

89 Parrot Species Face Extinction

Global Action Plan Launched to Save Them



London - A global action plan has been launched by the World Parrot Trust and WWF to help save 89 parrot species from extinction. The World Conservation Union's Parrot Action Plan assesses the status of the world's most endangered parrots and finds that a staggering 27% of the world's 330 species of parrots are on the brink of extinction, making them the most endangered bird family on Earth.

The Parrot Action Plan is the first ever attempt to launch a global strategy to save the world's parrots. It recommends that Recovery Teams should be set up to save each threatened species and emphasises that urgent action is needed to combat the two principal threats to parrots - habitat loss and the trade in parrots for the pet market. Over 50% of the world's forests have now been lost and the global trade in parrots is a significant part of the \$5 billion a year international wildlife trade. For every bird that survives the trading process, at least four will die along the way. There are 58 species of parrot threatened with extinction as a direct result of this trade.

"Habitat destruction and a rapacious trade threatens the world's most magnificent birds with imminent extinction", said Dr Paul Toyne, Conservation Officer for WWF-UK. "The Parrot Action Plan will play a vital role in helping forge action to save them from the brink. To be truly effective though, Governments must take firm action to increase protection for forest

habitat, promote the independent certification of managed forests by the FSC, and enforce CITES, the Convention which regulates the trade in wild animals."

John Cleese, internationally famous for the Monty Python "Dead Parrot" sketch, is supporting the call for action to save the world's parrots. He says "All the parrots desperately need our help. Help from me, help from you. What exactly can you do? Simple: support the international conservation work of the World Parrot Trust."

Due to hunting and habitat destruction at least 27 species have already become extinct, including the Cuban Macaw, the Seychelles parakeet and the Carolina parrot in the United States.

There are 39 threatened parrot species found in the Asia-Pacific region, with the highest numbers occurring in Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. The resurgence of forest fires in Indonesia this week has increased the risk to parrots in this region. The famous New Zealand Kakapo is now extinct in the wild and only 54 remain in semi-captivity.

There are 47 threatened parrot species that occur in Latin America and the Caribbean region with Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Ecuador supporting the highest numbers of threatened species. The Spix's Macaw is the world's most endangered parrot in the wild, with a

solitary male remaining in its natural habitat in Brazil. Its population has been decimated by the demand from collectors.

The Hyacinth Macaw is one of the world's largest and most striking parrots. With a population of around 3,000 it is listed as vulnerable to extinction and is threatened by illegal trade and destruction of its habitat.

The news for parrots is not all bad however. At a ceremony to launch the Parrot Action Plan, the World Parrot Trust's Carolina Medal for parrot conservation was awarded to Dr Carl Jones who has been instrumental in helping bring the Echo Parakeet back from the brink of extinction. In 1987 there were only 8-12 birds left in the wild due to habitat destruction. Following a dedicated conservation programme, part funded by the World Parrot Trust and the UK Parrot Society, there are now up to 100 birds in the wild. In the last year alone 22 captive-reared Echo parakeets were released.

"If we save the parrots we might yet save ourselves," said Mike Reynolds, Director of the World Parrot Trust. "We need the rainforests as much as the parrots do. The rainforests are the lungs of the planet, essential for human health. These forests also provide vital medicines with many more yet to be discovered," he added.

THE RESULTS ... →

National News

Parrots faced with threat of extinction

Monty Python star joins campaign to save 89 species from collectors and loss of habitat

Tim Radford
Science Editor

They will, in the immortal words of John Cleese clutching a stuffed Norwegian blue in a Monty Python sketch almost 30 years ago, soon be no more. They will cease to be. They will go to meet their maker. They will be late parrots.

Conservationists yesterday invoked the famous parrot sketch in a new campaign to save parrots from extinction. More than one quarter of the parrot family — the psittaciformes — are threatened or in imminent danger of extinction, the World Wide Fund for Nature revealed.

The WWF, the World Conservation Union, the Cornwall-based World Parrot Trust and, by video from Santa Barbara zoo, John Cleese himself launched the campaign to save 89 species of parrot in the Americas, south-east Asia, the Indian Ocean and Australia.

These include the Spix's macaw — there is only one male left in the wild in Bahia, Brazil — the New Zealand kakapo, a ground-dwelling parrot that exists only in semi-captivity, the echo parakeet of Mauritius and the huge and beautiful hyacinth macaw, whose last stronghold in Bolivia is about to be disrupted by oil pipelines.

Coveted as pets

Lear's macaw on the Brazilian plateau is down to 150, while the red-tailed amazon in Sao Paulo numbers more than 4,000. Some, like the scarlet macaw, with more than 10,000 in the wild in Venezuela, Brazil, Guyana and Peru, are listed as "vulnerable" but are particularly coveted by pet-keepers and are likely to become rapidly more vulnerable as the Amazon forests are cleared.

Scientists and campaigners want to set up recovery teams to save each species and urge governments to tackle the two

greatest threats to parrots: the loss of forests in which to live and multiply and the trade in wildlife for collectors.

More than half of the world's original forests have been cleared, burned or fragmented. And the commercial trade in parrots is a significant part of the \$3bn (£3bn) annual international trade in wildlife. But for every wild parrot that makes it safely to a perch in a collector's cage, four die along the way. Altogether 27 species have become extinct, including the Carolina parakeet of North America and island birds such as the Seychelles parakeet, the Cuban macaw and the Rodrigues blue, from the island of Rodrigues, next to Mauritius.

Habitats destroyed

There are around 10,000 species of birds altogether, and one species in 10 is endangered. There are 330 species of parrot, and 27% are at risk. Island parrots are most at risk because of habitat destruction and the introduction of unfamiliar predators such as rats, which take both eggs and fledglings and sometimes nesting adults.

There are only 800 St Vincent parrots on the island of St Vincent and fewer than 2,000 blue lorikeets left in the Society Islands of the Pacific.

In Amazonia, forests are dwindling, food supplies are imperilled and parrots are part of a lucrative trade. But in captivity many are hard to breed. Parrot specialists have for more than a decade watched helplessly as the wild Spix's macaw population fell to one. Between 30 and 40 exist in captivity, but conservationists have been unable to obtain breeding partners or eggs to be hatched.

The male Spix has been partnered with an Illiger's macaw, in the hope that the pair could be persuaded to foster fertilised Spix eggs. This would require the cooperation of the private collectors. There had,



The scarlet macaw of Brazil, above, is down to 150 birds in the wild. Below left, the St Vincent parrot numbers 800, while Spix's macaw, below right, also of Brazil, has been reduced to one male



'We have the technology to save all endangered species, but what we need is an effective system'



John Cleese: no more dead parrots

said Mike Reynolds of the World Parrot Trust, been no such cooperation yet.

Carl Jones brought the echo parakeet of Mauritius back to life by direct action. In 1987 it was down to eight when, to the alarm of conservation funding bodies, he started collecting eggs, hatching them and hand-rearing parakeets in a protected area. There are now 109 in the wild, and another 22 captive-reared birds were released into the wild last year.

He has also helped to restore the Mauritius kestrel and the pink pigeon, both native to the island home of the most famous extinct bird, the dodo. The Mauritius government has created a national park to preserve their habitats. "We have the technology to save all the endangered species of the world," said Dr Jones.

The parrot action plan is aimed at conservationists and governments of more than 50 countries. "What we are looking for is an effective system of protected areas which cover all types of forests, which will look after the world's parrots and indeed all the other species that are found in the forests," said Paul Toyne of WWF-UK. "We need to connect fragments of forests, and we need to protect them. We are calling on the governments to get at least 10% of the world's forests managed and protected."

Legal trade halved

Ten years ago 700,000 parrots were legally imported to the EU; the trade has fallen to 350,000. But rare parrots are still being smuggled in illegally. "The majority of parrots that are kept in captivity are captive-bred," Dr Toyne said. "The conservation message has got through to pet owners. The demand for parrots from the wild coming into the UK is decreasing."

John Cleese — on videotape, intermittently interrupted by an Amazon parrot that could sing "Alouette" and other ballads — said all the parrots needed human help. "Help parrots to survive in the wild and survive in our homes. We need the rainforests as much as the parrots do, because the rainforests are the lungs of the planet. They are essential for human health. These forests provide many of our most vital medicines, including certainly some that haven't been discovered yet."

"How much is that doggie in the window?" sang his parrot companion.

Above:
The Guardian

THE TIMES FRIDAY AUGUST 6 1999

News 11

Collectors may drive world's rarest parrot to extinction

TWO men on opposite sides of the world are holding the fate of the world's rarest parrot in their hands, it was claimed yesterday.

Spix's macaw, a blue parrot from the Bahia region of Brazil, is down to one solitary wild male, yet the failure of two private collectors to co-operate has jeopardised an ambitious scheme by an international team of scientists, conservationists and the Brazilian Government to bring together captive-bred male and female birds and reintroduce their offspring to the wild.

Mike Reynolds of the World Parrot Trust said yesterday: "They are supposed to co-operate with the Brazilian Government to produce birds for release into the wild. They have not done what they are supposed to do. It is very shocking. They are not behaving responsibly."

The numbers of Spix's macaw have been devastated over recent decades by poachers, supplying the illegal pet

Nick Nuttall,
environment
correspondent,
reports on the
plight of
Spix's macaw

trade, loss of habitat and by African killer bees taking over nesting holes.

Mr Reynolds named the pair as Antonio De Dizio, a Filipino businessman who owns around 1,000 aviaries. He is estimated to have around 30 Spix's macaws.

The other key collector is Joseph Hämmerli, a Swiss dentist, who has up to 12. Yesterday, however, Dr Hämmerli said he had sold his Spix's macaws. "I used to have a lot but now I have none," he said. "I have sold them to another person in Switzerland."

Another two Spix's are in captivity at the Loro Parque Fundación in Tenerife.

Tony Juniper, an environmentalist who discovered the sole Spix's macaw in 1990 after it was thought that the species had become extinct, said that it was vital that political and moral pressure was put on the two collectors. "If this last one goes, then the chances of re-establishing a wild population might become almost impossible," he said.

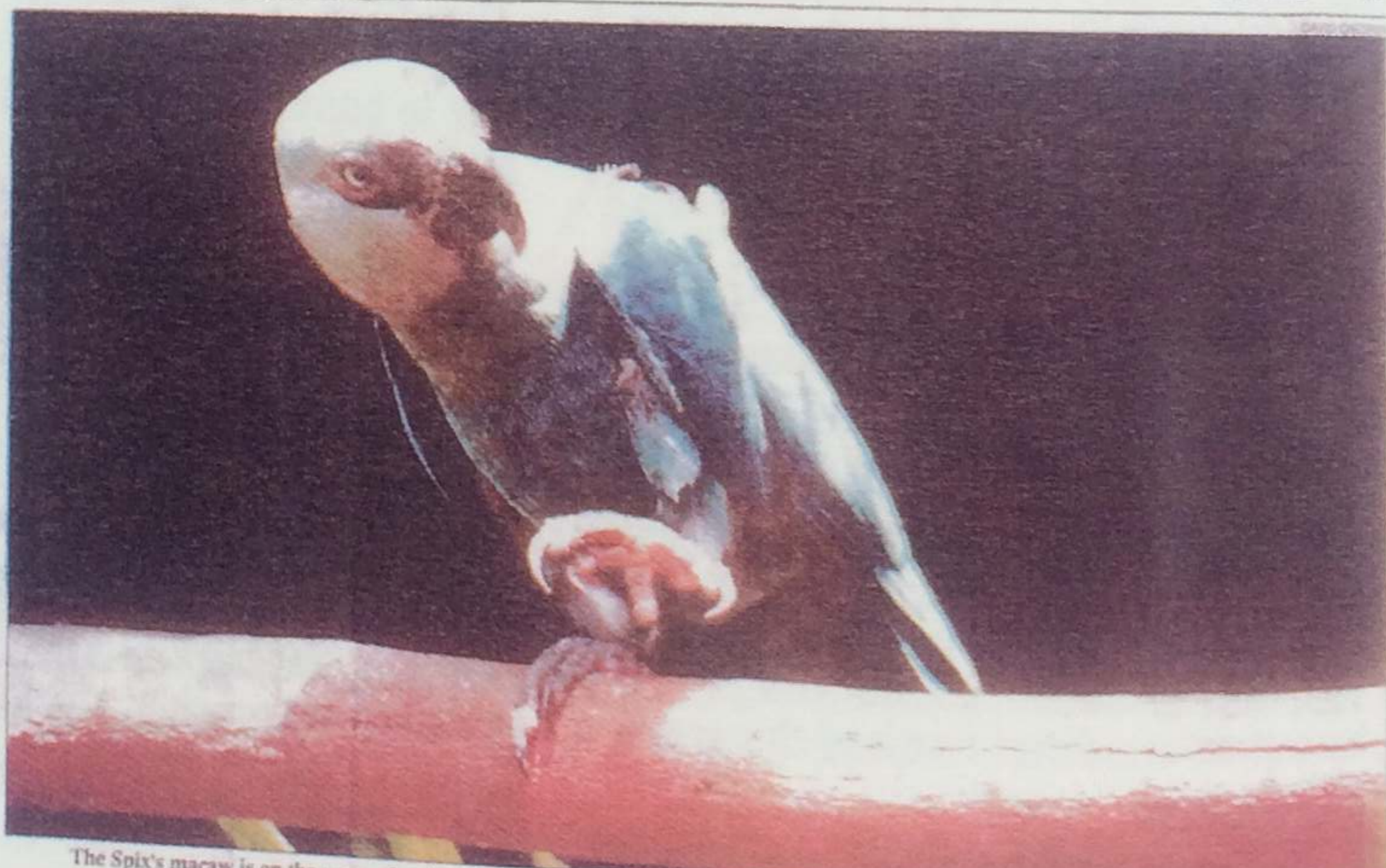
Mr Juniper, co-author of *Parrots: A Guide to Parrots of the World*, which has become the key reference book, said this last male is needed to teach captive-bred ones how to survive.

"It knows what predators look like, it knows where the food is, it knows where there is water in the dry season and where nesting sites are," he said.

The urgency of getting birds back to Brazil has been intensified by the remaining male's amorous liaison with a female Illiger's macaw, in the hope that they may produce hybrid offspring, which, if fertile, could spell the end of the pure Spix's line.

Mr Juniper, who is also campaigns director for Friends of the Earth, said that the two collectors might be concerned that their birds will be poached if returned to Brazil and released into the wild, but he said that this was unlikely, since local people were fiercely proud of their rare parrot and had pledged to defend it.

Mr Juniper said that since the last male was discovered,



The Spix's macaw is on the verge of extinction in the wild and private collectors appear to be reluctant to step forward and help to save it

camera crews, scientists and birdwatchers have descended on the area, bringing money to a hard-pressed region.

"Local people take an immense pride. They even have a pizza restaurant called the Blue Macaw. It is an enormous boost for a poor part of the world," he said.

The row emerged yesterday as the Trust and the World Wide Fund for Nature published a report showing that more than a quarter of the world's remaining parrot species — that is, 89 of 330 — are heading for extinction through a combination of habitat destruction, hunting for food and the pet trade.

Among those at risk are Lear's macaw, which is down to an estimated 150 wild birds in northeast Brazil; the Red-Tailed Amazon, down to between 4,000 and 6,000 in the coastal areas of São Paulo, Brazil; Puerto Rico's parrot, found in the Central Andes region of Colombia and down to less than 1,000; and the Yellow-Eared

parrot, with only 61 individuals living in the wild in Colombia and northwest Ecuador.

Others heading for extinction include the St Vincent parrot, down to some 800 birds in the West Indies; the Maroon-fronted parrot, which numbers fewer than 5,000 in north eastern Mexico; the Puerto Rico parrot, with a total of around 50 wild birds in Puerto Rico; the Philippine cockatoo, with just between 2,000 to 4,000 left; the Norfolk Island parakeet, which, at the last count in 1991, numbered just 40 wild birds; the Night parrot, from Australia, whose numbers are unknown but believed to be small; the Kakapo of New Zealand, which is thought to be down to just 50; the Mauritius parakeet, which numbers around 100; and the Blue Lorikeet, which is found only in the Pacific and whose numbers are between 1,000 and 2,000 in the wild.



The Red-Tailed Amazon is declining in its Brazilian home

BIRD TALK

- Some domestic parrot species live up to 70 years, but those in the wild face more threats and die much younger.
- Parrot collecting goes back at least a thousand years. Greeks and Romans collected them, naming one species after Alexander the Great.
- Parrots are said to be the most intelligent of birds. One bird, an American grey, was trained to answer various questions and identify colours and numbers.
- Nearly all domestic parrots can talk and identify up to 250 words. They have to be trained when young.
- Wild parrots sell to collectors for as much as £25,000, but the average domestic bird sells for about £400.

Right: The Times

Leading article, page 23

Help stop this bird from being an ex-parrot



WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE'S DEAD PARROT CAMPAIGN

Cleese's pet shop plea as 89 species face extinction

BY JOHN INGHAM
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

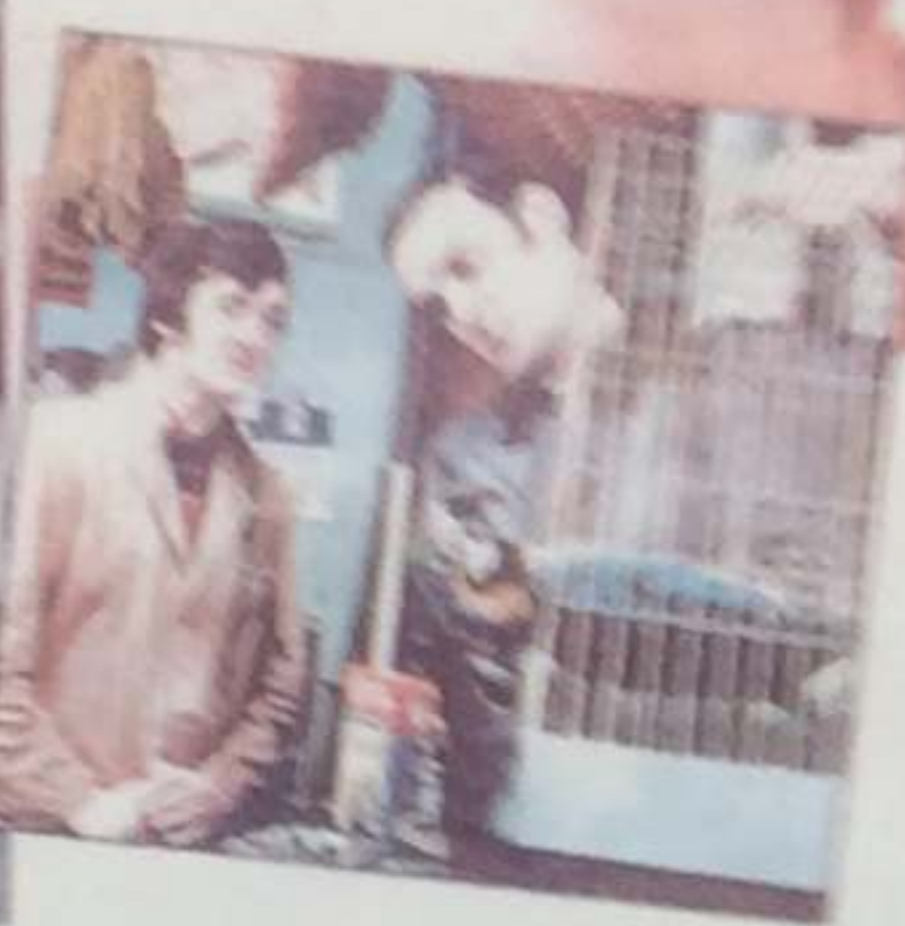
IN the wilds of Brazil, the São Paulo Macaw is a very lonely parrot. It is the sole survivor of the species in a rainforest that once teemed with the colourful birds.

But yesterday the São Paulo is joined 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 São Paulo, though, there is only one left in the wild, there are about 40 in captivity.

Conservationists are trying to re-introduce wild birds to their natural habitats. In the meantime, Cleese launched a video, entitled *The Live Parrot*, backing a worldwide pro-



tection campaign. The video opens with the classic Dead Parrot sketch which Cleese goes on to explain is an exaggeration.

He asks: "Can we face the extinction of these beautiful birds?" And he claims that selling the parrots could be used to support the business as well.

"If we save the parrots, we might save ourselves. We need the rain forests 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 cost as much as £1000 as a human baby and it can live a lot longer than you," he adds.

As a pet owner, Cleese says: "How much is *The Dog in the Window* in the background? Cleese says: "So please, think hard before you bring a pet parrot into your home - especially a green-winged lovebird."

Dr Paul Triggs, a WWF conservation officer, said yesterday: "Thank

you for your support. The world's most magnificent birds are disappearing at a rate of about 1000 a year. It is a tragedy that we can do nothing to prevent this. We need your support to help us save the world's most magnificent birds."

Dr Triggs says that parrot smuggling accounts for a significant amount of the world's illegal bird 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 was *American Cuckoo* (Parrot) in 1982, while millions of the million-dollar blue-winged lovebird at the Redgrave Ham, the Scimitar Parrot and the Crested Grebe are still being traded.

OPINION PAGE 16

Dead parrot takes off

COMEDIAN John Cleese is quite literally breathing life into an old joke. He has resurrected the Monty Python Dead Parrot sketch in aid of a charity to save exotic birds from extinction. The new version will feature a living parrot instead of the one famously nailed to its perch. Butchering one dead parrot joke seems a worthy price to pay if it saves a whole species.

Cleese out to save parrot

John Cleese, who took part in the classic Monty Python "Dead Parrot" comedy sketch, helped conservation groups launch an action plan yesterday designed to save many of the birds from extinction.

Eighty-nine of the 330 parrot species are in danger of dying out, says the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Parrot Trust. At least 27 species have already become extinct. Deforestation and trade in wild parrots for pets have been responsible for much of the collapse in populations. The new plan spells out ways in which nations can help save rare species.

Clockwise from Top Left: The Express, The Express (Editorial), The Daily Telegraph, Western Morning News, The Times, The Times (Editorial)

DEAD PARROTS

The demise of the world's most vivid and talkative avian

Rumours of the parrot's demise have not been exaggerated. More than a quarter of all remaining species of this precious bird are endangered and John Cleese, who once so famously made fun of a defunct *Psittacus*, has decided to adopt a more sympathetic stance. He has offered his support to a World Wide Fund for Nature scheme to help to preserve the parrot and its rainforest habitat.

Right from the beginning these tropical avians have been prized as much for their particoloured plumage as for their mimicry of human speech. In fact *Ctesias*, who made the first ever literary mention of a parrot in his *Indika*, appeared to believe that this bird squawked quite naturally in an Indian tongue, and he was only amazed that it could also be instructed in Greek. Parrots were later to be celebrated by a succession of classical poets and became quite fashionable in Rome where they would be displayed sitting prettily in elaborate filigreed aviaries. Parrots have always made popular pets. Intelligent creatures which have adapted to live in a complex physical and social environment, they have developed a capacity for learning and interaction which, like their habit of feeding themselves with their claws, is unique among birds.

In classical times some parrots would certainly have ended up on the banquet table. One emperor is even supposed to have fed them to his lions. But in modern times they would make a somewhat over-expensive menu item. In an avaricious pet trade which creates an illegal market for endangered species, a single bird can change hands for thousands of pounds. And though zoos, parks and licensed dealers are increasingly resorting to captive breeding programmes, birds and their eggs still continue to be stolen from the wild and smuggled overseas.

The beauty of the parrot's plumage has been the main cause of its demise. They are coveted for their conspicuous colouration. But now the time has come to turn their attractiveness back to their advantage. Because the *Psittacidae* are so appealing — even if only in the form of the budgie or cockateel — public support for any appeal should be easier to rouse up. The gradual destruction of the tropical habitats is the single most threatening factor in the parrot's disappearance. So if the bird will put in a publicity appearance, not only will some of the world's most vivid and talkative avians be rescued from the fringes of extinction, but a host of other less conspicuous creatures will benefit.

Governments given action plan

THE World Wide Fund for Nature report published yesterday was accompanied by an action plan to save the world's parrots (Nick Nutall) writes. The plan, which is being sent to governments around the world, has won the backing of John Cleese. He, comedian, who has made a 'live' parrot video echoing his famous dead parrot sketch on the series *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Yesterday Julian Penfiter, the President of the Royal Society for the

Protection of Birds, gave Dr Carl Jones the Cavallini Medal for parrot conservation. Dr Jones, a Welshman and conservationist, has played a key role in rescuing the Echo Parakeet of Mauritius from extinction. In 1987, there were only between eight to 10 birds left in the wild. Now there are more than 100. Dr Jones said the work underscored how captive breeding programmes can work. He said that they had found that young Echo parakeets were starving

because of a lack of food due to habitat loss. Dr Jones' team removes the young birds from the nests, feeds them and returns them to the wild. They also control predators, such as rats, and cultivate fruit trees and other plants before reintroducing them back into the parrots' forest. Dr Jones said when a parrot species became extinct, it created an ecological "void" with serious knock-on effects. He said that parrots were vital for spreading seeds from fruit trees.

WESTERN MORNING NEWS • SATURDAY AUGUST 7 1999

Global bid to save parrot

PHIL MONCKTON



ENDANGERED SPECIES: Parrots at Paradise Park, Hayle

A TINT Cornwall-based charity has inspired a global campaign to save the most endangered bird species from extinction.

The World Parrot Trust, founded at Paradise Park, Hayle, 10 years ago, joined the struggle with the World Wildlife Fund this week when a massive Parrot Action Plan was launched at a conference in London.

The project follows a decade of work and study by the Cornwall WFT, which persuaded governments worldwide of the need to work fast — and work internationally — to protect the birds.

A survey has shown that 89 of the world's 330 species of parrots are on the brink of extinction, and on Wednesday the WFT and the WWF announced their strategy. This includes recovery plans to save such threatened species,

and urgent action to combat the two principal threats to survival — habitat loss and the trade in parrots for the pet market.

Comedian John Cleese, in a twist on his famous "dead parrot" sketch, helped promote the Action Plan, telling the conference: "Can we really accept the extinction of these beautiful creatures? Please support the international conservation work of the World Parrot Trust."

Last night the man who founded the Trust, co-director Mike Reynolds, said he was delighted by the support of the WWF in what was such a huge and important task.

"We're just a small family-based charity, and we are very pleased indeed that we have managed to get activity going globally on behalf of these lovely birds,"

he said. "We opened Paradise Park in 1973, and worked hard building up a collection of the rare birds with the object of breeding them."

"Parrots are very special birds, and 10 years ago we founded the World Parrot Trust because we realised that although there were special charities for birds like cranes and pheasants, there was nothing for parrots. Everything goes from there."

Mr Reynolds said the aim of the Trust, and the campaign, were to work for the survival of parrots in the wild, and the welfare of the estimated 50 million captured parrots kept as pets.

"Some of these are kept in excellent conditions, but unfortunately about half are kept in horrible conditions," he said.