



from
the field . . .

by Jack Clinton-Eitnrear
Chairman, AFA Conservation Committee
San Antonio, Texas

(All rights reserved, 1988)

Green-cheeked Amazon Update

The haunts of the popular Mexican redheaded parrot were previously described in "Status of the Green-cheeked Amazon in northeastern Mexico" (December/January 1986), an article in the *Watchbird* so I will only summarize here. The species is of an average length of 12 inches and green in coloration except for crimson on the lores and crown, red on the secondaries and a yellowish band on the tips of the tail feathers. It inhabits a restricted environment of lowlands, foothills (to 1200 meters), gallery forest and deciduous woodlands of the northeastern Mexican state of Tamaulipas.

Previously the species was traded heavily with 3,279 being imported from October 1979 until June 1980 alone (source: Declaration of Import Documents). The only current "legal" supply of green-cheeks is from the various Customs Department auctions conducted on an irregular basis along the border states. In Texas this species composes the majority of the species being auctioned, with over 100 birds not infrequently offered. The species is traded frequently as a smuggled bird. Newspapers in San Antonio often offer birds of "questionable" backgrounds. Individuals, in the course of discussions, have confirmed the presence of numerous smuggled birds.

I visited the species' range in 1988 with the purpose of censusing wintering numbers as well as to collect items being foraged upon for future identification. In a previously mentioned arti-

cle I noted population data for three areas within the species' range. I will update the status of the parrot in those areas.

Gomez Farias. Since no additional Christmas bird counts have been made since 1980, I can only report what I observed during my stay in the area during March of this year. The area located in the village of El Encino continues to be cleared for agriculture and grazing purposes. A flock of 45 birds was observed one evening near a flock of *Amazona autumnalis* feeding in a citrus orchard. Several additional observations were made of small groups. The demand for young for pets (sold at the border) remains high. Only birds that nest in the remote parts of the foothills or in inaccessible locations along the river fledge young. Habitat destruction continues to be a major problem.

El Naranjo. In 1983 no Christmas count was conducted but in 1984-86 bird counts were made in the area. Throughout this period a decline was noted in the number of green-cheeks observed. In 1984, 84 birds were observed. In 1985, only 2 and in 1986 it was increased to 26. This is in marked contrast to numbers noted in 1980-82 when from 269 to 1,438 birds were noted. Habitat destruction does not appear to be as serious in this area especially in the oak belt of the Sierras where the parrots feed upon acorns and exotic China Berries (*Melia azedarach*).

Aldama. This area north of the city of Aldama adjoins a man-made dam and faces the Sierras de Tamaulipas. In 1979 I noted thirty pairs of *A. viridigenalis* as they travelled to their roosts. In 1983 only fourteen pairs were documented during a four-day stay in the area. Recently, during March of 1988, I returned and, although my stay was



brief, observed no green-cheeks at any time. The area used for nearly a decade for observation purposes contained two huts and was surrounded by livestock and fences. Inquiring as to the species' status in a nearby village confirmed my suspicions that the parrots no longer inhabited the forests along the dam. It was stated by one parrot trapper that they now must travel into the nearby Sierras to capture birds as



Protected from the sun by the shade of a village tree, these parrots are used as lures to attract roosting birds which are snagged from the trees by sticks with nylon nooses.

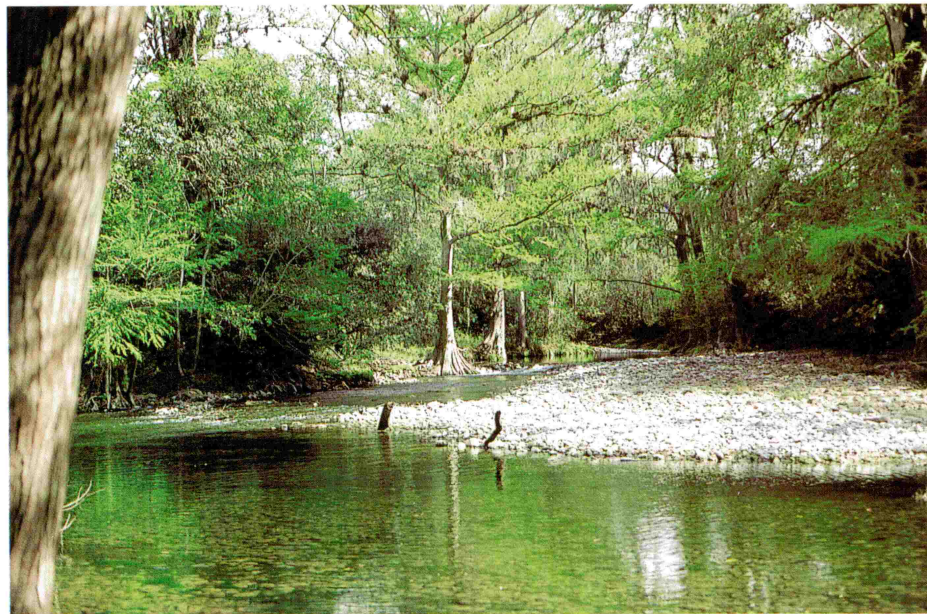
Photo by Jack Clinton-Eitnrear



A flock of green-cheeks as they cross a field in route to their roosting trees along the nearby river.



Habitat destruction along the Sabinas River. Such alterations of the remaining tracts of suitable habitat threatens the future survival of the species in the wild.



The Sabinas River remains the single most important area for the species in north-eastern Mexico.

few exist in the nearby forest.

Thoughts on the Future Survival of the Species

It would appear from the limited amount of data available that the species is decreasing in number in the wild due to capture for pets and habitat alteration. While the government of Mexico has ceased legal exportation of the species, the internal economic problems have prompted individuals to capture parrots for sale at the border cities. The erection of nest boxes may assist the population if they are not robbed of their chicks by the local people. It would appear more productive to enhance the amount of food resources through selective planting of fruiting shrubs and trees whose fruits are consumed by the species. In this way a maximum number of parrots could be sustained in the small amount of remaining habitat. In addition to such habitat enrichment, a financial reward must be given to local people if birds are left to fledge.

Recent correspondence with Nigel Collar, editor of the *Red Data Book: Birds of the Americas* (currently being revised), has indicated the species will likely appear as endangered in the soon-to-be-printed book. The species is well represented in captivity throughout the United States and is present as a feral species in several cities throughout the south. If captive propagation is to assist this species, efforts must be made by *all* aviculturists who maintain these birds to breed them and keep *accurate records*. Using close bands, implants, or tattoos, birds bred in captivity must be identified. If you sell a domestic bred bird, keep a record of who the new owner is and *update this yearly*. Should the genetic material contained within that bird be required in the future, your records will become invaluable. I would also encourage you to hold back representatives of each bloodline and sell only birds from pairs that overproduce.

While I will continue to investigate the dietary requirements and numerical status of the species in the wild, and have encouraged a friend to study its breeding biology, I hope readers maintaining the species will also assist by breeding the species and maintaining sound records. I'd like to hear of your successes or failures with this species. To do so, send them off to the AFA Home Office, 2208A Artesia Blvd., P.O. Box 1568, Redondo Beach, CA 90278 (attention Conservation Committee Chairman). ●