

# NESTING ECOLOGY OF THE

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**T**he Slender-billed Conure or Slender-billed Parakeet (*Enicognathus leptorhynchus*) is a parrot species found only in southern Chile, where it is called the "choroy." It gets its English name from the distinctive long and finely tapered bill. While not (yet) seriously endangered, little is known about the species, despite the fact that it occurs within areas easily accessible to researchers, and it is well known to local residents throughout its range. A research project has been begun by Dr. Jaime Jiménez of Universidad de Los Lagos in Osorno, Chile, and Dr. Tom White of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (field research director for the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program) to obtain basic information on the species so that a set of recommendations can be developed for a species management plan. The AFA Avian Research Grants program has selected this as one of its 2008 projects.

The range of the Slender-billed Conure is the central part of Chile from Santiago to just south of the island of Chiloe within the temperate forests of *Nothofagus* and *Araucaria* trees, where it feeds on seeds and buds. It was originally believed that the species required intact mountainous old-growth *Nothofagus* forests for nesting, but recent anecdotal information and direct observations indicate that the birds also make substantial use of scattered, remnant fragments of old-growth *Nothofagus* forests found within the extensive lowland agricultural landscapes of southern Chile.

The use of these agricultural landscapes for both nesting and foraging by Slender-billed Conures has led to increasingly frequent conflicts with human residents, particularly grain farmers, who often shoot the birds when they are observed foraging in newly planted fields. Moreover, as with many psittacines, an illegal market exists for wild-caught chicks for the pet trade, as evidenced by a 2002 confiscation of 400 Slender-billed



Conures in Osorno which were allegedly destined for transport to markets in Santiago (Juan Lara, SAG Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero, Osorno, Chile, pers. Comm.). In fact, in rural areas of southern Chile it is not uncommon to observe rudimentary "ladders" made of boards nailed to large *Nothofagus* trees which are used by poachers to access nest cavities. The current isolated and dispersed distribution of these old-growth *Nothofagus* fragments likely exacerbates the nest-poaching problem by making nest trees easier to locate. Finally, many of the existing large *Nothofagus* trees suitable for nesting by Slender-billed Conures are also being cut to supply the growing local demand for firewood.

Although Slender-billed Conures are currently "protected" under Chilean law and considered endangered (SAG 1998), the fundamental lack of basic ecological data on both the species and its relationship to remnant old-growth forest fragments makes it impossible for Chilean

# SLENDER-BILLED CONURE

## AN AFA AVIAN RESEARCH GRANTS PROJECT



authorities to effectively protect either the species or its environment. Drs. Jimenez and White plan to capture, radio tag, and monitor the activity of a number of adult Slender-billed Conures within the agricultural region near Osorno , Chile . They will track individual birds to their specific nest sites, document nest site and landscape variables, document foraging habitats and activities, and collect specific data on reproductive chronology and productivity. Most of the necessary equipment for accomplishing this radio tracking has been donated to the Universidad de Las Lagos by the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

In addition to radio tracking and nest site analyses, the studies will also examine local knowledge of and attitudes toward Slender-billed Conures using modern human survey techniques. Because of the local problems apparently faced by the conures due to presumed crop dep-

redation, habitat loss and nest poaching, it will be essential to assess the extent and levels of relevant sociological factors. This sociological data, combined with the ecological data acquired via the telemetry study, will be used to develop an integrated set of recommendations aimed at insuring the species survival. 🐦



The International Conure Association, an AFA-affiliated organization, featured this species in their Spring, 2007 journal in an article by Fran Andersen.