

Psitta Scene

Editor

Rosemary Low,
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall,
TR27 4HB, UK

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Cover Picture By Ray Hales

The elegant Citron-crested (*Cacatua sulphura citrinocristata*) is a familiar cockatoo in aviculture - yet it is also endangered. From the Indonesian island of Sumba, it has suffered the twin threats of loss of habitat and excessive trapping for trade. Captive-breeding unfortunately centres on hand-rearing young for the pet trade, so a question mark hangs over the future of this lovely cockatoo.

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Truly stunning displays

By JAMIE GILARDI

In mid-October I had the pleasure of visiting Bolivia with a group of avid parrot enthusiasts. My goal was to get some first-hand impressions of two very threatened parrots: the Red-fronted Macaw (*Ara rubrogenys*) and the Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*). We have published very little about the Red-fronted Macaw in *PsittaScene*, a species that is globally Endangered, and lives in the foothills of the Andes in central Bolivia. I had been told that these birds were beautiful in flight, but that didn't prepare me for the truly stunning displays of colour we encountered nearly every time we saw these birds. We spent three days in their mountain home, watching them fly through the valleys, drink from the river, and eat from the trees and cornfields. Since we had several very gifted photographers on the trip, I thought it might make a stronger impression on our readers to present the trip in a collection of photos.



Mark Stafford

Below: A flock of sheep being driven across the Mizque River itself by a sprightly gentleman. Sheep and goat grazing is one of several threats to all the parrots in the region. Grazing prevents the recruitment of many species of trees on which the parrots depend for many essential resources such as food, roosting habitat, and in some cases nest sites.



JDG

Above: After tracking the Red-fronts through two afternoons, we found that they were partial to one tree near a cornfield - it had very fine leaves and branches which swayed dramatically in the wind making telephoto shots like this one very difficult.



JDG.

Above: One of the many herds of cows, goats, or sheep we encountered in the Red-fronted Macaw habitat - typically driven by dogs, elderly men, or children. Like the goats and sheep, cattle are the reason for much of the habitat conversion in these valleys which helps drive the parrots to crops like peanuts and corn for food.



Bill King

Right: Late on our third afternoon, we discovered a group of birds on the ground in a large tilled field. It turned out they were looking for and eating the remains of a corn harvest. They would either eat the cobs on the ground or fly to a nearby tree, bounce around in the wind, and eat the corn there.

Right: After an overnight flight from Miami and a six hour drive through the Andean foothills, we descended along a steep winding and dusty dirt road into the Mizque Valley. Our intent was to spend the remaining light checking out the blind and the general vicinity, and maybe if we were lucky, to see some birds. Other than a few conures flying over on the way, these birds - a group of more than 20 Red-fronted Macaws - were the first parrots that we saw. It proved to be a highly impressive introduction to the species, as they bounced around on the stiff afternoon breeze, vocalizing and socializing, then gathering and flying off down the valley and out of sight.

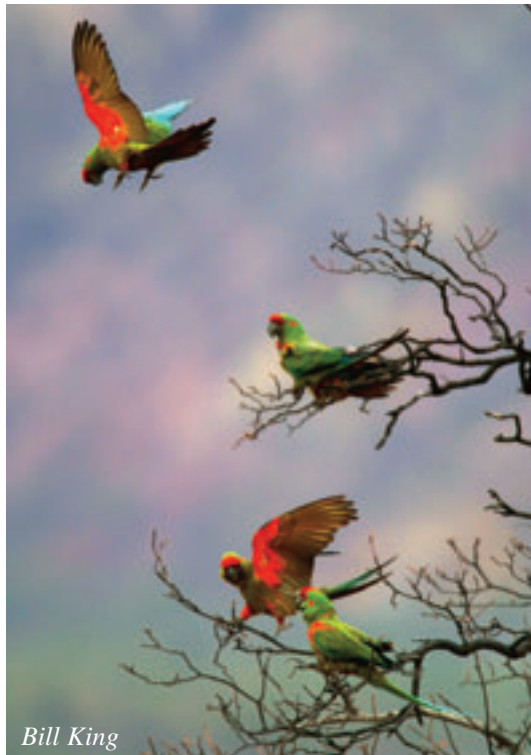
Below: The Red-fronted Macaw lives only in three major river valleys in central Bolivia, where steep dry canyon walls descend into lush river valleys like the Mizque River valley pictured here.



Mark Stafford



JDG

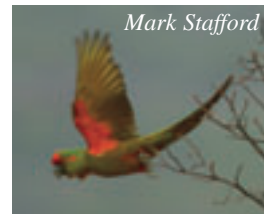


Bill King

Right: As part of a continuing series of bird-phones, the town of Santa Cruz has a collection of these beautifully sculpted and painted birds. These included several different species like this toucan, various waterbirds, and a Blue and Gold Macaw.



JDG



Mark Stafford



Bill King

On our second afternoon in the Mizque, we searched the valley looking for the birds and found many of them at one end of the valley. They were mostly perched in a bare tree at the top of a ridge, the strong wind making it easy for them to take flight and soar around on the updrafts in an impressive display of green and orange.



Mark Stafford



Bill King