



Puerto Rican Parrot

Amazona vittata
Familia: *Psittacidae*
Orden: *Psittaciformes*



Description

The Puerto Rican Parrot or “Iguaca” (name given by the Taino Indians) is a bright green bird with a red forehead, a white ring around the eye, and blue primary feathers. The juveniles are very similar in appearance to the adults. The females look like the males and measure approximately 12 inches in size.

Biological Information

The Puerto Rican Parrot reaches sexual maturity at approximately three to five years of age. The parrots usually form long lasting pairs. The pairs stay together throughout most of the year, except when the female is incubating eggs then the male assumes the responsibility of providing food. The parrot constructs its nest in cavities that are found in large trees such as the palo colorado (*Cyrilla racemiflora*). Nesting begins in the months of February and March and continues until June. Nesting occurs during the driest part of the year and during the fruiting period of the Sierra palm which is the parrot’s principal food source during the period of reproduction.

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 1993, 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

Snyder, N.F., J.W. Wiley, and C.B. Kepler: 1987. The parrots of Luquillo: natural history and conservation of the Puerto Rican parrot. West. Found. Vet. Zool., Los Angeles.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Recovery plan for the Puerto Rican parrot, *Amazona vittata*. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Atlanta, Georgia. 69 pp.

For more information

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