

MEASURES TO AVERT IMMINENT EXTINCTION OF  
SPIX'S MACAW

Critically endangered

Recent fieldwork strongly suggests that only a single specimen of Spix's (or Little Blue) Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* remains in the wild. This conclusion was reached following a recent field survey supported by ICBP investigating the precise requirements of Spix's Macaw in relation to its habitat. Only a very limited area of the preferred forest remains and it is assumed that this accounted for the original rarity of this beautiful and distinctive species and rendered it particularly vulnerable to trapping. Illegal trapping for the bird trade led to the effective extinction of the species in the wild and, apart from one bird, all of the Spix's Macaws in the world are held in captivity. With a total population of around fifteen birds, the situation is highly critical. The Spix's Macaw is currently the most endangered bird species on earth.

Immediate action needed

Only immediate and bold action can save this magnificent bird from total extinction, and this action must implement a plan that addresses the situation in the wild and that in captivity as a single management issue, with the irreducible aim of saving the species in the wild. This initiative requires substantial funding and a full commitment from and cooperation of the international conservation community, the Brazilian Government, the local people in Curaçá (north-east Bahia state, Brazil), the avicultural experts and the current holders of captive Spix's Macaw.

Current conservation efforts

ICBP first publicised the plight of the Spix's Macaw four years ago. It subsequently played a key role in bringing together relevant parties in an attempt to agree an international rescue and captive breeding programme. Current negotiations involving holders and the Brazilian government to manage the captive stock are welcome but slow and without reference to the long-term conservation of the species in the wild. Despite such efforts and the goodwill expressed by many, the situation continues to deteriorate. The known captive birds are still widely dispersed (and as many as six have died), the possible existence of additional captive birds is still shrouded in secrecy, and the population in the wild has declined to virtual extinction through persistent (documented) illegal trapping.

Rescue programme

ICBP advocates the following four-point rescue programme, to be implemented as a single initiative, as offering the best chance for survival of the Spix's Macaw in its original wild habitat:

## 1. Protection of last wild bird

If the species is allowed to go extinct in the wild, it will be much more difficult to reintroduce captive-bred individuals later on. Guards, if necessary armed, should therefore be posted immediately in the locality frequented by the last bird. A scientist should be stationed in the area to keep the bird under observation.

## 2. Release of at least one captive bird

A suitable wild-caught Spix's Macaw currently held in captivity should be released to provide a partner for the last wild bird. A feather recently collected from the field may allow scientists to determine the sex of the remaining wild bird.

## 3. Habitat conservation measures

The habitat of Spix's Macaw – a special kind of woodland that only grows by seasonal rivers – is not regenerating. Goats, cattle and sheep currently eat all of the young trees and as a consequence the woodland is gradually dying out. Sections of the seasonal rivers must be fenced for five to ten year periods to enable the young trees to grow out of the reach of grazing animals. Ultimately, this will be of benefit to the local farmers since the mature trees provide renewable food for their animals during the dry season.

## 4. Establishment of local breeding centre

To maximise the productivity of the tiny captive population the majority of the captive birds must be moved to a new breeding facility to be established within the current range of the species. This centre should be equipped with the latest captive-breeding technology and staffed by recognised experts. A second flock of 4-6 birds should be maintained at one other locality at an already established parrot breeding facility.

The captive birds at the local breeding centre should be managed in conjunction with the remaining wild birds, or could partly be managed as a semi-wild population. Proper climatic conditions prevailing at the local site will facilitate breeding success and acclimatisation of birds for release.

All captive birds must be brought together in the two breeding localities with no rights of ownership by any individuals.

The local breeding centre will also serve as basis for the habitat protection/restoration programme and initiate a local PR/education campaign.

## Coordinating task force

To promote, supervise and continuously review the implementation of the rescue programme a small task force consisting of experts from relevant disciplines must be established under the auspices of the organisation with the lead responsibility.