



Meeting the Future

CARLA AND TIAGO

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Tiago, a juvenile Spix's Macaw, a species extinct in the wild





Above: It is our duty and responsibility to save these birds for further generations. Right: Fresh branches and greens are part of the enrichment the birds get regularly.

My passion for parrots started long ago and as a parrot behavior consultant I am fortunate to meet a lot of birds and their owners. Every bird is special and valuable but there were always some on my list that I wanted to meet as my personal goal. During the last AFA Convention I could remove Cookie, the 83 year old major Mitchell cockatoo from the Chicago Brookfield Zoo, from my to-see-list. But this list got even shorter the year before when I visited the ACTP with my family and the parrot enthusiasts Tony Pittman, Karl-Heinz Lambert and Bärbel Zickner. On our way to the anniversary conference of the “Fonds für bedrohte Papageien” in Berlin we stopped in a small town called Schöneiche. No one would guess that this is the home of some of the rarest parrots in the world. Hidden in a small street is the entrance to the Association for the Conservation of Threatened Parrots e.V. (ACTP). Our small group was welcomed by Enrico Sydow, the curator of the facility, who guided us to the office building. But before we start our tour around the breeding facility of the ACTP just let me introduce this organization.

The ACTP is a non-profit organization founded in 2006 by Martin Guth, dedicated to preserve globally threatened bird species and their habitats. Rare Parrots were chosen as core species to underline the importance for habitat protection and to serve as ambassadors for the animal community and entire ecosystems. The ACTP focuses not only on breeding these rare parrot species to establish captive safety populations but also on breeding programs in the countries of origin of different species. Returning captive bred parrots back into the wild is one of the main goals that should be first met in 2021. Till then it is a long way to go and there for the ACTP and the government

of several countries work hard to prepare the public and the natural environment to make sure that this effort will be successful. There for the ACTP supports and works not only together with scientific institutions, international agencies, and wildlife conservation organizations, supports educational programs and donates equipment for Forestry Departments but also supports the local population to strengthen the local industry.

The breeding facility of the ACTP is home of Palm Cockatoos, Red-tailed and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Gang-Gang Cockatoos, Hyacinth, Lear’s and Scarlet Macaws, Red-Tailed Amazons, Golden Conures, St. Vincent Amazons, St. Lucia Amazons and the little blue star in the parrot world: the Spix’s Macaw. So now you can imagine how we felt when we passed the door to this impressive breeding facility.



During our visit new aviaries were under construction.



Above: "Hooligan" was really not amused and showed his full plumage to dismiss us. What an impressive bird! Right: Each aviary had a feeder that also functioned as a travelling cage.



The walls of the indoor aviaries are painted with pictures to enrich the birds and offer them visual stimuli during the long and boring winter.

Shortly after we were welcomed by Mr. Sydow, Martin Guth arrived and we started our tour around the breeding facility of the ACTP. During our visit the facility consisted of two large rows of aviaries, divided in small blocks. Each block can be served separately so that a disease can not spread from one block to the other. This makes sure that the whole collection is safe. A third row was under construction and even if this one will be finished, only 50% of the planned facility will be finished. So there is still a long way to go till the plans of this breeding station will be fulfilled.

Each aviary contains a 12 m–15 m big outdoor flight and an additional indoor flight of about 3 m length. During the hard winter in Schöneiche the indoor flights are heated with under floor heating. The staff can monitor each aviary via video cameras. The feeding stations are in door in a dual feeding station which can easily be closed. These feeding stations also serve as transport cages if a bird needs medical care. Between several aviaries were connecting hatches which allowed the birds to get to know each other before they were paired or to separate birds that do not fit together. The indoor flights were built of brick and tile, the outdoor flights out of aluminum and high-grade galvanized weld mesh. Students had painted the walls of the indoor aviary to enrich the birds during long winter days when it would be too cold to use the outdoor aviary.

The food was prepared in a separate kitchen which contained a walk in fridge and a freezer as well as an industrial dishwasher. The food for each bird was closely monitored and calculated, served in stainless steel bowls and, of course, of best quality.

Our small group walked along the aviaries, at first greeted by Golden Conures and Hyacinth Macaws. It was impressive to see how relaxed and curious these birds were even though they were living in groups or with their mates. Suddenly we were requested to be silent and walk straight past an aviary. A pair of Spix was living there and they were in mating season. Silently we walked pass this aviary not to disturb this fragile situation. But we were reinforced for our good manner because suddenly a screech got our attention. A tiny blue macaw flew into the aviary and tried to get our attention through the mesh. Tiago, the young Spix Macaw, knew exactly how to get human attention. Being totally parrot he mesmerized everybody with his emerald blue plumage, his dark eyes and the face of a totally innocent young bird. We simply were blown away! What a

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Above: Notice the pink-colored beak of the youngsters. This will turn black when they will get in their puberty. **Right:** Even the young St. Vincents loved to play with visitors. **Below Right:** Red-tailed Amazons showing mating behavior at the bottom of the aviary



wonderful moment: meeting one of the rarest bird species on earth in full sunlight! Everybody tried to get the attention of Tiago and Carla and they did their best to charm us.

Even though we could have stayed there for hours there were more birds to meet. St. Vincent Amazon Kiwi flirted with our youngest daughter Miel and St. Lucia Amazon “Hooligan” showed us how territorial behavior looks like in his species. He surely made clear that he wanted no contact with us. What an impressive and wonderful bird! The Red-Tailed Amazons showed mating behavior on the floor of their aviary. Something I was able to catch with a video.

During a short lunch Martin Guth explained the goals of the ACTP. Tiago and Carla, the offspring and breeding success of the efforts of the ACTP, should be returned to their home country Brazil at the 3rd of March 2015 to celebrate the World Wildlife Day. These birds were named after the famous movie “Rio” and should make a little part of this movie come true. Of the ten Spix Macaws that were living in the breeding facility in Brazil, only two birds were males. So Tiago was, from a genetic kind of view, enormous valuable. At the time of our visit only 110 Spix Macaws were recorded worldwide.

We returned to the breeding facility to finish our visit. Suddenly Mr Guth smiled and asked me if I wanted to meet Tiago and Carla personally. You can guess my answer! Tony Pitman and my husband



stepped right in and Mr Sydow guided us to the aviary. We slipped into the aviary and immediately Tiago flew near us. He was curious and very friendly, bowed his head and asked for a head scratch. Even though he and Carla were hand raised they showed quite normal behavior. This might be due to the fact that the ACTP socializes the birds with their own species and makes sure that the birds learn the behavior from their conspecifics. We did not see the adult Spix when we were in the aviary, they stayed in the indoor flight. But Carl and Tiago did their best to compensate the missing adult. We played, cuddled and enjoyed each others' company. What an experience!

Now Carla and Tiago live in Brazil and will hopefully be the ancestors of a new and healthy population of Spix Macaws in the wild. Carla now belongs to the Brazilian State. Tiago is still the property of the ACTP and there for also a connection between the Brazilian Government and the ACTP. The ACTP has obtained a 400 hectare area where the birds will be hopefully someday returned to the wild. The Blue Macaw School was founded to offer free lessons for children and adults to make the public aware of the needs of the Spix Macaws.

When I think about the ACTP in Schöneiche now, I remember a quiet and friendly place. The birds were relaxed and curious, accepted humans as care takers but did not depend on human contact. Every question was answered by the staff and every bird was known by name and character. This shows how enthusiastic the members of the ACTP work to make sure that future generations will have the opportunity to see and experience some of nature's most beautiful creatures: Parrots!

Clockwise from Top Left: St Vincent Amazons – a color festival! A look you can't resist: The St. Lucia Amazon. Tiago enjoys a head scratch from my husband Dr. Rainer Niemann. The curious offspring are socialized with adult birds and were not afraid to play with visitors.

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