

Help stop this bird from being an ex-parrot

Cleese's pet shop plea as 89 species face extinction

BY JOHN INGHAM
ENVIRONMENT EDITOR

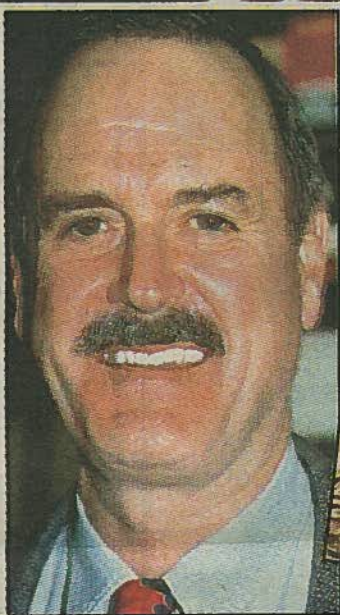
IN the wilds of Brazil, the Spix Macaw is a very lonely parrot. It is the sole survivor of the species in a rainforest that once teemed with the colourful birds.

But yesterday the Spix found a friend in John Cleese, the Monty Python star whose Dead Parrot sketch has become a comedy classic.

The man whose Norwegian Blue had "ceased to be" stepped forward to champion the cause of endangered birds as the World Parrot Trust and the World Wide Fund for Nature warned that 89 of the 330 parrot species are facing extinction.

They have been hit by the pet trade and the destruction of their forests. In the case of the Spix, though there is only one left in the wilds, there are about 40 in captivity.

Conservationists are trying to negotiate with bird collectors to return them to the forests. In the meantime, Cleese launched a video, entitled The Live Parrot, backing a world-wide pro-



tection campaign. The video opens with the manic Dead Parrot sketch before Cleese goes eyeball to eyeball with captive birds.

He asks: "Can we face the extinction of these beautiful birds?" And he claims that saving the parrots could be just as good for humans as well.

"If we save the parrots, we might yet save ourselves. We need the rainforests as much as the parrots do. The rainforests are the lungs of the planet. They are essential for human health. These forests also provide vital medicines with many more yet

to be discovered." Cleese appeals to pet owners to think again before buying a parrot. "A pet parrot can need as much attention as a human baby and it can need it for up to 50 years," he adds.

As a parrot called Groucho sings "How Much Is That Doggy In The Window" in the background, Cleese urges: "So please, think hard before you bring a pet parrot into your home - especially a troublemaker like that one."

Dr Paul Toyne, a WWF conservation officer, said yesterday: "Habitat



UNDER
THREAT:
The Spix.
Inset:
Cleese's
Dead
Parrot
sketch

Playing the field is bad for your knees

BY MICHAEL HANLON
SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT

TOO much sex is bringing our top footballers to their knees.

Scientist Paul Oyudo suggests that they are especially prone to arthritic knee injuries triggered by sexually-transmitted bacteria, picked up through unprotected sex.

Since professional footballers tend to have more sex than most men their age, it puts them most at risk.

Mr Oyudo, of Queen Mary and Westfield College in London, looked at 10 sportsmen with persistent knee injuries. Of the 10 unnamed athletes, six were footballers - five of them playing in the Premiership.

Five of the footballers admitted having had more than 11 sexual partners. Only about one in four British men in their mid-twenties claims such a high score.

Mr Oyudo wrote: "The level of promiscuity among these sportsmen calls for concern. Footballers appear to be the greatest culprits."

Adding that footballers have more sexual opportunities than most men, he went on: "They are very rich and have lots of spare time."

A spokesman for the Football Association said that young players were routinely given "general sex education", including advice on how to avoid sexually-transmitted diseases.

destruction and a rapacious trade threatens the world's most magnificent birds with imminent extinction." Half of the world's forests have been lost to development, logging and fires, he said.

At the same time about 350,000 parrots were traded legally around the world in 1995, a significant drop from 700,000 sold in 1988. Britain imported about 5,500 birds in 1997, of which 30 per cent were captive bred.

But Dr Toyne fears that parrot smuggling accounts for a significant share of the world's £3billion illicit trade in wildlife. "For every bird that survives the trading process, four will die along the way."

The campaign has come too late for countless parrots. The last species to die out was America's Carolina Parakeet in 1914, while islands in the Indian Ocean have witnessed the loss of the Rodrigan Blue, the Seychelles Parakeet and the Crested Grey Parakeet of Mauritius.

OPINION: PAGE 10