

and the cocks can be quite good talkers. Parent-raised birds are difficult to tame and inherit some of the nervousness of the wild bird. They are one species that should be hand reared even if the babies are to return to the aviary for breeding rather than to become pets.

Their diet is typical of most small to medium Australian parrots. Most Australian aviculturists do not use pellets, preferring seed based diets, and a Red-cap will do well on a Cockatiel type seed mix with abundant fresh fruit and vegetables also being provided. I use a seed mix of about 5% sunflower, 20% canary seed and the remainder a mix of millets and panicum seed types. Favored fruits and vegetables include apple, pear, grape, corn, celery, kale, capsicum and endive. If you live in an area that has Australian eucalyptus growing, a feed of fresh seed pods will be especially appreciated. I also give large amounts of sprouted seed leading into and during the breeding season.

The Red-capped Parrot is one of those species that is at peril of becoming endangered in Australian aviculture. When the market was flooded by very cheap, but very neurotic wild birds, few bothered to waste their time with them. Most of these birds would be purchased by inexperienced aviculturists unaware (as I was initially) of the problems that these birds have. Many birds would die early from stress, while those that survived would be passed from aviary to aviary, never getting a chance to settle down.

However, now that the supply of wild birds no longer is available, attention is being re-directed to the species, and discerning aviculturists are making an effort to properly establish a reliable, quiet stock of birds before it completely dies out in our collections.

I have always regretted selling my pair, and intend in the near future to acquire some hand-reared birds to do my part to ensure their continued presence in Australian aviculture.

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by Jack C. Eitnrear,
San Antonio, TX

In Search of Mexico's Endangered Bearded Wood-partridge

"...in the highland forest of Veracruz [Mexico] there is not a rarer bird than the Bearded Wood-partridge" Salvin and Godman (1888-1904)

Veracruz, Mexico

A cool fresh mist coated the mountainside as we hiked up the narrow cobblestone path. Giant tree ferns towered over the trail. In the distance the snow covered mountain peak "Orizaba" was framed with cottonball-like clouds. Rounding a bend in the trail our local guide Pedro Mota produced a long sustained single note whistle. Our group, previously talking, became silent. Pedro repeated the whistle. In the distance a response came sounding like a cross between a dog barking and a Guineahen scream. The chorus began then stopped as abruptly as it began. We had just heard the "chorus call" of the Bearded Wood-partridge *Dendrortyx barbatus*.

Similar to other Mexican birds that inhabit remote places, the woodpartridge's status and distribution greatly reflects the history of ornithological investigation in Mexico. Some of the first (and last specimens) of this species were collected along the lower slopes of Cofre de Perote, Veracruz in 1893. The bird then seemed to have disappeared from science until 1947. During the period of 1940-1970s, ornithological expeditions within the wood-partridge's range reported that the bird could only be found to inhabited cloud forest. With the rapid clearing of cloud forests the Bearded Woodpartridge was considered at "risk" therefore was included in the 1992 ICBP/IUCN publication *Threatened Birds of the Americas*.

Unfortunately listing a species as "endangered" does not guarantee action. The next document however

played a greater role in the species recovery. Hundreds of birds are included in one list or another but priority action is seldom taken until the species is included in one of the IUCN Action Plans. In 1995 the "Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan for Partridge, Quails, Francolins Snowcocks and Guinea fowl" was published. In order to draft the plan a group of experts gathered for a conservation Assessment Workshop. During the workshop they use the Mace-Lande threat categories to prioritize what actions should be taken with the endangered members of this group of birds.

Of course Mace-Lande categories are based upon population theory (considering; probability of extinction, effective population, sub populations, population decline, impact of catastrophe, habitat change, and impact of commercial exploitation or introduction of exotic taxa) so they are only as reliable as the data being used to draw the conclusions. When it came to the Bearded Woodpartridge the Mace-Lande Conservation status was "critical," the highest level of priority for action. What soon followed would change forever the way we think about this 13.5 inch rich brown and cinnamon forest quail, with a pale gray throat.

As newly appointed Mexico and Central American coordinator for the World Pheasant Association / Birdlife / Species Survival Commission (IUCN) Partridge, Quail and Francolin Specialist Group, I had two projects to tackle within the 5-year plan period. They included #4.2.1 "Assessment of the conservation status of neotropical quails in northern Central America," and #4.2.3 "Status and conservation of the Bearded Wood-partridge in Mexico."



Fig. 1 - Distribution of *Dendrortyx barbatus* in east-central Mexico. Specific sites of observation are shown by numbers. 1-Jose de los Duran, Querétaro. 2-Joya de Hielo, Querétaro. 3-Canada de Avispas, Querétaro. 4-Lontia, Hidalgo. 5-Tenamicoya Veracruz. 6-Cerro Acatlan, Veracruz. 7-Las Vigas, Veracruz. 8-Coatepec, Veracruz. 9-Xalapa, Veracruz. 10-Rio Metlac Drainage, Veracruz. 11-Pico Orizaba NP, Veracruz. 12-Tequila, Veracruz. 13-San Andres Tenejapa, Veracruz.. 14-Tlaquipa, Veracruz.

Fortunately, to make my task easier I was contacted by Sergio Aquilar of the conservation group PRONATURA: Veracruz. Aquilar is a naturalist and conservationist living in Jalapa (also written Xalapa) Mexico. He had published a paper on the sale of wild birds in Jalapa and was interested in starting a conservation project on the Bearded Wood-partridge called locally "Chiviscoyo." Sergio also has a friend Pedro Mota who was a bird trapper (a legal activity in Mexico given one follows the rules) in the nearby town of Coatepec. Mota had experience with wood-partridges as they fed upon various fruits within his coffee grove. After months of planning John Carroll (Chair of the Specialist Group) and I were off for Veracruz.

After a brief encounter with the wood-partridge (mentioned at the beginning of this article) we proceeded further into the bush. Several calling attempts by Mota were made before we finally got a good look at a covey of woodpartridges scurrying across the forest floor. We returned to Mota's home for lunch and discussed the plight of the wood-partridge. After just this short field trip one element of good news became clear, the wood-partridge was not restricted to pristine cloud forest. Several of our sightings and many of Mota's past observations were along creeks in secondary vegetation. The species even occurred within shade coffee groves which is

not suprizing as shade coffee is grown within the forest.

On the "down" side, the bird appeared to be in serious conflict with mans' activities. Within the forest local people planted pole beans that were fed upon by wood-partridges. In addition, some hunting occurred in the area. The birds population appeared to be limited by the combination of habitat, hunting and persecution (hunting and killing in response to their bean eating behaviour), as well as predation.

During the next few days we planned our strategy for dealing with the species. We would have to determine if the birds responded to the playback of a call. The chorus call was chosen as it appeared to be given throughout the day after a threat had passed as well as during sunrise and sunset. Given the difficulty in observing these birds in the underbrush, the playback of a recorded call was needed if we were to be able to determine the presence of birds in an area. Of course not all birds responded so not obtaining a response was not an indication of absence in the area. From 20 July 1995 until 2 April 1996 a transect route would be walked. At given points the tape would be played and responses recorded.

During this time an educational program would also begin. Why should local people who are barely surviving care about the wood-partridge? We decided to emphasize the link between the wood-partridge and water. Large cities in this part of Mexico depend upon water from mountain tops. This supply travels down the mountains in small creeks alongside which the wood-partridge survives. If the wood-partridge disappears it is likely due to habitat destruction and a sign that the water shed may also be at risk. It was decided that Aquilar would coordinate the Veracruz census and educational program and I would tackle the question as to the birds status and distribution further north.

Hidalgo, Mexico

Further north in the state of Hidalgo, ornithologist Steve Howell had documented the wood-partridge near Tlanchinol. His sighting was in the early 1990s so their was some question if the

Photo by Jack Elmear



A group of 12 Bearded Wood-partridges being maintained by a bird trapper near Xalapa. Seldom do the trappers capture the partridge as it is illegal and has a rather unpleasant song.

species still inhabited the area.

It was difficult to get a true feeling of the condition of the landscape in Hidalgo as we were restricted to highways. For this preliminary trip we would not have the benefit of satellite images or aerial photographs but did have topographic maps of the region.

At every vantage point we would have to scan the horizon and determine the amount of forest cover remaining and keeping a watchful eye for those patches of lush vegetation along streams and rivers.

On the 3rd of March 1997 Michael Gartside, Alvaro Aragon Tapia, and I left Ciudad Victoria (the capitol of the border state of Tamaulipas) for Hidalgo. Soon we were at the turnoff to the city of Xilitla. On another trip we would turn and travel west through Xilitla and on to the state of Queretaro. Today we proceeded south then east to the town of Huejutla. Unlike the highly agricultural cities in Veracruz, this part of Hidalgo supported numerous furniture and pottery workshops.

Unfortunately, mountainous areas we passed through were heavily deforested. Early the next morning we left for Lontla the site where Steve Howell had seen wood-partridges over half a decade earlier. We wound our way up the mountainside viewing the mosaic of cleared patches of forest in the distance. Except for a few areas

that appeared to be in riverine areas we held little hope for the wood-partridge in this region.

At the top of the mountain the vegetation turned into cloud forest. Small streams tumbled down the rocky hill-sides flanked with ferns and other plants. Densely vegetated areas alongside these streams, with forests adjacent to them, would likely support wood-partridges. Finally we turned the bend and noticed the sign to "Lontla."

Huge trees towered overhead. We turned off the main road to what appeared to be the trail to Lontla. After consulting with a resident we learned that the wider path was for pack animals and the narrower path was for foot traffic. We choose the foot path and began our descent into the distant valley below.

Being located several hundred miles north of the Veracruz site really made a difference in the vegetation. Tree ferns were present but appeared to be thriving less well possibly due to lower rainfall. As we proceeded down the path I noticed a ravine that looked like it might contain a creek (which it did). Removing the tape player from my backpack I played the "chorus call" tape. After I replayed the tape several times I finally received a response. Two birds were apparently moving up the valley to the stand of larger trees near the highway. They only respond-



Pedro Mota, bird trapper, in his store front with various songsters for sale in the background.

ed for a brief couple of minutes then were not heard again until sunset.

After a couple hours walk a small house was spotted. We visited with the residents who made their living principally by selling dried coffee beans. The area was significantly less tropical than the Veracruz site. A local stream bed supported lush vegetation but the numerous fruiting plants noted in Veracruz were lacking. The local people knew of the wood-partridge but with little habitat remaining its numbers were low.

Upon inquiring about the cloud forest at the top of the mountain near the highway they stated that it was owned by the municipality therefore could not be cut down or inhabited. This was certainly good news. Looking back up the mountainside I quickly realized that it would be an arduous task to return with all our gear. We decided to rent a couple of pack horses to transport our packs up the mountainside. We would, however, have to walk. What took

Photos by Jack Elinnear



Michael Gartside descends into the valley below near Lontia, Hidalgo.

three hours to come down took five hours to climb.

Future of the Bearded Wood-partridge

Considered restricted to cloud forest in Veracruz, the Bearded Wood-partridge was found also to inhabit disturbed riparian areas in Hidalgo (and on a later trip, in Queretaro). While these areas may provide food resources, roosting and nesting habitat in adjoining areas of the forest are also required to sustain viable populations of wood-partridges.

Concentrating populations in fragmented habitats makes them extremely vulnerable to predation. Unfortunately, areas inhabited by wood-partridges in the vicinity of Veracruz are valuable for agricultural purposes. This is not the case further north in the state of Queretaro where the birds were found in the uninhabited northeastern forests of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. The species last hope may well be at the peripheral edge of its range where it has had to adapt to harsher conditions and an environment of little interest to man.

While most aviculturists are familiar with the plight of the Masked Bobwhite and Attwater's Prairie Chicken, both are in reality subspecies of more wide ranging species. The Bearded Wood-partridge is monotypic hence declared endangered at the species level. Only the people that share the forests with the wood-partridge can determine its destiny in Mexico. The documentation of a wider distribution and tolerance of secondary habitats however creates significant optimism as to the future survival of the species on the planet.

About the Author

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Breeding Handfed Amboina King Parrots

Alisterus amboinensis

by EB Cravens, Waiohino, HA

On January 3, 1991, I realized a long-time dream by acquiring an unrelated pair of handfed weaned Amboina King Parrots *Alisterus amboinensis*. They were purchased at a price of \$300 each from Diane Welch, Scotia, CA, an experienced and conscientious hobby breeder of kings, Red-fronted Macaws and other parrot species. They were in pristine condition. I will never forget the way personnel in the bird room at Feathered Friends of Santa Fe, NM literally caught their breath as the two juveniles emerged from an airline shipping case. Wow! Such beauty! I was hooked.

Though shy around strangers and probably fatigued after a long flight, the two sexed psittacines were quite well-behaved. They would perch on an arm, come to a shoulder for treats; while the male especially liked to give and receive kisses. At 219 grams (male) and 207 (female) as immatures, it is possible that these birds are not the large nominate *A. a. amboinensis* subspecies, but as I have not yet found a study documenting size differences of various races, this is not easy to tell.

Two weeks later the pair make the long trek with me to my winter home on the Big Island of Hawaii and were installed in an 8 X 4 X 4 foot cage outdoors in the backyard of a hobby breeder friend of mine. There they received optimum care while awaiting sexual maturity. Setting up a young pair like this is an excellent technique when dealing with high-spirited, often quarrelsome Austral-Asian parakeets. It allows the two birds to bond tightly before frenzied variables of sexual activity enter the picture. Yet, even this does not guarantee success as I was to learn. *A. amboinensis* is not an easy species to reproduce in captivity.

"Ohia" and "Lehua," as we named them, went along fine until the spring of 1994 when, at age four, their activity level increased dramatically. He would chase her around the cage and

occasionally get her cornered on the suspended floor where she would screech and feathers would fly. As this was obviously not a positive prelude to successful breeding, I contacted some expert aviculturists for advice. Conclusion was a 8-foot-long cage was not sufficient for breeding these full-flighted birds. The next two weeks were spent preparing a 4 X 6 X 6 foot walk-in aviary. The birds were moved into it, and a new hollow nest was provided. Chasing and abuse was alleviated. Though the male would screech and go after his hen, Lehua could get away in the larger enclosure.

Two months later, disaster struck. The keeper came out for morning feed and discovered the female dead on the ground in the aviary. Diagnosis: a broken neck. I was heart-sick. I began to feel I had no business working with such an unpredictable species. What's more, I began to see that leaving my own breeder birds in the care of someone else was somewhat irresponsible. *No one* takes care of your birds like *you do*.

The fall of that year, I moved all my pet and breeder psittacines up to a half-acre farm lot and made the decision to remain permanently in Hawaii. Ohia, the lone male Amboina King, was given a 4 X 4 X 16 foot cage bordering one side of the garden plot of aviaries. He became very friendly to me; I was leaning toward keeping him singly as an aviary "pal."

Then in February, 1995, while on a visit to Dale Thompson's California facility, I learned of a party in the San Jose, CA area who had the Princess of Wales male I sought and *two* Amboina King females. The truth of the matter is, I detest keeping birds without mates — considering it both unnatural and not humane. One of his hens was a five-year-old proven female, the other a very inexpensive hand two-and-a-half-year-old with a leg healed crooked after an in-nest break.

"What happened to the mate of