

# Psitta news

## Cuba

Dr. James Wiley of Grambling State University, Louisiana, USA, reports as follows on the Cuban Conure (*Aratinga euops*):

Xiomara Gálvez and her team of biologists are making tremendous progress on the study of the status and distribution of this parakeet. This year we concentrated on the little-studied area of Oriente, where we were able to assess parakeet and parrot populations. In addition, Xiomara and her group have been collecting good data on the biology of the parakeet, as needed to develop biologically sound conservation programmes for the species. Of particular interest during the study period has been the parakeet's diet and reproductive biology. Also, we have made a special effort toward understanding its position in Cuban ecological communities, especially those greatly altered by man.

In 1998, as in 1997, we conducted a Conservation Festival as part of our efforts to inform and "convert" the local public to supporting the drive to conserve the Cuban Parakeet and other endangered species. This year's Festival was in Jaguajay and, like



Cuban Conure

Photo: R. Low

earlier events, was a spectacular success. The public (e.g., school children, hunters, citizens) participated in the inventory of parakeet populations centred on the north-central coast of Cuba, then enjoyed a community festival in celebration of conservation and the parakeet.

Plans are moving ahead for re-introducing the parakeet in the Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Pines), where the species was exterminated nearly a century ago. We have laid the groundwork for such an effort through baseline studies of potential nest cavity and food availability, predator and competitor threats, and potential release sites. In addition, Xiomara has led a public education programme that began in December 1995 with the first Conservation Festival (a report of which is in press in *Bird Conservation International*). That festival was founded on the participation of the public and we had more than 300 local residents manning survey stations during a one-day inventory of the parrot and crane population on the island. This year (November 1998), we will have a follow-up festival at the request of Isla residents. All of this is quite exciting, because now we are getting tremendous public interest in, and support of, local conservation programmes.

The efforts of the 1998 field season will be continued into 1999. We will be concentrating our studies of parakeet biology in the BelEm National Ecology Area, Camaguay, in east-central Cuba. Efforts there will be concentrating on characterising nest habitat, including nest cavity characteristics, as well as the behaviour and ecology of the parakeet. Additional areas will be surveyed to add to our pool of knowledge about the parakeet's distribution and status in Cuba. Another festival is planned for February, this time to be centred in the Zapata Swamp, an area of importance for many of Cuba's endangered species, including the parakeet.

Pending the outcome of the data collection in 1999, we may begin preparing manuscripts describing our parakeet findings late next year, but certainly by the following year. The support that

the Canadian World Parrot Trust have generously afforded Xiomara and her team is greatly appreciated, as it has allowed her to make tremendous gains in knowledge and to use that knowledge in developing an effective management program for Cuba's psittacines.

## Echo Parakeet Update

from Grant Harper ('Harpo'), Project Leader, 1998/99 at 8 October, 1998

There are currently eight nests. Five have eight chicks at various stages of growth, and three have eggs. Two wild chicks have already been transferred to the aviaries at Black River, where they accompany the two chicks that have been hatched from three harvested eggs. We expect at least four nests to produce clutches in the next week or two.

The most interesting news thus far has been pairing of a two year old captive reared release bird with a wild male. She ('Gabriella') has produced an egg which unfortunately, but not surprisingly, is infertile. We hope to foster a chick to her in the immediate future. This nest is a turning point for the Echo Parakeet project, showing that the release birds can become functioning members of the wild population, and bodes well for the future of the release program and the species as a whole. We have also found a pairing between a one year old female and a four year old male, both banded as chicks on nests. This pairing may give us some baseline information on sexual maturity, depending on whether they produce a clutch or not.

The recent purchase of a portable incubator has taken a lot of the guesswork and uncertainty out of chick transfers, and is a valuable and long awaited addition to the team!

Dale Jackson leaves us tomorrow to go back to Paradise Park after his six week secondment here. The Echo team and Dale have both learnt a lot while he has been here, and he's been a valuable, hard working and easy going member of the team. It would be good to see him out here again at some stage.



Dale Jackson in Mauritius

## The Echo Goes Techno with Help from Panasonic

by Amber Delahooke and Rob Sullivan

The Echo Parakeet Project in Mauritius has taken on a new technical dimension with the introduction of a nest camera! The camera will be used to record every going-on in the nest cavity of a wild pair of Echo's, (Corner Pair), throughout this breeding season. It should hopefully lead to important discoveries about the problems facing the young chicks in the nest; revealing the extents to which they are begging for and receiving food, the role of the extra males in the population or perhaps the intrusion of exotic competitors such as Indian Mynah birds. We are hoping to set up another system in the Captive Breeding Centre to compare the wild and captive Echos, the results of which will be used as the basis for Emma's Masters degree.

We are very grateful to Panasonic for donating the heart of the system, a 12V Panasonic timelapse VCR (worth £895) which can be programmed to stretch a 4 hour tape over 24 hours. It is nestled safely in a parrot proof case that is air and watertight and will be hidden away from the nest tree.

Many thanks are also due to the New Zealand Department of Conservation for all their help and advice, especially Paul Jansen and Murray Douglas, who have developed extensive field camera systems for monitoring the

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