



*In the lower right,
Ciudad del Maiz.*



*Another popular parrot, the red-crowned
or green-cheeked amazon.*



*A yellow-cheeked amazon, *Amazona autumnalis* the most frequently encountered
pet psittacine in the area.*

photos courtesy of J. Clinton Eitnear

*Two amazon parrots
kept as pets
behind a store
in downtown
El Naranjo.*



People and Parrots in Mexico

Ciudad del Maiz, San Luis Potosi

by J. Clinton Eitnrear

Neatly tucked between two ranges in the Sierra Madre Oriental mountains of San Luis Potosi lies the city of Ciudad del Maiz. Close to the once popular El Salto Falls, Ciudad del Maiz isn't mentioned in the Mexico tour or guide books. Even Edwards (1976) popular birdwatchers guide fails to mention one of the most unique attributes of the area, its Military Macaws, *Ara militaris*.

During April I travelled with my guide, Juan, to Ciudad del Maiz to photograph the military macaw. The macaw lives in the oak covered Sierras during the summer months and proved almost undetectable. Searching the area for three days we saw only two macaws and obtained no pictures. It seems that they are best observed during November and December when they travel from the Sierras to the lower elevations where they raid the corn crops. Although it seemed evident we would have to return in December I had one unfinished mission. I wanted to know what the villagers ideas were about the macaws, so before leaving the area an afternoon was spent in the nearby cities of Ciudad del Maiz and El Naranjo getting a "feel" as to the thoughts on parrots as pets and pests.

Four species of psittacines are readily available to the villagers for pets. They include the military macaw, *Ara militaris*, green conure, *Aratinga holochlora*, red-crowned amazon, *Amazona viridigenalis* and the yellow-cheeked amazon, *Amazona autumnalis*. The popular yellow-crowned amazon, *Amazona ochro-*

cephala is not found in the region. Surprisingly the most frequently encountered parrot was not the military but the yellow-cheeked. Despite being the only parrot protected from export by the government, I expected to discover at least one in the village as a pet. Having the largest population of militaries in its range made little difference, none were encountered. After being invited to see countless amazons I finally asked the owner of a healthy red-crowned why the villagers didn't keep the military or guacamaya as a pet. the response came fast, as though with experience, "they are very noisy, make big messes, and do not learn to talk." It seems a villager had one as a pet not long ago, it bit the children and was a very noisy all around pest. Finally it perished in a fight with a local village dog.

Although the numbers of macaws were low last year* the species at present appears secure. The oak forest where they thrive is extensive and of little value agriculturally. Although the species is not dearly loved during its raids on the local corn crops it is protected by law. They are attacked with sticks and stones but not guns. One farmer stated that every year the neighborhood children would try to capture an adult macaw in the cornfields As of yet they have never come close. *La guacamaya es muy alerta* .

* A National Audubon Society Christmas bird count is made every year during December in the El Naranjo, Ciudad del Maiz region. It is published in "American Birds" a publication of the National Audubon Society.

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