

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Critically Endangered Parrots Aided by Canadian Conservationists**

Victoria BC, July 12, 2007

Victoria-based wildlife conservation group OASES is co-sponsoring a presentation by a Canadian biologist in an effort to raise funds to save endangered parrots.

On July 21<sup>st</sup> at 7pm at the Victoria Art Connection, Toa Kyle, a Canadian biologist working in South America, will give a presentation concerning two endangered parrot species: Bolivia's Blue-throated Macaw and Brazil's Golden Conure. Co-sponsored by the World Parrot Trust, the evening promises a fascinating look at wildlife conservation efforts in developing countries.

### **The rarest macaw in the world**

Like most threatened species, parrots suffer from habitat loss though their popularity as pets has accelerated the decline of many species. This combination of rapidly shrinking habitats and trapping for the pet trade is perhaps the main reason the parrot family contains more endangered species relative to other groups of birds.

"With the extinction of the Spix's Macaw in the wild in 2000, the Blue-throated Macaw gained the dubious distinction of being the world's most endangered macaw" stated Kyle. "Less than 100 individuals have been observed in the wild in the last 3 years."

Endemic to the Llanos de Moxos region of north-central Bolivia, the species was being trapped to extinction before biologists finally observed it in its natural habitat for the first time in 1992. This remote, sparsely populated region was a major area of activity for cocaine cartels in the '80s thus making it dangerous for biologists to survey there during that period. Drug activity waned in the early 90's, making it possible to locate Blue-throats, though much work needed to be done to prevent their extinction. The Llanos (Spanish for 'plains' or 'flats') is an extremely difficult area to work in because the majority of it is flooded for 7-8 months each year. Using small airplanes to access otherwise inaccessible flooded areas, researchers live in primitive conditions as they try to prevent the extinction of these unique birds. Travel by horseback and even ox cart during the flooded months is the norm, including the occasional need to swim across caiman infested rivers.

### **Long-term conservation efforts in tumultuous times**

Key to the recovery of any endangered species is knowledge of its reproductive biology. With this concept in mind, the World Parrot Trust commenced field efforts to study the nesting habits of Blue-throats in 2002, an area of investigation that had remained unstudied up to that point. In a region where the average wage is less than \$60/month, it is understandable that locals would actively trap these attractive birds where they can be sold for up to \$500 on the black market. Despite constant human pressures, results for the study have shown that surprisingly, natural factors such as nest predation and severe weather are the main cause of nest failure for the macaws.

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Using digital cameras to photograph the unique facial feather lines each Blue-throated Macaw possess, researchers have been able identify individual macaws through the years without having to trap and band them. It's been seen that some pairs of birds, like 'Droopy and Flo' are seasoned veterans when it comes to raising chicks, while others like 'Pocho and Rosa' have had their nests lost annually to Great-horned Owls and nest flooding.

Dealing with the forces of nature makes the recovery process for Blue-throats hard enough but the current political situation in Bolivia makes it even harder. The government has changed hands a total of four times since 2002. Currently separatist sentiments are running high and the possibility of armed conflict may effectively stop conservation efforts for Blue-throats altogether.

## **The wrong side of the Amazon**

The Golden Conure is a visually striking species of parrot endemic to the eastern Brazilian Amazon; that same region has been hit hardest by habitat destruction over the past six decades as rainforest is felled for timber, cattle ranching and more recently soybean production. This region is also famous for its violent nature. In 2005, Dorothy Stang, an American nun working with the rural poor for over 30 years, was murdered in broad day light by gunmen hired by a local land owner who objected to her efforts to stop illegal logging on peasant's land.

Golden Conures are a fascinating species to work with as they often form large flocks of up to 30 birds and habitually roost together in tree cavities. In captivity, they are communal breeders, where unrelated birds assist parents in raising their young, a behaviour unknown in all other parrot species. At present, their nesting behaviour is still unstudied in the wild thus highlighting the need to accelerate conservation efforts for the birds. Though not suffering as dire a situation as found in Bolivia with Blue-throated Macaws, Golden Conures are a species that is endangered with population estimates currently at 1000-5000 birds remaining in the wild. The future survival of the species is at a critical juncture as current government projects aimed at paving 'TransAmazon' highways and the damming of Amazon tributaries will continue to negatively impact remaining populations of birds.

## **Recurring theme in conservation crisis**

The fact that those countries richest in biodiversity are often the most ill equipped to prevent its loss is a recurrent theme in the current global conservation crisis. Thus, there remains an obligation for developed nations to participate in and aid in the prevention of the loss of endemic species.

Vancouver Island residents interested in attending this presentation are encouraged to contact OASES through their website at [www.oasesconservation.org](http://www.oasesconservation.org) or by email at [oases@shaw.ca](mailto:oases@shaw.ca). Entrance fee is by donation at the door with funds being directed towards efforts to preserve these species.

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### About OASES

OASES is the Organization Advocating Sanctuary for Endangered Species and is a registered Canadian charity located on Vancouver Island. OASES is dedicated to fostering respect and caring for nature and inspiring people to take action and advocate for wildlife conservation.

### About the World Parrot Trust:

The World Parrot Trust works for the conservation and welfare of parrots, worldwide. Founded in 1989, the Trust has regional branches in North America, Asia, Australia and Europe; together they have aided the conservation of 37 parrot species in 22 countries.

### Notes:

1. Parrots possess the greatest proportion of threatened species of all bird families. One third of the almost 300 species are either threatened or endangered in the wild.
  - a. An extreme example of this is seen with the large and colourful macaws, a group of birds so spectacular, over half of the original 17 species have either gone extinct or are well on their way to doing so
2. Hi resolution images of Blue-throated Macaws and Golden Conures are available at: <http://oasesconservation.org/index-4.html>
3. Information about parrots can be found at the World Parrot Trust website at [www.parrots.org](http://www.parrots.org)
4. Media interviews with Toa Kyle are available upon request prior to or after the event.