect nectar and pollen from crimson rata, flax and Kowai flowers. This in turn fertilises and assists in the propagation of their native forests. Honey dew on the Black beech trees is being eaten by introduced wasps and denies Kaka this food also. Stunted vegetation and grasslands of the Port Hills, near Christchurch, were places Kaka could be found grazing. But not any more, as extinction occurred in this area where I lived many years ago.

OLD TREES BEING CUT OUT

Large old dead trees are being cut out of our native forests, and brought out by helicopter for milling. These trees it is thought are probably main nesting sites in which Kaka breed, having large holes which are most suitable for these birds. As New Zealand was a land with no predators and the only mammals were two bats, Kaka did not need any protection on the ground. But now we have stoats, ferrets, possums, rats and wild cats, which all prey on birds and eggs. When nesting occurs the noise Kaka make when feeding can be heard up to 1 Km. away. Young when fledging can not fly very well at all, and therefore stay on or near the ground for around three days. So you will see Kaka are not equipped to combat attacks from the predators. Either in the nesting cavity, or before the young birds have learned the basic art of flight.

THREAT FROM INTRODUCED SPECIES

Over one hundred years ago our government was warned of the threat, to these and other species, if stoats and ferrets were introduced. But they were introduced to control rabbits (which they have not done) and now we are seeing the effects.

Nests are now being plundered continually, so very few Kaka can breed; not only are eggs and young killed but also the hens. Cocks are thought to outnumber hens 50 to 1, and although some flocks of around 20 birds have been seen on Stewart Island, one wonders if these are mainly cock birds. In the wider area of Canterbury where we live, there is really only one area where some Kaka are still surviving.

NO BREEDING

No breeding has occurred for seven years, with the pairs they have monitored, with four out of five breeding hens killed on nest in one breeding season last year. In Southland forests D.O.C. staff say the birds monitored have not bred for five years, but hens have been saved. It is thought hens were able to get away because of the noise which the predators made getting over tin strips, which had been placed round the trees. The tin was to stop them getting to the Kaka nests but was unsuccessful. Nor was an electric fence around the base of the tree successful. 1080, a poison to kill predators, is being dropped by helicopters in forests . Unfortunately Kaka, it has been proved, eat enough 1080 to be lethal in captivity. Numbers of S.I. Kaka are unknown. Most are on Stewart and Codfish Islands, south of the mainland. These islands also have predator problems. The future looks grim, especially as we are not allowed to captive breed these birds. There is one good captive pair of Kaka (S.I), but they have not bred recently.

We have bred Kea, but have been told by D.O.C. we are not allowed to, and have continually pleaded to D.O.C. to let some breeding of Kaka take place. This they state is not a priority. They will instead try to rid the Southern Alps of all browsers and predators, or at least control them. This is an almost impossible task, but is what is needed. The Government has been trying to get rid of rabbits for one hundred years without success, so we don't hold out much hope. There are too many predators to be totally successful.

LETTER OF SUPPORT

Rosemary Low sent a letter of support when asked, and many world-wide did the same. These letters against the non-breeding directive of New Zealand's endangered species, which D.O.C. has in place, have been tabled in Parliament and talks have been continuing with the Ministry of Conservation. We are receiving more support and now have the backing of the High Country board of Trustees and the Deputy Director General of D.O.C. All are backing the move for us to be allowed to breed our endangered species. This is really a political matter, with some top people having the belief that extinction is better than captivity.

Our work will continue, as we sincerely believe in the fact that all endangered birds should be bred for future generations. We do not believe it is for some humans to say that these birds cannot survive into the future in captivity as well as in the wild. South Island Kakas' survival hangs in delicate balance.

KAKA UPDATE NOVEMBER 1997

By Rosemary Low

The situation for the North Island Kaka is rapidly deteriorating. As so many nesting females are killed by predators, the ratio of male to female is thought to be approximately 7:1. This figure was estimated after the recent capture of 14 birds, which were then released. In November 1996 the last known female in the Nelson area was observed trying to get out of her nesting hole. She was successful after two or three attempts. Attached to her leg was a brown stoat, which she managed to shake off. She was found dead later, presumably as the result of the stoat attack. The study was being carried out by Brian Karl of Landcare Research, but has now ended.

There are only two pairs of South Island Kaka in captivity. Those who hold the North Island Kakas have been instructed by the Department of Conservation to prevent them from breeding. Both forms of Kaka are declining so fast that captive breeding is probably the only realistic hope of saving them. Will the DOC wait until the species is nearly extinct, as happened with the Kakapo, before intervening? If so, they will not have much longer to wait...

Kaka. *Photo: D. Stewart*

Fundación Ara helps to preserve Mexico's parrots by Rosemary Low

MEXICO: the popular conception is of a land of colourful people, wearing big hats and eating spicy foods, influenced by ancient civilizations, such as the Mayas and the Aztecs. But if your interest is in parrot conservation, the picture is a very different one. Mexico's rapid population growth in recent years has resulted in much habitat destruction or degradation. The approximately 20 parrot species (experts differ when it comes to dividing species and sub-species) are threatened by habitat loss and trapping. The same old story...

An invitation to visit this fascinating country gave me the opportunity to find out more, in September this year. Mexico is big - eight and a half times larger than Great Britain - thus seven days provided little more than a taster. But I enjoyed the flavour so much, I am sure I will return again and again.

What made this short visit so memorable was not the beauty of the country or even the appeal of the parrots, but the very special people with whom I was privileged to spend my time. Fundación Ara was set up two years ago. Its purpose is to rehabilitate or breed from confiscated and donated parrots and other Mexican birds.

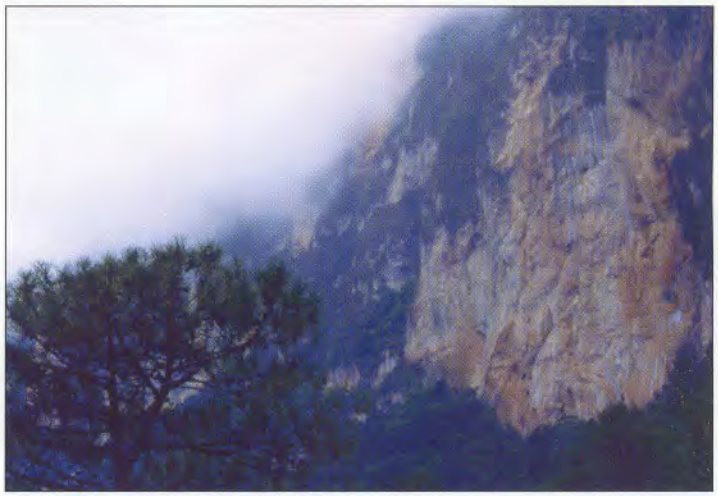
Overseeing the project is veterinarian Dr Miguel-Angel Gomez Garza, whose interest in Mexico's birds, especially parrots, is a life-long one. As with the other staff members, all aspects of ecology fascinate him. He is the author of *The Parrots of Mexico - A Natural History*, which will be published in Spanish and English at the end of this year.

Daniel Garza Tobon and Juan Julian Vargas work with the birds at the Foundation's headquarters but spend more time in the field. Juan is a specialist in the fauna of cave-dwelling species and has very extensive knowledge of Mexico's avifauna; he has spent much of his working life in the field. The depth of his knowledge on widely diverse subjects is truly impressive.

ORNITHOLOGISTS AND BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER

Daniel is the youngest member of the team but has already made his mark as an ornithologist and bird photographer. We visited an exhibition of his bird photographs at Planetario Alfa in Monterrey. Extremely artistic, his photographs demonstrate that bird photography is an art form on a level with the highest ranking artists. (One of his photographs is indelibly printed in my mind: small waders on a beach at sunset, their light bodies lit by the flash against a dark foreground and a red sky.) I also admired his video photography. He could have had a career as a film-maker.

The fourth member of the team is biologist Maria Catalina Porras. She works with the birds and the plants at the Foundation - and her love for both is very evident. The humorous and kindly Carlos Leal, a geneticist at a nearby hospital, works part-time for the Foundation. His work includes sexing birds using DNA techniques and breeding the critically endangered Venezuelan Red Siskin. As his hobby is breeding Malinois Canaries, a more appropriate person could hardly have been found!



Rapidly descending clouds obscure the nesting cliffs. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

The headquarters are situated only about 15 minutes from Monterrey, Mexico's third largest city, in the state of Nuevo Leon. It is located in the north-eastern part of the republic. More than 500 birds are housed in aviaries in an area rich in trees. And yet little more than two years ago it was a wasteland where nothing grew. Patron of the Foundation is Senor Alfonso Romo. He and his wife Maca and the company Pulsar are contributing not only to the welfare of Mexico's avifauna and forests but are educating the people in the south (some of whom speak no Spanish), regarding sustainable methods of agriculture. Sr Romo purchased the land for the Foundation's headquarters.

HORNED GUANS AND OTHER RARITIES

On the side of a mountain, in an area ringed with mountains, the pathway winds up a steep slope, with aviaries and trees flanking the path. Most of the 116 aviaries are on the lower level. The newer ones, only recently completed, are not yet fully occupied. Much thought has been given to their design; for example, special deep nest-boxes have been constructed for cliff-nesting species. Extremely rare species include the mysterious Horned Guan (*Oreophasis derbianus*) from volcanic cloud forest and the Solitary Eagle (*Harpyhaliaetus solitarius*) - perhaps the only one in captivity. However, as I am writing for *PsittaScene*, I will try to keep to the subject of parrots!

The purpose of Fundación Ara is the rehabilitation, release and breeding of Mexican birds. Most of these birds have been confiscated by the authorities. In Mexico, it is no longer permitted to keep endangered or threatened native birds. A fine of the equivalent of about £2,000 can now be imposed. Trapping and selling of native birds is being brought under control. The time will soon be right to release species which have been trapped out of existence in certain areas.

One of these is the Military Macaw (*Ara militaris mexicana*). In a certain area, about three hours drive away, good habitat has survived for this species. I was shown a magnificent aviary 50m (164ft) long and 15m (48ft) high in which confiscated Militaries were being prepared for release. They will be joined by parent-reared young. Probably about 20 birds will take part in the first release into the habitat where this macaw has become extinct.

The aviary itself was inspired by Miguel-Angel's visit to Paradise Park earlier this year. The outside perimeter is landscaped with trees and the inside with trees (still small) and large branches which have been lightly cemented into permanent perching areas; grass grows on the floor. The centrepiece is a magnificent rock pool where the macaws enjoy drinking and bathing. We climbed up to the observation room which overlooks a covered section at one end, where the nest-boxes are situated. Many

Miguel Gomez Garza and Rosemary Low in the nesting habitat of the Maroon-fronted Parrot. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

The aviaries at Fundación Ara are hidden amid dense planting. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

aviculturists dream of winning the lottery so that they can construct an aviary of this magnitude - in appropriate surroundings!

Some aviaries contain quite large groups of confiscated Amazons - Greencheeked (*Amazona viridigenalis*) and Red-lored (*A.a.autumnalis*), for example. Most of these have yet to moult out their cut flight feathers. When they do they will be paired up for breeding. Their young will be released in suitable areas. The same applies to the Green Conures (*Aratinga holochlora*) and the Orange-fronted (*A.canicularis*).

LUTINO AMAZONS

Mutation enthusiasts would have been enthralled to see two lutino Red-lored Amazons and a cinnamon Green-cheeked. All were hatched in the wild. There was also a pair of cinnamon Red-masked Conures (*Aratinga erythrogenys*) from Peru. The Foundation has received a number of interesting species of parrots, toucans and aracaris from Peru.

I especially enjoyed seeing two species from the Tres Marias Islands, off the coast of western Mexico. The Foundation received permission to visit the islands and to obtain a few birds. As the area is a penal settlement, few people are able to go there. Although many Amazon breeders in the USA believe that they have the *tresmariae* sub-species of the Double Yellow-head Amazon, they are wrong. They have *magna*. *A.o.tresmariae* is an extreme rarity in aviculture. The Foundation has nine young birds which will form the nucleus of a breeding programme. It also has a form from those islands which perhaps has never been in aviculture before: the subspecies of the Mexican Parrotlet *Forpus cyanopygius insularis*. It was very interesting to note the light blue sheen on the underparts of the males.

However, for me, the opportunity to see a parrot species which few have ever set eyes on, was something which I had looked forward to for a long time. The Maroon-fronted Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta terrisi*) is one of the least known parrots of the neotropics. Few have seen it in the wild; even most people who live in the area it inhabits do not know of its existence. After I visited its habitat, I understood why.

The Maroon-fronted Parrot is not unlike the Mexican Thick-billed Parrot (*R.pachyrhyncha*). It is slightly larger with a slightly larger beak. The forehead is reddish-brown instead of red, the underwing coverts are grey (not yellow) and the shade of green is slightly darker. (See the back page Parrots in the Wild in the November 1993 and February 1996 issues of *PsittaScene*, both of which feature this species.) The six confiscated birds at the Foundation are the only ones in captivity.

Few other parrots in the entire world are so well protected by their habitat. To catch one of these parrots is impossible, except using slingshots. They literally live up in the clouds! Those captured may have been brought to the ground during a hurricane or perhaps fell from a nest.

I was privileged to be taken by Miguel, Daniel and Juan to the main breeding area of the species. In September, young chicks are in the nest, thus a large part of the entire population can be located at one site. After an early start, we drove for one and a half hours into the mountains of Nuevo Leon. The scenery is breathtaking! Never before have I seen range upon range of mountains, most of them sheer-faced and impenetrable, stretching as far as the eye can see - high and wide! We reached an altitude of 2,300m (7,500ft) and left behind our 4WD vehicle. Then we started to climb through the pine-oak forest. It was very steep and the thick layer of pine needles and small cones made the going slippery. It took us 1½ hours to ascend only 400m (1,300ft). Of course the men on their own could have got up there in half the time! They have had a lifetime on Mexico's mountain slopes. Miguel, for example, has been watching *terrisi* since 1982 and Juan is an expert mountain climber.

We climbed through a fascinating area, where the oak trees were festooned with air plants. Butterflies were plentiful but birds were scarce. We saw the occasional Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and spent some time observing a Blue-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis clemenciae*), which has prominent white markings on the tail. Long before we neared the top we could hear the macaw-like cries of the Maroon-fronted Parrots.

When we had almost reached the top, they were far above us, flying about the steep face of the mountain in which they nest. Even through the spotting telescope they were little more than black dots. But that was as close as we could go! No one has yet been able to scale the sheer face of the mountain.

The habitat of this species can only be described as incredible; it must be seen to be believed. Although I had read descriptions and seen photographs of the mountains, I was unprepared for the height and the inaccessibility of the nesting area. These parrots are quite literally living in the clouds. After listening to their calls for a couple of hours and seeing them only as dark specks moving against the face of the mountain, the calling increased. During that time the clouds had closed in on us, blotting out the sun. Suddenly, the parrots started to pass through the clouds - flocks of 30, 40, 20 and smaller groups. The estimate was of about 150 birds. My companions were elated because seldom had they see so many together. Miguel told me that the largest flock was almost certainly

A cinnamon mutation of the Green-cheeked Amazon is among confiscated birds which are cared for at the foundation's headquarters. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

composed of non-breeding birds.

It is believed that about 28 pairs nest in the central wall at this location. The total population of the species is impossible to estimate but Miguel suggested that it may be less than 1,000 birds. The main problem for this species is Mexico's rapidly growing population (about 90 million people). Forests which were once protected by their remoteness are now being settled or even used for cattle grazing. Illegal felling continues. We saw a lorry loaded with illegal logs. There should soon be two forest rangers in the area where we saw the parrots - not sufficient, but better than none. It is not so much the birds which are at risk but the pine-oak forests on which they depend for their food. In addition, the preservation of the forests is vital for water catchment and to moderate the local climate.

This enormous aviary for Military Macaws intended for release was inspired by Miguel Gomez Garza's visit to Paradise Park. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

COMMUNITY NESTING SITES

Only two large community nesting sites of this species are known - and this is the most important. The Maroon-fronted Parrot breeds only in cliffs near forests with a good diversity of conifers. In addition to pine seeds, it feeds on the seeds and nectar of one species of Agave. Unfortunately, its numbers have suffered a great decline in recent years. Only two decades ago flocks numbering several hundred birds were reported; now they are a thing of the past. Illegal felling as well as the grazing of cattle and goats in the forests, have degraded the habitat. It was difficult to see what stock could graze on - perhaps a few succulents. Cutting the forests has inevitably led to drought (will Man never learn this lesson?), which means that forest fires can spread quickly, further eroding the habitat.

During my visit I was asked to give an interview to a reporter from *El Norte*, one of the national newspapers. I was pleased to have the opportunity to emphasise the importance of preserving the forests and protecting parrots world-wide from illegal trade. I was also able to describe the valuable work of Fundacion Ara. The interview appeared next morning.

Mexico has many mountainous areas where no man has ever trod. Unfortunately, most parrot species cannot survive in such areas because their food sources would be limited. On our way to Saltillo a couple of days later, Miguel pointed out to me a stand of *Pinus catarinae* on a distant mountain ridge. The stand extended only about 6km. Yet every October the Maroon-fronted Parrots find their way there to feed on the seeds of the pine. The young fledge at the end of October to coincide with the greatest availability of pine seeds. The total population is, perhaps, limited by the availability of food.

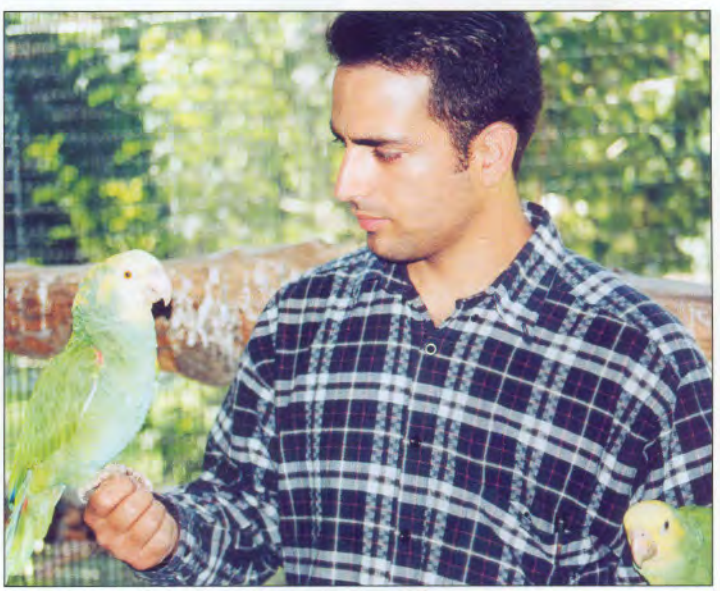
With the exception of the Scarlet Macaw, which is now almost extinct in Mexico, the Maroon-fronted Parrot has the most restricted range and is the least numerous of all Mexico's parrots. The biologists at Fundacion Ara are currently planning to publish a book about the unique parrot of the clouds of Mexico's Sierra Madre Oriental. This will surely be just one of many important contributions which they will make to the science and literature of the avifauna of Mexico.

Further reading: see PsittaScene August 1991, pages 7-8.

MEXICO'S AVIFAUNA

Saltillo is in the neighbouring state of Coahuila, a historic town with a magnificent cathedral. Here is situated el Museo de las Aves de Mexico (the Museum of the Birds of Mexico). Every one of Mexico's 1,010 bird species is preserved as a mounted specimen in attractive displays in a simulated natural setting. Mexico has more than 750 resident bird species. It has 80 endemic species, including five or six endemic parrots, the Thick-bill, the Maroon-fronted and the little Mexican or Blue-rumped Parrotlet. Two Amazons are endemic, the Green-cheeked and Finsch's (lilac-crowned). (If the Double Yellow-headed is considered as a separate species, then it has three endemic Amazons.) Of the parrots, five are on Appendix 1 (endangered) of CITES: the Military and Scarlet Macaws and the Thick-bill and Maroon-fronted. The Green-cheeked Amazon was a new addition, this year. Loss of habitat is the main threat to the existence of all five species.

One of the reasons for the rich avifauna is due to the wealth of biotic provinces; 18 have been identified. Different kinds of habitat include cloud forest, rainforest, tropical evergreen forest, tropical deciduous forest, thorn forest, savannah and tropical scrub. In the temperate regions, habitat types include pine-oak forest (home of the Maroon-fronted Parrot), chaparral (dwarf evergreen oak) forests, mesquite grassland and desert. Most of Mexico's parrots are, of course, inhabitants of the tropical zones but they can be found wherever there are good sources of food, even in quite heavily populated areas. Not far outside the city of Monterrey I saw Green Conures. This is the least colourful of the *Aratinga* species, being entirely green with yellow-green under wing coverts. Just before dusk, a group of five, probably a family, was feeding in the top of a large tree. Such close views of Green-cheeked Amazons eluded me. I briefly glimpsed a noisy flock of about 30 birds after waiting for two hours in a likely location. The area was one which contained many trees and gardens, and a large park where the Amazons often fed in the early morning. They were attracted to the ripening nuts of the pecan trees.



Daniel Garza Tobón with Tres Marias Amazons. *Photo: Rosemary Low*

NEWS...VIEWS...ACTION

STOP PRESS

(UK press report 14 November 1997)

HITMEN KILL THE BIRDMAN OF PALMA

The man with the biggest collection of parrots, macaws and cockatoos in Europe was shot dead yesterday in Mallorca, along with his eight-year-old son and maid. Police think they were victims of a Mafia-style 'hit squad'.

Manfred Meisel, 49, a beer importer known on Mallorca as 'The Beer King' was found with a bullet in his head in his villa near Palma. He had told friends of feeling under threat since March, perhaps because of the enormous amount of cash he handled in connection with his exotic birds, which he imported from the Philippines and Singapore.

No money or credit cards were taken from his villa, and not one valuable bird freed from 400 cages. The killers scaled a spiked perimeter fence and eluded five guard dogs. Meisel's son, Patrick, was shot twice in the temple while he was sleeping. Claudia Leisen, 30, who tended the newly hatched chicks every four hours, appeared to have had her wrists tied before she was shot in the back.

PDD UPDATE

Continuous support is need by the IAS to raise funds for PDD research, PDD is also known as "Macaw Wasting Disease". To raise these funds, the International Aviculturists Society appeals to the entire avicultural community as well as individual companion bird owners. IAS is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation with NO SALARIED POSITIONS. All donations to the PDD project are directed donations for PDD Research, and IAS will absorb any overhead expense in administering this project.

Additionally, your IAS PDD donations are frequently matched with funds from other government or private sources to multiply the effect of your donation.

Send your donations to: PDD Fund, International Aviculturists Society, PO Box 2232, LaBelle, FL 33975, USA. Fax: (941) 675-8824. Phone: (941) 674-0321.

TONY SILVA APPEAL DENIED

More news on parrot smuggler, Tony Silva, on August 18th, 1997 the US Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit affirmed the District Court (District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division) ruling which denied the appeal filed by Tony Silva asking that his motion to withdraw his guilty plea be permitted. Also affirmed was the District Court's ruling regarding Mr Silva's claim that errors were made in the sentencing process (No. 96-4026). Circuit Judge Ripple wrote the Circuit Court's decision.

Regarding the matters related to Mr Silva's motion to withdraw his guilty plea, the Seventh Circuit wrote: "The decision of the district court to deny the motion to withdraw the guilty plea was hardly an abuse of discretion. It was grounded in a common-sense evaluation of the representations made..in light of the unchallenged testimony presented... and the witnesses heard by the court during the sentencing hearing."

Regarding the matters related to Mr Silva's claim that errors were made in the sentencing process, the Seventh Circuit wrote: "The district court..determined that the reduction [in Mr Silva's sentence] was not warranted. The court concluded that, despite his guilty plea, Mr Silva denied his guilt in seeking to withdraw the plea and to shift blame to Mackman and the government for having entrapped him. The court further found that he had not been truthful in his own testimony during sentencing and his version of the offence submitted to the probation office. The district court's decision not to award the reduction was well 'within a zone of reasonable responses to the facts.'"

The decision is cited as: 1997 WL 469036 (7th Cir. (IL)).

THE MANAGEMENT OF CORRUPTION IN VENEZUELA

Concerned about parrots world-wide, WPT were interested to read a report from Julio Cesar Centeno, PhD, (a forestry specialist from Venezuela), about the developments of the nature area - Imataca, in Venezuela. The main issues highlighted in this report have been summarised as follows:

"In an open letter addressed to the President of Venezuela, dated May the 17th, 1997, 20 environmental groups, in co-ordination with a larger number of prominent citizens, denounce gross abuse of power and a deceitful manipulation of public opinion, in order to approve in Cabinet a management plan for a reserve the size of Holland.

As a consequence, the Commission on the Environment of the Venezuelan Congress will summon five Ministers, between June 12 and June 14, to clarify the situation: the ministers of the Environment, Energy and Mines, Defence, Planning and Frontiers, as well as the Director of the Forest Service. At the same time, the President of the College of Anthropologists and 20 environmental and social groups have requested from the President of the Republic and the Attorney General the annulment of the obscure decision taken by the Cabinet of Ministers."

BOOK REVIEW

"What the Parrot Told Alice" by Dale Smith
Reviewed by Emma Greig (age 14)

"When I was told about this book, which is targeted towards young people, never did I guess that I would be reading a novel that deals with the international concerns of the illegal importation of wild parrots and macaws. The story, set in 1996, is about a 12 year old girl named Alice who comes to realise the importance of conservation with the help of her Eclectus Parrot, Bo. The entire book focuses on him explaining to Alice how people exhaust wild parrot populations because of greed - smuggling birds to America for profit. Several other Psittacine characters also tell how they arrived in the pet market. Some of these narratives are heart-wrenching because they aren't just tales in a book. There is truth to all of them. One of the characters is Simon, a Spix's Macaw, a severely endangered species.....

'It's much too late for me, Alice' said Simon. 'But you can help. You must help. There are many other protected species in danger of extinction - not only parrots, but other animals, and other plants and other insects. Every one of them is important to the health of this planet, and who knows what secrets they hold.'

This book has a way of making the problems more immediate - not something of another time and place upon which one can have no effect."

What the Parrot Told Alice is a remarkable story, founded on fact. It is destined to awaken the conscience of young people to crucial issues of our time, such as habitat destruction and exploitation of wildlife. It deserves to be read (and will be greatly enjoyed) by all thinking people from nine to 90. It is so much more than a children's story - it is a cry from the heart of one of an increasing band of forward-looking individuals who understand the destruction of the world's resources must be halted quickly, and that this can be done only by educating today's young people.

What the Parrot Told Alice ISBN 0-9651452-7-1, softcover, 128 pages, illustrated with line drawings. Available in the USA from Deer Creek Publishing, P O Box 2594, Nevada City, Ca 95959, price $11.95 plus $3 shipping. In the UK it is available from Insignis Publications, P O Box 100, Mansfield, Notts NG20 9NZ, price £6.95 plus 70p post and packaging, (overseas postage extra).

Imataca is rich in ecosystems and biodiversity, and is covered with pristine tropical forests. But it also has a lot of gold, and therefore a lot of potential for miners. The area was designated a forest reserve and a protected area in the 1980s - therefore it should have been permanently protected to safeguard its natural resources and ecological processes, whilst still allowing the selective harvest of industrial timber and non timber forest products, through long term concessions. To date, nearly half the reserve has been allocated to forest concessionaires.

In the 1980s and 1990s, only the small miners came, but they were followed by the big international mining companies which meant big money. While the ministry of mines helped the companies by allocating concessions, the Ministry of the Environment prepared a management plan for the reserve which would allow such mining activities to take place.

"On May 7th, 1997, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Mines called a meeting to present their management plan to public scrutiny, as required by law.....
.....The Management Plan approved on the 14th of May is a clear demonstration of the profound level of corruption and abuse of power that characterises the present administration of the Venezuelan national patrimony. In an unprecedented measure, it divides the Forest Reserve of Imataca between loggers and miners, condemning the indigenous people of the area to be prisoners on their own lands, violating national and international principles of human rights and environmental protection, while fooling the general public through a farcical public consultation, in violation of established national regulations, and of fundamental ethical and democratic principles...
...It [the Management Plan] also demonstrates the scant respect the government has for public opinion, and its submission to commercial interests, regardless of the environmental and social costs incurred....
...The need to establish totally protected areas, to conserve fragile ecosystems and their biological diversity, has been ignored in the new Management Plan...This is not only a violation of Presidential Decree 2.214, it also absurdly presumes that in the whole of the Forest Reserve there is no need for truly totally protected areas."

The report concludes:

" ....The Management Plan for the Forest Reserve of Imataca violates Presidential Decree 2.214, represents an erroneous step with dangerous consequences for this reserve, as well as for other forest reserves in the country. It also contravenes international agreements signed by Venezuela related to the conservation and rational management of forest resources, the protection of biological diversity, and the recognition and respect of basic human rights. It is a backward step in the Venezuelan drive to reach a truly sustainable development model, where the rights of present and future generations to a better life are recognised....."

NEW WPT SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR

For several years now the World Parrot Trust has had the benefit of advice from a distinguished panel of scientific advisors. This consists of Joseph M Forshaw, Charles A. Munn PhD, and Andrew Greenwood MA, VetMB, FIBiol., MRCVS.

We are very pleased to announce that Dr. Roger Wilkinson has agreed to join our panel. In addition to reviewing funding proposals and other matters, he will take a special interest in African parrots, liaising with Professor Mike Perrin at Natal University.

Here is a brief CV:
Curator of Birds at Chester Zoo since 1983. Chair of European EEP and UK JMSP Parrot Taxon Advisory Groups. EEP Palm Cockatoo Species Co-ordinator and ESB Blue-eyed Cockatoo Studbook Keeper. Previously Senior Lecturer in Biological Sciences at Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria researching in bird behaviour and ecology. Retains research links with West Africa where advisor for study on ecology of African Grey Parrots in Cameroon. Personal recent research includes behavioural studies on Vasa parrots.

Roger can be contacted directly at the North of England Zoological Society, Upton, Chester, CH2 1LH., or through WPT.

Dr. Roger Wilkinson, new WPT scientific advisor.

CITES AND THE SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO

We reported in our August 1997 'PsittaScene' that a proposal to uplist Cacatua sulphurea to CITES Appendix 1 was withdrawn following disapproval by Birdlife International. We wrote to their Director of Policy, Dr. Colin Bibby, for more information. Here is his reply:

"*Cacatua sulphurea* was an interesting one. This species is currently listed on appendix 2 and Indonesia has set a 0 quota. The proposal to COP10 came from Germany and did not include any discussion with the range state (Indonesia). We are very concerned about the status of *Cacatua sulphurea* but we do not believe this is a fruitful way to do business. Indonesia values its wildlife in part because of its economic value and the potential to develop sustainable exploitation. Closing all the potential to re-open a controlled trade in *Cacatua sulphurea* would have sent a very unwelcome and unhelpful message from the west. Indonesia has committed to develop a management plan for the species which deals both with protected areas and the potential to regulate any future trade. This, if successful, would be a very important development for Indonesia towards an ability to manage its own wildlife. We believe that it is proper to support this admirable aspiration. Our position was supported by IUCN and adopted by the conference of the parties. Observers, quite rightly, will be looking very carefully in two years time to see that good progress has been made on the management plan and we will be doing our best to assist Indonesia in this direction."

GOODBYE OSCAR

Kirsty and Oscar

We are sorry to inform members of the sad death of Oscar the Scarlet Macaw. A post mortem revealed that his death was caused by heart failure, and other symptoms of old age. It is believed that Oscar was at least forty years old, although no-one knows for sure.

Oscar was a favourite at Paradise Park, and was also the most successful fund-raiser for the World Parrot Trust Sanctuary appeal. So many of you were touched by his story that in total, Oscar alone raised £3,150 towards building a sanctuary for other ill-treated birds.

He came to Paradise Park in 1994, after his owner fell ill. It was then discovered that he had been living in a cage inside a car repair and paint spraying garage for over fifteen years. He was in poor condition with many feathers plucked and an overgrown beak. After receiving plenty of love, attention and special care, his health improved enormously - even though sadly his plumage never did return to its full glory, and he was never able to fly, because he spent so long in a small cage. Unable to use his muscles, he eventually lost the use of them.
Oscar became a firm favourite with the keepers at Paradise Park, they spoiled him rotten, and even let him share their lunch!

Needless to say, Oscar will be greatly missed.

YOU CAN HELP US...

Charles A. Munn III PhD.
Founder Trustee WPT-USA. Senior research biologist. Wildlife Conservation Society.

Andrew Greenwood MRCVS
Founder Trustee of WPT-UK and WPT-USA. Zoo and wildlife veterinary consultant.

Audrey Reynolds
Director, Paradise Park. Founder Trustee of The World Parrot Trust UK.

Rosemary Low
Author of 'Endangered Parrots' and 20 more parrot books. Editor of PsittaScene.

Wm. Richard Porter MD
Director of the International Aviculturists Society. Founder Trustee of WPT-USA.

David Woolcock
Curator, Paradise Park. Founder Trustee of The World Parrot Trust UK.

Michael Reynolds
Founder of The World Parrot Trust, Hon. Director of WPT-UK, Trustee of WPT-USA.

...SAVE THE PARROTS!

Lear's Macaw

Echo Parakeet

Red-tailed Black Cockatoo

St. Vincent Parrot

Red-vented Cockatoo

Red-tailed Amazon

Hyacinth Macaw

Join us.

Become a member of the World Parrot Trust, receive our *PsittaScene* newsletter, know that you are actively contributing towards our aims.

Help fund our Projects.

We are currently supporting parrot conservation, education and welfare projects in Africa, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, the Caribbean, Equador, Mauritius, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru and the Philippines. Your generosity towards the parrots could help us expand current schemes and start new ones.

FEEL FREE to copy this page and hand it out to potential WPT members. Thanks!

World Parrot Trust

Aims of the Trust.

The survival of parrot species in the wild, and the welfare of captive birds.

These aims are pursued by:-

Educating the public on the threats to parrots.
Opposing trade in wild-caught parrots.
Preserving and restoring parrot habitat.
Studying the status of parrot populations.
Encouraging the production of aviary-bred birds.
Creating links between aviculture and conservation.
Promoting high standards in the keeping of parrots.
Supporting research into veterinary care of parrots.

YES, I WANT TO HELP SAVE THE PARROTS OF THE WORLD

SUBSCRIPTION RATES (please tick)

- ☐ UK and Europe (Single) £15
- ☐ UK and Europe (Family) £20
- ☐ Fellow (Life Member) £250/US$400 Corporate (Annual)
- ☐ All Overseas Airmail £17/US$25 (or equivalent currency payment by Access/Visa/Mastercard preferred)
- ☐ Plus donation of £/US$.....

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OR: I enclose cheque payable to the WPT ☐

I heard about the World Parrot Trust from .....

PLEASE SEND COMPLETED FORM TO 'WORLD PARROT TRUST' AT:-

UNITED KINGDOM
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 4HY

USA
Cynthia Webb, PO Box 341141, Memphis TN 38184

BENELUX
Romain Bejstrup, Boomgaardstraat 76, B2070, Zwijndrecht, Belgium

CANADA
Mike Pearson, PO Box 29, Mount Hope, Ontario LOR 1WO

DENMARK (SCANDINAVIA)
M Iversen, Alsikemarken 48, 2860 Soborg.

FRANCE
J & G Prin, 55 Rue de la Fassiere, 45140, Ingre.

GERMANY
G & D Harries, Vodestr. 39, 44625 Herne.

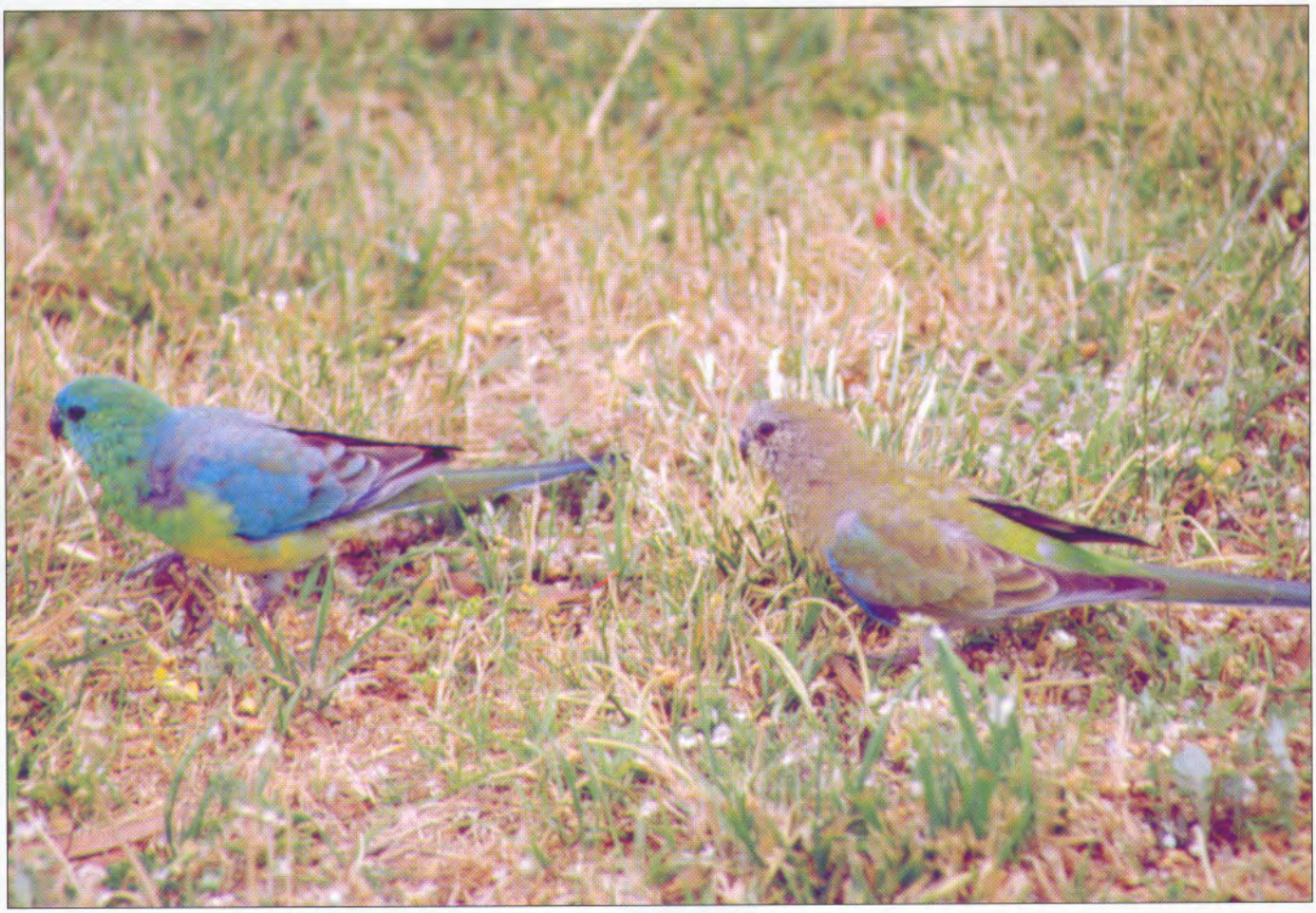
ITALY
Freddie Virili, via Matarus w.10, 33045 Nimis, Udine.

AUSTRALIA
Peter Sipek, 1 Rossell Pl., Glenfield, NSW 2167.

AFRICA
V. Dennison, PO Box 1758, Link Hills 3652, South Africa.

SWITZERLAND
Lars Lepperhoff, Sagemattstrasse 31, 3097 Liebefeld.

PARROTS IN THE WILD



RED-RUMPED PARAKEET

Psephotus haematonotus

Known as Red-rumped or Red-backed Parrot in Australia and Red-rumped Parakeet in other countries, this species is a familiar aviary subject wherever aviculture is practised. For Rosemary Low, however, the beauty of the Redrumps was most apparent when she saw them in the wild. The pair above were among five pairs feeding in a park at Horsham, Victoria, on November 19, 1994. An inhabitant of open, rather than forested areas, this parakeet spends much time feeding on the ground on the seeds of grasses and herbaceous plants. The leaves of thistles and the green seeding heads of crowsfoot (*Erodium botrys*) are also relished.

Why are we using a photograph of such a common species on this page? The truth is that we are finding it hard to find suitable photographs. Here is an appeal to members, especially those in Australia. Many of you must have far more exciting photographs than this one. Would you not like to see one reproduced on this page? Just forward it to the editor or to WPT headquarters. It will be returned after use! (Slides or prints can be used.)

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