

# Flappers

A monthly publication of the Flapping Feathers Parrot Club

Volume 1 Issue 2

April 2010



# The Flapping Feathers Parrot Club



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# Editor's Message

Welcome to the second issue of Flappers, the new Flapping Feathers Parrot Club newsletter. Once again the issue is very late because I again waited until the very end to start working on it. I keep saying that one of these days I'm going to start working on a newsletter early, but so far I haven't. One of these days.....

Because the last issue was a two month combo issue, I had an extra EB Cravens' article, so this issue has two of his articles. This newsletter was a little on the small side, so the extra article came in handy.

I know everybody has heard this before, but I need members to write articles for the newsletter. The reason is that anybody with web access can pull most of the articles in this newsletter off the web, so why have a newsletter? One main reason is to have articles that are written by members and not available anywhere else, and also so that I can put "Written by Flapping Feathers Member xxx" at the beginning of these articles (I enjoy doing this).

I want to thank Linda Costello for the great cover and inside pictures that she submits each month, and Frank Indiviglio for his great articles. Frank previously said that if you have something specific that you want him to write about, you can contact him at [fjindiviglio@aol.com](mailto:fjindiviglio@aol.com).

I put a new section in this newsletter called "Member News and Views". This is similar to the Announcements section found in other newsletters, but will contain only items related to members. An Announcements section should be used primarily for club announcements (we may have this section in the near future), which is why I created the Member News and Views section. If you ever have an item, including opinions, for Member News and Views, please let me know.

We don't have a Classifieds section yet because nobody submitted any classifieds so far. If you have anything for this section, please let me know and I'll put this section in.

Some of you who are receiving this newsletter are not on the Flapping Feathers email mailing list. You do not have to do anything on your PC in order to join. Just tell me that it is OK to add you and I will do everything that is necessary to add you to our mailing list. You are missing some great messages by not being on it.

Our first club meeting has finally been scheduled; see the announcement on page 4. It is a dinner meeting at the Land and Sea Diner / Restaurant in Fair Lawn. They have a private dining room that we will be meeting in, but normally they put customers in there if the main dining room gets crowded or if somebody requests that they be seated in there. If we have more than 25 people attending our meeting and I let them know this, they will reserve the entire room for us.

Everybody receiving this newsletter is welcome to attend our meetings. If you think you may come to our first meeting and have not done so already, please let me know so that I can let the diner know ahead of time how many tables to set up for us. I have scanned the diner's menu and uploaded it to the club's web site for those who want to [see the menu](#) before you come.

Thank you to the Beak N' Wings Bird Club for the lead to the story on Kuro the Starling.

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201-791-0245

# May 2010 Meeting

**Wednesday, May 5, 2010**

**7:30 pm**

[Land and Sea Diner and Restaurant](#)

20-12 Fair Lawn Avenue

Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

201-794-7240

First we will order food because by 7:30 many people will be hungry. If you already ate, you do not have to order anything. We will not be splitting the bill; everybody will pay just for what you order. You can [check the menu](#) before the meeting if you wish.

While waiting for the food, we will have the business portion of the meeting. Since we do not have a Board, the meeting will be a combination Board and general membership meeting. I suspect that all future meetings will be like this also.

Our main topic of discussion during dinner will be how we get our birds to do what we want. I have a very stubborn Grey who always thinks that she is the boss (am I the only one?), so I'm anxious to hear what everybody does. Of course we can also discuss anything else that anybody wants to.

We will also have door prizes. What will a meeting be like without door prizes? I will be bringing 2 bags of ZuPreem FruitBlend pellets which were donated by ZuPreem (see the ad on the last page), and 2 other members said that they will also be bringing door prizes.

Club membership cards will be given out with your names preprinted on them, assuming I have enough time to design a card and figure out how to properly print them by Wednesday. I will only print and bring with me cards for the members who say they may be there, so please let me know ahead of time if you think you may show up.

Our June meeting will probably be a weekend lunch meeting so that members who either work nights or who cannot drive at night will be able to attend. Watch your emails and the next newsletter for more information.

Shelly



## Member News and Views

- The Bergen Record is doing a story about birds, and member Christine Denny was interviewed. Pictures are being taken of her and her birds for the story. We will try to get the story for the next or the following Flappers.
- Check out the video produced by members Ann and Mark Zych of [Buddy doing the ring toss](#).
- Please submit entries for this section to [Shelly](#).

# Sun Conures Rising

By Toa Kyle

[www.parrots.org](http://www.parrots.org)

November 2009

Reprinted with permission from World Parrot Trust

One by one each member of the large Sun Conure (*Aratinga solstitialis*) flock descends and enters the tree cavity. It's near dusk but their brilliant yellow bodies still stand out in the ebbing sunlight. Finally, only one individual remains perched in the upper branches of the roost tree, vigilantly scanning the surrounding hills. After a few minutes this bird too descends into the tree cavity to join the rest of the flock for the night. I smile to myself as I realize I am the first biologist to witness this tree cavity roosting behaviour for the species in the wild. Like many parrot species that are popular as cage birds, little is known of the natural history of Sun Conures.

CONSERVATIONISTS HAVE BECOME more concerned with wild Sun Conures due to the recent split of the species from the Sulphur-breasted Parakeet (*Aratinga pintoii*). Previously the Sun Conure's range extended from southern Guyana to the northern bank of the Amazon River, a distance of over 400 kms/250 miles. The split into two distinct species, however, drastically decreased the known range of this species. Coupled with intensive trapping in the 1970's and '80's, wild Sun Conures may now number in the hundreds of individuals. While the "discovery" of a new species is usually a cause for celebra-



Photo ©Chuck Bergman

tion, in this case it also signifies the precariousness of another and provides strong motivation to study and protect those birds that still persist in nature.

With this sense of urgency, I arrived in the village of Karasabai in Southern Guyana as a follow up to the work initiated by WPT director, Jamie Gilardi, in May 2008 (see *PsittaScene* 21.1, Feb. 2009). The safest bet for observing wild Sun Conures is Karasabai. Elders in the village explained how in the 1980's locals would trap large numbers of Sun Conures and sell them to dealers who would visit periodically from the capital, Georgetown. On one such transaction in the late 80's, a dealer pulled a gun on villagers from Karasabai to avoid paying for a

shipment of birds. Although no one was hurt in the incident, a collective decision was made by the community to immediately stop the trapping and sale of birds in the area. Though locals made this decision to protect themselves, their action protected what were possibly the last flocks of Sun Conure in Guyana. Over the next 20 years, populations of birds in other parts of the country were wiped out completely.

THAT FLOCKS OF SUN CONURE roost in tree cavities year-round is the most important find of my trip to Guyana. In fact, their roosting behaviour may help explain how they were almost trapped to extinction before anyone noticed. By

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placing nets over the entrance of roost cavities at night, trappers can capture an entire flock of birds at once. Two of the three roost trees I located were in open settings. Given conspicuous neon-yellow birds roosting with easy-access roost cavities, one can begin to understand how the species' decline was swift and sudden. Although Sun Conures have evolved their roosting tendencies over the millennia (presumably as a defense from nocturnal predators), in the face of modern trapping techniques this behaviour almost caused their complete disappearance from the wild in less than 30 years.

Unique behavioural traits have spelled disaster for other parrots as well. Both Red-fronted (*Ara rubrogenys*) and Hyacinth Macaws (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*) readily descend to the ground to forage or drink from streams. Trappers duly noted this behaviour and proceeded to capture large flocks of birds by placing bait over nets at ground level. Removal of large numbers of birds at once has obviously tragic consequences for a species as the experience and knowledge of adult birds (as well as future breeding attempts) are lost forever. In the case of the Sun Conure, we need to find and protect roost trees before the trappers do.

**DURING MY TIME WATCHING** Sun Conures, I couldn't help thinking I was observing miniature versions of Golden Conure (*Guarouba guarouba*). I have spent over five field seasons studying these spec-

tacular birds in the Brazilian Amazon (see *Psittascene 17.2, May 2005*). Both birds are predominantly bright yellow, maintain flocks of up to 30 individuals and roost year round in tree cavities. The last trait is the most perplexing as no other neotropical parrot species is known to practice this sleep habit (though admittedly for most species basic natural history information is lacking). One would presume that the two species are related but genetic studies have shown that Golden Conure are more related to Red-shouldered Macaw (*Diopsittaca nobilis*) than any of the *Aratinga* parakeets. Perhaps there is something about being a bright yellow parrot that has created this peculiar roosting habit over time?

**THE MOST ENCOURAGING TREND** I witnessed on my visit to Karasabai is the apparent growth and expansion of the Sun Conure population found there. Following the trapping ban of the late 80's, birds were only observed on the Ureng River, around an hour northwest of Karasabai. On my last day in the field I visited the manioc plot of my guide, Francino. The plot was found in a forested area a half hour's walk north of town. Francino, a gentle Makushi indian in his 50's, told me he used to observe Sun Conures in this area up until the mid 80's, after which he never saw them again. In 2006, Francino regularly began to see two birds in the vicinity of his farm and in 2008, up to three separate, small flocks. Not only



Peering out of a roosting cavity, one member of the flock surveys the pristine landscape (below). Photo ©Toa Kyle

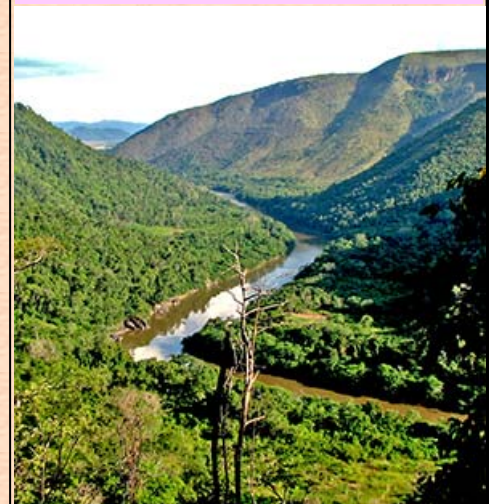


Photo ©Toa Kyle

did we observe Sun Conure during my brief visit to his plot, we also located the roost for a flock of four birds made up of two adults and two juveniles. It would thus seem prudent to assume that these birds descended from the initial surviving Ureng River flock and are now re-colonizing areas that other Sun Conures had been trapped out of in past decades. Great news for the future of these stunning parrots though it is important

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the educational work is done with surrounding communities as we cannot assume others will be as receptive to protecting wild Sun Conure as the people of Karasabai are.

Much work still needs to be done to preserve the last wild Sun Conures in perpetuity. One event transpired this year that may bode well for their future though. The Raposa do Sul indigenous reserve is located in the northeast corner of Roraima, the only state in Brazil where Sun Conure are found. It may hold the greatest number of Sun Conure in the wild but is also home to violent conflicts between natives and squatters over gold deposits and rice farming. I was actually prevented from passing through this area by military police, who maintain a permanent outpost in the middle of the reserve. Apparently even Brazilian biologists have an extremely difficult time obtaining permits to research in the area. In a landmark ruling in March of this year, the Brazilian government voted in favour of the natives' land rights and ordered the removal of all squatters from the reserve (unfortunately a rare event in Brazil). While it remains to be seen if researchers will be able to work in this area in the near future, we hope that the removal of the gold miners and rice farmers protects Sun Conure habitat within the reserve and the birds are free from trapping pressures. From a conservation perspective, we hope that with Sun Conures it is not a case of too little, too



Sun Conure *Aratinga solstitialis*  
Photo ©Chuck Bergman

late.

Toa Kyle led WPT's Blue-throated Macaw Project for many years in addition to his work on Golden and Sun Conures. He has recently relocated to Australia where he hopes to continue parrot conservation work.

**Sun Conures used to be considered wide-ranging throughout northern South America. However, recent research determined that there are actually two species. *A. solstitialis* (above) is now restricted to Guyana and far NE Brazil. *A. pintoii* (the Sulfur-breasted Parakeet) is found in NE Brazil, in N Para and NE Amazonas states.**

**A very rapid population decline has occurred in the last three decades due to trapping for the pet trade. Unsustainable harvests have extirpated this parrot from much of its former range, placing it in urgent need of protection.**

***A. solstitialis* may now number in the hundreds in the wild and is listed as Endangered in Guyana. The WPT is working to encourage protection and recovery of this species. Two recent expeditions revealed remarkable new information**



"Sunnies" are on the rise in Guyana thanks to local people who love and protect them, welcome tourists and shun poachers.  
Photo ©Chuck Bergman



A Sun Conure chick begging from its parents is a welcome sight in Guyana, the last stronghold of this vanishing species.  
Photo ©Chuck Bergman

**about the biology and behaviour of this species, including the first evidence of communal roosting in tree cavities.**

Source: PsittaScene, a publication of the World Parrot Trust  
[www.psittascene.org](http://www.psittascene.org).  
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# New Disease Threatens Parrots

University of Canterbury

[www.sciencealert.com.au](http://www.sciencealert.com.au)

March 24, 2010

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New Zealand's endangered parrots could be under further threat from a new genotype of a virulent disease that scientists at the University of Canterbury have recently helped identify.

The scientists are calling for urgent action to protect native parrot populations and are calling on conservation authorities to monitor the incidence of infection.

Dr Arvind Varsani, Dr Melanie Massaro and Dr Brigitta Kurenbach (Biological Sciences) have been working with Massey University PhD candidate Luis Ortiz-Catedral, who has been monitoring and documenting the incidence of beak and feather disease virus (BFDV) in the endangered New Zealand parrot, the red-fronted parakeet.

The results of this research were recently published in the journal, *Archives of Virology*, in a paper titled "A new isolate of beak and feather disease virus from endemic wild red-fronted parakeets in New Zealand".

The team has been working to identify the genotype of the BFDV infecting the parakeets on Little Barrier Island where an incidence of approximately 25 per cent infection was found by Luis in earlier research he conducted on the island.

The virus causes psittacine beak and feather disease, a common viral disease found worldwide that affects parrots and cockatoos. Birds affected by the disease can lose their feathers, suffer beak deformities and their immune systems weaken, making them susceptible to other infections. There is no cure and it is usually fatal.

In their paper, the team said there was an urgent need to protect endemic parrot populations from infection and recommended that the incidence of BFDV infections in both wild and captive parrots be monitored by conservation authorities, and that breeders and those working with psittaciforms be made aware of the consequences of outbreaks of the disease.

"These actions are pivotal for identifying and implementing management programmes aimed at containing the dissemination of BFDV to captive and wild populations of species at risk of extinction," the researchers said.

Dr Varsani said it was the first time full BFDV genomes from New Zealand had been documented. In the past, researchers in New Zealand had only looked at partial sequences of BFDV isolated from introduced parrots.



BFDV affects parrots and cockatoos, and is now threatening a rare New Zealand species.

Image: iStockphoto

"No-one has characterised the virus at full genome level in New Zealand before and when we compared it to isolates from around the world we found the New Zealand isolate was significantly different to other available BFDV genomes. This means the BFDV isolates from red-fronted parakeets represent a new genotype of the virus."

Dr Varsani said the discovery of a distinct genotype of BFDV raised questions about whether there were other genotypes or recombinants of the virus in New Zealand, and the potential harm it may have on other endangered native parrot species, such as the kakapo, orange-fronted parakeet or the Forbes parakeet.

"Our goal now is to document the diversity of beak and feather disease virus in New Zealand to determine if they are recombi-

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nants and assess their virulence. This information will be of great importance to psittacine conservation programmes,” Dr Varsani said.

Luis, who approached Dr Varsani with the project, carried out the fieldwork by collecting blood samples from 54 red-fronted parakeets on Little Barrier Island with help from Department of Conservation staff and volunteers.

Dr Massaro said the discovery provided the first evidence that native parrots, rather than just introduced species, were infected with the virus. However, it was difficult to know

how the virus had spread as red-fronted parakeets were mainly found on New Zealand’s off-shore islands. It was also difficult to tell whether the virus was a new arrival or had been around for some time.

She said the parakeets may have been infected from introduced psittacine species, escapees from breeding facilities or the virus isolate could have been endemic to New Zealand but remained undetected in wild species. Transferring birds from one island to another as part of New Zealand’s conservation strategy could also be spreading the disease.

“Another issue is researchers who go from island to island —

we could potentially be indirect vectors for the disease.”

Dr Kurenbach said it was amazing to see how a team of scientists from different fields — ecologists, molecular biologists and virologists — could be pulled together to address a question in a short period of time.

The team has recently secured funding from the Brian Mason Trust to train Department of Conservation personnel in BFDV screening and to study BFDV in native and introduced parrots in the Canterbury and Westland region.

## Upcoming Area (and some other) Events

- May 1 Newcastle, DE - [Exotic Bird Mart & Sale](#) - NUR Shrine Center, 198 S. DuPont Hwy, Newcastle, Del. 19720 - 9 am - 4 pm - 727-862-1542
- May 8 Newport News, VA - [Penninsula Caged Bird Society Festival and Cockatiel Shows](#) - The Columbian Center, 100 Columbus Way, Newport News, VA - 9 am - 4 pm - 757-247-0168
- May 8 Fayetteville, NC - [Exotic Bird Fair](#) - National Guard Armory, 449 East Mountain Drive, Fayetteville, N.C. 28306 - 9 am - 4 pm - 727-862-1542
- May 13-16 San Diego, CA - [Parrots International Symposium 2010](#) - US Grant Hotel, 326 Broadway, San Diego, CA - info@parrotsinternational.org
- May 16 Erie, PA - [Erie Cage Bird Club Bird Fair](#) - St. Patrick’s Cauley Center, 214 E. 4th St., Erie, PA 10 am - 4 pm - 814-833-6922 - 1mumc@pennswoods.net
- May 21-23 Parksville, British Columbia - [World Parrot Refuge Making a Difference Conference](#) - Bayside Parksville Hotel, 240 Dogwood Street, Parksville, British Columbia, Canada V9P 2H5 - 250-248-5194 - wendy.huntbatch@floprs.org
- May 22 Augusta, NJ - [Northern NJ Pet Expo](#) - NJ State Fairgrounds, Augusta, NJ - 10 am - 5 pm - 973-383-1500 ext. 234 - lwilliams@njherald.com
- May 22 Parkville, MD - [Baltimore Bird Fanciers Bird Mart](#) - Tall Cedars of Lebanon Hall, 2501 Putty Hill Avenue, Parkville, Maryland 21234 - 9 am - 4 pm - info@baltimorebirdfanciers.org
- June 19 New York City, NY - [National Pigeon Day](#) - Pilgrim Hill in Central Park, 5th Ave. and E. 72nd St., New York, NY 10021 - 10 am - 3 pm - bestbirdclub@yahoo.com

# Kuro the Starling

## by Izumi Kyle

Reprinted from [www.starlingtalk.com/kuro.htm](http://www.starlingtalk.com/kuro.htm) with permission from the author

I'd like to share with you a story about our pet, Kuro, a wild starling that I found when I was 12 years old. At that time, he was just a small, featherless hatchling that had fallen out of a nest at my primary school. Two children were teasing him, so I took him away from them and brought him home in a styrofoam cup.

We initially thought he was a blackbird, so we named him "Kuro" which means "black" in Japanese. After a quick trip to the library however, we confirmed that Kuro was a baby starling. He was such a hungry little bird. We fed him dog food several times a day. He grew rapidly and was soon a cute, juvenile starling with nice grey-brown feathers. He quickly learned his name and would respond with a squawk every time we called out his name. We also gave him flying lessons in the house and were careful that he didn't fly outside--we didn't ever want to lose our darling starling who had instantly become an important member of our family. Within weeks, he learned how to fly. He soon started adopting more and more human habits such as taking daily baths with my father every morning, joining us at every meal and sleeping on top or under the covers with us for a nap. Our house was his home and our family lived in his cage! As you can imagine, for most of my childhood and

adolescence, I often experienced "wet steps" walking on our carpet throughout our house and wore, unknowingly of course, white-stained clothes to school!

When he was a few months old, we were all very delighted to discover that Kuro could mimic words and sounds. He could say "good bird!", "pretty bird!" "Kiss!", "Kuro stay!" and many combinations thereof, as well as whistle many tunes including the William Tell overture and "Pop Goes the Weasel". His songs and voice were remarkably clear; in fact, he could imitate mechanical sounds such as the "beep, beep" of my watch so precisely that whenever I'd hear "beep, beep", I had to look down at my watch to see if it was my watch or him! He really loved to sing and would listen so intently whenever I would whisper or whistle to him. He would also never miss the opportunity of whistling along with my sister whenever she practiced playing the organ.

He would often amaze and surprise visitors with his mimicry talent whenever they came to our house. You could catch him singing day and night, except of course when I needed him to sing or talk..... One day, I was interviewed about my bird on the CBC Canadian radio show, "As It Happens". Michael Enright, the host, had done a show on bird



Kuro listening to my mother play the organ.

mimicry and had heard about Kuro and our family from an interview with renowned psychologist, Dr. Meredith West. (see [Mozart's Starling](#)) I was then called to do a follow-up interview. I knew Kuro would not let me down, as he ALWAYS sings. And in fact, I brought Kuro and the phone for the interview into our bathroom, because Kuro loved to hang out there and sing because he loved the acoustical effect of "singing in the shower".

The interview call came. All was going well. I bragged about how Kuro loves to sing, always sings and how clearly he could mimic songs and words. Michael then asked, "Can you please make Kuro say/sing something?" I then replied, "sure". I brought the phone close to Kuro. As you can imagine, rather than him looking curiously at it as he often does with new objects, he looked at it and looked at me with an expression, "What are you doing holding this big, plastic object in my face? Get it

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Kuro loved to be tucked into my dad's Japanese housecoat.

away from me!" He totally clammed up and did not peep a single sound! I was so embarrassed, as this show was broadcast across the nation. I continued on with the interview trying to keep calm and at the same time, trying to get Kuro to say SOMETHING. Not a word. As Michael was wrapping up the interview thanking me for my time, I was at once frustrated and humored that Kuro had done the "singing frog" trick. I hung up. It was silent in the bathroom--but only for a second as Kuro belted: "Good bird!" and started whistling the William Tell overture.....I guess he, like any other person might, had experienced performance anxiety!

Another memorable moment was when Kuro flew outside during the second year we had him. Our whole family was devastated that he had flown

away, but I vowed to find him. I rode my bike screaming, "Kuro! Kuro! Where are you?" There were a million starlings on the front lawns of houses in our Don Mills suburban setting so I started to lose hope of ever finding him. After about an hour and in tears, I came across my neighbor's tree that had a bird preening his feathers. I called out, "Kuro?" The bird didn't fly away so I came closer to the tree.....as I looked up, there was a starling in the middle of summer with his full winter feathers on (as he was domesticated, he always got his winter/summer coats mixed up!). He was also soaking wet so he had obviously taken a bath somewhere during his short adventure outside! I knew without a doubt, I had found my bird again. I coaxed him down from the tree, left my bike where it was and ran home with him in my hands, crying of joy.

When Kuro was around three years old, we wrote *Kuro the Starling* as a summer project. My mother had gone to Japan for a few months to tend to her sick mother, leaving our father to temporarily take care of us. We were aged 12-17 years so you can imagine the chaos in our house! We were arguing with each other every day and missed our mother terribly so in an attempt to re-bond the sisters and keep us busy, my father proposed a project to write a story about Kuro. We all agreed and worked over the summer to write a script about our beloved bird. We then submitted the manuscript to various publishers and got accepted by one that was looking to publish a short story



Kuro pecking at his gift.



Checking out Ayumi's play dough replicas of him.

as part of a series of readers for grade 3 students for schools in Canada. We were very delighted that a publisher accepted it and also to have such a great memento of our Kuro.

During his earlier years, Kuro slept up above my bed in a makeshift nest basket. We, of course place a box under it to catch all the droppings. Every morning, Kuro would not make a sound but as soon as I would move, he would then go into his singing/whistling repertoire waking everyone up! He would make sure he would visit all our beds to say hello every morning. While there were four sisters, Kuro definitely knew us apart and would react differently towards each sister. He knew me as the sis that could whistle and sing well! He especially loved my father and

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would hang out with him for hours as he studied at his work desk (he was a very studious professor). Only my father could make Kuro bow to his command. And if he was away on business trips, Kuro would stick to him like glue upon his return and would wait patiently by his bed without whistling and singing until he got up, which was at times in the afternoon!

Christmastime was always fun with Kuro. He loved to jump on all the presents gathered around the tree and tug at all the shiny ribbons. He also loved to rip up some of the wrapping, so there were many occasions when we knew exactly what we were getting from Santa! Every year, we would buy a little gift for Kuro. I remember one year my sister made little "Kuro" replicas out of clay as his Christmas gift. He helped tear the gift open but when he saw the other "starlings" he was a little scared of them at first--afterall he had never seen "starlings" before!

During his later years, Kuro was less playful and energetic but still very affectionate. He lost some of his voice and so words and whistles became less clear. He would allow us to scratch his head and help him molt whereas earlier he may have been less open to us stroking parts of his body. He also had to be put in a cage to sleep, as a couple of times he fell from his makeshift nest. Even in his old age, when all his sisters "flew out of the nest" he stayed close to my parents and would greet us excitedly any time any of the

sisters would come home for a visit.

As the only remaining one in "the nest", my parents treated him like a spoiled, youngest child; my mother made a hand-crafted futon sized perfectly to Kuro's size. And every morning, my mother would prepare four different dishes, especially chopped in starling-bite sizes and that covered all four food groups. Kuro's favorite dishes were: tofu, shrimp, and chopped vegetables. He especially loved traditional Japanese food. He was so spoiled in fact, that even if the fridge was empty of "human food", my mother would only make the trip to the grocery store if one of Kuro's staple foods ran out!

Kuro, lived a great, long life. He saw me grow from a primary school child to a university student to a married, grown-up adult. In 1999, at the age of eighteen, he made it to the Guinness World record, as the "world's oldest domesticated starling". Even though his feathers were thinning and he had arthritis in his legs, he still had his loving, affectionate character. He lived another year to the age of 19 and passed away in December 2000. My parents were by his side until the end. Our whole family was devastated and felt an incredible loss without our Kuro. We mourned for weeks and continue to feel very saddened by his loss. I still think about him often and remember all the wonderful experiences as if it was yesterday. I tear at times thinking about him and have many dreams that he is still with us. I really miss him and often reflect on how much joy



The author, Izumi, with her sisters and parents. Izumi is in the front row wearing the pinkish shirt. Beside Izumi is Nana, and Ayumi is behind Izumi. Meg is on the right wearing blue.



Kuro and his Guinness World Record Certificate.

he brought to our family -- all his mischief, songs, hours sleeping with us and eating meals with the family..... We keep all his memories in our hearts. ~Izumi

See an additional picture and a painting of Kuro on the bottom of page 26.

# First California Condor Egg in Pinnacles National Monument for 100 Years

[www.wildlifeextra.com](http://www.wildlifeextra.com)

March 2010

Reprinted with permission from Wildlife Extra

## Captive bred condors produce egg in the wild

March 2010. Biologists at Pinnacles National Monument in California have verified the first California condor nest in the Monument in over 100 years. Condor 317, a female released at the monument as a 1 ½ year old bird in 2004, has paired with a six year old male, Condor 318, originally released along the Big Sur coast by Ventana Wildlife Society.

## Radio tracking

This is the first breeding attempt by either condor. The adult condors were tracked using radio telemetry and global positioning technology to the nest site. They were also observed performing courtship behaviors for nearly a month before an egg was confirmed.

## Easily seen nest site

"We are thrilled that after being involved with the Condor Recovery Program since 2003, the park has its first nest in over 100 years," said Eric Brunne-mann, Park Superintendent. "...and conveniently Condors 317 and 318 chose a nest cave that can be easily viewed by the public from the Scout Peak bench on the High Peaks Trail," continued Brunne-mann. Although the areas directly around the nest cliff will be closed to public use for the duration of the nesting period, public viewing is still possible.

The strenuous hike to the viewing area is approximately two miles from the closest East or West Side parking areas. From the west, the elevation gain is approximately 1100 feet, and from the east it is over 1200 feet. Directions to the viewing area are available from the Visitor Center.

A temporary closure area around the nest cliff is in effect during the 2010 breeding season. An area extending from Western Front to Goat Rock and north to the edge of the Juniper Canyon Trail will be closed to protect the nesting birds. The Juniper Canyon and High Peaks trails remain open.

## 57 days to hatch & 6 months to fledge

Biologists will be closely monitoring the nest to determine if the new parents succeed in incubating the egg and rearing a young bird to fledge from the high rocky cliff. Condor eggs take an average of 57 days to hatch. Nestlings remain flightless for an additional 5½ to 6 months. Park Service biologists expect that if the new parents successfully rear a young condor, it would take its first flight in early October.

**History of the Pinnacles Condor Program**  
Pinnacles National Monument was chosen as a California condor release site due to



Two captive bred condors have produced a chick at Pinnacles National Monument.

Credit: NPS

historical documentation of condors in the area, good cliff nesting opportunities, and large expanses of intact habitat in the region.

## 26 condors at the Pinnacles

There have been six groups of condors released at Pinnacles National Monument, bringing the current total to 26 free-flying condors. 2009 marked the first year that a Pinnacles released condor nested. Condor 313 paired with Condor 303 who laid an egg in a rocky outcrop at the RS Bar Guest Ranch in southern San Benito County. Although Condor 303 died before her nestling took his first flight, the juvenile survived and continues to fly over San Benito County. With the approval of the National Park Service and others involved in the condor recovery effort, the owners and operators of the RS Bar Guest Ranch formed an unprece-

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In the early 1980s, an intensive captive breeding program rescued the species from extinction and in the 1990s reestablishment efforts began in southern California.

Credit: NPS

dent relationship with the Pinnacles Partnership, a non-profit organization supporting the monument, so visitors could have the opportunity to take guided trips to the remote nest site, where the nesting pair and their offspring could frequently be viewed for extended periods.

National Park Biologists are working with partners at the Ventana Wildlife Society and community volunteers to build a self sustaining population of condors in central California over the next several years.

This will contribute to one of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Plan goals by establishing a population in California of 150 or more condors with at least 15 breeding pairs.

### **History of the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*)**

Condors maintained a strong population in the American West until the mid-19th century, when shooting, poisoning from lead and strychnine, egg collecting, and general habitat degradation began to take a heavy toll. Between the mid-1880s and 1924, there were scattered

reports of condors in Arizona. But by the late 1930s, all remaining condors were found only in California and the mid 1980's, the total population had dwindled to just 22 birds.

As a result of the continued downward spiral of the condor population, the California condor was placed on the federal endangered species list in 1967. In the early 1980s, an intensive captive breeding program rescued the species from extinction and in the 1990s reestablishment efforts began in southern California. Since that time, release sites have also been launched in northern Arizona, along the Big Sur coast, at Pinnacles National Monument, and on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico.

The current world population of California condors numbers 348. Ninety-five birds are flying free in California, eighteen in Baja Mexico, and seventy-four in Arizona. An additional 161 are in captive breeding centers.

### **Challenges to Condor Recovery - Lead shot**

For recovery of an endangered species to succeed, it is necessary to change the conditions that lead to their decline. Egg collecting is no longer a significant threat, the effects of DDT are likely to diminish over the coming century, and poisoning of bait carcasses for predator control is no longer an established practice.

The primary threat remaining to California condor recovery is lead poisoning. Condors inadvertently ingest lead bullet fragments when animal carcasses, or their gut piles, shot with lead ammunition remain



Condor 303 being examined after she died from lead poisoning.

Credit: Ventana Wildlife Society

on the landscape. For this reason, the California legislature outlawed the use of lead ammunition for big game hunting and depredation within the condor's range. For more information, see: [California Department of Fish and Game](http://www.cdfg.ca.gov/).

The Institute for Wildlife Studies ([www.iws.org](http://www.iws.org)) works to disseminate information of the effectiveness and availability of non-lead ammunition.

### **Partners in Recovery**

The reestablishment of California condors to Pinnacles is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ([www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)), National Park Service ([www.nps.gov/pinn](http://www.nps.gov/pinn)), Ventana Wildlife Society ([www.ventanaws.org](http://www.ventanaws.org)), the Institute for Wildlife Studies ([www.iws.org](http://www.iws.org)), Pinnacles Partnership ([www.pinnaclespartnership.org](http://www.pinnaclespartnership.org)) and community volunteers.

# The Scarlet Macaw: Personal Observations in the Field and Natural History Notes

by Frank Indiviglio

Written for Flapping Feathers

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*Hello, Frank Indiviglio here. I'm recently retired from the Bronx Zoo, and write [That-BirdBlog](#), sponsored by [That-PetPlace](#), where I post 2-3 bird care and conservation articles weekly and answer readers' questions ...please stop by, thanks!*

The Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) is surely one of the most recognizable birds on the planet. Images of this spectacular parrot adorn the brochures and T-shirts of travel agencies, zoos and aviaries worldwide. Less well-known, however, are its natural habits and precarious status in the wild.

## Chancing Upon Macaws in Venezuela

In the mid and late 1990's, I had the great fortune of being able to participate in field studies of the Green Anaconda in Venezuela. Working in the seasonally flooded grasslands of the country's central llanos region, I was awestruck by the variety and abundance of bird life.

In my mind, many sightings vie for the title of "most spectacular" – scores of Hoatzins clambering about in riverside tree-tops, flocks of giant Jabiru Storks, hundreds of Scarlet Ibis and Roseate Spoonbills flying to roost, foraging Buff-napped



Scarlet Macaw at [Diergaarde Blijdorp](#), Rotterdam, Netherlands

Ibis, various hawks so bold that they dived at cast fishing lures. A chief contender among these was a small flock of Scarlet Macaws that frequented the study site.

Memories of these magnificent birds flashing across the llanos' strikingly blue sky remain as vivid today as when first I saw them. At 33 ½ inches in length, and with a wingspan to match, the deep red (or scarlet!), yellow-shouldered Scarlet Macaw is one of the world's largest parrots. Despite having worked with macaws for decades in captivity, I was simply awe-struck by my first view of a free-ranging flock.

I was a bit surprised to encounter these huge parrots in open grasslands, but have since learned that they quite readily switch habitats to those where they can live unmolested by people. The enlightened owners of most of the llanos' extensive cattle ranches jealously guard resident wildlife, resulting in a simply overwhelming array of animals of all kinds. I and my colleagues captured and tagged 500+ Green Anacondas over a 5 year period, and we regularly came across Giant Anteaters, Tamanduas, Crab-Eating Foxes, Fresh Water Dolphins, Capybara and a staggering array of other

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spectacular creatures. Jaguars and Cougars even showed up on occasion.

### **Relating Natural Behavior to the Captive Situation**

In accordance with the reports of others, I found that Scarlet Macaw pairs were very evident within the flock itself. Indeed, paired birds flew so that their wings were almost in contact, and foraged next to each other most of the time. One observes wild macaws only briefly before their sociability and need for contact becomes clear – it surely was a “take home” message for this aviculturist.

Always loud, when startled or “arguing” their voices were truly ear-splitting...those seeking to keep these birds as pets must understand that there is no such thing as a healthy yet quiet Scarlet Macaw!

Seeing macaws and other parrots in the wild really brings home to one just how sociable they are. This, and their high level of activity, must be taken into consideration when they are kept in captivity. Without sufficient space, companionship and stimulation, macaws make poor pets.

### **Range**

The huge range extends from Oaxaca in southern Mexico through Central America to Columbia, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil, and east to French Guiana. Within this area, however, the Scarlet Macaw is rare or absent from many locales, and may be extinct in El Salvador. Feral populations thrive in Puerto Rico and Florida.

A friend involved in field research in Guyana reports seeing mixed flocks of Scarlet and Blue-and-Gold Macaws (*Ara ararauna*) – one reason I’m planning a visit soon!

### **Status**

A spectacular appearance, sociable nature and ability to mimic earmarked the Scarlet Macaw for trouble early on. One of the first parrots to be severely impacted by both collection for the pet trade and habitat loss, by 1932 it was found to be rare in settled areas of Guatemala and elsewhere, and by the 1960’s had retreated to small, isolated habitat patches in Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Honduras, Guyana and much of the rest of its range.

Originally a bird of forest edges and wooded savannahs, Scarlet Macaws have now learned to utilize farms and relatively open areas as well. This ability to adjust to varying habitats – open to thick forest, scrubland, llanos, ranches and farms – along with its intelligence, are keys to its continued survival in the wild.

Today, legal protection, captive breeding and the species’ ability to adapt to habitat disturbance has led to something of a rebound in its numbers, but its future is by no means secure.

Along with its change in habitat preference has come increased vigilance...wild Scarlet Macaws are very wary of people, and take flight (screaming for all they are worth!) at the slightest disturbance.

### **Baths, Brains and the Future**



Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*). Two at [Lowry Park Zoo](#), Tampa, Florida, USA.

Wild Scarlet Macaws love to bathe and their antics in the rain are said to be very funny. Those I’ve cared for in zoos and aviaries accepted hose-bathing with gusto...several learned to fly to me immediately upon seeing a hose. In fact, by showing 1 pair a hose, I could get them to fly to their bathing site even though it was located away from me, on the other side of their exhibit. This degree of learning ability bodes well for the future of wild Scarlet Macaws...if we give them a hand!

### **Further Reading**

Venezuela’s llanos region, especially during the dry season, is a “must see” for serious birders. The ranch on which I worked is named Hato el Cedral. You can view a list of the 335 bird species recorded on the ranch at: [Xeno-Canto](#).

*Thanks, until next time, Frank Indiviglio.*

## “Selected Shorts”

Going through my “Article Ideas” file this month, I came across so many concepts that merit attention but do not require a full length column to explain. Thus the title and BN we have here. Enjoy!

### Constraints on Our Parrots

I agree that many feather mutilation problems occur because of what is forced upon the parrots in captivity...I do not agree that this necessarily means we must re-think the keeping of all birds in captivity. That is, in my humble opinion, a bit of a cop out, since there is no way that I or any other one of us is going to banish or even placate the captivity of millions of parrots currently being kept as caged birds. They are here; they are going to stay here. We need to work to improve their lot--not feel guilty about keeping them. What is more important is "constraints" we put upon our parrots. The more constraints placed upon a parrot in your home or aviary, the more the bird is going to have to react to such limitations and devise emotional or physical ways to cope. Why not we keepers try to minimize the constraints, give our parrots more freedoms, trust them, and offer them a chance to stretch and grow and be so much more than just captive cagebirds. Flight, sunlight, rain, avian companionship,

maybe even a family, who knows what else can be accomplished. Break out of our ruts and routines; trust our parrots to grow in ways we can devise; divert their attentions from humans and needfulness and sexual frustrations to fresh interests and curiosities and the world around them. Such imaginative ideas can break through perceived constraints and allow our parrots to flourish in captivity along with their humans (we who are also in "captivity" right?). Life can be lived on many levels.

Our handfed psittacines are not going to have a lot of chances to regain their wild existence in the near future. So it is up to us to unshackle them and let them soar in captivity...

### Capes and Drinking Water

Of all the species of psittacine I have kept, none preferred fresh, clean drinking water more than my *Fuscicollis* cape parrots. And they drink large amounts of liquid also. First thing in the morning, and last thing every night these birds love a long cool drink. It makes their droppings quite watery at times. Lots of birds show their desire for fresh drinking water



by coming over for healthy sips right after the water in their bowls is changed, but capes are by far the most particular here at The Perfect Parrot.

### Aloe Vera Usage

I can see why some owners would not trust aloe. I do not use it on a daily basis even with the most serious pluckers - catching and treating them is too stressful. I also do not like to buy bottled aloe, it has been too processed.

This may help those who are not familiar with the medical properties of aloe vera: For external use it is basically

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considered a vulnerary and a demulcent - the latter means it is very high in mucilaginous (mucous) materials and is soothing to irritated skin cells, the former means it is beneficial in the healing of open wounds. It is an herb of choice in the case of serious burns because it soothes and heals without drying or forming scabs quickly. It has anti-microbial properties and in fact we use it as the first apply herb to any wound considered liable to infection. In this external capacity we have used it regularly for feather pluckers with bare skin patches, and while it appears to stop itching and red irritation, it does nothing to aid re-growth of feathers (that is where we use Vitamin E oils).

It is also interesting that aloe has several internal indications for humans including being both a cathartic (laxative) and an emmenagogue (menstrual flow stimulator). It is an excellent natural herb with anthelmintic properties (de worming). Its bitter properties can also aid digestion. Our parrots absolutely love it and when fed it in their morning cooked mix every few weeks to a month or so, will devour every piece. This is odd because I find the taste too bitter for myself - but then parrots' tastes and digestive tracts are much different than humans. If we had to choose to have only one herb growing nearby for immediate home use it would be aloe, or perhaps comfrey, both are that useful to the first aid medicine chest.

## Bee attacks

Bee attacks on parrots are not that rare in outdoor aviaries, though usually it affects smaller parrots and babies in the nesting box. If Africanized bees are involved, it becomes much more dangerous for larger birds. Best way to guard against this is to remove your nest boxes during non-breeding times of year; learn from locals what months the bee hives in your region break up and produce new queens and swarm to form a new hive; during these weeks be very vigilant about any two or three or four bees flying in and around box openings; five scouts will become ten, then twenty, then when the box has been established as a prospective and marked site for the new hive, you may wake up next morning and find 20,000 bees in that box! Take repellent action as soon as you see the scouts checking out boxes; don't leave any unused boxes laying around the property; attach a board or tin plate over openings to discourage bees (also rats, centipedes, etc.). Bees are often drawn to water bowls in parrot cages, especially during prolonged draught when they may fly many miles for water for the hive. This can lead to more bee activities at your aviaries and cause problems. It is no simple matter to keep bees away from parrot water, so instead we provide open shallow plates for bees to water themselves outside the parrot flights. I don't know about foreign honey farming. But, if you do get a swarm locating on your property, it is a good idea to

call a bee farmer living in the area to come and remove the hive - they often will do it for free because they relocate it to their farm. Dealing with a hive yourself is frightening and not a little dangerous. Honey farmers will also brief you on the best ways to repel scouts and details about the bees in your vicinity.

## The Google Factor

Sometimes when I am queried about general topics such as how to take care of cockatiels or what to feed a pet lovebird, I inwardly grimace and answer the question as best I can in the time or space allowed, making sure to suggest the keeper seek out a species guidebook or parrot magazine for further information. The hidden expression is due to my wonder about why beginners or other pet owners prefer to ask of someone on an internet list or by e-mail about topics that are covered over and over in print and online. Just a little effort to type in "lovebird feeding" or "cockatiel basic care" or "sun conure nestbox size" or "areca palm toxic" or even "spelling pyrrhura" and the answer is at one's fingertip. Just hit Google Search, that's all!

## Parrots Marking Territory?

Down through the years, I have kept many kinds of male pet and breeder parrots. A funny thing is some of them used to delight in pooping on me when I was working underneath their perch or tree! I feel a splat and look up and there one was,

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peering down at me as if to say, "Bullseye!" Since none of my hens ever seemed drawn to such action, I have wondered if this behavior is a sort of one-upmanship or parrot insult of some sort, a prank, or maybe even marking territory like other male animals do...

### **Coping with Breeding Pairs Who Want to Nest**

Since April and I do so very little breeding now each season, we are faced with the dilemma of long-time mature and proven pairs who *really* want to chew and nest once springtime arrives. To solve their boredom and give them something to do, I have designed open topped wooden boxes made out of one inch pine approximately 12" x 12" by six inches deep. We fill the bottom up with bark and stems and wood blocks and palm husk and driftwood and lots of other chewables, then put up two hooks and hang them high up on a wall inside the flights. Since the boxes are not enclosed or very deep, the psittacines spend hours scrabbling around inside, chewing up the objects and staying busy without cycling any eggs. This might not work with cockatiels or smaller birds who would try to lay and set in an open box, but is an easy solution for the nesting urges of larger parrots.

### **Greg Glendell on Feeding**

There are three matters regarding advice on what captive birds should be fed which have not been mentioned in this discussion so

far. First, captive birds lead very different lives from what they have evolved to lead in the wild. Wild parrots will fly hundreds of miles every week as part of their normal activities. They therefore 'need' (will burn off) their high fat diet. Captive birds cannot do this. Many are denied flight altogether, but most fly only for a few seconds or a few minutes per day. They are not able to burn off a high fat/high calorie diet. Walking and climbing does not put any real demands on a bird's metabolic activities; the bird is barely in second gear here. Flight puts them into (normal) overdrive.

Secondly, Parrots as with most other animals, are adapted to acquire the most nutritious food for the least effort. This means that they 'like' (opt to choose) high fat and/or high simple sugar foods over those high in complex carbohydrates. This 'desire' is only overpowered by their 'desire' for warm food; parrots will often eat anything served at blood heat, as this relates to their pre-fledging experiences.

Thirdly. People will sell other people anything, just to make money, with no concern for whether the product is appropriate. This can include diapers for parrots, abrasive perches, cages and obscure and unnecessary chemicals to spray onto their feathers to make them look nice! Just because a product or some food is 'designed' or marketed for parrots does not mean it is appropriate, necessary or benign. If you are flying hundreds of miles a week you

probably need a high fat/high calorie diet.

But the life of a captive macaw in an aviary or in one's house bears little relation to the life that bird was evolved to live. To exaggerate the point, feeding captive parrots a high calorie diet would be like feeding human 'couch potatoes' the diet of an athlete who is in daily training for a marathon. If you want to feed a macaw a high fat diet, then just make sure the bird flies a few hundred miles each week. Otherwise, modify the diet to the bird's needs as these are dictated by captivity.

In general, captive parrots seem to do best on a diet high in complex carbohydrates as can be found in peas and beans and cereals. These sources also have appropriate amounts of protein. It is difficult to over feed complex carbs. Fruits and veggies should also be a major component of the diet. Most bird food is food which has failed human grades for consumption, so, it's best to feed human grade foods only. The other advantage of this is that human foods tend to come with nutritional information on every pack of food. This tells you the fat, protein, carbohydrate (and salt) content on every pack. Where bird food manufacturers fail to include this info on their products, then just refuse to buy their products, since you won't really know what you are feeding.

With aloha, EB

# Who's a Pretty Boy Then? Bird Caught Admiring Its Own Reflection In Pool of Water

[www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk)

February 5, 2010

Reprinted with permission from the Daily Mail



Who's that then? The beautiful Nuthatch peers into its own reflection.



Pucker up: The bird is mesmerised by what it thinks is looking back.

This is the incredible moment a beautiful Nuthatch is caught admiring its own reflection using a pool of still water - as a mirror.

Photographer Mark Hancox waited for a month in a specially built hide just yards from the pool for the opportunity to get the perfect shot.

He snapped the bird as it balanced upside down on a rusty hook just millimetres above the pond at a private woodland in Hanbury, Worcestershire.

Mr. Hancox, 48, of nearby Hartlebury, said: 'I had seen the Nuthatches foraging around in the area for a while and wanted to get a shot of one of

them perching on something.

'They are distinctive because they are the only British bird to climb down trees head first and I wanted to capture this somehow.

'One of the birds flew onto a hook above a pool of completely still water and just bent forward.

'I thought it was going to take a drink of water but it remained completely still, almost transfixed, by its own reflection before it broke the surface of the water with its beak.'

The Nuthatch is often confused with Kingfishers because of their distinctive colouring but they are actually from the Woodpecker family.

They get their name by the way they wedge nuts and berries into crevices in trees and 'hatch' them with their powerful beaks.

There are around 130,000 breeding territories in the UK, mostly in the south, central and western areas.

They live all year round in woodland areas and communicate using a variety of whistles, trills and calls.

An RSPB spokesman said: 'The birds are not rare but stay in the woodland so can be difficult to spot'.

'To see one in the open like this is quite rare because they move around very quickly and prefer to stay under cover of bushes and trees'.

## “Have You Ever Observed How Long It Takes a Baby Parrot to Learn a New Skill?”

April and I are blessed to have three baby *Fuscicollis* cape parrots outside in Ika and Stevie's wooden nest box. The pair was set up on request by two clients who wish to have offspring.

Both parents are doing such an admirable job, feeding the little ones five times a day and tending to them continually, that we have made the decision to co-parent them. They are now going on seven weeks of age and as Ika has begun sleeping out of the box at this stage, we can easily open the box and take them out after dark for sessions of cleaning, cuddling, brief hand-feeding if they wish, and all round introducing them to the world of humans.

In my way of thinking, this is a near-perfect way to raise baby psittacines. They grow faster, establish prime immune systems, get to experience a full and essential childhood in the dark with their parents, and are in very little danger of over-impressing on humans. In short they are birds first, companions second. It is quite amazing to note how calm these little fellows are when they have so much parental nurturing to rely on during upbringing. No stress or hunger in a nursery tub, no distractions with other species of hookbill, no bright lights or noisy electronic media. Mostly



they just stare at things - us included - wide eyed and contemplative about all the newness they begin to see away from their eat-sleep-poop routine in the box!

A fascinating aspect of this way of birthing and raising psittacines is the way April and I get to observe the scope of learning the chicks display from day to day, week to week. For example, the first time you pick a young partially-feathered parrot up in your hands, it will usually struggle a bit to keep its balance, moving its legs and body, perhaps flapping soft, fleshy wings in an attempt to compensate for being moved. The second time, it eases into the handling somewhat better, and by the third session, provided one moves very

carefully, the chick has learned to accept our hands with little notice at all. That's learning about the world of humans on the most basic level.

The same thing applies with handfeeding by a small cup; first time, it is a little awkward, thereafter, babies learn to allow the process and enjoy the warm meal. All sorts of handling fits in this scenario: feather shaft preening, beak wiping, bathing of poopy feet in a warm water pan. When you team the smartest of neonates with the most skillful and conscientious of keepers, the learning curve for baby parrots is speedy and gratifying.

Once a neophyte parrot be-

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comes a fledgling, this learning curve kicks into high gear. We are talking speed-read here - education on the wing! It is no coincidence that when a baby bird is at its most curious and alert he or she is confronted with two of the three most important lessons in life: eating and flying.

A fledgling learning to eat on its own can be a humorous sight. Chicks will experiment clumsily with left and right claw, as if trying to decide which is the coordinated one for gripping a piece of walnut or Swiss chard. Beaks drop things, get mushy and covered with uneaten food, babies struggle to gnaw an almond, crush a pea, extract the meaty interior from a sunflower or hemp seed. As they grow more adept, they choose preferences in foodstuffs - one prime reason for offering lots of crunchy greens and vegetables early on during weaning.

Flying is a trial by "fire" so to speak or perhaps by "crash." Fledglings tentatively try landing on all sorts of slippery and obstructed objects: picture frames, hanging curtains, screen doors, etc. Failure means a plop to the floor. So we provide lots of recognizable baskets with handles for our young flyers, similar to their nursery basket with towel and teddy bear in it. With such a goal in sight, psittacines learn very quickly to fly directly at a chosen landing spot, rather than hovering mid-air or bolting for somewhere they have no idea about perching

upon. (It's best to leave all toenails pointy sharp and useful at this stage.) As that learning curve steepens, a parrot will begin making 360 degree circles in flight, throwing in lots of little zigs and zags while airborne and increasing speed with confidence and joy.

My third most important lesson in a young parrot's life is *survival*. Now this may seem like a rather moot point in a docile, handfed bird destined to live indoors as a pet for years. But our definition of "survival" from a learning standpoint includes a wide range of abilities, from mastering those fight and defense postures so loved by rowdy sibling fledglings during their endless mock battles, to recognizing the difference between a dangerous soaring hawk and an unthreatening buzzard high up above. Living as a prey animal entails knowing about potential dangers before being cornered. Besides, living as a household bird never precludes being attacked or in jeopardy in a variety of ways. We expect all our parrots to absorb as much survival data as possible - from their parents and nestbox by way of audio signals, from brothers and sisters, from other savvy psittacines, from human teachers. I love to take older fledglings and train them to be on their backs, to claw and grapple, to learn the quick hop-and-flap techniques of peck, scratch and evade. Defense postures, survival information, wild bird talents these, but certainly they are not beyond the training regimen of devoted owners and their intelli-

gent parrots.

Day by day, practice and repetition lead to expertise; with the best of chicks, progress is swift. The important point is that we keepers stay tuned to what our baby birds are learning. We try to encourage where possible - show the youngster there is a peanut or hazelnut in that shell, or that drinking water (*say... 'wa-ter'*) comes in all sorts of cups and containers. Observing a psittacine chick's efforts to learn skills and become one with its world leads us keepers to design better and better instructive learning curves. For those smartest of parrots, the cockatoos and African Greys, lorries, capes and large macaws, the sky can be the limit on their knowledge provided they are given frequent opportunity. In fact, every bird from budgerigar to blue and gold benefits from the widest range of schooling we humans can devise. And much of it comes most straightforwardly when the parrot is young, curious, and flying. Have you ever observed how long it takes a baby parrot to learn a new skill? It's both fun and quite revealing...

With aloha, EB



# Injured Eagle Receives Unique Beak

By Jason Lamb

[www.ktuu.com](http://www.ktuu.com)

February 5, 2010

Reprinted with permission from KTUU TV

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- The wounded bald eagle found in December with severe damage to his beak is getting a little help -- from a place you might not expect.

"We decided to call him Cyrano," said Cindy Palmatier at the Bird Treatment and Learning Center. "It seemed appropriate somehow."

This is a unique place with a unique bird -- and a unique problem.

"The current and most workable theory is that he got some fishing line wrapped around that beak," Palmatier said. "And over time, it just slowly cut in and cut in and cut in."

It's hard to imagine this damage getting any worse, so the center's staff have a problem to solve.

"Which is, prevent that beak from breaking backwards," Palmatier said.

But this is Alaska, where a trip to any ordinary veterinarian to fix it just wouldn't do.

"They asked me if I had an interest in helping to repair a damaged bird's -- bald eagle's beak," said dentist Kirk Johnson. "And I was willing to try."

Of course, Johnson's usual specialty is people.



Injured bald eagle Cyrano's prosthetic beak is made with dental materials commonly used for crowns. (Rich Jordan/KTUU-DT)

"OK, this is just a big tooth for a different individual," Johnson said.

The original plan involved a specially made mold sent out of state -- and a lot of hassle.

"We knew we wanted to come up with a solution that was going to be easy," Johnson said. "Woke up two o'clock in the morning and it was like, 'OK, I got it -- I know how to do this.'"

Johnson's idea was unorthodox, to say the least.

"It's the product they use when they make temporary crowns



The Bird Treatment and Learning Center's Cindy Palmatier says staff believe Cyrano's injuries were caused by a fishing line getting wrapped around his beak. (Rich Jordan/KTUU-DT)

in humans," Palmatier said. "You see how it blends right in with the angle of his beak, covers up all the defectiveness we have in there."

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"The Alaska spirit," Johnson said. "It's kind of like duct tape: if you have a problem, there's always a solution."

What was that Johnson said about duct tape?

"You know, it sounds very bizarre to say we're holding all of this on with poster putty -- but that's really, truly is what we're doing," Palmatier said.

You might think he would stop there -- but you'd just be drawing conclusions.

"We wanted something that was going to be yellow," Johnson said. "I was looking around the office there and saw a yellow highlighter pen, thought, 'Well, that's sort of

Alaska style. Let's get a yellow highlighter and paint this bird beak yellow."

Yellow beak and all, Cyrano is doing pretty well these days.

"I think Kirk did an excellent job of coming up with this type of material to make the beak out of," Palmatier said.

Who needs fancy prosthetic beaks anyway when poster putty, a highlighter and a little Alaska ingenuity will do?

Bird Treatment and Learning Center staff say Cyrano is doing just fine with his new beak. They don't believe he can return to the wild, but will be able to be used as an educational bird.

Right now, the only special consideration is that he's got to



Dentist Kirk Johnson says he considered using a highlighter to color the prosthetic to match Cyrano's beak. (Rich Jordan/KTUU-DT)

eat fish already chopped up so he doesn't have to rip or tear at anything.

Contact Jason Lamb at [jlamb@ktuu.com](mailto:jlamb@ktuu.com)

[Editor's Note: [View this story on video](#)]



**Itinerary**

Port	Date
San Juan, PR	November 7, 2010
At Sea	November 8, 2010
Aruba	November 9, 2010
Bonaire	November 10, 2010
St. George's/Grenada	November 11, 2010
Dominica	November 12, 2010
St. Thomas	November 13, 2010
San Juan	November 14, 2010



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# AFA in Brief

April 2010

Editor - Carol Lee

36th Annual AFA Convention, The Magic of Birds!

August 4-7, 2010 in St. Petersburg, Florida  
Hilton St. Petersburg – Bayfront, 333 First Street South,  
St. Petersburg, Florida. (727)894-5000.

**Registration** for the 2010 AFA Annual Convention has begun: To register now, Contact Jamie Whittaker ([bjwbird1@earthlink.net](mailto:bjwbird1@earthlink.net)) our Convention Coordinator, or fill out an application available online at [www.afabirds.org](http://www.afabirds.org) and submit it with your payment or Credit Card information.

## IMPORTANT HOUSE OF DELEGATES VOTING INFORMATION

This will be our first year to hold AFA elections by electronic ballot. All Club Delegates, Board members, Committee Chairs, State Coordinators, and voting members must have a valid email address on file with the AFA Business Office in order to receive your electronic ballot. Please contact the AFA Business Office by email: [afaoffice@earthlink.net](mailto:afaoffice@earthlink.net) or call us at 512-585-9800 and update your email address as soon as possible. Those HOD members that wish to vote by “paper ballot” must contact the AFA Business Office and get your name on the paper ballot list before May 15, 2010.

### AFA Elections: What to expect.

AFA elections will be held electronically this year. All voting delegates will receive an email with a sign in name, Member ID, and Voter ID and will be directed to a webpage under the voting-place.net website. After you sign in with your given information, you will be directed to the ballot page for the specific region where you are authorized to vote. Those of you who are voting HOD members for more than one club will receive an email with a different Voter ID for each vote/ballot you will cast. Be sure to read them carefully and do not delete emails from votingplace.net to make sure you get the ballots

you are supposed to receive. Electronic voting is Easy and Fun. Additionally, it will help to cut costs on postage and paper use by the AFA.

**The 2010 AFA Convention raffle** committee is accepting donations for the silent auction, daily raffles, and three-day raffles. Anyone wanting to donate merchandise for these important fund raising events please contact Nora Schmidt ([nora@sdi.net](mailto:nora@sdi.net)) or Pat Chinnici ([lorolover@yahoo.com](mailto:lorolover@yahoo.com)).

**New Digital AFA Watchbird!** Available Soon: If you have contributed articles or photos to the AFA Watchbird Journal in the past, please contact Mary Ellen LePage ([mail@birds2pet.com](mailto:mail@birds2pet.com)). We are in the process of collecting release forms so we can offer back issues of AFA Watchbird journal to the public in an electronic form. Please help the AFA move forward with this valuable project.

**2010 Calendars Now ON SALE** for \$5.99 plus postage. Contact the AFA Business Office or find them online at the [AFA Store](#).

**The AFA 2010 Calendar** is proving to be a very popular item in the AFA Store. Get yours now so you can enjoy these beautiful images all year! Visit the AFA Store now to view thumbnail versions of the images in this year's calendar. Discounts available for quantity purchases, contact the office for orders of ten or more calendars. These calendars also make great gifts!

**DVD Videos** of Selected Presentations from the 2009 AFA Convention.

Need to beef up that Bird Club Library with educational materials? Just want to review a topic presented at the 2009 AFA Convention? Selected videos of presentations from our 2009 Convention are now available on DVD from the AFA Business Office. The price is \$15.00 each or two for \$25.00 plus postage. Get the whole set

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today. To order go to: [www.afabirds.org](http://www.afabirds.org). Proceeds help the AFA Conservation and Research fund.

## Two Exciting Conferences in the Canary Islands

In September 2010 there will be two conventions at the famed Loro Parque in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain.

The 1st International Convention on the Conservation of Psittacidae and

The 7th International Parrot Convention, Plus 3 additional workshops.

AND Visits to "La Vera," the Loro Parque Foundation Breeding Facility.

The Loro Parque Foundation International Parrot Conferences are held every four years. Attendees from around the world will experience seasoned speakers on such subjects as breeding, keeping, and conservation of parrots. Convention attendees have a three day access to the world's largest parrot exhibit, Loro Parque. For more information, click on:

[Loro Parque Parrot Conventions](#)

and contact

Janice Boyd ([jboyd46@charter.net](mailto:jboyd46@charter.net)).

## Have You Been to the AFA Store Lately ?

CITES Pin number 25, the Blue-eyed Cockatoo, is now available. Order yours today and keep your sets complete. All CITES pins can be purchased online at [www.afabirds.org](http://www.afabirds.org) and follow the links to the store.

In addition to our CITES pins you'll find t-shirts, coffee mugs, porcelain plates, gift boxes, spoon

rests and much much more.

AFA Board of Directors Quarterly Meeting  
April 30-May 1, 2010.

American Federation of Aviculture is now on Facebook.

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Whether you are renewing your club affiliation or your club is affiliating for the first time, all clubs must complete an application form each calendar year. Affiliation forms, along with applicable fees, are due to the AFA Office by January 1<sup>st</sup> and must be received by April 30<sup>th</sup> to receive all benefits. Visit the Club Resources page to download your form now:

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A painting by the author



# Parrots International Symposium 2010

## Meet Us in San Diego!

May 13-16, 2010

US Grant Hotel  
326 Broadway  
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- **Room Rate Reduced** to \$149 (You can have that rate for 3 days before & 3 days after. Go see Zoo, Wild Animal Park, Sea World, etc.
- Premium Pass Includes everything (except Zoo Day) - \$395
- Thursday Evening Speakers' Reception - \$40
- Friday Breakfast, Symposium, Lunch, Dinner Party - \$260
- Dinner Party Only - \$85
- Saturday Breakfast, Symposium, Lunch - \$175
- Sunday, May 16 - Optional VIP San Diego Zoo Day & Catered Dinner - \$100



This is a wonderful opportunity to meet avian enthusiasts from around the globe!

E-mail: [info@parrotsinternational.org](mailto:info@parrotsinternational.org)  
Website: [parrotsinternational.org](http://parrotsinternational.org)

## Conservation Happens in the Wild . . . Sharing Parrot Knowledge Can Be Fun!

### Speakers From Around the World

- Mariangela Allgayer, D.V.M. (Brazil - Conservation of the Green-winged Macaw and Toco Toucan)
- Dr. Nigel Collar (UK - The African Grey Parrot & Conservation)
- Olivier Chassot (Costa Rica - Conservation of the Great-green Macaw in Costa Rica & Nicaragua)
- Jaime Jimenez, Ph.D. (The Slender-billed Conure - Research & Conservation Strategies)
- LoraKim Joyner, D.V.M. (Gainesville, Florida - Compassionate Conservation)
- Rosemary Low (UK - Parrot Author & Avicultural Expert)
- Steve Martin (Florida - Natural Encounters - Parrot Behavior)
- Mike Perrin, Ph.D. (South Africa - South African Parrots)
- Paul Salaman, Ph.D. (Washington, D.C. - World Land Trust - Saving Habitat of Endangered Parrots Via Land Acquisition)
- Sara Lara Salaman (International Director for American Bird Conservancy - Endangered Parrots of Colombia and ProAves Colombia)
- Pedro Scherer Neto, Ph.D. (Brazil - Amazona braziliensis, Hyacinth Macaw, Green-winged Macaw)
- Mark Stafford, D.D.S. (Parrots International - Parrots International Projects)
- Dr. Darrel Styles, D.V.M., Ph.D. (USA - Avian Flu Task Force - Updates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture)
- Ryan Watson (Qatar - Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation - the Blue Macaws in Aviculture)

The **Parrots International Symposium** is now the largest annual parrot conservation conference, and this year it has qualified for continuing education credit, co-sponsored by the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association. We also enjoy co-sponsorship by the UCLA Institute of the Environment and the UCLA Center for Tropical Research. All proceeds from the Symposium go directly to the field to parrot conservation projects. We are 501(c)(3) tax exempt, non-profit organization with the goal of benefiting parrots everywhere by promoting and fostering international cooperation.

**Go to website to register, make hotel reservations, or print out a form to mail in.**  
<http://www.pisymposium.org>

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