

PSITTAScene

Magazine of the WORLD PARROT TRUST



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ABOUT THE WPT

Capture for the live-bird trade, habitat loss and other factors put wild parrots at risk. Nearly 30% of all parrot species are considered by IUCN to be globally threatened.

As an international leader in parrot conservation and welfare, the World Parrot Trust works with researchers, in-country organisations, communities and governments to encourage effective solutions that save parrots.

Since 1989, the WPT has grown to become a global force that moves quickly to address urgent issues and support long-term projects. Over that time the WPT has led or aided conservation and welfare projects in 45 countries for more than 80 species of parrot.

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ON THE COVER

Brown-headed Parrot in Kruger National Park,
South Africa © *Utopia88, Getty Images*

The diminutive Brown-headed Parrot feeds on seeds, nuts, figs, berries, mountain aloe, sausage tree nectar, and coconut flowers.

Read more in '*Wings of Change: The Decline of Brown-headed Parrots in Malawi*', page 18.



WITH DEEPEST GRATITUDE:

Honouring the Life and Legacy of Jane Goodall

The WPT family is mourning the passing of Dame Jane Goodall, a tireless advocate for wildlife, beloved by many, and a long-standing supporter of conservation everywhere. Her legacy will echo for generations.

From her earliest days, Jane held a deep love for creatures great and small, including parrots. Over the decades, she lent support, inspiration, and a voice to organizations like ours. Her work taught the world that every species matters, that empathy is powerful, and that conservation is as much about hearts as it is about habitats.

In 2013, Jane joined the WPT in Uganda to witness the return of Grey Parrots to freedom after years in captivity — an historic release that symbolized hope not only for those individuals, but for the future of their species. Her presence at that event shone a global spotlight on the plight of parrots and the urgent need to end the capture and trade of wild birds.

We are deeply grateful for the encouragement she offered, the doors she opened, and the banners she raised for all animals. Her life was a testament to perseverance, curiosity, and hope.

Let us carry forward her belief: that when we join hands, scientists, local communities, and passionate individuals, we can protect species that have no voice of their own.

Rest in peace, Jane. Thank you for championing life, for teaching us to look up, to listen, and to act. 📺

3 April 1934 – 1 October 2025



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I think my most special memory of parrots is from in the wild. I've been lucky. I've seen them in all the different countries where they live, but most of all, the African Grey Parrot.

They are literally magnificent, beautiful, winged spirits of the forest.



© Charles Bergman



© Sherry McKelvie

Left: Dr. Jane Goodall joins WPT's Rowan Martin and local officials to open the aviary door for 17 Grey Parrots who, after a long ordeal, finally made their way home to Uganda. **Above:** The first birds investigate the open door and soon the open branches near their acclimatization cage where they had gained strength for wild flight. (PsittaScene Winter 2013)



© Alison Hales, Paradise Park UK

BACK TO BALI:

Return of the Mitchell's Lorikeet

by Angela D'Alessio, WPT Indonesia Manager

Once thought lost to Bali forever, the dazzling Mitchell's Lorikeet is making a remarkable return. Through international collaboration, careful breeding and a bold vision for the future, 40 birds are now poised to bring colour and life back to the island's skies.



Bringing the Mitchell's Lorikeet back to Bali represents a major milestone in the long-term conservation strategy for *Trichoglossus forsteni mitchellii*, a subspecies that was declared extinct on Bali in 2015. With only a handful of individuals sighted in the wild in the past decade and likely no viable population left, the need for an in-country conservation breeding and reintroduction program has become urgent.

The 40 birds currently in Bali were sent from Paradise Park in the UK, in coordination with the World Parrot Trust. Paradise Park holds the world's largest and most successful captive population of *T. f. mitchellii*, and over the years has accumulated unparalleled experience managing the species, maintaining a healthy genetic pool, facilitating strong pair bonds, and producing multiple successful clutches annually.

Cross-border Collaboration

The administrative process of sending back the birds was complex and months in the making. Coordinating between Paradise Park, the World Parrot Trust UK, Indonesian authorities, and the two Indonesian receiving institutions required significant administrative work, health screening, and logistical planning.

Special thanks go to Louise Caddy, Head Keeper at Paradise Park, who prepared the birds for the journey and provided hands-on training to staff at both receiving facilities in Bali prior to the birds' arrival. This ensured that local teams were fully briefed in husbandry, diet, and behaviour management.

Journey to Bali

The World Parrot Trust facilitated the transfer of the birds back to Bali, where they arrived at the end of June 2025 after nearly two days of travel and were received by both Bali Bird Park and Taman Safari Bali. With each facility taking in 20 birds (10 pairs), both had independently prepared their own quarantine aviaries in advance and constructed new aviary infrastructure to support housing and future breeding.

Upon arrival, the birds entered quarantine and adjusted remarkably well. This quick acclimation is likely due to the excellent health and fitness condition they were in prior to departure. While some cooling measures were required to help them adjust to Bali's warmer climate, overall the transition has gone smoothly.

Following quarantine, the birds were paired as recommended by Paradise Park. Early signs are very promising: some pairs have already been observed engaging in bonding behaviours and are beginning to explore their nest boxes.

The transition in diet is also progressing steadily, with local teams now incorporating a broader variety of Balinese tropical fruits and flowers to reflect the natural resources available in-country.

Building a Future

These 40 birds now form the founding stock of an in-country conservation breeding program with the goal of producing a new generation of Mitchell's Lorikeets for eventual release. While breeding efforts are now underway, this period also allows the World Parrot Trust to conduct essential habitat suitability studies. Although historical records suggest the species once ranged across Bali's highland areas, it remains unclear whether those same sites are still ecologically viable today or whether other, more suitable areas exist. In addition, WPT will work with local communities on Bali to choose release sites and after releases have occurred, to keep the birds safe from persecution and poaching.

We are eager to explore the next steps with our partners on the ground and to embark on the next phase of this important effort for the recovery of the Mitchell's Lorikeet in the skies of Bali. 📍

Opposite page, top left: Start of the journey from Paradise Park, UK
Opposite page, bottom left: Awaiting the birds' arrival at the Bali airport
Opposite page, top right: Locally-sourced food being prepared
Current page, top and bottom: Birds settling into their new aviary enclosures in Bali
 All photos © Angela D'Alessio



EXCITING UPDATE:
 Some of the pairs have settled in and laid eggs, which are now hatching!
 Stay tuned for more updates.

LOST LOVEBIRDS OF TANZANIA

On the hunt for a mysterious
population of Lilian's Lovebirds

By Sascha Dueker, WPT Lovebird Coordinator
Photos © Ester Matingisa

Tanzania is known for its amazing wildlife and untouched nature — roaring lions, loud elephant snorts, and thousands of wildebeest feet echoing and trampling through the famous Serengeti National Park, which all can be heard over kilometres in the seemingly never-ending savannah.

The Great Wildebeest Migration in the Serengeti — dictated by seasonal rains — is truly magical for the ones lucky enough to witness it.

But Tanzania has even more to offer.

For parrot enthusiasts, a total of 9 (or possibly 10) of Africa's 26 parrot species can be found in the country. This is more than a third of all recognised African parrot species! They are:

- Red-headed Lovebird (*Agapornis pullarius*)
- Fischer's Lovebird (*Agapornis fischeri*)
- Yellow-collared Lovebird (*Agapornis personatus*)
- Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*)
- Brown-necked Parrot (*Poicephalus fuscicollis*)
- Red-fronted Parrot (*Poicephalus gulielmi*)
- Meyer's Parrot (*Poicephalus meyeri*)
- Brown-headed Parrot (*Poicephalus cryptoxanthus*)
- Red-bellied Parrot (*Poicephalus rufiventris*)

...and, with luck, Lilian's Lovebird (*Agapornis lilianae*)

Fischer's and Yellow-collared (or Masked) Lovebirds are endemic to this East African country. We have previously reported on sampling DNA from their different populations for our in-depth genetic study. The Red-headed Lovebird can also be found here as well as in neighbouring countries such as Uganda. But is there a fourth lovebird species? What about the Lilian's (or Nyasa) Lovebird?

A Mystery in the Maps

Distribution maps published in field guides and by BirdLife International have long suggested that a population extends from northern Malawi far into southern Tanzania. However, research by Dr. Tiwonge Gawa cast doubt on the existence of a resident populations in northern Malawi. Do these “colourful jewels”, as the Malawians call them, extend into Tanzania? Such information is critical for assessing the conservation status of a species and for planning conservation efforts.



Left: The team uses dugout canoes to travel to different study locations

Right: Morris Nyambo, left, highlights differences between local but similar looking parrot species



Following the Clues

Dr. Tiwonge Gawa, WPT’s Malawi Coordinator, has studied the species extensively with support from the World Parrot Trust. She has amassed field data and used statistical models to understand what affects their distribution. While Lilian’s Lovebirds can be found in northern Zimbabwe (e.g. Mana Pools National Park), northern Mozambique, and Malawi (in Liwonde National Park), their main distribution lies in Zambia (at least three distinct populations). All of these locations had been confirmed by Dr. Gawa to harbour populations of Lilian’s Lovebirds but the status of supposed populations in the northern part of their range remained a mystery.

We went on to check records in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), which aggregates species records from across scientific databases and those submitted by citizen scientists and passionate birders. Despite the many hundreds of records for Lilian’s Lovebirds in Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, only one record exists for Tanzania – and this is far outside their supposed range in the middle of Fischer’s Lovebird territory. Looking at the obvious physical similarities between the two

species, suspicion sneaks in – could this be a misidentification or simply clerical error?

We wanted to dig deeper into the topic. Could lovebirds have occurred there in the past but have now become extinct? Or are they still there, but records are lacking because there has been relatively little research in the area?

The Search Begins

In 2022, while planning field surveys and DNA sample collection of Fischer’s and Masked Lovebirds, we established contact with the Tanzania Bird Atlas project, coordinated by Neil Baker, who was enormously helpful in planning our field work. We put the question to Neil: why are there no records for Lilian’s Lovebird in Tanzania despite many maps suggesting their presence?

Neil highlighted that the southeast of the country was poorly known to ornithologists and that not many birders would travel to that side of the country. Local communities live very traditionally and rural, rather isolated lives. Neil also pointed us towards some intriguing reports published in the 1990s (Baker 1991 and Davies 1991), which both

reported having encountered something resembling Lilian’s Lovebirds in small numbers at different locations in southern Tanzania, but interestingly outside the range shown on maps. This needed to be investigated. If they were there in the 1980s and 1990s, could there still be a population in 2020s?

Into the Villages

We enlisted the help of Tanzanian ornithologist Morris Nyambo, who made a first trip to Songea, the location of one of the reported sightings, in 2023. His goal was to look for lovebirds and to interview and gather local ecological knowledge from communities about any sightings of Lilian’s Lovebirds.

Morris did not spot the lovebirds, but the short trip left us hopeful: some villagers reported how at certain times of year the small parrots would come and feed on

Coming back at the right time of the year would surely provide some sightings.

the crops that were ready to be harvested: sunflower and sorghum were irresistible for dinner for the tiny parrots, as we’d observed elsewhere. Due to a lack of ripe crops at the time of the field trip (in August the fields were already empty) and further information from chiefs and higher-ranking men in the community, we supposed we had just missed them.

Morris showed the villagers pictures of the lovebirds which the villagers confidently identified. Coming back at the right time of the year would surely provide the team with some sightings, we concluded.

Another Attempt – Another Mystery

In 2025 the team returned, this time in June to match the ripening season of the crops. This time Morris was accompanied by Ester Matingisa. Again, nothing! Our team encountered Brown-headed Parrots as well as Meyer’s Parrots feeding on the ripe crops.

Despite multiple long trips, and following the advice of villagers who had claimed to have seen them, no lovebirds were to be found. Morris and Ester concluded, and villagers admitted themselves, they had difficulties in distinguishing between different parrot species and may well have mistaken Brown-headed and Meyer’s Parrots for Lilian’s Lovebirds. After all, to non-ornithologists they are all green and their screeches are similarly high-pitched and not very easy to differentiate. Understandable, but what a disappointment.

The Mystery Remains

Are there Lilian’s Lovebirds in southeast Tanzania? It’s difficult to definitively conclude there aren’t, and there is certainly scope for further research and more systematic studies, however the evidence suggests that a significant resident population is no longer present. Perhaps they never were there. Perhaps some vagrant movements and occasional *irruptions* (sudden appearances of animals in large numbers into an area) linked to local rainfall still occasionally occur. Or perhaps the expansion of farming and clearing of trees means that suitable habitat has now gone. We may be getting a little closer, but the mystery remains... 

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Do these ‘colourful jewels’, as the Malawians call them, really extend into Tanzania?

NEWS FROM AFRICA

CONTINUING THE FIGHT AGAINST TRAFFICKING

Wildlife trafficking remains a serious issue in Africa, made complex by the social and economic difficulties of a growing human population. The World Parrot Trust, with its partners, continues its challenging work there with good news in the offing.

Major breakthrough in efforts to protect Grey Parrots in the DRC

Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) are some of the world's most trafficked birds. Each year, thousands are trapped in the wild in Democratic Republic of Congo and illegally exported. Efforts to tackle this trade are hampered by confusing legislation and a lack of awareness among law enforcement agencies. The WPT has repeatedly called for parrots to be added to the list of "totally" protected species and a ramping up of targeted law enforcement efforts. A new project started in 2022, spearheaded by the Lukuru Foundation with technical and financial support from WPT, established capacity to receive parrots seized from trade and engaged provincial authorities in central and eastern DRC in strengthening laws.

In April, there was a major breakthrough with Tshopo Province in DRC joining two other provinces in announcing a decree unequivocally prohibiting the trapping and trade of Grey and Red-fronted Parrots. Tshopo province is a key transit point for Grey Parrots that are trapped in central DRC and moved by plane to international airports, from which they are illegally exported. Many are shipped under the guise of Red-fronted Parrots, which can still be exported with permits.

This provided important momentum behind efforts to secure a similar decree at a national level, and shortly after the national Ministry of the Environment convened a meeting to explore this possibility further. Finally in late July, a national level-decree making it

a criminal offence to capture, possess, kill, sell, or transport the species within DRC was enacted. The new law was welcomed by Dr. Rowan Martin, WPT's director of Africa Region and Bird Trade Programmes. "This is a hugely significant step towards safeguarding the species across vast swathes of the Congo basin, where trapping has been rampant and has devastated wild populations. However, there remains work to be done. Large numbers of wild animals are legally exported from the DRC every year and often Grey Parrots are laundered as other species. It's critical that law enforcement efforts and surveillance are ramped up to ensure this new legislation is effective."



Confiscated Grey Parrots © Pandrillus

WPT applauds crack down on illegal trade in Nigeria

Meanwhile in Nigeria, a number of recent seizures of Grey Parrots and other bird species reflects the increasing seriousness with which bird trafficking is being treated. In July, Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) intercepted 111 live Grey Parrots being smuggled from Cameroon into Nigeria. The parrots, packed into six wooden boxes, were seized along the Gurin international borderline in Fufure Local Government Area in Adamawa State. According to Customs Area Commander Garba Bashir, the suspect was caught attempting to transport the birds. During a press briefing Bashir noted, "Poaching methods are often brutal, and a high percentage of captured birds die before reaching export sites."

The confiscated parrots were formally handed over to WPT's Nigeria Coordinator Ifeanyi Ezenwa and WPT partner Pandrillus, who transported the parrots to Drill Ranch in Afi Mountain Reserve where they will be rehabilitated and released. WPT's work with law enforcement and rescue centres in Nigeria has helped raise the profile of bird trafficking. Last December, the first soft release of Grey Parrots took place in Afi Mountain, a landmark for Nigeria and attended by multiple government agencies including National Parks and Customs Services. This year WPT has organised and delivered training



Left: Timneh Parrots being moved to release site in Liberia **Right:** Enjoying their first taste of freedom with fresh palm fruits
Photos © Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary



workshops with Customs Service staff in Lagos and Adamawa in the handling of parrots seized from illegal trade. This is the largest of several seizures of parrots made by Nigeria Customs Services in 2025 and the WPT is hugely encouraged by the resolve to end the trafficking of parrots.

Learn more about the work being done by Ifeanyi Ezenwa in the video released for World Parrot Day 2025:
<https://tinyurl.com/gpwpd2025>

Rescued Timneh parrots fly free in landmark release in Liberia

Progress also continues in Liberia with the Grey Parrot's close cousin, the Timneh Parrot (*Psittacus timneh*). In a historic event, 14 birds were released at an undisclosed location following months of preparation. Liberian ornithologist Andrew N. Gweh, on behalf of World Parrot Trust, worked alongside the Forestry Development Authority and long-term WPT partner Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary to coordinate their successful release back to the wild.

The parrots were among the survivors of two groups of Timneh Parrots seized from traffickers in 2023. The seizures, which led to the arrest and prosecution of a Ghanaian national, were made by the Forest Development Authority and the Special Wildlife Investigations Unit following training and awareness

activities by the Center for Environment, Forest Conservation and Research (CENFOR), funded through the WPT/NECF Conservation Grants Programme.

The Timneh Parrot is one of the most endangered parrot species in Africa, classified as globally Endangered and restricted to a small number of fragmented populations in Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. Liberia hosts some of the most significant wild populations and this area, and the parrots that roost here, are of genuine global importance. Illegal capture and trafficking continue to threaten them in many parts of their range.

Learn more about the seizure and rehabilitation of these parrots, as well as WPT's work to develop mobile pathogen screening, in the Spring 2024 and Summer 2025 editions of *PsittaScene*.

New Study Reveals Complete Genomes of all Lovebirds

A new study has revealed the complete genomes of every lovebird species. World Parrot Trust field researchers, working with the University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of Chicago and Iridian Genomes, have published the complete genomes of all nine currently recognised lovebird species. A genome is the full set of genetic instructions found in a living organism, and having access to this

information can reveal how species are related, how they've evolved, and what they may need to survive into the future. They were sequenced using wild-sourced samples that are geo-referenced, meaning researchers know exactly where each sample came from.

This provides a crucial foundation for understanding the genetic health and long-term viability of wild lovebird populations. WPT specifically focuses efforts on the four white eye-ringed species, due to their threat status, found in southern and eastern Africa: Black-cheeked Lovebird (IUCN VU), Lilian's Lovebird (IUCN NT), Fischer's Lovebird (IUCN NT) and Yellow-collared or Masked Lovebird (IUCN LC).

These wild populations still face many challenges, including habitat loss, climate change, disease and hybridisation (individuals of two different species breeding) due to trade releases and trapping for the wildlife trade. This research will help scientists assess how connected wild populations are, how much hybridisation is taking place, and what conservation steps are most urgent.

This past year has seen groundbreaking and positive results for African parrots continent-wide. The WPT, with its collaborators, are committed to keeping up the momentum going into the future. 📺



COMMUNITIES, NESTS AND TREES: HELPING THREATENED PARROTS REBOUND

The Neotropics encompasses southern Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean. This biographic region features a wide range of habitats from tropical and subtropical forests, both dry and humid, to dry scrublands, coniferous woodlands, and sprawling savannas. An astonishing diversity of parrot species thrives there, but many of them are at risk from habitat loss and trapping. The WPT and its partners are working together to protect them and their forests.



PUERTO RICAN AMAZONS: HELPING CHICKS AND RESTORING FOREST

In the 1970s, their wild population dropped to fewer than 20 individuals. Today, after decades of careful management, the Puerto Rican Amazon (*Amazona vittata*) is making a steady comeback. In a hopeful trend, recent years have seen especially good breeding seasons. A lot of that is up to the birds but also depends on the non-stop work the team puts into caring for these special parrots.

Top: Military Macaw perched on an artificial nest box © Marcela Franco
Left: Puerto Rican Amazon with chicks © DNER Proyecto Conservación Cotorra Puertorriqueña de Río Abajo

A breeding season handbook

At the end of last year, Puerto Rican Department of Environmental Resources (DNER) staff built a new captive breeding area to house 13 pairs. Then came repairs, cleaning and opening the wild nests, which remain closed when not used by the birds. By February, the parrots were laying eggs and by March the team was inspecting wild nests to follow the chicks' development. Each season, the youngsters are health-checked for appropriate weight gain, external parasites and development issues, and are ID banded.

This year, the team carried out several chick transfers between nests (both captive and wild) to sites such as El Yunque and Maricao to increase survivability and improve breeding outcomes. They also collected DNA sexing blood samples, which when analysed will help researchers better understand population dynamics (how the size and composition of a population changes with time) and future breeding potential. Finally the chicks fledged, and field staff are now searching the skies for the newly-banded birds in order to collect data on their progress, tracking individuals within the wild population. They are also identifying newly-formed pairs for the upcoming captive breeding season.

WPT's wildlife biologist Joymer B. Figueroa Martínez said, "So far this year, a total of 119 chicks fledged at the Río Abajo aviary, of which 72 (two more than last season) are from wild nests and 47 are from the captive population. A total of 29 wild nests were activated this season, marking a productive and encouraging breeding year." The news is good all around: there are 240 parrots in captivity, of which 50-70 will be sent to the El Yunque and Maricao sites sometime this year. In the wild, there are an estimated 320-340 of these iconic parrots.

Replacing trees lost to hurricanes and logging

As part of the overall conservation plan, an ambitious reforestation project is taking place through the US Forest Service and associated on-the-ground staff. As was reported in the Spring 2025 issue of *PsittaScene* the work has been steady, most recently on a 1.2 hectare second plot with the team removing invasive plant species and planting 40 native trees. Thirty more non-native plants were removed from around the site's interpretive trail. In addition, there is interest from landowners thanks to a social media ad asking for access to private properties to improve Puerto Rican Amazon habitat.

Top: Puerto Rican Amazon chicks curled up in nest
Middle: A wide-eyed chick sits on a researcher
Bottom: Conducting a health check

Photos © DNER Proyecto Conservación Cotorra Puertorriqueña de Río Abajo



Nest Boxes and Protection for Yellow-naped Amazons

Yellow-naped Amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*) face serious threats from illegal trafficking and deforestation, both of which have resulted in dramatic declines in populations throughout their range.

Guanaja Island: A refuge for parrots

When Green Island Challenge began work in 2018 there were only 323 Yellow-naped Amazons left on Guanaja, Honduras. By 2020, after three years of conservation actions, there were 875. In 2024, the team doubled the number of artificial nestboxes and the parrots have taken advantage of the extra chance to mate. During the 2025 breeding season, 30 out of 50 nest boxes installed saw 70 chicks successfully grow and fledge, joining their wild parents in the island's forests.

Along with protecting nests, the team is also empowering local communities to protect parrots generation over generation. Over the past year, their environmental education program reached seven out of eight island schools, immersing children in learning about parrots, forest ecosystems and wildlife.

By combining hands-on conservation with awareness, the team is sparking a movement that is encouraging local people to become stewards of their island's biodiversity. The benefits are tangible: today, thanks to round-the-clock nest monitoring and active community involvement, more chicks are surviving to adulthood.

Island community-driven conservation

On the Honduran island of Roatán, poaching and habitat destruction have pushed Yellow-naped Amazons to the edge. Thankfully a new community-led project is providing hope.

Through a pilot program begun by WPT, 44 nest boxes have been installed on private land to provide multiple safe breeding sites for the birds. Landholders monitor the boxes and report the parrots' activities, which provides in-country staff with data essential to tracking the birds' lives over time. And, by placing the boxes on private land, the parrots gain added protection from poachers.

Recent observations recorded a Yellow-naped Amazon pair inspecting a nestbox multiple times in a program participant's garden. The resident reported that the birds were giving new calls that were different from their usual vocalisations. Although it was too late in the season for egg-laying, seeing the birds apparently 'playing house' was an encouraging sign.



Top: An artificial nest box atop a tree in Guanaja
Bottom: Close-to-fledging chicks in artificial nest box
Photos © Green Island Challenge

Joining forces to combat trade

In El Salvador WPT's Yellow-naped Amazon Coordinator, Noelia Volpe, is collaborating with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) at the Santa Rita Protected Area. Last year, five Yellow-naped Amazons seized from trade received treatment and rehabilitation. WPT provided on-site training and a comprehensive care routine to the parrot rescue team to equip them to prepare the birds for release, and after six months they were successfully restored to the wild. Currently, a larger group of confiscated Yellow-naped Amazons is recovering with the hope of releasing them before the end of the year.

Santuario de Las Guacamayas: Safe Haven for Military Macaws

Trafficking Military Macaws (*Ara militaris*) for the wild bird trade, particularly in Mexico, is a serious concern. Range-wide, fewer than 7,000 mature individuals remain.

The WPT has been supporting Santuario de Las Guacamayas' crucial work protecting a local Military Macaw population from poaching. Since January of this year, along with installing 30 new nest boxes, the team at the sanctuary in Mexico has received 400 local visitors, including children and students, as part of its environmental education and outreach efforts. The activities took place while the macaws were breeding, when chicks were being carefully monitored and banded, identifying them as 2024-2025 fledglings. The season officially concluded at the end of April, with the last fledgling leaving the nest in a good condition. The exception was one chick that was infested with *Philornis* larvae, a parasite that damaged its feather follicles. This resulted in the loss of the bird's primary feathers, temporarily preventing it from flying. The chick is now slowly recovering thanks to treatment.

Overall, results for the season were encouraging, showing a notable increase to 14 fledglings compared to the previous year when only four chicks progressed to adulthood. There was an increase in treatments required for chicks, including the manual removal of *Philornis* larvae from a number of chicks and handfeeding an injured nestling. This greatly improved chick survival, resulting in a 50% fledging rate compared to less than 25% last season, and due to close attention and timely care and medical interventions where needed.

Rebuilding a forest, one seedling at a time

Other significant work carried out at Santuario de Las Guacamayas involves the establishment of firebreaks, which include maintaining existing roads, and the monumental task of planting of 6,000 pine (*Pinus* spp.) trees in time for the wet season. This task is particularly important considering the number of brush fires that have occurred in the area. Further, the damage the fires have caused has attracted more bees to the sanctuary, with five nests being occupied by hives by the end of the season. Sanctuary staff also found bark beetles that were damaging the trees, which they hope to prophylactically treat. Reforestation is also expected to contribute to maintaining climate balance in the region while providing food sources and shelter for animal species. Additional planting is planned for next season with seedlings sourced from local nurseries, focusing on Douglas pine (*Pinus douglasiana*) and Ocote pine (*Pinus oocarpa*), both native species of the region. 



Military Macaw fledgling extracting seeds from a pine cone
© Marcela Franco Ochoa

Each of the teams working with these endangered parrots plays a key role in their preservation and resilience in the wild. With support from the WPT, these dedicated field workers and conservationists will ensure the birds' survival.

WINGS OF CHANGE:

The Decline of Brown-Headed Parrots in Malawi

by Tamara Chirwa, MSc

In the rustling canopy of Malawi's southern woodlands, a flash of green and a fluttering call once signalled the presence of the Brown-headed Parrot, a small, charismatic bird with an outsized ecological role. But today, the sightings are fewer, their calls fainter, and their future increasingly uncertain.



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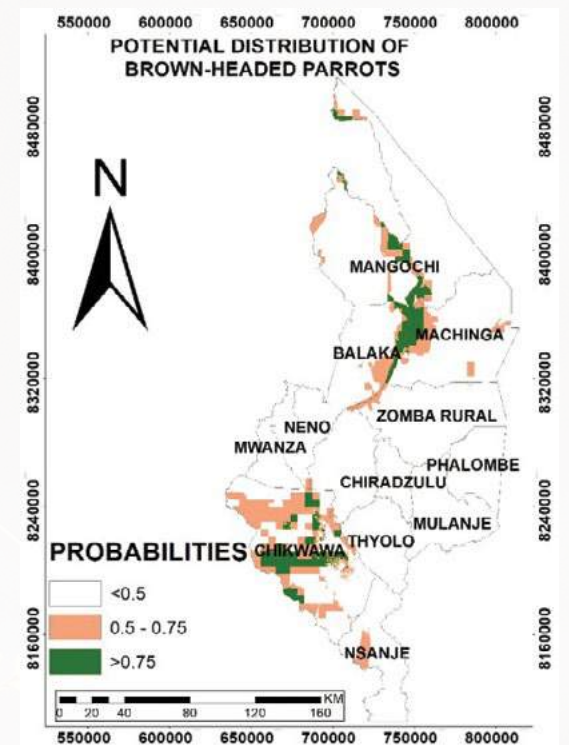
Once widespread across Malawi's southern landscape, Brown-headed Parrots (*Poicephalus cryptoxanthus*) are now facing a rapid decline. These parrots are secondary cavity nesters that depend on large mature trees, such as baobab and Mopane, which naturally provide cavities. Their diet consists mainly of fruits and seeds, and they are commonly found in the forest-savanna and dry woodland zones of South and East Africa. In Malawi, they are notably recorded in the southern region.

My recent research, which involved field surveys, habitat assessments, and community interviews, reveals that these parrots have vanished from over half the areas they previously occupied. Their retreat is a stark signal of broader environmental changes unfolding across the region.

A Species in Retreat

The Brown-headed Parrot is most associated with the lush riverine forests along the Shire River. These habitats, particularly those dominated by large, barrel-shaped baobab trees, offer both food and nesting cavities crucial for the species' survival. However, habitat destruction driven by agricultural expansion, deforestation, charcoal production and urban development is eroding their sanctuary. In protected areas such as Liwonde National Park, Majete Wildlife Reserve, and Lengwe National Park, parrots are still present in relatively high numbers. But beyond these safe zones, the outlook is grim.

My research aimed to provide an update on the distribution of these parrots, assessing the availability of suitable habitats crucial for their survival. To achieve this, I developed a Species Distribution Model (SDM)* considering potential changes driven by both climate shifts and habitat alterations. Using a combination of field observations and historical records, my study found that Brown-headed Parrots are now detected in only 42% of previously recorded locations. This contraction is not only worrying for biodiversity but also a wake-up call for conservation planning in Malawi.



* An ecological model that predicts the geographic distribution of a species based on its relationship with environmental factors.

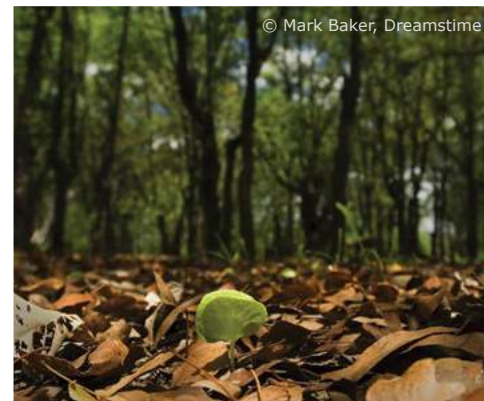


Left: A Brown-headed Parrot perches on a burned out Mopane tree.

Right, top: Mopane wood. Right, bottom: A mopane sapling pushes through the leaf litter.



© Sacha Dueker



© Mark Baker, Dreamstime

What's Driving the Decline?

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the dominant forces behind the parrot's disappearance. Mopane trees essential for nesting sites are being cut down at an alarming rate; sometimes for construction, other times for traditional medicine or charcoal. With each fallen tree, another potential home for the parrots is lost.

Climate change is compounding the pressure. Prolonged droughts, shifting rainfall patterns, and increased temperatures are altering the distribution of plant species and degrading habitat quality. In some areas the parrots have retreated altogether, replaced by silence and sun-scorched vegetation.

Community interviews confirmed what the data already hinted: locals observe fewer parrots than in the past and in some places, none. Interestingly, many noted that the parrots tend to stick close to baobabs, mopane and warmer zones, showing the importance of microclimate and tree availability in their survival.

Preferred Habitats Under Threat

Through habitat analysis, it became evident that lakeshore Zambezian woodland is the preferred habitat of Brown-headed Parrots. Unfortunately, this habitat type is also among the most threatened in the region, facing intense pressure from expanding farms, grazing lands, and settlements. The parrots' strong reliance on specific habitat types makes them particularly vulnerable to even small-scale environmental changes.

Signs of Hope and the Way Forward

Despite these challenges, there is still hope. Protected areas are serving as critical refuges, showing that effective conservation can work. Moreover, awareness among local communities about the parrot's role in seed dispersal and forest regeneration is growing. Some farmers shared observations of the birds feeding on wild fruits, which help reforest degraded areas; an ecosystem service worth protecting.

Going forward, conservation efforts must prioritise habitat restoration,

protection of nesting trees like baobabs and mopane, and strengthening of buffer zones** around park areas. Using climate-smart land-use practices and integrating indigenous knowledge into management strategies could also offer sustainable solutions. Ultimately, the story of the Brown-headed Parrot reflects the health of Malawi's forests, rivers, and the delicate balance between humans and nature. If we protect the parrots' habitat, we protect a wider web of life that sustains us all. 

*** Protected areas surrounding a sensitive ecosystem or habitat designed to minimise the negative impacts of human disturbance.*

Tamara Chirwa has earned a Master's degree in Biodiversity Informatics at Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST,) with her involvement in Lilian's Lovebird research serving as an inspiration. Her research, 'Assessing the Conservation Status of the Brown-headed Parrots in Malawi,' was supervised by Dr. Tiwonge Gawa, a lecturer at MUST and the Malawi Coordinator for the World Parrot Trust, Dr. Rowan Martin, WPT Director of Africa Region and Bird Trade Programmes and Sascha Dueker, MSc, WPT Lovebird Coordinator. She hopes her research will contribute meaningfully to the conservation of Brown-headed Parrots and the challenges they face in Malawi.



Remembering Daniel Postgate:

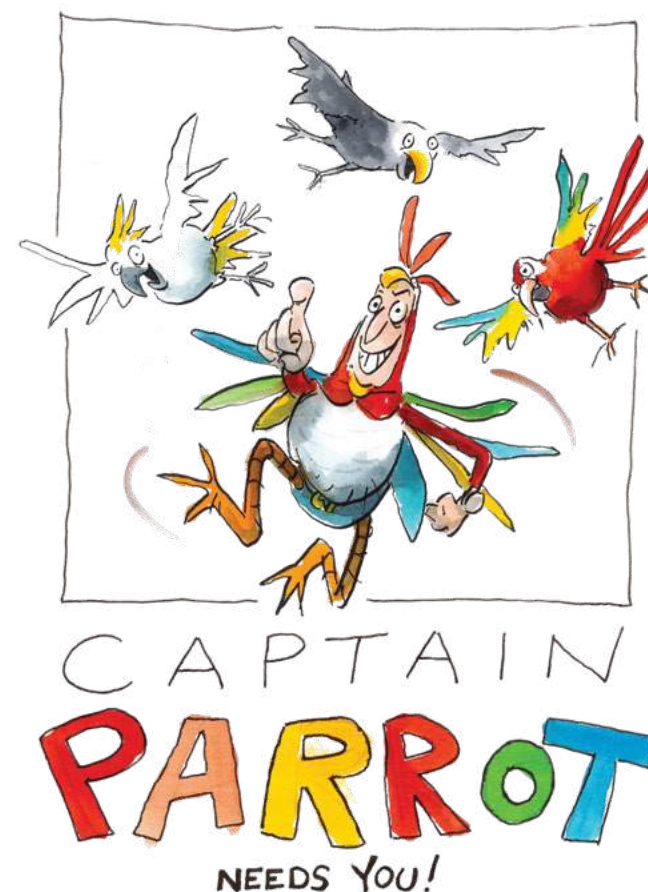
Artist who helped launch World Parrot Day

The World Parrot Trust pays tribute to Daniel Postgate, the notable British illustrator and storyteller who helped launch World Parrot Day in 2004 with his wonderful cartoons. Daniel passed away on June 27, 2025 at age 61.

Best known for children's books like *Kevin Saves the World*, *Engelbert Sneem and His Dream Vacuum Machine*, and *The Hairy Toe*, Daniel also revived *The Clangers* TV series, earning a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award in 2015 for his writing and voice work.

He also contributed his unique art to the cover of WPT's original *PollyVision* DVD.

Daniel will be deeply missed but his wonderful work will always bring a smile. 



THE SWARING PARROT.



CITES at 50:
Convention Marks Significant Milestone



© IISD-ENB | Mika Schroder

The first of July marked the 50th anniversary of the day on which the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), came into force. CITES has played a key role in tackling the unsustainable trade in wildlife, including parrots. When the convention took effect, hundreds of thousands of wild parrots were trapped and traded each year but there was little awareness of its impact on numbers in the wild. In 1982, the majority of parrot species were placed on the CITES appendices, requiring countries to issue permits and report annually on the numbers of parrots being exported. The scale of this trade was there for all to see and its impacts, in terms of collapsing wild populations, became increasingly evident. In response, the countries that are parties to the convention have agreed on coordinated action on the trade in numerous species and issues that affect parrots.

The convention is, however, not without its critics. Although it is constantly evolving, decisions are slow and bureaucratic, meaning it is often unable to respond to emerging issues. There are also concerns that the structure of the convention means that the default position is to allow trade in species unless there is robust evidence demonstrating it unsustainable. And there are also inevitable tensions between economic and conservation interests. This often means that actions to protect species (such as bans on trade) only happen after wild populations have collapsed. Another challenge is the increasingly long agendas of meetings as more issues are brought to the table.

It may come as a surprise, but international trade in wild-caught parrots of many species is still permitted under the convention. Many countries issue permits for their export despite there often being no meaningful monitoring of impacts on wild populations. Other challenges include the misuse of the permitting system to launder protected species and the abuse of loopholes, such as allowances for trade between “zoos” and for “breeding” purposes. The World Parrot Trust actively engages with CITES to ensure decisions are based on the best available evidence and issues affecting parrots are addressed. Through our field programmes, we gather data and local ecological knowledge, working to make sure the most up-to-date information gets in front of key people. We prepare reports, meet with government officials, participate in working groups, and send delegates to committee meetings and the Conference of the Parties. The next CoP, which happens every three years, will take place in Samarkland, Uzbekistan in November 2025 and WPT is hoping a number of important decisions will be made.

The world today and the challenges parrots face are, in many respects, very different from those in 1975. However, much work remains to be done and the World Parrot Trust will continue supporting the development and implementation of CITES, and ensure the voices of parrots are heard. To mark the occasion, CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero reflects on the Convention over the last five decades and looks ahead to the 20th Conference of Parties to be held in Samarkand later this year.

Read the article ‘Reflections on five decades’:
<https://tinyurl.com/cites50>



WPT's Dr. Rowan Martin speaking at CITES SC78 in February 2025

Nigeria Seizes 1,600 Birds in ‘Largest’ Wildlife-trafficking Bust

The WPT was very encouraged to see the recent seizure of over 1,600 illegally trafficked birds intercepted in Lagos airport and getting wide media coverage within Nigeria and internationally. This year has seen a number of seizures of parrots and other birds in Nigeria, reflecting concerted efforts to tackle the illegal trade. The latest seizure, the largest yet, reportedly involved over 1,600 Yellow-fronted Canaries and Rose-ringed Parakeets.



Last month, WPT organised and delivered a training workshop with Nigeria Customs Service staff in Lagos on the management of parrots seized from trade, helping to build capacity to tackle and raise awareness of the illegal bird trade. The recently seized birds are being cared for by Greenfingers Wildlife Rescue Centre in Lagos. Rose-ringed Parakeets and Yellow-fronted Canaries are both species that are widely trapped and exported from West Africa in a global trade that is still permitted by several countries in the region. With the recent passing of the Endangered Species Act and concerted efforts to tackle illegal trade in birds, Nigeria is leading the way.

Read the BBC article:
<https://tinyurl.com/nigeriabust>

New Zealand’s Massive Green Parrots Have Narrowly
Avoided Extinction, But Many of Their Parasites Did Not

In the past few decades, the critically endangered Kākāpō has steadily recovered from near-extinction. However, a new study published in *Current Biology* reveals that its parasites have not. The research showed that greater than 80% of the parasite groups previously found in Kākāpō are no longer seen in today’s birds. The team hasn’t determined whether this has consequences for the birds, but it does raise questions as to what it could mean for their future.

Read the article:
<https://tinyurl.com/kakapostudy>



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ACCESS PAST ISSUES AT: PSITTASCENE.ORG

A vibrant Red-and-green Macaw is shown hanging upside down from a thick, light-brown tree branch. The bird's head is at the bottom, facing downwards, with its large, hooked beak pointing towards the viewer. Its plumage is a striking mix of bright red on its head, neck, and body, with patches of blue and green on its wings and back. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a dense forest or jungle environment.

PARROTS IN THE WILD:

Red-and-green Macaw

(*Ara chloropterus*)

Spectacular and vocal, Red-and-green Macaws engage in play much like humans do. Such activities help cement bonds between pairs and families and keep birds fit and strong.

© Corey Raffel