



THE PLIGHT OF
Florida's Wild Parrots

Daria Feinstein



A Herald reporter was interviewing me for an article about Miami's wild blue and gold macaw flock when she asked, "How could I be a wild parrot advocate and conservationist and still justify keeping macaws as pets?" I replied, "Come watch." I brought my fully flighted pet macaws outside with the wild blue and yellow macaws roosting in the palms. When the wild macaws flew away, my pet macaws stayed. I explained, "Pet macaws choose to be pets, and wild macaws deserve to fly free." Hand raised birds will stay in their back yard just as your pet dog stays around his/her house because he/she loves her/his owner and home. I then asked the reporter not to include free flight into the article as Hillary Hanky's lecture will teach us; free flight requires training and experience. I went on to add my observation that escaped parrots do not survive long in the wild, similarly to dogs abandoned by the side of the road. Of the 36 wild macaws photographed by the ornithologist Bill Pranty, only two were banded and these two were each mated to a wild macaw. Unfortunately, a banded military and scarlet were observed flying with the wild flock for less than a season.

The Herald reporter's lack of knowledge brings up a legitimate important concern, parrot lovers have often asked me, "Will making an exception to the non-native law for wild parrots, make me at risk of being arrested if my pet bird escapes?" The answer is absolutely not. While it is true, poachers often tell concerned bystanders that they have been "hired" to shoot down non native macaws with net guns (that often break the macaw's feet when they plummet to the ground), an owner can show concerned bystanders a picture of their pet (or the band number) since each parrot has distinguishing characteristics. In the case of macaws, their facial feather lines are like fingerprints. I have included in this article a side by side comparison of the wild macaws in my palm trees compared to a wild macaw being sold in a disreputable pet shop in Homestead, FL. Responsible bird owners should have good photographs of their birds and/or their band information. Right now, it is perfectly legal to trap; capture and even kill wild parrots. This is a direct quote in the Miami Herald (www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/coral-gables/article27341464.html) from Florida

Fish and Wildlife Commission spokesperson Liz Barraco, “poaching non-native birds is legal if they are caught with landowner permission and captured using humane methods. If they have a class 3 permit and are capturing (the birds) legally, they have a right to sell”, Barraco said.

Just like the reporter had misconceptions, there is tremendous misinformation among, birders, biologists, Auduboners, and bird enthusiasts about the wild parrots and poaching. Technically I should not even use the word poaching since it legal to capture and even kill wild parrots (included is a crime stopper poster photograph showing a killed blue and gold pair). Foremost opposed to making wild parrots an exception to the non-native law are the biologists who think all non-native species do not belong in Florida. An example can be found on Florida’s Fish and Wildlife’s site, quoted here (www.myfwc.com). “Members of the parrot family carry Newcastle disease... This species also breeds in cavities which might limit the number available to native cavity nesters.” Both statements are misleading and dated. Newcastle is a non issue according to Dr. Susan Clubb, as wild parrots are no longer imported. The three leading wild parrot experts in the world, Kimball Garrett, Bill Pranty and Roelant Junker have written that parrots do not compete with any native species (except Hawaii) for either nest sites or food where they are located in urban areas. To quote Garret, “They are non native fauna that depend on non native flora and the kindness of strangers with bird feeders.” All three have written that wild parrots are limited to cities for their food sources (references provided). More proof can be found in Mira Tweti’s book, “Of Parrots and People”, in the chapter on Naturalized Psittacines, pp. 79-97 as well as Susan Epps, “Parrots of South Florida”. I especially want to point out Tweti’s statement, “Other estimates say more than thirty five thousand parrots in nineteen breeding species alone, making the United States home to the most diverse population of exotic parrots in the world.



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Side by side comparison of the wild macaws in the author's palm trees, compared to a wild macaw being sold in a disreputable pet shop in Homestead, Florida.

Responsible bird owners should have good photographs of their birds' facial feather lines, and/or their band information.

Another reason I often hear against wild parrot protection is that philanthropic monies will be diverted away from established programs. I cannot grasp this reasoning.

When the wild macaw killing in Miami hit the news, \$12,000.00 was pledged to Crime Stoppers and the City of Coral Gables got six hundred phone calls in one day. I think there is an untapped source of the sixty million parrot owners in the United States who might not have the time or energy to belong to bird organizations but will open their checkbooks to support wild parrot protection.

Parrot poaching is a huge nefarious and legal business in Florida and a threat to legitimate aviculture. Read the ads by dealers in Craigslist in the spring; go to the disreputable pet stores and flea markets. Hundreds of these magnificent creatures are being plucked from their flocks and mates and are being kept

in deplorable conditions. The wild blue and gold macaw has dwindled from +40 to 11. At least one hundred red crowned amazons and severe macaws have disappeared. Conures and orange winged parakeets are trapped by the hundreds. In the City of Pembroke Pines, a poacher was found electrocuted with a bucket of live baby parrots next to his body

What can be done? These are the goals of our Bird Lovers Club:

1. Receive an exception for wild parrots to Florida's non-native laws similar to that granted to the game fish industry for the peacock bass. The first step in this process has been successful. In April, following a presentation by our Bird Lovers Club, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission assigned us a staff biologist (some Commission members applauded).



REWARD

UP TO

\$2,000

SEEKING INFORMATION



The Coral Gables Police Department is seeking information on the senseless killing of two (2) **Macaws** that were **shot to death** with pellet guns on the corner of **Bird Road and Grand Avenue** in **Coral Gables, FL** on **Wednesday, March 23, 2016**.

Anyone with information on the above crime could be eligible for a reward by contacting **Miami-Dade and The Florida Keys Crime Stoppers** at the following **(You will remain anonymous)**:

- (305) 471 – TIPS (8477) or 1-866-471-8477
- Visit www.crimestoppersmiami.com and select “Give A Tip”





FIND US ON:






If the tip leads to the arrest of the subject(s), the tipster may be eligible for a reward UP TO \$2,000. All calls are kept strictly anonymous.

Funded in whole or in part through the Attorney Generals Office / Crime Stoppers Trust Fund.

Updated: 4/15/15

2. Go to all South Florida City Commissions to request protective ordinances as several Texas communities have done (McAllen, Brownsville, Weslaco and Harlington).
3. Accept SoCal's (www.socalparrot.org) offer to help set up a rehab program for Florida so injured and sick wild parrots can be released back in the wild as California does. Right now it is illegal for any wild rehab place to accept parrots.
4. Get Media attention to educate the public that parrots are eco friendly and deserve to be protected from poachers and to report poachers. The public is our eyes and ears.

5. Work to get birds included in the Animal Welfare Act. This was drafted several years ago and has not been passed. It is time to give birds the same rights as dogs and cats.

Roelant Junker expressed the plight of Florida's wild parrots so eloquently when he wrote, "The slippery slope is this: when you distinguish between native and non-native you create a second class of birds. Birds that are allowed to suffer, that are not to be enjoyed, birds that are to be hated, that may be tortured or even killed for personal gain. But non-native does not mean they are without value or that they aren't beautiful. Their presence and well being is appreciated by thousands of people."

I have always been proud to be an American. Why do we protect parrots in South America and allow poaching in the land of the free?

REWARD \$500

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No Questions Asked

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