

Buffon's Macaw news and funding update

by ROSEMARY LOW

In the February issue we highlighted the urgent need to raise funds to save the Buffon's or Great Green Macaw. It is suffering a dramatic and rapid decline throughout its small range in Central America (and is already almost extinct in Ecuador). Since my last report a sad event has occurred which underlines the need to make the breeding locality of this species in the northern part of Costa Rica into a national park.

There are now only approximately 35 pairs breeding in Costa Rica. In February, the nest tree of one of these pairs was illegally cut down. Guisselle Monge, the field director of the Great Green Macaw project, has reported the incident to MINAE (the environment agency) officials, and awaits their response. But whatever action is taken, that precious nest site has gone forever. There are relatively few trees large enough and with a suitable cavity to form good nests for this macaw which is almost as large as a Hyacinthine. Furthermore, every nest studied was revealing vital information which would aid in the macaw's survival.

Although the researchers have discovered new nests each season, the number of active nests has fluctuated from 17 in 1998, to 18 in 1999 and fell to only 12 in 2000. Two nest trees were illegally cut down in 1999, one in 2000 - and already one this year. Nine of the 52 nests found since 1994 have been felled, despite the fact that they have been plainly marked as nest sites and specifically protected by legal decree. It is urgent to find a more effective means of halting the cutting of almendro trees, since obviously the legal decree is ineffective.

It is interesting (also sad) to look at the history of one particular nest site. It was located in an almendro tree, north-east of the town of Ojoché. The forest surrounding the tree was gradually degraded until the area underwent massive clearing. Although the tree is still standing, it is in the middle of a plantation of melina (*Gmelina arborea*) trees. This exotic tree is very fast-growing and used for paper production. An American-owned company has large areas under melina cultivation in Costa Rica.

In 1995 three young fledged from this tree, in 1996 two and in 1997 only one. Since 1998 the almendro has not been visited by macaws.

This is probably because now that the area is a melina plantation, they would be unable to find food there.

Guisselle and her assistant Olivier spend hours in the field. Formerly volunteers were helping but the project ran so low in funds that the two or three volunteers assisting in gathering information and taking part in conservation education, have recently been missing. (They are not paid but their food and lodgings is paid for). Hopefully, as we raise the much-needed funds, volunteers will again play their important part in the project. The presence of researchers is vital. It has reduced to nil the number of macaws shot by local people. In addition to gathering field data and educating local people about the macaw's protection, Guisselle and Olivier work to raise awareness of the importance of a national park.

Funds raised at shows

Every one who reads this can do something to help, no matter how modest their contribution. After all, small sums add up to significant amounts. At Newark show in February I organised a sale table of unwanted items and ran a raffle. Although the sum raised was not enormous, £157, that sum will actually pay Guisselle and Olivier's wages for one week - so modest is their salary. At Stafford show in March, I raised a further £78.26 with a raffle and donations. In between other small sums were collected. Adding the contents of the collecting box of Markham Pet Stores (Doncaster), the total raised was £265.16. This sum has been paid into WPT's Great Green Macaw fund. I would like to thank the traders at the two shows who generously donated raffle prizes.

Famous artist donates picture

We are delighted to announce that

Elizabeth Butterworth, the world-famous artist, has donated a head study of a Buffon's Macaw in aid of the fund. Mounted (but not framed), this picture measures 35cm (14in) x 39cm (15in). It provides a unique opportunity to obtain this artist's work at an affordable price. Please send your bid to The World Parrot Trust. We will feature the painting again in the August issue and bids will close on October 1. The highest offer will secure the painting. Elizabeth Butterworth's work hangs in some of the world's most important galleries, including the Metropolitan Museum in New York. She is held in such esteem that, in 1996, the *Telegraph Magazine* described her as being 'mentioned in the same breath as the great natural history painters Audubon and Durer'.

She is portrait painter to the parrots. Her work is unique and immediately recognisable. It has



Olivier Chassot and Guisselle Monge.

Photo: Rosemary Low

WPT-USA has already donated a substantial sum to this project, and other donations have already been transferred to the USA to be forwarded to the project in Costa Rica

been admired over the years at a number of exhibitions, mainly in London and overseas. Liz formerly kept Scarlet Macaws and has had a life-long interest in these birds. This culminated in the production of the most ambitious fine art folio on any subject anywhere in the world. Entitled *Macaws*, it was unique: 12 life size (elephant folio) plates produced using a technique known as *la poupée*. This is seldom practised due to the enormous time and expense involved. It was a modern art publishing landmark. Liz's generosity towards the Great Green Macaw Fund is greatly appreciated.



WE INVITE BIDS FOR ELIZABETH BUTTERWORTH'S STUDY OF THE GREAT GREEN (BUFFON'S) MACAW

Photo: Rosemary Low