

Blue-throated Conures in U.S. Aviculture

Rick Jordan, Hill Country Aviaries, Dripping Springs, Texas

Photo by Matt Schmitt



These exceedingly beautiful Blue-throated Conures have only very rarely been seen in the U.S.A. Fortunately, the American zoo community has been able to bring some in during the past several years and here we see two of them happily at home in the Houston Zoo.

The Blue-throated Conure (*Pyrrhura cruentata*) has always been rare in captivity outside of its native country of Brazil. As a matter of fact, this species is endangered in the wild and is listed on the United States Endangered Species Act (USESA). It is protected under Brazilian law and any export from Brazil is prohibited.

Currently this species is listed on Appendix I to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and any international traffic of specimens is strictly controlled.

A decade ago this species was being bred by only a handful of aviculturists in the world. Blue-throated Conures have proven to be quite prolific, once established, demon-

strated by the many current reports of breeding successes both inside and outside of Brazil. Many of the birds produced today in captivity are several generations removed from the wild-caught stock of yesterday.

In private aviculture in the United States, imports of this species were few and far between, taking place back before the species was listed as endangered. Privately owned foundation stock here in the U.S. may be as old as thirty or forty years. A few younger birds have reached the U. S. and are now kept and bred in the zoo system. As of this moment, no exchanges or cooperation between the zoos and private breeders have taken place. This has been due to a relatively low reproductive rate of privately held speci-

mens as only two very old hens were alive to form the basis for genetics in the private sector as of 1995. In the year 1998, one of the original hens died, leaving only one female and five “hopefully” unrelated males in the private sector.

From this last remaining group of privately held birds, successful captive breeding was not reported until 2003, when the only hen held in captivity produced seven eggs, four of which were hatchable despite deformities and weaknesses in the shells. These four offspring were sexed and have been confirmed to be two males and two females. The young females will be paired with older, unrelated males to form the only known legally held *Pyrrhura cruentata* in the United States private breeding sector. (Researched through the USFWS’s Captive-bred wildlife registration system for Endangered Species)

Negotiations are under way with Brazil to allow private breeders in the U.S. to obtain up to ten new bloodlines from registered breeders in Brazilian aviculture. This program, if approved by both Brazil and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, will funnel some funding back to conservation groups in Brazil to aid in the preservation of the species in the wild. Of course, for this program to work, the species must breed, and sales between breeders must take place, establishing the Blue-throated Conure in U.S. aviculture, and aiding in its own conservation in the wild. ❖

Blue-throated Conure at the Houston Zoo

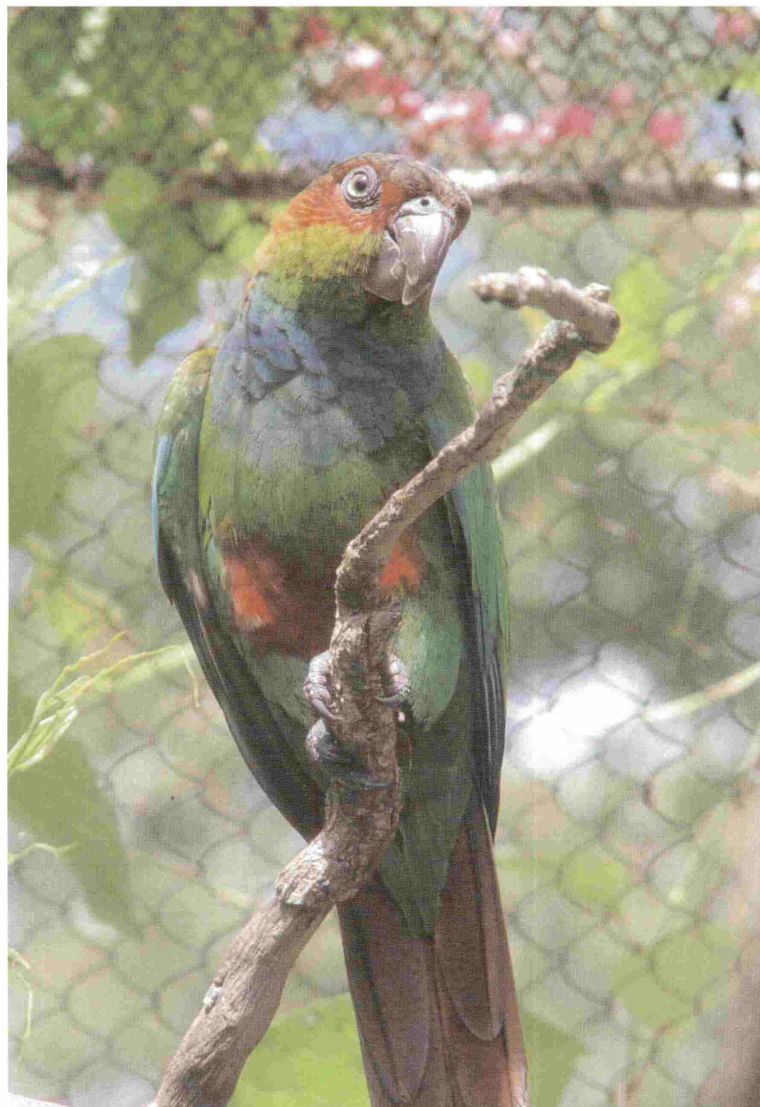
Matt Schmit
Bird keeper –

Houston Zoo Bird Department

The Houston Zoo is pleased to announce the arrival of a young pair of Blue-throated Conures (*Pyrrhura cruentata*). Earlier this year we acquired two parent-reared birds from the San Diego Zoo’s Wild Animal Park. Currently the birds can be found on exhibit in a large, well planted enclosure in the Pheasant Run facilities. The birds were initially shy but have begun to acclimate and are showing a lot of interest in the zoo visitors that pass by. At this time we are letting the birds settle in and soon hope to begin seriously working with this rare and unique species. ❖

These two residents of the Houston Zoo are enjoying each other's company. Thankfully, there are a few Blue-throated Conures also in the Hill Country Aviaries, Dripping Springs, Texas, where there has been a recent breeding success.

*This photo shows
the blue throat
from which the
species gets its
common name.*



Photos by Matt Schmit

