

2013 in Al Wabra BIRD DEPARTMENT

Simon Matthews

2013 was a record breaking year at Al Wabra, seeing the most birds-of-paradise bred in its history.

Our first chicks of the year were three Marabou storks (*Leptoptilos crumeniferus*) that hatched at the end January, joining two chicks being reared by a neighboring pair which hatched in late in 2012, giving us five young birds bred over the winter.

The Red Birds-of-Paradise (*Paradisaea rubra*) started the year for the New Guinea passerines, laying 2 clutches of 2 fertile eggs at the beginning and end of March, all of which were pulled and successfully hand-reared. The same female laid fertile eggs again in June which were again pulled and hand-reared, as she failed to rear chicks left with her in May. Two Aru Island Greater Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisaea apoda apoda*) were hand-reared to independence, one in April and a second in May, both from different parents, giving hope for more breeding of the species in 2014. The Lesser Birds-of-Paradise (*Paradisaea minor*) unfortunately only laid one fertile which we are successfully rearing in our nursery also in May. With the maturing of a young male Mainland Greater Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisaea apoda novaeguineae*), bred at Al Wabra, November saw two chicks hand-reared from two different females. We had to wait until August to see results from our King Birds-of-Paradise (*Cicinnurus regius*) when two chicks were reared. This result was doubled in December when two more Kings hatched and fledged just before the New Year. These final two Kings brought the 2013 total to five species and 15 individuals reared to independence.

The spring saw more success from our red birds, but this time they were the Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) with 15 chicks hatching in one of our large flights, three more in our visitor aviary and at least ten reared by our free-flying group who nested in a cluster of large palm trees near our largest enclosed population.

After a number of infertile eggs, the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*) got it right and hatched two very cryptic little



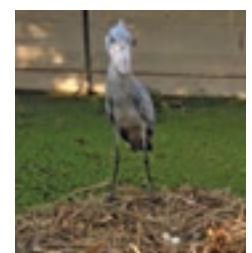
King Bird-of-Paradise. Courtesy of Simon Matthews.

chicks, which were extremely hard to spot for the first few weeks against their sandy substrate, but once they lost their down they quickly became just as hard to distinguish from the adult birds.

The blue macaws started their account of 2013 with four Spix's Macaws (*Cyanopsitta spixii*) hatching in mid May which were joined by three more as we moved from June into July. This equaled the 2006 record when 7 chicks were also successfully reared. But one of the other most important firsts of last year came from the spix, as not only one but two of the eggs that produced chicks were fertilized by artificial insemination. This was possible because of a combined effort with the Parrot Reproduction team, who we will continue to work with over the coming years to help secure the future of this beautiful species. We did set ourselves a new record with Lear's Macaws (*Anodorhynchus leari*) though, combining hand rearing and parent rearing to reach 8 chicks.

After success with parrot species laid solely with our breeding pair of critically endangered Blue-throated Macaws (*Ara glaucogularis*) who parent reared two chicks in the late summer. Though encouraging behaviour was made by the Golden Conures (*Guaruba guarouba*), Blue-headed Macaw (*Primolius couloni*) and Pesquet's Parrot (*Psittichas fulgidus*) which will receive increased efforts in 2014.

In early 2013 we saw some nest building behaviour from our newly socialized Shoebills (*Balaeniceps rex*). Then after a summer apart, the pair was reintroduced with a new wetland extension to one of their enclosures, and the pair instantly started to show signs of breeding, displaying and starting to build at nest on the platform place in their wetland. At the end of November they laid their first egg, another exciting first for Al Wabra and a rare occurrence for this species in captivity. This was followed closely by a second egg, and the pair incubated extremely well but it wasn't to be, and toward the end of December their eggs were candled and were infertile. Fingers are firmly crossed for success with this species and many others in 2014.



L to R: Spix's Macaw and Lear's Macaw (Cromwell Purchase), Blue-throated Macaws and Shoebill Stork (Simon Matthews).

New Nestbox Design Brings Hope of Breeding Success FOR THE SANTA MARTA PARAKEET

Dr. David Waugh
Director, Loro Parque Fundación

Photos courtesy of Fundación ProAves

Colombia has several native species of the genus *Pyrrhura* that are threatened with extinction. To promote the recovery of these species, the Loro Parque Fundación has since 2005 financed the Project Pyrrhura, which was implemented in Colombia by its partner in that country, Fundación ProAves. This project dovetails with another initiative that ProAves has developed over five years, within the framework of the Threatened Parrots of Colombia project. The initiative uses different conservation tools to ensure the viability of populations of parrots in threatened ecosystems and protected by the ProAves Nature Reserve network.

A tool that has contributed significantly to the recovery of wild populations of threatened parrots is the installation and monitoring of artificial nestboxes. This strategy has allowed the documenting of missing information on the reproductive biology of endangered species, as well as provided evidence for the formulation of conservation strategies directed at the protection of habitats and species.

From the beginning of this project in the El Dorado Bird Reserve, located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the recovery of the population of the Santa Marta Parakeet (*Pyrrhura viridicata*) has been an important objective. This species is endemic to Colombia and Critically Endangered (CR). Unfortunately, Scarlet-fronted Parakeets (*Aratinga wagleri*) have also been observed using these nestboxes. This is a parrot species that shares the natural habitat of the Santa Marta Parakeet.

Scarlet-fronted Parakeets have a territorial behaviour which, associated with their larger body size, has stopped the nesting of the Santa Marta Parakeets, because they are regularly displaced from the zones established for artificial nestboxes. Although different alternatives have been tried for only Santa

Santa Marta Parakeets inspect a nestbox.





New design of nestboxes; smaller and made from palm trunks.

Marta Parakeets to use the boxes, until recently only Scarlet-fronted Parakeets achieved breeding success.

Recently, after several years trying to provide artificial cavities for the optimal reproduction of Santa Marta Parakeets, the ProAves team at the El Dorado Bird Reserve started the installation and monitoring of 30 new nest-boxes, different to those regularly used. They achieved, in just three days, the first records of this species exploring the new boxes, achieving a significant advance in the use of this tool for the recovery of this species.

The important thing about this type of project, and the recovery of endangered species, is that it allows direct linking of people and institutions interested in the conservation of threatened species of Colombia through direct grants for the construction and monitoring of nests. These provide greater options of reproduction for the parrots despite the high deforestation that their forests have suffered that has led to the decrease of suitable nesting areas.



Making nestboxes in the forest workshop.



A pair of Santa Marta Parakeets.

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