

# FAQS

## Reintroduction Considerations



© Paradise Park

**History was made** on February 28th, 2013, when a group of six rare Blue-throated Macaws travelled from England to Bolivia, as part of an international project to breed and restore wild populations of the species in the country. The birds had been raised specifically for this purpose at Paradise Park in Hayle, Cornwall, UK, to support a 10-year long project being led by the World Parrot Trust (WPT).

Years of planning and careful consideration of countless questions and issues has prepared us for this next phase of Blue-throated Macaw (BTMA) conservation. Here we clarify some of the criteria used to guide this process.

**IUCN Criteria:** For the development of the release project, we have used criteria established by the IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group. This organization is part of the Species Survival Commission, and is an interdisciplinary group whose primary purpose is to promote the reintroduction of viable populations of animals and plants back to their natural ecosystems. The group deals with reintroduction efforts not only for birds but for a variety of taxa including reptiles, amphibians, mammals etc.

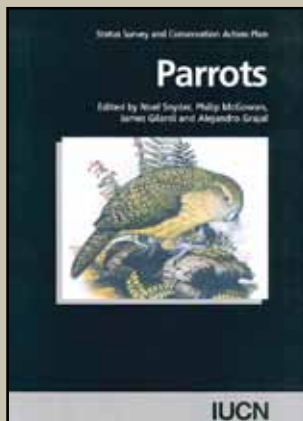
**Release Defined:** Of particular note is the Group's definition and classification of reintroduction programs. While the term "release" is used for a variety of techniques it is important to clarify our approach in this case. What we are proposing with the Blue-throats is a Reintroduction which is defined as: "...the intentional movement and release of an organism inside its indigenous range from

which it has disappeared." The last part is of particular importance for evaluating risk. "Reinforcement" (adding birds to an existing population) is often confused with the term "Reintroduction" (adding birds where they no longer exist).

**Disease Risk:** The World Parrot Trust has engaged in conservation, rescue and release programs for more than 50 parrot species in over 30 countries over the past 20+ years. The threat of disease is taken very seriously and all responsible approaches are made to minimize or eliminate any potential disease risks.

Individual birds for this transfer were sourced from a closed flock which we have worked with for a long period of time. The bird's history and health was well known and well documented. The birds were kept isolated from other birds and underwent intense screening for a variety of common infectious diseases. They were quarantined and vet checked prior to transport. Upon arrival in Bolivia, they were quarantined again, held in isolation where there are no other captive birds and then eventually released into areas where BTMAs no longer exist.

Because of the size of the BTMA habitat (35,000 km<sup>2</sup> /13,500 mi<sup>2</sup>), the incredibly small size of the wild population (115-130 birds), and our familiarity with the movements of the wild birds after having 10+ years of studying them in the field, we can say with a fairly high level of confidence that for the foreseeable future, all releases will be reintroductions, and that contact with any wild Blue-throats is unlikely to occur soon after release.





**Survivability:** Some well-intended publications have raised questions regarding the survivability of captive-raised parrots if returned to the wild. During the past 10 years, a great deal of new release work for psittacines has been undertaken and largely demonstrates that successful releases of captive raised parrots is feasible, but also that survivability of the birds can be very high with proper acclimatization and support for individual birds.

For our part, the WPT first became involved in reintroduction work in the early 1990's through our efforts to support the Echo Parakeet conservation program on the island of Mauritius, where the wild population in the late 1980's was reduced to only 12 birds. Thankfully the Echo has now recovered to over 580 individuals. More recently, though our FlyFree program, we have been directly involved in the release of literally thousands of parrots in 13 different countries (mostly developing nations), albeit with formerly wild-caught birds that have been held in captivity for varying periods of time, which in some cases exceed 5 or more years. Concurrently, the WPT has also been supporting and advising on the release work of other organizations, such as the ARA Project, who have successfully released 150+ captive bred (hand-reared and parent-reared) Scarlet and Great Green Macaws, reintroducing the birds into areas where they are regionally extinct (a scenario identical to the BTMA releases). In the case of the ARA Project their releases have occurred over the past 8 years and the survivability of the released birds ranges from 78-92%. In subsequent years many of the released birds have started to breed in the wild.

Additionally, WPT is supporting and guiding efforts to release other captive bred Scarlet Macaws in Honduras, Great Green Macaws in Ecuador, and other breeding and release programs for other parrot species in Brazil. Given the approach the WPT has taken and the protocols put into place, no risk of disease to wild populations from captive-bred birds has been shown to occur. Looking beyond the scope of the WPT, others have also been involved and had varying success with the reintroduction of others species of macaws (Scarlets in Honduras, Blue and Gold Macaws in Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago), a number of Amazon parrots in several locations, and a variety of other species of parrots and parakeets.

**Technique:** In almost all cases, where a thoughtful approach is given and "soft-release" techniques are followed (gradual acclimation to local foods, environment, and post-release supplementation) then survivability of the birds is quite good to excellent. In rare cases where survival of released parrots was low, that outcome appears to be related to using a "hard release" technique (abrupt release followed by little to no support post release).

The reintroduction activities being implemented here have been successfully used in a number of other programs for different species of parrots and macaws. The project also has the full support of all regulatory agencies involved in the process that have reviewed and approved this methodology.



© Helen Müller



© Stefan Avramov