

Loro Parque Fundación Returns Macaws to Brazil in Conservation Action

by David Waugh, Scientific Director,
Loro Parque Fundación

In a "Project for the Reintroduction of the Illiger's Macaw *Ara maracana*," the Loro Parque Fundación is sending 20 individuals of this species to Brazil, to be released to the wild later this year in the State of Bahia.

These macaws were bred in captivity in the world's largest parrot collection, which is owned by the Fundación and located at Loro Parque in Tenerife, Canary Islands. This important conservation action has several objectives, the most immediate being to determine the effectiveness of this technique to restore viable populations of endangered parrot species in the wild state. The results of such a carefully controlled project will help to determine the best ways to supplement reduced wild populations of parrots, as well as to reestablish populations of parrot species which have disappeared locally or have become extinct in the wild. In regard to the latter, this experimental release of Illiger's Macaws will provide valuable information about how to restore the wild population of the world's rarest parrot species, the Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii*.

The Spix's Macaw has only one known individual, a male, remaining in the wild state, although there are 39 registered in the globally managed captive population, two pairs of which are in the Loro Parque Fundación collection. As a founder member of the International Committee for the Recovery of the Spix's Macaw, the Fundación collaborates with IBAMA, the wildlife agency of the Brazilian Government, and indeed is the principal financial supporter of a recovery program which involves protection of the wild male bird, protection and restoration of its natural habitat, as well as working closely with the local community for awareness and education

about the environment.

Thus, the captive-bred Illiger's Macaws will be released in the native region of the Spix's Macaw, where also exists a wild population of Illiger's, artificially reduced by the previous effect of removal of young birds from their nests for illegal trade.

The entire process for the eventual release of these birds is being carried out with reference to the guidelines of the Reintroduction Specialist group of the IUCN—The World Conservation Union. Thus, every individual has undergone the most advanced testing possible for communicable diseases, and has shown negative for all tests. Even so, the birds will have a four month quarantine when they arrive in Brazil, followed by a further six months of acclimatization at the release site, in a huge aviary specially built and funded by the Loro Parque Fundación.

The release protocol also includes genetic and disease testing of the captive-bred birds as well as individuals of the same species in the recipient wild population. To enable the project biologists in Brazil to follow the released macaws, identify them and observe their behavior, each one will carry a miniature transmitter which will allow them to be found by remote means. Each macaw also has a leg-band with a unique number, and a distinct tattoo on the bare skin of the face, harmless-

ly applied under anaesthesia.

A key aspect of this reintroduction is the different history of each macaw which has been bred in captivity. While some were reared by their own parents, others were hand-reared, and also there are age and sex differences within the group to be released. The intention is to correlate any differences in ability to survive in the wild state with the differences of history in captivity. In this way the Fundación and collaborators will be able to determine for the future the ideal history of a captive bred macaw, or other species of parrot, for optimum post-release survival in the wild.

Although there have been successful and well documented reintroductions of other kinds of animals to the wild state, the Loro Parque Fundación will be responsible for the first properly documented case of this happening with a parrot species.

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Photo by David Waugh

Back to the wilds of Brazil: an Illiger's Macaw with distinctive tattoo.