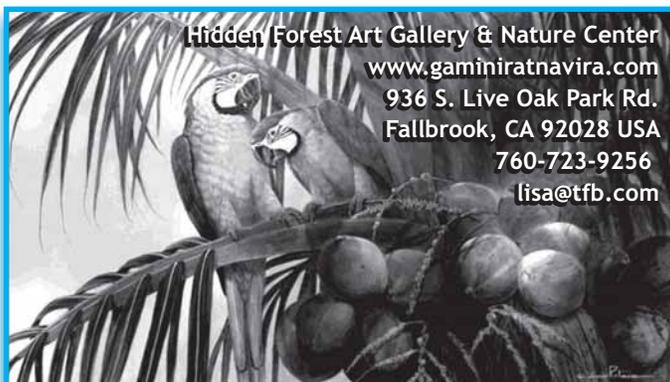


The egg that became Bird Endowment Inc. was most likely laid in the early morning hours of a warm Spring night in 1990, an otherwise unremarkable occasion with the exception that it also was the 20th reunion of Laney Rickman's high school graduation class. That was a party of celebration; long and hot tales of most sorts and cold wines of cheaper varieties and lesser origins than the Champagne appellation they mocked.



Arriving home after the late party, Laney rushed upstairs to check on her very first pet bird, a weanling Half-moon Conure a friend had given her just days earlier. Both of her house dogs greeted her at the door to the room where the conure had been left in a large pet cage on a table. Ominously, the larger dog – a 110-pound Weimaraner-Shepherd cross – had a mouthful of feathers. He had once before torn up every feather pillow in the house. These, however, were not the feathers of pillows. Quite unlike pillow feathers, these were green. No, these surely were the feathers of conure.

In the ensuing hysteria, Luna – the Half-moon Conure – was found underneath a low chair, alive and perfectly whole excepting a tail. Little Luna apparently had squeezed between the cage bars without any help from the dogs, not understanding the old adage that “freedom may be just another word for everything to lose.” A more secure protection was bought the next day. Until then, house dogs were yard dogs.

You can see that if the big Weimer-cross – named Pavo, which is “turkey” in Central American Spanish, but that’s a bird of a different feather – had been successful that night, Laney’s love for psittacines might have perished in its first, early blush. And, along with it, the eventual hatching of Bird Endowment.

As it would be, however, Luna thrived, became skilled at flying and even learned to call “Pavo, Pavo” – at least Laney swears those were the words – when he wanted to ride around on the dog’s back after they became tolerant housemates. With his newly realized flying skills, Luna was able to overcome what at one time had been a life-threatening situation.

Her growing interest in psittacines inspired Laney to volunteer as a keeper in the bird department at The Houston Zoo the following year after she had acquired a mature male Scarlet Macaw. It was here she met the first Blue-throated Macaws of her life and learned that in the wild they weren’t being quite as resilient as Luna at co-opting lethal threats to their survival.

With each passing year, Laney became more involved with parrots and more concerned with the plight of Blue-throated Macaws. She shared her concerns with other people. In 1998, more than 50 interested people joined Laney as Founders in start-up funding of Bird Endowment Inc. as a 501 (c) (3) organization. The non-profit’s stated mission is the well being of all birds.

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The primary concentration, however, is breaking the extinction vortex in which the Blue-throated macaw struggles.

An ex situ conservation breeding program that empowers parent rearing by Blue-throated founder pairs became the primary component of the overall effort which is called Saving the Blues. The objective of the domestic breeding program is to perpetuate from generation to generation the intact species culture that was brought here with the wild-caught founder birds. The goal is to have a back-up captive population with a language and culture as near as possible to their wild cousins in Bolivia. Bird Endowment's abiding principle is that this goal can be achieved only through parent fledging of offspring. This captive parent-rearing effort is centered in the breeding facility known as The Blues Conservatory. It is located in the beautiful Guadalupe River Valley in Texas.

In 2002, Bird Endowment published data from the International Studbook for the Blue-throated Macaws for North American aviculturists. That CD was the first popularly available copy in the United States of the European and international information, which had very few North American listings. Studbook keeper Matthias Reinschmidt, bird curator at Loro Parque Fundacion in the Canary Islands, cooperated with BE to provide and explain data.

Leading up to this, Bird Endowment had been lobbying for an official North American studbook for the species. American Zoological and Aquarium Association that same year had appointed Calvin Harpe, Cleveland Zoo bird keeper, to be the Blue-throated Macaw Studbook keeper for North America.

"Bird Endowment – through the guidance, vision and dedication of Laney Rickman – has been instrumental in helping compile the BTM studbook for the North American region," says Mr. Harpe. "BE's support brought a sense of reassurance to the aviculture community on the trust-worthiness of the project as well as recognition of the importance and magnitude of this on-going project."

The Saving the Blues program — while raising public and avicultural awareness of the Blue-throated Macaws' status in captivity – also focuses on its plight in the wild where the bird is threatened with imminent extinction.

The Saving the Blues component for in situ conservation is advanced through cooperative contact, input and

selective funding with the unified conservation effort now growing in Bolivia, home of the endemic Blue-throated Macaw. For instance, in 2002, Bird Endowment provided \$2,000 to help enable an expansive survey to more accurately determine the population and dispersion of the Blue-throated Macaw across all possible ranges in Bolivia.

The complete program is made possible by Bird Endowment partners who provide financial support for Saving the Blues on an ongoing basis with annual donations. Parenting Partners enter the program at the \$50 level. Honorary Curator partnerships start at the \$300 and up level. Some partners re-enroll while other partners come aboard new each year. Currently, Bird Endowment has about 100 individual partners from across the U.S. and around the world, including at this time four Canadian provinces, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Scotland, South Africa and Italy.

Laney also travels to clubs and organizations around the country to educate interested people about the Blue-throated Macaw and the Saving the Blues program. A number of clubs have formed partnerships with particular birds in the program as sustaining

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projects and help support “their” birds year after year. Some clubs have provided booths at their bazaars for members who also are Bird Endowment Partners to sell Bird Endowment fund-raising merchandise.

Bird Endowment’s booth at the AFA convention is another important annual funding source for Saving the Blues. As part of the education and awareness program, Bird Endowment hosts an open meeting at the AFA convention for partners and guests.

Pavo, the Weimer-cross dog with the – can you say? – Cheshire “bird” grin didn’t live long enough to see what he inadvertently begot. Luna’s parents later died and the friend who originally gifted him to Laney missed her Half-moon Conures and Luna went home to comfort her. From something that started and almost ended 16 years ago in Houston, there came forth the non-profit Bird Endowment and its internationally supported and recognized Saving the Blues program to help break the extinction vortex that the Blue-throated Macaw is in today.

The Endowment governance structure is static and autonomous to perpetuate an institutionalized vision that preserves flexibility even as it insulates the mission for surviving the things that most often beset human endeavors, like diverging agendas and individual mortalities. All equipment, buildings and birds are owned by the nonprofit organization. The use of land for The Blues Conservatory facility has been donated to date. There is no paid employee in the entire organization; volunteers handle daily chores and professional services provided by directors are donated. A second-generation website is maintained at [www.BirdEndowment.Org](http://www.BirdEndowment.Org). A more interactive and dynamic site utilizing Web2 technologies offers a future potential for expanding the internet as a more influential tool for a combined ex situ-in situ collaboration. The board hopes to embrace this opportunity to enhance odds for the long-term survival of Blue-throated Macaws as a thriving species, the ultimate goal of the Saving the Blues program.

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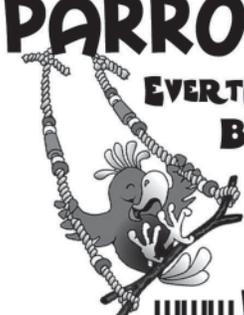
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