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CONTENTS

Bahama Parrots	2-5
PollyVision DVD review from 'Parrots'	5
The Tucuman Amazon	6-7
Trapping and smuggling of Salmon-crested Cockatoos	8-9
Field Observations on Yellow-faced Parrot	10-11
Military Macaws	12-14
Additions to Appendix I	14
Blue-and-yellow Macaws and Soybeans	15
PsittaNews	16-17
Dissertations: Diana May, Robin Bjork	18
WPT general info	19
Parrots in the wild	20



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After years of intensive research, discussion, and lobbying, the heavily traded Lilac-crowned Amazon (*Amazona finschi*) was transferred to Appendix I of CITES last month in Bangkok - for additional details on the listing and its consequences, please see page 14 in this issue of *PsittaScene*. This bird is one of many feral Lilac-crowns living in urban Los Angeles, California, enjoying a bath on some wet leaves. Please visit amazornia.us for additional stunning images

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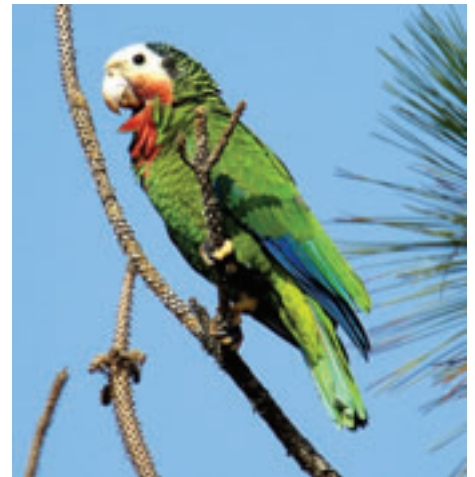
Caribbean underground: Bahama parrots in the wild

Text By CAROLINE STAHALA and Photos by MARK L. STAFFORD

www.parrotsinternational.org

The Bahama Parrot (*Amazona leucocephala bahamensis*) is facing similar threats as most parrots around the world, i.e. introduced predators, small population sizes, habitat loss and natural events such as hurricanes and fires. However, the people and organisations fighting to conserve this parrot are in a very unique position to make the conservation of the Bahama Parrot not only successful, but also provide more insight into their ecology. Prior to 2002, only one significant study was conducted on the Bahama Parrot and this was only with the Abaco parrot population. In 2002 an international conservation effort was initiated in order to prevent the rapid decline and extinction of this parrot from its remaining range. The ultimate objective is to successfully translocate the Bahama Parrot to other islands where it previously existed.

The Bahama Parrot currently inhabits only two of the major islands of the Bahamas, Great Abaco Island and Great Inagua Island. The fact that these two populations are quite different presents a challenge from a conservation perspective. Great Inagua Island is mostly composed of stunted hardwood forests, whereas, Abaco Island is mostly composed of Caribbean Pine in addition to mature hardwood corridors. In addition to differences in habitat, the two



Bahama Parrot sentinel perched above a nest cavity on Abaco Island, The Bahamas.

populations also exhibit differences in their breeding biology. The Inagua population begins breeding in March and searches out its nest cavities in low hardwood trees. The Abaco population begins breeding season later in April and they use nest cavities in the ground. Actually they use holes on the grounds, which are formed from dissolved limestone.

The two populations face similar threats when it comes to natural events, however the Abaco population is at a heightened risk due to human actions. Both populations are susceptible to natural disasters, which have detrimental effects on bird populations.



Adult male Bahama Parrot perched in a Caribbean Pine tree guarding his mate huddled in the ground hollow nest.

Hurricanes frequent the Bahamas and can severely limit food supplies (fruits and berries). In 2004, two major hurricanes made their way through the Bahama archipelago. When natural threats are compounded with additional human induced factors, it starts taking a toll on the populations. The Abaco population is currently being faced with just such a case.

During the 2004 breeding season, this population was impacted with two natural events, a forest fire through the nesting area, and category 3 and category 4 hurricanes. Introduced feral cats also predate upon both chicks and adults in the nests. Another problem that plagues the Abaco group is the introduction of raccoons. Raccoons were introduced onto the northern end of the island but are dispersing south towards the breeding area. An impending threat to the Abaco parrot

A note from the photographer:
The Abaco Island Bahamian Parrot is the only parrot in the New World (Western Hemisphere) that nests in the ground. It was amazing to hike with Caroline through the pine forests, walk up to a hole in the ground and see baby parrots inside staring back up at you. It also seemed a bit incongruous to find parrots roosting and feeding in pine trees.



An adult female Bahama Parrot (nick named Victoria by the field team) in her ground cavity nest with her first hatched egg. As the photo was taken Victoria warned the photographer with a low jaguar-like growl that she did not appreciate the intrusion.

population is the loss of vital hardwood wintering habitat to development. Currently only the pine forest breeding habitat is protected as a national park.

There are numerous examples in the West Indies of how the above mentioned threats have devastated parrot populations. Some of these examples include the Imperial Parrot (*Amazona imperialis*) on Dominica, St Lucia Parrot (*Amazona versicolor*), St. Vincent Parrot (*Amazona guildingii*), Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*) and the Cayman Brac Parrots (*Amazona leucocephala hesternia*). There are also plenty of examples of Amazons, which

have already gone extinct in the West Indies such as from the Turks and Caicos, Montserrat, Guadalupe, Martinique, Grenada and Barbados.

In order to prevent the same fate for the Bahama Parrot, a proactive approach was taken by local Bahamian organisations, local Bahamian government, US Fish and Wildlife Service and research universities. In 2002, a program was established to begin monitoring population size of the Abaco Parrot and prepare for the eventual translocation of the Bahama Parrot to an island in its former range. The population size in 2002 for the Abaco parrot was



Three Bahama Parrot chicks in limestone nest cavity.

estimated at 1,600 individuals.

The following year an intensive investigation into the health of the population was launched. Between April 2003 and August 2004 the Abaco parrot population was studied to determine survival rates of adults and juveniles and nest success. Movement patterns were tracked throughout the year to determine priority habitat. The Abaco population was the first priority due to the threat of predators and their unique ground nesting behaviour. These birds use limestone solution cavities on the pine forest floor as nesting cavities. The opening of the cavities can be as small as the top of a teacup to as large as a basketball hoop. The cavities are reused by pairs year after year just as tree cavities are reused by other



A Bahama Parrot pair resting in a pine tree after foraging on Metopium, which excretes a black sap.

A note from the photographer: The Abaco Bahamian Parrot is the only known fire adapted parrot in the world. When I was Caroline's guest I was fortunate to witness and film a forest fire set by lightning burning over the parrot nests. As the fire raged, I watched a mated pair intent on gobbling berries barely 50 yards from the fire line, presumably to take back to their chicks. The fire was incredibly hot and smokey. We were sure none of the chicks could survive as the fire burned over the nests we had checked and filmed earlier in the day. Miraculously, early the next morning, when we jumped the fire line and ran back into the smoldering charred moonscape, the mother parrots and their babies survived. Obviously they huddled in their ground hole nests as the fire raged over their heads. They were safe and healthy. Truly incredible.



The raging Forest Fire which swept through the parrot nesting area and over the ground nests in July 2004. Amazingly no nests or chicks were lost.

species. The parrots remove any debris that accumulated in the hole during the nonbreeding season. Adults enter the nest by flying to the ground and entering the cavity tail first. On average, a breeding pair produces 4 eggs and can fledge from 1-4 chicks. The adults feed on green pine cones that are found in great abundance in the pine forest only during the parrot breeding season.

Results

Results of this study show the importance of protecting the wintering habitat. After



The author examining the nest cavity (designated nest #19) the morning after the fire burned directly over the top....with three healthy, live chicks.

the breeding season, the pine trees no longer provide enough foraging resources for them to remain in this area. Due to the scarcity of food during the winter months, parrots move from the central part of the island or pine forest, to the fringes of the island where hardwood stands are producing berries.

Efforts are now underway to begin similar studies on the other population of the Bahama Parrot on Inagua Island. The work on Inagua will be an effort to determine the status of the population as a single unit. This work along with the findings from Abaco will allow for a well thought out plan for the protection of the remaining populations and the translocation of the Bahama Parrot to islands, which they previously called home.

Efforts are continuing to work towards multiple permanent populations of the Bahama Parrot. For any questions regarding the current and upcoming work please contact Caroline Stahala cstahal@ncsu.edu. The field team would more than welcome any support from WPT readers. Top on the list is a used 4x4 field vehicle. WPT will work to make any vehicle donation tax deductible. For inquiries regarding photographs please contact Mark Stafford info@parrotsinternational.org.



*A Bahama Parrot foraging on *Petitia* and *Metopium*. The *Metopium* bush, known locally as "Poisonwood", has an effect on humans like poison ivy and poison oak. Contact with the bush creates a red, itchy, very uncomfortable rash for about two weeks. The photographer speaks from experience after trying to keep up with Caroline bushwacking through the undergrowth. The Bahama Parrots love the stuff.*

PollyVision - Strictly for Parrots

Reviewed by Louise Warburton and first appeared in *Parrots* magazine (www.parrotmag.com)

PollyVision is a DVD made for viewing by your pet parrot, to entertain it with visuals and sounds from their wild cousins around the world. Sounds a bit wacky doesn't it?

I watched it with my African Grey and Lesser Jardine's parrots. Both have very different backgrounds and natures - the Grey is a wild-caught, mostly highly-strung wreck and the Jardine's is a hand-raised humanised brat (in the most affectionate sense!). They are both used to listening to the radio and CDs of African bird calls and the dawn chorus when I am not around.

PollyVision lasts for 80 minutes and will repeat automatically. Except for the introduction there is no music, just the sounds of the wild parrots and their environment. The visuals are divided into five sections denoted by parrot colour and region. We start with the 'Black and White' parrots in Australia, move onto the 'Greens' in Peru, the 'Greys' in the Cameroon, the 'Reds' in Peru and end with the 'Blues' in Brazil.

To begin with it was the audio track that caught my parrot's attention. The African Grey was the first to respond by going into relaxed mode, ruffling his neck feathers and starting to slowly grind his bill. The Jardine's took a little longer because she was distracted by trying to gain my sole attention. I became immediately spellbound by watching the Long-billed Corellas and Galahs going about their natural lives. About ten minutes into the show, when the White/Short-tailed Black Cockatoos squawk and go down for a drink, the attention of the feathered viewers was immediately caught and both turned to view the screen.

The next time their visual attention was noticeably caught was when a pair of African Greys were shown softly calling to each other at their nest cavity. I wished my birds could tell me what they were saying. In between turning to watch the screen both birds relaxed to the soundtrack throughout. It was obvious that they were listening as I detected slight movements in their neck feathers and eyes when the parrots on screen gave alarm calls and screeched off into the swirling flocks.

This DVD was made for parrots to enjoy, and it works. It also worked for me! I loved it, and can honestly say that it is one of the best things I have ever watched on the small screen. What a pleasure to have an hour and 20 minutes of watching parrots from around the world. Even better that

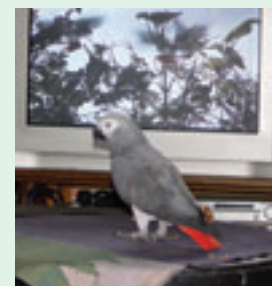
there was no music or voice-over, just the calls of the parrots and noises of their environment, which includes the odd buzz of a passing bee, rumbling of thunder and almost incessant chatter of Weaver birds during the African Grey section.



The footage was of a much better quality than I expected, especially the Australian and Brazilian sections which are 'Attenborough' class. We are treated to fantastic parrot spectacles. We see feeding, drinking, bathing, preening, huge flocks coming to clay licks, bill-tussling, mutual feeding, pairs bonding, pairs duetting, flocks wheeling in the sky ... the absolute highlight for me has to be watching a Lear's Macaw pick a bunch of palm nuts and fly with it to the next tree (away from the other macaws) and crack them open to enjoy like a chocolate treat.

I also think we as parrot owners have a lot to learn just by watching these wild parrots: how highly sociable they are, what a variety of foods they feed on both on the ground and up in the trees, how they drink and bathe in the early morning, their need to sunbathe, and how their alertness and agility is constantly stimulated. We can also begin to understand some of our pet's behaviours - no wonder they like to eat when we eat, look at how they all forage together in nature. We see parrots in a wide variety of habitats and watch them as wild birds, superbly adapted to their environment. Hopefully this DVD can go some way to nourishing and stimulating the perceptual senses of my two feathered friends - I certainly believe that it is a comfort to them.

PollyVision is available from World Parrot Trust. Tel:01736 751026 or go to: www.worldparrottrust.org to order. It costs £9.95/\$15.00 including worldwide shipping, and all the profit will go back to parrot conservation and welfare - which makes it even better!



From Dorothy Schwarz, WPT Member - Casper (3 yr old Grey) preferred the shots of Grey parrots to any other bird in PollyVision