



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW TIME (07:16)

GREAT GREEN MACAW (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH ERIC HORSTMAN)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS.LEON: Hello there. This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And today we have Eric Horstman on the line. Eric is the Executive Director of the Pro-Forrest Foundation in Ecuador. Since 1993, the foundation has worked to conserve a resident population of seven to nine individual great green macaws in and around Cerro Blanco. We'll get to that a little later. First, Eric, can you get us started today by telling us a little about the great green macaw.

MR. HORSTMAN: The great green macaw is one of the larger macaw species. From the tip of the beak to the tail it measures from 30 to 33 inches. Overall it's kind of a pale green color. Very spectacular bill, black with a red band behind it. Kind of pale around the eyes it has very distinct spider web-like or vein-like markings, which is used to identify macaws. And it has red, yellow, blue and even orange on the tail feathers. So it's just – it's overall a stunning bird.

MS.LEON: All right. So what are the primary threats to the species? And how is the foundation working to eliminate, reduce or mitigate those threats?

MR. HORSTMAN: Well the great green macaw, in its natural range – it's found from Honduras to Cerro Blanco here and near the outskirts of the city Guayaquil, which is where we work at the very southern part of its extension of its range. This species of macaw prefers low-land humid to deciduous or dry forest. In our case it's dry forest. And that puts it in conflict with everything from expanding cities to, you know agriculture expansion and whatnot.

So most of the forests, low-lands tropical forests within its range have been cut down or are in the process of being, and that in itself is the biggest threat to the macaw. On top of that it is a – because of it being such a spectacular bird, is actually very coveted in the national, in the case of Ecuador, and international pet trade, so there are people who go out and search out the nests of the macaws in the wild.

Sometimes they'll climb up the nest to get the chicks. Other times they'll cut down the nest tree and if the chicks survive the fall, they'll take them and sell them as pets. So those two factors combined have overall throughout its range, put it on the endangered species list. And in the case of Ecuador, which we have a unique sub-species, *guayaquilensis*, named after I imagine the city of Guayaquil, it's critically endangered.

MS.LEON: All right. So I understand a key component of the conservation program for the great green macaw is to involve local landowners. How is the foundation engaging these landowners and getting their buy-in?

MR. HORSTMAN: Yeah. It's critical because, you know the macaw by and large in Ecuador and pretty much, you know throughout its range, is for the most part found on private land. You know there are some parks and protected areas, in our case Cerro Blanco, which does provide some protection for them. But unfortunately for us, the species ranges quite widely and so do use areas outside of the protected forest. And so that is key that we have local landowners engaged in the conservation.

And in our case much of the land where the macaws roam is a combination of agriculture land, the quintessential slash and burn agriculture that's been practiced for many years. Large areas of pasture grasses for cattle grazing and patches of forest.

So we have gone out, outside of the boundaries of our protected forest to work with local landowners to identify the forests where the macaws are still found on their land. And come up with protection strategies for them, which basically involves people out and about, checking, making sure that poachers are coming in to, you know take the chicks if there are nests. Or start forest fires during the dry season, which could destroy the forest. Or, you know forest trees, especially hardwoods to sell for wood furniture or to make charcoal.

So it's a fairly complicated mix of things, but by and large we have landowners' interest. We do provide some small economic incentives, especially if they identify macaws and nests on their land, they do receive some recognition. And we're there to provide support as much as possible for them to help conserve this and many other species.

MS.LEON: All right. So the foundation is also reaching out and educating youth about the importance of this species and other rare species there in Ecuador. Is that right?

MR. HORSTMAN: Yes. You know, our education program basically works on two fronts. With the adults, including the landowners, their workers, which is a key component because those are the people who are out daily and are in contact with macaws. We have created what we call Community Park Warden Program where interested people, community members are invited to receive some training. We basically have them as part of biologists and they're out registering macaw sightings, they call it into us, we confirm.

So supporting them and their reforestation programs, that's a key component because this particular ecosystem is incredibly fragmented, Ecuadorian dry forest. And so we're basically through our own project in Cerro Blanco, the protected forest as well as outside working to restore habitat, and we're also working quite a lot with local school kids. And that involves working through, you know a formal setting as ecological clubs as well as informal going and visiting the school.

But more importantly taking the kids out here to visit Cerro Blanco. We do have a couple of great green macaws here on site that were former pets that have been donated so that the kids can actually see the macaws in the wild, which – or not in the wild, but at least in a semi-natural situation here in Cerro Blanco.

MS.LEON: So the hope then is that the kids are gonna relay this conservation message to their parents?

MR. HORSTMAN: Yeah. Because, you know it's been proven time and time again that with adult education it's a lot more of a challenge because people kind of get set in their ways. You know we have kids that we are reaching whose parents are still out there cutting down trees, maybe some of them are even occasionally capturing and selling macaws. So the most effective way to get to them is through their kids. And it's been amazing the response that we've had.

MS.LEON: Oh, that's wonderful. Thank you so much, Eric, for taking the time to tell us more about this species and the work of your foundation. It was a real pleasure having you on today.

MR. HORSTMAN: Thank you very much.