PsittaScene

The Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Winter 2015

PsittaScene

Winter 2015

World Parrot Trust

Glanmor House, Hayle
Cornwall TR27 4HB UK
info@parrots.org +44 (0)1736 751026
www.parrots.org

CONTENTS

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

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

From the Chairperson...

Wintery weather is here in Britain, so a recent VIP visitor from Brazil was feeling the cold when he came to meet us at the UK headquarters of the World Parrot Trust.

André Saidenberg is a veterinarian who represents WPT in Brazil. We found a multitude of interesting parrot subjects to talk about including new ideas on treatments for worms, as well as keel scores, nest box designs and his own pet parrots. His more official talks were about projects in South America, including work with Vinaceous and Mealy Amazons.

And Amazons are on our minds right now, as they are the focus of our campaign. I have been lucky to see, and hear, a tree-full of Yellow-crowned Amazons *(Amazona ochrocephala)* at dawn in deepest Brazil and it is a wonderful sight. The sound is quite astonishing too, joyful calling and chuckling together as they greet the day. But two-thirds of this group of parrots is under threat, from the poaching of chicks for the trade in wildlife, destruction of their habitats, persecution as crop pests, and natural weather events that can have catastrophic effects, especially on island populations. I have learned about some of the projects underway including habitat restoration, educational campaigns, rescuing, rehabilitating and reintroducing confiscated birds. The needs of each species and each individual are evaluated before action is taken. That kind of careful attention is evident in a project that we're supporting for the Puerto Rican Amazon, which you'll see in this issue. To get the work underway we need your help, so please visit ***www.parrots.org/amazons*** to learn about the campaign and give it your support.

In addition to the subtle greens of the Amazons, in this issue we also get an update on the Grey and Timneh parrots of Africa and a big splash of colour from Scarlet Macaws in Honduras and Red-and-green Macaws in Argentina as we learn about their journeys to become wild.

André's visit highlighted the array of talents which a new generation of scientists is bringing to the WPT, gathering evidence to understand the threats that parrots face, finding solutions and putting them into practice. We have also found some amazing supporters who are matching donations to protect the Amazon parrots. This means that even if you can only give a small amount it will have a big impact, and we can continue to help birds that are so magnificent to see in their natural habitat and are often great companions in our homes.

Alison Hales,
WPT Chairperson

ON OUR COVERS

FRONT A pair of **Puerto Rican Amazons** *(Amazona vittata)* peek out of a nest hole. Photo © Tanya Martinez. See Page 9 - **Hidden Lives:** ***An intimate glimpse into the behaviour of nesting Puerto Rican Amazons.***

BACK The **Scarlet Macaw** *(Ara macao)* is found in lowland rainforest and savanna, remote portions of humid forest, deciduous woodland and gallery forest in Central America. Although the Scarlet Macaw is listed by IUCN as Least Concern there is evidence of a population decline in the wild. Photo © Steve Milpacher.

SACRED VALLEY
of the Macaws

WPT Interview with Lloyd Davidson,
Macaw Mountain, Honduras

Lloyd Davidson is a gregarious Tennessee native who has spent a large portion of his life around the ocean, much of it involving commercial fishing. A red snapper venture in the Bay Islands of Honduras begun thirty years ago unpredictably morphed into a bird park/nature reserve operation, now known as Macaw Mountain Bird Park and Nature Reserve.

Together with the World Parrot Trust, Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IHAH), Copán Association, and a number of sponsors and foundations, the park's most important program is an effort to reintroduce the Scarlet Macaw to Honduras, beginning in Copán Ruinas, and widening to other areas it previously inhabited.

Alex Alvarado (left), Macaw Mountain, with Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernández © La Prenza

Q: When you arrived in Copán to start Macaw Mountain, what was the status of the macaws at Copán Ruinas?

A: When my partner Pat Merrfitt and I began constructing Macaw Mountain in 2001 there were Scarlet Macaws *(Ara macao)* living in the Copán Ruinas Archaeological Park (henceforth "the Ruins"). The group had developed gradually from an initial 4 birds sent in 1977 from the Honduran Mosquitia, with a couple of later contraband additions, and several eventual clutches of chicks. For the most part they were flightless and in poor physical condition with quite faded colours. The group scrambled around the ground near the entrance looking for handouts from the tourists like a bunch of hungry chickens.

Q: The ruins at Copán reflect a deep connection and reverence for the Scarlet Macaws by the local Mayan culture. In your early years, did the local community understand that these birds were at one time a major feature of Copán's wildlife?

A: Although the Ruins at Copán have more bird imagery than other Mayan sites, and the Scarlet Macaw is iconic, most of the locals and guides did not seem to make a strong connection. When we arrived the resident flock was understood to have been introduced, wasn't acting at all "wild" at that point, and some believed that macaws had never been in that part of Honduras. The fact that finely sculpted macaws presided over the famous "ball court" and that in play, points were scored when the ball contacted other large stone macaw heads seemed to be simply accepted more than analyzed or appreciated.

Q: Once you'd established Macaw Mountain, what caused you to focus on the wild birds at the Ruins?

A: In the early years of Macaw Mountain (2002 - 2010) we had no official interaction with the macaws at the Ruins. It became obvious that the diet of these birds had to be changed as tourists constantly commented on their dull colours and listless behaviour compared to our Scarlets. As Macaw Mountain gained credibility we were able to lobby for more variety in the diet, especially fruits. The food was moved from the ground to elevated platforms and as the macaws' health improved more began to fly.

Enter Dr. Jamie Gilardi of the World Parrot Trust on a visit to Macaw Mountain that proved to be the catalyst for the release program. On a 2010 trip to Central America to assess parrot stocks and problems he was directed toward Copán Ruinas. At that point the group at the Ruins numbered about 15 birds and our facility had another 45.

Over coffee Jamie asked if I had ever thought of releasing macaws. I said "Yeah, occasionally" but that it always looked tough in a valley populated with an intimidating number of young sling shot-equipped sharpshooters. Jamie countered that an education program should take care of it and added that we could use the Ruins as a release site and gradually grow the existing flock with inputs from our stock.

Onlookers watch as Scarlet Macaws take to the sky © Rene Matute

© Jamie Gilardi

He said he thought we were 85% of the way there. We agreed to think about it and communicate and a couple of months later the idea was a "go".

What followed continues to amaze me five years later. We were able to assemble a coalition of Honduran players from the private sector, government, and non-governmental organizations under the banner "Macaws in Freedom - The Beauty Returns". We were able to produce a signed accord that provided access to a World Heritage Site and an impressive amount of useful infrastructure and expertise.

Macaw Mountain already had the experience, facilities and employees to manage the avian demands of the effort. The Honduran Institute of History and Anthropology agreed to the use of the Ruins as our protected release site. The government's Forestry Conservation Institute, with legal authority over protected wildlife, authorized us to receive, rehabilitate, and relocate the necessary macaws. Copán Association signed on to handle the accounting chores and the all-important education program. Along with their contributions came the invaluable insights of Ricardo Agurcia, their Director, who has spent a lifetime studying the Maya in Copán. To top off this "Third World Dream Team" the WPT came fully on board with its wealth of experience, technical advice, and connections.

Q: Explain the point of the education work in the valley and surrounding communities.

A: From that first conversation when I met Jamie we agreed the success of any release of macaws here depended mostly on the educational effort. Copán was not a protected forest reserve but a well populated valley, though still a relatively natural one. We both ascribed to the belief that "the birds know just what to do if left alone, the people not so much".

The Copan Association, with funding provided by their Copan Maya Foundation, developed a 9-module lesson plan for the local schools that focused on life history information of the Scarlet Macaw, and examined their importance in Mayan art, ceremony, and mythology. Also included was the crucial information that the Scarlet Macaw is the National Bird of Honduras and that capturing or harming them had unattractive legal consequences.

A very critical element was a classroom visit by birds from Macaw Mountain, which interacted with the students to hopefully establish a

A Scarlet Macaw casually feasts on a morsel © Steve Milpacher

© Steve Milpacher

personal connection, or at least give the slingshot aces second thoughts. The WPT raised funds to allow a follow-up visit to our park for another educational experience and hopefully close the sale. An annual "Macaw Fest" in Copán's central park provides a periodic reminder and often involves as many adults as children. The package has been hugely successful and has established a special place for the birds in the community, and in four years we have gone from a perspective of "They'll all be stolen or killed" to an excited "Hey six macaws flew over our house at 5:45 this morning - Beautiful!"

Q: How does the children's museum fit into the broader education and conservation goals of the collaboration working to restore Macaw populations in the Copán Valley?

A: The children's museum, Casa K'inich, is a big part of Copán Association's educational effort. In fact the macaw program's outreach to the mountain village classrooms is managed through the museum with their staff making the crucial macaw visits. Casa K'inich was established to provide an interactive experience for children visiting the Ruins. The museum engages young minds with participatory displays that bring to life important elements of Mayan culture and daily life, making a visit to Copán much more exciting than a mere trek through the archaeological park for them. Needless to say the new element of free-flying macaws in the valley has elevated the museum's message immensely by including a "live action" link to Mayan history.

Q: Other than adding birds to the wild population in Copán, how do the releases themselves help to attract attention and support for the birds and conservation in the region?

A: The actual release events are now becoming more popular and are providing the opportunity to spike interest in the program. What began as an effort generally considered not doable and ridiculously naive has now become a reality, a growing source of pride in Copán, and increasingly on the national level. Our initial release in 2011 was well attended only because it coincided with the wedding of Ricardo Agurcia's daughter and pressure was applied on the guests. By the third release we had the U.S. Ambassador with us and the local villagers began to appear in support of "their macaws." We now have access to much better coverage in the national media and are becoming more adept in utilizing it.

Q: How is the Copán Valley unique relative to the rest of Honduras and Central America in general?

A: I have always felt that Copán is a unique and very special place both in Honduras and in Central America in general. Being from Tennessee I am not normally one to wax too mystical on things but I must admit that this valley has a calming ambiance and the Ruins an unusual peacefulness and beauty. The Maya chose to construct the "Paris of the Maya World" here and adorned it with


© Steve Milpacher


Youngsters enjoying the company of macaws © Steve Milpacher

their highest-relief and most elegant sculpture. These ruins have more bird imagery than any other Mayan site and the dominant image is the Scarlet Macaw. How convenient for anyone thinking about a macaw restoration project 6 or 7 centuries down the road!

Copán Ruinas is located in the mountainous northwest corner of Honduras that abuts both Guatemala and El Salvador. It is serious coffee country with those long traditions intact. Copán is considered an oasis of tranquility and truly natural beauty in the region, and these macaws are adding a spectacular and exciting element to the valley's mystique.

Q: Does protection for and restoration of the macaw population there have consequences for other wildlife conservation efforts in the area?

A: I definitely believe that "Macaws in Freedom" can have a long-term positive effect on conservation efforts both within Honduras and regionally. Copán is considered an almost sacred place within the country and indeed high school level students are obligated to visit the Ruins. A good percentage of internal tourism also involves a visit to the valley so the amount of exposure to these birds is impressive. The Scarlet Macaw is the National Bird and Hondurans are unashamedly patriotic. This iconic and highly visible species can be the "sales force" and Copán the "distribution centre" for popularising the concept of conserving the country's diverse natural heritage. When anyone is in the almost ethereal Grand Plaza at the Ruins and 15 brilliant macaws scream their way overhead they probably get chillbumps, but they definitely get the point: save this spectacular species' habitat and you coincidently protect hundreds of birds and mammals that share their forest.

In one important area of Honduras, the Mosquitia, we hope this project's increasing visibility can help focus attention on threatened wild macaws there. This still remote area of jungle in the eastern part of the country is home to the largest remaining populations of Scarlet and Great Green Macaws *(Ara ambiguus)* in Central America. We counted 17 Great Greens in one flight there earlier this year but it is a fragile resource under constant pressure from loggers and animal traffickers.

Honduras has a young and energetic President who has real concern about wildlife conservation issues. Hopefully by raising the macaw's visibility in the country this project will add popular support to his efforts to enhance control in the Mosquitia, the real source of these magnificent birds.

With four years into the project now we believe we are developing a model for introducing previously captive macaws (some quite long term) into the wild. We have already been approached by three groups interested in releases in other parts of the country. The crucial element in all this is of course the macaws

and we are working on connections for donations both from within and outside the country.

We are also beginning to examine the potential impact of a better-organised captive breeding effort. Our model could easily be used in other parts of Honduras and neighbouring countries as well. The coalition of private and public sector entities seems like a good concept in this region where budgets are tight and conservation can seldom be a top priority. We intend to share our bird handling experience and education programs with any seriously interested group.

Q: Have there been conflicts or synergies with the archaeological park over the years?

A: I suppose the most surprising thing to me about the Archaeological Park in Copán was that they agreed to cooperate with the release idea at all. Granted we had helped out for a while upgrading the diet of their macaws with visible results. However having a World Heritage Site for your release point is not at all the normal situation.

We have worked with three park administrators during the project's four-year run and all have had a positive view of the effort. There was however an undeniably negative view of it all by a good portion of the Ruin's tour guides. Many believed that as soon as the macaws ventured off the property the birds would be stolen, maimed, or killed. There was also the normal and expected resistance to change and the argument that the macaws would annoy and distract tourists from the Ruins. Since the site has 600-year-old macaw heads prominently featured I thought the chances of success looked pretty good. My standard line became, "The macaws are going to win this argument themselves, if of course they manage to survive", and left it at that.

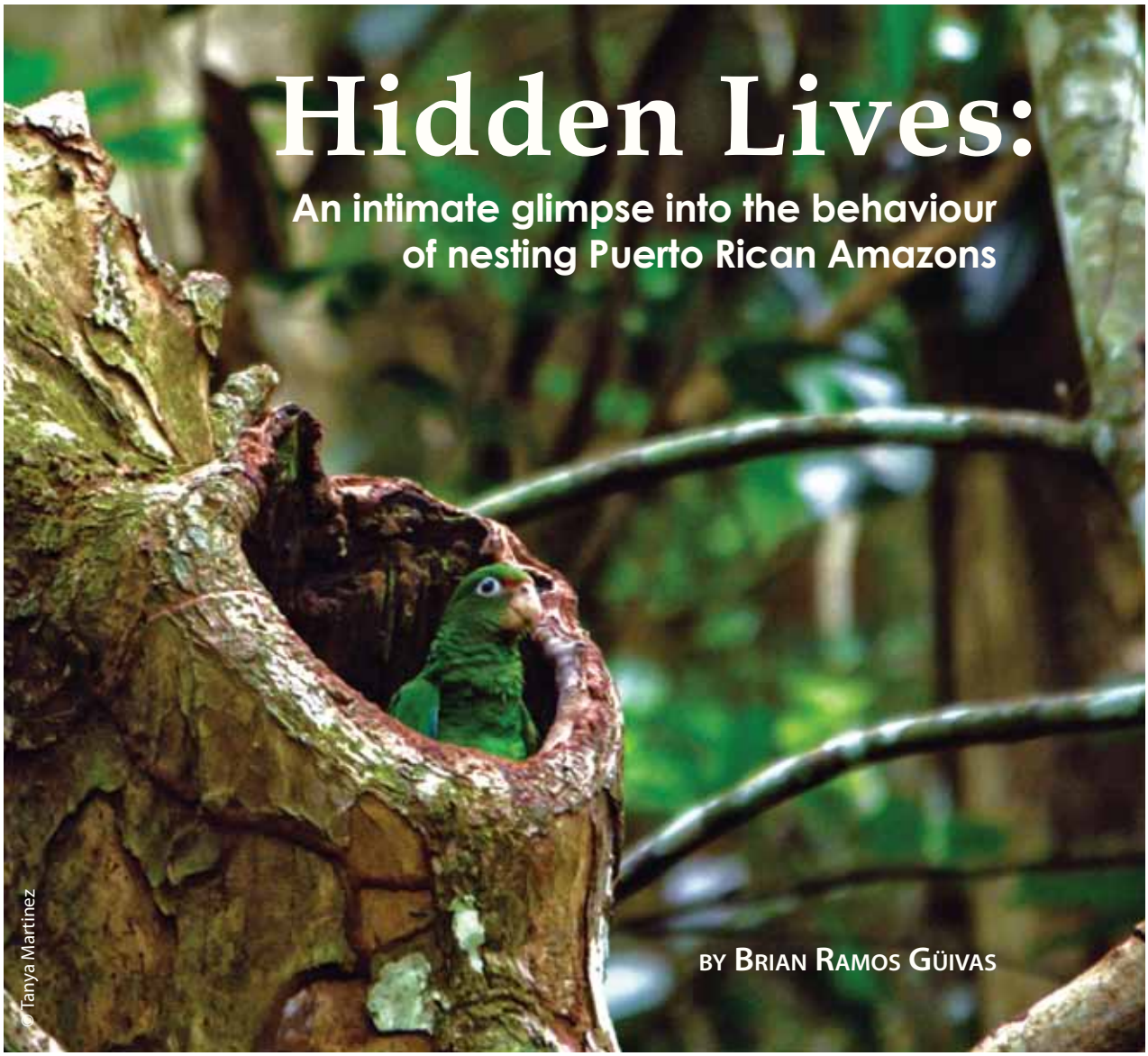
The program kicked in somewhat slowly as the birds from the Ruins became gradually stronger and the newly released macaws adjusted to freedom and gained confidence. By year three the Scarlets were changing the negative talk with forays about the valley (occasionally even into Guatemala) and with increasingly spectacular overflights of the tour groups at the Ruins

They are completely impossible to ignore and they have become local stars now in year four. One of the now converted guides told me recently that their presence has brought new life to the entire experience. It's like visitors from the Mayan world have come to join the tour.

Q: Tourism is clearly an important opportunity for the region: can you walk us through recent developments in the area and explain whether macaws may play a role in helping promote the area as an international tourist destination?

A: The two big economic factors in the Copán region are coffee and tourism. For years Copán has been considered a single night diversion to "see the Ruins", but now other activities are available, from Macaw Mountain, hot springs, canopy tours, coffee farm experiences, to the village itself, which is charming.

The Copán Chamber of Commerce and Tourism has voted to brand the area "The Sacred Valley of the Macaws." A grant proposal to the World Tourism Organization seeks funds to promote the region as a "special place" in Central America. Central to the effort is an expansion of the Scarlet release program. Future liberation sites outside Copán will expand the area where visitors may encounter macaws. Hotels, restaurants, and tour operators will identify with the project, and support the work at Macaw Mountain. The free-flying macaws are already giving back to the Copán community in a very tangible way. It is not a big stretch to imagine that the concept could eventually contribute to elevating the image of Honduras itself.



I first started working with the Puerto Rican Amazon in December 1999. At that time the world was gripped by the fear that Y2K, a potentially huge catastrophe, would occur when computers stopped working on January 1, 2000. Happily these fears never materialized.

A SIMILAR STORY CAN BE TOLD FOR THE PUERTO Rican Amazon itself. This parrot once seemed on the verge of extinction, where any natural disaster could wipe it from the face of the earth forever. Fortunately, this also has not occurred, and now seems less likely every year. My 16 years of working with the birds, though, has taught me that we still have much to learn about these beloved, charismatic birds and more work to do before we can be assured that disaster never strikes them.

A group of Puerto Rican Amazons forages for palm fruits.

The near-disappearance of an island parrot

Puerto Rico, the smallest of the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean, is home to the rare Puerto Rican Amazon *(Amazona vittata)*, or Iguaca as the islanders affectionately refer to them, after the call they make when they take off to fly. By the early 1900s the Puerto Rican Amazon, the only endemic parrot still alive in a US territory, began to disappear from different locations on the island.

When efforts to save them started in 1946, the only remaining population was located in the wettest forest of Puerto Rico, El Yunque National Forest (better known as El Yunque). In 1967, the Puerto Rican Amazon was listed as an Endangered species, and in 1973, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initiated a captive breeding program. Since the program's birth, one of the main difficulties in saving the species has been the lack of wild breeding pairs' reproductive success.

Continued nest failure has been attributed to external factors such as predation and cavity loss caused by competition with other cavity nesting birds like the Pearly-eyed thrasher *(Margorops fuscatus)*. Honeybees *(Apis mellifera)* also compete for nests, and rats *(Rattus rattus)* not only compete for the cavities, but also voraciously consume eggs and even young chicks. Also, chicks and fledglings can fall victim to the parasite Warble fly *(Philornis pici)*, and high levels of rainfall. Hawks *(Buteo jamaicensis)* frequently predate adults, and if one is lost there is a high risk of nest failure. Human disturbance near nest sites is also related to unsuccessful nesting attempts.

Despite the influence of these external factors, no study to date has analysed the behavioural factors that occur inside the nest that may be affecting reproductive attempts. Natural disasters and epidemic diseases can lead to the extinction of small populations.

To avoid the complete extinction of wild living Puerto Rican Amazons, on November 19th 2006, the Río Abajo Commonwealth Forest (known as Río Abajo) became the new home of 22 free living birds in north-central Puerto Rico. At Río Abajo the effort

A bright and curious bird displays the tracking gear fixed to its back.

is led by the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. There are now two wild populations still supported by released captive-reared birds from the two groups held at each forest.

To date, many scientists have focused mostly on external factors affecting parrot survival and reproductive success, as previously described. These extrinsic factors are studied out of concern for wild populations' difficulties in increasing their numbers. From my observations of these parrots for the past 16 years, I learned that there are behavioural factors that affect chick development, from hatch until they reach independence from their parents. Bi-parental care is common across monogamous species of birds like the Puerto Rican Amazon. Such behaviour is an advantage when resources are limited. In birds, parental provisioning patterns improve incubation consistency, health and survival of the chicks.

These are some of the major issues with captive and wild Puerto Rican Amazon pairs. We now have the technology available to finally take a closer look at factors within the nest that are affecting Puerto Rican Amazon survival and reproduction, which will allow us to help wild populations become self-sustainable.

Life on the inside

Video monitoring began in the late 1990s at the old aviary at El Yunque. These cameras recorded the activity that happened inside breeding cages, but not the activity inside the nests. It wasn't until 2000 when monitoring inside the nest began with the wild population at El Yunque. These cameras facilitated the monitoring of captive nests too. Biologists can now observe behaviours in the nest without disturbing the nesting females. They can coordinate nest checks to verify more effectively the condition of eggs and chicks. The managers of the wild population at Río Abajo have also implemented this technology since 2006, but not yet with the Río Abajo captive population.

Parrots are not camera shy. I have observed that successful Río Abajo wild pairs are active in their nests, even with a camera inside.

The fact that the cameras operate in the infrared spectrum likely prevents the parrots from detecting them when activated. These pairs carry on as usual: taking care of their nest, cleaning it as thoroughly as a team of house cleaners, and they do it without a vacuum!

The most interesting behaviour occurs when they feed their chicks. Normally, both parents enter the nest together. When the chicks feel the parents entering the nest, they wake up, moving their heads clumsily. In nests with three chicks, the chicks barely give their parents the opportunity to enter the nest fully because they become so animated. On occasion, parents start feeding their chicks while clinging from the wire mesh lining the inside of the artificial nest. Each parent feeds until sure that each chick is satisfied. Moments after finishing feeding the chicks, the parents return to the forest for more food.

Sustaining three hungry mouths for more than four months, three times in a day is a monumental task. How difficult would this task be if males did not help feed chicks? Would it be possible for one parent to raise more than one chick? Do these parrots behave differently in captivity than in the wild? Could a single captive parent raise two chicks or more? Does the feeding rate by both parents have an effect on the survival of their chicks? These are some of the questions I intend to answer with my research.

A better method

We make use of minimally invasive techniques that guarantee the expression of natural parental behaviour to better understand the breeding behaviour of the Puerto Rican Amazon. The availability of remote systems allows recording of feeding and other behaviours inside nest cavities, something that was not possible in the past. All of the wild and captive nests at El Yunque National Forest are currently monitored with video cameras. The captive population has cameras placed inside and outside the nest, set to record for 24 hours. We use remote recording equipment to document and evaluate the parental behaviours at all active nests at El Yunque.


© Tanya Martinez

In 2015, with a grant from the World Parrot Trust, we purchased more equipment to record 10 out of 13 breeding pairs at the Río Abajo wild population. After video recording, I will measure the frequency at which parents feed their chicks. I will aim to collect data from both wild and captive populations at El Yunque and Río Abajo. Finally, I will compare this frequency of feeding with how many chicks and fledglings each pair produces at the end of the breeding season. This information will allow managers to determine whether pairs' feeding patterns and other behaviours can be used to predict their reproductive success, re-match pairs when necessary to diminish mortality among chicks, and improve the survival of this Critically Endangered species.

Wild Puerto Rican Amazon

I strongly believe that a better understanding of species' breeding behaviour is as important as preserving habitat in working to sustain wild populations of endangered species. After my doctoral studies are completed, I plan to continue my efforts, as a biologist at the Río Abajo location, to save the beloved Puerto Rican Amazon. Our team is very grateful to have the support of the World Parrot Trust, but will need more to continue the research over the next two breeding seasons.

Biologist **Brian Ramos Güivas** has worked with the Puerto Rican Amazon for the past 16 years. As a doctoral student at New Mexico State University, he has developed a study that will aid the conservation of the Puerto Rican Amazon. His interest as a scientist is to apply behavioural knowledge to conservation efforts.

Conservation of the Puerto Rican Amazon *(Amazona vittata)*

The world's population of 480 to 550 Critically Endangered Puerto Rican Amazons reside in the Río Abajo State Forest and El Yunque National Forest. Habitat loss and degradation, hunting, capture for the wild bird trade, and increases in severe weather have all caused critical declines in populations and near extinction in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Work by the US Fish and Wildlife service and others stopped the losses and the species is now slowly recovering.

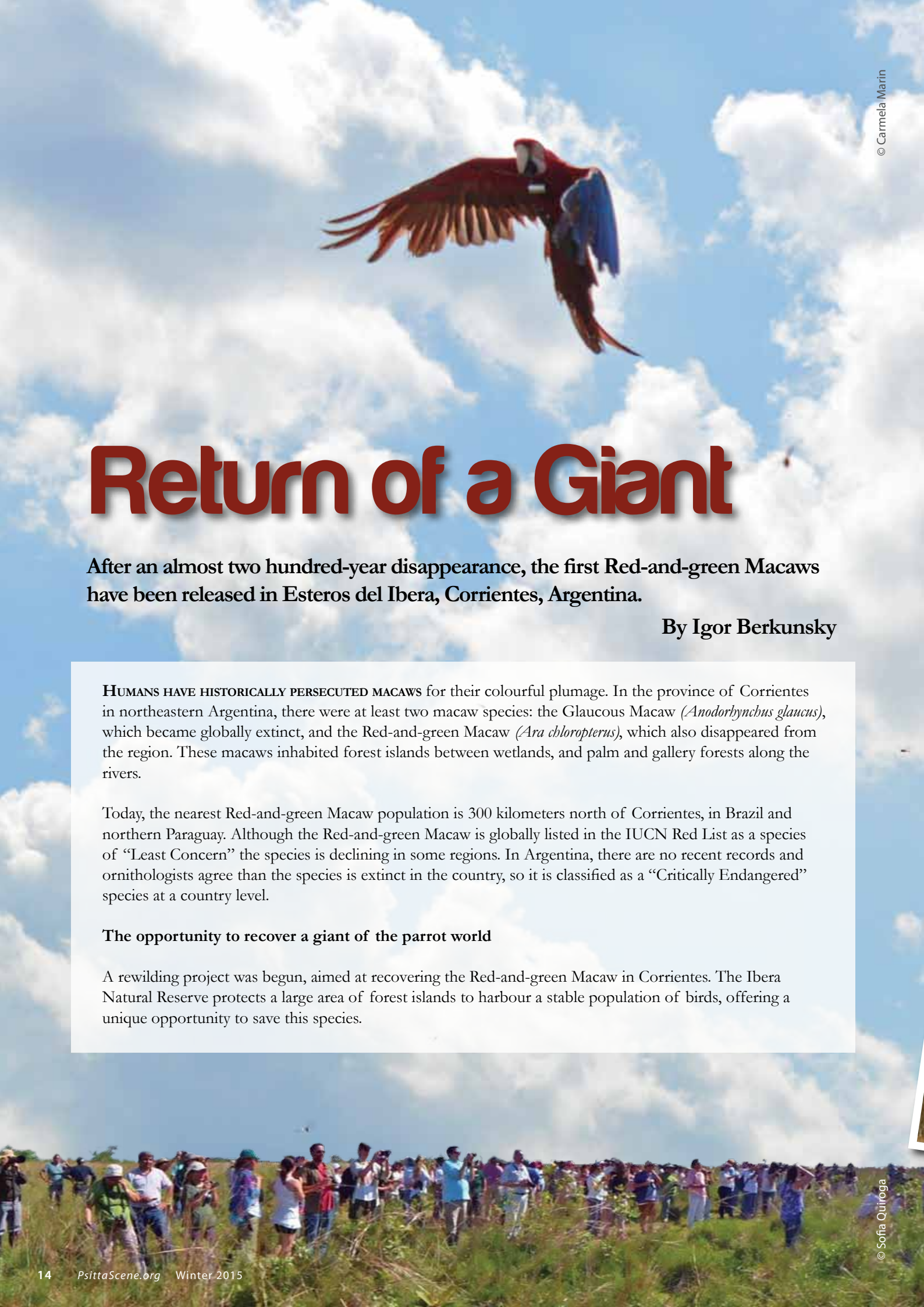
WPT Collaboration:

WPT partnered with Puerto Rican Department of Natural Resources in 2009 to support the breeding programs at the Río Abajo aviary. Around 430 birds are currently held in captivity at Río Abajo and Luquillo, with over a hundred birds being released back into the wild.

Future Efforts:

WPT is supporting new research which will examine the role of vocal duetting as a predictor of nesting and fledging outcomes, and learn if the male feeding rate during the incubation period affects the number of chicks that successfully hatch.

Researchers will also measure incubation consistency of the female and its effect on hatching success, and determine feeding patterns of individual chicks by both males and females and their effects on fledging success. The results of this study will be used to increase reproductive gain by selectively pairing males and females that exhibit particular breeding behaviours.



© Carmela Marin

Return of a Giant

After an almost two hundred-year disappearance, the first Red-and-green Macaws have been released in Esteros del Ibera, Corrientes, Argentina.

By Igor Berkunsky

Humans have historically persecuted macaws for their colourful plumage. In the province of Corrientes in northeastern Argentina, there were at least two macaw species: the Glaucous Macaw *(Anodorhynchus glaucus)*, which became globally extinct, and the Red-and-green Macaw *(Ara chloropterus)*, which also disappeared from the region. These macaws inhabited forest islands between wetlands, and palm and gallery forests along the rivers.

Today, the nearest Red-and-green Macaw population is 300 kilometers north of Corrientes, in Brazil and northern Paraguay. Although the Red-and-green Macaw is globally listed in the IUCN Red List as a species of "Least Concern" the species is declining in some regions. In Argentina, there are no recent records and ornithologists agree than the species is extinct in the country, so it is classified as a "Critically Endangered" species at a country level.

The opportunity to recover a giant of the parrot world

A rewilding project was begun, aimed at recovering the Red-and-green Macaw in Corrientes. The Ibera Natural Reserve protects a large area of forest islands to harbour a stable population of birds, offering a unique opportunity to save this species.

© Sofia Quiroga

Additionally, Ibera has many institutions and experts with experience in working with the restoration of extinct and endangered populations as diverse as the giant anteater, the pampas deer and the collared peccary. Another positive development is the growth of ecotourism in Ibera, where the presence of these birds will attract tourists, contributing to the development of local communities. The cultural value of Corrientes still present in artistic expressions and historical accounts has also been preserved for this reason.

From captivity to freedom in Ibera

The project focuses on using captive Red-and-green Macaws, originating from several zoos and rescue centers in the country. Selected birds arrive at "Aguará", a state rescue facility in Corrientes Province, where groups of individuals are consolidated and all health checks are performed to rule out diseases that may be spread in the wild following the release.

Before their release, the birds spent several weeks in an acclimation aviary in Cambyretá, the northern access of Ibera. In this aviary, the macaws learn to feed on native fruits and develop other skills for their reintegration into the wild. The birds are equipped with small radio transmitters that allow the tracking of each individual in the field. After their release and as they expand their range, the macaws are monitored by project staff to check their adaptation to the natural environment, reproduction and long-term survival.

The return of the Red-and-green Macaw is a collaboration of multiple institutions:

The Conservation Land Trust is financing most of the project thanks to a donation from a European philanthropist, and bringing its previous experience in wildlife reintroduction projects in Ibera. **Conservation scientists from the National Research Council** (CONICET) contribute their knowledge on the ecology of these birds and the reintroduction process. The state of Corrientes, through the **Natural Resources Agency**, provides the Aguará facilities, where the macaws are kept before being transferred to Ibera Reserve, where the Parks and Reserves Agency authorizes and supervises the implementation of the project on the ground. Several ecological parks, wildlife rescue centers and zoos across the country provide the macaws to be released. Conservation organisations such as **Aves Argentinas** and the **World Parrot Trust** have supported the project from its beginnings, contributing their skills and experience in the conservation of endangered species. Finally, **several groups of volunteers including scouts, schools and birders' clubs** assist in several stages of the project such as collecting wild fruits, building nest boxes and monitoring macaws in the field. Through this initiative, Argentina regains its first extinct species from the ex-situ management of wild bird specimens, and will continue working on their recovery through intensive management.

About the Author

Igor Berkunsky, PhD is a conservation biologist interested in parrot conservation and rewilding. He graduated from the Universidad Nacional de La Plata in La Plata, Argentina, Faculty of Natural Sciences, with a PhD in Ecology and has published a number of articles on his work. Igor studied Blue-fronted Amazons in the Argentinean Chaco for a decade, and led WPT's Blue-throated Macaw Project. Beginning in 2014, he initiated a rewilding project aimed at restoring macaw populations in northern Argentina.

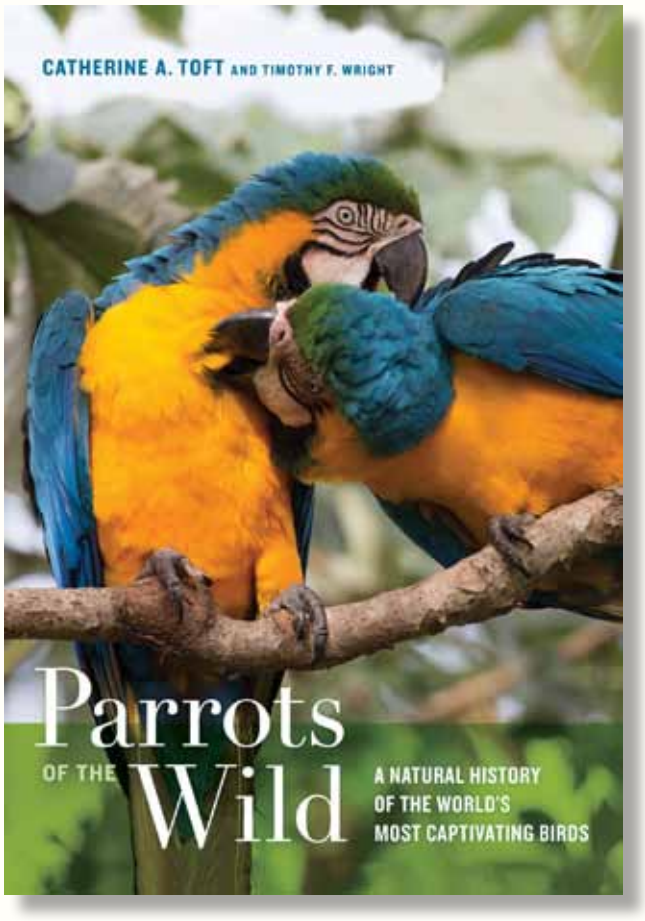
Volunteers Needed for Macaw Project in Argentina

The Rewilding Initiative in Argentina is on the lookout for volunteer field assistants for reintroduction work for the Red-and-green Macaw *(Ara chloropterus)* at Iberá, Corrientes, Argentina. The faint of heart need not apply: applicants must be disciplined, dedicated, diligent and tough.

Full Details Online: **http://tinyurl.com/ararewild**

NEW

FROM UC PRESS



"From their evolutionary past to their modern-day love lives, *Parrots of the Wild* presents a suitably captivating read. I thought I knew a lot about parrots—until I delved into these pages."

—Tony Juniper, author of *What Has Nature Ever Done for Us?* and *Spix's Macaw*

"Contributes very significantly to our knowledge of these fascinating birds. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in parrots."

—Joseph M. Forshaw, Australian Museum, American Ornithologists Union

Parrots of the Wild explores recent scientific discoveries and what they reveal about the lives of wild parrots. Catherine A. Toft and Tim Wright discuss the evolutionary history of parrots, conservation status, and the various ways different populations are adapting to a world that is rapidly changing. Featuring nearly ninety color photos of wild parrots, *Parrots of the Wild* melds scientific exploration with features directed at the parrot enthusiast to inform and delight a broad audience.

UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA PRESS

Advancing Knowledge
Driving Change

LEARN MORE

parrots.org/potw

Progress for African Parrots

By Dr. Rowan Martin

Recent successes in the fight against trade in Grey and Timneh parrots show that progress can be made in their protection, but new studies paint a bleak picture of the health of wild populations.

Trafficker arrested in Dakar

On the 18th of September, following months of painstaking investigations, Project SALF (Senegal-Application of the Wildlife Act) arrested a major trafficker of African parrots and other birds in Dakar, Senegal. The successful sting operation was conducted by Senegalese authorities and Project SALF, as part of an initiative funded through WPT. Over 800 parrots were confiscated. According to SALF director Charlotte Houpline, the seizure marks the first time an international trafficker of African parrots has been arrested in Senegal and brought to justice. It is hoped this represents a turning point in a country that has long been a major hub in the wild bird trade.

Among the birds confiscated were 89 Timneh parrots, which are categorised as globally Vulnerable by the IUCN. Timneh parrots are a focus of WPT's Africa Conservation Programme through a project funded by the IUCN's SOS fund (Save Our Species). CITES documentation found with the birds claimed that the Timneh parrots had originated in Mali, despite no wild populations occurring in the country. The parrots were illegally smuggled into Senegal and destined for export to Jordan.

WPT vet Davide de Guz travelled to Dakar prior to the confiscation and was on hand to oversee the transfer of the birds to a purpose-built facility at the Government department of Water and Forests. Many of the birds were in poor condition, weak and malnourished. Dr. de Guz drew on his experience of providing care for confiscated parrots elsewhere in Africa and immediately set to work stabilising

WPT vet Dr. Davide de Guz was in charge of care for the confiscated parrots.

An official business trading wild birds was used as a cover for the illegal trafficking of parrots.

the birds and providing training to local vets and carers. Building local capacity for the management of confiscated birds is an important part of WPT's strategy to support enforcement efforts around the world. WPT continues to work closely with the Senegalese authorities to find a long-term solution for the parrots and it is hoped that, once rehabilitated, it will be possible to release them back into the wild to support dwindling populations.

New data paints a bleak picture for West African parrots

Recent surveys in Ghana indicate Grey parrot populations have undergone a massive collapse over the last two decades. Ghanaian ornithologist Nathaniel Annorbah spent several months surveying forested areas of Ghana, returning to roost sites and other areas surveyed in the early 1990s. The research, which was recently published in the ornithological journal Ibis, and funded by the Loro Parque Foundation, used several lines of evidence to conclude that populations have declined by 90-99% since the early 1990s. Roosts, which once supported over 1000 parrots, were no longer active and interviews with former trappers found that the Grey parrot trade in Ghana has all but ceased – for the simple reason that there are too few parrots left.

Additional surveys in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire which were conducted as part of a project coordinated by BirdLife International and CITES similarly found very low densities of closely-related Timneh parrots. The authors of this research, published recently in the journal Oryx, concluded that given the few data available indicated a collapse of both Grey and Timneh parrot populations from virtually everywhere west of Cameroon, trade in either species from this region is currently untenable.

Parrot trafficker Aziz Sall was arrested along with five other persons.

Confiscated parrots were transported to purpose-built facilities.

Moratorium on trapping in eastern DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo has long been one of the leading exporters of Grey parrots, with swathes of intact forest in the country's interior likely supporting some of the largest remaining populations. In a reflection of patterns in West Africa, local declines are driving trappers into ever more remote areas with new frontiers of trapping emerging.

The Lukuru Foundation has been operating in eastern DRC for many years and with support from WPT has been monitoring wild populations and working with trappers and traders to assess the scale and impact of the trade. In just four months (May-August) this year, a minimum of 6,632 Grey parrots were observed passing through two regional airports. These data provide a clear indication that exports from DRC vastly exceed the recommended CITES quota of 5,000 per year. Taking into account trade through other routes and from other provinces, as well as the high death rates prior to export, the true number of parrots taken from the wild each year plausibly lies in the tens of thousands.

Perhaps most concerning is that many of the trappers and traders interviewed have moved into the area in the last few years and report declines in other provinces where they previously sourced parrots. Within the study area itself, multiple clearings were abandoned this year, as trappers sought more productive sites.

The Lukuru Foundation has built strong relationships with provincial authorities and it is hoped that meaningful action to address the unsustainable trapping of parrots will be forthcoming. Initial signs are positive. Following the presentation of the data on the scale and impact of the trade, the Environment ministry of Maniema Province proposed a 6-month moratorium on the trapping of parrots. Shipments of parrots from provincial airports have already been refused.

UPDATE: At the CITES Standing Committee in Geneva, the Secretariat has established a Trade Suspension for Grey parrots from DRC, allowing only 1,600 Greys to be traded.

References: Annorbah, N. D., Collar, N. J., & Marsden, S. J. (2016). Trade and habitat change virtually eliminate the Grey parrot *Psittacus erithacus* from Ghana, Ibis 158:82-91

Marsden, S. J., Loqueh, E., Takuo, J. M., Hart, J. A., & Abani, R. (2015). Using encounter rates as surrogates for density estimates makes monitoring of heavily-traded Grey parrots achievable across Africa. Oryx. Firstview online

Hart, J., Hart, T., Salumu, L., Bernard, A., Abani, R., & Martin, R. O. (2016). Increasing exploitation of Grey parrots in eastern DRC drives population declines. Oryx, 50(01), 16–17

WPT Africa Conservation Programme: www.parrots.org/africa

Glue sticks are used to capture the birds.

Provincial ministry official Lambert talks to villagers about parrot regulations.

TL2 staff member Mustapha with captured chicks.

STAFFING UPDATES

Matt Kirchhoff
Communications Director

Matt Kirchhoff is a member of the Association of Donor Relations Professionals, and is working with the WPT as a volunteer from his home in Anchorage, Alaska.

Matt moved to Alaska after he graduated from the College of Environmental Sciences and Forestry (NY) in 1975. In Alaska, he and his wife staked land, built a log cabin, and lived a subsistence lifestyle for several years. After completing his graduate degree in Ornithology at the University of Maine, he began a 25-year career as a wildlife research biologist for state and federal agencies, followed by 4 years as the Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Alaska. He has many peer-reviewed publications to his credit, and most recently, led the completion of a comprehensive Wildlife Action plan for the state of Alaska. Matt has also served as a trustee on a number of nonprofit boards, including as chair of the Audubon Alaska board, and chair (now trustee emeritus) of the Alaska Conservation Foundation.

Recently retired, Matt wanted to turn his conservation efforts towards species that are under severe pressure from human interference. Aside from a professional awareness of the plight of wild parrots, Matt also has empathy for companion parrots via experience with his son's Green-cheeked Conure and Hahn's Macaw. Although he could potentially help in several capacities given his experience, Matt felt he could do the most good by strengthening relationships with our supporters — the ones who fuel WPT's success, and is eager to work with others who share a passion for parrots and conservation. We are thrilled to welcome Matt to the WPT flock!

Tony Juniper
WPT Ambassador

Tony Juniper is an independent sustainability and environment advisor based in the UK. He has served as Special Advisor with the Prince's Charities International Sustainability Unit, is a Fellow with the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, a founding member of the Robertsbridge Group, and President of the Society for the Environment.

He began his career as an ornithologist, continuing a lifelong interest in birds and parrots in particular. In 1989 he joined the staff at International Council for Bird Preservation (now BirdLife International) to run the organisation's programme to conserve threatened parrots. In 1990 Dr. Juniper accompanied a team of scientists to search for wild populations of Spix's Macaws in the arid northeast of Brazil, with a project that was partially funded by the WPT. The discovery of a single remaining bird in a relict fragment of habitat helped to spark an international rescue programme for the species.

Despite moving to Friends of the Earth in 1990 to run that organisation's tropical rainforest campaign, Dr. Juniper retained a deep interest in parrots and in 1998 published, with his co-author Mike Parr, the award-winning *Parrots - A Guide to the Parrots of the World*. In 2002 he published the widely acclaimed *Spix's Macaw - The Race to Save the World's Rarest Bird*.

Dr. Juniper was asked recently what it is about parrots that drew him into the parrot world. He replied: *"As a child, I became interested in keeping birds in an aviary and so I began to learn about them, not only from the point of view of their lives in the wild, but also through a very basic interest in aviculture. As time went on, one interest broadened into issues of habitat destruction and tropical forests, and so all these areas came together. In parrots you find these almost human qualities, these bright colours, the intelligence, which kind of adds to the ones that you naturalistically have and adds a new dimension. I guess for me it is a combination of those things that draws me towards them."*

We are honoured to welcome Dr. Tony Juniper as WPT's Ambassador, in addition to continuing his work as our scientific advisor. In this role, he will work with WPT to raise awareness of the most critical issues facing parrots.

Online Extras ➲

Interview with Tony Juniper
Go online to listen to the interview between WPT's Tony Juniper and Charlie Moores of *Talking Naturally* in the **Learn > Podcasts** section of our website.
www.parrots.org/podcasts

NEWS

Two parrots uplisted by IUCN


Swift Parrot © J. Harrison via CC 3.0

Two parrot species have been uplisted on the 2015 IUCN Red List: the **Mexican Parrotlet** *(Forpus cyanopygius)*, a Neotropical bird, and the **Swift Parrot** *(Lathamus discolour*), a native of Tasmania and S Australia. The Mexican Parrotlet faces heavy trapping for the illegal parrot trade, as its range occurs close to the US border and along a main route for that activity. It has been uplisted to Near-threatened, with a population of less than 50,000.

The Swift Parrot faces a wider range of dangers: the loss of over 50% of the flowering Tasmanian Blue Gum *(Eucalyptus globulus)*, its main food source when breeding, is causing great concern. Other threats include competition for nest sites, collision with man-made objects, and introduced predators. A recent discovery revealed that they are under severe threat from introduced Sugar Gliders *(Petaurus breviceps)*, which prey on them. It has been uplisted to Critically Endangered, with a population of less than 2,000.

Aussie birds favour almonds for dining


Regent Parrot © Keith Lightbody

An extensive survey by scientists from Charles Sturt University and Subiaco's Australian Wildlife Conservancy has found that a great diversity of bird species are visiting almond orchards more frequently than other agricultural crops. In addition, some of Australia's most at-risk species are feeding on the nuts, with the eastern race of the Regent Parrot *(Polytelis anthopeplus)* most recorded, one of 11 parrot and cockatoo species seen.

Lead researcher Professor Gary Luck says the research draws attention to the value of agriculture to the survival of vulnerable species and points out an oft-unnoticed mutual relationship. Most literature concerning birds and crops has traditionally focussed on the birds causing crop damage. Prof Luck states "'…there is increasing interest in understanding the ecosystem services birds can provide agriculture, which can reduce costs to growers and improve crop yield." The birds remove leftover nuts on trees when the harvest is done, reducing the chance of fungal and insect infestation, which is a valuable service to the growers. Increasing the knowledge of this and other relationships between parrots and crops can provide benefit to both.

Read the article:
tinyurl.com/aussie-almonds

Tribute

Gary Aburn, Kakapo Tracker

Photo: Contributed

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy author Douglas Adams described ranger Gary 'Arab' Aburn as 'a man with a beard right down to his dog.' Officials with the DOC say that without Arab the Critically Endangered Kakapo, a flightless parrot from islands off the coast of New Zealand, might be functionally extinct.

Gary Aburn passed away September 8th 2015, aged 70 years. He was a hunter and ranger with the New Zealand Department of Conservation for many years, playing a pivotal role in the re-discovery and protection of the Kakapo. In April 1980 he caught the first female Kakapo in 70 or more years, verifying there was still a population of these birds. He did so when others had failed in their attempts – he had a special touch, a combination of years of experience in the bush and highly skilled tracking dogs, both of which led him to success.

In the twenty years that rangers spent capturing Kakapo for inclusion in the breeding programme, Arab caught 44 out of 86 of them. He spent decades on different islands performing feral animal control to aid endangered species, but it was the Kakapo that he loved the most: "You just have to ask anyone who works with them, they'll say they are their favourite. They are just an amazing bird."

You were an amazing conservationist Arab, rest in peace.

Events

Start off 2016 …with a trip to see wild parrots!

Brown-hooded Parrot © Steve Brookes

Steve Brookes' ***Wild Parrots Up Close*** travel company is trekking to Costa Rica once again, this time in March 2016. Steve promises interesting destinations, parrot projects and most importantly, wild parrots! Species native to the area include: Great Green and Scarlet Macaws, Crimson-fronted, Olive-throated, and Orange-fronted Conures, Red-fronted Parrotlets, Brown-hooded, Blue-headed and White-crowned Parrots, and many more! A parrot birding trip of a lifetime, and best of all, a portion of the proceeds will go to parrot conservation.

Learn more:
wildparrotsupclose.com

Opportunities

Echo and Ara Project - call for volunteers

WPT partners **Echo** and **Ara Project** are carrying out important work for parrots, in Bonaire and Costa Rica respectively, and they always need volunteers to help! If you have time to spare, take a look at their ongoing opportunities by following the links below, and see if you fit the bill.

Volunteer at Echo:
echobonaire.org/volunteer

Volunteer at Ara Project:
thearaproject.org

Access Past Issues at: Psittascene.org

WPT Contacts

WEB
parrots.org
psittascene.org
facebook.com/WorldParrotTrust
twitter.com/parrottrust

PsittaScene Editor
Desi Milpacher
dmilpacher@parrots.org

WPT Members - Join or Renew:
parrots.org/join

MAIN — UK & World
Karen Whitley
uk@parrots.org

USA
Glenn Reynolds
usa@parrots.org

AFRICA
Rowan Martin
africa@parrots.org

AUSTRALIA
Nicholas Bishop
australia@parrots.org

BENELUX
Ruud Vonk
benelux@parrots.org

NETHERLANDS
Ria Vonk
netherlands@parrots.org

BELGIUM
Ronald Coens
belgium@parrots.org

BRAZIL
André Saidenberg
brazil@parrots.org

CANADA
Michelle Kooistra
canada@parrots.org

INDIA
Avin Deen
india@parrots.org

ITALY
Cristiana Senni
csenni@parrots.org

JAPAN
TSUBASA
japan@parrots.org

SWEDEN
Maria Rogstadius
sweden@parrots.org

PERU / SPAIN / CENTRAL AMERICA
Rosa Elena Zegarra
centralamerica@parrots.org

Languages Available:
Dutch, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish