



The Official **NEWS** Letter of Foster Parrots & **The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary**

## The Lost Pets of Costa Rica By Karen Windsor

It had become a part of the daily routine and certainly an activity most highly anticipated by the dogs, that early morning walk down the dirt road bordering the Hatched To Fly Free property. The ambient temperature would give rise to sweltering humidity as soon as the sun ascended over the line of trees to the east, so the morning dog-walk was always prompt but short. As Marc approached the dirt driveway, two red-lored Amazons perched in the branches of the trees nearby caught his attention. Normally wild parrots quickly retreat and avoid humans, but one of this pair remained low in the tree, signaling Marc with pinning eyes and fanning tail. Marc was intrigued. “Hey, Chico!” he called. “Do you know people? You do, don’t you!” Marc held out his arm and beckoned the bird, who continued to trill and signal while holding his station in the tree. Giving up, Marc turned to leave and took a

few steps. Suddenly there was a red-lored Amazon on his shoulder. Chico accompanied Marc to the house where he hung around for a couple days, visiting with the guests and unabashedly accepting food treats. Then on the second day Chico’s mate flew by, reprimanding him and calling him to her. Chico took to the air after her. He did not return again to the house, although here and there over the next year many of our guests would notice an Amazon parrot perched low in the trees along the road, paying much more attention to them than a wild Amazon should.

While we can’t know the details of Chico’s story, we can presume he had been poached from a nest as a baby and raised by a human family. Whether he was an escaped pet or had been willingly released is anyone’s guess, but Chico had found his way back to the wild and to the life he was always meant to live, albeit with a lingering affection for humans.

It is illegal to keep native parrots as pets in Costa Rica, but this is a practice deeply ingrained in the culture and nest poaching is an activity that persists throughout the country. Costa Rica’s two indigenous macaw species, the scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*) and the great green macaw (*Ara ambiguus*) have experienced alarming declines in population over the last several decades. Having lost



*Pirate (left) and Jimmy - Photo by Marc Johnson*

ground throughout South and Central America, great green macaws are classified as an endangered species. They number only in the hundreds in northern Costa Rica and struggle against shrinking natural habitat in Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Columbia and Ecuador. Scarlet macaws, with a wider range that stretches from south eastern Mexico, down through Central America and well into South America, have fared better, but in Costa Rica where a relatively healthy population persists on the Osa peninsula, only fragmented pockets hang on throughout the rest of the country. Other native Costa Rican parrot species like the red-lored Amazon (*Amazona autumnalis*), the mealy Amazon (*Amazona farinosa*), and smaller species including the

*(cont'd on p. 2)*



*Chico - Photo by Tom Murray*

**It's Our Annual March Matching Fund Drive Issue!**

*See page 7 for details*

# The Lost Pets of Costa Rica

(cont'd from the cover)

crimson fronted conure (*Psittacara finschi*) and the diminutive orange chinned parakeet (*Brotogeris jugularis*) are prolific throughout their ranges, but are nonetheless subject to poaching.

Illegally held parrots are confiscated by the authorities when they are discovered in Costa Rica. Organizations like Hatched To Fly Free on the Osa peninsula are set up to care for birds like this and guide their transition back into the wild. However, human socialization, whether in a positive or negative context, leaves a fingerprint on every single bird who has been lifted from a nest and raised in a cage.

In the summer of 2016, Hatched To Fly Free (HTFF) received 14 parrots for rehabilitation from Parque San Francisco in Dominical, and all were successfully released. Several canary winged parakeets and one crimson fronted conure quickly assimilated into local flocks. One

white headed pionus disappears for days at a time but returns periodically for an easy meal at the house or at the feeding station that has been established to support released parrots before they achieve independence. In 2016 seven red-lore Amazons in all were released by HTFF, and all are now indistinguishable from the hundreds of Amazons that frequent the trees around the compound... except for the two who continue to be challenged by the imprint of their prior human relationships.

Jimmy is a stunning young red-lore male with sleek, green, iridescent

feathers and a confident posture. One of 5 Amazons rehabilitated and released by HTFF toward the end of the summer, Jimmy is strong and assertive and would be a great candidate for assimilation into the wild flocks on the Osa... if it wasn't for his uncompromising enmity toward human men, and his belief that he might actually be able to kill one if he remains committed to the task. It's hard to predict when Jimmy might strike, but early mornings and late afternoons are perilous times for human targets without the sun and intense mid-day heat to signal siesta time for parrots.

By Jimmy's side, always, is his chosen mate, Pirate, an old girl who had spent many years in captivity as a pet, and who, presumably, had been lovingly cared for, which is evident in her affectionate nature. Pirate has

done surprisingly well in the wild and the fact that she has taken a mate of her own species fills us all with hope and pride. But the sound of Pirate flying near signals the inevitable violence of Jimmy. The men all take cover.

A similar issue of aggression surrounded a toucan we met at Sanctuario de Lapas El Manatial, a large wildlife and bird refuge located near Punta Arenas in the north Pacific region of Costa Rica. When we visited the sanctuary in 2014, it was impossible to ignore the beautiful toucan as he paced the



*Louie, released by HTFF early in 2016*

ground inside his aviary, following human visitors and periodically slapping his impressive beak against the aviary wire. He was intent on engaging people, but it was not out of friendliness. "He had been raised as a pet," explained Rodolfo Vargas, the sanctuary Director. "We attempted to rehabilitate and release him, but he repeatedly sought out and attacked children. He is not eligible for release. He must live his life here now."

The sweetness of Pirate and the fearless aggression of Jimmy are polar opposite characteristics that render both birds equally vulnerable as they struggle to cut the ties that continue to bind them to humans. To some degree the relatively remote location of HTFF provides a level of security, but either bird may seek out interaction with a human, either out of love or hate, and the result could be disastrous. The questions we must ask are: when parrots like Pirate and Jimmy are unable to entirely transcend their human relationships, does this render them unreleasable? Does our desire to keep them safe justify a life-long sentence in captivity? What are we to do with the lost pets of Costa Rica? ☻



# Pishu: A Poached Baby Story... By Karen Windsor



**L**ittle Pishu began her life like any wild Amazon parrot. She emerged from her egg, presumably alongside a sibling or two, deep in the humid cavity of a tree with both of her parents sharing the duties of nurturing and feeding their young. Within a couple of months Pishu and her siblings would have left their nest to join their parents in the big world beyond, mastering their gift of flight, discovering what to eat, and learning how to navigate the social rules and patterns of their species. But none of joys of being a wild parrot ever happened for Pishu because she was poached from her nest. We will never know the fate of her siblings, but Pishu may have changed hands several times before finding herself at the Nogales, Arizona border crossing. Had her captors been successful, Pishu would have entered the pet

market in the U.S., landing in the hands of a dealer willing to support the illegal trade in poached babies, but law officials intercepted the her at the border. In December of 2016 Foster Parrots was contacted by Dr. Micheal Burke from the New York Animal Import Center, a federal quarantine station run by the USDA, who asked if Foster Parrots would accept a young Amazon parrot and two orange-fronted conures who had also been seized in a separate border incident.

Formerly the largest importer of psittacines in the world, the U.S. closed its borders to wild-caught birds in 1992 when, in an effort to curb the decimation of birds worldwide throughout their native ranges, the Wild Bird Conservation Act was passed into law. The European Union followed suit in 2007, restricting

the trade in wild caught birds and allowing only captive bred birds from approved countries to enter European pet markets. Closing major international markets has certainly helped, but throughout Latin America the keeping of parrots as pets has not only been a cultural convention for centuries, but a staple source of income for people with limited alternative economic opportunities, so illegal poaching and trade of parrots throughout Mexico, Central and South America continues. With domestically bred parrots in the U.S. saturating the market to the extent where parrots actually no longer have any real monetary value, it's hard to imagine that there's any lingering motivation to continue to smuggle parrots across U.S. borders. And yet here at the sanctuary, 3 little birds are trying to make sense of their new reality.

Pishu is small for her species. We estimate her to be less than 6 months old. While she is fearful of hands she is eager to connect and her baby innocence has captivated the staff and volunteers at the NEEWS. Hoping to give her as natural a life possible within the context of captivity, we have begun Pishu's careful integration into the Central Park Amazon Aviary where a small community of older, wild-caught birds will teach Pishu all about how to be an Amazon parrot. The tragedy of her loss of freedom is only intensified by the loss of her genetic contribution to her species. The conservation status of Lilac crowned Amazons was upgraded in 2014. They are now considered an endangered species. ☺

# Hanging In The Balance: The Captive Parrot Story

By Karen Windsor



The sun is just beginning to dip below the line of trees at the forest's edge and the red lored Amazons are starting to congregate. They fly in pairs and in small groups, coming from the fields and forests where they've spent their day foraging, dining on fruits and flowers in season, playing or napping through the heavy afternoon heat. Throughout the day hours they're widely scattered, but now as late day shadows begin to deepen, the trees are gathering hundreds of quarreling, calling, rejoicing parrots, pulling their numbers together for safety during the long night. In the wild these parrots live their lives as a part of a multi-species community that supports their understanding of and survival in the natural world. Here the fields and the forests pulse with the songs and sounds of insects and amphibians, of hundreds

of species of songbirds, parrots, raptors and scavengers, and of the resonant calls, grunts and growls of mammals and primates... it's a living tapestry of animal cultures and a web of interconnected communication woven together in a fabric that supports each animal's position and purpose within its own society – and its survival in the wild where multi-lingual cues alert all to the presence of predators, the possibility of danger, opportunities to mate and the location of food.

Millions of years of evolution have prepared parrots for life in this world. A few decades of commercial production cannot even begin to prepare them for lives in our world.

Nearly 400 parrots reside at The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary (NEEWS), Foster

Parrots' permanent care sanctuary facility. We log an average of 400 – 700 requests for the surrender of parrots annually, and these numbers are echoed by rescue organizations across the country as we struggle collectively to catch the fall-out from the commercial trade in parrots. Many of these birds carry psychological scars etched by the trauma of capture from the wild, or exhibit behavioral issues typical of wild animals hand-raised by humans as “pets”. Even under the best of circumstances it is difficult to locate homes capable of meeting the needs of an animal as intelligent and socially needy as a parrot. Complicate that relationship with issues of aggression, psychological manifestations of stress like feather plucking or self-mutilation, and vocal expressions that can literally damage human eardrums... Clearly, we are faced with a challenging proposition as we search for answers to an ever-expanding unwanted parrot problem.

The enormous volume of unwanted parrots being fielded by the rescue community indicates an epidemic failure of parrots as pets. But whose failure is it, really? We've done everything in our power to manipulate parrots and to alter and change them to fit better into our lives. We clip their wings and confine them to cages. We remove them from their families and from their flocks and instead try to fit them into ours. We reject their language and expect them to

*(cont'd on p. 5)*

recite our words. We genetically alter their colors and the contours of their feathers to create designer birds. We render them utterly dependent upon us and then, when we find we cannot entirely eradicate the true nature of the animal, we abandon them. Some of these parrots will find their way to a sanctuary or rescue organization. Millions will not.

**F**orty cockatoos reside permanently at the NEEWS and most of them live in large, tenuously compatible aviaries where only our most highly trained staff and volunteers are able to work. Cockatoos are smart. They size up their human care givers, seek out weakness or

trepidation and delight in games of manipulating or dominating their custodians. They are positively delighted when tours are being conducted and they have the opportunity to entertain – and sometimes intimidate - groups of new and interesting people with their physical displays and their ear-splitting, acrobatic vocalizations.

All of these cockatoos crave human attention and long to be a part of a human family; not a single one of them has any chance of ever successfully living as anyone's "pet". Their vocalizations

reach impossible decibels and they are capable of extreme and unpredictable aggression. They have an insatiable hunger for social interaction and they are psychologically and emotionally vulnerable to the extent that self-destructive behaviors like feather-plucking or self-mutilation are almost commonplace amongst Moluccan and Umbrella cockatoos



in captivity. Generally speaking, few people are capable of meeting the needs of a cockatoo over the long term.

To say that parrots are wild animals is to present only a part of the story. These birds may be ruled by all of the hard-wired behaviors and drives of their wild ancestors, but they have been deeply impacted by socialization and by their relationships with humans. Whether they regard us as their mates, their enemies, their family or their gods... whether the ties that bind us are rooted in irrevocable love or psychological

trauma, parrots in captivity suffer the weight of human-avian relationship and have been changed by it.

Working to meet the complex needs of hundreds of parrots in a sanctuary setting, we look toward the natural behavior of parrots in the wild to give us clues in regards to environmental enrichment,

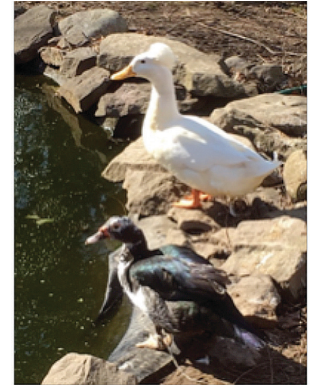
social structure and quality of life in sanctuary. Just like in our homes, however, the sanctuary setting represents a profoundly abnormal environment for parrots. Natural behavior is skewed, not only by the physical limitations of captivity but also by the indelible imprint of human socialization on these

psychologically complex animals. Parrots hang in the balance between who they were evolved to be and what we have tried to mold them into. We now must acknowledge the damage that's been done and take responsibility for the tragic end result of our fascination with these beautiful, intelligent and profoundly complicated creatures. Sanctuary is one answer, but it is not the only answer and it cannot work for every bird. In many ways it is evidence of our failure as guardians to parrots. ☺

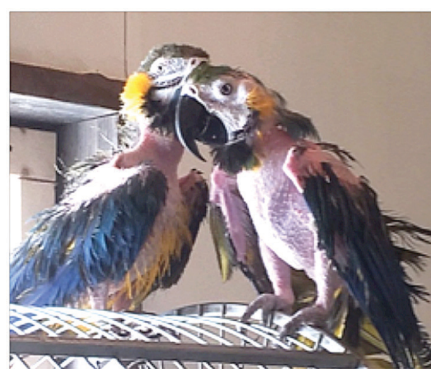
*(This article was adapted from an article previously published in the Delaware Valley Eagle Alliance Newsletter.)*

# Sanctuary Snippets!

On Christmas morning as Marc and Karen drove to the sanctuary they happened upon a female Muscovy duck standing on the side of the highway. With cars speeding by in front of her and a 14 foot barrier behind her, she had nowhere to go. She is now living happily as a Foster Parrots duck!



Introducing our brand new “Poicephalus Aviary”, which is a bright and spacious home to four Senegals and two Myer’s parrots!



Featured in our December newsletter, greenwing macaws, Bonnie and Clyde, and blue & gold macaws, Allie and Honey, now enjoying cage-free life at the NEEWS.

***It's Our Annual March Matching Fund Drive Issue!***

*See page 7 for details*



# It's Foster Parrots' Annual March Matching Fund Drive!

All donations dated in the month of March will be matched up to \$20,000!

Each year, in support of the birds and animals at the New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary and the education, conservation and adoption programs of Foster Parrots, we launch 3 important fundraiser initiatives:

- **Our Annual March Matching Fund Drive** is our biggest and most important fundraising initiative, setting the stage for our work through the upcoming year.
- **Our Fall Fundraiser Extravaganza** is an all-day, on-site, festival event that not only raises critical support, but is a way for us to give back to our loyal supporters.
- **Our Year-End Mini Match** helps us close the gaps in our budget and move into the new year with confidence.

*Please help support the work of Foster Parrots by choosing to participate in at least one of our annual fundraiser events!*

**Your donation matters! Every penny counts! Without you, none of this would be possible.**



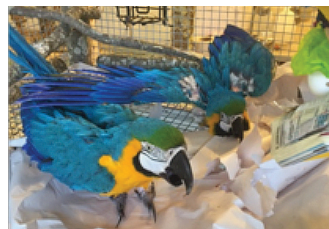
To donate on-line please visit our website at [www.fosterparrots.com](http://www.fosterparrots.com)

or

**Send your check to:**

Foster Parrots, Ltd. • PO Box 34 • Hope Valley, RI • 02832

## More Sanctuary Snippets!



One of our 2016 construction projects was the renovation of the pond for our aquatic turtles, which created this lovely indoor oasis!

Our “Big Quarantine” room, a permanently segregated area of the sanctuary where our viral parrots reside, got a complete facelift with renovations being completed just as the year came to a close.



# FOSTER PARROTS

& The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary  
P.O. Box 34 Hope Valley, RI 02832



**Please Support our Annual March Matching Fund Drive!  
During the month of March, your donation has twice the impact!**

**All donations dated in March will be matched up to \$20,000**

Your contribution to Foster Parrots helps provide care for over 400 parrots and animals at The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary.

It supports our humane education and adoption programs, and it helps to protect the freedom of wild parrots and natural habitat.

**Yes! I want to support the work of Foster Parrots with a donation of: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Please mail checks to:*



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