

# PSITTAScene

Magazine of the WORLD PARROT TRUST



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**ABOUT THE WPT**

Capture for the live-bird trade, habitat loss and other factors put wild parrots at risk. Nearly 30% of all parrot species are considered by IUCN to be at risk of global extinction.

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

Since 1989 the WPT has grown to become a global force that moves quickly to address urgent issues and support long-term projects. Over that time WPT has led or aided conservation and welfare projects in 45 countries for more than 80 species of parrot.

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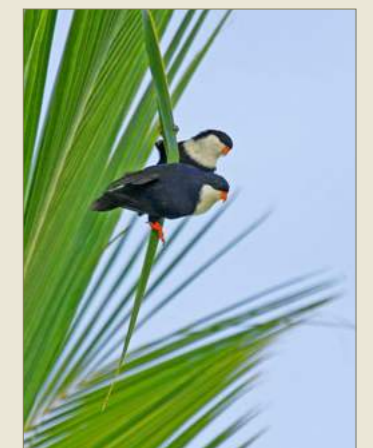
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**ON THE COVER**

Photo © Pete Morris via Alamy Stock Photo

Tiny and tricky to spot in the canopy, Blue Lorikeets (*Vini peruviana*) are seen in small flocks and are very active and acrobatic while feeding.

Learn more in *The Kurāmo’o of Aitutaki*, Page 5.



Partner Spotlight:



COOK ISLANDS  
NATURAL HERITAGE  
TRUST

The Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust is a government programme that aims to collect, integrate, preserve and make available to the general public scientific and traditional information on the biodiversity, nature and environment of the Cook Islands.

One of the species the Trust is working to protect is the Kuramo'o or Blue Lorikeet (*Vini peruviana*), a small parrot with dark blue plumage and a white chest patch. The Blue Lorikeet is native to French Polynesia but also occurs in the Cook Islands on Aitutaki Island.

Listed as Vulnerable in the wild, the Blue Lorikeet is threatened by introduced predators and habitat loss from an increasing number of severe storms across its range. In 2010, the World Parrot Trust co-funded a survey on Aitutaki to determine the extent of Cyclone Pat's impact on the Blue Lorikeets. The research concluded that the storm had caused a reduction of 50% of the population, with approximately 1500 birds left at the time.

The Blue Lorikeet is a beautiful and unique bird that requires protection. By supporting World Parrot Trust and partners like The Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust we can help to ensure its survival in the face of climate change and other threats. For more information, see **The Kurāmo'o of Aitutaki** on page 5.

### What will be your legacy?

Let your dedication to parrots live on! Leaving a legacy gift to the parrots through your estate may be one of the most fulfilling contributions you will ever make.

Visit our website at [parrots.org/legacy](http://parrots.org/legacy) or contact an office near you (see page 27.)



Yellow-billed Amazon © Neil Bowman, Getty Images



## The Kurāmo'o of Aitutaki

Article and photos by Luis Ortiz-Catedral

**L**ast year I had the opportunity to visit one of the most beautiful islands in the world: Aitutaki, in the Cook Islands. Aitutaki is atoll-like, with numerous islets and rocks dotted along the outline of the lagoon over an area of seven square miles. Aitutaki and its islets are covered in trees and shrubs, making it a speckle of green in the vast turquoise waters of the South Pacific. The purpose of my visit was to find the Kurāmo'o, or Blue Lorikeet (*Vini peruviana*), and to kickstart a partnership with local agencies to better understand the status of

the species on Aitutaki. This is one of ten or so lorikeet species in the *Vini* genus, a group of parrots that extends from the Solomon Islands to French Polynesia. *Vini* lorikeets are amongst the most vulnerable land birds in the South Pacific. Introduced rats eat their eggs and chicks while cyclones can profoundly impact the availability of flowers and fruits thus affecting the survival prospects of these sugar-loving parrots. They are also tricky to keep in captivity, thus limiting the potential for captive breeding to assist in their conservation.

The history of the Kurāmo'o is fascinating. The species was described by Philipp Ludwig Stadius-Müller in 1776, the same year of his death. Stadius-Müller originally named the bird "*Psittacus peruvianus*", indicating that the species origin was Peru. Back in those days, European naturalists would describe species without ever seeing them in the wild and often from a single specimen. Stadius-Müller never realised that the stuffed bird he used to describe a new species had been merely shipped to Europe via Peru, but was most likely collected in French Polynesia.





Up to the early 1700's, the Kurāmo'o was one of the most widespread lorikeets in the South Pacific, inhabiting at least 20 islands and various islets across French Polynesia. Nowadays, it occurs only on Aitutaki and less than 10 islands in French Polynesia. Interestingly, the Kurāmo'o might have been introduced to Aitutaki by Polynesians early in the 19th century from the Tuamotu or Society Islands. The earliest records of Kurāmo'o on Aitutaki by Europeans date back to 1899, but the species has not been found in subfossil material on the island. Paleontological evidence indicates that the closely related Kura (*Vini kuhlii*) occurred on Aitutaki but is no longer found there. *Vini* lorikeets are indeed a treasure trove of information about the biodiversity of the islands of the South Pacific and of the impacts of humans on the ecology of the region.

Aitutaki is my kind of place: white sandy beaches, coconut palms and hot temperatures. With just under 2000 inhabitants the pace of life is relaxed and friendly. Sporting a new pair of hiking boots, long-sleeve shirt and sturdy field trousers, I set out to explore the island on foot in search of these intriguing Blue Lorikeets. Boy was that a mistake. The island is simply too hot to wear hiking boots and trousers. *You are not in Kansas anymore Toto*, I said to myself.

By mid-morning I was drenched in sweat and quite tired. What kept my spirits up were lots of sightings of Kurāmo'o flying among coconut groves. Everywhere I went people offered a car or scooter ride, but I explained that I wanted to cover the island on foot, looking for Kurāmo'o. I did, however, accept a ride back to my accommodation in the early evening when I was done for the day. After eating a modest dinner of local pan fried fish, onions and breadfruit chips, I crashed, sleeping like a log.

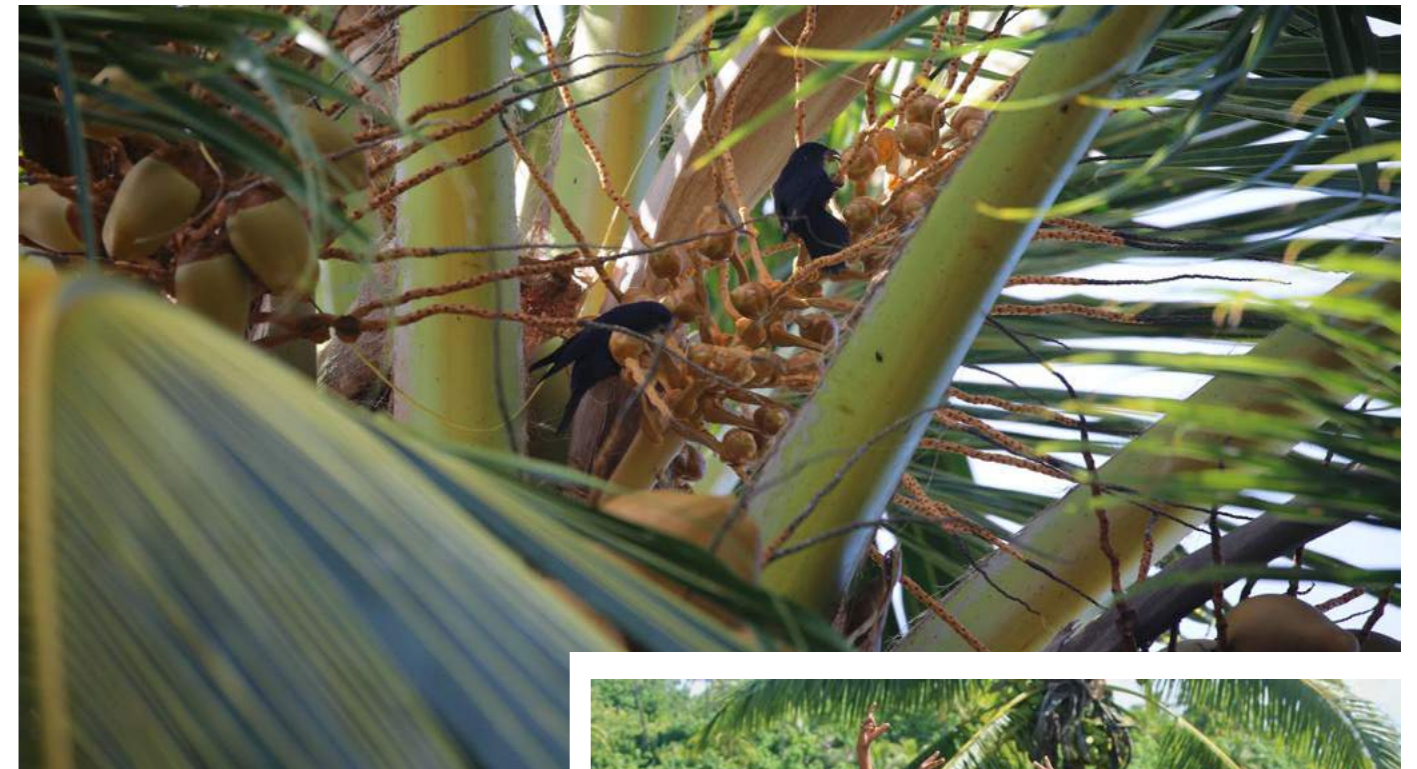
On Day 2 I decided to take a different approach. Lathered in sunscreen and wearing a tank top, shorts and running shoes I walked along the inner contour

of the lagoon. Within an hour I had to ditch the shoes and walk in shallow water, which offered a great perspective of the distribution of the main patches of vegetation and the flying paths of some Kurāmo'o. At one point I had to cross a private garden at the edge of the lagoon back to the main road, as the water was too deep to continue walking.

The owner of the property was delighted to hear I was looking for the Kurāmo'o. I waved goodbye to continue my walk but didn't leave empty handed; she gave me a ripe heavy papaya which I devoured later for lunch. I also asked her if I could crack open coconuts I found lying on the beach to drink the water, as I wasn't sure if those were up for grabs. She laughed heartily and nodded. When I was done with my surveys on Day 2 I opened two coconuts and was rewarded with the freshest coconut water ever. I didn't mind that it wasn't cold; it tasted wonderful.



On my second to last day, having walked some 10 km on the SE side of the island, a group of local kids on scooters drove past me and shouted at the top of their lungs: Kurāmo'o! They recognised me as the foreigner looking for these lorikeets, which wasn't that hard as word spread fast about the newcomer carrying a large camera and binoculars walking all over the island in search of these birds. I waved and they turned around and asked for a photograph which I happily took. That image sums up my impression of Aitutaki on my first visit: a colourful and friendly island.



By day four, having walked nearly 100 km and after opening many coconuts, I had registered 180 Kurāmo'o distributed across most of the island except the southernmost part where coconut palms are less abundant. I saw them feeding predominantly on nectar and pollen of coconut flowers, carefully nibbling at the petals and stamens of hibiscus buds, and banana tree buds. I also observed two juveniles with their almost even blue plumage, nibbling at coconut flowers. I also located several potential nesting hollows on dead trees. Kurāmo'o are fairly common on Aitutaki, however they are highly susceptible to depredation by introduced rats already present on the island.

This year, the World Parrot Trust in partnership with two local agencies, the Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust and Te Ipukarea Society, will begin a project funded by the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust aimed at enhancing the species' breeding success by protecting nests. The same project aims to estimate Kurāmo'o numbers on the island. Stay tuned for future updates. 📷



**Top:** Difficult to spot, Blue Lorikeets are masters of climbing and foraging in the tangled forest canopy.

**Middle:** Friendly islanders welcome the author to paradise.

**Bottom:** An idyllic scene on the beach at Aitutaki.

# Endangered Lear's Macaws Find Refuge at Paradise Park in Cornwall

Paradise Park UK, home to many of the world's most endangered parrot species, has expanded its conservation efforts with the recent addition of a group of Lear's Macaws.

Twelve birds made their way to the Park on May 27th following an urgent need for a change in their living situation. This group of Lear's Macaws, illegally smuggled into the UK in the 1980s and subsequently confiscated by Customs and Excise officials, have been kept in seclusion ever since at a different facility. Over time, the birds have increased their population through breeding.

As the only Lear's Macaws in the UK, their preservation is critical. "These are important birds; an Endangered species threatened by habitat loss, hunting, and the wild bird trade," explains David Woolcock, Curator of Paradise Park. "We are proud to be the only sanctuary in the UK to house them. Our objective is to provide a safe and nurturing environment that helps each bird express their unique character."

Paradise Park, in collaboration with the World Parrot Trust (WPT), worked around-the-clock to build new aviaries suitable for the birds. The WPT is already actively involved in conservation work for Lear's Macaws in their native Brazil. Future plans for these magnificent birds may include reintroduction into their native habitat as part of a larger conservation project aimed at preserving the species.

David Woolcock continues, "Working with the many rare and endangered species at Paradise Park is always rewarding, and we were more than happy to provide a home for the Lear's. We know our visitors will love these beautiful birds as much as we do."

The Park and its dedicated team remain committed to conservation efforts for these and other endangered species, striving to offer safe havens and contribute to the preservation of the world's biodiversity.



Lear's Macaw aviaries at Paradise Park, Cornwall UK



## Lear's Macaw (*Anodorhynchus leari*)

**About:**  
The Lear's Macaw — also known as the Indigo Macaw — is a large, all-blue Brazilian macaw classified as IUCN Endangered.

With a population of fewer than 1700, it faces threats such as habitat loss and degradation due to agriculture, illegal trapping, past hunting for food and feathers, genetic diversity loss, predation of eggs and juveniles, and Africanised bee invasions in nest burrows.

**Learn More Online:**  
[tinyurl.com/learsmacaw](http://tinyurl.com/learsmacaw)



**Paradise Park**  
WILDLIFE SANCTUARY • CORNWALL UK



## PARADISE PARK'S GOLDEN YEAR!

*50 Seasons of Conservation, Education and Family Enjoyment*

**This past April 14th marked an important milestone for the World Parrot Trust's founding institution, Paradise Park, based in the UK: the well-loved and award-winning facility celebrated its golden anniversary with a day of fun and events for all ages.**

Founded by Mike and Audrey Reynolds in 1973, Paradise Park has transformed from its humble beginnings as a small tropical bird collection into an important conservation and education facility.



And grown it has, by leaps and bounds: attractions for all ages include the Jungle Barn, the Gardens, Tropics and Walk-through Aviary, daily Events and Quizzes, Jungle Express Train, the Australian Aviary walk-through, regular Penguin feedings, Fun Farm and many immersive yearly events.

As for the animals they care for, there are birds of every colour and stripe: Palm, Citron-crested and Leadbeater's Cockatoos, Scarlet, Great Green and Blue-throated Macaws, Sun and Golden Conures, Mitchell's Lorikeets, Lilian's Lovebirds and Keas, plus Humboldt's Penguins, Red-billed Choughs, Caribbean Flamingos, various touracos, hornbills, pheasants and more. They also look after Red Pandas, Asian Otters, Red Squirrels, Pygmy Goats and Miniature Donkeys. The animals' well-being is the staff's top priority with health checks, special diets and plenty of creative enrichment to stimulate natural behaviours.

Conservation is a huge focus. From breeding-for-release projects like Operation Chough to the founding of the World Parrot Trust, the Park very early on recognised the need for protecting the most endangered species, especially parrots. They established Operation Chough in 1987, the World Parrot Trust in 1989, followed by projects for Red Squirrels and Blue-throated Macaws.

They've also supported endangered Red Pandas, the International Vulture Programme, the Water Vole Reintroduction Project, Barn Owl conservation in Cornwall, and

more. Education is hand-in-glove with Paradise Park's conservation and welfare aims. At the Park, educational and entertaining signage is featured at every turn. There are trails sprinkled with question and answer signs to test the most keen animal lovers' mettle while they're wandering. Nest cams dot the landscape, providing an intimate view of the various inhabitants. During feeding times and flying shows Keepers give talks on the species featured, highlighting their ecological and conservation status. School children come to immerse themselves in the sights and sounds, and college students come to learn about animal care.

Everywhere you look there is something to see and learn. So here's to Paradise Park — may she shine for 50 more years! Visit Paradise Park on the web: [paradisepark.org.uk](http://paradisepark.org.uk)





A Great Green Macaw pair peers out of their nest hole in an almendro tree; Sarapiquí, Costa Rica. © Corey Raffel

The Mountain Almond (*Dipteryx panamensis*) — locally known as the almendro — is an enormous tree reaching heights of 50 meters (164 feet), and can be seen towering over the rainforest canopy.

It is a primary food and nesting source for the Great Green Macaw. Sadly, over-harvesting has significantly diminished these trees' numbers.

## Four Orgs in Two Countries:



### A Great Green Macaw Primer

Great Green Macaws (*Ara ambiguus*) are large, olive-green birds that would nearly blend into the forest canopy were it not for their impressive contact calls, acrobatic flights and bright red forehead. They are found in E Honduras and Nicaragua through Costa Rica, and from Panama to NW Colombia. Subspecies *guayaquilensis* is confined to W Ecuador in Esmeraldas and Guayas.

These macaws are IUCN Critically Endangered in the wild through a combination of human causes, the main one being the loss of important nesting and food trees due to deforestation and drought.

Additionally, despite their Appendix I status they continue to be trapped throughout their range and are even hunted for food in some areas. Because they are long-lived they reproduce slowly, thus

population declines that occur are difficult to reverse. Recent estimates place the population at around 500 -1,000 mature individuals worldwide.

The World Parrot Trust (WPT) is working with a number of partners who, with funding from Tracy Aviary in the US, are devoted to bringing this special macaw back from the brink.

**Read on to meet the teams.**

# 1 Ara Manzanillo

Beginning in 2010, the Ara Manzanillo team established a Great Green Macaw reintroduction project in a national wildlife refuge near Manzanillo, Costa Rica with the aim of establishing a self-sustaining population there. Ongoing work includes monitoring and health-checking the wild population, captive breeding-for-release, and increasing wild breeding success by installing nest boxes and supplementally feeding wild chicks in need of a boost.


As of 2022, the team has installed 20 artificial nests and from these over 50 Great Green chicks have gone on to join the wild population. The 2023 breeding season has seen over 60 chicks fledge from artificial nests, with many other juveniles hatched in natural cavities joining the adult population. To date, the team has successfully reintroduced 45 captive-bred macaws. And yearly, there are wild birds that need rescuing and rehabilitation, whether from predator attacks or confiscations.

The program has greatly expanded to include community engagement in awareness activities at the breeding station and elsewhere, and receiving students and conservation workers to the site to learn about the macaws and their breeding ecology. The team also relies on volunteer internships for help in the field.

And, with the macaws' forest rapidly being lost there is a critical need to start replacing it; the team cultivates native trees and thus far they have planted out over a thousand trees, primarily mountain almonds. The team's latest effort is to restore the 30 hectares of forest surrounding the field station with select native species to support food security as the flock continues to grow.



**Left:** Staff and volunteers plant out plots in an ongoing reforestation effort  
**Right, top:** Great Green Macaws inspect a nest box  
**Right, bottom:** A macaw feasts on Chonta palm seed  
 Photos © Ara Manzanillo



**Ara Manzanillo works to ensure the long-term future of macaws in Costa Rica's South Caribbean through restoring them to their historic range, contributing to the scientific community, encouraging the protection of tropical forests, and educating the public to assure the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.**

**Visit their website:**  
[aramanzanillo.org](http://aramanzanillo.org)




# 2 Macaw Recovery Network

At Punta Islita on the south coast of Costa Rica, efforts to boost and monitor wild macaw populations, preserve their habitat and connect with communities continue. On the research front, the Macaw Recovery Network (MRN) team, Forestry and Wildlife, community volunteers, birders and partner organisations aim to gain an estimate of macaw numbers in the country to find out how they are faring. In progress as well are surveys to locate roosts and discover how and where the birds travel in the area. Sixty-three Audiomoths (sound recording devices) have been installed through 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Costa Rica's northern zone to detect the macaws' presence. They'll be reviewed mid-year to complete research uncovering the spatial distribution, or geographic range, of Great Green Macaws in the area.

MRN staff and university students also join forces to complete critical work. This year a Master's student from the US and two volunteer biologists are monitoring wild nests, and health-checking, genetic sampling and fitting the chicks with radio collars.

Engaging communities benefits both people and Great Greens - local women are being trained to identify, collect and propagate the seeds of trees important to the macaws. The Women Rangers Program in Boca Tapada, Alajuela was founded in 2020. A nursery, "Casa del Titor," which the women manage, currently houses 4,000 plants comprising 43 different plant species. The group has learned to monitor and record the weather and the plants' progress, and coordinate monthly trips out into the wilderness to collect more seeds to bring to the nursery. The team has, to date, planted 1,520 trees and aims to plant a total of 6,000 within the next two years, an ambitious project requiring coordinated efforts from seed collectors and nursery workers to land surveyors and through community outreach.

**The Macaw Recovery Network's mission is to protect and recover endangered parrot populations in the Americas. MRN envisions a future in which parrots and their ecosystems thrive and coexist with local communities.**

**Visit their website:**  
[macawrecoverynetwork.org](http://macawrecoverynetwork.org)



**Top:** Members of the Macaw Recovery Network team  
**Left:** Casa del Titor, home of present and future forests  
**Middle:** MRN trustee members visit the facilities  
**Right:** A Women Rangers team member with a recently planted seedling  
 Photos © Macaw Recovery Network

# 3 ADOPTA Bosque



In Panama, the threat situation for Great Green Macaws is similar to other countries where the species is found; there are, however, less data on distribution and how the wild birds are coping. This increases the urgency of meeting the challenges facing these macaws. One issue that is known: the trees they choose for nesting tend to be large and old and as a result, frequently fall due to storms or are cut by people. This has been a significant obstacle to their breeding success and recovery.

ADOPTA Bosque works in two indigenous territories, La Marea and Bajo Lepe, in the Darién region, which borders with Colombia and may be highly important as a stronghold for Great Green Macaws. The team works to engage local communities with education and awareness programs to change their perceptions of these macaws and to instill the idea that the birds are better off living in the natural world for the benefit of all.

Communities will gain much from their involvement by becoming nest monitors and trackers, in addition to taking part in ecotourism, handicrafts, and other initiatives. These new activities will help to minimise damaging slash-and-burn agriculture practices and poaching activities.

Further, ADOPTA Bosque collaborates with community members to get them involved in citizen science projects such as nest box construction, installation and monitoring, and reforestation.

As for research and conservation, the team has now located up to five active Great Green Macaw nests. ADOPTA Bosque is looking to increase nest site availability and protection within the Darién, and obtain new data on the birds' habitat use and movements in the area. They have gone further afield in their partnerships and reach, joining a regional collaboration with Colombia and Costa Rica and having journalists from news organisations come to spread the group's work and message across the world for greater awareness and support.

**ADOPTA Bosque (Adopt a Panama Rainforest Association) is dedicated to the conservation of Panama's unique ecosystems. Through donations and volunteer efforts, the team works to protect the natural wonders of Panama and educate the public about the importance of the neotropics.**

**Visit their website: [adoptabosque.org](http://adoptabosque.org)**



**Top and bottom:** Team members work at height installing and checking artificial nest drums for the macaws.

Photos © Bienvenido Velasco @ Agencia EFE

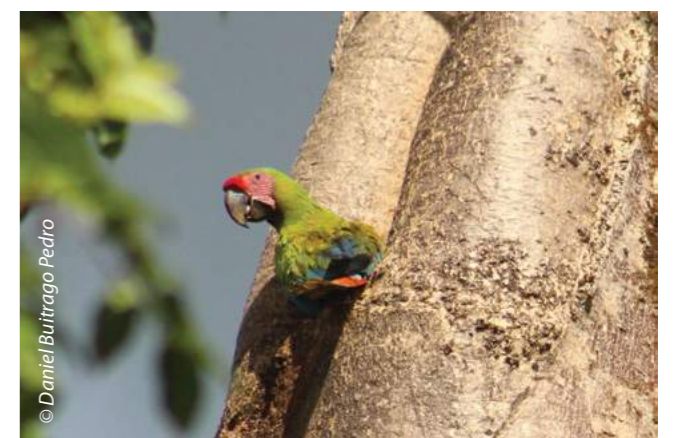
# Panama Wildlife Conservation 4



**PANAMA** wildlife conservation

Based in the UK, Panama Wildlife Conservation (PWCC) has been working to protect Great Green habitat in an effort to bolster their numbers. Their scientifically-based endeavours take them to a protected area known as Cerro Hoya National Park (CHNP), located on the Azuero Peninsula in the south of the country. This area and its buffer zones have been subjected to the most severe habitat degradation in the country through agriculture and drought. Conservation efforts here include habitat restoration (planting over 4000 native flora and trees important to macaw survival), population monitoring, and education and outreach programs. The team is also working with local communities to promote sustainable practices, such as ecotourism, that encourage the protection of macaw roosting and breeding habitat and also benefit people. PWCC's team has also edited and printed the first educational booklet about natural history, ecology and conservation of Great Green Macaws for local school children, with the support of the University of Manchester and the WPT.

Crucially, PWCC is also seeking to uncover where the macaws occur, tree species used as food sources, the birds' ecology, and to explore ongoing and emerging threats. Population studies of the isolated groups that live in the southern part of the peninsula continue with the aim of comparing new data with population estimates elsewhere. So far, they have identified four nesting sites within the CHNP and a flock of over a dozen individuals in the western edge of the park, with more reported on the eastern side. These sightings bring hope for the populations of this area.



**Left:** PWCC team members survey the landscape in macaw habitat  
**Right, top:** A Great Green Macaw pair investigates a nest cavity  
**Right, bottom:** A lone macaw keeps a watchful eye on activities

**Panama Wildlife Conservation is an organisation dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity, animal species and their habitats through the collaboration with local residents and organisations in Panama.**

**Visit their website: [panamawildlife.org](http://panamawildlife.org)**



# HURRICANE FIONA AND THE PUERTO RICAN AMAZONS: UPDATE FROM THE MARICAO SITE

by Kenneth X. Rodriguez-Rivera and Lorna V. Alvarado-Rodriguez

**T**he Maricao facilities are in the mid-western part of the Island of Puerto Rico. Our facilities are a release site only and every year, we receive candidates from the two aviaries on the Island.

Our focus is to train the Puerto Rican Amazons (*Amazona vittata*) to find wild fruits and provide them with flight training so they can survive in the wild, become a third wild parrot population and eventually, connect with flocks from the Jose Vivaldi aviary in Utuado.



© Tanya Martínez



Chick exam © Kenneth Rodriguez Rivera



In the shelter © Kenneth Rodriguez Rivera



Moving the birds to safety © Lorna Alvarado

Hurricanes are part of the Puerto Rican culture and way of life. This is also true of flora and fauna, in the way that forests need hurricanes for native vegetation to grow. But when monster hurricanes like Maria hit, destruction is sure to follow. We start tracking hurricanes when they leave Africa and when they get to the Caribbean, it becomes clearer if they will pass through or hit us. Hurricane intensity is also determined closer to the Island. We check the news daily to start making decisions about moving the birds or leaving them in their cages; this depends on the hurricanes' severity and how much stress the birds endure. When Fiona's landfall was imminent, we decided to capture all caged birds as quickly and gently as possible to minimise stress.

Once captured, birds are moved into the safety of the hurricane room to be monitored and fed daily until the hurricane passes. We knew that Fiona was a strong storm, but we did not expect it to become a Category 1 hurricane hours before hitting Puerto Rico. Fiona entered Puerto Rico at the southwestern part of the Island and brought with her 30-60cm of rain and 85mph sustained winds. The

damage in Maricao was worse than we expected: mudslides were huge, big enough to cover roads and took days to clean up; trees had blocked the main roads and power lines were broken by fallen branches. This destruction eliminated power to the island for almost a month and limited access to the town centre and the aviary.

When the hurricane passed, we tried searching for the wild parrots but as expected, almost all of them were not in the area. Then, we started seeing more individuals visiting the wild supplemental feeding stations; they were starting to come back! We used the VHF transmitters to locate approximately where they were via telemetry until they eventually came back to the main area. Thankfully, none of our parrots died or got lost due to the storm. This was a relief, because the Maricao project is just starting again since Maria wiped out the wild population five years ago. We now have 14 wild parrots and 26 release candidates that joined the wild flock in January. They are allopreening and allofeeding, indicating the beginning of mate selection and hopefully, when we release them, pairs will be fully bonded and ready to mate. ☑

## About the Authors



Lorna V. Alvarado-Rodriguez

Lorna holds a bachelor's degree in Natural Sciences with a minor in Marine Biology from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Bayamón campus. In 2021 she started working for the WPT as a Wildlife Biologist in the Maricao State Forest for the newly established parrot population.



Kenneth X. Rodriguez-Rivera

With a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Puerto Rico, Ken is on track to complete his master's degree. He started working for WPT during the Summer of 2022 as a Wildlife Biologist in the co-management and recovery efforts of *Amazona vittata* at Maricao. Ken is currently pursuing a PhD in Wildlife Conservation focused on avian ecology.



© Tanya Martínez

# HURRICANE FIONA AND THE PUERTO RICAN AMAZONS: UPDATE FROM RÍO ABAJO

by Sara Remmes

**Nearly 5 years to the day after Hurricane Maria pummelled Puerto Rico, Hurricane Fiona made landfall on September 18, 2022 along the southwestern coast of the island near Punta Tocon, leaving roads flooded and knocking out the power grid, plunging the island’s population of about 3.2 million people into a total blackout.**

**I** can confidently say that of all of the different locations I have lived within the Caribbean, no community has shown such expert precision in tracking local weather patterns like Puerto Rico. Every person that lives on the island has some form of app on their phone that tracks weather systems the moment they are detected off the coast of Africa.

These live radar maps analyse the development of potential hurricanes and project their trajectory. As accurate as these models are, the direction of growing storms can remain wildly unpredictable – as we found out with Hurricane Fiona.

Preparation for hurricane season began in August. Having a captive population that exceeds 200 means that care must be taken to verify that every bird has a place in the Hurricane shelter. More

organization and planning you can accomplish before a natural disaster reduces the likelihood of costly mistakes. Ironically, no one anticipated that Fiona would even hit the island. News anchors issued cautionary wind warnings, while locals mainly prepared for heavy rains. It wasn’t until twenty-four hours before Fiona made landfall that anyone realised how quickly circumstances would change.

I received the phone call from my supervisor early Saturday morning that overnight Fiona had developed into a Category 1 hurricane. All staff were needed immediately at the aviary. By then it was raining so hard that I could barely see the road in front of me. I hastily packed my dog in the car in case a treefall event or mudslide trapped me at the center overnight.

Nets were pulled from storage and all functioning transport cages

were utilised to facilitate the mass migration of parrots to safety. Fledglings and breeding pairs were kept in groups while everyone else had their own designated cage inside of the shelter. To make matters more complicated, of the 210 Amazons that comprise our captive population, almost half are housed in large flight cages. The enormity of this task resulted in us capturing birds in the rain until the very last light the day provided us. The final aviary to complete housed the release cohort candidates and by the time we netted the last individual the forest had become completely dark. It took our team of five over six hours to capture and relocate every parrot into the hurricane shelter. Now all that was left to do was wait, and hope.

Hurricane Fiona made landfall the following morning. Even though the strongest impacts were felt in the South, the winds

tearing through the forests in the North made it feel as though you were standing in a wind tunnel. The time the hurricane spent crossing the island may have been insignificant, but damage to the infrastructure of Puerto Rico was anything but. Understory trees were destroyed, power lines grounded and rivers flooded to the point of pulling entire bridges from their foundations. Two staff members watching over the captive population became trapped at the aviary due to several trees falling and blocking the road.

Once the rains had subsided the following morning, I gathered supplies and hiked up to the center. Upon arrival, I immediately heard a wild flock of thirty Amazons crossing the forest. They appeared wet and agitated but otherwise eager to return to their routine foraging bouts. Something I was reminded of in that moment is that many of the birds in our wild population are survivors from Hurricane Maria. It’s genuinely unbelievable what forces a 250-gram parrot can learn to adapt to and overcome.

Thanks to our precautions and the safety provided by the hurricane shelter we experienced no mortalities to our captive population. Within two days of the storm passing through, the parrots were safe to be placed back

in their enclosures outdoors. The forest was miraculously mostly intact, and there was no serious damage to any of the aviaries. The biggest challenge that the staff would face for the following weeks was losing access to electricity and water. Providing adequate care to such a large population of parrots without these essentials meant that routine tasks like cleaning and feeding would take significantly longer. Many exhaustive hours were spent attempting to re-route pipes and fix generators in order to gather enough water just to make it through the day.

We doubled the amount of food in the supplementary feeders to help support the wild birds while they recovered from the storm. Further leg band sightings and telemetry will help us determine the suspected losses from the wild population. However, based on the sightings of a number of chicks from the 2022 season, it appears that the parrots may have endured the storm better than expected. Every season that an individual survives a hurricane in Puerto Rico gives knowledge that can be passed on to their offspring. Social learning is a ubiquitous feature of the life history of parrots, and we can only hope that these Amazons will continue to learn how to navigate these powerful natural disasters in order to keep the species alive. 📍



© Sara Remmes



## Puerto Rican Amazon (*Amazona vittata*)

**World Population:** est. 700

**Where Found:** Puerto Rico and formerly neighbouring islands of Mona and Culebra.

**Threat Summary:** A BirdLife ‘restricted range’ species. Affected mainly by habitat loss; also hunting, trapping for trade and increasingly severe hurricanes. In addition, introduced honeybees occupy nest cavities, botflies (*Philornis pici*) parasitise nestlings, and increasing numbers of Pearly-eyed Thrashers (*Margarops fuscatus*) destroy nests.

## About the Author



**Sara Remmes BSc, MSc** is a conservation biologist who specialises in studying the reproductive biology of critically endangered parrot species. She has led field research in countries including Costa Rica, Puerto Rico and Bonaire.



# PART TWO: PARROT CONSERVATION GRANTS PROGRAM

More Plans and Actions (continued from Spring 2023 PsittaScene)



BYRON SSEMAMBO  
LONDON SOUTHBANK UNIVERSITY



**COUNTRY:**

Uganda

**SPECIES FOCUS:**

Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*)

**PROJECT FOCUS:**

The aim of this project is to study the distribution, ecology, breeding season, habitat use, threats and people's perception on conservation of Grey Parrots on Koome Islands, with the ultimate goal to ensure the survival of this endangered species in the country.

**USE OF FUNDS:**

Funding will help cover costs for the field equipment to be used by the community-based monitors, allowances for the monitors, and facilitation for the participants during Focus Group Discussion and Awareness Meetings on threats and people's perception of parrots.

**LEARN MORE:**

[UG.LINKEDIN.COM/IN/BYRON-SSEMAMBO-MS-2334AA25](https://www.linkedin.com/in/byron-ssemambo-msc-2334aa25)



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BENEDICTUS FREEMAN,  
UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA



**COUNTRY:**

Liberia

**SPECIES FOCUS:**

Timneh Parrot (*Psittacus timneh*)

**PROJECT FOCUS:**

Building on current knowledge to understand the conservation status and threats impacting the Timneh Parrot population in Liberia. Despite being recognised as a stronghold for the remaining population of the endangered Timneh Parrot, little is known about the conservation, population, threats, and cultural beliefs associated with this species in Liberia. To address these knowledge gaps, this project seeks to collect field-based data to understand the conservation status and threats (e.g., trafficking, trapping) impacting the species in Liberia, as well as to document the underlying traditional beliefs behind the conservation of a unique roosting population.

**USE OF FUNDS:**

This funding provides the needed support to document the current conservation status of Timneh Parrot in Liberia, which will serve as a baseline for further research.

**LEARN MORE:**

[@BENEDICTUSFREE1](https://twitter.com/BENEDICTUSFREE1), [@THEUNIVERSITYOFLIBERIA](https://twitter.com/THEUNIVERSITYOFLIBERIA)



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BOSQUE NUBOSO A.C.



**COUNTRY:**

Mexico

**SPECIES FOCUS:**

Lilac-crowned Amazon (*Amazona finschi*)

**PROJECT FOCUS:**

Conservation of Lilac-crowned Amazon in the Sierra de Atoyac, México. The project is a first approximation of the current knowledge of the species. Even though the Lilac-crowned Amazon is an endangered species there are no conservation plans in the region.

**USE OF FUNDS:**

Funding will allow us to generate current information about the Lilac-crowned Amazon population and possible threats, which is the first step to the conservation action strategy.

**LEARN MORE:**

[FB.COM/BOSQUENUBOSOASOCIACIONCIVIL](https://www.facebook.com/bosquenubosoasociacioncivil)



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KIBALE PARROT  
CONSERVATION COALITION

**COUNTRY:**

Uganda

**SPECIES FOCUS:**

Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*)

**PROJECT FOCUS:**

Monitoring Released Grey Parrots in Bigodi Region, Neighbouring Kibale National Park. Confiscated Grey Parrots that were ringed then released into the wild over 10 years ago have never been systematically monitored for survival nor integration into the resident parrot population. Our project will coordinate the monitoring of the parrots with local bird guides and children from the Village Bird Clubs, to build knowledge and support for parrot conservation among community members.

**USE OF FUNDS:**

Funding will facilitate community monitors to reach sites used by parrots, equip them with smart phones and cameras for data collection and provide training in the use of appropriate data base systems.

**LEARN MORE:**

[FB.COM/VILLAGEBIRDCLUBSKIBALEFORESTUGANDA](https://www.facebook.com/villagebirdclubskibaleforestuganda)



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## CENFOR



### COUNTRY:

Liberia

### SPECIES FOCUS:

Timneh Parrot (*Psittacus timneh*)

### PROJECT FOCUS:

Saving the Timneh Parrot (*Psittacus timneh*) through strengthening the enforcement network and stakeholder engagement in Grebo-Krahn National Park (GKNP), southeastern Liberia. The objective of the project is to involve communities in protection of the endangered Timneh Parrot against killing, trade and trafficking in Grebo-Krahn National Park, Liberia. This will be achieved through stakeholder engagement and law enforcement.

### USE OF FUNDS:

Funding will help CENFOR expand its activities around Grebo-Krahn National Park and highlight the urgent need to end threats against the Timneh Parrot.

### LEARN MORE:

[FB.COM/CENFOR.LIBERIA.7](https://www.facebook.com/CENFOR.LIBERIA.7)



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# CLIMBING

## for conservation

by Meg Hill  
photos © Jack Haines

*Parrots are fascinating creatures with unique nesting habits that often involve hard-to-reach locations, like hollows in ancient rainforest trees or hidden crevices in cliff faces.*

*Sadly, these precious nesting sites are increasingly under threat from human activities, such as deforestation, habitat destruction, and poaching.*



## AVES ARGENTINAS



### COUNTRY:

Argentina

### SPECIES FOCUS:

Vinaceous Amazon (*Amazona vinacea*)

### PROJECT FOCUS:

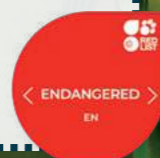
Saving the endangered Vinaceous Amazon by *in situ* conservation management in Argentina's Atlantic Forest. This project is an initiative that complements the Atlantic Forest Project (Aves Argentinas- BirdLife International) and other initiatives that already exist for the conservation of endangered parrot species in the province of Misiones, Argentina. The aim of this project is to contribute to the conservation of Vinaceous Amazon through the implementation of long-term *in situ* management strategies, update the conservation status of threatened and poorly known psittacines of the southern portion of the Atlantic Forest, understand the impact of illegal trade on conservation targets and work with local communities to change the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that have driven several of these species to extinction.

### USE OF FUNDS:

Funding will finance the purchase of nest boxes and support annual counts.

### LEARN MORE:

[FB.COM/AVESARGENTINASAOP](https://www.facebook.com/AVESARGENTINASAOP)



© GlobalPics, Getty Images

### UPDATE:

Between March 24 and 26, a new annual census was held in Misiones, Argentina. Organiser Aves Argentinas, bird watching clubs, farmers and their families, the Ministry of Ecology of Misiones, the National Parks Administration and University of San Pedro students participated. 247 parrots were counted at a number of sites, with likely more individuals to be found in other locations.

**The World Parrot Trust (WPT) employs many strategies to conserve wild parrots. Climbing is just one of the many tools that we use to help monitor and safeguard parrot populations. It's not an easy feat; it takes specialised skills, equipment, and a deep commitment. But the effort is worth it. Through climbing, WPT and in-country partners can gather crucial data on parrot breeding habits, population sizes and more, which is then used to develop effective conservation action.**

WPT works with skilled field biologists and conservationists who are passionate about making a difference for parrots in the wild. One such individual is Jack Haines, WPT's Neotropics coordinator, who is no stranger to working in varied

and challenging environments to aid WPT partners and projects. Jack has been instrumental in helping develop and implement effective conservation strategies for parrots with a variety of projects in the Neotropics region. With his extensive knowledge of climbing, he offers technical support to projects which enable them to monitor and manage natural nests, as well as install artificial nest boxes to help improve breeding success.

Last May, Jack embarked on a skills exchange and relationship-development trip to Panama to meet with several organisations interested in helping save the Great Green Macaw. Unfortunately, this beautiful parrot is IUCN Critically Endangered and is facing numerous threats such as deforestation and poaching for the illegal pet trade.

While in Panama meeting with the various organisations, Jack had the chance to offer his technical assistance and expertise to local organization ADOPTA Bosque, which was conducting a pilot trial of installing artificial nest boxes in the heart of the Darién region, where a small population of Great Green Macaws still make their home.

The Darién is a remote and rugged wilderness that spans over 1.4 million acres and is famous for being an almost impenetrable forest border between Panama and Colombia. The region is largely inaccessible by road, and visitors must navigate the area's challenging terrain on foot, by boat, or by plane. The remoteness of the area means that conservation efforts can be difficult to implement, making it all the more important to engage with local communities and work collaboratively.

Fieldwork can be a tough and gruelling task at the best of times, but it is even harder when it comes to working in locations such as the Darién. Although, the real work began for Jack after he made the long trek through dense rainforest, navigating tricky terrain and hauling heavy gear, and was faced with a monstrous 40-meter-high tree that happened to be the chosen site for the installation of a new nest box.

Climbing requires a lot of physical strength and endurance, so despite Jack's muscles aching from the hike, he began scoping out the tree to find the best anchor point to climb the natural skyscraper. Drawing on his years of experience and knowledge of single rope access techniques, Jack had to improvise and create a system where one rope connects to another so that he had enough rope to scale the tree. Even for someone with several years of experience and no fear of heights, being suspended 30 meters up in a tree can be a nerve-wracking experience when you are trusting, in essence, a bit of string.



**Top:** WPT's Jack Haines with a fully-loaded truck of nest barrels  
**Bottom:** Jack and the ADOPTA Bosque team prepare to install the barrels

Thankfully Jack has climbed hundreds of trees at varying degrees of difficulty and managed to stay as calm as a cucumber. His meticulous preparation paid off and he installed the artificial nest box like he had done many times before in other locations.

According to Jack, despite the sheer exhaustion of fieldwork the reward is always worth it. By installing nest boxes or monitoring natural nests, WPT can help provide safe and secure homes for parrots, protecting them from the dangers of poaching, habitat destruction and other threats. Jack's physically demanding trip into the Darién might feel like a small step, but it's a significant one in the ongoing effort to conserve these birds and ensure their survival for generations to come.

The benefits of this trip extended beyond just the installation of the nest boxes to aid in the reproduction of this endangered parrot. The local indigenous community that lived in the area also had the opportunity to join in and practice the single rope technique, albeit at much lower heights, and learn how to monitor the resident parrot population.

Engaging the local community is a key part of the successful protection of a species - their knowledge is essential in identifying nesting and roosting locations. Involving local people creates a sense of responsibility and ownership for the birds' well-being. Education and awareness-raising opportunities empower community members to become

advocates for conservation efforts, help them develop alternative livelihoods and create a positive cycle of community well-being and sustainable conservation.

Jack's trip to Panama was not only about providing technical support for local programs but also about building relationships and connections between organisations with the same mission. He was able to help begin a collaboration between ADOPTA and WPT's long-term partner Ara Manzanillo, which is working with a reintroduced population of Great Green Macaws in Costa Rica.

By facilitating this connection, Jack helped the organisations gain access to new skills for monitoring and protecting these macaws and gave them the chance to practice and develop their climbing skills. This exchange of knowledge and expertise is critical for the success of conservation efforts and ensures species like the Great Green Macaw continues to thrive throughout its range.

The World Parrot Trust is committed to protecting parrots and their habitats through a variety of innovative conservation strategies. Climbing is just one tool in our arsenal, but it's an essential one that allows us to study and safeguard parrot populations in challenging terrain and locations. As a part of our team, Jack will continue to use his climbing experience to aid in-country organizations and partners to implement effective conservation strategies. 📍



NEWS

**Freedom: Rehabilitated African Grey Parrots Begin Journey Back to the Wild**

In a world where wildlife trafficking remains a persistent issue, it is inspiring to report on a story of rescue, recovery and eventual freedom. Last year, a significant stride was taken in the fight against trade as 120 endangered African Grey Parrots were intercepted from a wildlife trafficker in Uganda. Thanks to the concerted efforts of various organizations, the parrots found refuge at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre. Here, they embarked on the journey that would eventually lead them back home. The first milestone has been reached, as an initial

group of 58 rehabilitated parrots has been successfully relocated to a release aviary in Kibale National Park. There they'll be given time to adjust to their new environment in safety, gradually being introduced to the foods available in the wild and being given the liberty to leave at their own pace. This undertaking ensures other groups of parrots will follow suit, granted they are physically fit to endure the journey back to freedom. This approach provides these intelligent and vibrant birds with the best possible chance of survival in the wild. The parrots were intercepted as a result of intelligence-led cross-border investigations coordinated

between Conserv Congo, the World Parrot Trust, the Wildlife Trust of India, and the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The successful interception of the trafficker has not only resulted in the rescue of the parrots but has also marked a significant achievement in the fight against wildlife trafficking. The wildlife trafficker, of Congolese origin, was apprehended and subsequently pleaded guilty in Uganda's Wildlife Court. This resulted in a landmark sentence of seven years, a potent message to traffickers who threaten the biodiversity of our planet.

Read more: [tinyurl.com/arrestuganda](https://tinyurl.com/arrestuganda)

**Seizures in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Liberia**

April and May saw significant progress for addressing parrot trafficking in West Africa with four seizures taking place and close to 200 parrots rescued from traffickers. Following investigations by the EAGLE Network, two law enforcement operations took place in April leading to the seizure of over 100 Grey Parrots in Ivory Coast and 11 Timneh Parrots in Senegal. The World Parrot Trust worked with local partners ahead of the operations to plan for

the care of the parrots. Meanwhile in Liberia WPT partner and NECF/WPT Parrot Conservation Grantee CENFOR conducted two successful operations leading to the seizure of 73 Timneh parrots likely destined for Ivory Coast. The parrots were transferred to Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary where WPT have supported the construction of an aviary to house previously seized groups of parrots. Last year WPT staff delivered a training workshop to enforcement personnel working with Liberia's Wildlife Crime Unit on the trade in Timneh Parrots and best practice in managing groups of

parrots seized from trade. Experienced veterinarians Dr. Davide de Guz and Antonella Palese travelled to Ivory Coast and Liberia on behalf of WPT to conduct health checks on the parrots, train staff and advise CITES Authorities on the short and long term care of the parrots. In addition, with technical support from Nottingham Trent University the team was able to screen for diseases using a mobile genetics lab.

Read more: [tinyurl.com/Ghanianconviction](https://tinyurl.com/Ghanianconviction)



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[www.parrots.org/flocktalk](http://www.parrots.org/flocktalk)

**End Wildlife Trafficking and Animal Cruelty online**

WPT has joined forces with the Alliance to Counter Crime Online and a raft of wildlife conservation and welfare groups to call for wildlife trafficking and animal cruelty to be included within the UK's Online Safety Bill. The Online Safety Bill, which is currently making its way through Parliament, is a landmark piece of legislation that will place the UK at the forefront of the regulation of online platforms requiring tech companies to put in place measures to address crimes taking place on their platforms. WPT has been calling on law-makers to treat illegal sales of endangered wildlife on a par with sales of drugs, firearms and people.

WPT has conducted extensive research into how online platforms facilitate wildlife trafficking and has briefed ministers, MPs and Lords on the vital importance of addressing wildlife trafficking online, including the UK's Environment Minister during a visit to Paradise Park. In May Lord

Stevenson of Balmacara advanced an amendment in the House of Lords to include Animal Cruelty as a priority offence within the bill. Unfortunately the government has not adopted this amendment at this time, but we are continuing to make the case for its inclusion within the Bill and also to ensure the harms caused by wildlife trafficking and animal cruelty online are explicitly recognised within official guidance on the implementation of the Bill.

The parrots were intercepted as a result of intelligence-led cross-border investigations coordinated between Conserv Congo, the World Parrot Trust, the Wildlife Trust of India, and the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The successful interception of the trafficker has not only resulted in the rescue of the parrots but has also marked a significant achievement in the fight against wildlife trafficking.

Read the letter to the UK Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology: [tinyurl.com/sossafetybill](https://tinyurl.com/sossafetybill)



**15th Annual Parrot Lovers Cruise February 6 - 16, 2024: Caribbean Islands**

Imagine cruising crystal blue waters while experiencing some of the most magical sightseeing in the world! Join fellow parrot lovers aboard the Caribbean Princess for ten days of enlightening seminars and exciting excursions visiting a variety of stunning locations, all while supporting parrot conservation. Don't miss out — contact Carol Cipriano to book your cabin today.

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**PARROTS IN THE WILD:**  
**Finsch's Conure**  
(*Psittacara finschi*)

These chatty parrots, found across southern Central America, are usually seen in groups of up to 30 birds feeding and socialising.

© Daniel Parent, Getty Images