

By Janice D. Boyd, Ph.D.

AFRICAN GREY PARROTS IN TROUBLE IN CAMEROON

Not only human beings, elephants, primates, rhinoceroses, and so on are suffering in the chaos that seems to constantly afflict so much of Africa. Many readers will have read the disgusting announcement of a poacher captured with 353 African Grey parrot heads and over 1000 red tail feathers. As a follow-on, Irene Pepperberg sent me a URL about happenings in Lobeke National Park, a supposed protected reserve in Cameroon—a reserve where some of her students attempting to study Grey parrots in the wild were chased by machete-wielding poachers in 1999.

A report from the World Wildlife Fund reported on two poachers, well-known to the park rangers, who have been capturing or killing Grey parrots for over 10 years. Authorities estimate the men killed over 1000 greys in 2008, collecting their heads and tail feathers. World Wildlife Fund workers helped to collect information that allowed wildlife authorities to arrest the men. According to an East Cameroon Wildlife official, Balla Ottou Appolinaire, the heads are generally exported, especially to India and China, while the tails go to Nigeria. The bodies are tossed away to rot or sometimes eaten.

The report from the World Wildlife Fund can be found here:

www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/africa/where/cameroon/news/?uNewsID=135201

World Parrot Trust and Loro Parque Fundación are talking about doing more in Africa. Let's hope they can.

EMPEROR PENGUINS MAY FACE EXTINCTION BY 2100

According to a study published in the February 10, 2009, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), by the year 2100, Emperor penguins may be reduced in numbers by 95% or more. The chances of this occurring are estimated to be at least 1 in 3 and possibly even as high as 8 in 10.

The culprit? Yes, again anthropogenic (“human-created”) greenhouse gases and the resulting warming of Antarctica and the loss of sea ice. We're going to hear a lot more about this problem in the future. And the resulting conservation problems are going to be very difficult to solve.

As the Hollywood movie “March of the Penguins” documented, the Emperor penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) uses sea ice as a breeding, foraging and molting

habitat. It is the only penguin species that breeds during the harsh Antarctic winters. Colonies gather far inland after long treks across sea ice, where the females lay just one egg that is tended by the male.

Researchers from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts took projections of future Antarctic temperatures and sea ice extent from the most recent IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) assessment report and coupled the information with a demographic model derived from 43 years' worth of observations of an Emperor colony in Antarctica's Terre Adelie. The results were alarming. They calculated that the median population size will decline from about 6,000 breeding pairs to about 400 breeding pairs by 2100.

The researchers write: “To avoid extinction, emperor penguins will have to adapt, migrate or change the timing of their growth stages. However, given the future projected increases in greenhouse gases and their effect on Antarctic climate, evolution or migration seems unlikely.”

You can find the abstract of the study online at www.pnas.org/content/early/2009/01/26/0806638106.abstract

Formal reference: Jenouvrier, S, et al. 2009. Demographic models and IPCC climate projections predict the decline of an Emperor penguin population. *PNAS*. February 10, 2009, vol. 106 no. 6 1844-1847 doi: 10.1073/pnas.0806638106

GOOD NEWS: CRITICALLY ENDANGERED YELLOW-EARED CONURE HAS RECORD BREEDING YEAR

Numbers of the once critically endangered Yellow-eared Conure (*Ognorhynchus icterotis*) topped 1000 in 2008. Once down to 81 individuals only 10 years ago, conservation efforts by Colombian non-profit ProAves have paid off. Eighty natural and artificial nests were monitored in 2008 and are known to have produced a record number of 203 chicks, leading to a total population of over 1000 individuals.

The species is now returning to areas it historically inhabited before habitat destruction led to its near-extinction, and ProAves is now recommending down-listing of the species from Critically Endangered to Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

This remarkable success story is due to the

conservation campaigns initiated by ProAves with the help of Loro Parque Fundación, American Bird Conservancy, AFA-Specialty Club the International Conure Association, and other groups and individuals.

The Yellow-eared Conure was once abundant in the Andes Mountains of Colombia and northern Ecuador. As a highly gregarious and nomadic bird, large flocks were commonly observed until the 1980s. By the early 1990's, only two flocks of less than less than 50 individuals were known to exist, and by the late 1990's it was feared extinct. In April 1999, researchers with the support of Loro Parque Fundación and the American Bird Conservancy rediscovered 81 individuals in the Colombian Andes.

The species is strongly dependent on wax palms (*Ceroxylon quindiuense*), Colombia's national tree, for nest sites and foraging. The conure's decline was largely due to destruction of wax palm forests for agriculture and to provide palm fronds for Easter celebrations. Thanks to a national TV and radio outreach campaign initiated by ProAves, religious demand for the wax palm fronds has been shifted significantly in favor of a non-threatened, non-native palm.

Ongoing conservation actions by ProAves include environmental education campaigns, reforestation of key areas, mounting of artificial nest boxes, and involvement of the local communities, the success of which are evident in the rapid growth of this once highly threatened population.

Further information: www.wildlifeextra.com/go/news/yellow-eared_parrot723.html.

ProAves: www.proaves.org, (to view the site in English, click on the British flag above the words, "Enter the site.")

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