

PSITTAScene

Magazine of the WORLD PARROT TRUST



Autumn 2023



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ABOUT THE WPT

Capture for the live-bird trade, habitat loss and other factors put wild parrots at risk. Nearly 30% of all parrot species are considered by IUCN to be at risk of global extinction.

As an international leader in parrot conservation and welfare, the World Parrot Trust works with researchers, in-country organisations, communities and governments to encourage effective solutions that save parrots.

Since 1989 the WPT has grown to become a global force that moves quickly to address urgent issues and support long-term projects. Over that time WPT has led or aided conservation and welfare projects in 45 countries for more than 80 species of parrot.

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CONTENTS



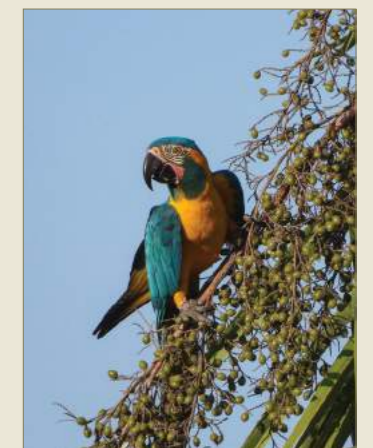
- 4** **Project Profile:**
Natural Encounters Conservation Fund
- 5** **Blue-throated Macaws:**
Steady Progress to Secure their Recovery
- 8** **Feathers in Dark:**
Unraveling India's Bird Seizure Report
- 11** **Parrot Conservation Grants:**
First Reports
- 14** **Kākāpō:**
The Parrot of the Night
- 19** **115 Seized Parrots**
Amazons confiscated from trade recovering in Mexico
- 22** **PsittaNews**
*Parrot news and updates
WPT contacts*
- 24** **Parrots in the Wild**
Red-tailed Amazon

ON THE COVER

Blue-throated Macaw © Fundación CLB

The pulp of fruits of *Attalea* and *Acrocomia* palms are the preferred food of critically endangered Blue-throated Macaws. The birds occasionally open unripe nuts to access the liquid inside.

Learn more in *Blue-throated Macaws: Steady Progress to Secure their Recovery*, Page 5.



Partner Spotlight:



Natural Encounters Inc. (NEI) is a for-profit organization dedicated to promoting wildlife conservation through educational and engaging programs designed to improve animal welfare and training practices. Founded by Steve Martin, a renowned pioneer in the field of animal training and behaviour, NEI brings together the most experienced, cross-disciplinary behaviour management training and program development team available to support the diverse needs of the zoological community.

Starting in 1976 with a ground-breaking bird show at the San Diego Wild Animal Park, Steve's innovative approach of showcasing free flight birds with a compelling conservation message has inspired thousands of people to appreciate the diversity and beauty of nature. Since 1991, NEI has continued on with Steve Martin's vision by offering a wide variety of services as well as informative programs at zoos and other venues across the United States and abroad. NEI's team of professional animal educators use positive reinforcement techniques to train animals to demonstrate their natural behaviours, while delivering carefully crafted dialogue and choreography that highlight the challenges and solutions for wildlife conservation.

Working in partnership with the World Parrot Trust NEI, through the Natural Encounters Conservation Fund, participates in a variety of conservation projects to protect and restore the habitats of globally threatened parrots, as well as to raise awareness and involve local communities in their conservation.

By fostering a sense of wonder and respect for all living beings, NEI aims to empower audiences to take action for the preservation of our natural world and to ensure the survival of parrots in the wild.

Learn more about National Encounters Inc. at: naturalencounters.com.

Leave a Legacy



Galah © Corey Raffel

What will be your legacy?

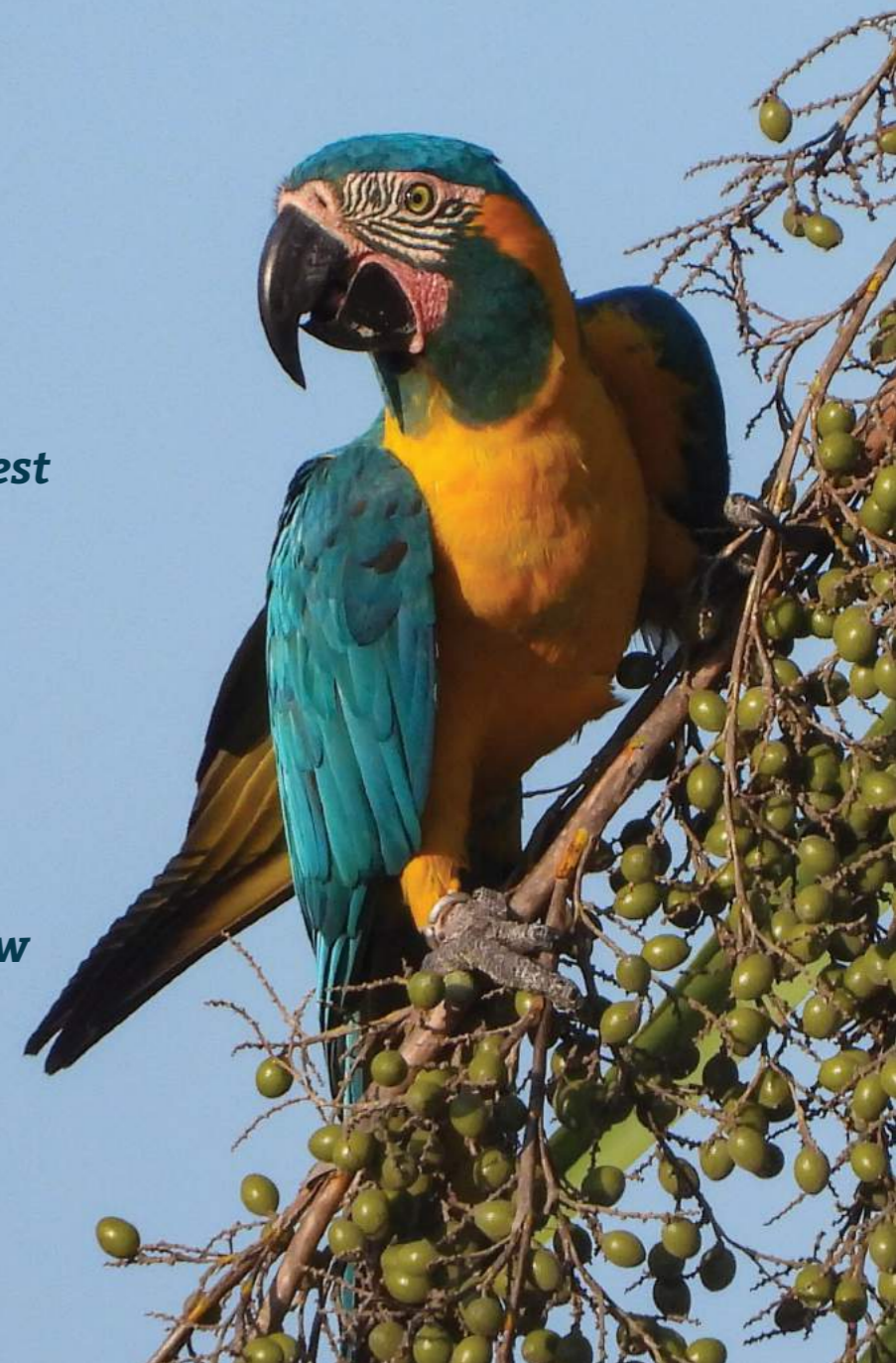
Let your dedication to parrots live on! Leaving a legacy gift to the parrots through your estate may be one of the most fulfilling contributions you will ever make.

Visit our website at parrots.org/legacy or contact an office near you (see page 23.)

“The Blue-throated Macaw lives in our southern area with its beautiful song fills the trees with charm, its blue beard its yellow chest how beautiful she looks showing her brilliance, she is so brave she rises at dawn she returns to her bedroom just at dusk.

Let's take care of our macaw with CLB Foundation as it is found in danger of extinction.

*~ Renata Melgar Sanchez
Student, Loreto, Bolivia*



BLUE-THROATED MACAWS:

Steady progress to secure their recovery

by Desi Milpacher and Rafael Mounzon

All photos © Fundación CLB

Blue-throated Macaws are found in a small range in El Beni, or Beni Department, in Bolivia. They inhabit seasonally flooded savannah, which is characterized by swampy areas and forest islands where many palm trees grow. These medium-sized birds with the turquoise 'beards' face serious challenges, many of which are now related to issues with breeding and habitat loss.

Since 2002 the World Parrot Trust has supported the often complex work of saving these critically endangered birds in Bolivia. The phrase 'it takes a village' is literally the truth here — the community members of Gran Mojos (GMPMA) and Pampas de Yacuma Municipal Protected Areas dedicate their time and passion to save Blue-throated Macaws with the local organisation Fundación CLB (Conservation Loros en Bolivia or Parrot Conservation Bolivia).

In 2023, these committed people carry on. There is much to do, beginning with monitoring and identifying chicks that have fledged — an important step to adulthood — during the current breeding season. The number of Blue-throated Macaws leaving the nest to forge lives as adults has become more reassuring. This is due to intensive on-the-ground work to boost breeding success in various ways. Beginning in October 2022, work began to install 50 nest boxes in new areas as well as areas known to have macaw populations, for a total of 96 boxes available for birds to raise chicks.

Through the end of 2022 and early 2023 the CLB team were actively monitoring over 40 occupied nests, ID ringing nestlings, and providing supplemental feedings to ten vulnerable chicks in four nests in Gran Mojos. One happy discovery: a new nest was found in the population's southern range. And although the breeding season officially ended in April, there was one more surprise — field workers discovered two chicks that had hatched near the beginning of July. The chicks have done well, with the field team certain that they would fly out of the nest as of the end of August. The data that CLB is collecting is new, such as the foodstuffs that the parents are working so hard to find for the chicks is now different than that of the rainy season, when the other pairs' chicks hatched.

The team keeps close track of the adults as well. In an important first, a survey was completed across the southern part of the macaws' range in November 2022, a concerted effort that required counts at ten locations by 16 staff and volunteers from the community. The total numbered 34 (+ or - 5) adult birds, while birds in one known area were unfortunately not sighted or heard. Happily though, the macaws began nesting where they never had before, thanks to the team placing nest boxes in new areas. All in all, with technical support from the WPT, the team covered a remarkable 4800 square kilometres with 42 separate surveys. A future aim is to survey wider areas within the Blue-throated



Macaws' range to look for more birds and prospective pairs, to confirm active nests and provide the ongoing monitoring and any nest or chick protection interventions they may need.

The work includes learning, too. In the last year, CLB staff and GMPMA rangers have completed training, with the help of WPT's Field Conservationist Jack Haines,

on artificial nest construction and monitoring.

Using two new specialised phone apps, the team collects observational and locational data of wild Blue-throated Macaws on one of them, while the other helps them conduct social surveys to collect data from local residents on sightings, counts and behaviors of the macaws. In 2019 and 2022, fire specialist Eric Horstman gave forest fire prevention and mitigation workshops to GMPMA members (see *PsittaScene Autumn 2022*). This was particularly important as changes in climate have resulted in an increase in frequency and intensity of fires throughout the macaws' range, resulting in a loss of vital nesting and food trees.

Along with fieldwork, education and outreach have played a huge role in linking communities and fostering pride in local wildlife. CLB-led school-age programs and ecotourism workshops for landowners have centred on presenting and supporting the Blue-throated Macaw as a flagship species for the Beni savannah. Thousands of people have

been engaged through conservation outreach programming and messaging. The annual Blue-throated Macaw festival in Loreto attracted dozens of people of all ages with special performances for the adults and drawing and poetry contests for the young.

Conservation Loros en Bolivia and the local communities are looking to the future for the Blue-throated Macaws and other wildlife of these special protected areas. They hope to increase the amount of preserved wild spaces and to create a vital interlinked network of the current protected areas and new ones. Other goals are to complete excursions into the northern part of the birds' range to confirm any changes from historic observations of the population.

With determination and new conservation actions, the Blue-throated Macaw team and their local allies are seeing encouraging results. People of all ages in the Beni region are coming together to work for their special wildlife, especially the Blue-throats, and are enthusiastic to continue into the future. 📍



Healthy Blue-throated Macaw chicks wait for their parents to return
© Fundación CLB

FEATHERS IN DARK: Unraveling India's Bird Seizure Report

Indian PhD scholar Ms. Sharda Kalra and her PhD advisor Dr. Asha Poonia teamed up with Ms. Alisa Davies and Dr. Rowan Martin from the World Parrot Trust to publish new research on the bird trade in India. In this research, they used information gathered from news reports of seizures of birds in India to understand the trade networks in India and beyond.

WPT caught up with the team members to ask a few questions about their research.



Rose-ringed Parakeets at market, India

© JezPhotos, Getty Images

Starting with Sharda, could you give us a summary of what you did in this study?

Well, bird trade in India is extensive. While it provides livelihoods for some people, it also involves unregulated and illegal activities that threaten both native and exotic species and pose health risks to people and wildlife. So, we set out to understand the trade routes and the species involved using media reports of bird trade seizures from 2010 to 2020. We took this approach as there was no centralized database of this information and examining media-reports can be a cost-effective way of gathering data. We ended up collecting 182 reports covering 109 seizure events, involving 25,850 birds. Out of the 58 identified species, 18 were native to India, while 40 were non-native. Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were identified as significant trade hotspots, with Uttar Pradesh

having strong connections with Nepal for trade in native species, whereas West Bengal was a centre for trade in non-native species.

This sounds interesting. Could you brief us which birds are highly traded and why in India?

We found [that] parrots (Psittacidae and Psittaculidae) were the most frequently reported group of birds in trade, likely due to their high demand as pets on the black market. Besides keeping as pets, parrots are also traded in India for superstitious beliefs such as for astrology and belief-based medicine, etc. Parrot astrology or Parakeet fortune-telling is very popular in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. It is a type of astrology traditionally practiced [for] centuries using mainly Rose-ringed and Alexandrine parakeets and involves the birds to pick up Tarot-like fortune cards. Two native Indian

species that are categorized as Near Threatened; the Alexandrine Parakeet (*Palaeornis eupatria*) and Red-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*) were frequently reported in seizures, followed by Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) and Common Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*), indicating the possible threat posed by trade to native species. For non-native [species] Lovebirds (*Agapornis spp.*) were most common.

Moving to Dr. Martin, what were some of the most surprising or alarming trends revealed in the report?

The media reports highlighted numerous welfare issues, including birds being hidden in pipes, shoes or garments and the taping of beaks and feathers to prevent noise. Large groups of birds were also shown being kept together in close confinement. Some reports described birds dying during transportation, and high mortality

rates have been recorded; this means that the numbers of birds reported in trade are likely a fraction of the birds taken from the wild. Cramped and stressful conditions and non-adherence to biosecurity measures also increase the risk of spreading infectious diseases such as avian chlamydia [psittacosis] or bird flu, some of which could pose significant risks to human health, agriculture and the survival in the wild of threatened species.

In your opinion, what impact is legislation having in India on bird trapping and illegal trade?

India's Wild Life Protection Act, 1972, treats native and exotic species differently. The Act prohibits trade and ownership of native species, while exotic species can be imported under license. Although official figures report India has imported very few CITES listed birds, the scale and scope of

trade and ownership indicates that many enter the country through illegal routes. Once in the country, determining the provenance of non-native species is challenging and this has seen a boom in trade in exotic species, including CITES listed species. We found a higher volume and network complexity of trade in birds native to India, which likely reflect differences in how these species are treated under the law rather than overall trade volumes. In 2020, a Voluntary Disclosure Scheme saw the registration of 32,000 exotic pets. There is a need for strengthened legislation on the keeping, breeding and sale of exotic species, especially highly threatened CITES-listed species. The number of seizures rose over the study period, which may indicate increased trade or increased enforcement efforts. We could not find any official government seizure data and there are concerns about the capacity of rescue centres to handle seized birds. Corruption among public

officials also plays a significant role in illegal wildlife trade, undermining legislative changes. There are reports that some seized birds find their way back into the illegal trade. Addressing these issues is crucial to effectively curb illegal bird trading and protect native and exotic species in India.

How has the Indian bird trade affected/interacted with that of surrounding countries?

Other work by WPT has revealed how South Asia and India in particular are important centers of demand for wild birds in international trade and how lax regulation and enforcement in some neighboring countries means that they have become hubs for illegal trade into the wider region. Our study revealed that Indian states have porous borders like Uttar Pradesh, which shares a border with Nepal and West Bengal, which shares a border with

Alexandrine Parakeets are highly sought after, with large numbers being traded every year. © Neil Bowman, Getty Images

Q Coming to Alisa, were there any specific regions or areas in India that were highlighted in the report as hotspots for bird poaching?

West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Tamil Nadu states had the most seizures, out of which West Bengal appears to be a key trade hub and transit point for both the native and exotic bird trade. Uttar Pradesh also appears to be a key destination and transit point for the trade in native species from multiple other states, and it acts as a gateway for trade in native species between them and Nepal. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were destinations for trade in exotic species from Myanmar, Bangladesh and directly from Thailand and African countries.

Q So, have you identified any bird markets in India during this study?

Yes, we actually have, including weekly pet markets in Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Crawford Market in Mumbai (Maharashtra), Russell Market in Bangalore (Karnataka), Jama Masjid market and Chakla area in Delhi, Gallif street market in Kolkata (West Bengal), Mulki Bazaar and MehboobChowk bird market in Hyderabad (Telangana), Mishrikar toll market in Patna (Bihar), Bahelia Toil market in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) and Nakhas market in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) to name a few.

Q Why were you interested in India for this work?

Well, India has become a region of concern for illegal wildlife trade, including birds, and the volume of such trade is increasing. The country's large population and low per capita income create strong economic incentives for engaging in illegal wildlife trade. Rising incomes in urban areas also drive demand for exotic pets as status symbols. But, while there is evidence of a thriving internal trade in exotic species, there was little information on trade routes.


Q Dr. Poonia, did you find this investigation interesting? What was most challenging part for you?

Well, I came in touch with 'Parrot Researchers Group' and took up this study. We had already done the analysis of CITES listed birds trade in India from 1975-2019, which was published in "International Journal of Ecological Economics and Statistics" and [the] present study was a valuable follow-up to many of the questions that study raised.

Definitely, it was so fun working together from such [an] amazing team from different parts of the world. As the team never sat together physically, we tried to understand others' point of view through mails, and that I guess was a bit challenging. I must say, Dr. Martin as an established expert on Aves, gave his very important inputs while Alisa Davies successfully helped to tackle all the technical challenges of the study.

Q Could you give a few recommendations from your study?

Let me give a point-wise reply:

1. Educating consumers on responsible parrot purchasing and ownership is essential to curb the growth in demand for these birds.
2. Enforcement efforts should prioritise building capacity at key transit locations and routes in India and neighboring countries to disrupt illegal trade networks effectively.
3. International cooperation will be necessary to combat cross-border trafficking.
4. Training for law enforcement and civil service staff in investigations, evidence-gathering, prosecutions and handling of live animals.
5. Where trapping is negatively impacting wild populations and local communities have few economic alternatives, community-based conservation initiatives focusing on developing alternative livelihoods should be developed. 

Sharda Kalra et al., "Insights from the Media into the Bird Trade in India: An Analysis of Reported Seizures," *Oryx*, September 11, 2023, 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0030605322001594>.

Asha Poonia, "Trends in CITES Listed Bird's Trade in South Asian Countries in View of Evolution of Indian Laws during Last Four Decades," *SciForum*, March 16, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3390/bdee2021-09480>.



PARROT CONSERVATION GRANTS: FIRST REPORTS

Our coverage of the Parrot Conservation Grant awardees continues with new progress reports coming in about the projects and parrots supported by the WPT/NECF initiative.

ECO-Earth Crusaders Organisation

Asian parakeets are found in India, Nepal, Sumatra, Sri Lanka, parts of Southeast Asia, China and smaller islands in the Philippine Sea in many forest types, from dry forests and rainforest to mangroves and cultivated areas.

Many of these parrots, particularly Alexandrines, are at risk from the brutality of wildlife trafficking and other threats. The eastern Indian state of Odisha is particularly vulnerable to native bird trade, as it borders with countries where active illegal trafficking occurs. There, Alexandrine and other parakeets are traded for their ability to mimic the human voice despite the fact that they are protected under India's wildlife protection law.

In a first-of-its-kind project in Odisha, Earth Crusaders Organisation (ECO) aims to prioritise the protection of parakeets from illegal trafficking and learn about their status in the wild. The team has uncovered data on how many bird species are being traded, finding that the Vernal Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*) and three parakeet species Alexandrine (*Palaeornis eupatria*), Ringneck (*Alexandrinus krameri*) and Plum-headed (*Himalayapsitta cyanocephala*) are targets for trappers. ECO also took part in a first-time confiscation of Red-breasted Parakeets (*Psittacula alexandri*), and identified trading routes, potential areas of nest robbing and selling venues.

Zeroing in on key locations with the help of local informers, where trade and nest poaching occurs, was an important

finding that enabled the team to share intelligence with the Forestry Department.

Earth Crusaders Organisation has trained over 165 frontline forestry staff on wildlife and CITES laws and how to handle confiscations, and has educated communities about wildlife legislation. ECO has provided workshops and bird and nature walks to more than 200 students to educate them about parakeets and encourage them not to trap and trade birds. ECO has also been able to enforce laws in some of the divisions where they have conducted training programmes, and have mobilised ground staff to catch poachers and other middlemen involved in poaching.

In all, more than 100 parakeets were seized. With the support of the state forestry department, the team has seized over 200 birds (70% parakeets, 30% other birds), some of which are still being rehabilitated, and others fit enough to be returned to the wild. Rescue cages have been provided to the division headquarters where newly confiscated birds are sent to recover.

While the team was collecting evidence on threats to parakeets they discovered that local farmers were using plastic nets to protect crops from birds. The birds were getting badly entangled in the nets and either hunted by feral dogs or taken and sold by poachers. ECO has created a Quick Response Team, which involves community members in rescuing parakeets and other birds from the farmers' crop netting. The rescued birds are then repatriated to the wild. These and other activities are inspiring people to participate and to change their attitudes towards the birds: Odisha residents also celebrated World Parrot Day for the first time in 2023, where 40 students visited an open aviary for talks on parakeets.



Top: Alexandrine Parakeet being rescued from crop netting
Middle: A confiscation in Odisha
Bottom: Training frontline staff to fight trafficking
All photos © ECO

Association Rima'Ura

Kuhl's Lorikeets (*Vini kuhlii*), or Kura, are native to Rimatara, Tabuaran and Teriana islands in the South Pacific. Recently they were re-established on the island of Atiu in the Cook Islands. Found in mixed horticultural woodland, forested valleys growing coconuts and village gardens, these lorikeets feed on seeds, flowers and leaves.

This tiny lorikeet is IUCN Endangered due to a number of issues — a vanishingly small range, predation from Black Rats (*Rattus rattus*), and competition and attacks from Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*). In addition, many of the large trees on Rimatara have been lost to agriculture. New work, however, aims to help alleviate some of these threats: a comparative study on nesting habitat preferences,



piloted by Hāloa Production with the support of the Direction of the Environment French Polynesia (DIREN), NZ Parrot Trust (World Parrot Trust New Zealand), Rima'Ura Association and Bird Habitats Australia, is determining which nest options Kura prefer. The study will compare three choices — Thermal Haven nest boxes, log hollows (created from naturally-felled trees) and renovated cavities — which have been set up at five different sites on specially chosen trees in areas with confirmed lorikeet populations.

A number of other tools, including monitoring cameras and protective roof covers for nests, are being tested. The study's results will provide valuable insight on Kuhl's Lorikeet breeding and will drive future management programs. The team doesn't have long to wait for new data: as of May 2023, the lorikeets have been observed excavating cavities near one of the nest sites in preparation for the breeding season, which lasts from September to March.



Top: A prototype log hollow and a Thermal Haven nest box
Bottom: A lorikeet exploring a natural nest cavity
All photos © Association Rima'Ura

Wild Bird Trust

The Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*) is found only in Afromontane mistbelt forest in South Africa. It is mainly a forest canopy dweller, coming to the ground only to drink, and roosts communally in flocks of up to 20 in large *Eucalyptus* or *Podocarpus* trees.

With fewer than 2,000 left in the wild, the Cape Parrot is critically endangered nationally and globally Vulnerable, with habitat loss and degradation being the main threats to its existence. Compounding the issues there is a lack of up-to-date information on the status and condition of Cape Parrot forest, which has hindered its conservation.

A new project aims to address this gap by developing a long-term habitat monitoring plan for the most important forests, with the WPT/NECF Parrot Conservation Grants initiative supporting the pilot study phase of this effort.



Twenty-four acoustic recording units will be deployed to collect about 8,000 hours of non-breeding season Cape Parrot calls across the Amathole forest, a range of densely forested mountains situated in the Eastern Cape province. Currently, 18 Wildlife Acoustic Song Meter minis are in operation at 42 sites across four forests, with four more areas to be surveyed soon. The team has forged partnerships with Harvard University, the K. Lisa Yang Center for Conservation Bioacoustics at Cornell Lab of Ornithology, University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Pretoria. Coupled with LiDAR data (which captures topographical information), these data will be used to investigate Cape Parrot habitat use and determine habitat quality.

Scattering these acoustic devices has provided the opportunity for two general staff members to train as field assistants. They have quickly learned to operate GPS trackers to successfully deploy and retrieve the recording units deep in the forest, an important first step towards building the team's eco-ranger capacity.



Top and bottom: Installing an acoustic recording unit and marking the GPS location.
All photos © Wild Bird Trust

Wild Sun Rescue Center

The iconic Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) ranges from southern Mexico to Pacific Costa Rica, through southern Panama down into northern South America where it is scattered through Colombia, Guianas, Ecuador and Mato Grosso, Brazil.

With its population declining, the Scarlet Macaw faces considerable pressure from trapping and habitat destruction. The population of subspecies *cyanoptera* totals about 4,000 birds, having become extinct in a number of areas in Central America. Heavy illegal trafficking and deforestation has historically threatened it and continues today, with the loss of nesting cavities a critical factor in its recovery.

Wild Sun Rescue, in a project in Costa Rica, is assessing potential natural



nesting cavities in the southern Nicoya Peninsula. They have developed a list of 20 suitable sites to place nestboxes and thus far have installed seven, plus three placed at the Wild Sun Rescue Center. Since 2019, with their local partners at AsoProapa, the team has released 35 Scarlet Macaws in the area. The newly-placed nestboxes will help provide them enough nesting sites to begin breeding.

The nests will be closely monitored and protected from poachers. So far there has been activity (birds seen exploring inside the boxes for an extended time or spending time around them) in three of the seven installed boxes and two of the three at Wild Sun. One pair is possibly breeding.

To engage the public in monitoring and protecting the macaws the team has produced and distributed an information pamphlet to encourage the local community to share macaw sightings with the centre.



Top: Building the nest boxes
Bottom: Scarlet Macaws in a custom-built home
All photos © Wild Sun

Young Pioneers for Development

Senegal Parrots (*Poicephalus senegalus*) occur in most countries in West Africa. These sociable birds are usually seen in pairs but also in flocks up to 20 or more to feed on flowers, buds, fruits and sometimes crops.

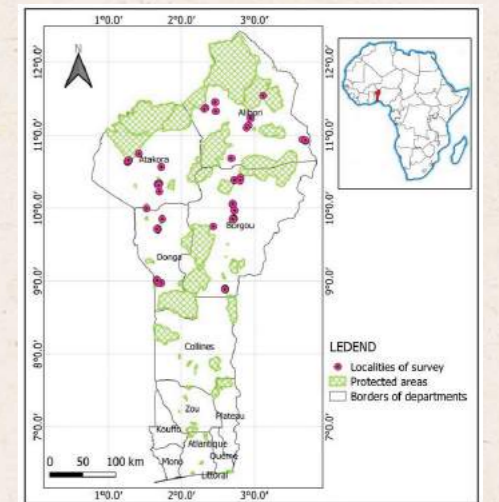
The Senegal Parrot is one of two parrot species found in Benin. Unfortunately, there are little data available on the uses, distribution and habitat of these parrots there and overall there is concern that wild populations throughout the species' large range are declining.

Young Pioneers for Development, an NGO based in Benin, has launched a project which will contribute to conservation of Senegal Parrots by providing reliable baseline data on their ecology in Benin. Their goals are to assess the distribution, abundance and habitat preferences of the species there and assess the locals' knowledge of the birds.



The team's first actions were to interview 100 people in different localities of northern Benin to gain an idea of where the birds are found. Next was to find out how these parrots are captured and used by local people. Using photographs of the parrots and questionnaires, the team travelled to 12 districts surrounding or near protected areas in northern Benin where over 450 individuals were surveyed, taking into account their sex, age, religious beliefs/affiliations and ethnic group. Interviewees were then questioned on their knowledge of the habitat where the parrots are found, threats to the birds, uses by people and price when captured and sold.

The results showed that the Senegal Parrot is used as food (83.96%), in magic or spiritual rituals (33.63%), in folk medicine (11.43%), for aesthetics or pets (16.92%). The survey also found that the parrots damage crops. The majority of respondents, however, (nearly 55.4%) also noted that wild populations are decreasing.



Top: A map shows locations of surveys and protected areas
Bottom: Conducting interviews with local people
All photos © Young Pioneers for Development

The WPT and NECF are pleased at the progress made by these groups for parrot conservation. We look forward to providing more updates in future issues of PsittaScene.

KĀKĀPŌ:

THE PARROT OF THE NIGHT

by Luis Ortiz-Catedral, Ph.D
WPT Director, Oceania Region

Photos © Jake Osborne

The forest on Whenua Hou...
dark green...but not at first.
At first, it is emerald, a dusky
emerald. But not quite. Jade,
perhaps ('Pounamu', in Te Reo
Māori). But not solid jade...
more like translucent jade...
the forest on Whenua Hou: its
colour ever-changing. The wind
picks up, and the branches of
old trees move. Tree crowns,
ferns and epiphytes sway.
The forest turns a vibrant moss
green; millions of leaves flutter
revealing their pale undersides.

Whenua Hou / Codfish Island
May 2022

I'm standing on a rock near the summit of the island, looking down at the canopies. The forest is so thick and so vast that it resembles the feathered back of a giant mythical bird. Not a bad spot for a lunch break, but too soon the break is over. Time to get back on the track and continue with the task at hand. I am on Whenua Hou helping staff from the Department of Conservation provide supplementary food for a giant green parrot: the Kākāpō, a bird so rare that it truly resembles the stuff of legends.

The Kākāpō...softly-feathered with a face resembling an owl...a loose translation of their scientific name "*Strigops habroptila*." I believe, however, that Māori better captured the essence of the Kākāpō in their name. Kākā meaning "parrot" (as in other Polynesian and Austronesian languages), and pō, meaning darkness or night: Kākāpō, the parrot of the night. The Kākāpō is a parrot...but rather un-parrotlike. The word "parrot" evokes images of shrieking birds in tropical regions, often flying in large groups or at least in pairs, their bright plumage colouring the skies like feathered fireworks. But Kākāpō are flightless and predominantly nocturnal. These ancient birds, which can weigh up to four kilograms, are also lek-breeding*.

There is no pair-bond among Kākāpō. They are solitary giants roaming the night forests. Males attract females using a deep "booming" call. After mating, males and females go their separate ways. For males, this means continuing their entrancing booming, trying to attract and mate with as many females as they can. Only a subset of males mate, the rest of them continue booming into

the night with no guarantee of mating. It's quite a different story for the females. Female Kākāpō are solo mothers. They incubate their eggs and raise their young alone. Other parrots form pair-bonds that in many cases are for life. These nocturnal parrots are also un-birdlike. "Their traits are so unusual they are hard to believe: they're a bird, but they certainly don't behave like one!" says Andrew Digby, Science Advisor for the Kākāpō Recovery Program from the Department of Conservation (DOC), New Zealand.

I leave my rocky outpost and continue hiking, heading towards the next feeding station. Here and there, I find Kākāpō footprints in the mud, the humid soil yielding beneath the weight of these incredible birds. I stop in my tracks and pick up a Kākāpō feather and perform a little ritual known to every visitor on the island: I take a whiff, and there it is...the musky, sweet and grassy scent of Kākāpō, once described as the smell of a musty violin case. The faint scent reminds me of a mouldy rose. For all I know, there's a Kākāpō right next to me, sitting still amongst the vegetation, its plumage blending in the ever-changing greenery, listening to my fading footsteps.

The conservation story of Kākāpō is one of tragedy and hope. The bird has long-held significance among Māori. Kākāpō feathers were used to weave intricate capes, their fatty meat preserved in baskets made of tree-bark and kelp fibres. By the time European settlers came to New Zealand in the late 1700s, Kākāpō were still abundant in the South Island.

However, within a century the Kākāpō was considered a species at risk of disappearing due to the ecological changes brought by the introduction of alien species by European settlers, which brought rabbits to New Zealand where they quickly became pests.



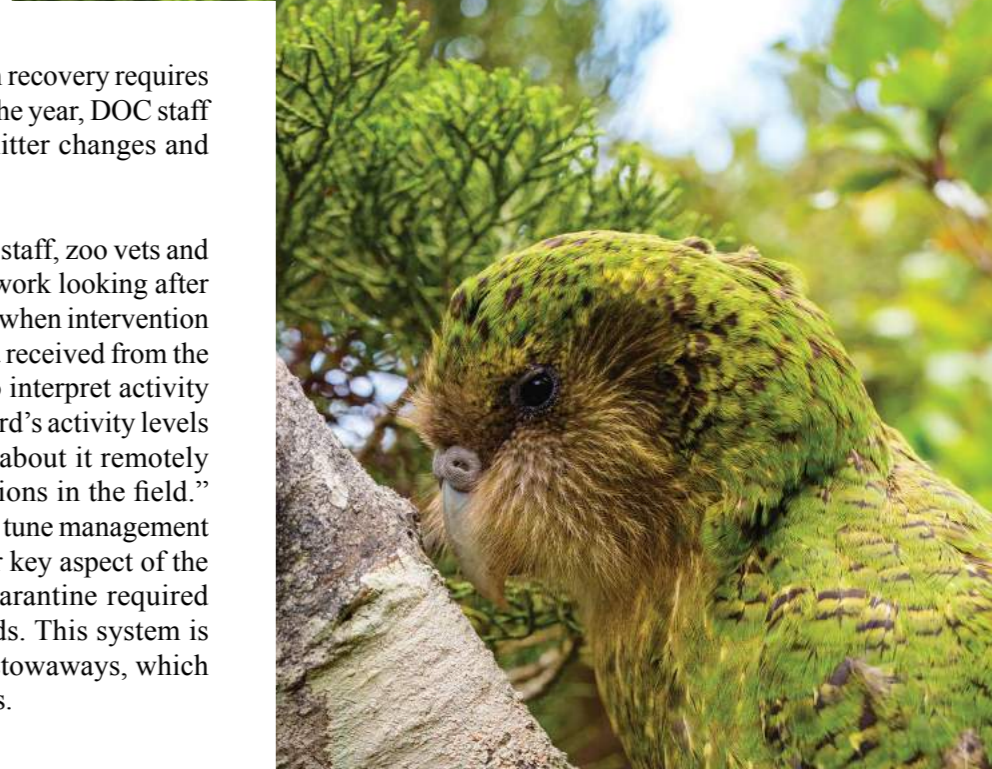
A close-up of mossy green Kākāpō plumage.

*Lek breeding is a reproductive system where males congregate in a specific area (lek) and compete to attract and mate with as many females as they can.



the species has gone from 51 to 247. Such recovery requires an enormous human effort. Throughout the year, DOC staff conduct Kākāpō health checks, transmitter changes and upkeep of gadgets.

During breeding season, dozens of DOC staff, zoo vets and volunteers put in thousands of hours of work looking after Kākāpō. The bird's behaviour can signal when intervention is needed, as Andrew explains, "The data received from the remote monitoring devices allows us to interpret activity information daily. So, for example, if a bird's activity levels drop or change significantly, we learn about it remotely and can then follow up with investigations in the field." Technology is thus allowing DOC to fine tune management and maximise Kākāpō survival. Another key aspect of the success of the program is the strict quarantine required for goods and people on Kākāpō islands. This system is in place to prevent the introduction of stowaways, which could easily hide in crates and backpacks.



In the late 1800s, mustelids (ferrets, weasels and stoats) were introduced to control them. The introduction of mustelids failed to control rabbits, but instead accelerated the decline of New Zealand native fauna. Coupled with the effects of rodents and cats introduced towards the end of the 18th century, this invasion of mustelids had catastrophic consequences for native fauna, which had evolved in the absence of mammalian predators. Kākāpō were not spared. Their only defence against predators — sitting still, playing Kākāpō — was no match for the furry hunters. By 1980, just over 100 Kākāpō remained, and most of them were males.

The last refuges for the solitary giants were offshore islands where mustelids and feral cats had not been introduced or could not swim to. So the decline continued — by 1995 the number had dropped to just 51 individuals. Since the mid 1990's, DOC staff have tried innovative approaches to conserve Kākāpō: from supplementary feeding to help females raise young, to artificial insemination and remote monitoring. Nowadays, there are 247 Kākāpō alive. "There are so few, that each bird is known by its name and distinct character," says Andrew. The New Zealand Parrot Trust, a World Parrot

Trust affiliate, has supported Andrew's team to advance the passive monitoring of Kākāpō. This includes installing backpack-style transmitters on Kākāpō and putting up trail cameras. These transmitters are connected to a network which listens to and collects data on individual birds and their location and movements. Their movements are also tracked passively via trail cameras placed in front of the very feeding stations I am refilling during my hike through Whenua Hou.

Camera stills offer a glimpse into the nocturnal antics of Kākāpō. Andrew explains to me how these gadgets are helping his team in the race to conserve the species. "For almost three decades our programme has relied on an intensive and individual-bird-focused management approach. But as the population grows it's infeasible to continue at the same level of intensity. Technology is key to being able to achieve a successful new phase of sustainable Kākāpō management."

These solitary parrots have a slow life cycle; they reproduce only every two to four years, chicks reach sexual maturity at age six, females can lay up to four eggs but rarely raise more than one young. Considering these issues, it is nothing short of extraordinary that in less than 30 years,



Top: Trail camera captures a male Kākāpō booming.
Bottom: A Kākāpō dives into a supplemental feed hopper.
 Trail photos © Department of Conservation, New Zealand

These solitary parrots have a slow life cycle; they reproduce only every two to four years, chicks reach sexual maturity at age six, females can lay up to four eggs but rarely raise more than one young. Considering these issues, it is nothing short of extraordinary that in less than 30 years, the species has gone from 51 to 247.



The future of the species certainly looks brighter: as more Kākāpō hatch, and as the Predator-Free 2050 plan gains momentum, the chance of establishing more Kākāpō populations on the mainland grows.

The conservation of Kākāpō is a testament to the kiwi ingenuity and applied, creative science for conservation. It is also an ambitious venture: “Our vision is to return the distinctive sound of Kākāpō ‘booming’ throughout Aotearoa / New Zealand.” says Andrew. As I write this article, a new chapter in the remarkable recovery of the species is unfolding: a small group of Kākāpō has been released at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, a fenced mainland forest free of introduced predators in the North Island.

In the 1970s-1980s the remaining mainland Kākāpō were evacuated to offshore sanctuaries in a bold conservation move not free of controversy. Now, these magical birds are roaming once again on mainland soil. Conservation tech has played a central role in this ambitious new phase, as Andrew explains: “Fitting

each Kākāpō with backpack-style transmitters and GPS units — which were developed with support from NZPT/WPT — provided us with the confidence and peace of mind to make this milestone a reality. The technology allows us to track the birds’ locations and activity levels remotely. From this data we learn how they are adapting to their new environment, how they interact with the fence, and to detect any health concerns.”

The future of the species certainly looks brighter: as more Kākāpō hatch, and as the Predator-Free 2050* plan gains momentum, the chance of establishing more Kākāpō populations on the mainland grows.

On my second to last night on Whenua Hou, I was woken up by something pressing softly against my head, something outside my tent.

Half-awake I decided to investigate. In the darkness, while looking for my headtorch I heard something resembling footsteps in the leaf litter. A penguin — that was my first thought as I poked my head outside the tent, still half-dreaming. My midnight visitor was no penguin, but a Kākāpō chick, Stefan, a handsome lad with a perfectly round face. More owl than parrot. I stood there, smiling, looking at the bird move slowly around the tent grunting, nibbling, exploring its surroundings.

Eventually the chick slowly walked into the forest and disappeared in silence into the darkness, under the beckoning fires of the stars. 📷

*Predator Free 2050 is a plan developed by the New Zealand Government to remove mustelids, rodents and possums from the country by the year 2050.

115 SEIZED PARROTS

by Marcela Franco MSc, DVM, WPT Veterinarian and Field Researcher and Desi Milpacher, WPT Editor

Mexico City is a central point for trafficking illegally trapped birds to be sold on site or distributed to other states. On May 15, 2023 officials from the Attorney General’s Office of Mexico City carried out a large operation involving several private homes in the municipality of Iztapalapa. The residents were suspected of carrying out illicit activities and illegally keeping animals for trade. Officers found drugs such as cocaine and marijuana, and seized about 1,000 birds of different species. Five men were arrested.

Of the confiscated birds, 44% were parrots of different species and of those, 115 Amazona parrots were taken into custody by the Secretariat of Citizen Security through the General Directorate of Animal Surveillance Brigade (BVA).

Since then, Dr. Patricia Escalante, of the Institute of Biology of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), has led a group of people committed to the recovery, rehabilitation and release of the birds. Among the pillars of this group are the organization “Vuela con Loros”, which coordinates all the administration, fundraising, outreach and coordination of volunteers, and the Mexican Association of Veterinarians Specializing in Companion and Wild Birds A. C. (AMMEVEAVES), which supports the group with specialized veterinarians.

Due to the chicks’ poor condition and early stage of development, it was necessary for them to be kept for a month in Mexico City to stabilise them and provide the clinical and nutritional care they required. Of the 115 birds received, most were between two and three weeks of age with some younger

or older, plus one juvenile and one adult. As they grew and their plumage developed, seven species were identified: Yellow-headed Amazon (*Amazona oratrix*), Green-cheeked Amazon (*A. viridigenalis*), Lilac-crowned Amazon (*A. finschi*), White-fronted Amazon (*A. albifrons*), Northern Mealy Amazon (*A. guatemalae*), Red-lored Amazon (*A. autumnalis*) and Yellow-naped Amazon (*A. auropalliata*).

From day one, medical personnel and volunteers worked 24 hours a day to feed, treat and provide a clean environment for the chicks. Biosecurity measures helped reduce disease transmission among the birds. The birds were divided into three groups: stable, under observation (mild disease signs) and clinically unwell.

Each of the sick parrots had a treatment record, were weighed daily and fed according to their nutritional requirements.



Illegal bird vendor with an Orange-fronted Conure (*Eupsittula canicularis*) with head painted yellow to disguise it as a Yellow-headed Amazon.

© Marcela Franco



In general, the birds showed malnutrition, dehydration, crop stasis (a failure of the crop to empty properly) and respiratory signs. Stress lines caused by poor nutrition were seen in the birds' feathers. The diet provided by the traffickers is unknown, but it was likely not adequate due to the cost of special chick-rearing formula, or a lack of proper food preparation. Bacteriological and faecal samples were taken from the sick parrots to determine which diseases were present. The team found *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Staphylococcus sp.*, *Escherichia coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Streptococcus sp.* and *Proteus mirabilis*, with *E. coli* being the most common. For example, a Yellow-headed Amazon chick tested positive for *E. coli* and *Streptococcus sp.* and a White-fronted Amazon had *P. mirabilis*. Thankfully, both markedly improved with treatment.

The birds received environmental enrichment and other forms of care, including UVB radiation (for vitamin D3 production), warm water baths, temperature-controlled environments using thermal plates and heat bulbs, special diets, deworming and antibiotic medications, nebulisations (inhaled medicine therapy) and more, with 94% of the birds surviving a month after the team received them.

Once the parrots were stable, they were transferred to Veracruz where they began to adapt to the humid tropical climate as well as begin their rehabilitation. The transfer by road was done at night to avoid the hottest hours of the day. The parrots were placed in kennels lined with towels and covered with blankets to protect them from possible drafts. During the trip the outside temperature and the birds were closely monitored. During the first hours of sunlight, the team regulated the rising temperature with air conditioning or by spraying the birds lightly with water, gradually increasing the temperature as they reached their new environment.

Upon arrival, the birds were fed and placed in their new enclosures. Clinical observations continued, along with feeding and more environmental enrichment. Some of the birds still had respiratory signs or were otherwise recovering, but the climate of the new site suited them very well and they recovered completely.



Opposite page, top: Mainly Red-lored Amazon chicks, day 1 of arrival. Orange arrow shows a Yellow-headed Amazon and green arrow shows a Green-cheeked Amazon. **Opposite page, bottom:** Red-lored Amazon, one month after arrival. **Current page, top left:** Yellow-headed Amazon chick at UMA Nancyaga eating solid food. **Current page, top right:** At UMA Nancyaga, parrots are kept in an outdoor aviary so they can acclimatise to their environment. All photos © Marcela Franco



However, as the days went by, some individuals became sick due to uncontrollable environmental factors: torrential rains, wind and very high temperatures and humidity. A change in their water source led to many of them to stop drinking even though a filter was installed to avoid the high mineral content. Finally, contact with environmental pathogens could not be controlled because of the enclosures' exposure to the outside. As of now, three-quarters have survived.

The World Parrot Trust has closely followed all of the activities carried out, from the first care the parrots received to their rehabilitation and eventual release to each species' natural range. The WPT has helped by providing support, advice, veterinary care and basic meals for some of the volunteers at Veracruz.

To date, more than 20 avian veterinarians and more than 100 volunteers from different fields, biology, veterinary medicine, architecture, administration and art, have participated in the

rehabilitation of these birds. Women from the local community have also provided much-needed help. Support from donors has been constant and varied, from kitchen supplies to medicines and cages. Without them saving the birds would have been difficult.

Efforts to return these birds to their natural habitat are ongoing, but it is important to emphasize that these individuals are evidence of an environmental crime that, according to Mexican law are under the control of the judge presiding over the case. When these birds can be released remains uncertain and is why outside support is still required to keep these birds healthy and ready for release.

Illegal trafficking of species in Mexico continues despite the 2008 ban on the purchase and sale of native parrots. In addition to these birds extracted from the Mexican rainforest, to date the sale of parrots still occurs in the popular markets of Mexico City. Likewise, several of the veterinarians who

supported this rescue were at the same time receiving parrot chicks in their clinics for medical attention.

Sadly, the number of parrots in this seizure represents a very small fraction of the number that are currently being trafficked in Mexico. In addition, only a small number of birds survive transport due to poor conditions and handling during their capture and transfer. A lack of personnel and resources for environmental inspections, law enforcement and awareness among the general public are the causes of ongoing parrot trafficking in the country.

Meanwhile, a few problems remain for the confiscated group – the fight against infection continues, and the weather has wreaked havoc on some of the buildings where the birds are housed. But as of October 2nd there are 86 birds remaining, waiting for further rehabilitation once they are all able. They are recovering and growing well and the signs for their eventual release are positive. ☐

NEWS

Free-flying UK Bird Event Raises Funds for WPT

Parrots and people of all sizes and stripes descended on the beautiful estate of Turvey House in Bedford, UK for a unique event: a celebration of free-flight, feathered companions and parrot awareness, all to raise funds for the World Parrot Trust's ongoing conservation and parrot care work. The one-day gathering also celebrated one macaw in particular: Mia, of Mikey and Mia free-flying fame, enjoyed her sixth birthday surrounded by human and parrot friends.

During the day there were activities that included face-painting, games, raffles, flower arranging and painting workshops, educational talks given by WPT staff on parrot conservation and care, lots of

delicious food from various vendors and dozens of free-flying parrots and their people. A toy-making booth encouraged people to make over 100 toys for the parrots housed at WPT's Kiwa Centre UK, a rescue for birds in need.

A wonderful time was had by everyone, a new community feeling strong amongst the 500+ attendees. All in all, over £4,200 was raised for parrot conservation and welfare. We thank the sponsors of this event, without whom it would not have happened: long-time WPT supporter Cemal of Phillo Flowers, Misland Capital, Soho House, Heemskerck Flowers, J Van Vliet London and Charlie and Grace Hanbury of Turvey House.

Watch a recap of the event on YouTube: tinyurl.com/turvey-wpt



ABOVE: Carlie Thomas, WPT Parrot Care Communications Coordinator, and friend

BELOW: Jack Haines, WPT Neotropics Regional Coordinator, gives a talk at the event



Southern Asia parrot trade continues due to lack of regulation

The study mentioned in the India trade article featured in this issue has again highlighted how lax regulation of wildlife imports in neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh, together with porous land borders, create opportunities for illegal trade within southern Asia. Since 2021 WPT has been working with partners in Bangladesh to strengthen enforcement and improve permitting processes to prevent illegal trafficking (see *PsittaScene Autumn 2022*.)

Read more: tinyurl.com/learsbangladesh



15th Annual Parrot Lovers Cruise February 6 - 16, 2024: Caribbean Islands

Imagine cruising crystal blue waters while experiencing some of the most magical sightseeing in the world! Join fellow parrot lovers aboard the Caribbean Princess for ten days of enlightening seminars and exciting excursions visiting a variety of stunning locations, all while supporting parrot conservation. Don't miss out — contact Carol Cipriano to book your cabin today.

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Gino Conzo: Dedicated Avian Veterinarian and WPT Colleague Passes

The World Parrot Trust was saddened to learn of the loss of Dr. Gino Conzo, one of the first avian veterinarians in Italy. In 2007, he spearheaded WPT veterinary assistance in Africa, treating a large confiscation of Grey Parrots at the Limbe Wildlife Centre in Cameroon. He trained the resident veterinarian there to deal with future confiscations.

He later traveled to Bulgaria, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo whenever help was needed with confiscated parrots. He trained Dr. Davide De Guz, a very capable veterinarian but with no experience with the challenges of managing recently trapped Greys and other parrots. His guidance enabled Davide to take over in his stead, which has been incredibly important for the parrots that the Trust is helping to save from the devastation of the wildlife trade. Gino was also the author of a very successful book on avian medicine for birds in captivity. He will be greatly missed by both his colleagues and clients for his great generosity and cheerful personality. The WPT family would like to extend our condolences to his family and friends.



Gino Conzo (far right) and team, taken at the Lwiro Primates Rehabilitation Centre in the DRC.



2024 Parrot Wall Calendars

Enjoy a year's worth of your favourite birds as depicted by some of the world's best wildlife artists with our Artist's Edition calendar *or* fall in love with candid images of parrots in the wild with the Photography edition. Sale proceeds help to protect parrots from trafficking and habitat destruction.

Get yours while supplies last: parrots.org/shop

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PARROTS IN THE WILD:
Red-tailed Amazon

(Amazona brasiliensis)

The handsome Red-tailed Amazon lives in a restricted range along the southeast coast of Brazil. It favours lowland forest and wetlands, foraging in groups of up to 20 and roosting in larger flocks.

© Corey Raffel

