

# PsittaScene



Twenty Years

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Saving Parrots

May 2009

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IT WAS THE END OF APRIL 2008 and the Thick-billed Parrots (*Rhycolapsitta pachyrhyncha*) of “Madera” in Chihuahua, Mexico were choosing new nest cavities for the upcoming breeding season. In just two months the first eggs would be laid. Based on our 14 year knowledge on the species and their preference for aging (unstable) aspens, we designed, built and set out 20 artificial nest-boxes.

In 1995, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) began studying this species and working on their conservation. In 2008 with the support of the World Parrot Trust, local “Ejidros” (land owners) and government authorities, we had a meeting about the importance of this project and the implementation of the new recovery plan for the parrots. Land owners agreed to allow the installation of boxes and asked that the ITESM keep them informed on the project’s development and parrot’s nesting success. Local interest in Thickbills is very different from in 1995 when the project began. Now conservation and sustainability have involved a new generation.

Nest box design was guided by aspects of the parrot’s natural nests such as entrance width, depth, and internal diameter. In the same way we considered parameters of the natural cavities to install the nest-boxes such as hillside exposure, altitude, slope, and height from ground level. Nest-boxes were mounted on three species of trees: Douglas fir, Mexican White Pine and Durango Pine.

On June 20th, just fifty days after the installation process ended, nest-box use was 30% (6 nests). The six artificial nests were used by the parrots during the breeding season but nesting was confirmed at only one of them. With this, we have confirmed the first ever successful use of a nest-box by this endangered species. Three eggs were laid, 3 chicks hatched, but unfortunately one of them died during the first week. The other two fledged 2 months after hatching.

The other five nests were used for roosting, but we also observed nesting behavior. The parrots put in nesting material such as feathers. They also created sawdust by interior scratching. This is a positive sign for the coming years even if the parrots were not successful on their first attempt this breeding season. They liked the boxes and used them so quickly!

The project team wants to thank the World Parrot Trust for funding support and especially Jamie Gilardi for knowledge and advice. We also thank Daniel Perez, representative of the Ejido El Largo south area, Esteban de Larrea and Alfonso Dominguez Pereda, Conservation and Forest Development Unity #2 (Unidad de Conservación y Desarrollo Forestal #2) from the Ejido Alfonso Dominguez, for their support and facilities at their Thick-billed Parrot conservation areas.

The first documented use of a nest-box by the endangered Thick-billed Parrot. Of 6 boxes occupied, one was used for nesting. The pair laid 3 eggs and 2 chicks survived to fledging.



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