

Thick-billed Parrot

- an historic agreement

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After two years of delicate negotiations an historic agreement was signed to protect the most important nesting area known for the Thick-billed Parrot. The Thick-billed Parrot is an endangered species endemic to the Sierra Madre Occidental of Mexico and the sky-islands that extend into the south west US in New Mexico and Arizona.

Work conducted over the last five years in a collaborative project between Wildlife Preservation Trust International (WPTI) and Monterrey Tech (ITESM) with support from a number of institutions had identified this area as the most important nesting site with over 100 nests possibly representing around 10% of the total breeding population of the species. The site, comprising over 4,000 acres of a very diverse and beautiful forest and although not strictly old growth, had remained relatively undisturbed, unlike 98.5% of the Sierra Madre which has been logged; it was targeted for logging in 2002.

The agreement calls for a 15 year moratorium on any cutting of timber in the area, Bisaloachic (or Cebadillas) which represents 10% of the timber potential of the 40,000 acre Ejido Tutuaca, a rural forest cooperative. To offset in part the losses in timber potential a number of organisations notably The Wildlands Project, Pronatura (Noreste) and Naturalia will provide the community with a number of incentives including a "rent payment" representing over time 50% of the net value of timber that will not be harvested. These organisations together with WPTI and ITESM will continue monitoring and provide community services including consultants to obtain forest certification in their remaining forest, promotion of ecotourism and participatory rural development. The importance of this strategy lies in making the pristine forest worth much more in the long run to the people than timber so that once the 15 year agreement expires they will continue protection based on self interest and pride.

It is important to consider that

the community is composed primarily of very poor foresters/peasants who in the short term have to give up about 6% of their expected annual income to make the deal happen. They do this in the hope that the offer of conservation for a better future will come true and will shortly offset this short term sacrifice. Over the life of the binding agreement they will make sure that conservation values on the land area are maintained and



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Photo: Keith Ewart

participate with conservationists in all necessary work to achieve this.

The negotiation itself that day was quite intense. The turning point was when the most important community leader, a man in his thirties who opposed our offer, noted; "If you want a deal give us more money and give it quick, I won't be around in fifteen years to see what happened". To this, one of the elderly community members, a woman in her seventies

responded; "Look I am quite older than you and will certainly not be around here in fifteen years but my children and grand children will. They will benefit from this and we want it to happen." The crowd cheered. Another woman noted, "Give him what he wants, he can take it from our part and lets agree on conservation of Bisaloachic". On the way back to Chihuahua City the forester that supervises the common public land told me that in all his years, over 20, working with Tutuaca and many assembly meetings, he had never seen women participate until that day. I never thought you could convince them, he said. In the end everyone but one agreed on the plan, including the young leader.

Now, even before the first material results of the agreement reach Tutuaca, they are already different because they have hope for the future in alliance with conservation. This will be formally announced at a "fiesta" in the summer. When the sun set on 22 January, 2000 the horizon looked brighter for man and parrot in the Sierra Madre.