Puerto Rican Parrot

Amazôna vittata
Familia: Psittacidae
Orden: Psittaciformes

Distribution
The Puerto Rican Parrot, an endemic bird to Puerto Rico, was abundant throughout the island, and also the islands of Culebra, Vieques and Mona. It is estimated that when the Spaniards colonized Puerto Rico, the population of parrots reached a million individuals. Today, the bird is found only in the Caribbean National Forest (known as “El Yunque”) located in the northern part of the island.

Threats
The dramatic reduction in numbers of the parrot at the end of the 19th century was primarily due to deforestation for agriculture, which eliminated extensive areas of mature forest. By the 1940’s, the only population of the Puerto Rican Parrot was found in the Sierra de Luquillo mountains, popularly known as “El Yunque” in eastern Puerto Rico. During the last decades, the population has been estimated at around 30 parrots. The causes for this low population include destruction of habitat, poaching and nest cavity competition with other species such as the Pearly-eyed Thrasher. Hurricane Hugo, in 1989, had a great impact on the population of parrots, reducing the wild population from 47 individuals to 22 individuals. In the years following until the present, that population has increased to approximately 35-40 parrots in the wild.

Methods of Conservation
The Puerto Rican Parrot was designated as an endangered species in 1967. In 1968 cooperative efforts, between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, began to recover this species. These efforts included a captive breeding program which continues today. Other recovery activities include the construction of artificial nest cavities for the parrot, and nest monitoring to prevent depredation and to ensure the normal development of eggs and chicks.

The captive population is maintained for various reasons: to reproduce parrots and increase their numbers, ensure additional populations particularly in the case of a natural catastrophe such as a hurricane, and to provide birds for reintroduction into forests previously inhabited by the parrots. The Luquillo Aviary contains approximately 50 individuals.

The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources constructed a second aviary in the Río Abajo State Forest in order to maintain a second captive bred population. In May 1988, 10 birds were transferred from Luquillo to Río Abajo for breeding and the establishment of a new population. The population at this aviary has increased to approximately 45 parrots.

To kill, damage, harass, trap, buy or sell an endangered species or parts and products derived from that species is a violation of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and can carry a fine up to $100,000 and/or one year in prison.

References


For more information
Please call: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 787/851 7297
or write to: P.O. Box 491
Boquerón, Puerto Rico 00622