

# Saint Vincent Parrot Consortium Meeting Report

by DAVID WOOLCOCK

The International Captive Breeding Consortium for the Saint Vincent Parrot, *Amazona guildingii*, was established in the early 1980's to assist the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in managing the worldwide captive population of these birds. The breeding programme is intended to maintain a managed captive reservoir of *Amazona guildingii* that could supply birds for reintroduction if needed in the future.

The Consortium provides support and assistance for the management of both the captive and wild populations of the species and its habitat on the island of Saint Vincent. The Consortium also recognises that all Saint Vincent Parrots, regardless of where they reside are, and should be, the property of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

A meeting of the Saint Vincent Parrot Consortium was held at the Villa Lodge Hotel Saint Vincent. I attended this meeting representing both the World Parrot Trust and Paradise Park.

After a welcome by Nigel Weekes, Chief of Forestry in Saint Vincent, the current status of both the wild and captive populations of *Amazona guildingii* was discussed in detail. The biennial census of the wild population, which is carried out by Forestry staff, has shown an increase in the number of birds between 1988 and 1994. However since 1994 no census had been undertaken due to problems with funding and staffing levels. There are no known nest sites of the Saint Vincent Amazon Parrot. Although the birds are apparently doing well, field research in the form of an up to date census and identification and monitoring of nest trees is required as a matter of some urgency.

The problem of birds being illegally taken from the island was discussed in some detail and will probably need to be addressed again once a census has been undertaken. In order to make it more difficult to launder illegal birds it was agreed to write to all known holders of *Amazona guildingii* outside of the island to request DNA samples from the birds they hold. This DNA work will also have a secondary role as it can be used to determine relatedness within the whole captive population. Recent research carried out by the New York Zoological Society on confiscated birds entering the US has revealed previously unknown genetic lines within the species.

Another pressure on the wild population is the illegal farming

of marijuana deep in the forest which is encroaching upon the birds habitat. The Forestry Department and the Police are doing their best to combat this problem.

On the positive side there have recently been new sightings of the parrot on Soufriere, the island's volcano, following regeneration after the last eruption.

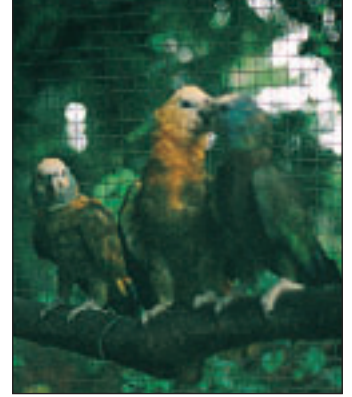
There are currently sixty six captive birds on the island with twenty nine of these being in aviaries at the Botanical Gardens as part of Forestry's in-situ breeding and education programme, and the remaining thirty seven birds being in the hands of "custodians" - Vincentians who had had pet birds prior to the amnesty and who have registered their birds with the Forestry Department.

The ex-situ breeding programme was also discussed at length with reports from all consortium members and holders present. It was agreed to take all available action to try to encourage holders of *Amazona guildingii* who were not consortium members to at least register their birds with the

studbook but to, in preference, participate fully within the consortium framework.

Nigel Weekes, Chief of Forestry, expressed a desire for further veterinary assistance with the captive population on the island. Five years ago consultant avian veterinarian, Andrew Greenwood visited the island on behalf of The World Parrot Trust and with the generous assistance of British Airways Assisting Conservation. Nigel would like this type of visit repeated on a regular basis as no equivalent veterinary expertise exists on the island. Nigel also commented upon the need to train the staff at the Botanical Gardens in best practices of captive bird care. Several collections offered facilities to train Forestry staff ex-situ but Nigel would prefer to have someone come to the aviaries for two to three weeks in order to train all the staff at the Botanical Gardens at the same time.

The importance of the parrot and its habitat as a valuable source of tourist revenue was discussed and parallels were drawn with the successful Forest Trails



St. Vincent Parrots

programme in Saint Lucia. The Saint Lucia trails provide a good source of revenue for the Forestry Department there and a large percentage of the funds raised go directly back into the field conservation work.

The last part of the meeting dealt with the functioning of the consortium and the roles and responsibilities of individuals. Donald F. Bruning was re-appointed as Chairman and I have been appointed both as Consortium Secretary and International Studbook keeper for *Amazona guildingii*.

The following day we visited the aviaries at the Botanical Gardens to see at first hand the work currently going on in the construction of a large educational exhibit aviary which had been funded by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. In addition we had an extremely fruitful meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and Labour, the Hon. Jeremiah Scott. Mr Scott reaffirmed his Government's commitment to the consortium and is even initiating moves to enshrine the consortium within the legislation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thus giving it, and I quote "more teeth" to act for the benefit of the National Bird of the island.

On the final morning of my visit I was fortunate enough to travel to Buccament Valley to observe a group of fourteen or so *Amazona guildingii* in the field. A truly breathtaking sight.

My sincerest thanks to British Airways Assisting Conservation for providing the flights to Barbados. Thanks also to the staff at Forestry Saint Vincent for their time and assistance with field observations.

## Footnote:

Since returning from the meeting funding has been provided by the World Parrot Trust, New York Zoological Society and Houston Zoo to enable the census to be undertaken. It is currently underway



From R to L: Yves de Soye, Loro Parque; David Woolcock, Paradise Park; Don Bruning, NYZA; Luanne Porter; Hon Jeremiah Scott, Minister; Paul Reillo, R.S.C.F.; Mrs White, Minister's P.S; Nigel Weekes, Chief of Forestry; Fitzgerald Providence, Forestry