

Counting Blue-throated Macaws

IN BOLIVIA

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The Blue-throated Macaw, a species found only in north-east Bolivia, is listed in the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species as “Critically Endangered”. The wild population has been drastically reduced in the past by capture for trade, destruction of habitat from cattle ranching, and occasional shooting to obtain feathers for traditional headdresses.

Since 1995, the Loro Parque Fundación together with its Bolivian partner, Asociación Armonía, has undertaken a range of actions for the conservation of this species. These have included the direct protection of natural nests and nest-boxes, the creation of a private protected area of 11,000 hectares for the macaws, the avoidance of shooting of the macaws by creating artificial feather headdresses for the indigenous people, the raising of awareness and co-opting local stakeholders to protect the macaws, and the breeding in captivity of over 300 Blue-throated Macaws as an insurance policy.

These actions continue to have a positive impact for this threatened species. At the end of the 1990s, only 36 wild Blue-throated Macaws could be counted, but now there could be as many as 350, occupying a much greater area than two decades ago. However, this is still a small total number of macaws, which not only means that the conservation efforts must continue, but also that there must be a periodic census of the wild population. Such a census is now taking place, with

a team of field workers led by Dr. Sebastian Herzog, Scientific Director of Armonía, making a simultaneous count of the macaws in the different areas of its geographical distribution.

In one of those areas is the Barba Azul Nature Reserve, the protected area owned and managed by Armonía. Previously, as many as 105 Blue-throated Macaws have been simultaneously counted in the reserve; and as far as we know, this is the only place on planet Earth where a big flock of Blue-throated Macaws can be seen. Dr. Herzog was recently there and had the wonderful opportunity to photograph a big flock, part of a total of 56 Blue-throated Macaws, on their way to a roost-site. Fingers crossed that the result of the census will reveal that the population continues to expand.

