PsittaScene

Magazine of the World Parrot Trust

Autumn 2024

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World Parrot Trust

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ABOUT THE WPT

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

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 the WPT has led or aided conservation and welfare projects in 45 countries for more than 80 species of parrot.

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Ultramarine Lorikeet Photo © **Luis Ortiz-Catedral**

These tiny lorikeets live on only one island in the South Pacific, where their future remains tenuous. There is, however, hope.

Find out about ongoing efforts to protect them in ***Ultramarine Lorikeets: The Pride of Ua Huka***, Page 12.

Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden: Championing Conservation and Education

Nestled in the heart of Cincinnati, Ohio, the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden stands as a world-renowned and inspirational beacon of wildlife conservation. Established in 1875, it is the second oldest zoo in the United States with a storied history in promoting conservation, education and the appreciation of nature's wonders. Spanning over 65 acres, the Zoo is home to more than 400 animal species and 3,000 plant varieties, making it a vibrant hub of biodiversity.

The mission of the Cincinnati Zoo is to create adventure, convey knowledge, conserve nature, and serve the community. This mission is reflected in every aspect of the Zoo's operations, from its immersive exhibits to its robust educational programs. Committed to providing excellent animal care, the Zoo prioritises the health and well-being of its inhabitants. Through engaging and interactive experiences, the Cincinnati Zoo connects its 1.9 million annual visitors with wildlife, inspiring them to become ardent advocates for conservation.

Among the Zoo's many standout programs is the **Wings of Wonder** bird encounter, a dynamic presentation that showcases the beauty and importance of bird species from around the globe. This program not only educates visitors about avian diversity but also serves as a vital platform for raising funds for conservation efforts. Recently, the dedicated team behind Wings of Wonder selected the World Parrot Trust as the beneficiary of funds collected during their free-flight events, raising over $11,000 USD in support of our ongoing work in parrot conservation.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Zoo's passionate animal care team, whose efforts go beyond providing excellent care for the animals. Their dedication to engaging visitors in meaningful ways has inspired countless individuals to support conservation initiatives. This collaboration reflects the Cincinnati Zoo's broader commitment to fostering conservation-minded communities and making a positive impact on the natural world.

The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden remains a sanctuary of hope for wildlife conservation, blending education, community engagement, and passionate advocacy. Their unwavering support of the World Parrot Trust underscores a shared vision for a better future, one visitor and bird at a time.

Wings of Wonder show © Cincinnati Zoo

VICTORY FOR THE BURROWING PARROT

Municipal Nature Reserve: Acantilado de los Loros

by Alejandro Balbiano and Juan F. Masello[1,2]

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On June 19, 2024, the City Council of the Municipality of Viedma, in Río Negro, Argentina, unanimously approved the creation of the Municipal Nature Reserve "Acantilado de los Loros", created to protect the largest parrot colony in the world.

This is the first time that the parrot colony of El Cóndor has received a legal protection status.

A long history

Since 1998, as part of the Burrowing Parrot Project, we have been conducting research on the biology of the Burrowing Parrot or Patagonian Conure (*Cyanoliseus patagonus*), in a colony located on the cliffs near the Río Negro Lighthouse and the village of El Cóndor. The colony is located 30 kilometers from Viedma, the capital city of the province of Rio Negro in Patagonia, Argentina.

Since 2006, the flock at El Cóndor has been internationally recognised as the largest parrot colony in the world. Currently, it extends along 18.1 kilometres of cliffs facing the Southwest Atlantic Ocean, where the parrots use the cliff's layers of the Río Negro Formation, composed of sandstone or consolidated sands, clays and silts of continental origin, interspersed with marine deposits. The name "burrowing parrot" comes from the behaviour of this species, which digs their nest-burrows on cliffs and ravines.

After 26 years of scientific research, and considering the outstanding biological value of this colony, it was strange that it was not legally protected either at national, provincial or municipal level. This despite numerous Act proposals that were presented to the Congress of the province of Río Negro in 2004, 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2015. None of them was ever approved by the legislature, and some were not even considered.

Burrowing Parrots at sunset © Alejandro Balbiano

Burrowing Parrots and cliffs

The name Municipal Nature Reserve "Parrot Cliff" makes profound sense. It is not possible to protect the parrots without protecting the cliffs - it is a connection that has existed for thousands of years. The cliffs are a 'registered trademark', very distinctive of Patagonia. The geological history of this region is written on their walls.

The El Cóndor cliffs are part of the Río Negro Formation, and throughout their history they have undergone transformations due to marine and river erosion. About 125,000 years ago the sea level last advanced, which gave the cliff coast a shape similar to the one we observe today. And approximately 120,000 years ago, Burrowing Parrots crossed the Andes from Chile to Mendoza, Argentina and began to colonise Argentina to the northwest (where they established colonies in ravines) and to the south, reaching Patagonia (where they live in cliffs). This means, that in almost the same geological time that the Patagonian cliffs were formed, the parrots found a place to nest in them. Both parrots and cliffs have been closely linked ever since.

Notably, ravines and cliffs are not abundant, especially those associated with the food and water needed by Burrowing Parrots. All the more reason to defend the cliffs where these parrots live and raise their nestlings. Burrowing Parrots occupy their colonies a few months before egg laying and gradually leave the site as the nestlings fledge and are ready to migrate.

Adults excavate their own nests in the faces of sandstone cliffs and earthen ravines. Each nest is occupied by a single pair and is between 80 cm and 2.5 metres deep, although they can sometimes reach 3 metres. The nest consists of a tunnel leading to a nest chamber where the eggs are incubated and the nestlings raised. Females lay only one clutch of 2 to 5 eggs per breeding season and incubation is carried out by the female alone for approximately 24 days while the male provides food. The nestlings remain in the nest for an average of 63 days.

After fledging, the juveniles continue to be fed by the parents for about 4 months. Burrowing Parrots are monogamous and both males and females are intensely involved in the care of the nestlings.

But, on October 8, 2015, the situation finally changed. The Municipality of Viedma, by provincial law, expanded its territory by incorporating a continuous coastal area that includes the Burrowing Parrot colony at El Cóndor. It marked a new beginning.

Importance of the colony

The Burrowing Parrot colony at El Cóndor has been recognised worldwide as an Important Bird Area (IBA) with priority status for the Patagonian region. The designation followed extensive research work by the Burrowing Parrot Project and Aves Argentinas, a member of BirdLife International. In addition, the El Cóndor colony has been nominated as a priority area to complete the *biogeographic representativeness** of the Arid Patagonia Protected Area System as part of the joint project between the Argentine National Parks Administration (APN) and the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA).

There are an average of 37,000 active Burrowing Parrot nests at El Cóndor, which contains 71% of the world's population of this parrot species. Found only in Chile and Argentina, Burrowing Parrots appear to be very abundant, but only in northeastern Patagonia, Argentina. In Chile, for example, the Burrowing Parrot, or "tricahue", as it is known in that country, is listed in the "Red Book of Terrestrial Vertebrates" with an estimated population of 5,000 to 6,000 individuals. The future of the species is therefore inextricably linked to the El Cóndor colony's protection. Catastrophic large-scale events that could affect the colony, whether natural or man-made, could jeopardise the survival of the entire species.

Parrots are considered globally as the group of birds with the highest number of endangered species; for example, 38% of the species in Latin America are at risk. For decades, many wild parrot populations have been declining, mainly due to habitat fragmentation or degradation caused by agricultural expansion, trapping for the wildlife trade, the introduction of exotic species into their habitats, persecution as crop pests, and hunting. Of the 26 parrot species that live in Argentina, five have been declared "vulnerable species." One of these species is the Burrowing Parrot.

This parrot is a highly sociable species that nests colonially and is found mainly in the Monte biogeographic region. The area is seriously threatened by very high rates of deforestation that have been occurring for decades. It is considered one of the most deforested areas in South America at 3.7% per year, which causes loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, increased evaporation that dries the land, and dustbowl-like events. In addition, some wildlife, deprived of their natural habitat and food, forage on agricultural and livestock lands, which can hinder the industry.

**Assuring that the diversity of life in one place parallels that of other places.*

Creation of the nature reserve

After many years of research, education and conservation efforts, local authorities echoed the requests made by researchers and supporting NGOs about the need to create a nature reserve to protect El Cóndor's Burrowing Parrots. At the beginning of 2023, the current Vice Governor of Río Negro Pedro Pesatti, at that time Mayor of Viedma, presented a project to the City Council for the creation of the Municipal Nature Reserve. The project was supported by a number of NGOs and scientists including the World Parrot Trust, WCS Argentina, Fundación Patagonia Natural, Aves Argentinas, Fundación Soberanía, Fundación Humedales/Wetlands International, Sociedad Naturalista Andino Patagónica, Estación de Rescate de Fauna Marina, Guillermo "Indio" Fidalgo, Fundación Inalafquen and local biologist Mauricio Failla, who has been in charge of the educational campaigns we have been informing *PsittaScene* readers about since 2007.

On June 19, 2024, the City Council of the municipality of Viedma unanimously approved the creation of the Municipal Nature Reserve "Acantilado de los Loros" (Parrot Cliff), created to protect the Burrowing Parrot at El Cóndor. The new nature reserve has four main objectives, namely to:

1) Promote the conservation of the native forest, the Monte and the species that live in it,

2) Promote the sustainable development of tourism, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of the municipality of Viedma, and to the conservation of the parrot colony and the natural and cultural heritage associated with the cliffs of El Cóndor,

3) Encourage educational and environmental awareness campaigns to promote knowledge about Burrowing Parrots and the Municipal Nature Reserve,

4) Conserve the paleontological, archaeological and historical heritage present of the area, which contains a wealth of fossil invertebrates and fossil footprints of birds and mammals that are millions of years old.

Burrowing Parrots at the El Cóndor cliffs, Argentia © Christian Peters, Getty Images

Beginning of a new phase

The creation of this Nature Reserve not only provides protection for the parrot colony but also complements previous actions such as the creation of the Centro de Valoración del Monte Rionegrino (Monte Rionegrino Appraisal Center) at El Cóndor in 2022, directed by local biologist Mauricio Failla, and the construction of a biological station in the near future for the study of local bird species. From now on, about 40 of the 90 km of the municipality of Viedma's coastline will be under environmental protection. Of this, 19.7 km will protect the Burrowing Parrot colony.

The creation of a Municipal Nature Reserve in El Cóndor is a fundamental step towards conservation. But it is only the beginning. Now begins a new period of commitment and responsibility, of more science, more education and awareness of the importance of this unique natural heritage. The newly created Nature Reserve must have a Management Plan for the future, an environmental education project at all educational levels, and the creation of a Municipal Environmental Guard to comply with and enforce the regulations of the ordinance. We will be working with and advising all of these efforts in the near future.

Migratory birds, dolphins, sea lions, whales and penguins are all protected species in the coastal and marine areas, such as the Bahía de San Antonio Natural Area, the Punta Bermeja Nature Reserve and the Complejo Islote Lobos National Park, of the Province of Río Negro. To this universe of 'biological stars' was added the Burrowing Parrots, now protected at the municipal level. We celebrate this moment, the result of almost 20 years of effort and sacrifice by many researchers, local people and authorities, together with the parrots.

For further details, visit:
lorosbarranqueros.blogspot.com


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Right, top: *Co-author Masello scales the cliffs at El Cóndor.*
Right, middle: *Researchers examine chick and egg.*
Right, bottom: *A Burrowing Parrot chick with its first feathers.*

Bottom: *Burrowing Parrots at their cliff nests.*


© Christian Peters, Getty Images

Timneh Parrots:
Research and Conservation in Liberia

Article and photos by Dr. Steven Janssen, WPT Wild Parrot Rescue Coordinator

In June, all the pieces fell into place to realise a trip to Liberia. The plans had been in the making for some time, and now the fruits of that labour could finally be harvested. Dr. Davide de Guz and I were going to the Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary to test Timneh Parrots as part of a pre-release disease screening protocol. In addition, two training sessions were planned to build the capacity of government agencies involved in combatting the illegal wildlife trade. And last but not least, I went in search of the enigmatic "K-Town," where a colony of Timneh Parrots was said to be found in the middle of the village.

For logistical reasons, my trip began with the visit to K-Town. The existence of the K-Town Timneh Parrots *(Psittacus timneh)* came to the attention of conservation scientist Andrew Gweh a few years ago while he was researching other bird species in the region.

Andrew visited the village for the first time in 2022 and since then he, along with his mentor Benedict Freeman, has built a trusting relationship with the village to research their Timneh Parrots. So, it was only natural that they would accompany me on this field trip. Our group was completed by Professor Nancy Jacobs and her daughter, Ela.

Nancy is an environmental historian who is currently writing a book about the global history of African Grey Parrots and was interested in the interaction between the parrots and the village. Early in the morning after my arrival in Liberia, the rented 4x4 with driver was already waiting for me, and we picked up the rest of the group one by one along the way. After a few stops for fuel and supplies, we were ready to embark on the approximately seven-hour trip. We drove southwest on paved roads to Buchanan and then continued on muddy roads to K-Town. The timing of the trip was not great as we were already several months into the rainy season, and this quickly became apparent with the obstacle course that the road to K-Town represented. About an hour into the muddy roads, one of the left shock absorbers gave out. Fortunately, this was a minor issue for our driver, who managed to force it back into position with a few well-aimed blows from the jack. Amazingly, the shock absorber held up until we reached our destination.

By the time we arrived, it was already dusk, but that turned out to be the perfect time for the most beautiful welcoming committee imaginable: the Timneh Parrots seek their nighttime roost in the village's palm trees around 6:30 PM, whistling and shrieking while fluttering around in groups until they finally settle in the trees around 7:30 PM.


Left to right: Ela Heywood, Ben Freeman and Nancy Jacobs.

Timneh Parrots gather at the K-Town roost at nightfall.

Team members sit for community discussions.

Author Janssen (second from left, back) with members of CENFOR.

After that beautiful natural spectacle, it was time to get to work. We set up four large tarps under the trees to collect faecal samples from this wild population. These samples will be analysed to test for the presence of certain organisms, giving us a better understanding of which ones wild parrots carry. This information is important as it greatly influences the criteria for releasing rehabilitated parrots, but also because it can carry weight in the fight against the illegal wildlife trade. Knowing that there are only a few identified African Grey roost sites in Africa adds to the value and importance of these samples.

The next morning I was pleasantly surprised, as I had expected the heavy rain overnight to wash away all the bird droppings, but there was no shortage of samples. The Timnehs had provided me with all shades of brown to choose from. We preserved some of the samples in ethanol, while others were dried in separate bags for later food analysis and genetic studies.

We were then invited to a community meeting where, after the official introductions, we could explain our motives and goals. This was followed by a Q&A session, which made it clear how proud the community was of their parrot colony. Nancy interviewed the village elders in the afternoon to get a better understanding of this remarkable, symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. The parrots enjoy absolute protection in the village and, in turn, are seen as guardian angels: during times of war, the parrots would leave the village early when danger was on the horizon and only return once the threat had passed. Additionally, they cheerfully wake the villagers every morning with their songs and, in the evening, warn them with the same melodies when it's time to return home from the fields. We used the second night to conduct a count and concluded that this colony consists of over 1,100 parrots, spread across about 50 trees, literally in the middle of the village!

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, and so our visit to K-Town. After being awakened by Mother Nature's most beautiful alarm clock, I collected fresh samples one last time, and then we set off back to Monrovia. However, the return trip was a bit less smooth than the outward journey. After about forty-five minutes, our left shock absorber decided to retire for good, making it painfully clear that it was indeed an essential part of the car. I experienced the rest of the drive as a cross between a mechanical rodeo bull and a bouncing ball. But that, too, came to an end when we reached an improvised mud bridge where four trucks were competing to see who could sink in the deepest. We abandoned the vehicle and decided to continue on motorcycles to Buchanan to find a taxi from there, but even the motorcycles had to surrender at certain mud baths. We covered those sections on foot, including the inevitable slips and falls. After a long but adventurous day, we finally arrived back in Monrovia, tired yet satisfied.

In the days that followed, training sessions on first response care for rescued parrots were on the agenda. For each workshop, about twenty government agents were invited to the workshops held at the Libassa Ecolodge in Monrovia and the FDA (Forestry Development Authority) office in Zwedru. The Libassa workshop, organised by the WPT, included agents from SWIU (Special Wildlife Investigation Unit) and WCTF (Wildlife Crime Task Force). In Zwedru, the participants were more varied: there were FDA rangers, lawyers, CENFOR (Centre for Environment, Forest Conservation and Research) staff, and agents from LIS (immigration), LDEA (narcotics) and LNP (police). The sessions covered topics such as initial rescue steps, triage, health assessments, basic first aid, safe transport, cage design, and proper parrot handling. These presentations were also compiled into a handy "first response parrot care" manual, which was distributed to all participants. The theoretical presentations were followed by a practical session in parrot handling, which involved rescued parrots from the Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary. These parrots needed to be captured anyway to be tested for diseases as part of the pre-release protocol, combined with a general health check, so it was useful to link the handling session to this. Normally, Dr. Davide de Guz would guide this practical session and the analysis of the samples, but, tragically, due to flight delays and the theft of his luggage containing lab equipment, he could not travel to Liberia. Unfortunately, we had to limit ourselves to the health check and taking blood samples, to be analysed at a later date.

The second workshop in Zwedru was organised by CENFOR, a Liberian conservation organisation in Zwedru dedicated to stopping the illegal wildlife trade and educating youth about their natural heritage. Their training session was spread over two days and included a component on wildlife crime law as well, presented by Col. Edward Appleton of the FDA. Like K-Town, Zwedru is more southeastern oriented, but to get there from Monrovia, you need to detour up north to Ganta before heading southeast again to Zwedru. The roads are nicely paved until Ganta but from there, it becomes a red mud slalom course. I had mentally prepared myself, but skiing with a 4x4 through a wall of rain at the average pace of a Dakar rally is a surreal experience. Kudos to our drivers, who made it look so easy. In Zwedru, we were welcomed by George Gbarwea of CENFOR, who had everything organised in great detail. During both training sessions, it was noticeable how passionate and concerned the participants were about their nature and their jobs. The conditions in which results are achieved are very challenging and resources are limited. They were grateful for this workshop, and there was a great demand for more in-depth training. The discussions during the presentations were eye-opening, as they exposed local perceptions but also highlighted the specific needs and problems wildlife crime fighters encounter on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, the end of that workshop also marked the end of my trip. I left for Liberia with suitcases full of presentation materials and research equipment, but I returned with suitcases full of interesting encounters, useful information, valuable insights and unique experiences.

A special thanks goes to all the organizations that made this trip possible: WPT, USDA WCF, Focused Conservation, FDA, Libassa Ecolodge, and CENFOR. Hopefully, with sufficient funding, we can do more capacity building on a larger scale in the near future.

About the Author:

Steven Janssen, DVM
Wild Parrot Rescue Coordinator
World Parrot Trust

Steven grew up in the Belgian countryside and was drawn to the beauty and diversity of nature from a very young age. He finished his veterinary studies at Ghent University after which he specialised in wild animal health at the Royal Veterinary College in London. He has participated in research projects and worked in zoos and rehabilitation centres across the globe before venturing out to the African continent. The exposure to different species in different ecosystems under very diverse circumstances has shaped his versatile and pragmatic approach to conservation. This practical experience and his veterinary background are being put to good use as parrot rescue coordinator for the African continent.

Ultramarine Lorikeets:
THE PRIDE OF UA HUKA

Article by Luis Ortiz-Catedral

Ua Huka, Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia
December 2023

Ua Huka is crescent-shaped with deeply indented contours. The cliffs and lowlands of the island are semi-arid, with low-shrubs and scattered trees. Groups of free-roaming horses gallop near the shoreline, giving the place a certain "wild west" vibe.

The brown-red soil of the lowlands contrasts with the turquoise blue waters along the rugged shoreline. The water is so transparent that on a clear day, from above, one can see squadrons of manta rays swimming near the coast. The island's steep interior is densely forested. Ua Huka's highest peak, Hitikau, at 850 m has an aura of mystery, with clouds obscuring the summit. When I looked at the ridges of Hitikau, I wondered which mythological guardians dwelled at those heights.

On the ground on my first day there, I was escorted by three present-day guardians of Ua Huka: Chloé Brown and two border terriers: Tip and Duke. Chloé is the director of Association Vaiku'a, a non-government organisation working to protect the natural heritage of Ua Huka, including the remarkable Ultramarine Lorikeet *(Vini ultramarina)* or "*Pihiti*", one of the rarest parrots on Earth.

We hiked along the main road in the Hane valley towards an area frequented by *Pihiti*. As we moved uphill, the canopy of coconut trees became denser. On the slopes of the Hane valley, the coconut tree is king. During our walk we heard the *Pihiti's* distinctive high-pitched *iiiii!* coming from the tree crowns. Their blue wingbeats speckled the shaded forest interior. We headed to a vantage point that offered a better chance to see the parrots up close. We arrived at Meiaute, a clearing on a hill with ancient stone *tiki*. *Pihiti* were flying high, foraging on nearby trees, perching and preening.

Ua Huka island © Thomas Atenol


© Luis Ortiz-Catedral

These parrots are impossibly blue; their plumage mirrors the sky above, the turquoise waters off the coast, and the dark blue of the sea beyond, which gives them the name Ultramarine Lorikeet (From Latin *ultra*: beyond and *mare*: sea). "They are the most beautiful bird of the world," said Chloé. It was hard to disagree with her; the word "blue" takes on a new meaning after seeing *Pihiti* in the wild.

Nowadays, the only place to see *Pihiti* is Ua Huka, in the Marquesas Islands, due to a simple fact: the island is free of Black Rats. Ua Huka is one of the very few islands worldwide where these rats have never established. In the last 200 years, Black Rats have colonised subantarctic islands and tropical archipelagos, driving multiple species to extinction in record time. They prey on the eggs, juveniles and often nesting females of *naïve* bird species. Ua Huka and its birds have been spared these cunning rodents so far. However, changes in the frequency of supply boats between Ua Huka and neighbouring islands represent an increasing risk of arrival for these successful invaders.

"Black Rats are bad for our biodiversity, but also a threat to our economy, to our way of life," Chloé explains. She is a proud Ua Hukan who understands first-hand the importance of preventing the introduction and establishment of Black Rats on this island. The main crop on Ua Huka is *coprah* (dried coconut).

Other islands in the Marquesas also produce it, but their yield is severely affected by these rats, which can spoil up to 80% of the production. Therefore, their establishment on Ua Huka could have serious irreversible economic repercussions. Black Rats could also wipe out native and endemic species, including the *Pihiti*, as they have done on other islands. In the last 50 years, *Pihiti* populations plummeted shortly after the establishment of Black Rats on Nuku Hiva, Ua Pou and Fatu Iva. Although 50 years seems like a long time, it is staggeringly fast in ecological timescales.

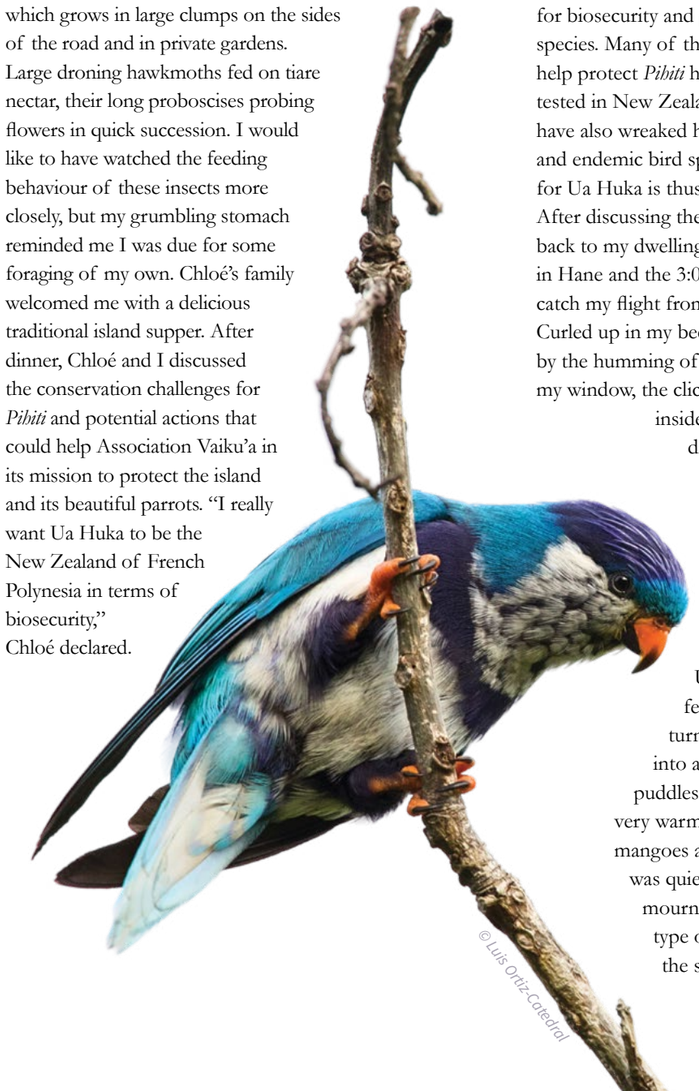
These rats on Ua Huka could be the deathblow for the species. Since the 1970s, the techniques for the removal of invasive rodents on islands have greatly advanced. Invasive rodents have been removed from over 150 islands worldwide, including Campbell Island, which is 40 times the size of Ua Huka. However, rodent eradications are expensive and require years of extensive planning, community consultation and mitigation actions for non-target species. For many islands there is simply no other option but sustained control or eradication of Black Rats. For islands like Ua Huka, preventing an invasion is the only cost-effective approach to safeguard the island's biodiversity and economy.

After our hike in Hane, Chloé dropped me off at my lodging in the town of Vaipaee. We made plans to continue talking about *Pihiti* over dinner after a much-needed rinse. After nightfall, I walked to Chloé's house along the main road in Vaipaee next to some large wooden frames used to dry *coprah*. The warm air smelled of coconut oil and *tiare* (a type of gardenia), which grows in large clumps on the sides of the road and in private gardens. Large droning hawkmoths fed on tiare nectar, their long proboscises probing flowers in quick succession. I would like to have watched the feeding behaviour of these insects more closely, but my grumbling stomach reminded me I was due for some foraging of my own. Chloé's family welcomed me with a delicious traditional island supper. After dinner, Chloé and I discussed the conservation challenges for *Pihiti* and potential actions that could help Association Vaiku'a in its mission to protect the island and its beautiful parrots. "I really want Ua Huka to be the New Zealand of French Polynesia in terms of biosecurity," Chloé declared.


© Luis Ortiz-Catedral


© Luis Ortiz-Catedral

Opposite page, top: *A Pihiti feeding on mango.*
Current page, top left: *Exploring a banana blossom in search of nectar.*
Current page, top right: *A small flock rests and preens in a tree.*


© Luis Ortiz-Catedral

New Zealand has set the gold standard for biosecurity and protection of island species. Many of the actions that could help protect *Pihiti* have been tried and tested in New Zealand, where Black Rats have also wreaked havoc among native and endemic bird species. Chloé's vision for Ua Huka is thus certainly achievable. After discussing these ideas, I walked back to my dwelling, tired from the hike in Hane and the 3:00 am wake up call to catch my flight from Tahiti to Ua Huka. Curled up in my bed I was lulled to sleep by the humming of hawkmoths outside my window, the clicking calls of geckos inside my room and the distant pounding rain approaching.

During my second day, I explored an area called Pitake to become familiar with the blue denizens of Ua Huka. Heavy rain fell late the night before, turning my morning hike into a constant dodging of puddles. The air was humid, very warm and smelled of ripe mangoes and mud. The forest was quiet except for the mournful calls of the *kuku*, a type of fruit dove, heralding the sunrise. "In Marquesan culture, the kuku represents the spirits of our ancestors," Chloé told me later. Large mango trees fringe the sides of the road to Pitake. Before long, I came across a group of five *Pihiti* foraging on the bright yellow flesh of mangoes. I took some photographs and made notes about their feeding behaviour and colouration.

The diet of *Pihiti* consists primarily of the nectar, pollen and fruit pulp of nearly fifty plant species, as well as invertebrates. *Pihiti* also feed on the flowers of coconut trees and the nectar of sea hibiscus. As they flew from tree to tree they shook their thin perching branches, leaving behind a fleeting trail of water drops. On a large tree I found an adult *Pihiti* hanging upside-down holding a flower with one foot and grabbing onto a branch with the other, calling and nibbling the base of the flower as if it were the most comfortable position to forage. The ground under the tree was carpeted with hibiscus flowers, each with distinctive *Pihiti* pecks.

It is not unusual to encounter *Pihiti* in people's gardens, foraging on flowers or the pulp of ripe fruits. *Pihiti* are gluttons for banana tree nectar: they often feed on flowers still protected by the leathery bract of inflorescences. With remarkable dexterity, *Pihiti* use their beaks to lift the bracts and to crawl under them to reach the sugary reward.

Ultramarine Lorikeet
(Vini ultramarina)

World Population:
est. 2,000, declining

Threat Summary:
Restricted-range species, endemic to Marquesas Islands Endemic Bird Area. The only extant population is found on Ua Huka, a small island of 83.4 km².

All islands where the lorikeets were formerly found have been devastated by overgrazing and fire, but introduced ship rats were the main cause of the species' extirpation.

Other invasive species that may be threats include birds that may transmit diseases, and ants.

Dancers Tapapohue (left) and Athena (right) costumed as Pihiti rehearse for the Matava'a, a bi-annual cultural event that brings together people from all over the Marquesas Islands.

© Luis Ortiz-Catedral

On my third day on the island, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand the biosecurity work conducted by Chloé and her team. There was much abuzz at the Vaipaee pier, with heavy machinery offloading cargo from the ferry. I waved *Kaoha!* (hello!) to sisters Sabrina and Melanie, both born and raised in Ua Huka. They too are guardians of this island, working for Association Vaiku'a.

The dogs Tip and Duke inspected the cargo, taking turns jumping on top of boxes and sniffing between crates, searching for rat clues under Sabrina's direction. Sabrina is an impressive dog handler. She commanded the dogs to look for the clues effectively in every crate and parcel offloaded before giving the "clear" signal. Chloé explained to me that for quarantine dogs like Tip and Duke, discipline and ongoing training are essential to ensure they effectively detect rats in cargo. Tip and Duke work hard, rain or shine. In a few months, things will get even busier for the biosecurity team as a new pier in Hane, some nine kilometres from Vaipaee, is set to start operations.

After inspecting the morning cargo, Chloé took me to Hane to have a look at the site of the new pier. Construction was well underway and when fully operational it will allow for more cargo and passengers to reach Ua Huka. Association Vaiku'a is working closely with local authorities to implement the appropriate biosecurity measures and minimise the chances of Black Rats reaching the island. With the support of the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust (EKCT), consolidated shortly after my December visit, the World Parrot Trust and New Zealand Parrot Trust have started a partnership with Association Vaiku'a to help deliver on this ambitious task which will help protect the world's only population of *Pihiti*.

After a further six days of exploration (mostly on foot, once on horseback), and having eaten as many forest mangoes as a small nation, I thought I had exhausted the island's surprises. But Ua Huka had one last surprise in store. Two days before my departure, Chloé invited me to a cultural center, Tetumu, to watch a rehearsal for the Matava'a, a bi-annual cultural event that brings together people from all the islands in the Marquesas Islands. Nuku Hiva, west of Ua Huka, was the host island in December 2023.

The performers had only a few days left of rehearsals before travelling for the big event. At Tetumu, the Ua Huka delegation rehearsed the Haka Manu (Dance of the Birds), and the bird being celebrated was none other than the *Pihiti*. "This bird is our emblem and our identity; it is part of our culture and part of the biodiversity of our land. I want my kids to see it someday," Chloé said. For me, witnessing this rehearsal at Tetumu is a true privilege, and I thanked my good fortune as I found a spot to sit. Tetumu has an open, grassy area flanked by traditional thatched roofs supported by elaborately carved wooden columns. Colossal stone *tiki* stand on the corners of the field, looking out at sea. Under the stars, fifty dancers, some as young as ten years old, took their places, sitting or crouching in the grass. In the dim light, as I captured the scene, twelve men struck large wooden drums, making the ground vibrate. Then a melodic chorus of voices sang: "*E manu, e manu Pihiti. E manu, e manu Pihiti*!"

The rhythm reached a crescendo and one hundred open hands and stretched out arms swayed to the percussions and the lyrics of the song. Twenty men stood up, stomped the ground and sang in unison, clapping their thighs and chests with all their might. Four young dancers entered the scene from the back and sides of the group, pacing gracefully towards the front, moving their arms slowly like stylized wings, like a *Pihiti* courtship. The winged dancers moved in circles, their arms telling a story without words. The powerful drums and body music contrasted with the tenderness of the voices.

This is the heart of Ua Huka, beating with ancestral energy and contemporary pride. "Ua Hukans really love the *Pihiti,* uh? They are proud of it," I asked Chloé when the rehearsal ended. "Yes! You know how New Zealanders are called 'Kiwis'?* I would like Ua Hukans to be called '*Pihiti*s' one day," she replied.

**After the national bird, the Kiwi.*

YAYASAN KONSERVASI PARUH BENGKOK

Yayasan Konservasi Paruh Bengkok: The World Parrot Trust's Voice in Indonesia

By Charlotte Foxhall and Angela D'Alessio

Southeast Asia, with its rich biodiversity and rapid development, presents unique challenges for parrot conservation. Habitat loss, driven by urbanisation and deforestation, threatens the forests of countless parrot species. Fuelled by the demand for exotic pets, illegal trade presents another significant crisis. In response to these challenges, the World Parrot Trust (WPT) has collaborated on projects in South and Southeast Asia, working tirelessly to protect parrots and their habitats.

WPT's recently established affiliate *Yayasan Konservasi Paruh Bengkok* **(Parrot Conservation Foundation)**, deepens our commitment to collaboration and local engagement in the area. The new organisation allows us to direct more resources into the region and to work closely with in-country partners to improve conservation for threatened parrot species across the expanse of these islands.

This year, our Indonesian affiliate is focusing on key species such as the Mitchell's Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus forsteni mitchellii),* the Red-and-blue Lory *(Eos histrio)* and the Blue-eyed Cockatoo *(Cacatua ophthalmica*). The WPT is studying population declines, threats from habitat loss and illegal wildlife trade, and competition with other species that these birds face. These intensive efforts help our team carry out science-driven and specific conservation actions in collaboration with local partners. In addition, we provide emergency care for Indonesian parrots affected by illegal trade and critical support for rescue centres and other organisations working on the frontline in the region.

Our mission is to boost efforts to address the root causes of illegal wildlife trade and see birds released back into their home ranges after successful rehabilitation. The WPT has grown a solid parrot conservation network by providing comprehensive support, including hands-on training comprising veterinary, rehabilitative, husbandry and enrichment techniques to rescue centres and government agencies. We also share best practices for relocation, release and post-release monitoring and help to evaluate the impact of the work. Our projects in Indonesia work in tandem with Dr Rowan Martin's research to prevent illegal trade at its source.

Dr Martin, WPT's Director of Africa and Bird Trade Programs, is addressing the international illegal trade of parrots. His recent publications with multiple collaborators identify trade hotspots, priority areas for interrupting trafficking and key knowledge gaps that need to be addressed to develop strategies for stopping illegal trade worldwide. Collectively, we aim to significantly impact global parrot conservation by examining and addressing both the root causes and consequences of illegal trafficking.

Individual parrots often do not survive the ordeal of trapping, transport and confiscation. For those that do, we have recently published the *"Guidance for First Responders on the Short-Term Care of Confiscated Parrots"* through our conservation network and the Asia for Animals Coalition. It is available in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to create best practice frameworks that can be adopted by frontline organisations treating parrots caught in illegal and harmful trade across the region. The guide is already proving to be a lifeline for these parrots. It equips responders with the knowledge needed to provide immediate primary care specific to the unique needs of the different species that are seen in trafficking. These birds often arrive at rescue facilities stressed, exhausted, injured and malnourished, often confined to sawed-off bottles, tiny cages or poorly ventilated bags. First aid within the first 24-48 hours can increase their chances of survival and potential for rehabilitation and release. More of these guides are being produced for use in other areas where parrots are found and are trapped.

Beyond trade, the WPT will support viable breeding-for conservation projects to restore endangered wild populations. Research also plays a key role in the conservation and recovery of understudied parrots. Learning about the ecology, behaviour and habitat needs of individual species guides conservationists to protect and restore them and their ecosystems. Our work also extends beyond direct conservation: by learning about and applying how in-country partners engage communities, we can encourage people to become stronger stewards of their natural heritage.

Outside of the region, repatriations of parrots caught in illegal trade are taking place with organisations across Southeast Asia, and new conservation projects are beginning in Papua New Guinea. There is much work to be done for parrots in this vast area of the world and the World Parrot Trust is just at the beginning of it. Stay tuned for frequent updates.

NEWS

Symbolically Adopt a Parrot

Support welfare and conservation with a Symbolic Parrot Adoption Kit. Now you can adopt a special feathered friend from the Kiwa Centre, our rescue facility in the UK. Support their care while contributing to WPT's broader conservation efforts. Plus, you'll receive all kinds of special goodies, regular updates about your favourite bird, and details about their life at the Centre.

Adopt your parrot: parrots.org/shop

Successful translocation of confiscated parrots in Indonesia

The Indonesia wildlife trade often involves the transport of animals to other islands in the archipelago and outside the country. In June 2024, 68 animals were transported from Bitung back to their native Ternate (North Maluku) and Ambon (Maluku). The group included 11 White Cockatoos, 29 Chattering Lories, four Violet-necked Lories, 11 Red Lories, nine Moluccan Cockatoos and several reptiles. They had been rescued from the illegal pet trade by forestry department officers and handed over to the North Sulawesi Natural Resources Conservation Agency. They then received specialist care and rehabilitation at the Tasikoki Animal Rescue Centre over several months.

The parrots sent to Ternate were deemed healthy and released; the others on Ambon are awaiting release.

Chattering Lories in their rehabilitation aviary
© Angela D'Alessio, WPT

Black cockatoos prefer fruits from trees grown in acidic soils

Recent research from the University of Adelaide has shown that Glossy Black Cockatoos favour feeding from trees growing in acidic soils. These cockatoos are seed-eating birds that feed almost exclusively on the cones of drooping sheoak trees. It was noted that they select trees that grow on the poorest soils found on ancient sedimentary rocks.

"Sheoak trees are three times more likely to be used as feeding trees if they are growing on non-limestone sedimentary rocks," says Dr Gay Crowley, University of Adelaide's School of Social Sciences. Crowley further stated that sheoaks gain their nutrition through fungal associations rather than from the soil, and their associated fungi thrive on poor soils.

Read more: tinyurl.com/avaem6wt

Glossy Black Cockatoo feeding on sheoak
© Andrew Peacock, Getty Images

Novel data released on zoonotic disease risks associated with animal markets

A new report examining the zoonotic disease risks associated with animal markets has been released by the Animal Law & Policy Program at Harvard and the Center for Animal and the Environmental Protection at New York University. The global synthesis includes case studies of 15 countries and examines in detail the risks associated with trade in wildlife including illegal trade in parrots and other birds.

WPT's Director of Bird Trade programmes, Dr Rowan Martin, was among a number of experts interviewed as part of the project and shared findings from WPT's investigations into the parrot trade and research on diseases among parrots seized from illegal traffickers.

Read more: tinyurl.com/4t2euu8c

Warning: images in the embedded report may be disturbing to some readers.

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PARROTS IN THE WILD:
White-eyed Conure
(Psittacara leucophthalmus)

These neotropical parrots are very social, forming flocks of several hundred birds. At night they roost communally in trees, canefields and caves.