

SAVING THE BLUES

Conservationists at a conservatory in Texas are working to bring Blue-throated Macaws back from the brink of extinction

*Story and photography
by Laney Rickman*



Above, Jake, Aretha, Sippie and Katie in their enclosure. Previous page, Katie flying.

THE WELL-BEING OF ALL BIRDS—especially parrots—is Bird Endowment’s passion. Our daily labor, however, is breaking the extinction vortex into which the Blue-throated Macaw has been thrust.

Saving the Blues™ *ex situ* seeks to ensure survival of a bird in captivity that is most like those threatened with extinction in Bolivia. At our breeding facility in Texas, The Blues Conservatory empowers Blue-throated Macaw parents to fledge and wean their offspring in order to preserve the integrity of the species cultural identity and provide future breeding birds with the best potential for hatching and parent-rearing their own offspring.

Like The Blues Brothers on their “Mission from God,” we have our primary devotion to *Ara glaucogularis*. But, for the love of music we also are passionate about the Blues, a music genre that has come back from the edge of extinction itself. That is why some of our Blue-throated Macaws have Blues names. They are named after Blues icons and characters in The Blues Brothers movies.

Much work remains to be done to assure the Blue-throated Macaw’s survival even in captivity. Successful F2 (second generation captive-hatched) parent-rearings of this species have been very limited.

The first F2 success we are aware of was in February 2000 at the Houston Zoo. Their F1 male spent some time with his parents. Their F1 female was fully parent-reared at the St. Catherine’s facility. Their first F2 male remained with his parents for about a year before being sent to The Blues Conservatory in 2001.

After being tagged “Elwood Blues,” he and Dicha selected each other while living in The Flock and then moved into their own breeding habitat. She was raised in 1997 by BE Founder pair #1. They are nesting for the first time in January 2010.

The Houston Zoo pair raised two offspring in 2001. The F2 female came to The Blues Conservatory in 2002. Delta Blues and her older brother are important additions to the Saving the Blues breeding program because of their learned behavior and their excellent potential. They are very special for sentimental



Irma at 75 days, with LouAnn at 70 days.

reasons as well. Their parents are the very first Blue-throated Macaws I ever laid eyes on in January 1992 when I began my volunteer work at the zoo.

Jake Blues is a first generation captive-hatched (F1) male. He was raised in 1998 by his parents, BE Founder Pair #3.

Aretha Franklin Blues, the first offspring that BE Founder Pair #2, was raised at The Blues Conservatory in 2000. In 2001 she moved into The Flock. The Flock of conspecifics is a socializing effort. The young birds have an opportunity to learn from their peers even as they start pairing up. The size has varied from seven to three birds depending on various situations.

Jake and Aretha selected each other while living in The Flock environment. In 2002 they moved into their own flight. In 2006 they began seriously exploring their nest.

April 2007 T-Bone Walker Blues hatched. Jake and Aretha were wonderful first-time parents. T-Bone came out of the nest after twelve and one half weeks. The family remained together until February 2008. T-Bone is a second generation captive-

hatched (F2) male who now resides in The Flock.

F2 females Sippie Wallace Blues and Katie Webster Blues hatched in July 2008 and spent almost a year with their parents before moving into The Flock.

Jake and Aretha were outstanding parents again in 2009. Irma Thomas Blues and Lou Ann Barton Blues hatched in June and left the nest in September. They remained together as a family until the parents were ready to nest in 2010.

Another pair we are also very proud of just produced a new milestone in our Saving the Blues ex situ breeding program.

Buster Blues was raised by BE Founder Pair #2 in 2001, and along with clutch mate Layla remained as a family unit until 2002 when both yearlings moved into The Flock.

Janis Joplin Blues is the first F2 produced at The Blues Conservatory. Her mother Xena was raised in 1997 by BE Founder Pair #1. Her father Trust was raised in 1994 by BE Founder Pair #3. Joplin hatched in 2002 and moved into The Flock after weaning. She chose Buster for her mate and in 2003 they moved into their own breeding flight. She is one

of the youngest ever to pair up in The Flock environment.

We are delighted to report that our first F2 has raised her first chick! Albert King Blues hatched July 21, 2009. Joplin and Buster have done a fine job as parents.

Layla, Buster's clutch mate, and Precious are nesting for the first time in January 2010. He was raised by BE Founder pair #1 in 1996. Virginia had been paired with Precious. After years together it became apparent that they wanted a divorce. So in 2005 Layla chose Precious and Virginia moved into The Flock.

In 2009 Virginia chose Eric Clapton Blues as her mate and they moved into their own flight. He was raised in 2005 by BE Founder pair #4. She was raised in 1997 by a wild-caught pair



Joplin and Buster perch, while Albert peeks from the nest.

in Virginia. As of January 2010 they are demonstrating courtship behavior. Koko Taylor Blues was raised by BE Founder pair #2 in 2002. Elmore James Blues was raised in 2004 by a wild-caught pair at Wendy's Parrots. They are attempting to nest for the first time in January 2010.

The next goal at The Blues Conservatory is to facilitate the parent-rearing of F3 offspring. High hopes are riding on the F2 pairing of Stevie Ray Vaughan

and Delta Blues. If Saving the Blues is important to you, there's a place for you in the nonprofit 501(c)3 Bird Endowment program. You can become a vital part of Bird Endowment's mission by signing on as a participant at The Blues Conservatory facility. For more information: www.birdendowment.org

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