

CONSERVATION

ORNER



By Janice D. Boyd, Ph.D.

PARROT TRAINING WORKSHOP

I ATTENDED TWO INTERESTING FUNCTIONS in January 2009. One was the first workshop in the Natural Encounters, Inc (NEI), series “The Art and Science of Training Companion Parrots.” NEI is the animal training company set up by the well-known bird trainer Steve Martin, and the series on training companion parrots consists of three levels of workshops: Foundation Skills, Refining Skills, and Trainer Immersion. (see more at www.naturalencounters.com, under “Training and Education.” I had heard good comments about the workshop from my friend Karen Justice of Parrot University, so I decided to give the beginning workshop a try.

Wow, what a great experience! First, Steve Martin practices positive reinforcement techniques and wants the animals being trained to be happy and enjoy participating. That means we twenty trainees were treated very nicely. The experience started off with a Sunday evening icebreaker where we found out about the other participants, met our group trainers, learned who would be in our training groups, and learned which of the available psittacines would be ours for the week. And enjoyed lots of snacks, good wine and soft drinks. (You’ll read a lot about the

food here because it was so good!) Three nights dinner was on our own, but NEI provided a van and an SUV, both equipped with GPS units, so we could get around. Two other nights were a social night with NEI picking up the tab at Chili’s nearby and a Pizza Night and behavior discussion round table—again, courtesy of NEI and with plenty of beer and wine and soft drinks to go around.

Monday through Friday we met for a morning session and an afternoon session, each consisting of several hours of lectures by Steve on principles of bird and other animal training and then two hours (morning and afternoon) of hands-on work with our assigned birds. I had attended short theory-only talks on behavior and training and wasn’t terribly impressed with how efficacious it all appeared to be. But when given the opportunity to practice under the tutelage of one of the staff instructors at NEI, I was astonished at how readily the birds learned. Of course, these birds “knew the game,” so to speak, so as soon as we showed up with pieces of nuts in hand they began waving and turning around on their perches in an attempt to figure out what behavior would get them treats. Yet, my four pet birds at home learned almost as fast, and they really enjoy working for the little pieces of peanut and

Above, during a Natural Encounters training session, a class participant trains Palmer the Black Palm Cockatoo to fly to her.

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pecan and walnut I give them. Lunch each day was catered by NEI and what a lunch it was! No cheese sandwiches and chips – a real substantial lunch with main course, vegetables, salad, desert, and drinks. At the end of each day we all gathered for half an hour to discuss the day's training experiences and munch away on crackers and cheese, washed down with beer or wine or soft drinks.

The last Saturday we had a review of the material presented and then all twenty of us got to demonstrate what we had taught our birds. I had worked with my blue throated macaw on nail trimming behavior. She was not quite sure about the whirring Dremel tool, but I had made plenty of progress in training her to hold her foot on the cage wire and let me touch her toenails with it. Others in the class had taught their assigned birds such behaviors as to go into a travel crate; to pull up a bucket containing a washer, take the washer out and walk along the perch to deposit the washer in another bucket; to fly around poles and then to come back to the trainer, and a cute kea learned to spin around upside down on the perch—all for a quarter of a grape (the two keas only would work for grapes—no nuts, thank you).

The class wrapped up with an exam (ugh!) and a great banquet at Chalet Suzanne, a 75-year-old restaurant and inn. Ever had broiled chicken liver on top of broiled grapefruit? It's remarkably tasty! The NEI team had put together a slide show to music of scenes from our week that made everyone feel a little wistful that it was all over for now. But we had learned so much that many of us felt we would like to return the next year to take the next workshop.

The workshop was definitely worthwhile, and a lot of fun: see www.naturalencounters.com for more information. The sister nonprofit organization The Natural Encounters Conservation Fund makes significant contributions to animal and bird conservation in the wild.

PUBLICATION OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2008 SCARLET MACAW RECOVERY WORKSHOP

AS REPORTED IN AN EARLIER ISSUE of *Watchbird*, a Scarlet Macaw Species Recovery Workshop was held in March of 2008 in Guatemala. A number of biologists, conservationists and veterinarians gathered for a week-long workshop to discuss the status of the scarlet macaw in Guatemala and El Salvador and to come up with a set of conservation and research recommendations for promoting the species' conservation. The recommendations of the report are likely to be adopted by the Government of Guatemala as its conservation plan for the species for the next several years.

The final report in both English and Spanish has been completed and published. Many of the sections contain information useful for conservation of other Neotropical psittacines. It is available in pdf for viewing and download at www.parrotfund.org.

org/WorkshopMarch08/WorkshopMarch08.html

(Or go to www.parrotfund.org and follow the link) Contents of the report that may be of wide interest include:

Chapter 4: Reintroduction of the Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) to El Salvador: Phase I, Feasibility

Chapter 5: Scarlet Macaw Breeding Aviaries and Genetic Considerations

Chapter 7: Population Viability Analysis (PVA) and VOR-TEX Modeling

Chapter 8: Disease Issues in Reintroduction and Testing Recommendations

Chapter 9: Scarlet Macaw In-situ Management

Chapter 10: Scarlet Macaw Reintroduction, Release, and Population Management

Note: Amigos de las Aves USA Parrot (The Parrot Fund) is an AFA Specialty Group

NEW COSTA RICAN BIRD ROUTE OPEN

AT ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF WEST VIRGINIA, Costa Rica has a greater variety of bird species than all of North America, and it is home to five per cent of all the world's known animal and plant species, including 850 bird species. To help preserve this spectacular biodiversity, The Costa Rican Bird Route (CRBR) officially opened in February of 2009. A first-of-a kind project in the country, it is modeled on similar trails in US which aim to promote tourism and conservation at the same time.

The project is the brainchild of the Rainforest Biodiversity Group, with funding assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Act. The Rainforest Biodiversity Group, a U.S. non-profit organization founded in 2000, was formerly known as Friends of the Great Green Macaw and has worked for a number of years towards the conservation of the highly endangered Great Green macaw (known in the U.S. as the Buffon's macaw).

Earlier initiatives involved environmental education, reforestation, smaller local ecotourism initiatives, and now the official Costa Rican Bird Route. The hopes are that the Bird Route will promote conservation of bird habitat and the biological diversity within the San Juan - La Selva Biological Corridor of northeastern Costa Rica by improving bird tourism in the region. Bird tourism will bring economic opportunities for local landowners and local communities via visiting bird watchers and other eco-tourists, and thus provide an economic incentive for habitat conservation.

The present Costa Rican Bird Route consists of 13 bird watching locations located within 12 official sites, sites that provide the best bird watching opportunities in this northeastern part of Costa Rica. Of the 12 sites, six are newly created reserves owned by local landowners. The other six sites are established biological reserves that offer access to all viewing sites and also provide visitors with accommodations and meals, if desired. All the sites

are monitored to ensure they adhere to a set of sustainable tourism practices.

The Costa Rican Bird Route offers a variety of bird watching and nature tourism opportunities. Day tours and multi-day tours are available, and multi-day tours can be customized to suit individuals or groups of travelers. For macaw aficionados, there are unique tours available that includes a number of localities where visitors are likely to be able to view the endangered Great Green (Buffon's) macaw in its natural habitat. There is also the possibility of seeing scarlet macaws on these tours. For those who would like to explore the route on their own, there is a Costa Rican Bird Route Map and Guide.

If the Costa Rican Bird Route proves successful, the economic benefits provided to local land owners of this region will be very important for improving their livelihoods and preserving the ecological integrity of this part of Costa Rica. It also will provide a model for the development of bird tourism in other parts of Costa Rica and of Central and South America. More information:

- Costa Rican Bird Route: www.costaricanbirdroute.com/
- Description of Great Green Macaw tours: www.costaricanbirdroute.com/tours/LapaVerde.htm
- Biodiversity Conservation Group: www.rainforestbiodiversity.org/

MISSING KAKAPO FOUND AFTER 21 YEARS

KAKAPO RANGI WAS ONE OF FOUR male kakapo (*Strigops habroptila*) released on the 1400 ha (3500 acre) conservation sanctuary of Codfish Island in 1987 without a transmitter. He had not been seen since. Recently kakapo ranger Chris Birmingham heard the distinctive booming of a male kakapo in a location on the island where no kakapo had been detected before. After a chase through wet undergrowth and ferns, the ranger was able to grab the bird and realized from the numbered metal leg band that this was the long-lost Rangi. The number of critically endangered kakapo in the world immediately increased to 91 even before the eggs from the 2009 breeding season began to hatch.

After given a checkup and found to be healthy, sperm was collected from Rangi, and he was transported back to his home territory and released – this time wearing a transmitter so he can be tracked. Genetic analysis will be done on his sperm to determine the best females to inseminate in order to maintain maximum genetic diversity in the population.

More information and a picture of Rangi and Chris Birmingham at www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/43277/kakapo-found-after-21-years-his-own.

More information on the kakapo and New Zealand's Kakapo Recovery Programme (with some really cute pictures) at www.kakaporecovery.org.nz/.