



THE MAURITIUS PROJECT

FORESTRY QUARTERS • BLACK RIVER • MAURITIUS



Dear Mike

I would like to thank you and Audrey Reynolds and everyone at Paradise Park for the support that they have given us this season and over the years, without which we could not have progressed nearly as far as we have with the Echo Parakeet project. This last season has been a watershed with the parakeet work and this was in no small part due to the help we received from Nick, Kirsty J and Pete. They really are a winning combination. Nick is an excellent organiser who kept camp working and organised and greatly reduced the usual entropy present in running a field camp, he took a lot of the organisational burden off the shoulders of myself and Kirsty S. At the aviaries, Kirsty Jenkin took to the work like an old hand, got on very well with Aranxia and had a wonderful time. It is due to the excellent work of Aranxia and Kirsty J that we successfully reared 11 out of 13 young, and several of these were rescued birds from failing nests, and not at all easy to rear. Pete fitted into camp life and his no nonsense approach and practical skills

were appreciated by all. He organised one of the most successful and enjoyable Christmases I have had here and his butchering skills came in very useful while preparing wild pig and venison for Christmas dinner. They are a winning combination and worth a huge amount to the project, and we would very much like to see them out here again as a part of the Echo Parakeet team. This would be a very useful contribution by the World Parrot Trust / Paradise Park.

The last wild Echo fledged a few days ago (27th January) the seventh successfully fledged from seven nests. The best productivity from the wild birds for well over twenty years. You will recall that we attempted a different management strategy this year to help the wild birds. In the past we have tried to maximise productivity by double clutching. This does not always work and if it does it means that the young of the second brood fledge very late in the season when there is a very real risk of them dying during cyclonic weather. I was unhappy that as a result of these egg manipulations not all pairs in the wild were rearing young themselves. As you will be aware it is very important that pairs rear their own young since it helps maintain a stable pair bond and develop a good breeding pair. We have also noted that in the wild, chicks in broods of two or three do not do as well as single chicks. So this year we "down brooded" all pairs with young. We let them hatch a brood and then harvested all but one of the young. These harvested young were then either fostered to pairs that had no young (due to them failing for one reason or another but still on infertile or dummy eggs) or reared in captivity.

In captivity we have reared eleven young from both captive birds and harvested/ rescued eggs and young. All of these are due for release and the first group of three young were taken up to camp yesterday afternoon and placed in the release aviary. Within minutes the three Echo's released last summer flew in and landed on the top of the aviary to meet their new friends, with much calling between them. I have heard this morning that the already released Echo's are around most of the time taking great interest in the new birds.

We have had ten of the eleven hand-reared young birds sexed and there are eight females. Someone is smiling upon us. We had originally planned to capture up surplus released male birds, since the wild population is skewed towards males and we wanted to balance the sexes as best we could. However this is not an immediate problem and we will leave as many of the birds at liberty as possible. The other young will be going up to the forest for release over the next month or so. We will probably be keeping them in the release cage for a week or ten days before release and then monitoring them intensely for a month. The earliest we are going to be finished is going to be late April. Kirsty S is returning to the UK at the end of the month since she is totally whacked and needs the rest. I will be staying on until early May to keep everything ticking over. The first release of last summer has been a great success and the three birds are now interacting with sub-adult wild ones and they have been seen going around in a group of four or five - the three released birds with one or two wild ones. We have also had a wild bird feeding at the supplemental food hopper with the released birds.

I will keep you informed as the releases progress.

Best wishes

Carl Jones.