

Psittta scene



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THE BLUE MACAW CONFERENCE

by Michael Reynolds

The World Parrot Trust received an invitation to attend this conference in October 1992, and I was able to combine it with my visit to Paraguay the previous week. The conference was organised jointly by IBAMA, IUCN/CBSG, WWF/TRAFFIC, and Biodiversitas. Other participating organisations included CITES, ICBP, Conservation International, AAZPA, and World Parrot Trust.

Spix's Macaw

The main event of the week at Belo Horizonte was the PHVA (Population and Habitat Viability Assessment) Workshop for Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii*. A comprehensive briefing book was supplied to all participants. The various sections covered: History of the Conservation Effort, Committee Reports, Field Research, Avicultural Reports, Chromosome & DNA Analysis, Diseases, Studbook, Small Populations and Related Information.

Undoubtedly the most compelling contribution to the Workshop came from Marcos da-Re, the field biologist who has been working on Spix's Macaw for more than a year. He has succeeded in organising the support and concern of the inhabitants in the area, and in particular the nearby town of Curaca. The blue macaw, known as 'Ararinha Azul', has effectively been adopted as the symbol of the district, and there is even a restaurant named after it.

Much time was devoted to means of determining the sex of the single bird remaining in the wild, and the scope for reintroducing one or more birds to the wild. Although

the final report and management plan is not yet available, it seems certain that this will be a first priority. The management of the captive population of approximately 30 birds was also discussed at length. Seven of these birds are held in Brazil, and I was able to see and photograph those at Sao Paulo Zoo and in Nelson Kawall's collection.

The remainder of the birds in

the Studbook are held by three collections outside Brazil: Loro Parque, Tenerife; Mr. De Dios, Philippines; Dr. Hammerli, Switzerland. It was a great disappointment that none of these holders attended the Workshop. At a time when aviculture needs to demonstrate its responsibility for the endangered species it has the privilege to have in its care, this is

most regrettable. The only positive aspect is that Mr. De Dios has offered to supply a young Spix's Macaw to be paired with the bird in the wild. Another unfortunate fact is that the DNA work carried out on the captive population is incomplete, and therefore of little value. It will probably have to be done again.

The situation of Spix's Macaw



Spix's Macaw at Sao Paulo Zoo.

Photo: Michael Reynolds

“psittacine
(sit'á sīn) Belonging
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parrots; parrot-like”



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Lear's Macaw . Adult pair and juvenile, near Canudos, Brazil.

Photo courtesy of Biodiversitas

remains desperate, both in the wild and in captivity. Having had the benefit of attending the Workshop, I believe it is essential to try to maintain the remaining bird in the wild, and provide it with a breeding partner as soon as possible. A second pair should also be released. It is also vital to support the work of Marcos da-Re, thus ensuring that the wild population is safe-guarded. The World Parrot Trust, which in 1990 jointly funded the ICBP expedition to establish the status of Spix's Macaw, has been invited to give further assistance to the species, and hopes to be able to assist the conversion of a derelict theatre in Curaca into a community and conservation centre. Regarding the captive population, the Trust would like to see the Brazilian authorities take a firmer line with the holders of the species in Europe and Asia. It would be a disaster for aviculture if, due to a lack of goodwill and proper cooperation, this species were to be lost in the wild and only sustained as a captive population for primarily commercial objectives.

Lear's Macaw

A separate workshop was held for Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari*. This species has a small population of about 60 left in the wild. The birds are dependent on the licuri palm for their principal food supply, and during the breeding season are recorded as flying 80km to 100km per day in search of it. Field researchers, including Munn, Yamashita, Hart and Machado,

emphasise the need to protect existing licuri palms from goats and cattle and to establish new plantations.

The presence of guards and field biologists in the area where Lear's Macaw roosts and nests is thought to reduce greatly the possibility of birds being taken for trade. It is accepted that continuing research into the general and breeding biology of the species is needed, and The World Parrot Trust has provided funds for such research. The Trust has recently launched a 'Palm for a Parrot' fund-raising campaign. In the case of this species also, excellent environmental education work is being carried out in its immediate locality, and this too deserves support.

About ten captive specimens exist, but these are widely dispersed and the majority are considered too old to form the basis of a successful captive breeding programme. Therefore the emphasis must be on the preservation and expansion of the wild population.

Hyacinth Macaw

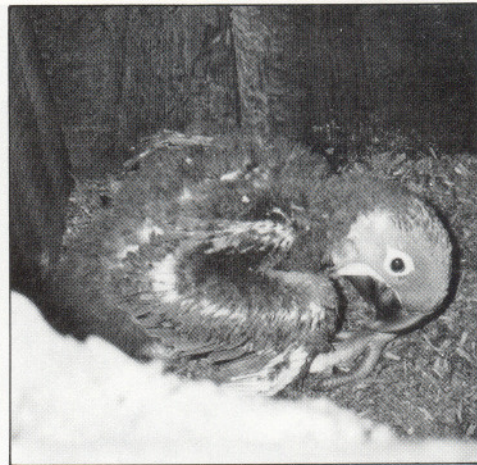
In comparison with the two other endangered Brazilian macaws, the Hyacinth Macaw *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* is clearly in a much stronger position. Between 3000 and 4000 are thought to remain in the wild, in four separate populations. Although some birds are still being trapped for the pet trade, it is considered that ranchers and other landowners have come to value and appreciate these macaws, and that there is a reasonable prospect of the

populations stabilising at around the current numbers.

The Hyacinth Workshop heard excellent reports of continuing field work from Carlos Yamashita, and from Neiva Guedes, working with separate populations. With this species also it is evident that the presence of researchers in the field encourages the local people to take a proprietorial interest in the macaws and help protect them from trappers.

The World Parrot Trust, through its Hyacinth Fund, has supported the work of Carlos Yamashita and Charles Munn during the past year, and will continue to do so in the future. Neiva Guedes has been funded by WWF but it seems there is some doubt about this being continued. For the reason given above, this would be very regrettable. Incidentally we have supplied over 100 of our special Brazilian Hyacinth T-shirts for use by Carlos and Neiva in their vital field work.

The Hyacinth Macaw is well established in aviculture, with perhaps as many being held in captivity as there are in the wild. Breeding success is being achieved increasingly, although the vast majority of young birds are hand-reared for sale as pets. This, hopefully, relieves the pressure on the wild population, but it is very unlikely that such imprinted birds would ever be of use in a reintroduction programme. The World Parrot Trust advocates the production of parent reared Hyacinth Macaws wherever possible.



Concluding Remarks

It was extremely valuable for The World Parrot Trust, and for me personally, to meet and work with the delegates to the Blue Macaw workshops at Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Many useful contacts have been established, and it is clear that the Trust is well regarded by the conservation community. In our three years of existence we have demonstrated our ability to pursue parrot conservation projects in Australia, the Caribbean, Central America, Indonesia, Mauritius,

Mexico, Paraguay, and of course, Brazil.

As funds allow, we will continue to expand our work with endangered parrots, both in the wild and in captivity. We have recently agreed to make a contribution towards a new ICBP initiative to research the problems facing two Brazilian Amazon parrots, *A. pretrei* and *A. vinacea*. The Trust also intends to continue its support for all three endangered Brazilian Macaws: Spix's, Lear's, and the Hyacinth Macaw.

Above left: Unusually, this Hyacinth Macaw nest contained a clutch of three eggs. Photo: Carlos Yamashita

Above middle: Two Hyacinth chicks in a natural nest. Photo: Carlos Yamashita

Above right: Probably the first Hyacinth Macaw chick to be reared in the wild in an artificial nest box. This programme is part funded by the World Parrot Trust. Photo: Carlos Yamashita

Make sure you buy the right T-shirts

A range of colourful parrot T-shirts has been on sale in a number of countries, accompanied by leaflets claiming that a donation is made to The World Parrot Trust for every shirt sold. Unfortunately, for reasons too boring to explain, the Trust will only benefit by a derisory cent or two per shirt. So please, do not buy these shirts.

If you want a parrot T-shirt, buy one of the two designs available direct from the Trust. These are the 'Palm Cockatoo' shirt featuring the Trust's logo, and the Hyacinth shirt

complete with the message in Portuguese which says: 'Protect the heritage of the Pantanal'. With the generous assistance of British Airways we have sent a good supply of these shirts to field biologists working to preserve and study Hyacinth Macaws in the Pantanal, and you can buy the identical and authentic shirt. We charge £9.95 each for these, plus post and packing, but this price includes a contribution of £4.50 which goes directly to help our work for the parrots.

