

An Avicultural Experience at Loro Parque

by Tom Marshall, Leesburg, Virginia

Sometimes you just have to do what you have to do. When you are a parrot person, Loro Parque on Tenerife, one of the Canary Islands, is Mecca. An opportunity for a pilgrimage to an international parrot convention at Loro Parque, however, presents itself only once every four years. The time was right for me to go, so I did.

Kudos to Wolfgang Kiessling, owner and general administrator of Loro Parque, for creating and hosting a five star production of the IV International Parrot Convention, September 17-21, 1998, which in all respects and with great success lived up to its reputation as the premier first class experience for specialized knowledge on parrots.

There were between 750-800 world class scientist and biologist, zoo curators and veterinarians, birders and aviculturists from literally all corners of the globe. The North American contingent probably made up no more than 100 individuals, but we were an enthusiastic group eager to meet our counterparts from Germany, United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, Denmark, France, Indonesia, New Zealand and other locales where aviculture is practiced.

All the speakers at the convention were good and many of those in the vanguard of new developments in aviculture, avian medicine, and husbandry were from the U.S.

Jim Murphy, M.S. spoke with insight about Amazon parrots; Susan Club, DVM spoke with experience about how to cope with hand rearing problems, and Branson Ritchie, Ph.D. spoke with hard-earned knowledge about proventricular dilatation disease, formerly known as macaw wasting syndrome.

At the culmination of the formal talks, the delegates voted Paul Butler as their favorite speaker. Paul Butler is Director for Conservation Education for RARE and is mostly known for his

work on behalf of the endangered Amazons of St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Dominica. However, his efforts have extended to the other Amazons of the Caribbean region including the *parvipes* Amazon. His methodology, "Promoting Protection through Pride," has spread to a total of 14 Caribbean, three Central American, and three Pacific Island countries – all with good to excellent results. This has been accomplished by generating grassroots support for conservation in developing island nations, through the combination of a colorful flagship species with a burgeoning sense of national pride. Much of his programs' efforts are directed to the children of these nations as they will be the decision-makers of the future.

Second place distinction went to Carl Jones, who has worked in the Mascarene Islands for the past 20 years on the conservation of their endemic wildlife. Working with the Jersey

Wildlife Preservation Trust, Jones has concentrated his efforts into the conservation of the Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon, and the Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques*.

Saving the Echo Parakeet should be viewed by conservationists and aviculturists with mutual pride and mutual appreciation, as this chunky relative of the Indian Ring-necked parakeet is being helped by a combination of good conservation practices and by manipulative techniques learned in the practice of aviculture. Dr. Jones, a trained field conservation professional, in his address to the convention, made some telling comments that clearly were supportive of aviculture's role in conserving wildlife.

His first statement was an acknowledgement of the limits of conservation in protecting critically endangered wildlife: "In most of the world where native habitat has been fragmented by man or disrupted by alien organisms, habitat conservation *per se* is rarely enough to achieve sustainable conservation of all wildlife and is a largely passive approach to conservation and imbibes an attitude of 'let nature sort itself out' often to the detriment of biodiversity."

Parrots, as favorite avicultural subjects, are also important conservation



Photo by Mark Sargent

Author, Tom Marshall makes a good parrot stand for some of Tenerife's most beautiful residents at the International Parrot Convention, Puerto Pela Cruz.

subjects. Jones indicated that parrots, because of their charismatic personalities and brilliant coloration, play a major role as "flagship species" in helping to convince decision makers regarding the value of habitat protection and management.

Also, he said, that parrots by virtue of their great intelligence makes them amenable to training possibilities not available to other groups of birds. On Mauritius, released captive-reared juvenile Echo Parakeets are trained to take supplementary pelleted food provided in hoppers where they have to learn to open the hopper lid to obtain the food. This works exceptionally well keeping the food dry and away from other species thus avoiding problems such as attracting predators and an increased disease risk. Finally, he acknowledges, the value of closely related models, e.g., Indian Ring-necked Parakeets, in any captive breeding project for endangered species, e.g., Echo Parakeets, cannot be overstated.

Perhaps the most unanticipated, yet

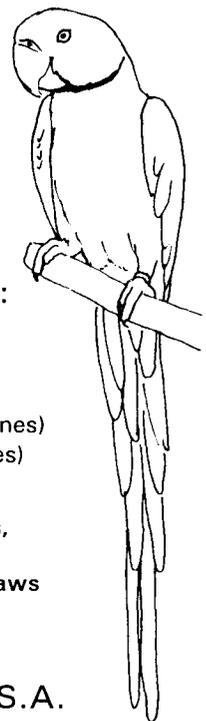
most pleasant aspect of the IV International Parrot Convention was the many elegant and enriching social gatherings. These events had to have been sponsored by supporters of Loro Parque and the Loro Parque Foundation, as the modest convention registration would never have covered the expense of these first class experiences. The first of these commenced with a cocktail party in the garden of the five star Hotel Botanico on Thursday September 17. This was followed by a dinner on the lawn of the Taoro Casino Friday evening. Saturday produced a dinner cruise on board the good ship *Banaderos* along the coast of Tenerife. Finally, there was Sunday's gala banquet with a band and a singer for entertainment and dancing. I was in heaven when the lead singer and I started the evening rolling with a medley of Diana Ross hits, much to the amusement (or possible chagrin) of my companions. Sometimes you have just got to do what you have to do!

Loro Parque, which was founded in

1972, boasts the largest collection of parrots in the world, over 300 species and some 3000 individual birds. The Loro Parque Foundation, which supports conservation outreach programs benefiting parrots in the wild, inaugurated its Center of Rearing to coincide with our visit. It is here that they are attempting to recreate the different environments of the world in which parrots breed. The Foundation's Center is located quite a distance from Loro Parque and is generally off limits to the public.

Delegates to the Convention, who were, or became Foundation members, received a brief tour around the periphery of the breeding areas. We caught glimpses of some beautiful and unusual parrots and were treated as visiting dignitaries by the staff, who provided us with the tour and with catered refreshments. Both Loro Parque and the Loro Parque Foundation have as their main objective the conservation and reproduction of parrots and are certainly worthy

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Loro Parque was a beautiful destination and all of us saw much of what we came to see. I saw a variety of parrots that I wanted to see, including Green-thighed White-bellied Caiques, Malabar Parakeets, and the Vinaceous and Red-Spectacled *A. pretrei* Amazons.

Of course we all saw parrots that we never saw before and had never formed an opinion about, but which have now intrigued us to such a degree that we are researching their avicultural and natural histories in Forshaw's *Parrots of the World* and *Parrots* by Tony Juniper and Mike Parr.

In conclusion, I would like to give you some random impressions and observation gleaned from my trip:

- The island of Tenerife is quite upscale – governed by Spain, but with a heavy influence and investments from Germany.

- When you are in any Spanish Airport or flying any Spanish Airline, be sure you have a boarding pass or you won't go anywhere.

- Avicultural techniques and knowledge gleaned from captive breeding are now almost universally seen by a growing number of conservationists working in the field as invaluable in designing management programs for wild birds.

- AFA convention planners may want to consider shortening the period of the day allocated to speakers' presentations and increasing the social opportunities in late afternoon and early evening afforded by tours, aviary visits, and planned meals, which appeared to foster greater cohesiveness at Loro Parque among convention attendees than is usually possible with all-day lectures in dark rooms now in common practice.

- When you meet bird people from around the world and experience an authentic avicultural experience with like-minded people, it validates what you already know – that aviculture is an exciting human endeavor, and sometimes you just have to do what you have to do. 

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