



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Puerto Rican Parrot 2002 Update



What are the survival rates and causes of mortality of parrots from the two previous releases?

In 2000, ten (10) captive-reared parrots were released into the Caribbean National Forest (CNF). Sixteen (16) additional birds were released in the summer of 2001. The survival of these released parrots can only be documented for 9-12 months after their release due to the life expectancy of the batteries in the radio telemetry transmitters each released bird is wearing. Five of the ten parrots released in 2000 were still alive after 9 months. In 2001, transmitters signals for nine (9) of the sixteen (16) parrots were lost, within five (5) months after their release. Since that time, USFWS personnel has been unable to locate them again. Three released parrots, from 2001, were confirmed alive 9 months after the release, and four either succumbed to predation by Red-tailed hawks or died of other causes. The fate of the remaining released parrots is undetermined at this time. It appears that predation by Red-tailed hawks may be a major mortality factor for both wild PR parrots and those released from captivity.

What are the origins and numbers of parrots to be released on May 14, 2002?

On May 14, 2002, nine (9) Puerto Rican parrots all from the Luquillo Aviary will be released into the Caribbean National Forest. Due to a potential threat of a serious disease at the Río Abajo Aviary, a decision was made not to use parrots from that aviary until the health issues are completely addressed. Nevertheless, the group of nine parrots to be released includes two birds transferred from the Río Abajo Aviary in 2001. These are birds that were not ready to be released last year.

Why is the release scheduled for May?

The wild parrots start flocking after the breeding season (usually the end of May). Scientists believe that it is easier for the released birds to integrate into the wild flock following the breeding season. Rapid integration into the wild flock may increase chances of survival for the released birds.

When will the next release be and why?

USFWS scientists will not release parrots in 2003 and perhaps not in 2004. Further evaluation is needed to continue refining the release techniques. Time is also needed to increase the numbers of birds that are suitable for release. In addition, a greater number of parrots will be necessary in order to start a second wild population in the Karst region of northern Puerto Rico. During 2003 and 2004, scientists will concentrate on developing the plans and strategies to start this new phase of the release program including building the infrastructure necessary for pre-release training in Río Abajo Commonwealth Forest.

Meanwhile, USFWS personnel will concentrate on improving census methods, and searching for parrot activity within CNF and surrounding areas to confirm the parrot's current status in the wild.

What are the current numbers of parrots in the wild and in the two aviaries?

The last population survey documented 21-24 wild parrots. These numbers are very low, and suggest that either the population is declining rapidly or that the wild birds are dispersing to undetermined sites in or outside CNF. As of the end of March 2002, we had 144 Puerto Rican parrots at both aviaries including 16 hatchlings. Less than 24 individuals, however, comprise the fertile breeding population at both aviaries. The low number of fertile pairs highlights the need to improve husbandry techniques including remodeling the aviary facilities and infrastructure. In order to resolve major safety and health concerns for both parrots and employees, the Service is proposing the relocation of the Luquillo Aviary. This action is expected to enhance opportunities for the formation of new pairs and breeding success at Luquillo.