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## FROM THE FIELD...

Peter H. Them, Denmark

## Ecuador and the Yellow-eared Conure (*Ognorhynchus icterotis*)

The Danish biologist, Niels Krabbe, Ph.D. in ornithology from Copenhagen University, is, together with Dr. Jon Fjeldsaa, Copenhagen University, the author of the *Birds of the High Andes*.

Niels Krabbe and Jon Fjeldsaa with several of their students have been working for many years in South America, their second home besides Denmark.

Dr. Krabbe is also one of the main authors of the *Red Data Book of the Americas* (BirdLife International, 1992), which published all available information about the bird species of the Andes including the endangered parrots of the Andes.

Dr. Krabbe, it is clear, is well qualified and dedicated to his work. Indeed, he and his family moved permanently to Ecuador in 1990 to work with the endangered birds there.

The main threat to the majority of the birds is the damage of their habitats. For the Yellow-eared conure (*Ognorhynchus icterotis*), however, it seems that a major cause of their decline is caused by hunting the parrots at their roost-sites.

There had been virtually no observations of the Yellow-eared Conure since 1989 but in 1994 Niels Krabbe finally spotted some of them. Then, in 1995 in northern Ecuador, he actually succeeded in finding a roost-tree.

Interviews with the local people showed that Yellow-eared Conures had for years roosted in the same wax palm. When the tree fell in 1992, the parrots moved to the neighboring wax palm.

The Yellow-eared Conure is not afraid of human beings and will still use the same roost-sites even if the

local people shoot at them. For many years the previously mentioned wax palm that finally fell was the roost-site for more than 100 Yellow-eared Conures even though the local people now and then shot a few of the parrots for food.

Today this group of Yellow-eared Conures has been reduced to about 19 birds and they are still very tame.

In 1995 when Dr. Krabbe discovered the roost-palm with the 19 Yellow-eared Conures, he requested foundation support and with the funds succeeded in purchasing the 50 hectare piece of land (123.5 acres) with the roost-site.

That done, he has, together with his assistant, Francisco Somaza, started a nursery focused on cultivating the Yellow-eared Conure's favorite food trees and the wax palms for roosting.

The old wax palms growing on the field have a disease and are slowly drying up and dying. The disease is caused by the cooperation of a beetle and a fungus.

But the wax palms growing in the mountain forest are, apparently, not attacked by this disease. To ensure the survival of the wax palms in the area, Dr. Krabbe and his team are trying to raise enough money to purchase the 21,000 hectares (51,870 acres) of forest at the altitude of 1,200 - 3,000 m. (3,936 - 9,840 feet) near the area, where the Yellow-eared Conures breed today.

The Yellow-eared Conures breed in the tall wax palm (*Ceroxylon andicum*) and it is said that the parrots use the same nests year after year — the nest hole is often 25 m. (82 feet) up in the tree.

But so far, Dr. Krabbe and his team

do not know of any active nests. Their work at this point has been limited to lectures in the schools to educate the local people about the birds, as well as distributing educational folders.

Although the Yellow-eared Conures like to roost in the same tree each night, they move around a lot while foraging and are therefore very vulnerable to various hazards.

But, on the other hand, there is hope if Dr. Krabbe and his crew can find all the roost-sites and protect them as there are only very few people who try to shoot the birds.

Dr. Krabbe and his team hope there will still be some Yellow-eared Conures left when the young trees and palms he has planted have grown up and begin producing fruit and nesting and roosting sites so the birds will be inclined to spend more time in Niels Krabbe's area.

But more funds are required to save this critically endangered Yellow-eared Conure.

Dr. Krabbe will be one of the speakers at the IV International Parrot Convention, Thursday 17 to Sunday 20 September, 1998, hosted by Loro Parque, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain. The theme is "Parrot Conservation Into the 21st Century, Uniting Excellence in Captivity and Field."

For further information about the convention contact:

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As has been the case with the three previous International Parrot Conventions at Loro Parque, which have been held at four intervals since 1986, I am delighted to be the Scandinavian organizer for this Convention in 1998.

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