

Lear's Macaw Threatened by Illegal Bird Collectors

The Brazilian Institute for Environmental and Natural Renewable Resources issued the following press release on 14 July 1998

Brasilia — The Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari* is one of the world's most endangered species. Occurring only in the semi-arid north-eastern region of Bahia in Brazil, its area of occupation was only located in 1978 by a team led by Dr. Helmut Sick (who was one of Brazil's best known ornithologists).

Due to habitat alteration, hunting and capture for the illegal trade, the species is facing a very critical situation - the populations of Lear's Macaw have been reduced to less than 130 individuals in the wild. The illegal capture of these birds for trade has been recognized as one of the most important factors in the species' decline.

The rarity and precarious status of the Lear's Macaw in the wild has accorded it the highest level of protection provided under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora - CITES. Brazil has been a party of the CITES Treaty since 1975.

In addition to being a party of CITES, Brazil has strict domestic legislation prohibiting the export of wildlife species. The Brazilian Wildlife Protection Act of 1967 prohibits the commerce of wildlife and products or objects that implicate their capture, pursuit or destruction. According to this law, it is considered illegal to keep Lear's Macaws in captivity. It is important to note that since the legislation came into effect, Brazil has never issued any permits for the export of this species.

In 1992, the Brazilian Government created a Working Group today called Committee for the Preservation of Lear's Macaw. This Committee is responsible for the development and

implementation of the conservation management plan for this species, which includes habitat protection, anti-poaching efforts, field conservation, research and educational programs.

Legal protection and the involvement of a number of institutions have contributed to the conservation of the Lear's Macaw in Brazil. Contributing organizations have included the Brazilian Institute for Environment and Natural Renewable Resources (IBAMA), National Fund for the Environment - FNMA, Sao Paulo Zoological Foundation, Biodiversitas Foundation, Busch Gardens (USA), Houston Zoological Gardens (USA). Other groups that have supported conservation efforts include the World Parrot Trust (UK), the Wildlife Conservation Society - WCS (USA), CETREL S.A. and PETROBRAS - the Brazilian Oil Company. The Brazilian wildlife authorities of IBAMA, in collaboration with state and local municipal agencies have been conducting a major campaign against the poaching in the region. Successes include the arrest in 1995 of a smuggler called Paraíba, who was caught with a Lear's Macaw in his possession. In early 1998 the field team was able to observe a poaching attempt and apprehend the infractors in the act of placing the nets for the capture of the birds. In May of 1998, eight more birds were confiscated from an aviculturist called Zezao in northern Brazil. Despite increased security and ongoing efforts to control poaching, the Lear's Macaw populations are still threatened. Many birds are still taken from the wild by trappers - going to a few illicit collectors of rare species.

Unfortunately, Lear's Macaws are also being smuggled internationally from Brazil. In 1996 two birds that did not have any legal documentation or permits were confiscated from Mr. Lawrence Kuah Kok Choon at an airport in France. The French governmental authorities collaborated fully with the Brazilian conservation effort by repatriating the birds to Brazil. Sadly, one of the birds died at the French airport before it could be returned to Brazil.

In an international effort to conserve this species, the authorities in

Singapore confiscated two Lear's Macaws from a private collection, of Mr. Lawrence Kuah Kok Choon, the same infractor of the episode in France. This issue and the eventual disposition of the birds is now being addressed by the Singaporean legal system. Also this year, the British government confiscated three birds from a collector in Yorkshire. The Brazilian Government has requested the repatriation of all of these birds.

There is an expectation that both the Singaporean and the British governments will support the conservation of this species by acting quickly to repatriate the confiscated birds to Brazil, following the example of the French government and according to the CITES regulations. It is hoped that, these governments will access the heaviest penalties possible under their laws and jurisdiction against the infractors.

The position of the Brazilian Government and the Lear's Macaw Committee is that all undocumented and illegal birds should be confiscated by the authorities of the country in which they are found, and be returned to Brazil as part of the conservation program. As there have been no official permission for legal export of Lear's Macaws from Brazil. All repatriated birds, as well as those confiscated in Brazil, will be evaluated for possible return to the wild or for participation in a coordinated captive management program. There is a strong national commitment to the preservation of the Lear's Macaw in Brazil, as has been demonstrated by a recent grant of \$ 200,000 to the project by the National Fund for the Environment - FNMA. In conjunction with project collaborators, this major grant has facilitated the protection of the area against poaching, supported field research, habitat restoration, conservation and educational programs.

The conservation of endangered species and the preservation of the world's biodiversity is a responsibility that all governments must take seriously. The illegal trade in rare and endangered species is a problem that has crossed national boundaries and can only be addressed through cooperation and support of all parties. 