

from the field...

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Field Research Programs on Parrots in Mesoamerica

Only a decade ago, one could count on one hand the number of field projects involving parrots. Most effort was being placed on the Caribbean species of *Amazona* parrots while some mainland studies had begun, principally on macaws, in Costa Rica and in Peru.

Today, countless projects involving parrots are going on throughout the New World tropics. Nowadays, hardly a country is without a biologist conducting parrot research or an outdoor educator implementing an educa-

tional program with a significant emphasis on parrots.

This article will address some long-term parrot studies in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Venezuela. I am hopeful that you will be able to get a "taste" as to the variety of programs going on in the region and be better able to select those projects and organizations worthy of your support.

Mexico

The status of parrots in Mexico depends greatly upon the species and geographical location within Mexico under consideration. Rampant habitat alteration coupled with decades of harvesting for the pet trade (internal and external) has resulted in the listing of the Yellow-headed Parrot *Amazona oratrix* (formerly *A. ochrocephala oratrix*) and the Red-crowned Parrot *Amazona viridigenalis* as threatened in the recent edition of the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book. This should not be misconstrued to indicate that parrots are, in general, doing poorly throughout the Republic. In the Yucatan Peninsula, both the White-fronted *Amazona albifrons* and



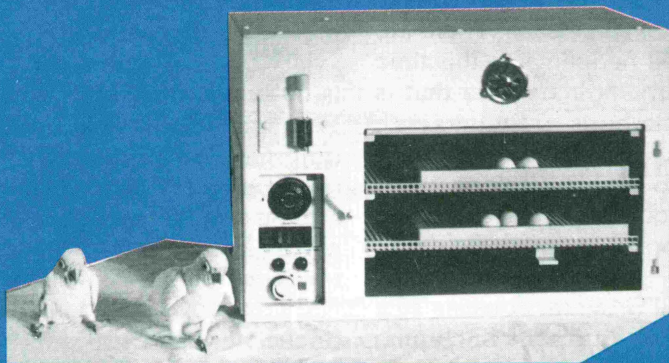
A wild Red-shouldered Amazon is utilizing this artificial nest box in northeastern Mexico.

Yellow-shouldered Amazons *Amazona xantholora* have been counted in the thousands at roost sites. While some trapping has been noted, robust parrot populations appear to exist in this part of Mexico.

In the northern border state of Tamaulipas, the future survival of parrots has been the focus of several major efforts. The Mexican biologist Ernesto Enkerlin (a doctoral candidate at Texas A&M University) has been investigating the ecology of the *Amazona* parrots in northeastern Mexico. After two seasons in the field, knowledge as to the nesting and foraging requirements of Amazon parrots in the region is becoming clearer. In addition to his doctoral research, Enkerlin is working with the Center for the Study of Tropical Birds and the Universidad Autonoma de Tamaulipas (with funding from the avicultural community) to begin additional aspects of parrot conservation. The possible use of confiscated parrots for re-stocking and/or re-establishment projects was explored. An educational program has been developed utilizing coloring books and posters. Finally, the possible role that artificial nest-boxes might play in bolstering parrot populations was investigated. Both the research and educational outreach projects will be continued into the foreseeable future so long as financial support continues.

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This poster and coloring book is distributed through the rural schools in northeastern Mexico.

Guatemala

Most readers are aware of the field studies being conducted on Yellow-naped Amazon Parrots *Amazona auropalliata* in Guatemala by the Psittacine Research Project of the University of California, Davis campus. Recently they have produced and distributed a coloring book titled "Los Animales de Guatemala" featuring nine drawings of the country's varied animal life. With funding from A.I.D.U.S., this project, too, is a collaborative effort. Acknowledgement should be given to the Asociacion Audubon de Guatemala, FUNDAVES and the Auto Safari Chapin for their support and continued interest in parrot conservation.

Costa Rica

The Scarlet Macaws *Ara macao* living in Costa Rica at the Carara Reserve have become one of the most intensively studied of all parrot populations. Most recently, Leonel Marinero (a Honduran) has completed his graduate thesis titled "The Scarlet Macaw: ecology, tourism and management guidelines in the Carara Biological Reserve, Costa Rica." Unlike Amazon parrots, the macaws have a significant attraction for tourist dollars. Viewing Scarlet Macaws "screaming" over tropical forests is an experience one is not likely to forget.

Using ecotourism to benefit the

macaws, as well as the foreign tour operators, remains a challenge. Nevertheless, it provides an option for conservation that does not exist for less attractive species. Research at Carara continues under the capable direction of Christopher Vaughan at the Universidad Nacional in Heredia, Costa Rica.

Venezuela

Since 1988, the Tomas Blohm's Ranch in Hato Masgual, Venezuela has been the site of an intensive research program on Green-rumped Parrotlets *Forpus passerinus*. With over 3,200 birds banded to date, a number of Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies graduate students have completed Masters and/or Doctoral research studies on the parrotlets. Currently, two important projects are underway under the supervision of Dr. Steven Beissinger. The first, by doctoral student David Casagrande, will explore methods for monitoring parrotlet populations in support of sustainable use programs. It is critical to the effective management of a species that accurate population monitoring be implemented. Current techniques for censusing songbird and gamebird populations seem difficult to apply to parrots. Casagrande will explore several methods in hopes of determining and refining the most suitable technique for

parrots. While pairing monogamous relationships have certain advantages, the role of the male in fledgling rearing has not been documented.

What is the impact of male mate removal on fledgling success? This is the topic of Bret Elder's Masters research project in Venezuela. Again, with applications to the sustainable use of parrots, his research findings will bring us closer to being able to effectively manage parrot populations, thus assuring their continued presence on planet earth.

Conclusion

The above outlines of parrot research in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Venezuela will hopefully provide some indication as to the varied scope of study currently being undertaken. Additional studies on Amazon parrots in El Salvador and Costa Rica as well as with Buffon's Macaws in Costa Rica and Scarlet Macaws in Mexico will also contribute significantly to our knowledge of the ecological requirements of these magnificent birds.

Those individuals and clubs interested in providing financial contributions or having questions regarding field projects involving parrots are encouraged to write to the Center for the Study of Tropical Birds, Inc., 218 Conway Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78209 or fax 210-828-9732. ●

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