



This is a rare photograph of the Echo Parakeet in the wild.



Field workers' living quarters on Mauritius.



Carl Jones is inspecting nest boxes to be placed in the natural habitat of the Echo Parakeet.

The Echo Parakeet

*the world's
rarest parakeet*

*compiled by Judith Venning
Cornwall, United Kingdom*

Recent successes in field management of the Echo Parakeet are giving hope for the future of this highly endangered bird. The world's rarest parrot struggles to survive in the severely degraded forests on Mauritius, a tropical island in the Indian Ocean. The Echo Parakeet is confined to a small patch of endemic forest encroached upon by introduced plants which are unsuitable for feeding or nesting. Less than a dozen birds still exist in the wild. The World Parrot Trust, an environmental conservation charity based in Cornwall, U.K., is participating in a dual scheme to provide conservation management to the wild birds, while attempting to breed additional Echos in captivity for eventual reintroduction to the forest. In addition to funds, the Trust has supplied a four-wheeled-drive jeep to facilitate transport of equipment to remote areas of the forest. Much of the field work and management is coordinated by Welshman Carl Jones, who has been responsible for the project since he launched the rescue package in 1973.

Mauritius is 1,865 sq. km. and has a population of over a million people. When it was first discovered in the late 16th century, ebony forests and palm savannahs covered the island. There were giant tortoises, fruit bats and many reptiles. There were between 30 to 40 unique species of bird including six species of parrot. The most famous



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* Position open — contact regional vice president if interested

** Indicates 2 year term has been fulfilled. If no new interested party comes forward and indicates a desire to serve, incumbent remains in position.

For information about contacting any of these member clubs, please call that club's state coordinator.

SCHEDULE FOR AFA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Mark these dates and plan to attend!

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(Meeting starts at 10 a.m. Friday, May 14th)

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bird of all was the dodo.

By 1972, large areas had been cleared for tea plantations and others for pine and softwood. A survey in 1976 found only 11 species of bird and only one parrot species, the Echo Parakeet. The island is now well developed and little remains of the native forest. The only sizable remnant left is to be found in and around the Black River Gorges, where the parakeets live. The parakeets have a range of about 60 sq. km. but most of their time is spent in an area less than half this size centered on the Macchabe Forest.

In the early 1970s, there were about 50 Echo Parakeets, but following forest destruction in the mid '70s, their numbers fell alarmingly, until by 1981 only ten birds were sighted.

Carl Jones and his fellow field workers began to see results from their research and breeding attempts towards 1987. By 1990, they had reared seven birds in captivity from harvested eggs and chicks, and observed nine new birds amongst the wild population of some 20 birds. Unfortunately, over two thirds of the birds are male and the cause of this imbalance is still unknown. Spare males frequently fly in association with established pairs of Echo Parakeets.

Eggs are usually laid between October and December; two or three to a clutch. Carl Jones and his team do not want to upset the natural breeding of the wild birds, so eggs or young are only harvested from nests where the birds have laid early in the season and are likely to raise a second brood later in the year.

Field studies show that plants on which Echos feed are so scarce that these green parakeets are exhausting themselves foraging, leaving little energy for breeding. Months of supplemental feeding trials in the wild have finally met with success. The Echos can now feast on a selection of readily available fruits and chiles sus-

pending in wire feeding baskets which are especially designed to suit hungry parakeets but dissuade rats, monkeys and other bird species.

The Echos have great difficulty competing with other species in their hunt for suitable nesting holes, and their eggs are often stolen by rats. After much experimentation, Carl and his team have recently perfected artificial nest log cavities which are acceptable to the Echos when positioned, with some difficulty and precision, on cliff faces and in tall trees. Parts of the forest are also being cleared of intrusive exotic weeds and parakeets are showing a marked preference for colonizing these areas.

After consultation with the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, the Mauritian government plans to designate the forest in which the Echos dwell as the island's first national park. Its primary purpose will be conservation. However, the World Parrot Trust anticipates that support for "hands on" conservation of the Echo Parakeet will be required for many years.

At present there are four healthy Echos in the aviaries, aged six to nine months and developing well but as yet unsexed. Future plans include the research and creation of a new diet for the Echos, which could produce a real long-term benefit to the project and may also help other species of parrot. The New York Zoological Society and the World Parrot Trust are starting the necessary analysis and development of the new food.

Anyone who wants to support this Echo Parakeet rescue plan is asked to send a donation or £15.00 for a membership pack to the World Parrot Trust, 6G, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, U.K.

Further information and photographs available from: Judith Venning, David Woolcock or Mary Talbot Rosevear, The World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 4HY, U.K. Phone: 0736 753365, Fax: 0736 756438. ●