

A PROFILE OF EDUARDO NYCANDER VON MASSENBACH

By Charles Munn

In August 1987, an inexperienced but enthusiastic 25 year-old architecture student from Lima named Eduardo Nycander von Massenbach hitchhiked on a research boat all the way to my study site encampment in the Amazon rainforest of Peru's Manu National Park. At the camp I led a team of Peruvian biologists in researching the biology of large macaws for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS, formerly New York Zoological Society). Surprisingly, it was the first detailed wild study of these handsome birds, which trappers have eliminated from many areas of intact forest in Latin America.

Equipped with a camera body and a couple of small lenses, Nycander attempted to photograph every creature and jungle scene, learning as he went. His energy and dedication convinced us to invite him to photograph our project during the peak of nesting activity in early 1988.

Nycander attacked the challenge of nest photography

with a vengeance. He erected 60 foot-high scaffolding towers in a soggy, mosquito-infested palm swamp to photograph nests of Blue-and-Yellow and Red-bellied Macaws. His unrelenting drive to get the best results under extremely difficult field conditions convinced us that Nycander had tremendous untapped potential in macaw research and conservation. I hired him to work from September through November 1988 to photograph the individually-recognizable facial line patterns of each of the hundreds of Red-and-Green Macaws that come daily to eat clay at the two large clay licks in the Manu region. He not only took an excellent face photo of these birds, but he also went far beyond the call of duty by devoting extra days to building better-concealed, closer hides to permit art photography of the more than 1,000 macaws and parrots that visit these licks on most clear days.

Nycander devoted most of 1989 to architectural thesis research in

Manu studying the traditional building techniques and designs of the indigenous Machiguenga Indians. This research later served him well by providing him with ideas for construction in Tambopata, Peru of traditional Indian houses and lodges to be used by macaw researchers and visiting ecotourists.

In September 1989 Nycander travelled with the fourth WCS expedition (the first was in April 1985) to visit the huge macaw and parrot clay lick on the middle Tambopata River near the Bolivian border in southeastern Peru. This trip changed his life, setting him off on a hell-bent-for-leather course of macaw conservation and research in the Peru-Bolivia border region. He decided to team up with two other Peruvian conservationists, both of whom previously had assisted WCS macaw projects in Manu, to form a tourism company to protect this huge clay lick, which is the largest macaw and parrot lick in the world. Large flocks of five species

of macaws and many other parrot species visit this lick in what is surely one of the world's noisiest and most colourful wildlife spectacles.

Since early 1990, Nycander, his team of WCS field biologists and his Peruvian ecotourism partners have carried out research on nearly 100 macaw nests near this lick, which is the site of Nycander's Tambopata Research Center. The Center is a 100-foot-long raised platform covered by a traditional thatched roof and equipped with mosquito-net-shrouded beds. The Center serves both as a macaw research station and as a rustic but comfortable tour lodge.

When Nycander and his colleagues found that most of the second nestlings died in nests of large macaws, he and his team started experimenting with rescuing and handraising these second young and soft-releasing them into the wild flocks of hundreds of macaws near the Center and clay lick. He also built and hung near the Center several different designs of nest boxes, the most successful and durable of which have been 20 seven-foot-long sections of heavy, 14-inch-diameter PVC pipes.

At this point, not only is the huge lick at the Center completely protected and easy to view (meat hunters used to shoot these birds there), but Nycander and his team have successfully raised and released 20 large macaws of three species. Thanks to the PVC nest pipes, the number of successful Scarlet Macaw nests within a 15-minute walk of the station recently jumped from one to nine. In 1993 the BBC filmed the clouds of wild and tame, handraised macaws that fly in the forests and visit the clay lick near the Center. A cover story on macaws that I have authored for an upcoming National Geographic Magazine will highlight the work of Nycander and his research team.

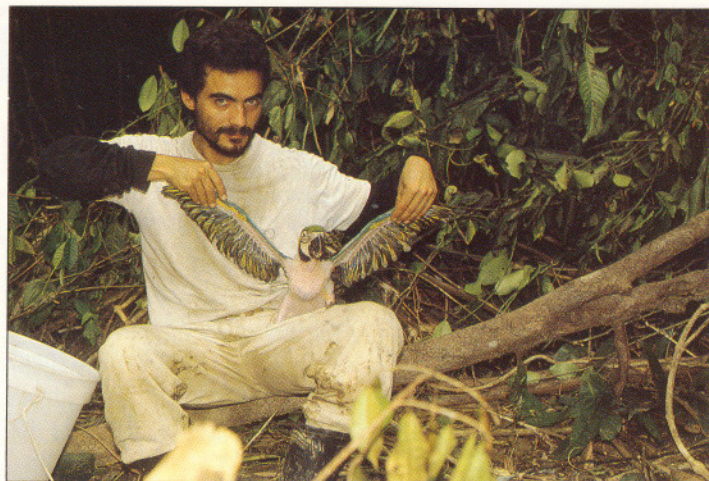
In 1993 Nycander started field training courses in Tambopata for biology students from one of Peru's leading secondary schools, the English-speaking Markham School of Lima. His work has been featured on nationwide television in Peru. Finally, Nycander is a key figure now both in Peru and in Bolivia working to push through the creation of huge new national parks that will protect spectacularly viewable flocks of large macaws.



Eduardo joined Charlie Munn in Bolivia to get this stunning shot of a family of Blue throated Macaws.



Eduardo removes a Scarlet Macaw nestling for routine measurement.



This young Blue and Gold Macaw is being hand-reared, and will eventually re-join the wild flock.

In sum, Nycander has shown that macaws add up to more than just the sum of their colourful feathers. They actually are the most beautiful, tractable and versatile ambassadors for the endangered rainforests of Central and South America. Macaws now are successful metaphors for ecosystem conservation in the world's most intact and biologically diverse habitats - the pristine forests and savannahs of

the Peru-Bolivia border region. All macaw lovers should try to visit Nycander's project sites in Peru and Bolivia for an unforgettable and unique wildlife experience.

Editors Note: If any reader would like to consider visiting Tambopata or Manu forest reserves in Peru, they could contact Eduardo's company:-Rainforest Expeditions, Galeon 120, Lima 41, Peru. Fax: +51.14.472497. Phone: +51.14.389325.

NEW TEAM TACKLES WORLD'S RAREST PARROT

By Paula Harris

Efforts to save the Echo Parakeet have intensified in the aviary and in the wild with the appointment of two senior biologists to the project.

Kirsty Swinnerton did not have to travel far to take up her new post as manager of the Mauritius government's aviaries at Black River. She simply descended from the campsite in the Macchabe Forest where, since 1988, she has led the field team reintroducing captive bred pink pigeons back into the wild, as well as monitoring and managing the remaining wild population of the aptly named Pigeon Wood. When Kirsty arrived in Mauritius from the U.K., the wild population of pink pigeons numbered less than 20 and the first attempt to reintroduce pink pigeons into the island's Royal Botanical Gardens had been abandoned when the pigeons were killed by predators ranging from mynahs to young boys with slingshots.

Captive populations in Black River and at the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust were well established, however, so Kirsty

began new releases in a remote location and launched a programme of predator poisoning and supplemental feeding for the free-living birds. By the spring of 1993 the population had increased threefold, over 50 free-living captive bred pigeons had been returned to the wild and had themselves bred a new generation of wild pigeons - at least 20 at the last count! Kirsty has also had years of hands on aviculture experience, first at Twycross Zoo and later coaxing captive pigeons to breed and rear their own chicks in Black River. Now she will manage breeding programmes for the pigeon, Mauritius kestrel, Rodrigues fruit bat and the Echo Parakeet.

Kirsty takes over the running of the aviaries from Dr. Leslie Smart who spent a year working on the project. Leslie did detailed studies on the nutrition of the parakeets with Monica Wroebe, a Canadian Zoo Biologist. The work of Leslie and Monica has left some sound management techniques which Kirsty can now develop.



Kirsty Swinnerton meets a friendly cockatoo at Paradise Park.