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THE WORLD'S LEADING MAGAZINE ON PARROTS AND PARAKEETS



# parrots eMag

Issue 313

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February 2024

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- **what needs to be done**

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- **on par with other animals?**

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**UK woman gets Belize award!**

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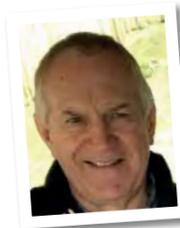
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# Welcome to .....

# parrots

magazine



How many of us dread the thought of one of our cherished birds escaping and flying off into the blue yonder? And how easy is it to leave the door or window open when we are distracted? Well, this happened to a Goffin's cockatoo called Max that saw a gap and went to explore the great outdoors. What is different about this story is that Max gives his own account of his adventures and what it was like to be a bird that finds itself in, what can only be described as, an alien environment.

It is usual in situations like this that the owner will give an account of what has happened and tells the traumatic story of trying to get the escapee back home. Needless to say there will be all attempts to find an escaped bird in order to retrieve it, and Max's owner did just that. Max gave an interesting account of what it was like for him over several days as he flew from branch to branch and into even more unfamiliar territory.

All the time his owner was close by and sleeping out at night in the hope she could get Max back with a happy ending. Yes, it did end well by putting out some of Max's favourite treats, and he was glad to get back home!

*John*  
Editor

## Get in touch

If you would like to write about your parrots, and have some good photos of them that you can send us by email, we would love to hear from you! If you would prefer not to write it yourself, but would still like to tell your story, please contact us and we will write it up for you. Email us on [editorial@imaxweb.co.uk](mailto:editorial@imaxweb.co.uk)



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Cover picture: *Pyrrhura melanura* (left) and *Pyrrhura egregia* (right)  
Photo: Courtesy of Loro Parque

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## Rare chicks hatch at Chester Zoo



Chester Zoo in the UK has welcomed what they call 'two

of the most precious chicks on the planet', in what could be a pivotal moment in pulling a critically endangered parrot back from the brink of extinction. Zookeepers at Chester Zoo have successfully hatched two Mitchell's Lorikeets. These Lorikeets are a rare subspecies of the Scarlet-breasted Lorikeet, considered endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN, which are native to the Indonesian islands of Bali and Lombok. Their numbers have been decimated by the illegal wildlife trade, and a 2020 conservation expedition found just seven birds left in Bali.



The team still needs to determine the sex of the new arrivals, which will be done by testing DNA samples from their feathers, but the two chicks will have an important role to play in the future of their species. They eventually join a special breeding programme for extremely rare birds, which is being coordinated by conservation zoos across Europe.

Chester Zoo's parrot team manager, Zoe Sweetman, said: The hatching of two Mitchell's Lorikeet chicks was a pivotal moment for the species, especially as its future on the planet hangs in the balance. Given how precious the chicks are, we've been monitoring them very closely and weighing the duo regularly to give them every chance of fledging the nest and reaching adulthood because they really are very special."

The unrelenting pace of the illegal wildlife trade has pushed the species to the edge of existence, so in 2018 Chester Zoo joined an important conservation breeding programme where every new addition is helping to protect the future of the species. Chester Zoo is now home to 12 of these beautiful parrots, which is sadly more than what has been recorded in the wild in recent years.

The zoo said extensive hunting and trapping for the illegal wildlife trade was to blame for the lorikeet's drastic decline in numbers. More than a million birds are taken from the wild each year, and they said the market is being driven by a culture of keeping and giving birds as gifts, where rarer or more colourful birds are the most highly prized.

Andrew Owen, head of birds at the zoo, said: "Many of Indonesia's birds have now largely disappeared from their forest homes, which is why we've been working with our partners in Java, the *Cikananga Conservation Breeding Centre*, for more than a decade to rescue birds and provide the skills to breed them in their own country. Part of this work also includes working with local communities to try and change the culture from trapping birds, to helping protect them, which is a huge task in itself." He continued: "In the case of the Mitchell's Lorikeet, it will be the role of conservation zoos like ours to provide a safe haven for the birds and, through specialised breeding programmes, secure their future and help bring them back from the brink."

## Star's parrot speaks Boris Johnson's name



Dame Judi Dench has said her pet parrot, Sweetheart, once spoke the name of former prime minister Boris Johnson "clear as day".



The stage and film titan said her African Grey

hardly ever speaks, but revealed that it said something 'unusual' while she was sitting in the garden one evening. Speaking in *Good Housekeeping* about what makes her laugh, the 88-year-old actress said: "My parrot, Sweetheart. "She's an African Grey and she hardly ever speaks, but a little while ago, she said something quite unusual. Three of us were sitting quietly in the garden, it was a beautiful evening and we were having a drink. Suddenly, clear as day, Sweetie said, "Boris Johnson."

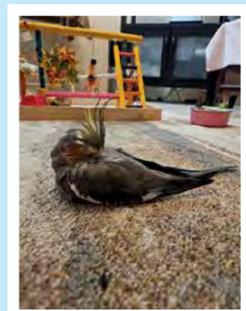
In 2021 the actress told *The Graham Norton Show* that she had been given the charming parrot at Christmas. In a recent interview with Louis Theroux for his BBC series, she told the documentarian that she wouldn't be without her for the world.

## Feathered Friends Photo Competition

We are proud to announce that **Michelle Lowden** from British Columbia, Canada, is the winner of the Facebook "Feathered Friends" group monthly photo competition. The prize is a six month subscription to *Parrots* magazine. The group is located in the UK and run by Sheila Ambrose, who would love to hear from other enthusiastic parrot owners.



Contact details: <https://tinyurl.com/yc4jc6ws>



## Suspended for driving with parrot



Polly may want a cracker, but this passenger may have wanted Polly out of the vehicle. A Gojek driver has received a suspension after bringing a pet parrot into his vehicle and tickling it while driving. The passenger who reported this incident, a civil servant surnamed Xiao, said that when she had got into the car while rushing to work, she realised there was a parrot sitting on the driver's shoulder, staring at her. According to photographs provided by Xiao, the parrot is a female *Eclectus* Parrot \$2,000.

She brushed it off because she needed to get to work, but as the ride progressed, the parrot began to screech at her, which she surmised to be due to her presence. The driver then tickled the parrot again, speaking to soothe it while keeping only one hand on the steering wheel.



Her 22 minute ride was a fearful one as the parrot kept squawking at her and the driver also swerved at times when turning around, Xiao explained. "Whatever the reason was for bringing the parrot into the car, they're a clear distraction and driving under such circumstances can be quite dangerous," she said. Xiao also complained that she wasn't notified of the additional 'passenger' on board the vehicle, further stating that the driver never explained why there was a parrot present in the car. "Although the parrot didn't fly anywhere during the trip, how can we be sure that it won't attack people," she added.

Responding to the complaint, Gojek shared that they had taken action to resolve the problem after speaking with both the passenger and the driver. A Gojek spokesperson also added that they intend to create a safe environment for passengers and ensure that drivers' behaviours meet the company's high standards. The driver has been reportedly suspended.

(Gojek is an on-demand app based in Indonesia that provides a variety of services, food delivery, transportation, payments and logistics etc.)



## Over 200 parakeets rescued in Coimbatore



Warbles of parakeets welcome one to the avian recuperation centre on the District Forest Office campus in Coimbatore, India. The centre currently houses over 200 parakeets, including pet birds surrendered by the public and those rescued by the Forest Department and volunteers.

The Forest Department launched a special drive in September 2023, urging the public to hand over parakeets that were kept as pets. Within three months, the drive witnessed a positive outcome as more than 200 parakeets were handed over by people from different areas of the district. District Forest Officer, N.Jayaraj, said the department staff and volunteers of *Animal Rescuers*, a non-governmental organisation, were taking care of the rescued birds. In the case of birds with trimmed beaks, it takes a longer period for recovery. During rehabilitation, health supplements and grains are included in the diet. In the first week of October, 10 parakeets were released following recovery.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, several people turned in their pet parakeets to us. That was the time when people realised how it felt to be caged all the time," a volunteer added.

The centre also shelters other rescued birds, including Indian peafowl, owls, Asian koel, pigeons and an Egyptian vulture that was found with a fractured wing near Sulur in 2020.

## Pet Greys re-united after drone attack



It was another Russian drone attack on Kyiv in Ukraine lasting over six hours that



destroyed an apartment block, killing at least two people and injuring 49 others. Many pets have also been killed and injured including some parrots, but miraculously, two African Greys were rescued by fire-fighters and re-united with their owner who was emotional and tearful after having them handed back to her.

CLICKABLE VIDEO LINK <http://tinyurl.com/h2xhp5ts>

## 188 Parakeets ringed to protect bird population



The Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) in collaboration with the *Psittacula Breeders Association of Pakistan*

organised the second phase of "Protecting Parakeets in the Wild" at its Dino Park office near Maghazar Zoo and ringed some 188 birds to maintain track record of the bird species in captivity.

"Under the parakeet ringing process, 27 enthusiasts successfully completed the process of registration when



thirty six rings were issued," a news release said. However, seven breeders also completed their registration. A total number of 188 rings were issued for Alexandrine Parakeets. During the registration process 34 registration forms were received and 224 rings were issued to date.

The implementation of the certificates was done for the year 2023, and for the renewal of certificates for the year 2024, and the required fee must be submitted. It is important to note that the payment of the fee is mandatory not only for certificate renewal, but also for the inclusion in future registrations. This event, focusing on the protection of parakeets and raising awareness about their conservation, witnessed the combined efforts of IWMB and the *Psittacula Breeders Association of Pakistan*. The ringing process is a crucial step towards understanding and preserving the parakeet population in its natural habitat.



## New LEGO Art Macaw Parrots set for 2024



LEGO has revealed an all-new LEGO Art set of parrots releasing in early 2024 and here's what you can expect from the LEGO Art Macaw Parrots set. If you have felt gloomy about the LEGO Art sets retiring in 2023, this recently revealed LEGO Art kit might just brighten up your day, and room for that matter.

Scheduled to be released on January 1, 2024, this set forms part of LEGO Art's The Fauna Collection. A couple of LEGO reimagined Macaw Parrots are sure to add a pop of colour and a touch of nature to your home or office. The vibrant, brick-built birds will make for eye-catching wall art. Indeed, they were specially designed to be hung on your wall. If you are wondering how much space you will have to make, the yellow model stands 16 inches tall, with the pink parrot measuring 13.5 inches beak to tail, and 22 inches in width. The former is perched atop a branch, replete with flowers, while the latter's wings are stretched as if it's in flight.

Designed for art aficionados aged 18 and up, this kit comprises 644 pieces. It is sure to provide adult LEGO builders with an immersive and relaxing building experience. In addition, as this kit contains two exotic birds, the joy of bringing these LEGO Macaw Parrots to life can be shared with a fellow art lover.



## Who's a naughty boy then?



There are several ways, if you are truly unfortunate, that you might become the victim of theft on your holiday with the unfelt hand of the pickpocket, the aggressive attentions of an opportunistic criminal if you stray into the wrong part of town, or the open hotel window. Such incidents are thankfully rare, but perhaps not as rare as the light-fingered incident that ruined one Scottish traveller's tour of New Zealand.

Peter Leach, from Glasgow, was forced to report a distinctly unusual robbery after his cash was stolen from his campervan by a parrot. Mr Leach claims that he lost a considerable sum, around 1300 New Zealand Dollars (£700), when the kleptomaniac bird flew into his vehicle and seized the money. This was when Leach had stopped to take a photograph, leaving the campervan unguarded.



The first he knew of his loss was when a Canadian couple walked past and alerted him to the eagle-eyed parrot's distinctly magpie-like behaviour. "We've just seen that bird take something out of your campervan," they told him, and this dastardly feathered crime left Mr Leach distinctly underfunded. "It took all the money I had and left me with just 40 dollars in my pocket," he said.

With no sign of the feathered highwayman and little prospect of recovering his money, Mr Leach reported the incident to the police.

## UFC Star blamed for death of parrot



Furious parrot keeper David Dunne said a building project has taken a terrible toll on him and his pregnant partner. The fuming parrot keeper blames UFC cage fighter, Conor McGregor, for the death of one of his prized parakeets. David Dunne said his £1,300 conure suffered a heart attack after test drilling at a huge nearby building project backed by the UFC star.

David Dunne, 37, of Drimnagh, Dublin, has a 30-strong collection of exotic birds and said: "Once the works started, it was so noisy and really stressed all my birds out. Some were so traumatised by the noise they started pulling out their feathers and added: "The noise from the drilling killed my prize conure."

Dunne told how his prized £1,300 Lutino Conure suffered a heart attack after test drilling at the site close to his home. In a blast at UFC star Conor's property company, Dunne continued: "Once the works started the noise stressed my birds, so I had to do something."

Distraught Dunne whose collection includes parakeets, Amazon parrots, macaws and African Greys said he contacted one of Conor's firms as the peace and tranquillity had been shattered. He explained: "I rang and told McGregor's company about it and they came around and saw the dead conure saying they were very sorry and will do something about it. After ringing several times, they said they would compensate for the loss of the bird, but when push came to shove, they didn't do anything."

Eventually, Dunne had an agreement that the firm would help move the

parrots to a location away from the site in Drimnagh, Dublin, but said he was left angry when the company later turned around and only offered the price of a van rental. Dunne said: "I had to take all my aviaries down and move all the birds out on my own and feel they just disregarded me and my birds, despite that they said they would look after them. But just carried on and clearly did not care."



Dunne has now moved the majority of the birds to a friend's property in Co Wicklow, and is soon to become a dad for the second time saying the building project has taken a terrible toll on him and his partner.

He said: "Relocating the birds is costing me a lot of money that I shouldn't have to spend. I have to do a full day's work, come home, get the food for the parrots, drive to Wicklow and feed them, so is taking time away from me and my family."

The building site in Drimnagh has planning permission for a nine-storey, 188 build-to-rent apartment scheme that McGregor has bought. Preliminary works are now under way on site, leaving local residents livid. A number have lodged objections to the multimillion-euro plans by one of the UFC star's firms to build an eight-storey, 118 unit apartment block adjacent to the site.

Conor McGregor, 35, shot to fame and fortune as a mixed martial arts ace and professional boxer.

# Animal Genetics

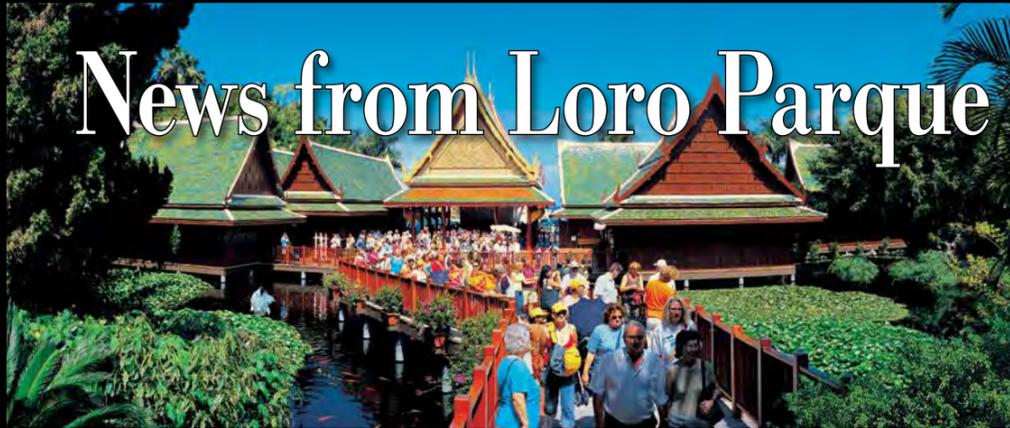
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## New space for the Genus *Pyrrhura* at Loro Parque

by **Rafael Zamora Padrón,**  
Scientific Director, Loro Parque Fundación

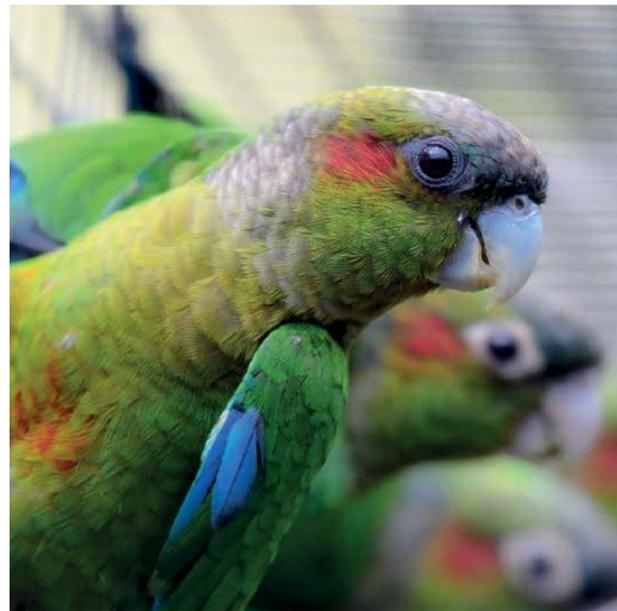
Loro Parque, immersed in a continuous quest to optimise spaces for parrots, has created a new space for *Pyrrhura* parrots integrated into a dense jungle that the park has developed over the last 50 years.

In a large space, visitors can now observe the aerial evolutions of this interesting genus of parrots native to Central and South America. In an enclave of dense vegetation, the largest representation of this group of parrots in the world can now be seen in a community aviary. It is an amazing landscape where the differences between the various species and subspecies native to tropical environments can be appreciated. The opening of this new environment coincides with the start of the new breeding season for many species, whose adults are preparing to start breeding. This is the time of the beginning of courtship and the establishment of new pairs.

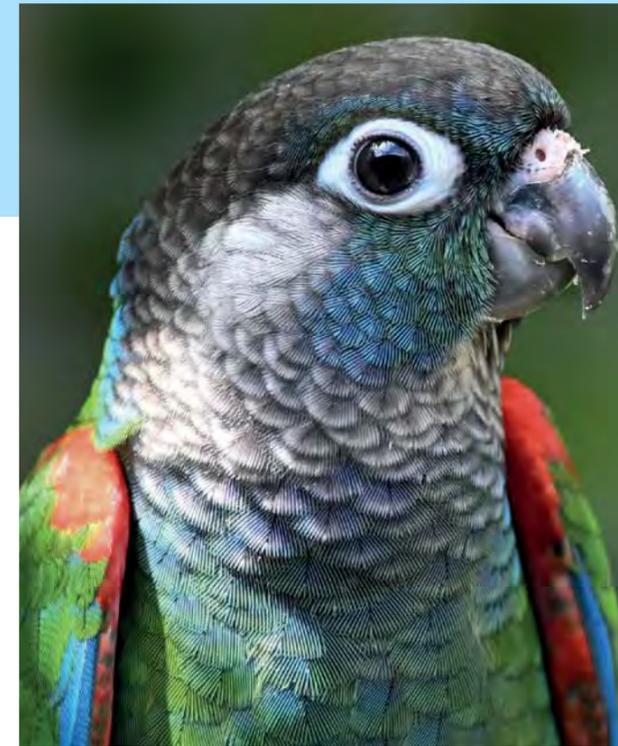
To start a new breeding season, the results of the previous season must first be reviewed. Not only the number of chicks in each pair. Even more important is to look at the dates when



*Cacatua leadbeateri*  
Photo: M. Perez, LPF



*Pyrrhura hoematotis*  
Photo: M. Perez, LPF



*Pyrrhura coerulescens*

each pair started laying eggs, the number of clutches laid, the number of infertile eggs and all the incidents that occurred during the year. Aggressions, eggs laid outside the nest, death of chicks and mistakes made by the breeder. This analysis prior to the reproductive stage will allow us to be attentive in each case and to have prepared the tools and actions that will allow us to improve these results in the following season.

Having made a review of what we can find in each month with each known pair, we can make forecasts and corrections that will be very useful in order not to fall into forgetfulness in breeding management. One of the things we must avoid is that the females lay eggs early when the males are not fully active. This is an important concept for new pairs at the right age to start breeding. Laying the first eggs of the year can be infertile if the pair is not yet synchronised. Early presence of the nest may result in males forcing females to enter or females being stimulated to lay eggs without male interest.

In the case of cockatoos and many species of Amazons, covering the entrance to the nest with soft wood for the pair to work on accessing the nest facilitates synchronisation of the two birds and in turn prevents much aggression in those species where males tend to be very territorial.

Hygiene once again takes centre stage at the beginning of the year. Nests in particular need to be disinfected or renewed. And if the previous year's nests did not work with a particular pair, they may need a change of location of the brood box or the encouragement of a new nest as an option.

With the opening of the new community aviary for the *Pyrrhura* at Loro Parque, new pairs of different species can be formed, which thanks to the large flying space and the freedom to choose their companion, will allow the breeding of healthy chicks from vigorous parents. We invite all our followers to enjoy this new space and to see and photograph little known species of parrots like nowhere else. ■



*Pyrrhura melanura* (right) and  
*Pyrrhura egregia* (left)



The Thick-billed Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*) is a medium-sized parrot endemic to Mexico  
 Photo: Mark Dumont via Creative Commons licence

# Endangered Thick-billed Parrots

## – threatened by deforestation and climate change

by GrrlScientist

Senior Contributor, Evolutionary & behavioural ecologist, ornithologist & science writer

**Thick-billed Parrot populations have declined to fewer than 2000 individuals due to habitat loss, logging and climate change**

Thick-billed parrots (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*), are an enigma. Despite their ecological and cultural importance, especially to indigenous peoples, combined with the fact they historically lived in the southwestern United States, we know surprisingly little about them. Currently, their small population is declining due to habitat loss and degradation, and also as the worsening climate crisis continues to squeeze suitable habitat into ever-smaller areas. For these reasons, the species is listed as Endangered.

To learn a little more about these mysterious parrots, a cross-border collaboration of scientists based in the United States at the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance and in Mexico at the Organización Vida Silvestre A.C., tagged dozens of Thick-billed Parrots with tiny solar-powered satellite transmitters to track their movements. Thanks to these efforts, new critical habitat for the parrots has been revealed, 80 per cent of which has no formal protections. “Until now, it was a mystery where Thick-billed Parrots overwinter and the sites where they nest along the way,

creating a difficult challenge for efforts to conserve this species,” lead author, spatial ecologist and conservation biologist, Dr James Sheppard, a Recovery Ecology Senior Scientist with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, said in a statement.

Dr Sheppard works on a wide variety of conservation projects that benefit from spatial ecology approaches and analyses, he also serves as the Chair of the Spatial Ecology & Telemetry Working Group of The Wildlife Society and as an Associate Editor of *The Journal of Wildlife Management*. “We have now identified new, critical habitat and migratory routes for Thick-billed parrots as well as steps that need to be taken to protect them,” Dr Sheppard stated.

The Thick-billed Parrot is the only living parrot that is native to the United States. These parrots historically occurred in parts of Arizona and New Mexico, in the far west of Texas and even as far north as Utah before newly arrived European colonialists extirpated them. Thick-billed parrots also historically ranged as far south as Venezuela.



Copper Canyon (barranca del cobre) in Chihuahua, Mexico  
 Photo: Jens Uhlenbrock via a Creative Commons licence

Currently, Thick-billed Parrots are largely restricted to temperate conifer, pine, mature pine-oak and fir forests at elevations of 1200–3600 metres in the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range in Chihuahua and Durango, Mexico. The parrots are nomadic, following variations of cone abundances, although they do feed on acorns and pine buds to a lesser extent. They nest in holes, many created by the now-extinct imperial woodpecker, the world’s largest woodpecker, a tragic event that likely significantly reduced their population size. Habitat loss and poaching have also reduced this parrot’s numbers, which currently are estimated to be fewer than 2,000.



Figure 1: Location of a previously unrecorded 2022 parrot nest site near the Chihuahuan town of Madera that we predicted from the tracking data using the nestR package for R (Picardi et al., 2020). (A) Backpack attachment method for the transmitter. (B) Pink star indicates the predicted nest site location, and the blue cross indicates the actual nest location confirmed via ground-truthing. The zoomed-out topographic map on panel (C) shows the spatial distribution of the tracking data (red dots) used to derive this nest site prediction, with the yellow triangle indicating the nest site where this bird was initially telemetered in 2021

Tracking data was collected during a three-year effort that began after Dr Sheppard convinced a technology company to sell the team the necessary supplies to construct the parrots’ transmitter ‘backpacks’ (Figure 1 below).

“They weren’t going to sell us the technology because they didn’t think it was possible to attach GPS transmitters to these strong, boisterous birds,” Dr Sheppard explained. “But we convinced them and proved it could be done.”

Since first attaching the solar-powered transmitters, Dr Sheppard and collaborators remotely collected a data set of more than 40,000 locations from the tracked parrots, enabling the discovery of a new nesting location as well as their overwintering home ranges, migration paths and stopover sites. “Prior to this study, there was only anecdotal evidence to suggest where Thick-billed Parrots spent their breeding and overwintering seasons,” said Ernesto Enkerlin-Hoeflich, Director of Conservation and Sustainability at Parque Fundidora, who was not involved in the study. A prominent Mexican conservationist, environmentalist and researcher, Dr Enkerlin-Hoeflich specialises in parrot ecology, environmental policy, sustainability and biodiversity stewardship.

“Now we can show the birds spend their breeding season mostly in the states of Chihuahua and northern Durango then overwinter in the south-central Sierra Madres, and we can share this information with regulatory agencies and engage them and the conservation community to protect the forests the parrots need to survive,” Dr Enkerlin-Hoeflich observed.

But Dr Sheppard and collaborators discovered something that is deeply worrying. Almost none of the endangered Thick-billed Parrots’ range is

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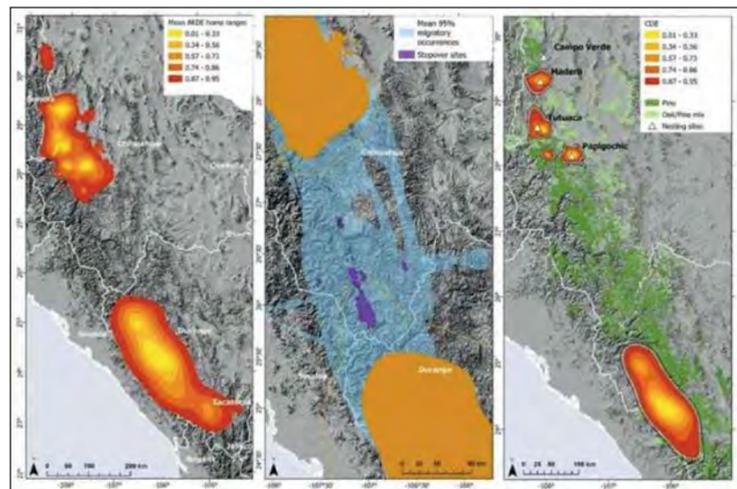


Figure 2: Left: Mean AKDE home ranges with CIs for Thick-billed Parrot locations recorded at the northern breeding sites and southern overwintering sites. Centre: Mean migratory route area defined via 95 per cent Kriged occurrence distribution estimate (blue polygon) with five stopover sites defined by the 25 per cent occurrence contour (purple polygons). Orange polygons indicate seasonal home range areas. Right: Conditional distribution of encounters for parrots at the breeding and overwintering sites indicating a higher likelihood of encounters concentrating around the nesting locations

protected from logging. “Strikingly, less than 20 per cent of the newly identified Thick-billed Parrot overwintering habitat is protected from the timber industry and common clear-cutting practices,” Dr Sheppard stated, noting that less than one per cent of the old-growth forest that once covered the Sierra Madre Occidental remains today. He added: “Further, existing networks of protected sites may not be adequate for the parrots’ survival as a changing climate increases the intensity and frequency of forest fires as well as exacerbates pine beetle outbreaks, which can devastate a previously healthy forest.”

But knowledge is power, and this study could motivate environmental authorities, stakeholders and conservation biologists to protect essential habitat for these endangered

parrots. “The good news is, we understand what’s needed to save this iconic bird,” Dr Sheppard pointed out. “Now, with the sustained engagement of local stakeholders, we hope to successfully recover wild populations of Thick-billed Parrots as well as old-growth forests, and perhaps one day, use this information to reintroduce Thick-billed Parrots to their former ranges, including in the U.S.” ■

Source: James K. Sheppard, Javier Cruz, Luz Francelia Torres González, Miguel Ángel Cruz Nieto, Ronald R. Swaisgood, and Nadine Lamberski (2023). Spatial behaviours and seasonal habitat use of the increasingly endangered Thick-billed Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*), *Global Ecology and Conservation* 48:e02712

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# The i-Holistic Parrot

by Leslie Moran

## My Great Adventure by Max the Goffin's Cockatoo

A true story from Max's owner

**M**y name is Max. My Mom calls me Baby Boy, Baby Parrot, Baby Bird and her Cockatoo Kangaroo. I'm seven years old. Mom adopted me about five years ago from my first owner who was an airline pilot in Miami. Up until a few years ago, I lived in South Florida. But then Mom, our two cats Kitty and Emma, and I moved to the beautiful Laurel Highlands in southwestern Pennsylvania. It's about an hour south of Pittsburgh. Just recently, we moved closer to the town of Mt. Pleasant to our new place, which has a beautiful patio on the first floor.

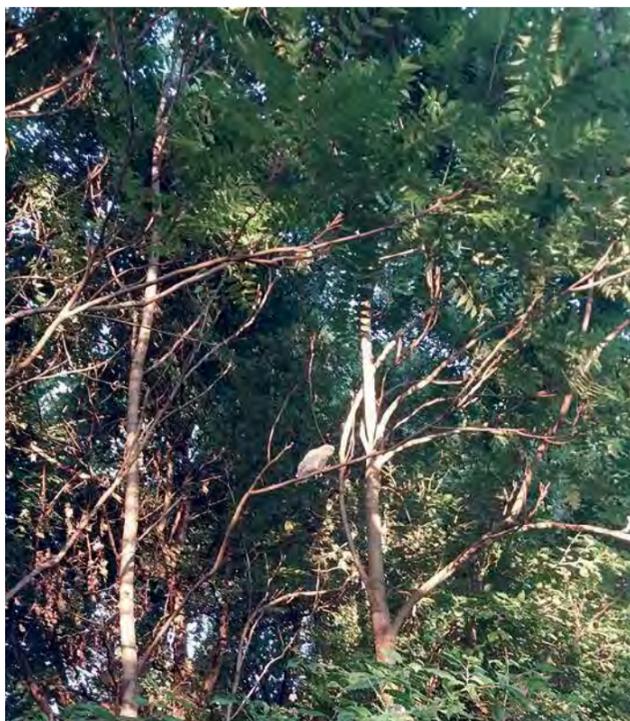
A big, loud truck had just moved all our belongings to our new house. It was our first morning here and Mom was enjoying her coffee on our new patio. I waddled up to the big glass door and she let me out! I hopped up on her lap and sat there very contently.

The next morning and the morning after, we did the same thing. It's August, which is late summer here and everything is still so lush and green, and it's going to be just great living here! I didn't notice the really big tree in our backyard until now. Since my wings hadn't been clipped in a long time, I sat here wondering if I could make it up into that tree. I don't think Mom is really paying much attention to me right now, so I'm going to give this my best shot.

### Day One

Made it! Wow! It's like a huge playground up here! It's a little tricky manoeuvring on these branches and it's much easier to climb UP than to climb DOWN. Before I could get my footing on the branches, Mom ran over in a panic. Even though I'm about 15 feet (4.5 m) high, I can still see the patio from here. She wants me to come down, but I'm just going to enjoy this for a little while.

Before long, some of our new neighbours and lots of Mom's friends started coming to watch me play. Even my Aunt Linda, Mom's sister from Pittsburgh is here! Someone is now throwing a nerf ball at me and it's scaring me. I'm going to



Max in one tree during his adventure

climb up higher in my tree. Everyone down below seems upset, and the vibe is not a good one. Next thing I knew, two firemen stopped by, and I could see them both scratching their heads, as they were trying to figure out how to get me down. They must think I'm a cat! I really don't like these firemen shaking my branches, so I'm going to go further up in the tree where it's

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safe, especially from the nerf balls. I can see a rooftop and I'm planning to fly there next. I've never flown very far before. The only real experience I have is flying from my cage to the perch on my playpen. Well, I missed the rooftop but, luckily, there was another tree close by. That felt great and I feel so free!

Oh gosh, they're after me again! I can hear Mom crying, sobbing deeply. As I rest and look around at my new surroundings, I can hear her on her phone. She called Dr. Backus, my Vet in Pittsburgh, some local animal control services, and even some wildlife societies. She also reached out to my avian specialist and dietician. I call her my "Aunt Leslie". Aunt Leslie (Moran) is sending me this amazing energy all the way from Nevada. I can feel her encouragement and she's telling me to be brave, keep myself safe and fly back home.

I think I'm better off finding another tree right now. Things on the ground feel too chaotic. I'm beginning to feel more comfortable when I fly. I just point myself in a certain direction, spring off the branch, and aim for another tree. Then I grabbed a new branch as tightly as I could and squeezed real tight! Safe again!

I flew to eleven different trees today. That must be a record! I see that the sun is going down. I can also see Mom beneath me with a sleeping bag and a flashlight. It looks like she may stay with me tonight sleeping at the base of the tree. It's been a long and emotional day, I'm so tired, and it's way past my bedtime. There are a lot of creepy sounds I've never heard before. I'm so glad that I don't have to be alone tonight.

### Day Two

As soon as the sun came up, I could see Mom in her sleeping bag down below me. I didn't sleep at all last night, and I stayed in this same spot on this branch leaning into the tree trunk. I'm getting hungry, but I just don't know how to get down from here. I think it's probably a good idea to do exactly what I did yesterday. Mom and her team of friends haven't lost sight of me once, so I think it's OK to just keep exploring. The only thing that bothers me right now is that Mom is still crying hysterically. I'm thirsty, I'm hungry, and still a little scared.

I managed to drink a little water yesterday because Mom and her friends sprayed me with a hose. Today I flew to a total of nine more trees! It has been another long day and it's starting to get dark. Mom is getting her sleeping bag out again and it's humid. There are so many mosquitoes everywhere and other things crawling around that only come out at night. I hope that I'm safe in this tree until morning.

### Day Three

This is my third day in the wild and I need to find something to eat. Hesitantly, and not really wanting to know the answer, Mom Googled, "How long can a pet parrot survive without food or water?" Google responded that: "After only two days, a bird could face serious health risks and this could be fatal". This information made for a very stressful day. Mom was pleasantly surprised when a nice gentleman named Rick from Tall Timber Wildlife Services returned her phone call from yesterday. While she was talking to him, I spotted a nice thick



## It takes a village to bring a lost parrot home

Team Max: Far back, Uncle Jason and Aunt Heidi, Debbie, Aunt Linda, Aunt Trudie, Aunt Kristin, and Uncle Andy. All are neighbours and friends of Cindy and Max. Cindy, Max's Mom is in front holding the sign

In the Team Max photo this is the sweatshirt that Cindy is wearing



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patch of woods off in the distance. Food, I need food, so I'm headed there now.

A few hours later, Rick came to visit me. I can see him looking at me through his high-powered binoculars. Since I flew here a few hours ago, I've found some wild cherries. Yum! Rick told Mom about the cherries that I was eating and told her that my beak was stained bright red from them. I saw her hugging Rick when he told her that. She seems to have much more hope now and that makes me feel so much better. Rick stayed for a while and gave my Mom some important advice. He's suggesting that she brings my cage, my perch, and my food and water bowls to the clearing at the edge of this new little forest. (Aunt Leslie had suggested this too). Now I can see all of the things that I'm familiar with, and Mom's friends were telling her to get some rest, so she reluctantly headed back to our house.

Instead of napping, Mom created and distributed flyers to all our neighbours. She included my best picture and even described how I sound when I call out and scream. A few hours later she came back to me with some food, but I still can't figure out how to get myself down to get it. The sun is setting again. Because my voice is getting weaker, Mom is having a harder time finding me when I call for her. She knows that I'm losing strength. I'm still flying around the area looking for food and it took Mom a long time to find me tonight. It's almost pitch dark now. Just before I made my final call for the night, I watched her sit down on the forest floor as she sobbed deeply and went to pieces. She cried down there for a long time, but I know that she won't give up on me.

### Day Four

As the sun comes up, I watch Mom walk to the clearing at the edge of my forest and it looks like she's going to spend the day there. "Don't worry, Max. Mommy is not ever going to give up on you. Be a good boy, Baby". Today I'm more than 40 feet (12 m) high in a tree. After a while, I decided to venture just a little further away from where Mom put my cage and my perch. I can see a new clearing where an old cornfield stood. I called out to Mom, but she's having a hard time finding me this time because my voice is so weak. After calling out again, I finally see her down in the cornfield where the stalks are short and low to the ground. She's now telling me that it's safe to fly down to her and land in the field. "Max, come here to Mommy, it's OK Max, come here Baby," she said.

I'm now at least 60 feet (18.3 m) above the ground. I think this is my record-breaking height. I feel like I just might be able to do this. I hear her pleading with me: "Come down to Mommy, Max". That's what she always says when she wants me near her, so I must be brave. It looks like a little landing strip down there. No trees and nothing in my way, so I'm going to fly down.



Max with a toy

My first landing attempt failed, and I swooped back up to the same tree.

My second attempt didn't work either. I need to rest before I try this again. After all, this is day number four and I don't have much fight left in me.

What happened next was the most frightening part of my adventure. As I was planning my third landing attempt, I heard some loud shrilling cries from above me. Not one, not two, but four hawks were circling. They were telling each other that I was up here. They've synchronised their flight pattern into a perfect circle and their cries are terrifying. Being a bird myself, instinctively I know that hawks usually swoop down and snatch their prey from the ground or the edge of a tree branch. That's why this whole idea of landing in the cornfield is over.

I think the best thing for me to do right now is to crawl inward

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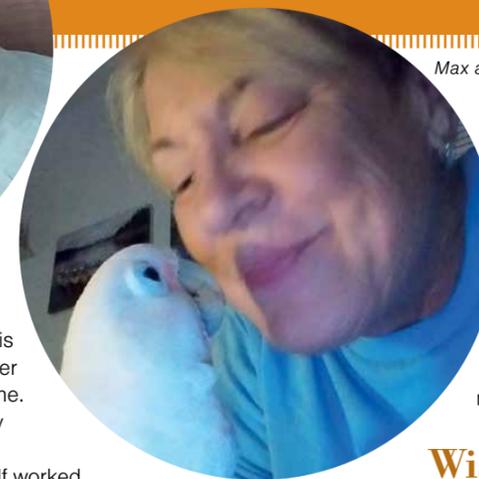
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Max snuggling with Cindy



Max and Cindy. Love and dedication, a two way street

on this branch towards the trunk of this tree where I feel safer. I must get closer to the trunk, so the hawks don't see me. And now, I'm going to flatten my body against this trunk.

Well, my plan to camouflage myself worked and Mother Nature sent those hawks away. Mom stayed in the corn field for a while longer, giving gratitude for my bravery and my instincts. Soon after, I can hear Mom and her friend Aunt Megan not far from me. They are singing my favourite song over and over: "I've been working on the railroad, all the live long day. I've been working on the railroad just to pass the time away." The singing made me feel relaxed and happy, but I don't think the neighbours enjoyed it as much as I did.

### Day Five

I am so hungry, I feel like I'm starving. I'm also thirsty and feel dehydrated. I've doubled the amount of time that Google told us that I could survive. I'm close to some houses now and can see a few people that I don't recognise. They don't look or sound like any of my Mom's friends or family. The good news is that they must have heard me calling.

I'm only about 10 feet (3m) off the ground now. I can see the neighbours placing berries and fresh corn from their gardens on the ground for me. They're calling "Max, Max, come here Max". They must know my name from those flyers. The ground looks so much closer than it did when I was hiding from the Hawks.

I need to get to that food! Downward I climb and I hit the ground. My new friends started yelling at my Mom. "He's on the ground, he's on the ground, and he's eating!" All this excitement and shouting was scaring me so I flew back onto a low-hanging branch. A few minutes later Mom was there. She spread out a big towel on the ground, rolled up her sweatshirt made herself a little pillow and laid down. "Come on baby, let's go night-night, come here my Baby Boy, it's okay," she said. She waited and waited, and I finally came down the branch and flew to the ground towards her.

She reached over slowly and touched me on my back. I moved a little closer and the next thing I remember is being safely in her arms. She wrapped me gently in her towel, held me against her, and then slowly stood up. She walked me back towards home, right back to where I had started five days ago. Once inside, she unwrapped me like I was her little Christmas gift and then she kissed me. I'll never forget that kiss. I was home.

### Wisdom from a Goffins

If only I could have given my Mom some advice when my adventure first began. I wish she would have just left me there for a

while when I flew off. She could have put my stuff in the backyard by the tree I was in and I probably would have come down before dark. I could still see my patio and I never would have felt lost or disoriented.



Welcome home Max!

I would have seen that my food and water were there. Chasing me, shaking the tree branches, throwing nurf balls, dousing

me with water from a garden hose and even sending those firemen just made everything worse. I just wanted to see what it felt like to fly. I just wanted to see what it felt like to be free.

Since my great adventure, Mom has told me the same bedtime story every night. She tells me, "You fly like a beautiful, white angel, you're an amazing little birdie and I'm so proud of you for never giving

up". Mom still calls me her Baby Boy, her Baby Parrot, and her little Cockatoo Kangaroo, but my favourite name now is "Max the Survivor". ■

Next month we explore the benefits and disadvantages of feeding alfalfa, both the sprouts and the dried herb.

Photos by Max's Mom, Cindy Benz



A cake for the thank you party for Team Max members combined with celebrating five years together for Max with Cindy



Max with his wings clipped after returning home from his great adventure

# Founder of Belize Bird Rescue scoops international award

by International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

A British woman who lives in Belize, originally from the UK, is one of the first international winners to be recognised with a special award from the [International Fund for Animal Welfare](https://www.ifaw.org/) (IFAW) at BAFTA, London, honouring her work to protect wild birds. Nikki Buxton, 58, relocated to Belize 20 years ago where she founded Belize Bird Rescue and has been [rescuing parrots and birds in the country ever since](#).

Each year, approximately 300 birds, from about 250 species come to her rehabilitation centre, which houses up to 190 birds at a time. Most are parrots, which have been taken from the wild and sold into the illegal pet trade. Nikki says about half are handed over by local authorities that have confiscated them, and half are surrendered directly by people keeping them as pets.



The parrots that come into Nikki's care often need attention to get them ready to be returned to the wild. Sadly, many have their wing feathers clipped, which take a long

time to regrow. Some develop leg deformities when they grow up trying to stand on tiled surfaces. Or their bones, eyes or feathers don't develop properly as a result of being fed poor diets causing malnutrition. Mostly though, they have behavioural issues that need correcting, such as talking and being overly familiar with humans. "Every bird you see in a cage here has been taken from the wild. Rehabilitating these birds is a long process which can take several years," Nikki says. "When we first started out, people would say to us that it couldn't be done, that the birds could never be returned to the wild. But now what we're seeing is not only are the birds surviving in the wild, they are thriving, joining wild flocks and successfully breeding. It's worked so well that other organisations in other countries have now adopted this approach."

Despite the success of this pioneering parrot rehabilitation programme, which includes so many other wild bird species such as toucans, raptors and seabirds, it was purely by chance that Nikki came into this position. She said: "We had recently moved to Belize and a young boy knocked on our door with two baby parrots in a bucket, selling them for about £20. I'd asked why these birds weren't with their mum, and offered to pay him to take them back, to which he smirked. I felt I had to do something for these poor parrots, so I took them in. We were able to raise and release them. Then the word spread, and our situation quickly snowballed, so here we are today!"

Birds are usually taken directly from their nests in tree hollows, often by children, and sometimes by poachers. Nikki works closely with the Belize Forest Department to improve the situation for birds in Belize. This includes running local initiatives to deter people from taking parrots



Nikki could not believe she had won this prestigious award



Every bird in the cages has been taken from the wild

from the wild, and making sure correct handling techniques are used when birds are confiscated.

On winning the award, Nikki said: "When I found out that I had won this award, it took me a while to process, as I couldn't quite believe it. Having *Belize Bird Rescue* and the work we do here being validated in this way is just amazing and I feel so honoured." Lois Lelanchon, Programme Manager at Wildlife Rescue, IFAW said: "Nikki's work to rescue and rehabilitate birds that had become caught up in the exotic pet trade is commendable. So many animals are captured from their natural environment, and while this has wider biodiversity consequences, for the individual animals involved, their lives in captivity are often short lived and miserable. But Nikki and her team provide a lifeline to help get wild birds back where they belong – in the wild. Hearing about what she has done to protect the endangered Yellow-headed Amazon in particular, is remarkable. Nikki is a deserving winner of the IFAW Animal Action Award". She received her award at IFAW's prestigious Animal Action Awards event on 17th October 2023. ■

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# Scarlet macaw reintroduction in Costa Rica

by Wild Sun Rescue Centre

The Scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*) is one of the most emblematic species of Costa Rica. Unfortunately, their populations are decreasing worldwide and they have been extirpated from the majority of Costa Rica. Formerly present in the entire Pacific coast of the country, macaw populations have dwindled due to habitat destruction and intense poaching for the pet trade.



Scarlet macaws are important in several biological processes, including regeneration of the environment, dispersal and germination of seeds, and population control of various species of trees and shrubs. To help restore balance in the ecosystem, [Wild Sun Rescue Centre](#) has partnered with AsoProLapa to reintroduce the Scarlet macaw into the Nicoya Peninsula.



AsoProLapa started breeding Scarlet macaws in 1996, as they were all confiscated from the pet trade and could not be released. The third generation was ready to be reintroduced back into the wild, and the first releases took place in 2007. In total, 159 birds were released between 2007 and 2017.

Important limiting factors of the success of macaw conservation are the number of suitable nesting tree sites available and poaching of nestlings for the pet trade. Therefore, artificial nest boxes were developed that are harder for poachers and predators to access and in areas that are secure and monitored.

The first 30 artificial nest boxes were placed in the Pochote area in 2008. As of October 2022, there are 77 artificial nest boxes in place, and 40 natural nesting sites have been identified. The project in the Pochote region is very successful. Over 130 chicks have hatched in the wild, and the wild population of Scarlet macaws is now currently estimated at over 250 individual birds.



In 2019, the next phase of the macaw reintroduction project started with a second release site in Cabuya at [Wild Sun Rescue Center](#). So far, a total of 35 Scarlet macaws have been released from this site, and it is intended to carry out continuous releases of juveniles from the breeding programme with the aim to release 100 birds in Cabuya within the first 10 years. The ultimate goal of the programme is to reach a viable population of over 400 free-living Scarlet macaws by the year 2030.

The first group of macaws in Cabuya will be reaching maturity within the next few years and nest boxes will be provided for them in the area. So far, seven artificial nest boxes have been provided and five more during 2023. These boxes are closely monitored, and it is hoped to soon be able to report the first wild born Scarlet macaw in the Cabuya area! ■

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# How smart are Parrots

## – and what about the others?

by Samuel Christopher

Parrots have a well-deserved reputation for being one of the smartest species of animals. These birds routinely exhibit intelligence traits that are on par with other animals that are considered intelligent. This includes species such as primates, dolphins, octopi, and humans. Certain species of parrots are particularly clever. This article outlines some of the species that exhibit signs of high intelligence.

Of course, animal intelligence is a tricky and imperfect science. Much of this is due to the slippery nature of intelligence in general. Are things truly intelligent just because they exhibit behaviours that align with our notions of intelligence?

### Intelligent parrot behaviour

Parrots appear to start learning rapidly early in life, and much of their learning process is social. Many species of parrots live together in massive flocks that give their young plenty of teachers. Young parrots learn in many of the same ways that young humans do, through a sense of curiosity and play.

Parrots react positively to stimuli, which keeps their minds active. Like humans, parrots that are placed in isolated circumstances without stimuli react negatively. In extreme circumstances, they sometimes even engage in self-harm behaviours, which has led many zoologists to believe that many species of parrots need environmental enrichment. This is a term that refers to constantly updating and changing one's set of circumstances, in order to feel engaged with their surroundings.

One thing that works in favour of parrot species in terms of their ability to learn, is their long life spans. Many species can live to be fairly old with some, such as the African Grey, living upwards to 50 or even 60 years old. This gives these birds more time to work through the trial-and-error processes that constitute learning.

Some of the behaviours that parrots exhibit, which experts consider indicative of intelligent behaviour, include extensive interpersonal communication. This includes associating body movements with emotions, as well as the ability to solve simple puzzles. In addition, parrots are often observed remembering paths, objects, and people. Certain species of parrots have even been observed forming subcultures. These micro-groups form language and song dialects within larger groups.



Dolphins have amused spectators for years with their intelligent antics

### Particularly intelligent parrot species

There are many species of parrots that display at least rudimentarily intelligent behaviour. Some of the kinds of parrots that are considered to be the smartest are Macaws, African Greys, Amazons, Cockatoos, and the Kea of New Zealand. Many of the parrots that show an ability to mimic speech patterns are also the species that tend to do very well in intelligence assessments when studied. Two examples stand out in particular: The African Grey, and the Amazon parrot of South America. These species of birds are considered to be the master linguists of the psittacine world.



Amazons can have excellent talking abilities and demonstrate their intelligent behaviours

### African Grey Parrots

African Grey Parrots exhibit a sophisticated knack for language. These parrots have exhibited extensive problem-solving skills and some scientists compare them to being on par with human children. African Greys are native to the central African Congo area and its companion tropical rainforests. In the wild, they can be seen in large flocks, but can be quite shy in captivity when faced with new items and different environments. They coordinate efforts in order to accomplish tasks more effectively and efficiently.

Some examples of intelligence that African Greys exhibit include spatial recognition and colour recognition. It has even been observed that these intelligent birds have the ability to conceptualise new names for things. This includes things that they didn't know already existed. For example, one bird was observed calling Banana Chips 'Banana Crackers'. An African Grey by the name of **N'Kisi** has a vocabulary of over one thousand words in English. This verbose bird has even invented nomenclatures that they used to refer to things that they haven't experienced before.



One of the most famous examples of an intelligent bird that has an amazing talent for mimicking sounds

### Alex the African Grey

One African Grey in particular really made a name for himself for his perceived genius and went by the name of **Alex**. Alex became something of a celebrity in his day due to his advanced cognitive abilities. Interestingly, he was observed to use language in ways that suggested he was at least able to draw correlations between a sign (like a word or phrase) and a signifier. One example is that Alex would say "I'm sorry" if he thought that he had done something bad.

One bittersweet element of Alex's life is that he was born an experiment. His lifelong companion and observer bought him in order to study animal intelligence. Alex's name is actually an acronym - Animal Language Experiment. Alex's caretaker had high estimations of his cognitive abilities. She believed he had yet to reach his full potential and had the intelligence of a five-year-old human child. He sadly died at the age of 31.

This is often how animal experts use to compare the intelligence of African Greys – to that of a five-year-old child. Alex's death came as something of a surprise, as he was actually several years younger than the typical lifespan of an African Grey Parrot. Greys can routinely live up to 45 years, and in some cases, even older.

### Keas – Mischievous and Clever

Interest in the intelligence of Keas has increased in recent years. Keas have also come under renewed scrutiny recently for their extensive intelligence. Rather than African Greys or Amazon Parrots, that often display their intelligence through their extensive language skills, Keas seem to have a knack for manipulating their environment on a level that seems akin to primates. Keas will routinely open locked trashcans, pick out trim of cars, and travellers' luggage. They do this in order to play with and manipulate the contents. These abilities are often displayed at very high levels, to the dismay and delight of tourists and locals in New Zealand.

These birds are often considered to be somewhat zany and mischievous. They seem to delight in destroying private property or things they consider to be in their way. This has earned them the nickname 'The Clown of The Alps'. There are elements of their behaviour that seem to suggest that Keas have a keen interest for new and novel things.

They have consistently outperformed primates in logic and problem solving tests of the same nature. Studies in recent years suggest that the overall cognitive abilities of these parrots might be even higher than those of African Greys.

The Kea's intelligence and curiosity, along with its destructive nature, have unfortunately brought them into conflict with farmers and other rural types who live in proximity to these birds, as Keas will often destroy private property. They have even been observed to attack sheep, if only to tear up their wool out of a sense of mischief and curiosity.



Interest in the intelligence of Keas has increased in recent years

### Other intelligent bird species

Corvids, such as ravens and jays, are also quite intelligent and there are other species of birds that exhibit intelligent characteristics. The Corvids, such as crows, jays, magpies, and ravens, are just some examples that come to mind. These birds often display characteristics of intelligence that showcase their own specialties. For example, ravens seem to be able to remember individuals who either perform kind or ill deeds for them.

Cormorants are other birds that seem to exhibit intelligent behaviour, which can often be seen sitting close to fisherman's boats and seem to understand that an overflow will result in a meal for them as well.

Determining which species of bird is the most intelligent is a daunting task. Even the study of intelligence itself is something of a mysterious process. However, by most known criteria of intelligence, parrots score very high. ■



Crows, ravens, rooks, magpies and jackdaws can often display high levels of intelligence

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# Preparing for the breeding season

– and why this is variable

by Rosemary Low

In the UK and in northern Europe most parrot species are likely to start to breed in March or April, or sometimes in May with the larger South American parrots. The exceptions are Ringnecks and other members of the *Psittacula* genus, tough birds that somehow can be successful when eggs are produced in February. Breeders then don't want to stop them breeding because a second clutch might not follow.

They must therefore be prepared for this by placing the nest box in the inside accommodation, with heating available when chicks are in the nest box. In our unpredictable and changeable weather, we often have a short, fine sunny spell of weather in January or February, which can have a disastrous impact on the breeding season. It encourages pairs to nest too early in the year because it is usually followed by a cold and frosty spell.

A frequent result is infertile eggs or chicks that die in the nest when the parents stop brooding them, possibly as early as two weeks old. One solution to this problem was solved by lorikeet breeder David Fawcett. He screws a small heat box to the back of the nest box in winter. It is a reptile heat bulb inside a small box with a dimmer switch plug. This makes it easy to adjust the temperature. A stick-on thermometer, made for aquariums and reptile accommodation, can be used to monitor the temperature. David said that chicks move towards the heat. This is especially useful for single chicks, which are extremely vulnerable to hypothermia in cold weather.

Most Australian Parakeets, also Cockatiels, start to breed in March, as the lengthening hours of daylight act as a stimulant. But this is not true of all parrot species. Over the years I have noticed how my lories and lorikeets wanted to start nesting in November. I never wanted my birds to breed during the colder months. As they are all shut inside a heated building at night, I can withhold the nest box until warmer weather. However, sometimes withholding the nest box is dangerous because the male could become aggressive towards the female, if he wanted to nest, so I had to relent.

Why do they have a strong desire to breed when the days are becoming darker and colder? The Indonesian lories and lorikeets are found just north of the equator when day length does not differ much throughout the year, so they are not stimulated to breed by lengthening hours of daylight.

The nesting habits of some parrots in the wild, especially endangered species and parrots in Australia and the Neotropics, are quite well known. Almost no one has studied and very few people have even observed nesting lories and lorikeets in New Guinea, so we know almost nothing about when they go to nest. There are no New



The Alexandrine Parakeet is an early nester  
Photo: Rosemary Low



A view inside the heat box  
Photo: David Fawcett



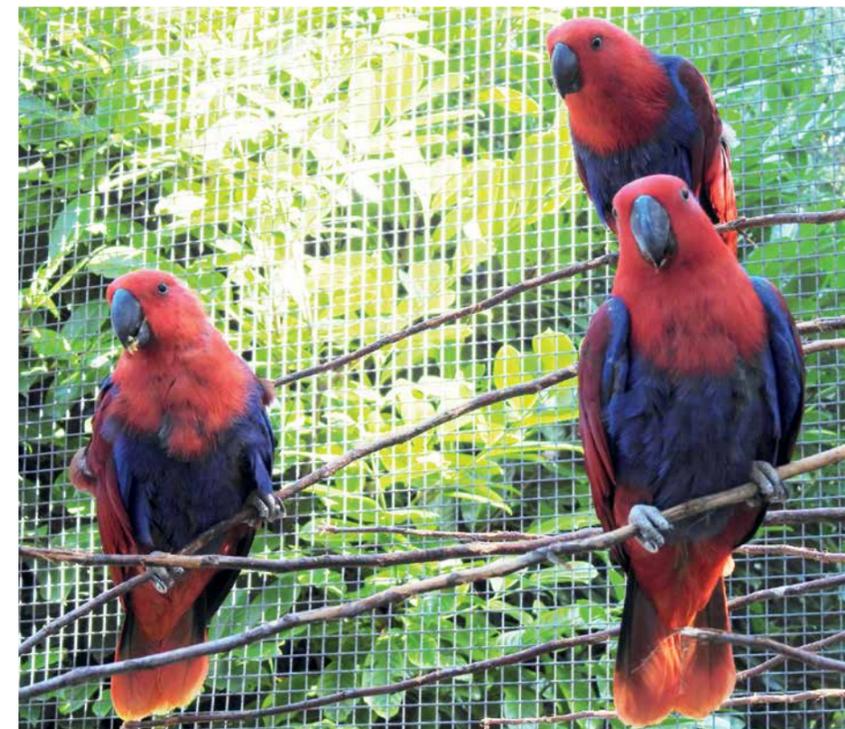
The plug used for the heat box  
Photo: David Fawcett

Guinea parrots that might be called domesticated so the likelihood is that they retain the strong instinct to breed when they would do so in the wild. So what are the factors that stimulate wild parrots to breed?

## What triggers breeding?

The main factors are:

1. Availability of an important food source, possibly seasonal, such as flowering trees and seeding grasses. This certainly applies to lorikeets in Australia, some of which might breed in any month of the year. If the eucalypts are flowering and providing nectar and pollen, the small lorikeets usually start to nest in August, which equates to February in the Northern Hemisphere.
2. The weather, especially rain, is the catalyst for breeding for species in dry habitats. It indicates that good food sources will soon be available. Note that in Europe rainy weather can stimulate cockatoos to breed. As we cannot control rainfall, it is worth installing a sprinkler system for birds from dry habitats.
3. The discovery of a suitable nesting site. This is fundamental to any breeding attempt but for the Eclectus Parrot it has a special significance. The female is fed by two or more males who attend the nest to call her to a nearby tree. If she dares to venture far from the



Female Eclectus Parrots might lay at any time of the year  
Photo: Rosemary Low

nest, it might be taken over by another female. She will continue to breed in that nest, almost certainly having multiple clutches there. In this instance there is no actual season. Captive females behave in the same way and not until the nest box is removed will they cease to breed. Eggs could be laid in any month of the year.

4. Sexual maturity. The age at which this is achieved varies from a few months in small parrots up to five years or more in large species.

## In aviculture

Our birds are affected by some of the above factors and by several others. The main one is domestication. Truly domesticated species that have been bred for many generations, such as Budgerigars and lovebirds including the Peach-faced and Masked, might breed during any month of the year. This also applies to some of the small parrots that do not have a long history of domestication, which are bred in controlled conditions indoors, not in outdoor aviaries. Parrotlets and, more recently, Lineolated Parakeets (*Bolborhynchus lineola*), are examples.

In the UK the earliest nesters are the Asiatic parakeets, including Ringnecks and Derbyans. They have the most northerly distribution of all the parrots, which is between about 15 and 30 degrees north. It is interesting that a few other species from the same latitudes, but from the other side of the world, also tend to be early nesters. I refer to those from Mexico and Central America, such as the Yellow-naped and Double Yellow-headed Amazons. In our aviaries they tend to lay earlier than the South American species, which are more likely to start in April.

## African parrots

In the UK the larger African parrots, such as Greys and *Poicephalus* species, including Senegals, are often early winter breeders. For this reason the nest box should be in the inside part of the aviary, an area which preferably is heated.

When do they breed in the wild? Most Grey Parrots originate from just north of the Equator, from 17 different countries. Even



African parrots, such as the Senegal, often want to breed in winter in the UK  
Photo: Rosemary Low



Little is known about the breeding habits in the wild of Indonesian lorikeets, such as this Mitchell's

Photo: Rosemary Low

today so little is known about the nesting habits of Grey Parrots that the best indication of when they breed is indicated by when trappers collect (illegally, of course) young birds. Little information is available from scientific field studies, of which there have been few. For the *Poicephalus* species, nesting records tend to be vague and quite scarce. Records are more numerous for the Meyer's (*P.meyeri*), the most common member of the genus. It has a very large range, from north to south and breeding has been recorded at various times of the year. However, this will be dictated by the onset of rain.



Above: This commercially available candler is the correct way to check eggs for fertility or for vein development or to check if the embryo is still alive. Another option is to use a torch – but this candler, which caters for different-sized eggs, is better. It is very disturbing to know that some breeders actually open eggs – only to find a live chick inside, which dies as a result of this interference

Photo: Rosemary Low

Left: This Little Lorikeet in New South Wales has chosen a nest hole which is so small it must wriggle to enter. This hole excludes nest competitors, such as larger lorikeets, also predators

Photo: John Courtney

### Erratic weather conditions

Bad weather and rapidly changing weather often has a detrimental effect on the birds in our aviaries and even in those birds kept in controlled conditions in buildings. Scientists state that birds might sense extreme weather events thanks to their low frequency hearing, well below the human range. Birds are very sensitive to environmental conditions, something that many parrot keepers overlook. So when a widespread poor breeding season occurs, it is not necessarily the breeder's fault.

One of the features of recent breeding seasons was the large numbers of infertile eggs, often believed to be weather-related. The production of infertile eggs is a common problem. Now that more parrots are being studied in the wild we know that this even occurs under natural conditions. There are many reasons, so it is usually difficult to determine the cause. However, a common cause is that male and female do not come into breeding condition at the same time.

Take care of every female, not only because she will be difficult to replace, but because if you do not spot a problem she could suffer a painful death from egg-binding or mate-inflicted injury. If the pair had a close bond, the male will be bereft and might refuse to accept another female for a very long time. ■



A common mistake is to provide a nest-box with an entrance hole which is too large. This could prevent this pair of Red-spectacled Amazons from entering the box. The entrance admits too much light. Parrots instinctively choose a nest with the smallest possible entrance, to exclude predators. Also note that parrots like to gnaw around the entrance to the nest-box and this can stimulate breeding. It is impossible here because the entrance is lined with metal

Photo: Rosemary Low



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## Some parrots may not be right for your locale

There are sundry reasons why psittacines could become unhappy or unhealthy at someone's home site. Climate is one, chaotic activity level another, even dislike of a keeper may turn into a long-term problem. I remember years ago when my pet Blue-fronted Amazon, Hamsa first laid eyes on Gilbert, a wonderful gay man who used to come into our bird shoppe and visit, hoping to one day afford a parrot. Hamsa did something unheard of before. He climbed off of my shoulder onto Gilbert's shoulder! Then after a time, when I tried to get him off and onto my hand, he backed up warily and tried to bite me. That began a conversation that resulted in Hamsa becoming Gilbert's prized companion for decades.

About 35 years ago, I was fortunate to own one of the first female White-bellied Caique pets born and raised on the west coast of the US. We were doing species pet behaviour comparisons at the time amongst dozens of hand-raised parrots in the free flight bird room of *Feathered Friends of Santa Fe*, New Mexico. I received this baby, which we

named 'Zia', from an expert aviculturist in Northern California, the first chick he had ever bred. She was a little doll, let me tell you, and appreciably different than all the Black-headed Caiques we had so far kept and trained.

A year or so later, I approached the same breeder about obtaining several more of his Caique fledglings to bring to our shop, but I then received a surprising reply: "I no longer have any Caiques," he stated. They were not thriving at my facility and I passed them on to a better climate." Not thriving? That was the first occasion I had ever heard such a description given to certain psittacines that someone owned. At the time, I thought the phrase unusual, but have over time come to realise it was an extremely unselfish and far-sighted view, at the same time both pragmatic and compassionate.

I was some time later reading an online discussion about the owner of a pet Orange-winged Amazon that had begun flying at her, attacking and biting painfully. She had tried most every means of re-establishing



Derbyan Parakeets, a mountain species, may not do well in hot desert locales

a loving relationship with the parrot, but nothing was working. Her online question was answered by a behaviour expert in much the same way many personality problems are responded to: use positive reinforcement training in a neutral setting emphasising rewards and targeted goals to get the bird to behave in an affirmative way. After reading again all of the ways the owner had tried to solve this dilemma over the past months, I wrote a short comment to the online article editor:

*"It seems to me the pet care giver had tried all the retraining and counselling ideas offered to her. I have had and known of parrots, especially Neotropicals, that become absolutely angry with owners and sometimes no amount of retraining is going to change that. I have birds in my care that detest me because I am a favourite of their mate's, or ones that detested April or all women or men. One current Amazon down on the Kona Coast on the Big Island Hawaii is being given up now because it attacks its owners after being a good pet bird for a long time.*



Baby Zia was a stunning fledgling

*They have tried for two years to change that. Sometimes the most kind hearted thing a person can do is give up a parrot that is distinctly not happy in its present home life. There is certainly no shame in that, certainly when the bird will be going to a better place with a better chance of being happy and bonding with a new human or family."*

You know, psittacines are highly intelligent creatures and for most of them a close emotional bond is

a necessity, as normal as sleeping and waking. In a home pet situation, it may take something as seemingly insignificant as another bird being handled and befriended, or a new puppy or human infant, not to mention a boyfriend or girlfriend coming into the environment, to change that psittacine's loyalties. Smart as they are, parrots can sense when they are no longer the exclusive number one object of an owner's attentions.

One common situation is when the primary caregiver goes on vacation for two or three weeks and leaves his or her pet bird with another experienced and affectionate keeper. The true owner returns home and finds a hookbill that has firmly attached itself to the 'babysitter', since it had no idea in its animal-oriented mind that the absentee owner circumstances were only temporary. This has happened to me with certain beloved Amazons, and it took real attention and some significant time before I was able to win back the former allegiance of my pets. Yet still there was always that eerie sinking feeling that I had broken some sort of trust with my parrot and that it no longer quite viewed me in the same way.

In the cases where Amazons, macaws, conures or Greys have totally changed their mind set during such an interval of absence, sometimes months later the owner is still not accepted back as the primary 'bonded companion'. We then have a state of affairs with an unhappy, unfriendly pet parrot, and a frustrated, uncomprehending human – not thriving.



It can be difficult to maintain safe nest box temperatures in winter climates



Rare species should be kept at only the best of facilities

Photo: Jim McKendry

### The Breeder Parrot Circumstances

I admire aviculturists who have breeding pairs of parrots that they come to recognise are not doing well at their facility, so they pass the birds on to a happier situation. Decades ago I was attempting to breed one of my favourite pet species, the Timneh African Grey. After two years of no success and nervous, out-of-sorts birds, I came to the conclusion that my Timnehs were unhappy around all the commotion and noise of a large Amazon/conure flock. I sent them to a friend in California who maintained a peaceful African parrot facility where they were much happier.

Another time I helped to re-home some Princess of Wales Parakeets, a distinct dry climate psittacine, moving them from a U.S. region with continual wet and rainy weather to a better area. That is the kind of responsible choice that makes for happier birds and satisfied keepers. In this day and age, with many parrots growing elderly without real gladness in their lives and some species on the brink of total loss in captivity, thriving is a sound criteria for making a decision about what is best for all involved. Once accomplished, it often brings about the added benefit of a feeling of satisfaction to the aviculturist for having finally resolved a problem that was long weighing on his or her conscience. ■



Athletic flying psittacines need to have plenty of space to exercise

# Partnership to help critically endangered Cape Parrot

Preserving our natural heritage for future generations – planting 10,000 trees at a time

Cape Town-based [Fairtree](#), a global investment company, had partnered with the [Cape Parrot Project](#) and the [Wild Bird Trust](#) to plant at least 10,000 indigenous trees over a three year period with 5000 planted by the end of 2022. This is to restore the forest habitat that is home to South Africa's only endemic parrot, the Cape Parrot. Listed as Critically Endangered, there are fewer than 2,000 Cape Parrots (*Poicephalus robustus*) left in the wild, limited to forest patches in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo Province.

The parrots nest in existing tree hollows in old Yellowwood trees, South Africa's national tree, and rely on the fruit of these trees for nutrition and survival. However, there is currently a shortage of natural nesting sites due to the scarcity of old Yellowwood trees, largely attributed to habitat degradation caused mainly by historical logging practices. "Our goal is to achieve sustained growth in the population of this rare parrot species, and together with strategic partnerships we are working towards a total wild population of 2,500 birds within the next 10 years," said Dr Kirsten Wimberger, Director of the [Cape Parrot Project](#) and Trustee of the [Wild Bird Trust](#).

The Cape Parrot's limited habitat is under threat because of numerous human-induced factors, including over-exploitation of natural resources, the proliferation of exotic plants, including commercial forestry, and depleted groundwater supplies, which all contribute to habitat degradation and ultimately a lack of nesting sites and food for the species. Then there is the new threat of climate change. The plan is to protect and improve Cape Parrot forest habitats, thereby halting the habitat degradation driving their decline, and providing conservation actions needed to improve population numbers.

The [Fairtree Reforestation Project](#), in partnership with the [Cape Parrot Project](#), aims to provide indigenous trees, particularly Yellowwoods, to restore forest habitat in a stronghold area of the Cape Parrot, namely



Artificial nest boxes help to overcome the shortage of tree holes

the Amathole region of the Eastern Cape, thereby contributing to ensuring their survival. This is being accomplished by engaging members of local communities in conservation efforts through the establishment of community tree nurseries.

In 2017, the first community nursery was developed at Sompondo village, while a second nursery was built in 2021 in the Esikhululweni village in the Hogsback area, located in the Amathole mountains of the Eastern Cape. Here, members of the local community act as custodians of the trees, collecting seeds, germinating, planting and nurturing them until they are large enough to be planted on surrounding habitat restoration sites, essentially degraded areas within this forested landscape which are being restored as part of this project. Five thousand indigenous seedlings, comprising a variety of species, including 1,000 Yellowwood trees, would have been planted within a year since the start of the [Fairtree Reforestation Project](#) in 2021.

Through this partnership, the existing Sompondo community nursery was extended to accommodate 12 additional growers, bringing the number of community growers up to 28, while the newly established isiKhululweni community nursery accommodates eight growers. These 36 community growers of indigenous trees represent 36 families who benefit materially from the project. A third nursery is planned to open through funding from [GreenPop](#). In addition, 10 community members are part of the core [Cape Parrot Project](#) team and six temporary workers are hired during the planting season.

"We see a strong link between Fairtree's mission of enriching lives and the caring for local communities that happens through this initiative.

One of our main aims with this project is to create opportunities for local communities to earn an income for their families," says Kobus Nel, Fairtree's Group Chief Executive Officer. "Involving the community in the [Fairtree Reforestation Project](#) not only supports these families financially, it also enables them to contribute to the long-term survival of the Cape Parrot and play a vital role to safeguard our natural heritage. We are very proud to be integral to this project that works to conserve the South African national tree, while helping to save an endangered species in the process," he added.

Now in her 70s, Nozibele Mphothulo, affectionately known as 'Mamma Evelyn', is one of the 28 tree growers at the Sompondo Nursery. A true pioneer of the nursery, she has lived in Sompondo village all her life and the neighbouring Auckland State Forest is home to her. With other growers, she collects indigenous seeds from trees in the community and forest edge, germinates the seeds and grows healthy seedlings, which are then purchased by the [Cape Parrot Project](#), when they reach planting height (40cm).

For Mamma Evelyn, and most of the growers, this is their only source of income with which to support their families. Mamma Evelyn has been able to purchase rainwater tanks for water security, fence off her homestead food garden and support her large family, with the income she gets from the [Cape Parrot Project](#). Although she grows a diversity of tree species, the Outeniqua Yellowwood (*Afrocarpus falcatus*) is her signature species and over several years, thousands of these trees have been planted in and around this forest habitat. "If I ever retire, I want to pass on my knowledge to the younger generation," she says.

"As we move forward on our Fairtree journey, this initiative speaks to who we are, not only as a company, but also as individuals. This project allows us the opportunity to give back, restore what has been lost, and leave the world in a better place. Most of all, we want to leave a legacy for future generations," Nel concludes.



The communities have united to earn an income and to help the survival of the Cape Parrot

## More about the Wild Bird Trust and Cape Parrot Project

Dr Steve Boyes founded the [Wild Bird Trust](#) in 2009 with its primary objective of keeping birds safe in the wild. The [Cape Parrot Project](#) (CPP) was the Trust's first project. The project aims to conserve the endangered Cape Parrot through research on the parrot, habitat restoration efforts and community engagement and has planted 50,000 trees in over 200 hectare of restored habitat, resulting in nearly 100 Tonnes of carbon sequestered since 2009.

Afrotropical forests in South Africa face various threats, ranging from water scarcity to unregulated use of forest products. It is only through the protection and restoration of these forests, in collaboration with the communities that surround them that the Cape Parrots will ultimately survive. CPP, through implementing community engagement, education and community-based restoration initiatives across three critical population zones will help preserve Afrotropical forests and ultimately the Cape Parrot.

In an interview with [National Geographic](#), Dr Steve Boyes said that we have a responsibility to give back what we have taken. "In the Okavango Delta, Botswana, the birds are spoiled for choice with thousands upon thousands of natural cavities in trees. Here in the Amatholes (Eastern Cape), on the other hand, there aren't any. We chopped all the large hardwoods down over the last 150 years," he said. "It is our responsibility now to supply homes for cavity-nesting birds like the Cape Parrot. And that's exactly what we're doing."

Hobbiton Outdoor Educational Centre was started in 1945 and offers free camps for less privileged children, to promote team building, personal development, conflict resolution, effective communication and environmental education. The [Wild Bird Trust](#) (WBT) and [Cape Parrot Project](#) teamed up with Hobbiton to nurture the development of well-rounded, caring, creative children living in under-privileged communities surrounding key Cape Parrot habitat, and share with them the importance of conserving and protecting the Cape Parrot, the forests, and all creatures that inhabit them. Through two camps held thus far, a total of 120 children, between the ages of 10-14 years, from local villages adjacent to Cape Parrot habitat in the Amathole Key Biodiversity Area have been reached with the WBT aiming to fund many more camps in the future.

For more information please contact the [Cape Parrot Project](#) at [capeparrot@wildbirdtrust.com](mailto:capeparrot@wildbirdtrust.com)

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# News from Feathers Together

Feathers Together is a charity based at Garden Feathers in Tyne & Wear and is in search of forever homes for unwanted birds whose owners can no longer care for them. Many different species come and go, from cockatoos and African Greys to quail, finches, and budgies.

We aim to advise and educate bird owners on how to provide the best care for their individual birds, as well as find the best possible homes for unwanted birds.



One of seven cockatiels, in need of some TLC



Kakariki

Only three weeks into the New Year and its already shaping up to be a busy one. Intakes so far have included:

- African Greys (2)
- Zebra Finches (10)
- Cockatiels (7)
- Budgies (2)

We have lots of parrots and smaller birds ready for adoption. The parrot chooses the person at Feathers Together, so we request you to visit at least twice to meet any parrot that you are considering adopting. Contact us for further details on the adoption process.



African Grey

Ready for adoption as of January 2024:

- Captain Morgan – African Grey
- Phoebe – African Grey

Want to find out about other birds we have available for rehoming? Follow us on Facebook @featherstogether

- Skips & Quavers – Kakariki
- Kate & Buddy – Budgies
- Freya – Budgie
- Pineapple Conure (aviary bird)
- Zebra Finches
- Diamond Doves
- Canaries

## The rescue community

One of the things we feel very strongly about is supporting and working with other parrot rescues. There should not be 'competition' between people, sanctuaries or rescue services, as we are all working toward the same goal, and together we can always achieve more. Join us in thanking other organisations that are making a difference to parrots.

## Nally's Parrots

In December 2023 we visited Nally's Parrot Rescue (Nally's Papegaaienopvang) in Belgium. Nathalie Lycke is a true inspiration, and we are very grateful to her for her time showing us around and explaining how her operation works. We'll be sharing more about our trip, and the many, many things we learnt, in the coming months. Until then you can read more about her work at:

<https://app.nallyspapegaaienopvang.be/>

and on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/nallyspapegaaienoovang>. ■

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# Last dance for Larry the Parrot

– The closure of a little Cork pet shop tells a bigger story

By Joe O'Shea

A wave of family-owned businesses are closing across Cork as a cruel January takes its toll. During a number of years, for kids coming and going from school in the west Cork town of Dunmanway, Larry the dancing Blue and Gold macaw puts on a show in the window of Scruffy's Pet shop on Main Street.

The raucous bird has been a big feature of the little pet shop that's one of the very last, family-owned, live animal stores outside Cork City. A great little business bringing loyal customers into the West Cork town six days a week, providing a valuable service for pet owners and delighting kids and adults alike.

But after nearly six years in its current location, Scruffy's is closing its doors for the last time, a victim of soaring operating costs, a biting cost of living crisis and competition from the likes of Amazon and the big supermarkets that are ruthlessly crushing local stores. Business groups are warning that the story of Scruffy's will be the story of a lot of other small stores and businesses across Cork over the coming months as a run of really tough years, from the pandemic to the huge jump in energy costs and cost of living crisis, finally knocks them out.

A survey carried out by the Restaurants Association of Ireland early in 2023 found that a shocking 67 per cent of businesses were worried they would not last into 2024. In Cork, since New Year's Day, there has been the biggest loss with the closure of the oldest and biggest Chinese restaurant after 60 years, an award-winning gastropub on Barrack Street, together with a family-owned chain of newsagents.

Groups representing small businesses warn of a further wave of closures, especially in rural towns like Dunmanway, where Scruffy's is closing for good. "It's not workable for us anymore and it's not going to be workable for a lot of businesses in Cork like us," said Scruffy's owner, Lyndon Forsythe, as he opened for the last time. "We've worked hard, we've been on social media to let as many people as possible know about us, we've offered advice, the best feeds for animals, quality products at prices, not far off what you'd pay online, but we just can't keep going anymore. The feedback we have had from our customers is that they'd love to go on supporting



us, but they are struggling to put fuel in their cars to get to work, and the cost of living rises are hammering people who have been cutting right back, or not spending at all," he added.

Lyndon has not just sat in his pet shop on Main Street in Dunmanway, he's worked hard on the road, taking his animals out for corporate events, birthday parties, into nursing homes and summer markets and fetes, something that he will continue to carry on in west Cork.

You can support Lyndon on his Facebook page [here](#).

As he got ready for the last few hours in business, Lyndon said: "You can work as hard as you can, but when your bills double overnight, when the cost of feeding your animals goes up by 66 per cent in a couple of months, when people can't afford to run their cars and come into town to shop, what can you do?"

The kids are going to miss Larry in the window and he's having to get used to a much quieter time at home with Lyndon who fears for the other businesses in Dunmanway because the footfall is right down and people have very little spending money. Any they do have will be spent online and get things delivered right to their door.

Dunmanway is described as a great town and local businesses have made a huge effort, but the odds are stacked against them. It's a really tough time for businesses all round with the local pubs and restaurants all going and taking the money out of the local economy. Soon there won't be any businesses left to employ part-time students in the summer or to bring people into the town. "Once they are all gone, that's it," Says Lyndon. ■



# Palm Cockatoos move to new homes

– an important new year project to build a captive population



Norbert was hand-reared by staff at Paradise Park in Cornwall  
Photo: Paradise Park, Cornwall

Palm Cockatoos eating hawthorn berries  
Photo: Paradise Park, Cornwall



Norbert with some fuchsia  
Photo: Paradise Park, Cornwall

After great success in recent years in breeding and hand-rearing four Palm Cockatoos at Paradise Park in Hayle, staff are placing pairs on loan to other collections with the aim of building a captive population of this 'Near Threatened' species.

Curator David Woolcock explains "Palm Cockatoos are not the easiest species to breed, but with many years' experience, our dedicated staff have successfully reared four in the past few years, Herbert, Norbert, Ethel and Elsie. After they spend some time as a group of youngsters they become mature enough to pair up and bond with potential mates. Ethel and her mate recently moved to Drayton Manor, and now we are delighted to announce that Norbert and his mate have moved on loan to Newquay Zoo, so a great start for the New Year."

A few weeks before the move, Paradise Park hosted a member of staff to spend some time getting to know the birds and ensure that there would be continuity in their care, and the range and presentation of food.

David added "Sadly, this year, the species was moved on the IUCN Red List from 'Least

Concern' to 'Near Threatened' due to habitat loss in its native Australia, and its slow breeding rate. As well as being a beautiful and fascinating species to see, the captive population is more important than ever now that it is considered under threat in the wild. The pairs and young Palm Cockatoos still at Paradise Park are looking great so we hope for more chicks in 2024." ■

Video of Norbert at Paradise Park  
<http://tinyurl.com/43chrns5>

# A bedroom turns into an aviary for seven lovebirds

by Liam Ang

You can tell that this couple clearly loved their lovebirds when they dedicated a whole bedroom into an aviary.

We've seen people dedicate spaces in their homes for birds, but @thebossyluvbird, owner of seven lovebirds, takes that concept to the next level, with an entire room dedicated to the creation of an aviary.

Clover, the first lovebird they had, would always try to get the attention of his owners to be let out of his cage. Their lightbulb moment came when they were struggling over the issue of finding a larger cage, and instead of having an actual cage taking up space in the room, why not have the whole room itself?



Clover was rescued from a crow attack during the Covid period  
Photo: @thebossyluvbird

They lived in a four room 92sqm apartment and did not have kids, so they were more than happy to give up a room for their adorable new member of the family. And a good thing they did as well, as once they gave Clover a companion when the Covid-era work-from-home arrangements ended, the number of birds they had quickly went up to seven.



Photo: @thebossyluvbird

@thebossyluvbird eventually came up with a cageless concept for the room, where amenities like toys, eating and resting areas would be added to make the aviary a self-contained habitat. The tree is the centrepiece in the room, on which all the other fixtures are either mounted onto or positioned around. It was hoped that having the tree would help the birds feel more comfortable with its surroundings.



Asher and Jade gazing out the window  
Photo: @thebossyluvbird

The room, originally used for gym equipment, was chosen as it faced the park downstairs. This allowed the birds a view of the outside as well as to soak in some vitamin D from sunlight in the evening. The hammock swing and perch are installed near the window as well after @thebossyluvbird

noticed that the lovebirds seem to enjoy gazing out the window. The minimalism was intentional, citing IKEA and Apple as inspirations, and @thebossyluvbird says the arrangement was meant to ensure the aviary was both easy to maintain and allowed for the easy implementation of new add-ons.

## Furnishing the aviary without breaking the bank

Having the equipment to make an aviary in Singapore is usually quite expensive, as @thebossyluvbird confided. Instead, she turned to Taobao for most of the items, including the tree itself, the various trays, beds, meshing for the windows and perches. All in all, the entire aviary did not cost more than S\$1000.



The tree and most of the toys were purchased from Taobao  
Photo: @thebossyluvbird

The trays at the bottom help catch poop, making cleaning up easier  
Photo: @thebossyluvbird

## Room modifications that helped keep her birds & appliances safe

The windows in the room are usually closed, but sometimes they have to be opened a little to allow for ventilation. Naturally mounting a wire mesh on the walls is potentially the most crucial modification to making the aviary possible. It's not always fool-proof though, as they once had an incident where the birds peeled back the mesh, allowing Draki to escape. It took the homeowner two months to find Draki and return him back when he broke out of the aviary.



Female lovebirds are quite territorial, so the beds needed to be spaced far enough from each other to avoid conflict between them. The lovebirds instinctively look for high up areas as it makes them feel safe, so all the beds are hung high up on the

A cosy home for Jade and Asher  
Photo: @thebossyluvbird

tree and even mounted on the wall. All of these modifications did not mean that @thebossyluvbird could prevent some initial fighting as the lovebirds competed over who got the higher beds, but eventually they all settled down.

Air-conditioning sealed to stop the lovebirds from chewing at it  
Photo: @thebossyluvbird



One of the key parts of living with lovebirds is that they will gnaw at anything they find and have a tendency to hide in nooks. For both reasons, the air conditioner in the room was sealed with a combination of barriers and covers to stop them from having access to it. Which made sense, as there was no intention of using the air-conditioning unit in this room.

@thebossyluvbird mentions she always likes seeing the birds being kept in their cages at the end of the day and got around the issue by teaching them to return to the aviary each evening. This was done through consistent training and avoiding the use of artificial light at sunset. The result is that the birds would always fly back to their beds at sunset, even at times when they were allowed in the living room to play.

## Dedicated an entire room to her pet birds

As the parents of seven birds, it is clear that the entire aviary is a labour of love by @thebossyluvbird. For those looking to have something similar for their own feathered friends, she says that the key consideration is to keep things minimalist, with enough space for the birds to fly and play. ■



# San Francisco's wild parrots back on the big Screen

by Julie Zigoris

The wild parrots of Telegraph Hill, stars of a classic 2003 documentary, are getting a second run at fame. Twenty years after their Hollywood debut, the wild parrots of Telegraph Hill are still squawking and breeding like crazy. The Cherry-headed Conures, also known as Red-masked Conures, became San Francisco celebrities in part thanks to the 2003 documentary *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*, which screened in 500 theatres and grossed more than \$3 million. A restored, 20th anniversary version of the celebrated film lands at the Mission District's *Roxie Theatre*. "It's become a classic in San Francisco and nationally," said director Judy Irving.



Director Judy Irving has two documentaries out at the same time, the restored, anniversary release of "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill" and "Cold Refuge," a film about swimming in the San Francisco Bay  
Photo: Courtesy Pelican Media

Irving has been working on a restored version of the documentary for the past five years. Filmgoers can expect a more vibrant, speck-free viewing experience that takes up the full frame, what Irving called "the director's framing."

Today, parrot fans can scout the colourful conures all over the city and as far south as Brisbane, but they're most reliably spotted at Sue Bierman Park, near the Ferry Building. Every day around 4pm they fly in like a swarm of locusts and roost on the tall eucalyptus to snooze for the night.



The wild parrots of Telegraph Hill, stars of a classic 2003 documentary, are getting a second run at fame  
Photo: Courtesy Pelican Media

It remains a mystery exactly where the parrots came from and theories abound. It's assumed the first mating pair escaped, or were released, from a pet store. What is known is that the cherry-headed flock established itself around 1990 and found a leafy refuge in Telegraph Hill. Despite their association with the neighbourhood, the iconic birds never actually nested there, they only flocked to the hill as a food source, feasting on the profusion of loquats, juniper berries, blackberries, apples and magnolia blossoms.



While San Francisco's wild parrots have historically been associated with Telegraph Hill, they have long flown all over the city  
Photo: Courtesy Pelican Media

The wild parrots soon did what nature intended and began mating. Their numbers have grown from dozens in the 1990s to an estimated 250 to 300 birds today. While they used to nest exclusively at Fort Mason, their area codes now span from North Beach to the Mission, the Richmond to the Marina. The only neighbourhood they haven't been reported in is the Outer Sunset. San Francisco's chilly weather doesn't ruffle the feathers of these tropical birds, and they can be spotted flying all across San Francisco. It remains a thrill to spot them, as unexpected and whimsical as the city itself.

The documentary film follows [Mark Bittner](#), a philosopher turned amateur ornithologist, who develops a close relationship with the birds. "I was completely alone when I started that project," he said, recalling that he'd recently arrived in San Francisco as a homeless seeker, having dropped out of society in search of the meaning of life. "They were my only real friends," he said.

Bittner claims the birds gave him insights into human as well as feathered social dynamics. "The journey to the street and the journey with the parrots are all part of one journey and the parrots got me off the street," he said. Irving attributes the success of the documentary to Bittner's close, focused attention on the birds, taking the time to get to know them and name them. "He actually found out more about them than most scientists ever do," she said.



While self-taught parrot enthusiast Mark Bittner hand-fed parrots 20 years ago, he discourages the practice today, which is outlawed in public settings  
Photo: Courtesy Pelican Media

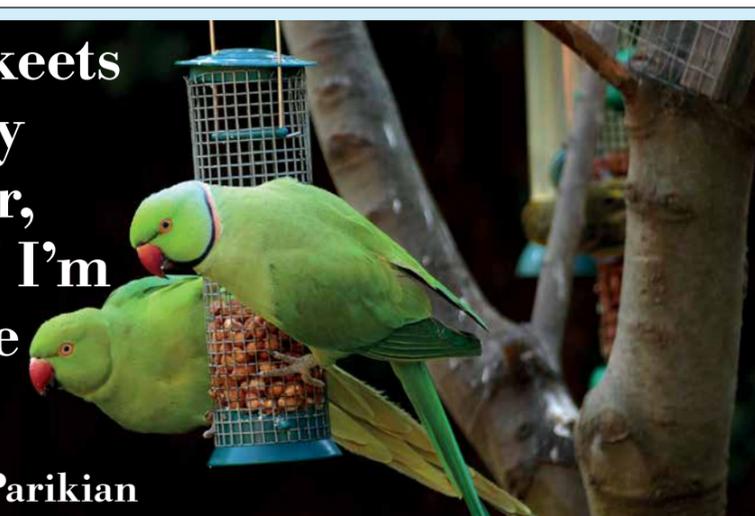
It's a practice Bittner himself would not encourage today, as the parrots' numbers grow and their range around the city spreads. He supported a 2007 law that forbids feeding the parrots in public parks. The film's formerly homeless star hopes that people just leave the birds alone, as they are doing just fine on their own. "No one needs to worry about them making it or not," he said.

Both Bittner and Irving see the parrots as a metaphor for the magic of San Francisco and its colourful and quarrelling factions. "They squabble a lot about which way to go when they're flying," Irving said. "They're exuberant, joyful, and they know the city well."

Irving's 2023 documentary about San Francisco Bay swimming, *Cold Refuge*, is also out in theatres, the first time the director has had two films screening at the same time. But to witness one of her early films back in theatres is particularly special. After showing at the Roxie, the film will move on to San Rafael and then Bolinas, with both Bittner and Irving appearing at the opening screenings. "It goes so much deeper than an animal movie," Irving said. "The parrots literally taught Mark about consciousness, about death." ■

## Parakeets on my feeder, while I'm on the fence

by Lev Parikian



The wind relents. Just for a bit, mind. Wouldn't want us to feel settled. Some small birds take advantage of the lull to descend on the feeders. Coal tit, blue tit, robin – performing a group dance with complex, secret moves.

A furious squawk, a chartreuse-green flurry, a general sense of agitation. The smaller birds disperse, leaving the feeders free for the interlopers – big kids throwing their weight around in the playground. They land with a clatter and set about their business.

Ring-necked parakeets, incoming. They visit our south London garden occasionally, mob-handed, colourful bandits on a smash-and-grab mission. That bright yellow-green plumage is accessorised by a ruby beak, matching eye rings, and the slender collar (in the males) that gives them their name. Attractive bird, you might think. A welcome splash of colour in an avian landscape that can tend towards the drab, especially in winter.

But the parakeets divide opinion. Some applaud their colour and freshness while others decry them as rowdy vermin. Still others, myself included, sit in the middle, enjoying the flashiness, the exuberance, the spectacular formation flying, while also quietly concerned at their rate of growth and expansion, the

possibility, as yet unproven, that they're pushing out other cavity-nesting birds and even bats. There was talk, at one point, of a cull.

Four decades have passed since their acceptance on to the British list in 1983. I saw my first shortly afterwards, on a cricket field in Teddington, the sighting etched into my memory because it made me drop a vital catch – that's my story and I'm sticking to it. Then very localised, now they're almost unavoidable in London, park roosts numbering in the thousands. And they've spread from their original enclave in the south-east, establishing themselves in towns and cities ever more northerly, all a far cry from their original homes in the Asian subcontinent and central Africa.

The origin myths involving birds released by Jimi Hendrix or escaped from the set of *The African Queen* are enticing, but the more mundane truth is probably one of multiple pet escapes from the 1960s onwards, adaptability and a high rate of breeding success.

As suddenly as they arrived, they're off, darting low across the garden before rising sharply over the rooftops, the feeders swinging like saloon doors in the wake of a newly arrived gunslinger. A short pause. A coal tit hops across on to the swaying feeder, and order is restored. ■

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Adult Yellow-naped Amazon  
Photo: Giff Beaton/CC BY NC

# United to protect the Yellow-naped Amazon

by David Waugh Correspondent, Loro Parque Fundación

Yellow-naped Amazons are not only attractive for their plumage, but also for their fine ability to mimic sounds, including those made by humans, especially speech, song and whistling. Regrettably, these attributes have contributed to their undoing, because people prize these parrots as pets and demand leads to the poaching of young parrots from their nests.

The extent of illegal trade and the loss of natural habitat has been so intense as to cause a sharp decline in the size of the wild population of this species, leading to its inclusion in the category of 'Critically Endangered' in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. There are now considered to be fewer than 2,500 mature Yellow-naped Amazons throughout the entire geographical distribution of the species, from the south of Mexico through Central America to Costa Rica.

Yellow-naped Amazons are one of a number of species which, by means of

their foraging behaviour, transport tree seeds from one area to another, thereby helping to regenerate forests. This important ecological function, as well as the fact that the Amazons have a right to exist, has led to several initiatives to promote their conservation. One such dynamic effort is being conducted by the Nicaraguan NGO, Paso Pacifico, using the Yellow-naped Amazon as an emblem for the conservation of western Nicaragua's tropical dry forests in the region known as the Paso del Istmo, between the Pacific Ocean and Lake Nicaragua.



Dry Forest habitat of Yellow-naped Amazons on Nicaragua's Pacific coast  
Photo: Paso Pacifico



Pale-billed woodpeckers (*Campephilus guatemalensis*) make tree holes later occupied by Yellow-naped Amazons  
Photo: Marcos Calero/Paso Pacifico



Camera-trap photo of a pair of Yellow-naped Amazons at their nest entrance  
Photo: Paso Pacifico

Stages of development of Yellow-naped Amazon chicks  
Photo: Paso Pacifico



This project has been supported in Nicaragua by the Loro Parque Fundación for many years since 2008, and in recent years the project has expanded to protect Yellow-naped Amazons in El Salvador.

The *modus operandi* of Paso Pacifico has on the one hand been to use expert researchers to investigate in detail the ecological requirements of Yellow-naped Amazons in the region covered by the project. On the other hand, Paso Pacifico has encouraged the local communities within the same region to embrace the Yellow-naped Amazons and the dry forests as integral to their natural heritage, recognising the future resources that protection through sustainable use can provide.

Science leads the way for all project activities, with many community members proud to be recognised as citizen scientists, some being employed as project rangers and others, particularly small-scale farmers, being financially rewarded for guarding Yellow-naped Amazon nests on their properties until the young Amazons have successfully fledged. Some of these farmers use the nest protection funds not only to improve their farming operations, but also to reforest portions of their farms.

Over the past eight years the project has saved over 170 Yellow-naped Amazons nestlings from being poached, which is a significant contribution to the future of this species.

In recent years, parrot trafficking has increased, being fuelled by global consumer demand coupled with increased economic hardship in source countries. This summer, over 30 Yellow-naped Amazons were confiscated at the Salvadorean border with Nicaragua, and in the spring U.S. Customs seized a suitcase destined for Taiwan which contained almost 30 eggs in the process of hatching, most of which turned out to be *A. auropalliata*.

Others have been confiscated in China. The smugglers have scant regard for the welfare of the birds, and many die during the journeys. However, the community participation of Paso Pacifico's project in Nicaragua is having



Paso Pacifico ranger with well-developed Yellow-naped Amazon chicks  
Photo: Paso Pacifico



Paso Pacifico 'Junior Rangers' happy with their protection of Yellow-naped Amazons  
Photo: Paso Pacifico

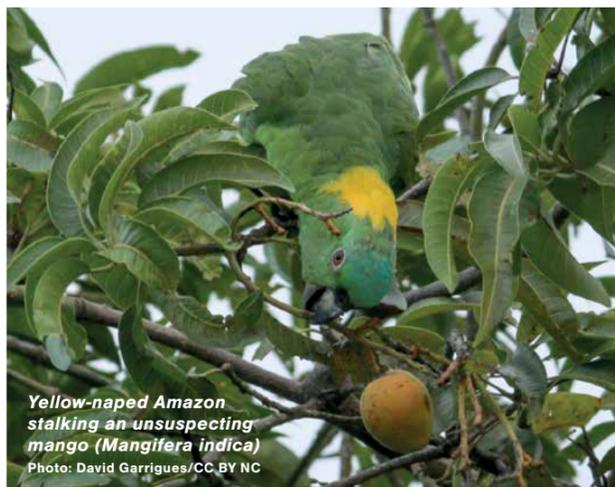


Yellow-naped Amazon at the entrance of a jute-cement artificial nest  
Photo: Paso Pacifico

Yellow-naped Amazon juvenile  
Photo: Tomas Cruz/CC BY 2.0

the effect of reducing the level of poaching by training local women as rangers who then conduct parrot conservation workshops for local children. Although these workshops do not teach children to chase down poachers, some brave individuals have indeed done so and recovered stolen chicks which have then been turned over to a Paso Pacifico ranger for eventual rehabilitation back into the forest.

Some of the experienced forest rangers are also skilled parabiologists who have a key role in the research that is undertaken on the Yellow-naped Amazons. Before each breeding season commences, the ranger team climbs dozens of trees to check nest-cavities and nest-boxes, clean out debris from the nests and remove invasive bees. They team up with local farmers to look out for Amazon pairs, locate the nests and commence the protection efforts. Through the year they record observations of the Amazons feeding and identify the plant species eaten. These activities and more are gradually being passed on to no less than 188 'Junior



Yellow-naped Amazon stalking an unsuspecting mango (*Mangifera indica*)  
Photo: David Garrigues/CC BY NC



Yellow-naped Amazon eating leaves  
Photo: Adam Jones/CC BY-SA

Rangers', building pride among these young members of the community who aspire to a future which has healthy forests home to large flocks of Yellow-naped Amazons.

Identifying the food plants of the Amazons is important for several reasons, not least that the most preferred food plants can be included in the reforestation efforts that are on-going. In this context, researchers have recently published\* the results of their research on the food plant species of *A. auropalliata* (and four other *Amazona* species). Although the study has particular relevance for the conservation of this species in El Salvador, it included the researcher's own observations as well as sources of information from several countries within the geographical range of the Yellow-naped Amazon, including Nicaragua. For all the countries and *Amazona* species included, seeds (51.4 per cent) and fruits (47.6 per cent) were the most used food resources. Specifically for the Yellow-naped Amazon, a total of 80 plant species were recorded as providing food. In terms of which parts of the plant were favoured as food, seeds were top of the list

\* Herrera, N., & Rodríguez, D. (2022). Especies de flora como fuente de alimento para las poblaciones de la Lora Nuca Amarilla (*Amazona auropalliata*) en El Salvador. *Revista Científica Multidisciplinaria de la Universidad de El Salvador-Revista Minerva*, 5(4), 61-75.



Yellow-naped Amazon feeding on flowers of mountain immortelle (*Erythrina poeppigiana*)  
Photo: Don Marsille/CC BY NC

(44.9 per cent of all records), followed by fruits (31.1 per cent, a third of which specify fruit pulp and only 2.7 per cent unripe), flowers (16.6 per cent) and leaves (4.7 per cent). There was only one record each for nectar, buds, twigs and stems.

The researchers note that a total of 27 plant species proposed for ecosystem restoration are a source of food. Under the guidance of Paso Pacifico, the communities in the Paso del Istmo can use this information to improve the prospects of the Yellow-naped Amazon. ■

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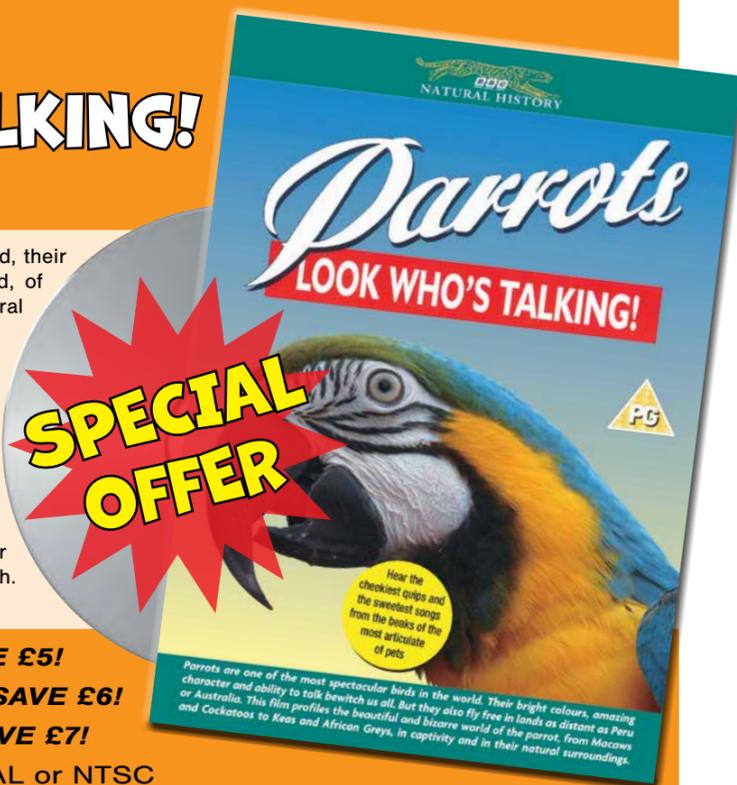
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Please note that issues 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 41, 43, 46, 47, 50, 54, 72, 73, 75, 76, 78, 81 and 143 are sold out.

Issues 72, 73, 75, 76, 78, 143, and issues 309 onwards, are only available as downloadable eMags from the Parrots website shop at

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## Postbag...

Please send your letters and photos to:

'Postbag', Parrots Magazine, West Building, Elm Grove Lane, Steyning BN44 3SA, UK  
Or email: [editorial@imaxweb.co.uk](mailto:editorial@imaxweb.co.uk) or through Facebook

parrots  
magazine

Whilst Parrots magazine will always allow contributors the opportunity to voice their opinions on any subject – no matter how contentious they may be – we wish to point out that these views do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor.

Dear Parrots magazine

### Nutrition and enrichment

I have had an Orange-winged Amazon for over 16 years and have always been relatively happy with what I have been feeding him on. Probably like many of this magazine's readers, I have read a lot about diet and nutrition and have always tried to follow the advice of experts who have written much about this subject.

I have to say that there have been times when I question what is said, as some experts might disagree with others, so it can be quite confusing for people like me who are not experts and can only go by what others tell us. There has been a lot said about pelleted diets with some saying they are the ideal complete diet to feed to our birds, but then others say they are not complete enough to provide the best nutrition. I can understand there will always be different opinions and it's up to us to make our own minds up.

A few years ago I came across a Yellow-headed Amazon that was in a small cage, which I considered not to be adequate. This poor bird had just one round dowel perch to stand on and as a result its claws almost wrapped around. The diet this bird was on consisted of almost sunflower seeds and was clear the owner had very little knowledge of diet and what nutrition parrots need. I am sure the man who owned this bird just followed popular knowledge and thought he was doing the right thing.

I could not let this situation continue and did spend quite a lot of time with him who did listen to me and was quite willing to make the necessary changes, not just to this bird's diet, but to its whole environment, it clearly needed some stimulation and enrichment. But the one thing I thought most important was what this Amazon was being fed with. I did explain to him the importance of a good nutritional diet and that his Amazon was looking under nourished. He was a very pleasant and understanding man and realised he wasn't treating his bird properly.

As a result of my visit he agreed to change a lot of things and when he invited me back a couple of weeks later he had bought a much bigger cage, filled it with a number of toys and natural perches cut from one of his apple trees in his garden, I did suggest this as I could see he had a number of fruit trees in his garden and the dowel perch was of great concern to me. I was also very pleased to learn that he now only buys organic fresh produce whenever he can. I know that a lot of people can't always afford organic foods, but this man was quite well off so price was not an option, only the welfare of his Amazon.

I am sure that there are many other birds in similar situations and are not discovered, some through total ignorance, but others through little interest in the well-being of the birds some people keep. It is concerning that it was only by chance I came across this man through a mutual contact, but glad I was able to improve the care of this very precious Amazon parrot..

Alison, by email

Postbag continues on the next page.

Do you have something you would like to say, or have a view on a particular topic? Here's the opportunity to air your views or tell your story to our readers. Let's hear what you have to say, and send to [editorial@imaxweb.co.uk](mailto:editorial@imaxweb.co.uk) including POSTBAG in the subject line.

## THE PARROT SOCIETY UK

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARROTS OR PARROT-LIKE BIRDS - THIS IS THE SOCIETY

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- **HELP LINE:** Our experienced staff are available between 9am and 3pm each week day to answer questions regarding parrots or parakeets. This is a completely free service.
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# PARROTS HELPLINE



Image created by A.I. on NightCafe

If you have a parrot problem – whether it be health, diet, or whatever – you can contact any of the advisors listed here. They will do their very best to point you in the right direction.

- Bristol:** Christine Goodall 0117 950 8059
- Devon:** Kathy Moore 0741 3838631
- East Kent:** Rowan Vanmiller 01843 223737
- Oxon:** Nicole Place 01608 811281
- Surrey:** Juliet Eberle 01306 884569

Please understand the advisors on our Parrots Helpline are dedicated parrot people, and unpaid volunteers that give their time for free. It would therefore be appreciated if you would ensure your call is important and that you contact them at a reasonable time of day, unless an emergency.

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Issue 314 classified advertising deadline – 24th January 2024

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### Abbreviations

H/R	Hand-reared	S/S	Surgically sexed
C/B	Captive-Bred	C/T	Cuddly-tame
P/P	Proven-Pair	H/T	Hand-tame
T/T	Tame-talking	U/R	Unrelated
C/R	Closed-rung	Prv	Proven

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**DYH female**, preferably mature aviary bird but all considered. Phone, text or email Nora Ritchie. Tel. 07925 593860. [noratyrell1@gmail.com](mailto:noratyrell1@gmail.com)

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**Leicestershire Parrot Club**  
We meet 7.30 pm on last Thursday of every month at Co-Op Sports & Social Club, Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicester, LE4 4DE  
[www.leicestershireparrotclub.co.uk](http://www.leicestershireparrotclub.co.uk), call Rita on 01283 713623

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Covers the UK's south eastern counties, and possibly further afield.  
Call Deron on 07398 764207

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Meets on the 2nd Tuesday of every month 7.30pm at Pride Park Veterinary Centre, Riverside Road, Derby, DE24 8HX  
Get your parrot to bring you along.  
For further details [info@midlandparrots.com](mailto:info@midlandparrots.com) Telephone 01159 725965

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**SEE PAGE 21 FOR MORE DETAILS**

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# International PARROTS 2024 TWENTY-TWENTY-FOUR

## WHEN

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to Sunday 21st July 2024

## WHERE

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Services Club**  
Chermside, QLD, Australia

## FIRST SPEAKERS ANNOUNCED



**Randy Berry**  
*Berry Avicultural Park,  
Italy*



**Stephanie Edlund**  
*Understanding Parrots,  
Sweden*



**Scott Hovelroud**  
*Lutino Macaws Australia,  
Australia*



**Dr Neiva Guedes**  
*Hyacinth Macaw Project,  
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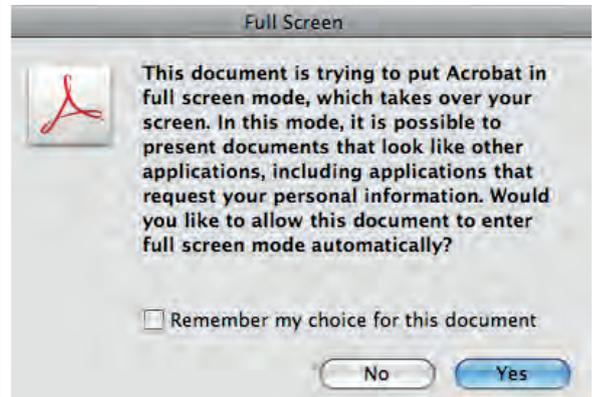


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**BACK**