

Comprehensive
and relevant
information
for bird people

Talking Birds

BIRD
WORDS
EVERY
MONTH

\$10

australian & world news, conservation, threats, birdwatching, finches, cockatoos, parrots, pets, pigeons, raptors, seabirds

August 2024



**Spix's future
is uncertain**

**Amazon
fraud and
corruption**

**US hatch
of extinct
kingfisher**

**Golden
bird back
in wild**

**Planning
for pet
bird move**

**King gets
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**Guinea
fowl not
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**Hornbills
have very
hard heads**

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**Pleasure
from bark
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**Hawaii
parrots to
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the blue box

IT seems that the extinct-in-the-wild Spix's macaw reintroduction project in Brazil is in danger of falling in a heap.

The program requires captive-bred birds to be released into the wild for the next 20 years.

But the Brazilian Government has not re-signed an agreement with German operation ACTP which bred the birds because ACTP has been selling Spix's to private people in Europe and India which is against the rules.

ACTP reckons transfers have been done to help the birds but given ACTP top man Martin Guth's previous history with shonky dealings involving South American parrots and his criminal record the Brazilian officials are understandably worried.

Guth made headlines in Australia a few years back when he was able to export 200-plus parrots to his German operation, claiming that it was a zoo and that the birds would never leave that facility.

Many of those birds have turned up in aviaries owned by private aviculturists in Europe. **p19.**

■ **TRUE ART:** Photographs are great, they can show us delicate intricacies as seen through the lensman's eye.

Good paintings are also truly wondrous and those done well in watercolor hold a special fascination for art aficionados.

An Australian artist and his writer mate have produced a brilliant new book where watercolors focus on Australia's best-known birds. **p7.**

■ **PIGEONS NO MORE:** For all of her reign Queen Elizabeth II was heavily involved in pigeon racing with her birds well regarded in Europe's homing bird fraternity.

King Charles III is not enamoured with pigeon racing, so much so that he has disbanded the loft loved by his mother and is no longer the patron of pigeon racing in the UK. **p45.**

■ **PET BIRDS' FUTURE:** Succession planning is often mentioned when writing about business and politics.

It's not often discussed when it comes to companion parrots but given the fact that many birds are long-lived the subject needs attention.

This month pet parrot guru Stephen Lavoie discusses the pros and cons and provides food for thought aplenty. **p37.**

■ I hope you get something from this month's magazine.

— Lloyd Marshall

Renaming no small matter

By ANDREW STAFFORD

THE Major Mitchell's pink cockatoo has had a few names over the years.

The father of Australian ornithology John Gould knew it as Leadbeater's cockatoo following the *Cacatua leadbeateri* scientific name given to it in 1831, named after Benjamin Leadbeater, the London naturalist and taxidermist.

Sir Thomas Mitchell, the surveyor general of New South Wales from 1828 to 1855, called it the red-top cockatoo.

He was awestruck by its beauty.

"Few birds more enliven the monotonous hues of the Australian forest than this beautiful species whose pink-coloured wings and flowing crest might have embellished the air of a more voluptuous region," he said.

It was for that lavish description that the pink cockatoo, now officially classed as endangered, was renamed Major Mitchell's cockatoo in 1977 after a survey of members of the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union — now BirdLife Australia — a vote which the organisation's public affairs manager Sean Dooley, described ruefully as "a bit of a Boaty McBoatface moment".

It was certainly unfortunate to name such a beautiful bird after a mass killer.

In 1836 at the euphemistically named Mount Dispersion, Mitchell encountered the indigenous Kureinji and Barkindji people on

the banks of the Murray River.

His account of what happened there, unsparing in its brutality, stands in stark contrast to his rhapsodic description of the bird:

"It was difficult to come at such enemies hovering in our rear with the lynx-eyed vigilance of savages," he wrote.

"Attacked simultaneously by both parties, the whole betook themselves to the river, my men pursuing them and shooting as many as they could, numbers were shot swimming across the Murray and some even after they had reached the opposite shore."

It's due mainly to this incident — Mitchell's starring contribution to Australia's frontier wars for which he only ever received a mild rebuke — that BirdLife Australia has recently reverted to using the name pink cockatoo in official correspondence.

It's part of a push by the organisation to examine the utility of eponymous names more generally.

In a recent paper for the ornithological journal *Emu*, environmental scientist Stephen Garnett argued that bird names should be culturally and socially inclusive.

Common names are a historic reflection of the power structures of society, naming places and their fauna after their colonial conquerors is the most naked expression of dominance and ownership.

■ *Continued page 8.*

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Tortilla babyblanket

A FAMILY in Texas got very creative when they rescued a baby bird.

A spokesman for the Wild West Wildlife Rehabilitation Center said they got a call about an orphaned baby bird.

When they asked the family if they had placed the bird in a box the family told the rehabilitation center that they had wrapped it in a warm tortilla.

The family told a staff member they were outside barbecuing and swimming when they noticed a baby bird on the ground.

ODD SPOT

They were concerned about the bird getting cold so they warmed a tortilla on the grill to wrap the bird in to keep it warm.

The rehabilitation centre said the inventive method was surprisingly effective.

Commenters on the rehabilitation centre's Facebook post were creative about potential names for the baby bird.

Name suggestions included Taco, Burrito, Mississippi Crunch Wrap Supreme, Birditto, Taquito and Enchilada. Taquito was the winner.

COVER: THE SPIX'S MACAW REINTRODUCTION PROGRAM IN BRAZIL COULD BE IN TROUBLE — PAGE 19.

Three flu strains in Oz

AUSTRALIA is facing an unprecedented threat from three different strains of avian influenza.

Debbie Eagles and Frank Wong from the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness warned that three strains of the highly pathogenic H7 avian influenza have been detected in Australia in 2024.

The outbreaks affected poultry farms in Victoria and New South Wales as well as the Australian Capital Territory prompting the culling of over 500,000 chickens.

Wong said experts have not been able to identify a reason behind the simultaneous outbreaks.

Brisbane peafowl ban

BRISBANE City Council is set to ban keeping peafowl in residential areas under a proposed new law after several complaints during the past year

“Council has received 11 noise complaints about peafowl which can be excessive during mating season,” a council spokesman said.

Up to 20 peacocks can now be kept on a property more than 800 square metres and up to six on premises under 800 square metres.

But news that peafowl owners will need to surrender their pets if the law goes ahead has not gone down well with them.

Corellas defeated

IT'S long been known that lighthouses provide an irresistible attraction for seabirds and migrating passerines, especially at night when rotating lights entice passing avian species.

The lighthouse at South Australia's Cape Northumberland attracted flocks of little corellas that were drawn to the high salt content of its antique stonework.

To get to the salt they chewed away the soft limestone of the 142-year-old structure causing \$2 million in damage.

The damage has been fixed and the building is now birdproof.

Rocket site threats

THE prospect of launching rockets generates interest from politicians and members of the public but there can be severe ecological consequences from those disruptive activities.

A proposed rocket-launching site at Whalers Bay on the southern end of South Australia's Eyre Peninsula is a case in point.

The location is in a tract of critical mallee habitat that is home to one of only five populations of the Eyre Peninsula emu wren as well as the endangered mallee whipbird — the population of that bird is around 80 per cent of the entire global total.

Pair investigated after killing galahs to eat

TWO men are under investigation after shooting several galahs in a Victorian state forest that officials believe they were planning to eat.

Police and Victorian Fisheries Authority officers were called to Goat Island in the Gunbower State Forest at Cohuna near the NSW border after reports that native birds had been shot.

Five galahs which are protect-

ed under Victoria's Native Wildlife Act 1975 were killed.

Officers spoke to two men and found ammunition and guns including a .22 rifle fitted with a silencer in a vehicle.

Some of the birds had been mutilated in preparation for human consumption police believe.

The firearms and ammunition were seized by police a spokesperson said.

Question on Molly cartoon money

THERE'S been a major development in the saga of Peggy and Molly, the real-life staffy and magpie who became Insta-famous this year.

They've inspired a new cartoon.

But the announcement has left people asking what will happen to the profits?

Because while you might assume such a project would provide a massive financial windfall for Molly's carers there's a catch.

The duo was thrust into the media spotlight after it was revealed that Molly had been surrendered to authorities.

That followed an investigation by the Queensland Department



of Environment that concluded the Gold Coast couple behind the social media stars, Juliette Wells and Reece Mortensen, weren't licensed to keep the native bird.

While many wildlife advocates celebrated the development which included a plan to house Molly with its own species the response from the general public was the opposite.

After an extraordinary intervention from the premier Molly was returned.

But the couple had to agree not to make any ongoing commercial gain from the bird or from its image.

Dogs major killers

TASMANIA'S little penguins only hit the news when another colony has been ravaged by dogs.

The birds are threatened by numerous issues ranging from existential threats posed by global climate change to the loss of habitat and disturbance by people.

A recent study has concluded that in Australia's southernmost state dogs are the biggest killer of little penguins.

The study analysed mortality data that said there were 887 deaths from 71 mortality events dating back to the 1980s.

Plastic for bowerbirds

MALE bowerbirds are reknowned for collecting numerous small items which they carefully scatter to decorate bowers in an effort to attract mates.

Each species appears to specialise in the type of trinkets they choose and their color.

For the satin bowerbird of eastern Australia the items chosen for display are generally blue.

Items chosen range from flowers and berries to feathers from the crimson rosella.

Increasingly the bits and pieces they gather are plastic with many bowers containing ballpoint pen caps and lids from milk bottles.

Cockies get free feed

A WOMAN in Sydney recently shared a funny video of cockatoos cheekily begging her for lunch while she was snacking in a McDonald's car park.

She was eating hashbrowns when a cockatoo sat on the side mirror and began to beg for food.

She fed the bird thinking that was that but then a whole mob of cockies flew to her window.

They looked in the window asking for food and one bird began to bite the lowered glass.

The woman gave up, she fed all the birds then went for a second portion, this time just for her.

Penguin chicks hatch

SYMBIO Wildlife Park in Sydney has hatched two little penguin chicks.

Wanda and Elouera hatched on June 6 and are doing in well.

The duo will remain off display for the time being and are expected to make their debut in August when they venture outside for their first swim.

At around eight weeks of age little penguin chicks are fully feathered and are close to adult size.

They then head out to fend for themselves, instinctively knowing how to swim and feed.



If you would love to own and breed the most beautiful budgies ever developed, consider joining the Australian Heritage Budgerigar Association.

We have rescued the stunning Australian Clearwings and Rainbows that were nearly extinct. We are also working on other critically endangered varieties like Banded Pieds, Heritage Darkwings, Blackeyed Yellows and Whites and many more.

We breed small, athletic Australian budgies that conform to the 1962 Australian National Standard. Our not-for-profit club provides a friendly environment for members, and Kids and people of all ages are strongly supported.

We sell our birds at prices that people can afford too. To enquire about membership (\$20 P/A), go to our Facebook page, Australian Heritage Budgerigar Association, or email our President Bob Pitt robertpitt47@icloud.com.



Council says don't feed pigeons

By OLIVER JACQUES

GRIFFITH City Council in the NSW Riverina area has asked residents to refrain from feeding wild birds following reports that pigeons are being fed regularly around the Coolah Street area.

Mayor Doug Curran said that while council did not have the legal authority to prevent people from feeding birds on private property it strongly advised against the practice and had communicated the request to residents.

ents.

"Feeding wild birds can disrupt their natural diet and lead to large concentrations of birds in one area.

"We have already noticed large colonies of pigeons roosting in various locations around the city," he said.

"This can cause tree and property damage, noise disturbances and other nuisances for nearby residents."

Councillor Curran said it was important to follow expert advice to protect the local poultry

industry.

"Our economy relies heavily on poultry, and it's crucial to avoid any potential risks," he said.

Griffith Council warned that feeding wild birds can result in several issues including:

- Health risks — human food especially bread is often low in nutrition and can make birds sick.

- Disease transmission — feeding birds in a central location can increase spread.

- Overpopulation — ibis,

cockatoos, pigeons and Indian mynas can become overabundant.

- Increased predation risk — leftover food can attract predators such as foxes which may prey on young birds.

- Public health concerns — large gatherings of birds can lead to increased fouling and attract vermin.

Property owners in the Griffith area dealing with nesting or roosting pigeons are advised to seek help from licensed pest controllers the mayor said.

Tassie officials seize thousands of eggs

FEDERAL officials have raided a property north of Hobart and seized more than 3000 bird eggs including some thought to be threatened species after a Tasmanian man was identified as a suspect in a global wildlife crime investigation.

The raid comes after European authorities launched a probe last year into the illegal harvesting and trade of bird eggs on the continent and around the world.

The investigation resulted in a number of search warrants being executed and the seizure of more than 56,000 eggs with Australian native bird species and threatened and migratory birds among them.

That led authorities to zero in on an Australian in Tasmania.

On July 9 environmental crime investigators from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water swooped on a Hobart property and seized a total of 3404 eggs estimated to be worth as much as \$500,000.

Investigators were assisted by Tasmania Police and representatives from CSIRO and Tasmania's Natural Resources and Environment Department.

It will be alleged that the man who cannot be named for legal reasons sent native Australian eggs taken from wild nests to a person in Europe in exchange for other eggs.

The investigation is ongoing and arrests have not been made while the eggs are still being analysed.

A DCCEEW spokeswoman said



Some of the eggs seized in Tasmania during the joint police investigation.

the Tasmanian man was being investigated and that the department would allege he was involved in the collection and harvesting of bird eggs from the wild as well as the trading of eggs with people overseas.

"Australian native bird eggs seized are suspected to include rare and threatened species such as the forty-spotted pardalote, the shy albatross, the fairy prion and the swift parrot, all facing a high risk of extinction in the wild," she said.

"The species will be confirmed following full analysis."

There are estimated to be around 1500 forty-spotted pardalotes and 750 swift parrots left in the wild.

The shy albatross and fairy prion are listed as vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

There are various wildlife trade offences proscribed under the Act.

Interpol last year warned that wildlife trafficking had become one of the world's largest criminal activities and that the black market for illegal wildlife products was worth up to about \$27bn Australian.

Federal Environment and Water Minister Tanya Pliibersek said illegal trafficking and wildlife crime were fast becoming a threat to many Australian species that were already at risk of extinction.

"We have to stamp out this terrible trade which sees our native animals captured in the Aussie bush and sent overseas to be sold," she said.

"That's why we're boosting our efforts to combat crime here and overseas, using some of the best minds and technology available."

Uproar over NZ cat kills

IN rural New Zealand an annual hunting competition has stirred controversy by including feral cats among its targets.

This year participants in the North Canterbury event killed around 340 feral cats, a significant increase from the previous year.

The event which aims to raise funds for local causes also features hunting categories for deer, pigs, ducks, possums and rabbits.

The introduction of feral cats to the hunting lineup in 2023 has drawn intense criticism from animal rights activists.

They argue that the contest promotes cruelty and desensitizes children to violence.

Protesters from the Animal Save Movement attended the event, condemning it as a misguided attempt at conservation.

Event organizer Matt Bailey defended the inclusion of feral cats, citing their threat to native wildlife and livestock.

He explained that measures are in place to ensure only feral cats are targeted with specific protocols for humane killing.

Bailey emphasized that rural life often involves hunting and processing animals which is reflected in the community's acceptance of the event.

Despite the backlash the competition raised around \$60,000 for local projects.

Egg shortage in Bali

A SUB-SECTOR of Bali's extensive handicraft industry — those who carve and decorate large eggs — faces a shortage of eggs.

The industry works with duck, geese, swan, ostrich and cassowary eggs.

Supply of eggs from cassowaries and ostriches are difficult to obtain because those species are endangered and protected.

Because of the difficulties the decorative egg handicraft workers are forced to import large eggshells co-ordinated by men like Jro Amik, a handicraft artist and seller of decorative eggs.

Goose poop scooped

THE US Town of Milton has a new piece of equipment to help keep a local park clean.

At the most recent Sounds of Summer event Councilman Scotty L. Edler helped to unveil what he called the town's new goose poop pooper scooper.

The Tow-and-Collect machine can be towed behind an all terrain vehicle, a 4WD or a truck.

The little red trailer has brushes that help to scoop goose poop in the the Milton Memorial Park and then deposit the the droppings into a black bucket on the back.

Bollywood smuggler

RAAMA Mehra, a Bollywood director in India, found himself in trouble at Soekarno-Hatta Airport in Indonesia when customs officials discovered protected wildlife in his luggage.

The 56-year-old director was apprehended after an X-ray scan of his suitcase revealed two birds of paradise and an otter, species protected under international and Indonesian law.

Gatot Sugeng Wibowo, head of Soekarno-Hatta Customs and Excise said the animals were concealed among food items, clothes and children's toys.

Saudi ostriches breed

THREE common ostriches have hatched in Saudi Arabia as part of ongoing efforts to re-establish the species more than 80 years after the birds became extinct in the country.

A pair of the nominate sub-species *camelus* was introduced to the Imam Turki Royal Nature Reserve in 2021 and the female laid 12 eggs this spring.

The nominate form is considered the closest relative to the extinct sub-species *Struthio camelus syriacus* which used to be found across the Middle East from the Negev Desert in Israel to the tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

UK bird feeder fined

A UK woman who was fined £150 for feeding birds at a Derby beauty spot has lost an appeal against the charge.

Jenna Summers said she was left disgusted after being issued with the fine for littering in the city's River Gardens on May 31.

The 37-year-old from Oakwood in Derby challenged the penalty arguing that signs about the ban on bird feeding were unclear.

Cockfighter charged

POLICE at Bucks County in the US joined Bucks County SPCA to bust a cockfight and save 50 birds.

They raided a property where they found 25 people at a cockfight in a ring inside a two-car garage.

Cesar Cordova-Morales was charged with cockfighting offences and is being held at the Bucks County Jail.

Fire kills UK pigeons

RACING pigeons at Ashford in the UK died after someone set fire to their loft.

Two sheds were deliberately set on fire in the early hours of July 4 Surrey Police said.

The fire is believed to have occurred at 12.25am and a large number of birds in one of the sheds died.

The fire came after the RSPCA and Surrey Fire Service rescued eight ducklings that hatched inside a chimney stack 50 feet high in a precarious position where larger birds were eyeing them off.

Eagles in Belgium after 500 years

By LESLIE SATTLER

WHITE-TAILED eagles, once widely found across Europe, are making a comeback in Belgium after a 500-year absence.

A pair of the birds recently hatched a chick at the De Blankaart nature reserve in West Flanders.

The expectant parents are keeping watch over a second egg with hopes of welcoming another eaglet soon.

While white-tailed eagles have been reintroduced in Great Britain and Ireland but it is Belgium's first recorded nesting in five centuries.



Local officials are taking the occasion seriously, setting up a protected area around the nest and threatening trespassers with fines.

The return of the iconic birds isn't just a win for biodiversity, it's a sign that Europe's ecosystems are healing.

White-tailed eagles, also known as sea eagles, suffered steep population declines in the 20th Century largely due to the widespread use of harmful agricultural chemicals.

Thanks to more sustainable farming practices and dedicated conservation efforts Europe is now home to over 6000 breeding pairs of sea eagles.

Chooks killed for fun

FOUR chickens in the US were beaten to death with a blunt object at a church in the University of California Santa Barbara.

"Our chickens were not just animals but cherished members of our community," said Carly Mar-to, program manager of the Isla Vista Compost Collective.

"They brought us joy and companionship and their loss will be deeply felt."

A witness to the attack confronted the killer and asked why he killed the chickens.

"For fun," he reportedly responded with a shrug.

Royal men attacked

A GROUP of Pakistani villagers brandishing guns and knives attacked the convoy of a Qatar royal family member on an expedition to hunt the houbara bustard, a rare bird whose meat is prized by Arab sheikhs, according to officials.

The hunting party was unhurt but three security guards with the party were wounded during the attack at Musakhel in Pakistan's south-western province of Baluchistan.

District deputy commissioner Muhammad Yasar said: "A case has been registered against 25 people."

Hong Kong emu loose

AN emu has been spotted running along a motorway thousands of kilometres away from its natural habitat in Australia — a sight that baffled Hong Kong locals and people on social media.

It comes as a wallaby hopping down a regional road was sighted by locals in England's south with emu sightings in the US also baffling authorities.

The recent sighting was reported to authorities by passers-by claiming they had seen the bird wandering along the roads in Tin Shui Wai, a north-western territory in Hong Kong.

Hen's head bitten off

ANDHRA Pradesh police in India have registered a case for biting off a hen's head during a dance performance.

The video went viral on social media, presenting a disturbing scene where a person bit off a hen's head during a dance performance which was portrayed as entertainment.

PETA India worked with police to get a report registered.

A study by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals found that animal abusers are five times as likely to also harm other humans.

Diesel oil hits swans

AN emergency mission was carried out at Milton Keynes in the UK to rescue swans covered from head to foot in black diesel oil at a city wildlife haven.

The oil was dumped in water at the Stonepits field and pond.

At the same time it was discovered that asbestos waste had been dumped in the venue's car park.

The Parks Trust has asked people to contact police if they saw anything suspicious at the scene.

Dumped asbestos tiles were found and the trust cordoned off the area and called in a specialist firm to remove them.

Flu shots in Finland

FINLAND plans to start offering preventive avian flu vaccinations to people in contact with animals the country's health authorities have announced.

The country will offer the vaccine to individuals at risk of infection due to work or other circumstances according to the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

The vaccine received marketing authorization in the European Union in April this year and was developed to curb the spread of the H5 subtype of the avian flu virus.

Alexandrines rescued

INDIAN forest officials rescued two Alexandrine parakeets from a house in Namakkal district.

After a concerned citizen's report about two Alexandrine parakeets being kept at a residence People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals collaborated with officials and visited the location.

The team found two parakeets and rescued them.

"Forest Department officials registered a case against the person who kept the parakeets under the Wild Life Offence Act," said Sunayana Basu, PETA India's cruelty response co-ordinator.

Birds helping to solve crimes

SOME birds have well-deserved reputations as crime-busters.

■ On Christmas Eve 2001 someone brutally murdered pool business owner Kevin Butler and his pet cockatoo Larry Bird in their home.

It turned out that Larry tried to defend its owner during the attack, biting and scratching the perpetrator, scattering feathers all over the house in the titanic battle and losing his life in the process.

The killer wiped blood from his injured forehead with his hand and left it on a light switch

in the home.

Matched with DNA in the bird's beak and claws that led to the arrest of a former employee at Butler's pool business.

Thanks to Larry the killer got a life sentence.

■ Police investigating the murder of Martin Duram in 2015 got the lead they needed when Duram's African grey parrot Bud started spilling the beans.

Police noticed the excited bird kept repeating the last phrases it had heard: "Get out!" "Where will I go?" and finally, "Don't f—ing shoot!"

That testimony was not used in the trial but Duram's wife Glenna was convicted of first-degree murder.

Most people believed that Bud's recall of the couple's last fight proved the jury made the right decision.

■ Nellie Sullivan, 92, went missing from her home in North Carolina in 2020.

Her granddaughter Angela Wamsley with her boyfriend Mark Barnes were the main suspects, motivated by a desire for the elderly woman's social security money and prescription medi-

cines.

Without a body it was hard to get charges to stick.

That is until a duck got away from its owners and waddled under Wamsley and Barnes's trailer.

The owners went under the trailer to retrieve their pet and found a container with the elderly woman's body inside leading to murder charges for the suspects.

Why the police couldn't crack the case is a mystery but fortunately a duck was there to get the job done.

Turtle dove hunting gets OK in Greece

A YEAR after the Greece Environment Ministry instructed local authorities to adopt urgent protection measures to tackle spring poaching against the turtle dove on the Ionian islands it has approved the hunting of the endangered species.

That drew the ire of the Hellenic Ornithological Society which said the bird has been classified as at risk since 2019 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The group said the ministry is catering to hunters and pointed to how Spain and France — like Greece, corridors for the bird's migratory path — have ensured protections over the previous three years leading to a recovery of the species.

The ministry set a limit of killing 35,000 of the doves instead of 120,000 with no indications how that could be monitored or enforced in the wild and if there would be officials tracking the hunting.

The group said that Greece has ignored European Union recommendations for a complete ban and said that allowing even 10 per cent of the current numbers to be hunted wouldn't slow its extinction in the country if the practice continues said a spokesperson for Bird-Life International.

"The turtle dove breeding population on the central-eastern flyway continues to decline, the population having nearly halved over the past 20 years.



A juvenile turtle dove at Nynäshamn in Sweden.

"The 10-year trend in this region has worsened from stable to moderate decline."

In May 2023 Greek Deputy Environment Minister Giorgos Amyras sent out the direction against poaching the bird in the Ionian Sea in the spring when it migrates from Africa to Europe and uses Greek islands where it rests.

"We are putting the emphasis on prevention, creating a strong shield for species threatened by those who break the laws," Amyras said at the time, two years after the ornithological society called for an ban on hunting the bird in the spring.

The activity, illegal in Greece since 1983, "turns the Ionian Islands into an altar of sacrifice of thousands of exhausted migratory turtle doves," the society said.

"Spring hunting constitutes a real crime against turtle doves arriving exhausted and emaciated from their long migrations — a crime victimizing birds coming to Europe to nest.

"Spring poaching is especially troublesome in the Ionian Islands in Western Greece where despite the decades-long prohibition it is still considered a traditional activity and is still going on."

Good news in Wales

IN the face of the current nature and biodiversity emergencies and the risk of extinction faced by some species across Wales, stories of conservation success can offer hope for the future.

One such example involves the remarkable return of two of the UK's rarest and most elusive marshland birds — bitterns and marsh harriers — to the Gwent Levels near Newport.

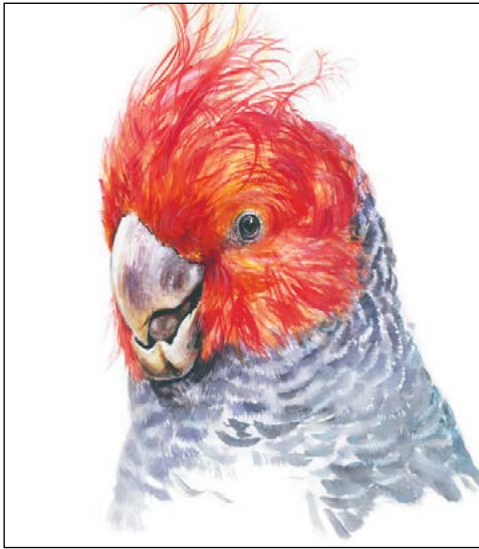
After previously being driven to the point of extinction bitterns have bred for the fifth year in a row at Newport Wetlands thanks to conservation efforts by officials and volunteers from Natural Resources Wales.

Before 2020 bitterns had previously not bred on the Gwent Levels for at least 200 years and officers recently recorded four separate nests at the reserve.

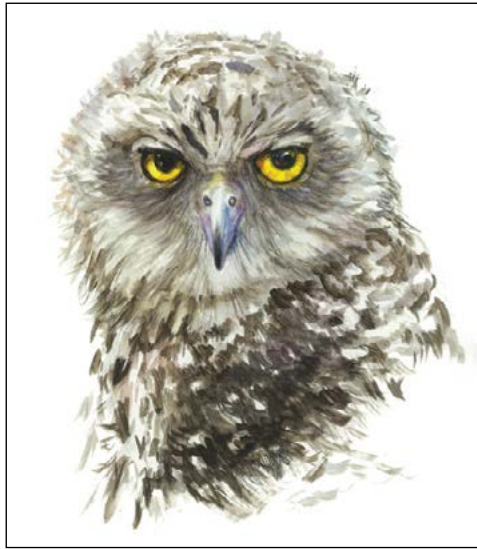
There are no records of bitterns ever having bred in Gwent but it is likely that they did breed there hundreds of years ago.

By taking action for nature, officers and volunteers have made a number wetland improvements over the years which have helped to create optimum habitat for bitterns to thrive.

Those improvements include the careful management of the reedbeds and introducing important food sources such as small like rudd and helping elvers into reedbeds from the Severn Estuary.



Male Gang Gang Cockatoo.



Powerful Owl.



Long-billed Corella.

Watercolour wonder

I RECKON “the ultimate beautiful coffee table book” is the best way to describe *Australia’s Birds in Watercolour*.

With exquisite illustrations by masterful watercolour artist David Freedman and words by Richard Steele this book is a truly spectacular volume.

At 303 pages, 304 if you count the stunning painting of a gang-gang cockatoo on the un-numbered very back page, it’s well worth the effort involved in lifting its 2.3kg onto a flat surface in order to peruse avian delights aplenty.

This book contains 250 illustrations, is 30mm thick and measures 300mm deep by 268mm wide.

It features Richard Steele’s informative, very personal and entertaining text that describes the

unique characteristics and behaviour of each bird.

Thirteen on 16-point Gill Sans Light typeface was used for the text, an ideal size which when set left ragged right makes for easy reading.

If there’s a bird that encapsulates Australia’s avian family it has to be the galah which can be found pretty much everywhere on the Australian continent.

A female of that species graces the front cover and is sure to attract attention when this book is displayed in bookstores as well as when it takes its place on a coffee table.

Almost a third of Australia’s avian species including the best-known are exquisitely illustrated in superbly-detailed watercolour.

The text is informative, entertaining and wonderfully complements the paintings.

Artist Freedman said: “We obviously both love birds which symbolise freedom for me.

“When you attempt to depict them with watercolour you feel in partnership with the water itself.

“It is like having a friend helping you and it is best not to try to control its effects and results too much.”

This is a tome that I highly recommend to bird enthusiasts and to anyone who appreciates fine natural history art.

For bird lovers and enthusiasts of all ages this remarkable book is an essential addition to any collection.

Printed on 157gsm matt art

paper it has a black ribbon bookmark which is handy to let you know where you are up to when returning to read more.

Geoff Slattery, the main man at Slattery Books, is to be commended for taking a punt on this book because birds are not a mainstream subject and avian aficionado numbers in Australia are limited.

I could waffle on forever about this great book but instead I’ll tempt you with a few of its stunning paintings.

Australia’s Birds in Watercolour can be purchased [here](#) and from selected bookshops.

Recommended cover price is \$99.95 and I reckon that’s around half of what this truly spectacular book is really worth.

— Lloyd Marshall.



Pelican.



Double-barred Finch.

17 species added to Aust. threatened list

By LISA COX, The Guardian Australia

SEVENTEEN species including two birds, two fish, several reptiles and the Lord Howe earthworm, have been added to Australia's list of threatened species.

The sooty shearwater, known for its long-distance journeys, has been listed as vulnerable, while the red-tailed tropicbird which breeds on Christmas Island has been listed as endangered.

The Lord Howe earthworm, Daintree rainbowfish and seven reptiles including the Jardine River turtle, Mitchell's water monitor and the northern blue-tongued skink entered the list at critically endangered, the most urgent threat category.

A further four reptiles and one fish were listed in the endangered category and one bird, the Mallee whipbird, was moved up from vulnerable to endangered.

The Australian Conservation Foundation nature campaigner Peta Bulling said the list was "a poignant reminder that governments and businesses are not doing enough to protect Australia's reptiles.

"Australia is home to more than 10 per cent of the world's total reptile species," she said.

"With 93 per cent of our reptiles found nowhere else on Earth it's critical we protect our unique scaly wildlife.

"As conservation efforts often focus on the cute and cuddlies it's easy to forget about the unique



The endangered red-tailed tropicbird breeds on Christmas Island.

reptiles that call our big backyard home."

Bulling noted that the Daintree rainbowfish was not described by western science until 2018 and was already listed as critically endangered.

She said many of the new threatened species were found in tropical north Queensland which was being hit by climate-exacerbated extreme weather events.

"Environment minister Tanya Plibersek has set a worthy target of no more extinctions," Bulling said.

"To stop more Australian wildlife from heading to extinction the government must urgently strengthen our national environmental law and adequately fund threatened species recovery."

Plibersek is working on over-

hauling Australia's environmental laws with legislation expected to be introduced to the parliament next year.

She said eight of the new listings including the rainbowfish, the Cape Melville leaf-tailed gecko and the Jardine River turtle were threatened by illegal wildlife trade.

Plibersek said the federal and New South Wales governments had boosted efforts to combat the trade more rapidly and effectively while also better caring for the species affected by it.

She said teams had been established in Sydney and Melbourne to work with the Taronga Conservation Society and security screening company Rapiscan Systems to use emerging technology to detect and care for

smuggled wildlife.

"Illegal trafficking and wildlife crime is fast becoming a threat for many of our species that are already at risk of extinction," Plibersek said.

"In fact a single poaching event could drive the critically endangered Cape Melville leaf-tailed gecko to extinction in the wild.

"We have to stamp out this terrible trade which sees our native animals captured in the Aussie outback, bound and gagged and sent overseas to be sold."

Additional bird species are expected to be added to the list or have their conservation status upgraded.

Three bird species are expected to have their conservation status downgraded.

Renaming Australian birds no small matter

Continued from page 2.

If you'll forgive the phrase, the reversion to pink cockatoo represents the tip of the spear in the wider revision of Australian bird names.

"It's the easy one because it's the most contentious," Dooley said.

There has been very little pushback.

"A few people have harrumphed and said that this decolonising of names is political correctness gone mad but that's only one or two voices."

He points out that pink cockatoo has been the predominant white Australian epithet given to the species anyway, starting with the RAOU's first official checklist

in 1926 and Australia's first field guide, Neville Cayley's *What Bird is That* in 1931. There are many First Nations names for the cockatoo the best known being the Wiradjuri *wijugla*, whimsically anglicised as "wee juggler".

The more practical problem with eponymous names and others reflecting their colonial origins — emperor and royal penguin, princess parrot and so on — is their lack of utility.

They tell us nothing about the species.

Even the multihued Gouldian finch — an iconic species named not after John but his wife Elizabeth — is better described by the alternative rainbow finch.

The question of utility could

potentially call into question the use of colloquial names such as galah and willie wagtail.

But such names are an entrenched part of the Australian vernacular, used affectionately for some of our most familiar species.

The fact that willie wagtails are in decline, like many of our most common birds, should give us all pause.

The reversion to pink cockatoo will become final with the release of BirdLife Australia's next *Working List of Australian Birds*.

"If you'll excuse the pun we're trying to get all our ducks in a row," Dooley said.

In the digital age it's complicated with various databases and apps needing to be updated.

At least common names unlike scientific names are subject to change.

Spare a thought if you will for *Anophthalmus hitleri*, a Slovenian beetle pushed to the brink of extinction by collectors of Nazi memorabilia.

More recently a Panamanian amphibian *Dermophis donaldtrumpi* as well as a Californian moth were named after the former US president.

According to *New Scientist* those names were bestowed with the intention of drawing attention to Trump's appalling environmental legacy. The renaming of the pink cockatoo on the other hand is an act of remembrance and respect and that is no minor matter.

Brush turkey's rise in cities interesting story

By PETER DE KRUIJFF

RESEARCHERS have mapped the changing fortunes and presence of Australian brush turkeys from pre-1900 to 2019.

An analysis of historical and modern records shows how the native species has gone from near extinction to become an entrenched urban bird.

More citizen science contributions will fuel further research into how big urban populations could become.

When David Poole was a kid knocking around the bushlands of Sydney's northern suburbs in the late 1970s there was not a brush turkey to be seen.

A few years ago he began to notice the black plumage, bald red head and yellow dangling wattle of the native bird around his streets.

"It wasn't until I was in my 50s that I noticed them encroaching into suburban areas where they are now prolific," Mr Poole said.

"They're non-aggressive but very destructive to gardens, regularly open garbage bins and spread garbage across the road, often on the roads causing a driving hazard as they are not afraid of cars."

The Australian brush turkey's colonisation of the city has seen it take over the northern suburbs of Sydney and more recently start a push into the inner-west, south of Darling Harbour and the Parramatta River.

Remarkably the brush turkey, also known as the scrub turkey, has gone from a creature we feared was on the brink of extinction in the 1930s to a fully fledged urban bird.

A new study published in the Australian peer-reviewed journal *Wildlife Research* has chronicled the fall, rise and conquering of Brisbane and Sydney by a bird we nearly ate to extinction.

Analysis of historical museum specimens, birdwatching logs, archival newspapers and more modern sources such as citizen science contributions to the Big City Bird digital app resulted in a collection of close to 100,000 records of the bird from 1839 to 2019.

Lead author Matthew Hall who is an urban ecologist at the



The humble Australian brush turkey has come back from the edge of extinction to become a fully urbanised bird.

University of Sydney said the brush turkey was once common throughout Queensland and New South Wales.

"They got as far south as the border with Victoria and as far west as Dubbo, maybe even further," he said.

"They've actually disappeared from a lot of those places now.

"We think they originally disappeared by the early 20th Century because of over hunting."

Anecdotally the bird went from being a common sight on the landscape to so few in number that in 1952 the New South Wales Government set out to survey where the brush turkey and the inland Australian bustard also known as the plains turkey might have survived.

Legislation changes in the 1970s mean native species including the brush turkey were suddenly protected.

In a rebound that bears similarities to the recovery of saltwater crocodiles in northern Aust-

ralia Dr Hall said legal protection helped the turkey return from the brink.

The authors of the study admit that the quality of records prior to a national bird survey in 1977 are lacking so turkey population numbers before then were probably underestimated.

Dr Hall said the first resighting of the bird around a capital city was in Brisbane in the mid-1970s.

Brush turkeys started to radiate from around Mount Coot-Tha, a large forested area bordering Brisbane's west, into neighbouring suburbs quickly.

A 1991 study noted that turkeys were present in around 39 of the river city's suburbs.

That figure has since jumped to 158 suburbs.

Sydney's brush turkeys started showing up in the Central Coast in the 1980s and 1990s, Dr Hall said, "Then became really common in northern Sydney in the 2000s and 2010s".

In 1999 a mere four Sydney sub-

urbs recorded turkeys and nearly three decades later they are in 312 suburbs.

Legal protection and urban greening are two hypotheses for the turkeys' re-emergence and subsequent takeover of cities.

That and the turkey's own adaptation to big-city living.

"They'll eat almost anything they come across," Dr Hall said.

"So they've taken really well to scavenging off any food they can find in the city.

"They've also learned to build their nest out of somewhat sub-optimal materials."

Male birds build large mounds in which females lay eggs.

During the annual breeding season a female can lay around 20 eggs and more than one clutch can be laid in a single mound.

Despite predation by cats and foxes enough baby turkeys survive each season to keep population numbers rising.

Dr Hall said urban turkey numbers could really explode if cat culls were put in place.

He said further research was needed to understand what environmental factors might put a cap on population numbers.

"One of their limits is the number of available roosting trees but I've seen at least 70 brush turkeys all roosting in a single tree so they can get to really high densities in some suburban areas," he said.

"They've lost some of that territoriality so they're not driving each other out."

But whether they're in a coastal rainforest or busy food court it seems the new generation of east coast Australians won't remember a time without turkeys.

That's something Dr Hall hopes people remember if they ever start feeling annoyed about their neighbourhood turkeys.

"They're actually a fantastic success story of a pretty unique native species that's come back from possibly the brink of extinction and is now thriving in one of the most hostile environments we can make for them," he said.

"We're probably very lucky that a bird like the brush turkey is able to survive and in an urban environment."

Legal protection and urban greening are two hypotheses for the turkeys' re-emergence and subsequent takeover of cities.

NZ penguin jumps over seal

By SANDA ARAMBEPOLA

PEOPLE at a New Zealand penguin colony shared a video of birds in a hurry jumping over a sleeping fur seal instead of walking around it.

Staff at the Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony were looking through old livestreams to kill time when they came across the brave bird.

In the video shared on their Facebook page a waddle of penguins can be seen walking towards a few fur seals which are resting and enjoying a nap.

While most of the flightless



Penguins can be seen walking from the shore where seals are resting.

birds chose to walk around the seals one brave little bird can be seen trying to climb over a sleeping seal, jerking it out of its nap.

“While it’s relatively quiet and the penguins haven’t been up to much during the non-breeding months we’ve been looking back

over some of our favourite videos,” the caption read.

“This one is definitely a favourite, showing how the fur seals are not a threat to the penguins here and how the penguins aren’t really that scared of them.

“Watch closely for the penguin

who chooses not to walk around the seal!”

Dr Philippa Agnew, science and environmental manager at the Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony said fur seals in New Zealand are not predators of penguins.

“The fur seals don’t try to eat the penguins in this country, they eat probably fairly similar things to what the penguins eat — like fish, squid and that sort of things,” Agnew said.

“Penguins normally walk around the seals, if a seal moves or looks at them they might shy away and move a little bit.”

Emu mob briefly joins local WA footy game

By JAMES COONEY

A MOB of excited emus have been filmed making a mad dash through a game of Aussie Rules football in outback Australia.

Footage posted to social media shows six of Australia’s largest native birds charging erratically through the game of club footy.

In the clip, believed to be recorded in Western Australia, the players on the field seem remarkably unfazed by the animals and continued playing the match as normal.

“Outback streakers in the local footy” captioned the TikTok account Madmonday who uploaded the video.

Amused followers took to the comments section to point out how hilarious the sight was.

“Something I never thought I’d see,” posted one user.

“That’s the most entertaining AFL will get,” joked another.

“Average Aussie Sunday afternoon,” said a third.

Emus primarily travel alone or in pairs but on rare occasions they will come together in large flocks.

The tall birds will travel in flocks to head to an area that has a better food supply.

During summer months emus mainly consume seeds, flowers, grass and insects.

Baby emus usually stay with their father for up to one-and-a-half years before moving off on their own.



Six emus took to the field during an Aussie Rules football match in Western Australia.

During the mating period female emus court males and will sometimes fight other females for access to the males.

After the female lays her eggs she will wander off and may mate with other males.

In other instances she will stay to defend the nest with the male before the eggs hatch and after hatching she will leave the nest.

The sight of the emu flock comes after two cheeky emus returned to an outback town after they were banned from the local pub.

The birds, Kevin and Carol, spent months terrorising the Yaraka Hotel at Yaraka in south-west Queensland, stealing customers’ food, drinks and car keys.

The Yaraka Hotel in the remote orange sandy desert of south-west Queensland had to put up barricades at its entrances in an effort to stop the birds from getting inside.

The emus were so naughty that the owner was forced to enforce a lifetime ban and set barricades up at the entrance to stop them from sneaking in.

The pair are beloved by the town’s 20 residents but vanished in January.

Yaraka resident Leanne Byrne, the emus’ unofficial carer, said she had since spotted the siblings return to the town and one of them now had four chicks.

Ms Byrne leaves Yaraka each year for a few months at a time to work and said the pair usually

make their way back from the wilderness when she returns.

But the emus failed to come back to Yaraka at the start of the year after going walkabout in January with Ms Byrne struggling to find them.

Ms Byrne was given nine emu eggs that had been found by local workers but only Kevin and Carol survived being incubated.

The animal lover said the pair who are siblings love cuddles.

Ms Byrne is hoping the emus will stay away from the town until the chicks are grown and able to fend for themselves.

“They’re not my pets, they just tended to stay and everyone looked after them type thing, they’re still wild animals,” she said.

Feral cat trapping ramps up

By TESS BRUNTON

FERAL cats are causing the deaths of countless New Zealand native animals according to conservationists.

The apex predators are different to purring pet moggies or strays — they can weigh up to 7kg and feed on everything.

Multiple groups are working together to try to tackle the problem in the Queenstown Lakes area but say they are working in often challenging terrain against smart and deadly predators.

Matukituki Charitable Trust is working to clear predators from valleys in Mount Aspiring National Park.

Trustee Gillian Crombie said one feral cat had managed to escape twice from the trust's traps.

"There was nothing wrong with the trap but it was just so big and so strong it just broke right out of it," Crombie said.

The group's contractors used live traps between May and July.

"Honestly, they're wild, you do not want to touch the trap with bare hands while they're in it, they will do some damage to your hands," she said.

"You need leather gloves and sometimes even that's not enough."

The trust is part of the Southern Lakes Sanctuary Trust which is a collaboration of local groups trying to protect and restore declining biodiversity.

Sanctuary planning manager Katrina Black said the groups were working to trap and remove predators in urban and remote terrain.

"We're doing it through farmland, braided rivers, native forest, up into the national parks, right up into the sub-alpine and alpine environments as well and

we're finding feral cats through the whole region," Black said.

"There's nowhere where we do our work where we don't have feral cats."

When group members started trapping at Mount Creighton Station they saw around five cats on their cameras.

Across 20 nights they trapped 37 feral cats using 10 live capture traps along a 1km to 2km stretch of Lake Whakatipu.

"Our minds were blown that that was the number of cats that were in that area," Black said.

"That really shows us the scale of the issue that we're dealing with."

Last year they caught around 100 cats in the Rees Valley.

It was disheartening to find similar numbers of cats through monitoring a year later but they were determined to keep doing their job to clear them out especially because the valley was a

potential site for the release of takahē swamp hens she said.

Group members would be expanding their efforts this year she said.

Department of Conservation Whakatipu operations manager David Butt said feral cats could be found

from 2000 metres altitude right down to sea level.

"They're really trap averse so they won't go into traps," he said.

"They roam for long distances so they can be hard to find so they're very difficult, time intensive to actually catch," he said.

DoC used a mix of permanent kill traps and live trapping with a variety of baits including rabbit distress calls and crayfish carcasses he said.

In 2020-21 DoC tagged and monitored a group of kea.

Kea Conservation Trust chair Tamsin Orr-Walker said what happened showed how much



Southern Lakes Sanctuary Trust biodiversity co-ordinator Greg Whall with a feral cat.

DoC used a mix of permanent kill traps and live trapping with a variety of baits including rabbit distress calls and crayfish carcasses he said.

damage feral cats could do because they targeted adult kea and their young.

"Feral cats reduced adult kea survival in eastern ecosystems, those are the drier ecosystems east of the divide, to less than 60 per cent," she said.

"That's actually a catastrophic event and we know that that has not just been an isolated event."

Kea are long-lived and slow to breed so they needed a high survival rate to bolster their population Orr-Walker said.

She wanted urgent action to tackle the problem including adding feral cats to the Predator Free 2050 program.

"This is just about recognising that we can not have a large, obligate carnivore species that's incredibly efficient at killing our native wildlife in our ecosystems," Orr-Walker said.

"It's an absolute disaster and we need to be taking it seriously."

Otago Regional Council envi-

ronmental implementation manager Libby Caldwell said the council supported the sanctuary's work and had given it funding.

"Community-led biodiversity and biosecurity work is critical to helping to protect and enhance the environment and we thank the community in their efforts to support achieving joint objectives to see biodiversity and ecosystems thrive."

Feral cats are only included in the Otago Regional Pest Management Plan 2019-2029 for particular site-led programs.

Those include programs on the Otago Peninsula, the West Harbour-Mt Cargill area and Quarantine and Goat Islands.

"Site-led programs seek to manage additional pests to avoid, mitigate or prevent damage to the indigenous ecosystem values at specific sites," Caldwell said.

The regional council's role in those programs was advocacy, education and collaboration she said.

Kiwi situation is down to human interference

By LUCY DIAZ

PICTURE it with me.

You're standing in the forest or in a grassland or in a mangrove at night.

All is peaceful, quiet, serene then you hear it.

Some scrounging in a bush, the snap of a twig, a scuffle nearby and all of sudden a tiny shape darts by running, well, faster than you.

"Kee-wee, kee-wee," it calls out.

If you stand still and don't make any sound you might be able to spot the species that has become the avian symbol for New Zealand so much so that New Zealanders have come to be called Kiwis.

Strange and tiny, there are five different species of kiwi in New Zealand today and they have some shocking statistics which make one question how they've managed to make it this far at all.

Kiwis are extremely endangered and humans are to blame.

We are the main cause of declining environmental conditions and dwindling habitats of species all around the world.

As the responsible party I feel that we have a duty to learn more about the lives that we affect.

Even if it's in the form of fun facts and what I hope will be an entertaining piece it's important to remember that humans are now responsible for driving the evolution and extinction of most species on the planet today.

Despite conservation efforts the kiwi population is decreasing at about two per cent each year which is approximately 20 of the little birds per week.

So let's learn about these fascinating little birds before they are gone.

If you aren't fully mystified by the parasitic and horrifying nature of human childbirth you certainly should be by the way in which kiwi have their young.

On average a kiwi egg amounts to 15 per cent of its mother's body weight and can weigh up to a quarter of a female's body mass.

Imagine a 109kg woman giving birth to a 16kg baby and you'll be able to calibrate your level of horror.

Kiwi mothers can only carry



There are estimated to be 68,000 kiwi in the wild in New Zealand.

one egg at a time but despite that only five per cent of the eggs laid yield kiwis that make it all the way to adulthood.

The males of the mated pair sit on the egg until it hatches and the remains of the egg are used to sustain the chick.

While this is not uncommon for species that lay eggs I still feel the need to present to you the idea of drinking the amniotic fluid and eating the placenta for the first couple of months of your life.

Kiwis mate for life and if a male is interested in a female he will follow her around and grunt at her until she decides whether or not she wants him.

I guess this is like the kiwi version of catcalling?

If the female kiwi doesn't decide that the male pursuing her is up to her standards she will try to scare him off or simply just run away from him.

As nocturnal birds kiwis have very poor eyesight.

They are perpetually far sighted which for an animal that eats tiny, fast-moving insects doesn't seem so ideal.

They're also colorblind so at this point why really even have

eyes, you know?

Even more sad than their lack of eyesight is the size of their wings — they measure on average about 5cm long in comparison to their 46cm size.

When they run, they run with their wings tucked in close to their sides so yes, they're basically just Naruto-running everywhere.

But most kiwis, particularly the females, can run faster than people so maybe it's working out for them.

Kiwis that do make it to adulthood can live up to 50 years which is quite a long time.

They are the smallest of the flightless bird species within their clade or group of organisms descended from a common ancestor.

Other birds in that clade — like ostriches and rheas — weigh in at mid-95kg and around 23kg respectively while kiwis comparatively weigh a paltry 2.9kg.

Now in all honesty kiwis do seem a little bit useless.

That is because they have no natural predators and the decline in their population is sadly entirely due to human coloniza-

tion of their habitats.

Rats, stoats and dogs — all introduced by humans — pick away at the kiwi population and expansion of towns and cities in New Zealand further whittle away at their habitat.

A cherished national symbol kiwis appear on the New Zealand one dollar coin and on the coat of arms and defence force emblem.

The native population of New Zealand, the Māori, honor the kiwi as protected by gods and use their feathers for ceremonial cloaks.

They are no longer able to hunt kiwis but they continue to collect the feathers to continue the tradition and practice.

There are five wildlife sanctuaries in New Zealand, started in 2000, dedicated to preserving the kiwis that remain and ensuring no more kiwi species go extinct.

Before humans arrived kiwi populations were estimated to have been around 12 million but only 68,000 of the birds remain today.

You can learn more about kiwis and how to help protect them by looking up Operation Nest Egg, a program that helps kiwi chicks to make it into adulthood and re-integrate them into the wild.

Other birds in that clade — like ostriches and rheas — weigh in at mid-95kg and around 23kg respectively while kiwis comparatively weigh a paltry 2.9kg.

Fossilization affects feathers

By AISHA AL-JANABI

IN a study of dinosaur feathers researchers found that fossilization can alter trace protein composition and structure and find similarities to bird feathers.

Researchers at the University College Cork in the Republic of Ireland, Linyi University in China and the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory in California found that the protein composition of dinosaur feathers is more similar to modern-day birds than previously thought, shedding new light on feather evolution.

Earlier studies found that dinosaur feathers were mostly composed of alpha-keratin which makes feathers less stiff, whereas bird feathers consist of beta-keratin which makes them stronger.

The researchers wondered if that difference was due to changes caused by fossilization.

To find out they analyzed samples of 125-million-year-old feathers from the dinosaur *Sinornithosaurus* and from an early bird called *Confuciusornis* and a feather from the USA that is 50 million years old using the Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Light Source.

The powerful X-rays helped the team to determine if the beta-proteins were in their native form or if they had altered over time.

They also simulated the temperatures that occur during fossilization.

That showed that beta-keratin can unravel under extreme temperatures and form alpha-keratin which could explain the difference in protein composition.

“Fossil proteins are a useful tool in evolutionary biology however the idea that original protein composition may change over time is an often-overlooked aspect of look-

ing at biomarkers from deep time,” explained co-author Sam Webb from the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory.

The results show that the observed difference in protein composition between dinosaurs and birds is likely due to the fossilization process.

“Traces of ancient biomolecules can clearly survive for millions of years but you can’t read the fossil record literally because even seemingly well-preserved fossil tissues have been cooked and squashed during fossilization,” a researcher said.

Bush moa sequenced

USING ancient DNA extracted from the toe bone of a museum specimen Harvard biologists have sequenced the genome of an extinct flightless bird called the little bush moa, shedding light into an unknown corner of avian genetic history.

Published in *Science Advances* the work is the first complete genetic map of the turkey-sized bird whose distant living cousins include the ostrich, emu and kiwi.

It is one of nine known species of moa, all extinct for the last 700 years, that inhabited New Zealand before the late 1200s and the arrival of Polynesian human settlers.

“We’re pulling away the veil across the mystery of this species,” said senior author Scott V. Edwards, professor in the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology and curator of ornithology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

“We can study modern birds by looking at them and their behavior,” he said.

“With extinct species we have very little information except what their bones looked like and in some cases what they ate.

“DNA provides a really exciting window into the natural history of extinct species like the little bush moa.”

Bush moa were the smallest of the moa species, weighing about 60 pounds and distributed in lowland forests across the north and south islands of New Zealand.

Genomic analysis has revealed their closest living relatives are not kiwis as was originally speculated but rather tinamous, a neotropical bird group from which

they diverged genetically around 53 million years ago.

The Harvard team offered new genetic evidence for various aspects of bush moa sensory biology.

Like many birds they had four types of cone photoreceptors in their retinas which gave them not only color but also ultraviolet vision.

They had a full set of taste receptors including bitter and umami.

Perhaps the most remarkable trait of the flightless birds was their complete absence of forelimb skeletal elements that typically comprise birds’ wings, the researchers wrote.

Studying the moa genome could offer new clues into how and why some birds evolved to become flight-

less.

The scientists used high-throughput DNA sequencing which allows rapid sequencing of short DNA fragments of only 101 nucleotide base pairs and the building of libraries with millions of those genetic sections.

To produce the bush moa genome the team sequenced the equivalent of 140 bird genomes or around 140 billion base pairs of DNA only around 12 per cent of which was actual moa DNA — the rest was bacterial.

They then assembled the genome, taking each snippet of DNA and mapping it to its correct position.

Other species that have been mapped similarly are the passenger pigeon, the woolly mammoth and our close relative the

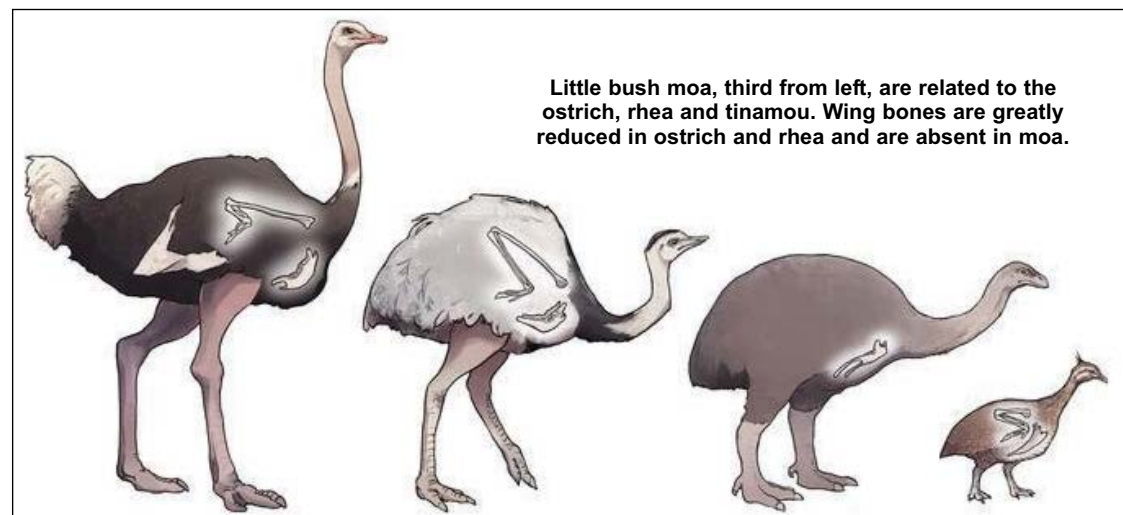
Neanderthal.

Using an existing emu genome as a guide they strung together the bush moa’s genetic sequence by finding overlaps between each genetic snippet, essentially reconstructing a long puzzle of 140 billion pieces.

The project originated more than 15 years ago in the lab of the late Allan J. Baker, an expert in ancient bird DNA at the Royal Ontario Museum who first extracted and sequenced the bird’s DNA from a fossil from the South Island of New Zealand.

Also involved in the initial DNA processing and sequencing was co-author Alison Cloutier who worked with Baker and later became a postdoctoral researcher in Edwards’ lab at Harvard which inherited the data.

Reconstructing the genome of a long-extinct bird fills in a new branch of the avian family tree, opening doors to study avian evolution or even someday, to possibly resurrect species.



Little bush moa, third from left, are related to the ostrich, rhea and tinamou. Wing bones are greatly reduced in ostrich and rhea and are absent in moa.

Other species that have been mapped similarly are the passenger pigeon, the woolly mammoth and our close relative the Neanderthal.

Private land protected to aid plains wanderer

By DELLARAM VREELAND

WITH an estimated wild population of just 250 plains wanderers may be Australia's rarest bird and most of their remaining habitat is on farmland.

The wide, dry grasslands of north-west Victoria are home to one of Australia's rarest birds.

Graziers who have lived alongside the elusive animal for generations have joined forces with conservationists to keep the species alive.

Bill McGillivray's family has owned property on the Patho Plains in north-central Victoria for more than 70 years.

"My father and partner bought the property in the late 40s just after the second world war and they had about 12,000 acres," the 80-year-old said.

"They sold it off but I've still got the original block they started with."

Of the 1400 hectares that McGillivray owns he says there are parts that have been grazed by sheep and cattle but have not otherwise been touched.

That has left the native mix intact which makes it ideal habitat for the critically endangered plains wanderer.

In 2016 McGillivray and his wife Sandra permanently protected 137 hectares of their grasslands through the conservation organisation Trust for Nature after the birds were recorded on the property through the use of song meters.

Now the couple plans to add 236 hectares more to the covenant.

North-west area manager of Trust for Nature, David Dore, said an estimated 500 to 1000 hectares of Murray Valley grasslands continue to be lost every year due to cropping and pasture improvement so securing the remaining patches is critical to the long-term integrity of the endangered ecosystem.

"We are very excited about it," he said.

"This is known prime habitat for the plains wanderer, validated through song meter recordings over many years and regular nocturnal surveys."

Conservation covenants result in a permanent, legally binding

agreement to prevent activities that might damage native habitat such as intensive cropping or development.

The covenant is registered on the property title and protects the bird's habitat even when the land changes ownership.

The plains wanderer is a ground-dwelling bird that depends on native grasslands.

They're notoriously difficult to spot and have to be startled by spotlights at night to make their presence known.

Standing at around 12cm tall the bird's fawn-coloured feathers blend in with Australia's arid plains.

Their main populations are now in the New South Wales Riv-

erina and northern Victoria with some recorded in outback South Australia and south-west Queensland.

The population in Victoria has declined by 95 per cent according to a 2015 threatened species assessment by the federal environment department which recommended the bird's conservation assessment be upgraded from vulnerable to critically endangered.

Numbers declined by 84 per cent in the NSW Riverina region.

The total estimated number of mature plains wanderers in 2015 was less than 1000.

In 2020 that number was reduced down to an estimated 250 mature birds left in the wild.

The biggest threat to the bird's survival is the loss of remnant grassland, overgrazing, use of pesticides and predation by cats and foxes.

BirdLife Australia's national public affairs manager Sean Dooley said the loss of native grassland has left the birds with very few options.

Dooley said the 2020 population estimate, contained in the Action Plan for Australian Birds, was concerning.

"The numbers can fluctuate according to the season and there may be other small populations of this hard-to-detect species but even if the popula-

tion is double or triple that it is still extremely precarious, teetering on the edge of extinction," he said.

"In the last decade we have made some real strides in protecting plains wanderers with several conservation reserves established to protect habitat and the management of those remnants has gotten so much better to keep conditions favourable.

"Much of the best remaining habitat is on private property and this is why covenanting schemes like Trust for Nature are so vital."

Another such privately owned grassland belongs to George Cullinan.

The 98-year-old farmer from Jil Jil in Victoria's north-west has placed 91 hectares of his property into a conservation covenant with Trust for Nature to protect the little birds.

"When we took the deed to the covenant out to Cullinan he said 'well as long as the little birds are OK'," Dore said.

"He's very simple but heartfelt and takes a great deal of pleasure knowing they are thriving on his property."

There are other hopeful developments — a breeding program at Zoos Victoria's Werribee Open range zoo has produced 48 plainswanderer chicks since the zoo's threatened species program started in 2017.

The organisation has partnerships with Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria and private landholders to select sites to release the captive-born chicks and protect their remaining habitat.

Zoos Victoria's general manager of threatened species and wildlife conservation science Garry Peterson said landholders such as the McGillivrays and Cullinan are integral to conservation efforts and critical to the success of the breeding program.

A number of plains wanderers have already been released as part of a three-year trial in partnership with Taronga Western Plains Zoo and Monarto Safari Park in South Australia which is intended to allow researchers to collect data on dispersal, breeding and survivorship and refine monitoring technology.

Dore says the partnership between private landholders and Trust for Nature works for both parties and for the environment.

"An enormous amount of really threatened habitat is on private land so this is a way of exercising some influence on the conservation values of that land but still not removing someone's property rights," he said.

"Part of our job is not to be critical of other farming systems but to remind people there are other ways of doing it that are a bit more in harmony with Australia's ecosystem."



Plains wanderers are around 12cm tall.

erina and northern Victoria with some recorded in outback South Australia and south-west Queensland.

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Tree removal affects cockatoos

THE Shire of Northam in Western Australia has been fined \$10,000 over the removal of 300 mature eucalyptus trees that were habitat for several threatened cockatoo species.

In May 2017 a contractor was engaged by the shire to cut down and mulch trees along 2.2 kilometres of Chinganning Road as part of a roadworks program.

The shire did not have a permit authorising clearing of the native vegetation.

The trees were estimated to be more than 25 years old.

An assessment by the Depart-

ment of Water and Environmental Regulation said the trees were foraging habitat for Carnaby's, Baudin's and forest red-tailed black cockatoos.

The Shire was charged under the Environmental Protection Act 1986.

In response to the clearing the department issued a Vegetation Conservation Notice to the Shire in 2019 requiring the installation of nesting boxes for cockatoos.

The Shire was ordered to pay a fine of \$10,000 with \$788.30 costs.

The maximum penalty for the offence is \$500,000.

Executive director of assurance

at the department Ruth Dowd said anyone planning to remove trees must see if permission is needed.

"In this case it appears there was a misinterpretation about what was allowed under the Act," she said.

"Our officers can advise on what permits are required and I'd encourage anyone planning to remove native flora, especially if it involves hundreds of trees, to check with the department.

"The shire has implemented new procedures to ensure that it complies with its environmental obligations."



Baudin's cockatoos were among birds affected by tree removal.

Rodent baits kill WA magpie-attacked owl

By BRIANNE TOLJ

A WOMAN'S horrific find in a suburban driveway has drawn attention to a disturbing increase in the number of native owls suffering painful deaths with vets and wildlife shelters in Perth pleading with residents for help after being inundated by the problem.

Michelle Silvestro said she was walking her dogs on a street in Morley around 5pm when she saw what she believes to be an eastern barn owl standing in front of a home while being attacked by a group of birds.

"No owl would be there unless something was wrong," she said.

"I asked a lady who lived there for a towel and at that moment eight magpies were swooping in on it so I snuck up and put the towel on it and walked home."

Michelle said she rushed the owl to her local vet which was only a minute or so away.

"The vet came back saying unfortunately it is dying," the mum recalled.

"She said it had a red belly and blood around the mouth which is likely rat poisoning and that there were a lot coming in lately like that."

Despite wildlife groups persistently urging companies like Bunnings to stop selling rat baits due to their destructive impact on native animals and pets there appears to be an increase in poisonings across Perth during the past few months.



Michelle wrapped the owl dying from rat bait poisoning in a towel and rushed it to her local vet.

Darling Range Wildlife Shelter WA said on Facebook in April it had admitted eight boobook owls most of which had signs of rodenticide poisoning.

The shelter urged locals to stop using second generation rat baits which remain in animal tissue after being ingested.

"It may be peace of mind for you to just throw some cheap bulk poison into your roof but these second generation poisons bioaccumulate," Darling Range Wildlife wrote online.

"That means the predators who eat them via poisoned rodents

accumulate the poisons in their body and the predators die too, a slow, painful, horrific death."

The organisation said volunteers "can't handle any more rat bait owls dying in our care".

New research published by Deakin University late last year revealed 92 per cent of nocturnal animals tested — including owls and tawny frogmouths — had rat bait poison in their systems.

The concentration of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides "in the liver was such that toxic or lethal impacts were likely to have occurred in 33 per

cent of powerful owls we tested, 68 per cent of tawny frogmouths, 42 per cent of southern boobooks and 80 per cent of barn owls," researchers said.

Rodents die quickly due to the efficiency of the rodenticide so the poison stays in the dead rodents and there is potentially a greater risk of secondary poisoning of non-target species.

Poisons should always be a last resort for rodent control BirdLife Australia said and instead suggests using a non-toxic trap or lure or rodent-proofing materials like wire mesh.

"Purchase baits that come in block form and deliver them in tamper-proof bait stations," a spokesman said.

"Tamper-proof bait stations are available at all major suppliers, avoid bait pellets or paste as these can be easily eaten by other animals."

Products that have a low predator poisoning risk are:

- Ratsak Naturals (a human and pet safe bait option)
- Bayer Racumin Rat and Mouse Blocks.
- JT Eaton Apple Bait Block Rodenticide.
- Parafarm Ratex Mouse and Rat Bait.
- PCT Holdings Surefire Couma All Weather Blocks Rodenticide.
- Ruth Consolidated Industries (RCI) Ratblitz bait.
- Yates RATSACK Double Strength Bait Station.

Protection plan ready for Phillip Island birds

By DANIELLE POPE

ONE of Victoria's top tourist attractions, the Phillip Island home to thousands of penguins, is developing high-level plans to protect the world-famous flock from bird flu.

There are fears that the deadly H5 avian influenza strand will end up on Australian shores and cause inevitable mass kill events according to some experts.

Australia and New Zealand are so far free of the H5 strand after the first cases were confirmed in Antarctica in February 2024.

Those in charge of protecting the colony of little penguins on Phillip Island are planning for an outbreak on Australian shores.

"Phillip Island Nature Parks has been really concerned about the risk and has been developing plans to be prepared," Invasive Species Council principal policy analyst Carol Booth said.

Dr Booth said even though Australia was well protected by its distance from other continents the main risk for the penguins will be in spring when migratory birds return to Australia from the Northern Hemisphere.

"That's definitely regarded as high risk," she said.

Phillip Island Nature Parks chief executive Catherine Basterfield said contingency planning was underway.

"Phillip Island Nature Parks is working closely with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and other relevant organisations to prepare in the event of an avian influenza detection in penguins on Phillip Island," she said.

While the Covid pandemic affected international visitor numbers to the world-famous penguin parade it remains one of Victoria's top tourist attractions, recording more than one million visitors per year from 2012 to 2018.

The 40,000 breeding little penguins on Phillip Island do not migrate but spend their lives on the shore, venturing out to sea for food.

Other penguin colonies include the St Kilda breakwater in Melbourne, Montague Island, Sydney's Manly Beach and Penguin Island in Western Australia.



Little penguins at Phillip Island come ashore after feeding.

Chair of Ecology at Deakin University Marcel Klaassen agreed that it was only a matter of time before the deadly H5 bird flu virus hit Australia via migratory birds.

"For wild bird populations it would be pretty devastating, we are seeing entire colonies being wiped out overseas so it could have pretty dire consequences here in Australia," Professor Klaassen said.

In March Federation University ecologist Meagan Dewar led a team of scientists to monitor the H5N1 outbreak in Antarctica.

Dr Dewar described the scene awaiting them as unlike anything the remote continent had ever experienced.

"This is the first time we are seeing something so widespread," she said.

"To arrive in some places where we have had mass mortality events was quite difficult to

work through and be in."

Scientists uncovered four new locations where the virus had spread and documented thousands of dead Adelie penguins on one of Antarctica's neighbouring islands.

Dr Dewar said the virus had the potential to devastate wildlife and the ecosystem in Antarctica.

"We have seen devastating consequences in South America with over 600,000 sea birds affected and over 50,000 sea mammals succumbing to the virus," she said.

"We do predict that it will come into

Australia with a lot of migratory birds around spring time."

According to Wildlife Health Australia targeted surveillance efforts for avian influenza continue to focus on sampling from waterfowl and shore birds par-

ticularly from locations where wild birds are known to mix with poultry and humans.

General surveillance across Australia is focusing on exclusion of avian influenza from wild bird mortality and morbidity events.

The strain of bird flu killing thousands of penguins and other birds in Antarctica is different from the strains that have decimated the poultry industry in Victoria during the past few months.

More than a million chickens have had to be culled in response to the outbreak of the highly contagious and deadly H7 strains of bird flu at farms at Meredith, Terang and other locations in western Victoria including a commercial duck farm.

Agriculture Victoria believes the disease had spread from wild birds in the state into domestic poultry.

A separate strain of the HPAI H7N8 virus was detected at an egg farm in the Hawkesbury district of New South Wales.

General surveillance across Australia is focusing on exclusion of avian influenza from wild bird mortality and morbidity events.

Kangaroo Island bird numbers down 70%

By CAROLINE HORN

THE number of little penguins on Kangaroo Island has plummeted by more than 70 per cent since 2011 with three previously active colonies now believed to be extinct according to the first all-island survey to be carried out in more than a decade.

Officers from the Kangaroo Island Landscape Board carried out the survey in November 2023 and recently released the results.

There are now thought to be 558 breeding adult little penguins across the 12 surveyed colonies on the island.

That compares to 1348 in 2011 however the biggest decline in numbers occurred between 2011 and 2013 when only 566 birds were counted, the last time an island-wide survey was conducted.

The latest survey showed the decline has continued but researchers say there are positive signs for the colony at Emu Bay which increased its population by 20 birds over the past decade.

The colony at Kingscote, the site of the island's biggest town, was once the largest but has now lost more than 90 per cent of its population, now totalling only 74 birds.

Colonies at Cape Cassini, Brown Beach and Western River Cove are believed to now potentially be extinct.

Project officer Alex Comino said the 2023 total island population estimate was conservative and that there may be pockets on the island with one or two birds that weren't counted.

She said time will tell whether the colony at Kingscote would also become extinct.

Ms Comino said there had been data in recent years from individual colonies and anecdotal reports from farmers and residents for some time about the decline in numbers.

"People have told us there used to be penguins here and I could hear them a lot and I just have not heard them in the last few years," Ms Comino said.

She said the island-wide survey now provided the bigger picture and would be repeated annually.

Ms Comino said the efforts of groups such as the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Network to re-establish habitat at Emu Bay have



One of the little penguin natural nesting burrows at the Vivonne Bay colony which had 54 little penguins in 2023 compared to 126 in 2011.

helped that colony along with the board's program to rid the island of feral cats.

"It's been a communal effort and driven by the passion in the community," she said.

Weeds and in particular kikuyu grass which pushes out native vegetation and forms mats that penguins find difficult to get through are also a problem.

Ms Comino said staff surveyed the penguins by looking for active burrows rather than for the birds themselves.

Little penguins tend to forage all day and return to their burrows in the evening.

"Their schedules are all over the place," she said.

She said they were often noisy as they tried to find each other and squabbled over burrows.

But the biggest sign of an active burrow was the smell.

"It's very, very smelly — smells very fishy and acrid and it's a very specific kind of pooey

smell," Ms Comino said.

Once calculated the number of active burrows found is doubled to arrive at the estimated number of adult breeding penguins per colony.

Little penguin researcher Dr Diane Colombelli-Negrel from Flinders University said she was not surprised by survey numbers having carried out colony-specific surveys in recent years.

She said the decline was due to a combination of factors including terrestrial predation, predators at sea, climate change aspects, food availability and disease.

She said it was important to continue to improve the habitat for the penguins and to continue the cat eradication program on the island.

"Yes, the numbers are down but at the same time I have to think, they're still there as well so there's still hope," Dr Colombelli-Negrel said.

She said it was difficult to say

whether the extinct colonies could revive but it was not impossible with little penguins having a high fidelity to the areas they were born in.

The board is working with a number of agencies and farmers to rid the island of all feral cats by 2030 in conjunction with a phasing out of all domestic cats.

All domestic cats on the island must be contained to a house or contained run and must be de-sexed.

Chantelle Geissler from the feral cat eradication team said more than 1000 cats had been removed from the island's Dudley Peninsula which has three little penguin colonies including the one at Emu Bay.

Another 2000 cats have been removed from the western side of the island as part of efforts to help native wildlife recover from the 2019/2020 bushfires.

"They are pretty unique that they're the apex predator on the island, the island being free from wild dogs and feral foxes as well," Ms Geissler said.

All cats caught in the KILB cages are scanned for microchips with any roaming pet cats returned to owners by the local council along with a hefty fine.

She said it was important to continue to improve the habitat for the penguins and to continue the cat eradication program on the island.

Pleasure-seeking birds using pepper tree bark

By PENNY OLSEN

BIRDS have been known to seek out pungent chemicals for various reasons.

Some consume fermented fruits with gusto and suffer the ill effects.

Others expose themselves to ants but only the stinky kind.

Those ants produce useful antimicrobials and insect repellents.

In our recent research my colleagues and I observed Norfolk Island green parrots applying chewed pepper tree bark and shoots to their feathers and skin during preening.

We believe that is a rare example of a bird using plant matter to rid themselves of parasites.

But there may be more to it.

Those birds seem to be enjoying themselves.

For more than a century scientists have puzzled over the purpose of anting.

When birds engage in that behavior they either actively spread ants or simply allow ants to move through their feathers.

In defence the ants release formic acid — could birds be getting high on the fumes?

Maybe pepper tree bark has more than medicinal effects too.

It's highly likely that such self-medicating is stimulating.

Both formic acid and piperine — from pepper trees — are pungent chemicals with proven medicinal, antimicrobial and insect-repelling qualities.

Our green parrots appeared extra animated while they busily snipped, chewed and rubbed pungent pepper tree bark and foliage through their plumage.

Almost a century ago, in 1931, Prussian naturalist Alfred Troschütz noted of anting “the formic acid must have an especially agreeable effect”.

In 1957 US ornithologist Lovie Whitaker concluded that the bird she was studying “appeared to derive sensual pleasure, possibly including sexual stimulation” from anting.

Her views were quickly dismissed and anting declared “strictly functional” but is it?

The apparent ecstatic state reached by some anting birds is well known.

People often come across Australian magpies with their feathers



Green parrots on Norfolk Island appear to enjoy anointing themselves with chewed pepper tree bark.

ers fluffed, body contorted, perhaps staggering and seemingly unable to respond normally — that is, to flee.

In humans piperine, the key ingredient in pepper, is mildly stimulating and several potentially hallucinogenic or mind-altering substances, notably formic acid, have been isolated from ant toxins.

Formic acid has been used to tone the muscles, to increase muscular energy and to ease the sense of fatigue.

In 17th Century Europe it was the “secret” ingredient in a popular tonic believed to improve well-being, calm digestion and to increase sexual appetite.

Indigenous groups across southern California used red harvester ants for medicinal purposes as well as for religious rituals.

The ants were ingested alive in massive quantities to induce prolonged catatonic states punctuated by hallucinogenic visions.

Many birds become intoxicated after eating fermented fruits and berries.

Their drunken state is often detected when they collide with windows or cars, get caught by cats while in a stupor or suffer from alcohol poisoning.

In 2021 around half a dozen drunk red-winged parrots were handed in to Broome Veterinary Hospital in Western Australia after feasting on overripe mangoes and many more never made it to the clinic.

The drunken reputation of the Kereru saw it voted in as New Zealand’s Bird of the Year in 2018.

That pigeon is known for occasionally becoming tipsy, even falling out of trees.

All of those pissed parrots and pigeons lend themselves to jokes about party animals but there is a deeper evolutionary context to such behavior.

As fruit ripens it becomes sweeter and more nutritious.

At the same time the sugar ferments and is converted into alcohol (ethanol).

So the concentration of alcohol increases.

Volatile compounds (alcohols) produced during fermentation can be carried in the air helping birds to locate the rich food source.

Ethanol is also a source of energy in its own right and stimulates the appetite.

Fruit eaters including birds, our human ancestors and other animals may have come to associate the presence of ethanol with a sugar hit and mild pleasure.

In turn the fruit eaters reward the fruit or nectar-producing plants by dispersing seeds or facilitating cross-pollination.

That evolutionary explanation for an attraction to alcohol is sometimes referred to as The Drunken Monkey Hypothesis, which was first suggested by US biologist Robert Dudley.

While some birds are inclined to imbibe it seems most can handle their liquor.

Like humans their central nervous system may well reward moderate alcohol consumption, making them feel less fatigued, more relaxed and sociable.

Such pleasure-seeking may seem like an evolutionary dead end but nature generally contrives to limit availability to alcohol.

Stimulation is mild and cases of drunken excess are the exception.

The latter often occur in situations where the fleshy fruits are in abundance, other food is scarce or conditions have produced unusually high sugar content which yields an extra-potent brew when it ferments.

Often the boozy casualties are young birds. Sound familiar?

Just as well smart birds have not figured out how to distil alcohol.

Likening green parrots rubbing aromatic vegetation through their plumage to inebriated pigeons falling from trees may seem a stretch.

But nature rewards behaviour that offers evolutionary advantage, often it seems by tapping into animals’ pleasure centres.

The pursuit of pleasure is an important, usually overlooked aspect of animal behavior, worthy of attention and further research.

Volatile compounds (alcohols) produced during fermentation can be carried in the air helping birds to locate the rich food source.

Agreement on release of Spix's uncertain

- The Spix's macaw, one of the world's most threatened birds, disappeared from the wild at the turn of the millennium due to illegal pet trade and habitat degradation in Brazil.
- In 2022 a reintroduction program released the first batch of 20 Spix's macaws, bred from captive birds, back into the wild, achieving great results, including the first hatching of wild chicks in decades.
- A leading parrot conservationist advising on the project said it "the most carefully planned, the most carefully executed and the most successful reintroduction of any parrot I have ever seen anywhere".
- In June 2024 the co-operation agreement between the Brazilian government and the German breeding centre that holds most of the world's Spix's macaws ended without renewal casting the future of the project into doubt.

By **BERNARDO ARAUJO,**
Mongabay

ON May 24 this year Ugo Vercillo woke up to a piece of amazing news — two parrot fledglings born in the wild in Curaçá municipality in the Brazilian state of Bahia had taken flight for the first time.

These weren't just any parrots they were Spix's macaws, one of the world's most threatened species with its few living individuals all confined to captive facilities around the world.

Or at least they were prior to 2022.

Now 11 of the stunning blue birds are flying free again in the semiarid Caatinga biome of northern Bahia and hatching a new generation of wild macaws, a testament to an intensive conservation effort that some consider — at least as far as parrots are concerned — the most successful ever attempted.

Vercillo, the technical director of Blue Sky Caatinga, a conservation organization focused on restoring Caatinga ecosystems and closely involved in the Spix's macaw reintroduction,

said the young birds that left the nest in May weren't the first wild hatchlings born from the program.

That first batch, a duo born in 2023, died before being able to fly so when Vercillo and other conservationists discovered a new clutch of eggs early this year they were determined to act.

"We had to intervene," Vercillo said.

"There were three chicks, we took one of the chicks because it was already weaker which is natural because they usually lay three eggs and out of the three eggs only one survives.

So we took the smallest one to take care of it in captivity to save it.

"But the two that stayed are strong and flying," he said.

"This morning I woke up to a photo of the chicks already on top of a catingueira tree, playing with their mother and being fed by her."

By 1990 that number had declined to a single male who found companionship with a female blue-winged macaw.



Two young Spix's macaws on lower branch with a parent after release.

The story of how the Spix's macaw went from being extinct in the wild to once again flying the skies of the Caatinga is a stormy one.

The successful reintroduction hasn't quieted the squalls — the same week that Vercillo received news about the chicks flying the administrative bond that held the project together was broken, threatening the future of the promising program.

For all their power as a national conservation symbol for the most biodiverse country on Earth wild Spix's macaws coexisted very briefly with conservation efforts to save them.

Though indigenous inhabitants of the Caatinga had probably long known about them the species was only described by science in 1832 from a specimen collected in 1819 by German biologist Johann Baptist Ritter von Spix.

But no one was really sure

where the species occurred until its rediscovery in the late 1980s and by then only three known individuals survived in the wild in the municipality of Curaçá some 1600 kilometers north of Rio de Janeiro.

By 1990 that number had declined to a single male who found companionship with a female blue-winged macaw.

That year conservationists said the Spix's macaw was effectively extinct in the wild.

The last wild bird died in 2000 but the species' extinct status was only formalized in 2019 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the global wildlife conservation authority.

In the eyes of contemporary science Spix's macaws have always been on the brink of disappearing.

Conservation efforts have been in place since the 1990s to try to save the species but they were hindered by a lack of resources and basic behavioral and ecological knowledge about the birds.

Driving the extinction were the threats of habitat degradation as farms and livestock pas-

■ *Continued next page.*

Agreement on release of Spix's uncertain

■ *Continued from previous page.* ture expanded across the Caatinga and the illegal pet trade which picked up speed in the 1960s and 1970s.

It was captive birds that eventually fuelled the species' revival.

The biggest captive flock of Spix's macaws today is held in Germany by the Association for the Conservation of Threatened Parrots.

In 2020 as part of an agreement with the Brazilian Government the ACTP sent 52 birds back to their home country for the reintroduction program.

What would follow was by all accounts a surprising success — one that would be thrown into uncertainty over a series of controversies between the Brazilian conservation agency and the German institution working alongside it.

Cromwell Purchase is the scientific and field project co-ordinator at the ACTP having previously served as research director at Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation in Qatar.

That facility once held most of the Spix's macaws left on Earth but according to Purchase in 2014 following its founder's death "the best option — and in fact only option — that secured the release project in Curaçá was to send all the birds to the ACTP in Germany."

The ACTP's main partner in Brazil was the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation, the federal agency responsible for managing protected areas and biodiversity.

In 2019 the same year the species was declared extinct by the IUCN, ICMBio forged a technical co-operation agreement or TCA with the ACTP regarding Spix's macaw reintroduction.

That agreement formalized the responsibilities of each part and would be valid for five years until June 2024 after which it would need to be renewed.

Under it ICMBio would be responsible among other things for technical support in monitoring the birds and bureaucratic support for the project while the ACTP would build and manage the facilities to breed, train and release the birds within the species' historical range.

In 2020 ACTP transferred 52 birds to that breeding facility from Germany and in 2022, decades after they disappeared from the wild, 20 Spix's macaws were released back into the Caatinga.

"The project has been amazingly successful beyond anything we could have dreamed of," Purchase said.



Spix's macaws in a specially-built enclosure at São Paulo Zoo in Brazil.

"We had a wish list and all the items have been ticked."

That's also the assessment of Thomas White, a wildlife biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and a co-author with Purchase, Vercillo and others of a study published this January in the journal *Diversity* describing the results of the first year of reintroduction.

The zoo now holds 27 of the birds with a maximum capacity of 44 but that on its own wouldn't be enough to supply the rewilding target of 20 birds per year.

"The Spix's macaw reintroduction has been the most carefully planned, the most carefully executed and the most successful reintroduction of any parrot I have ever seen anywhere," White said.

And he's seen a few — White was one of the minds behind the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Project, an initiative that successfully increased the number of wild Puerto Rican amazons from 13 to around 250 plus more than 450 in captivity.

He also worked on the conservation of parrot species in the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Chile and Brazil and was invited to advise on the reintroduction of the Spix's macaw in 2012 and according to him this project was special.

Before setting the birds free the team placed them in a training-and-release facility so they

could properly develop their flying, social and feeding skills.

The researchers selected birds for release based on their genetic makeup and age — 3-7 years — to maximize genetic diversity and avoid maladaptive behaviors that come from too many years spent in captivity and even after all that careful preparation the parrots weren't cast into the wild alone.

"The Spix's macaw reintroduction is the first parrot reintroduction that used the surrogate species concept and what's called the mixed species flock concept to maximize the probability of success," White said.

What this means is that the researchers released the first batch of 20 Spix's macaws along with blue-winged macaws — the same species that formed a couple with the last wild male Spix's in the 1990s so that the birds could form unified groups.

Unlike their captive-reared cousins the blue-winged macaws were taken from the wild for the specific purpose of teaching the Spix's how to behave as free parrots.

According to Vercillo by observing the more experienced birds the Spix's would develop a better grasp for finding food and avoiding predators.

By all metrics the Spix's macaws were good learners.

By the end of the first year of the reintroduction in June 2023 the reintroduced population showed a

cumulative survival rate — accounting for the uncertain fate of some individuals — of 58.3 per cent.

That might not sound like much but based on the other parrot reintroductions the researchers were ready to consider anything above 30 per cent a success.

The birds also showed good cohesion with 17 of the 20 staying together as a group.

Perhaps most importantly the released birds formed at least six heterosexual couples and one pair successfully bred in their very first year in the wild, a sign that the project was on the right track.

"We were pretty sure we'd have good survival, good flock cohesion and good interaction among the birds but we were surprised that they started breeding so soon," White said.

But the future of the Spix's macaw is still far from secured.

Vercillo led a study published in 2023 in *Bird Conservation International* presenting a population viability analysis for the species — a mathematical model used to gauge the likelihood of a population going extinct under various scenarios over a given period.

"In this study we estimated that in order for the population to remain stable and to avoid the risk of extinction in the next 100 years it would need to grow to around 700 or 800 animals," Vercillo said.

The plan was simple — to keep reintroducing 20 Spix's macaws into the Caatinga every year for the next 20 years so that the somewhat safe threshold could eventually be reached.

The goal would demand constant caring for and monitoring of the birds and continual investment in its breeding and training facilities.

The Diversity study reinforces that point, noting that "the importance of regular population supplementation and continued support of this nascent wild population cannot be overemphasized".

So it came as a shock to many of those involved in the reintroduction program when ICMBio announced in May 2024 that it would not renew the co-operation agreement with the ACTP.

Since then a conflict of narratives has broken out between the two sides throwing into uncertainty the future of the reintroduction of one of the rarest, most threatened species of parrot on Earth.

■ *Talking Birds* tried to contact ACTP's Martin Guth for comment about him selling Spix's in Europe and India. We did not have his contact details and asked Simon Degenhard who helped Guth export 234 parrots from Australia and is now editor of *Australian Birdkeeper Magazine*. He did not get back to us.

According to Vercillo by observing the more experienced birds the Spix's would develop a better grasp for finding food and avoiding predators.

Parrot painters saving refuge

By NEIL HORNER

WENDY Huntbatch didn't know what to do.

Her World Parrot Refuge at Coombs in British Columbia was surviving on lint and there didn't seem to be any light on the financial horizon.

That was before Fang, Pepsi and a flock of fellow cockatoos took her under their wings and got together to help.

The parrots, she said, have begun expressing their creative side with their paintings put on sale to raise funds for the cash-

strapped facility.

"We were desperate for money," Huntbatch, the owner of the refuge, said.

"We really didn't know what to do."

But inspiration struck either Huntbatch or the birds, depending on which tale you believe.

"I was chatting with a friend who asked me what I was going to do," she said.

"I said, I don't know, teach the parrots to paint or something, they teach elephants to paint, right?"

Huntbatch prefers a more

magical version of events.

"This guy from A Channel asked where I came up with the idea and I said it was the parrots," she said.

"There's a group of cockatoos that gather every morning and it's like a union meeting.

"They talk about all sorts of things, I was crying, really upset and one of the parrots came to lick the tears off my face which they will do and I told them we had no money and I had no idea what we were going to do and the next morning I heard them talking about getting into selling art."

Regardless of how the inspiration occurred it clearly struck a chord, certainly with the birds.

"They have a blast," Huntbatch said.

"It's something different and fun, we're always laughing and singing while they do it and they're just like little kids."

Unlike many artists the parrots, mainly cockatoos, don't go for long, moody walks along the beach to get their inspiration.

"We give them one piece of canvas and finger paints and we dip a brush and give it to them," Huntbatch said.

Ringneck cull gets nod

By SCOTT YUNKER

SEEMINGLY no one in Hawaii views Indian ringneck parakeets through rose-colored glasses — at least on the island of Kaua'i where the bright-green bird is categorized as an especially destructive invasive species.

A bill allocating \$150,000 to establish a one-year pilot program to reduce the population of the birds on the garden isle was met with overwhelming approval during a public hearing held by the Hawai'i House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems.

Representatives of state and county agencies, conservation and agriculture interests and individual residents on Kaua'i delivered written and oral testimony in unanimous support of House Bill No. 2329.

Indian ringneck parakeets decimate farmers' yields by eating seed and fruit crops including corn, sunflower, mango, lychee, longan, guava, rambutan, papaya and passion fruit.

They are responsible for an estimated average 10 per cent losses for the island's small farms.

"The financial loss to farmers is substantial, farming is hard enough as it is and most farmers don't make much money," certified master gardener and resident Bill Skelton wrote.

"Big losses might be the straw that breaks the back of some farmers.

"The last thing we need is reducing harvests of locally produced food, even homeowners are losing fruit to the parakeets."

The birds' status as an agricultural scourge lay at the heart of nearly all testimony received by the Committee on Agriculture



Indian ringneck parakeets are a huge problem in Hawaii.

and Food Systems.

"Population management of Indian ringneck parakeets is paramount if Kaua'i is to mitigate adverse effects on the economy, environment and our community's quality of life," wrote Nalani Ka'auwai-Brun, director of the Kaua'i Office of Economic Development.

"Kaua'i has the potential to be the breadbasket of the state," Ka'auwai-Brun said.

"Given our state's widely-known food insecurity and urgency to improve the security of our overall food system resources must be committed to reaching target populations on Kaua'i."

Ka'auwai-Brun's office recently

launched a citizen science mapping tool to engage locals and visitors in tracking and gathering data on the avian pests.

Indian ringneck parakeets — a popular pet species — were introduced to the Kaua'i ecosystem in 1968 when a pair escaped from captivity.

Several others joined the wild population after Hurricane 'Iwa in 1982 and since then numbers on the garden isle have exploded — more than 12,500 birds were estimated to exist in 2021.

Outside agriculture Indian ringnecks can present significant problems to everyday residents and the resort industry.

Their mass roosting behavior,

loud calls and accumulated droppings represent a nuisance at best and a potential public health concern at worst.

The birds may also harm native ecosystems by spreading invasive seeds, displacing other native birds and potentially spreading avian diseases.

Although House Bill No 2329 is specific to Kaua'i, O'ahu is also plagued by the parakeets.

"Let's not minimize the extent of the problem, we have it right next door at 'Iolani Palace," said Brian Miyamoto of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau.

"If you really want to see the extent of the problem go to Beretania and Punahou at dusk and you will see thousands and thousands of birds, they are in Central O'ahu, they are in Pearl City, they are all over the place.

"We don't want to take away from Kaua'i," Miyamoto said.

"But if there is funding, absolutely, let's look at O'ahu also."

The pilot program funded under House Bill No 2329 would reduce parakeet populations through roost culling or shooting birds with small-calibre firearms.

Representatives of the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources while supportive of the bill claimed that culling alone will not solve islands' predicament.

"Several tools will be needed to develop a long-term effective control strategy for parakeets" wrote DLNR chairperson Dawn N.S. Chang.

"It is important to recognize that not all management options have been tested on Kaua'i such as mist netting or cannot be implemented given the current knowledge gaps of the behavior and ecology of this species."

Reintroduction brings golden parakeet back

By SARAH BROWN

THE golden parakeet is as noisy as it is brightly colored.

Hanging from the branches above three of the medium-sized parrots screech and squawk as they peer down to get a better look at biologist Marcelo Vilarta as he observes them.

Also known as golden conures and Queen of Bavarias they are striking birds with their vibrant yellow plumage and green wing-tips distinct against the Amazonian vegetation but it's those colors that have put their population at risk of extinction.

The illegal pet trade coupled with acute habitat loss have reduced the population of golden parakeets to fewer than 10,000 wild individuals — a tiny number for a large biome like the Brazilian Amazon which is the only place on Earth where they are natively found.

They occur mostly in the state of Pará with records also in the states of Maranhão and Amazonas.

“There aren't any other golden parakeets naturally in the wild in any other place in the world,” Vilarta said.

He's part of a golden parakeet reintroduction project supported by the Institute for Forest Development and Biodiversity, a Pará state agency and the non-profit Lymington Foundation.

The program began in 2017 with the first flock of golden parakeets released into the wild in January 2018 in Utinga State Park in Belém, the capital of Pará and the host city of the COP30 climate summit in 2025.

In Belém the birds had been locally extinct for more than 100 years.

The inquisitive golden parakeets watching Vilarta from the tree are three of the 50 that have been released there so far.

“The idea of the project is to reduce the vulnerability of the golden parakeet population and create a new wild one here in an area where they were already extinct,” Vilarta said.

The golden parakeet plays an important role in seed dispersal especially for fruit trees such as nance and açaí as well as up to 21 other plants native to the



The bright yellow and green colors of the golden parakeet have made it highly valuable among wildlife traffickers. Intense poaching has reduced the population to fewer than 10,000 birds in the wild.

Amazon.

They are threatened with extinction in the wild but they remain fairly common in captivity.

On the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List and Brazil's national classification the species is categorized as vulnerable.

Habitat loss from deforestation and wildlife trafficking in particular continue to be significant threats to the bird.

The illegal pet trade was more of a threat in the 1980s and 1990s according to Luís Fábio Silveira, a curator of birds at the University of São Paulo's Museum

of Zoology who works with the golden parakeet reintroduction project.

Nowadays people breed golden parakeets in captivity where “they can be legally acquired all over the world” from authorized breeders he said.

But the demand for exotic and rare birds as pets and the profits they bring keeps the black market active.

“Wildlife trafficking is the third-largest illegal commercial activity in the world, second only to drugs and weapons,” Julia Trevisan, a biologist and wildlife coordinator at UK-based

campaign group World Animal Protection said.

Buying trafficked birds can be cheaper than through legal channels and traffickers are lured in by the potential high profits.

A hyacinth macaw for example can fetch up to \$16,500 Trevisan said.

An online search found websites selling golden parakeets for up to \$2400.

Most of the trafficked birds are sold in Brazil but some go overseas to the US and Europe.

Traffickers often capture gold-

■ *Continued next page.*

Reintroduction brings golden parakeet back

■ *Continued from previous page.* en parakeets by cutting down trees with nests in them and collecting surviving chicks.

It's a devastating practice for the wild population.

"The birds that survive can't produce again because their nest was destroyed," Vilarta said.

"They need very specific tree cavities to make nests and these are very rare to find."

The Lymington Foundation, based in São Paulo state, has successfully bred golden parakeets during the past 20 years to boost the species' numbers and in 2017 teamed up with others to reintroduce the species back into the wild.

Belém was chosen for the reintroduction to bring back "a species to a place where it had already disappeared," Vilarta said.

Utinga State Park in the heart of Belém is a conservation unit and the largest green space in the city, sprawling across 1393 hectares of largely preserved natural Amazonian environment, the bird's preferred habitat.

The area is guarded by private security and public environmental police, reducing the possibility of trafficking and deforestation.

The program's co-ordinators set up two aviaries in the middle of the park where 10 golden parakeets are being prepared to be reintroduced into the wild.

Most have come from the breeding program at Lymington but some were rescued from trafficking or from being kept as pets.

Within the enclosures the golden parakeets go through a period of adaptation and acclimatization which takes at least five months.

The nursery has vegetation similar to what the birds will find in the wild and they are taught to recognize and consume local foods.

They're also trained to recognize predators such as boa constrictors with Vilarta and his team placing live snakes safely near their enclosure.

The researchers then assess the golden parakeets' reactions to the snakes as well as to local birds of prey that hunt in the area and give them a pass mark if they emit alarm calls as predators approach.

Environmental education for the wider public especially at schools and universities and for park visitors also plays a key role in long-term protection of the species.

"The project has intensified its education to raise awareness of the importance of this species



Wild golden parakeets feed on fruits and seeds that biologist Marcelo Vilarta leaves out for them every day.

for the city of Belém because it's this bird that helps propagate the fruit species typical of our city," Monica Furtado da Costa, a director at Ideflor-Bio, said.

Educational activities include distributing booklets about the golden parakeet to students, creating games for children and hosting an exhibition about the species in Belém's Porto do Futuro Park.

So far the reintroduction program is working.

A study in 2021 about the project found that the released birds were very successful in finding and consuming native foods, evading predators and one pair managed to reproduce successfully.

The project has managed to reintroduce 50 individuals into the wild to date.

Despite the successes reintroducing all the golden parakeets — especially those previously captured — isn't always easy.

A female golden parakeet balances on the mesh netting inside the enclosure curiously watch-

ing Vilarta talking nearby and edges closer to him, showing little fear of people.

He says she was once kept as a pet, raised illegally in Pará before the owner surrendered her for the project.

"You can even talk to her and she responds," Vilarta says.

Another parrot clings to the netting nearby.

Vilarta enters the cage, collects the bird using a long pole and places him near a nest box to shelter from the mid-morning sun.

Before being rescued and given to the project that bird had been kept in a cage for 15 years and never learned how to fly.

Vilarta says reintroducing those two to the wild will be challenging if at all possible due to their inability to adjust to living outside captivity.

"At least these two can be happy and safe here," he says.

Currently 10 of the 50 wild birds reintroduced remain in the main reintroduction site in Utinga State Park and visit the en-

closure daily to socialize with the captive golden parakeets and to eat at the bird feeders that Vilarta leaves out for them.

He spends every day next to the enclosures monitoring captive and wild populations.

The other 40 that were previously released have dispersed to other regions.

Before their release each golden parakeet is fitted with a ring on its leg and a collar around its neck to help keep track of the population.

The radio collars help monitor the individual birds up to a point but they're not effective over long distances.

"Once they've been released it's hard to keep track of them," Vilarta said.

The plan now is to expand the size of the aviaries to accommodate more golden parakeets and then release another 50 into the wild over the next two years which the researchers and conservationists say they hope will go on to create their own populations across Belém and beyond.

"I hope there will be more chicks soon because they now need to increase their population naturally," Vilarta said.

"At some point we can stop releasing new birds here and the population can re-establish itself naturally."

Before their release each golden parakeet is fitted with a ring on its leg and a collar around its neck to help keep track of the population.

Trafficked birds back in wild

A GROUP of 41 parrots of different species from the Latin American region has been released in Guatemala's Mayan Biosphere Reserve after being confiscated from illegal wildlife traffickers.

The release of the birds into their natural habitat was the result of joint work of animal welfare non-profit organizations Asociacion Rescate y Conservacion de Vida Silvestre and Humane Society International/ Latin America which have worked together since 2007 to protect wildlife in Guatemala.

Most of the parrots were seiz-

ed in 2021 by officials while they were being held captive in wooden boxes in a hotel at Flores.

The others were brought to ARCAS after a series of rescues throughout the rest of 2021 and after a quarantine period they joined the initial group and have progressed together in their rehabilitation process.

Andrea Borel, executive director of HSI/Latin America, said negative interactions between people and wildlife as well as illegal trafficking of wild birds such as parrots are becoming more common in the region.

"The capture of wild animals for the national and international pet trade is a real problem in Guatemala," Borel said.

"These animals are often kept in cramped, inadequate conditions and denied the ability to exhibit their natural behaviors which can further cause them physical and psychological distress.

"By supporting and working with our local partner ARCAS this rescue, rehabilitation and release program is giving these birds back their freedom as well as increasing their wild popula-

tions to ensure future breeding in their natural forest habitat where they belong.

"We also work together on raising awareness and urging citizens not to buy products from wildlife and to report suspicious activity to the authorities."

Fernando Martinez, ARCAS director, said: "In our rescue centre the animals' physical, medical and ethological rehabilitation is carried out under strict standards and in compliance with protocols for the different species that are brought in as a result of illegal trafficking.

Neglected African grey taken from MP's home

By MURRAY SWART

THE Cape of Good Hope Society for the Protection of Animals in South Africa has confiscated a severely neglected African grey parrot from a newly sworn-in member of parliament.

In late April the SPCA reacted to a complaint about the living circumstances of dogs on a property held by a member of parliament in the National Assembly.

During the initial inspection the owner denied the SPCA official entrance and told him to return later that day.

When the inspector returned the conditions appeared to be in order indicating that the owner had cleaned the animals' living quarters.

However the inspector saw an African grey parrot with serious feather loss and issued a written warning to the owner to have the bird inspected by an exotic bird vet.

The owner complied and the veterinarian gave advice on how to improve the bird's health and reduce stress.

Despite that the SPCA encountered resistance when conducting follow-up inspections.

The owner accused the SPCA of harassment and refused to co-

operate with inspectors.

After a lengthy conversation the owner grudgingly consented to a specified inspection time while advising the inspector to tread very carefully.

"Our inspector arrived at the agreed time only to be denied access once again," an SPCA official said.

The SPCA approached the Mitchells Plain Magistrates Court on July 2 and obtained an order in terms of Section 8 of the Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962 read together with Regulation 468.

"Section 8 of the Animals Protection Act allows inspectors to secure a court order if an owner or occupier refuses access," the SPCA official said.

"Armed with the court order our inspectors accompanied by the South African Police Service, returned to the property.

"The owner was informed of the court order but responded with threats, claiming the inspectors 'do not know who they are dealing with'.

"Despite this our team proceeded with the inspection."

Upon examining the African grey parrot it was clear that the bird's condition had deteri-

The owner was informed of the court order but responded with threats, claiming the inspectors 'do not know who they are dealing with'.



The African grey was kept in unsanitary conditions at the MP's home.

orated.

The owner had not followed the veterinarian's advice and the bird was living in filthy conditions with an unsuitable cage adding to its stress.

The SPCA confiscated the parrot and took it to an avian and exotic veterinarian for further examination.

Radiographs indicated a respiratory infection and osteoarthritis while blood tests revealed elevated creatine kinase, mild hae-

molysis and low calcium levels.

The bird was also suffering from musculoskeletal pain and required ongoing pain medication, treatment for the respiratory infection, calcium supplementation, a proper diet, adequate sunlight and a suitable cage.

The veterinarian concluded that it was inhumane to keep the bird in such conditions because untreated the bird would continue to suffer.

Fraud and corruption driving Amazon trade

By CARLA RUAS

In 2017 authorities at the Miami Airport inspected a commercial shipment from Europe.

Inside a container they found 21 splash-backed poison frogs, a species known for its vibrant colors and poisonous skin.

The species is endemic to the southern tributaries of the Amazon River and it is highly sought after by private collectors worldwide.

When questioned the travellers transporting the package promptly presented documentation including an export permit required to remove, sell or maintain the frogs away from their natural habitat.

Wildlife inspectors realized the paperwork was false only because it was issued in Europe and not in Brazil, the frogs' country of origin.

The case illustrates the challenges of curbing wildlife trafficking from the Amazon Rainforest.

A new report by Transparency International Brazil, *The Wildlife Laundromat*, has found criminal organizations are using elaborate smuggling techniques, including fraud and corruption.

Experts say those tactics are driving the trafficking of millions of live animals, animal parts and wildlife products.

"It's shocking to see how these criminal organizations are structured," Dário Cardoso, a wildlife trafficking analyst who co-authored the report said.

"You have the typical suspects who collect, transport and trade wildlife.

"But you also have individuals specialized in falsifying and altering documents that give the entire operation a veil of legality."

Cardoso said the tactics show just how organized the operations have become.

While there's still an active network of small smugglers more professionalized groups are taking advantage of the legal trade to transport wildlife — from small fish to monkeys — across the border to neighboring countries, and eventually to Europe, China or the United States.

"This is not just about smug-



The hyacinth macaw, the world's largest flying parrot, is closer to returning to Brazil's endangered species list and is the target of smugglers.

gling wildlife in suitcases any more," he said.

"It's about laundering money and laundering the animals themselves to pretend their business is legitimate."

In Brazil, as in many other countries, the legal trade of some species is allowed based on CITES, the convention on the global trade in wild animals and plants.

That international agreement was introduced in 1973 and has since been ratified by 183 countries including Brazil and the European Union known as parties to the convention.

In that time it has also opened the door for falsifying a wide variety of documents to meet CITES requirements.

According to Transparency's new report, from 2010 to 2022 smugglers in Brazil were caught altering everything from fishing permits to export licenses.

They mislabelled species' names, altered their places of origin and falsely declared wild-caught animals as being bred in captivity, they also counterfeited bird rings and microchips.

Over the years IBAMA, the Brazilian environmental protection agency and the Federal Police have tried to fight back by digitizing forms and permits.

But according to police records even those e-documents are being forged.

Part of the problem is the lack of a comprehensive and unified digital system that monitors

transit, sale and apprehension of species leaving the Amazon.

Smugglers aren't only circumventing the law by falsifying documents, they're also making more money.

"It's a very profitable tactic," Cardoso said.

"When a monkey is traded with a false receipt giving the impression that it has been legally obtained that animal will sell for double the price."

That type of operation relies on corruption at every step of the way according to the report.

It identifies several instances of bribery along smuggling routes in Brazil, including police officers paid to ignore suspicious cargo, veterinarians paid to is-

■ Continued next page.

Fraud and corruption driving Amazon trade

■ *Continued from previous page.* sue false reports and airport employees paid to bypass luggage scanners.

Most concerning Cardoso said are instances of public officials facilitating wildlife trafficking.

“To have an idea of the extent of this bribery network just look at the diversity of public agents involved,” he said.

“We know of federal inspection agents, state police officers and politicians who have accepted bribes who were supposed to be working to protect wild animals.”

With so many people to bribe trafficking organizations need cash, lots of it.

That suggests that they get funds from even larger criminal enterprises.

“We’ve seen many instances in the Amazon of drug trafficking financing the illegal wildlife trade,” Melina Rizzo, research director at the Igarapé Institute, an environmental think tank, said.

“That is very clear regarding ornamental fish taken across the border to Colombia.”

Criminal groups smuggling drugs and wildlife across the Brazilian border likely share more than just resources.

“We know these organizations have also been using the same logistics and transportation methods,” Rizzo said.

In 2022 British journalist Dom Phillips and indigenous rights advocate Bruno Pereira were killed in the region while investigating one of the operations involving large-scale illegal fishing.

Although experts say more sophisticated groups are driving species smuggling from the Amazon it’s difficult to measure the extent of the activity.

According to Rencta, a Brazilian network to fight animal trafficking, 38 million specimens are trafficked yearly in Brazil.

While that figure may seem high experts consider it a very low estimate and it doesn’t distinguish how many species are coming from the Amazon Rainforest.

“We have a problem that official numbers are based on apprehensions,” Juliana Machado Ferreira, executive director of the non-profit organization Freeland Brazil said.

“In the Amazon in particular it’s very difficult to detect wildlife trafficking.

“The territory is huge and it’s very challenging for authorities to travel within the forest, inspect every aircraft and land border.”

What’s more certain types of species are rarely seized by auth-



Brazilian authorities found macaws hidden in a car by smugglers.

orities.

“A suitcase stuffed with bags of water containing ornamental fish is much easier to detect than a person carrying reptile eggs strapped to their body,” Ferreira said.

“Let alone bushmeat, bird feathers and jaguar teeth that cross the border completely undetected.”

A good way to start fixing the problem experts say would be for Brazilian Government agencies to share the information.

“Often apprehension data is

not shared widely within the government,” Ferreira said.

“Without consolidated statistics we’ll never have a true understanding of wildlife trafficking in the Amazon, how it affects biodiversity and other social and economic impacts.”

In the future she said there should be a unified national strategy to combat wildlife trafficking in Brazil that involves state governments, the Federal Police and the ministries of environment, health and education.

“Everyone has a different role

in combating this crime and we all have to work together.”

Brazil’s Ministry of Environment and Climate Change said it’s working on a national plan to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, one that calls for “greater articulation and co-ordination between federal agencies responsible for protecting wildlife”.

The ministry has 800 agents from IBAMA working in collaboration with state governments and the Federal Police dedicated to fighting this criminal activity.



Brazilian authorities raided a fair where birds were illegally traded.

Lilac Amazon shot by BB pellet

By **MICHAEL CHEN**

AN endangered wild parrot was found injured outside a home at Spring Valley in California but the biggest shock came when a veterinarian took a closer look.

Daisy and her husband hung out with their dogs in their side yard.

“There were five parrots flying around,” said Daisy.

On the ground Daisy’s husband found a wild parrot in the mouth of one of her dogs and her husband freed the bird.

“It walked and tried to fly but

it couldn’t fly,” said Daisy.

The couple called County Animal Services and the parrot ended up at SoCal Parrot in Jamul, a group that rehabs wild parrots.

An X-ray revealed a stunning finding — a BB pellet lodged near the abdomen.

“It was very surprising because I was assuming that puncture wound was from the dog’s tooth,” said SoCal Parrot operations manager Ashly Cass.

The injured parrot was an adult lilac-crowned Amazon, one of three endangered parrot species in the area.

In the San Diego area there are a few thousand wild parrots, around eight species in all.

Wild parrots date back nearly a century — Cass said it’s believed that the first parrots were trafficked across the border to be sold as pets.

During the past decade the parrots have been targeted several times.

“Simple cruelty somebody wanting to be a bully,” said Cass.

Cass said more than five parrots were shot with pellets and killed at Ocean Beach and Point Loma in 2016.



The lilac-crowned Amazon was shot by a BB pellet.

Hotel in Greece fined for abusing macaws

By **TASOS KOKKINIDIS**

A HOTEL owner at Halkidiki in northern Greece was fined by the authorities for animal abuse for using two parrots as teasers to attract guests.

Animal rights group Animal Rescue and Defence Squad alerted the police and local authorities in the resort of Pefkohori.

“With the perfect co-operation of all of us by order of the prosecutor two macaw parrots were removed which were being used for profit on the beach of Pefkohori,” the group said in a Facebook post.

A lawsuit was filed for passive abuse of animals and by order of the Prosecutor of Halkidiki the animals were removed and administrative fines provided for in article 14 of a 2021 law amounting to €20,000.

“We hope that our actions can help reduce the use of animals for profiteering,” Animal Rescue and Defence Squad said.

Macaws are a group of new world parrots that are long-tailed and often colorful in the group Arini.

They are popular in aviculture and as companion parrots but there are conservation concerns

about several species in the wild.

There are 19 species of macaws including extinct and critically-endangered species.

In addition several hypothetical extinct species have been proposed based on very little evidence.

Macaws and their feathers have attracted the attention of people throughout history, most notably in pre-Columbian civilizations.

Their feathers were highly desired for their bright colors and were acquired via hunting and trade.

In 2021 the Greek Parliament approved a new law on pet ownership which PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis said will create rules so that no animal will be abandoned or abused.

“Greece is changing and is finally adopting a modern legal framework for the protection of pets,” Mitsotakis said.

Despite the new law cases of animal abuse continue to happen in Greece.

In a well-publicized case in 2023 authorities imposed a €30,000 fine on a 75-year-old man after his donkey, tied with a rope, got tangled and died at Koropi east of Athens.



The two macaws used to attract customers in northern Greece.

“This is the first time that the prosecutor’s office has described this heinous act, the slow and torturous death of an equine as a result of a heavy form of passive abuse, as a felony,” the Hellenic Donkey Center, a non-profit group, said at the time.

In May 2022 police arrested a man who lured a cat near his

table at a taverna and then kicked her into the sea in a shocking case of animal abuse.

The incident took place in a restaurant in Aidipsos on the island of Evia.

It was caught on camera and was widely circulated on social media before police made the arrest.

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Elusive thrush found at very high altitude

By BOB DUCHESNE

THIS adventure began atop Cannon Mountain in New Hampshire's Franconia Notch.

I managed to sneak away from a family visit long enough to take the aerial tramway to the summit in search of a very elusive bird.

Bicknell's thrush is an alpine breeder.

In the northeast it nests in the stunted spruce zone at elevations between 3000 and 4200 feet.

Maine has suitable habitat on most of its taller mountains but access is challenging on all of them.

Bicknell's thrushes inhabit the stunted spruce because they can duck into the impenetrable scrub to elude predators.

The harsh environment also discourages food competition from other bird species.

But high mountaintops remain difficult places to live.

Two alpine species, Bicknell's thrush and the blackpoll warbler were added to Maine's threatened species list last year.

Cannon Mountain tops out at 4080 feet.

Not only is the stunted spruce zone easily reachable via the tramway but a well-maintained summit path and an observation tower make it easy to explore.

Thousands of tourists visit every week unaware that they are in the company of a rarely-seen bird.

I was aware.

I spotted my first Bicknell's thrush on that same summit two decades ago.

I've been up several times since occasionally spotting another but they are notoriously difficult to see.

But not on this day.

As I stood on a ledge I was shocked when a thrush popped up next to me and started calling.

From the next ledge, 100 yards away, another called.

Within just a few minutes I was easily seeing five notorious-sulky birds.

Then the singing started.

They were clearly ignoring me and reacting to each other but not in a belligerent way.

The Bicknell's thrush has a



This is a Bicknell's thrush. The photo was taken on Cannon Mountain in New Hampshire.

reputation for singing only at dawn and dusk.

But at 11am their songs were lilting all over the summit.

What explained that unusual day?

Unusual weather.

I deliberately picked a perfect day — warm sun and low wind.

All thrushes are enthusiastic singers.

But on mountaintops the wind typically comes up early and settles down late.

Few birds sing into a stiff breeze because they know they can't be heard very far.

I think the dawn and dusk singing ritual among Bicknell's thrushes has more to do with wind than any peculiar habit.

Their most unusual habit was on full display — the birds were not fighting over territory, they were advertising.

Bicknell's thrush males and females both mate with multiple partners.

Eggs in nests typically have

two or more fathers.

Accordingly fathers typically feed young in multiple nests.

They don't hold territories the way many birds do and different males will sing from the same spot at different times without dispute.

It makes sense.

In the poor visibility of thick vegetation males would have difficulty enforcing fidelity anyway and with such limited food supplies for hungry nestlings co-operation beats competition.

Socialized hanky-panky in the bird world is unusual but not rare.

In other low-visibility habitats such as grasslands and marshes it is almost common.

Bobolinks spread their genes around multiple nests.

In the same hayfields male Savannah sparrows work a little harder to defend breeding territories although enforcing fidelity is typically a losing battle.

In the marshes red-winged

blackbirds really mix things up.

Males spend a tremendous amount of time declaring territories and warding off rivals.

They use their red shoulders to display fierce aggression toward other males.

The blackbirds could learn a thing or two from the Bicknell's thrush.

Most of their territorial aggression is wasted energy.

One male may have up to 15 nest mates but as many as half of the eggs in his mates' nests aren't his.

Marsh wrens don't fare much better.

Both males and females aggressively defend their breeding territories.

To ensure enough food for their kids they will even destroy the eggs and nestlings of neighboring wrens.

Normally shared activities might strengthen a pair bond but males regularly mate with other females.

It's the same in salt marshes. Nelson's sparrows and salt-marsh sparrows along Maine's coast form parental pair bonds but fidelity is iffy at best.

What happens in the marsh stays in the marsh.

To ensure enough food for their kids they will even destroy the eggs and nestlings of neighboring wrens.

Long lost species on camera

By ROBYN WHITE

A LONG lost bird species from the African continent has been captured in photographs for the first time in 20 years.

The yellow-crested helmetshrike is known to inhabit the Albertine Rift which is located in the eastern mountains of Democratic Republic of the Congo but it is rarely seen or reported.

That is largely due to its remote habitat and the fact that it is situated in an area of ongoing

conflict.

The American Bird Conservancy has reported the bird as lost because it had not been spotted in such a long time however it has been sighted again.

The photographs were taken by scientists at the University of Texas at El Paso who searched for the bird high and low for six weeks throughout the Itombwe Massif, a mountain range in the east of the Congo.

"It was a mind-blowing experience to come across these birds," Michael Harvey, an ornithologist

and UTEP assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, said.

"We knew they might be possible here but I was not prepared for how spectacular and unique they are."

This bird is distinguishable by its striking bright yellow crest and that is what ultimately led the scientists to the lost bird.

During the expedition the team searched for 75 miles through the mountains for the birds, analyzing different bird species and other animals.



The first-ever photograph of the yellow-crested helmetshrike.

Hunt for 126 lost birds

By PHOEBE WESTON

THE coppery thorntail and the New Caledonian lorikeet are among the 126 birds lost to science, having not been seen for a decade or more according to the most comprehensive list of missing species composed to date.

The new tally is based on millions of records collected by enthusiastic birders and amateur scientists documenting wildlife in some of the planet's most remote locations.

To be part of the dataset the bird must not have a recorded sighting in at least a decade and not be assessed as extinct or extinct in the wild by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List of threatened species.

"Figuring out why these birds have become lost and then trying to find them can feel like a detective story," said John C. Mittermeier, director of the Search for Lost Birds at American Bird Conservancy which has created the dataset alongside BirdLife International and Rewild.

The authors hope that releasing the list will encourage people to come forward with new sightings of some of the lost birds and will spur conservation more efforts.

"While some of the species on the list will be incredibly challenging or maybe even impossible to find others might reveal themselves relatively quickly if people get to the right places," Mittermeier said.

Many lost birds live in the tropics, particularly on small islands and in mountainous areas.

Fifty-six lost birds are from Oceania followed by Africa with 31 and Asia with 27.

The longest-lost bird is the white-tailed tityra which has



An artist's impression of the New Caledonian lorikeet.

not been seen in 195 years.

It is known from a single specimen collected from Porto Velho in Brazil in 1829 and there was a possible sighting in 2006.

Others have not been seen for more than 150 years.

The coppery thorntail is a mysterious hummingbird known only from two specimens collected before 1852.

The precise location is not known but it is believed to be somewhere in Bolivia.

The New Caledonian lorikeet is a parrot known only from two preserved specimens collected in 1859.

Sixty-two per cent of lost birds are considered to be threatened

with extinction according to the IUCN.

Ornithologists scoured more than 42 million photos, videos and audio from citizen science websites as well as from eBird to find which birds had not been documented in the past decade.

They also looked in museum collections, read scientific papers and conferred with local experts.

Some of the birds are in remote locations and it's possible they are not lost to local and indigenous communities.

A large pigeon called a black-naped pheasant-pigeon which lives on a single island in Papua New Guinea was lost to science for more than 100 years.

It was rediscovered in 2022 after scientists spoke to local hunters who had seen and heard the bird, known locally as Auwo.

A paper published recently is based on initial analysis from 2021 which tallied 144 lost birds.

Since then 14 species have been recorded by citizen scientists and conservationists while a handful of others have been found in captivity or subject to taxonomic clarification, bringing the current total to 126.

If birders see one of the lost species they can contact the Search for Lost Birds to share photos, videos or audio.

Roger Safford from BirdLife International said: "We hope they are not gone forever and should do all in our power to prove this by finding them again and use what we learn to conserve them and the many other species sharing the extraordinary places where they live."

It was rediscovered in 2022 after scientists spoke to local hunters who had seen and heard the bird, known locally as Auwo.

Extinct in wild kingfisher hatches at zoo in US

IN May this year an extinct-in-the-wild Guam kingfisher, also known as Sihek, was hatched in captivity, marking a key milestone of an ambitious project to return the species into the wild.

The London Zoo is part of The Sihek Recovery Program, an international collaboration between wildlife experts across the world who are working together to restore a wild population of the species which is now only found in human care.

The female chick hatched on 28 April at Sedgwick County Zoo at Kansas in the US and is being cared for around the clock by a team of specialists to ensure the precious youngster's survival — including two keepers from zoos in London and Whipsnade who travelled to the US as part of the organisations' wider initiative to recover extinct-in-the-wild species.

Known as Sihek by the indigenous Chamoru people the species once flourished on the North Pacific island of Guam.

The accidental introduction of the brown tree snake to the island in the 1940s wiped out many native birds, bats and lizards.

The last wild sighting of Sihek was in 1988 and the birds are now considered extinct in the wild by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

There are only 141 Sihek left in the world, all under human care.

The recovery program is working to establish a temporary wild population on the island of Palmyra Atoll where there are no invasive snakes or other predators such as rats before their eventual return to Guam.

Nine zoos across the US are taking part in the collaborative breeding program in preparation for this year's hopeful release.

With only 45 breeding females left in the world the new female chick is vital to restore the species back to the wild.

The first chick was hatched from an egg which was transported more than 1000km across the US from Cincinnati Zoo in Ohio to the central facility at Sedgwick County Zoo where a team of specialists was ready to help rear the precious arrival.

Bird keeper Charlotte James from London Zoo said: "Each egg is about the size of a marble so

monitoring them requires a lot of care and patience.

"It's such a priceless moment seeing the first signs of hatching as these tiny eggs start to crack, revealing an invaluable new member of this unique species beneath their hard shells."

The chick is enjoying a nutritious diet of mice and insects provided by her carers but in the forests of Palmyra Atoll the birds will have to learn to hunt and forage for everything from insects to geckos.

Charlotte said: "Looking after these chicks during hatching is just the start of our work.

"With her eyes closed a dis-

ciens."

Yolonda Topasna from the Guam Department of Agriculture's Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources said: "We're all thrilled that this year's first chick has hatched and is doing so well.

"These beautiful birds haven't sung in the forests of Guam for over 30 years but this exciting moment brings us one step closer to the release of Guam Sihek onto Palmyra Atoll — a pivotal step towards the eventual reintroduction of this stunning creature to Islan Guahan."

With more chicks due to hatch over the coming weeks the re-

monitored before hopefully raising the first wild-born Sihek chicks since the 1980s.

Professor John Ewen from Zoo Society of London's Institute of Zoology and Sihek Recovery Program team chairman said: "Conservation zoos have played a vital role in saving these birds from certain extinction through a recovery operation initiated in the 1980s with an ongoing breeding program.

"Now in a growing global partnership we're working towards the next exciting step of releasing Sihek back into the wild, first on Palmyra Atoll where they will find a safe wild home to thrive in but ultimately then to a snake-free Guam."

He underlined the complexity involved in re-establishing a wild Sihek population: "Returning species to the wild is a long, carefully planned-out journey built upon global scientific expertise.

"When a species is as close to the edge of extinction as the Sihek low population numbers mean we often face challenges such as a lack of eggs and reduced fertility.

"As a result only one of the seven eggs that have made the journey to Sedgwick County Zoo so far has successfully hatched, highlighting not only how special this tiny chick is but why it's so vital that we continue to build large populations of extinct in the wild species under human care and work as quickly as possible to restore their wild numbers.

"We're hoping to release nine chicks on Palmyra Atoll later this year but this all depends on what happens over the next few weeks.

"It's still early days on the road to establishing a thriving wild population of Sihek but we know from other successes such as the 2023 downlisting of the previously extinct in the wild scimitar-horned oryx after the antelope's reintroduction to Chad that we can reverse the fate of the species on the very brink of extinction.

"Siheks deserve a chance to flourish in the wild once again and it's well worth taking our time to get it right."



This adult male Sihek is part of the reintroduction program.

tinct lack of feathers and weighing no more than a pencil this chick entered the world rather strange looking and completely dependent on us.

"But in just 30 days she'll have grown almost 10 times heavier and be covered in beautiful blue and cinnamon-coloured plumage.

"From feeding, weighing and monitoring them we're using the knowledge we've gained from raising chicks previously to make sure we're giving these birds the strongest possible start.

"Despite their small size each individual is a huge beacon of hope for the future of this spe-

covery program hopes to release nine chicks onto the predator-free zone and fully protected island of Palmyra Atoll.

There the birds will continue to be raised in aviaries at The Nature Conservancy's preserve at Palmyra Atoll until they are ready to be released into the wild across the atoll and into the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge, making them the first wild population of Sihek in almost 40 years.

The releases will be repeated annually until 20 Sihek successfully establish as breeding pairs. They will then be tracked and

Vancouver hen takes record

By DIRK MEISSNER

A CHICKEN from British Columbia in Canada named Lacey has earned a Guinness World Record for correctly identifying the most objects in one minute.

The world record shows that chickens are intelligent and Lacey now has bragging rights as one of the world's smartest hens said owner Emily Carrington, a veterinarian who lives with her bird on Gabriola Island.

"I just got the news a week or two ago that she'd been awarded the record," said Carrington who

trained six of her chickens to do a series of identification tricks — Lacey, an 18-month-old Hyline hen, came out on top.

"On the day of the record I ran three or four of them through the different tricks and Lacey happened to be the one who got the most tricks in one minute," Carrington said.

"The chickens were identifying a target they had memorized, it highlighted their intelligence."

In a video of Lacey setting the record of six identifications Carrington showed the hen a series of letters, numbers and coloured

objects before Lacey correctly pecked them out from among similar objects.

"I was just using their ability to see what they were capable of doing," said Carrington.

"I was just going with visual cues, their sole task when I presented the letters in front of them was to walk up and peck the letter, it's a great, fun way to show that they are smart."

Carrington said Guinness officials sent a letter last month naming her as the holder of the record for most identifications by a chicken in one minute.



Lacey the hen holds the Guinness World Record.

Guinea fowl pets, not poultry: Canada court

THE City of Vancouver in Canada has lost an appeal in the British Columbia Supreme Court that challenged a ruling last year that a woman's two guinea fowl hens were being kept as pets not poultry.

Justice Neena Sharma's decision on the appeal was handed down after the city argued again that a guinea fowl is a fowl and is therefore prohibited.

The matter was first brought before the court by Arielle Reid who disputed a charge laid by the city alleging she violated a municipal bylaw by harbouring a prohibited bird.

The city allows exotic birds to be kept as pets as long as a person does not have more than 12 but it also prohibits keeping of most types of poultry or fowl.

Guinea fowl are not explicitly mentioned on the list of what is allowed or on the list of what is prohibited.

When determining whether the guinea fowl hens were pets or poultry the lower court judge considered the reasons why Reid had the birds, the care she took of them and that her decision to keep them did not adversely affect anyone else.

"The disputant kept them as beloved companions for the pure

pleasure of their proximity," the decision said.

"Perhaps the same reasons many keep canines or felines, budgies or parrots.

"Her conduct in stewardship and care of these birds is exemplary.

"She has provided for these birds an exceptional sanctuary and the evidence shows an excellent coop, clean, airy and bright with fresh water and food, demonstrating the disputant's diligent efforts in creating a comfortable habitat for these beautiful birds."

In its appeal the city argued its bylaw is to prohibit keeping of animals in city limits unless an animal is specifically exempt.

The city also argued that the intention of the person keeping a prohibited animal shouldn't be a factor in the offence.

"The fact that she kept them for the 'pure joy of their companionship' does not take them outside of the category of being a fowl," Sharma's summary of the city's appeal said.

Reid disagreed saying that because the bylaw doesn't specifically mention guinea fowl by name it can't be prohibited.

Sharma also disagreed with the city saying that while the



Pet Guinea fowl can now be kept as pets in Vancouver.

bylaw does prohibit certain animals — "in no section does it state that animals or even classes of animals are prohibited unless exempted".

"I am not persuaded that a Guinea fowl is necessarily a fowl because the word fowl appears in its commonly held English name," Sharma wrote.

"The simplicity of the city's argument may be appealing but it does not account for the surrounding words, context and purpose of the bylaw."

Sharma said Reid gave several examples of other oddities in the English language specifically regarding animals.

"For instance doves and pigeons are in fact the same animal but when we eat them they are called squab," Sharma's decision said.

"Animal control legislation discussing cats as they are commonly understood may not intend to include bobcats in the same manner that bylaws targeting fowl may not intend to include guinea fowl."

Sharma determined that whether the omission of Guinea fowl in the city's bylaw was deliberate or inadvertent it's not something that can be corrected by the court.

"Importantly, the city bears the burden, as prosecutor, to prove that the bylaw applied," the judge said.

"Ms Reid raised an ambiguity about the applicability of the bylaw to her birds.

"The city was required to bring evidence or make submissions to resolve that contested issue. It failed to do so."

Reid disagreed saying that because the bylaw doesn't specifically mention guinea fowl by name it can't be prohibited.

Cuban sanctuary for world's smallest bird

THE wings of the world's tiniest birds are a near-invisible blur as they whizz around tourists visiting a private Cuban garden that has become a haven for the declining species.

The bee hummingbird measures just five to six centimeters long and is only found in Cuba.

Its losses have been huge with the International Union for Conservation of Nature saying it has disappeared from many areas due to deforestation.

But at Palpite in the southwest of the country Bernabe Hernandez, 75, has turned his garden into a paradise for the tiny bird.

"We never get tired of it," he said as he watched two of the hummingbirds *Mellisuga helenae* zip towards a hanging water bath.

"We always discover something new.

Cubans call them zonzuncito, a word evoking the sound of the buzzing of their tiny wings that can flap up to 100 times a minute.

When Hurricane Michelle, one of the strongest to ever hit Cuba, devastated crops and homes in the area in 2001 the zonzuncito disappeared according to local bird lover Orestes Martinez.

"There were no more flowers, many died," he said.

Hernandez moved to the village of Palpite after the hurri-



A Zonzuncito hummingbird feeds at the House of the Hummingbirds.

cane destroyed his home.

The government gave him land to rebuild on the edge of the Cienaga de Zapata, the largest wetland in the Caribbean.

"I moved here but there were no birds," he said.

"So I planted a ponasi plant to provide shade and attract some birds," he said, referring to a shrub whose fruit is sought after by birds.

He did not know that the shrub's flowers were a delicacy for bee hummingbirds who quickly flocked to his garden which also boasts mango, guava and avocado trees.

"When I first saw a zonzuncito I thought it was an insect," he

said.

He decided to plant more of the shrubs and his lush garden soon buzzed with hummingbirds which nested in nearby woods.

Another hummingbird the Cuban Emerald which measures up to 10 centimeters also frequents the garden which was opened to tourists in 2003 and is known as The House of the Hummingbirds.

Visitors hold up bird feeders to lure the tiny birds closer.

Guides from the Cienaga de Zapata National Park, known for its diversity of bird life with over 175 species, aided Hernandez and his wife Juana Matos with the precise mixture of wat-

er and sugar in the feeders.

The two have become experts in the behavior of the bird, pointing out the iridescent red head of a male bee hummingbird which looks like he is wearing a glittery mask, but only during the mating season.

For the amateur ornithologist Martinez the garden is an important sanctuary for the minuscule hummingbird classified as near-threatened by the IUCN which estimates its numbers at between 22,000-60,000.

The garden helps to protect the bird.

During the breeding season the female can more easily gather food for the chicks.



A zonzuncito hummingbird perches on the branch of a bush in the Hummingbird's House in Palpite village.



Bernabe Hernandez feeds a zonzuncito hummingbird with a mixture of water and sugar in his backyard.

Birds score high

By **TESSA KOUMOUNDOUROS**

ONLY some animals are known to fathom object permanence — the idea that something still exists even when it's out of sight.

Oriental pied hornbills are one of the few with an advanced understanding a new study has confirmed.

It's a clever skill that comes in handy when nesting females seal themselves out of sight in tree hollows, relying on their mate to bring them food.

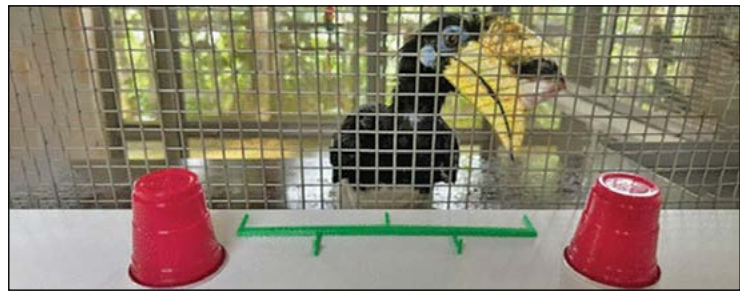
To lay and tend to their eggs in safety female Oriental pied

hornbills brick themselves into their refuge with dollops of mud, poop, saliva, fruit and bark.

They leave only a narrow slit for the males' food deliveries.

For any offspring inside to survive male hornbills must understand that their mate still exists even when he can't see her.

"From an evolutionary perspective the ability to represent other animals and objects when they are out of sight provides great adaptive advantages in activities such as foraging and avoiding predation," National University of Singapore psycholo-



One of the clever Oriental hornbills and the experiment set-up.

gists Ruitong Yao and Elias Garcia-Pelegrin explained in a new paper.

Aside from notoriously clever corvids and cheekily smart parrots no other birds were previously known to have object permanence to the same extent as

primates.

The researchers taught the hornbills to indicate where a visible treat is with a peck then the birds were moved onto a series of challenges which tested for increasingly difficult levels of object permanence.

Hornbills joust without getting knocked out

WHEN helmeted hornbills go to battle they wield their giant heads as weapons in airborne jousting competitions.

Diagrams reveal the calamitous outcomes that send one contender spiralling toward the ground as the victor rises but how do they smash into each other without falling unconscious?

That's what scientists have been trying to find out.

As their common name would suggest these birds are famous for their impressive head

which is armed with an enormous bulbous casque that's both ornamental and protective.

Known to science as *Rhinoplax vigil* the helmeted hornbill is a curious species from an academic perspective because its giant helmet could explain how they're able to bonk heads in midair without it ending in disaster for both parties.

"As I learned more about this species I discovered a cross-section of a dried skull in a museum revealing a shocking trainwreck of trabeculae — inter-connected bony struts — in the casque," said Dr Mason Dean, an associate professor of comparative

anatomy at the University of Hong Kong.

"When I heard that individuals are known to ram their casques together in mid-air displays I just had to know more about the functional morphology."

The team used micro-CT to look inside the casque to uncover the secrets of the hornbills' helmets.

Their samples encompassed male and female specimens including some with joint flexibility and a rhamphotheca — the

keratin sheath that covers the casque — that can slide off so they could get a really good look at a wide range of helmets.

The results revealed that trainwrecks of trabeculae were on average as thick as those inside an elephant's femur.

If that seems excessive you're not wrong because typically animal size corresponds to trabeculae thickness so the helmeted hornbill has really taken this trait and run with it — even Dean's socks were knocked clean off.

"I've used micro-CT to look at a big diversity of animal skeletons but I have never seen bony trabeculae like the ones we've



Male helmeted hornbills butt heads in aerial jousting at the speed of automobile collisions.

found in the hornbill," Dean said.

"That massive stand of trabeculae then channels back to the braincase like a bundle of ban-

yan tree prop roots, converging on a bony platform that's far more reinforced than in other hornbills and relatives we've looked at."

"I've used micro-CT to look at a big diversity of animal skeletons but I have never seen bony trabeculae like the ones we've found in the hornbill,"

Lensman fine for disturbance

A PHOTOGRAPHER in Wales has been found guilty of disturbing a European honey buzzard nest and fined more than £1600.

John Paul Haffield from Neath was fined after disturbing a nest containing a breeding pair of honey buzzards and their eggs.

After Haffield's disturbance one of the eggs failed.

The European honey buzzard is a rare breeding bird in Wales.

Haffield visited nest sites of several Schedule 1 species in Wales taking photographs of the birds and their young or their

eggs within the nest and offered the images for sale online on his website.

Haffield visited the honey buzzard nest in question on a number of occasions.

PC Mark Powell with the Natural Resources Wales Industry Regulation team said: "Officers from Natural Resources Wales are successfully working with police forces across Wales and the National Wildlife Crime Unit to investigate and prosecute those responsible for committing wildlife and rural crime offences.

"This was a particularly upsetting case, the defendant was actively taking photographs of birds protected under Schedule 1 and offering them for sale," Powell said.

"Climbing to nests causes extreme stress to adult birds resulting in eggs not being properly incubated, on the honey buzzard nest there were two eggs and one failed.

"This is very disappointing as the honey buzzard is considered to be one of the rarest birds in Wales."



The European honey buzzard is a protected species.

Loose emu finds a new Calgary home

By AMIR SAID

EMUS are native to Australia not Alberta in Canada so what was one doing on the loose near DeWinton?

Keith, found wandering through the Alberta foothills, will get to live with others of his kind thanks to Cobb's Exotic Animal Rescue in Calgary.

The bird was spotted by several people roaming near Red Deer Lake School before he was captured.

The emu which had been walking by the highway with a slight limp was wrangled and put in a trailer for his own safety before being picked up by the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"The Alberta SPCA gave me a call, they knew we had emus and asked what vet we use and then asked if we would house them for a little bit, just until the owners came forward," said Rianna Smyth, manager of Cobb's Exotic Animal Rescue.

"For us it was an easy answer because we had the space and we are familiar with emus.

"So we said yes and a week or so later they came back and nobody had come for it so they ended up gifting it to us."

The enigmatic emu raised questions when it was found — what was it doing on the loose near DeWinton with there being no information on emu owners, farms or hobbyists in the vicinity?

Why did no owner or anybody with knowledge of the large bird report it missing or come forward with information?

"It's somewhat of a mystery



Keith the emu has found a new home with other emus.

for everyone here," said Smyth who named the emu Keith.

"Lots of people will use them to protect their property and so maybe they had him and a few others protecting property or other animals and then he snuck out."

Emus, the second-tallest living birds after ostriches, can reach around 1.8m tall and weigh up to 60kg and are armed with sharp claws.

"Sometimes people have them as pets, obviously if it's a pet chances are someone would have come forward if they were missing it," said Smyth.

"If the previous owner came back we'd have to decide if we could verify that this was theirs but for now he is a permanent resident.

"Nobody's come forward and the SPCA has basically said that they probably won't."

No information is available

online about domestic emus in Foothills County and surrounding area though emu farming is widespread in Alberta and other parts of the country.

Outside urban areas no licence or permit is needed to own or breed emus in Canada.

Keith seems to be doing well in his new home which is home to nine emus in total.

Due to Keith's limp he is being treated before being introduced to the others.

"I'll probably be mixing him in with the others next week," said Smyth.

"They're posted on each side of the fence together and he's started making little friends through the fence."

When he's recovered from his injury and joined the other emus Keith will have plenty of space to run around and socialize.

"Super smart animals, they're very curious," Smyth said.

Swallow killer charged

IN a landmark decision a court at Świdnica in south-western Poland has convicted a man of destroying a swallow nest, marking the first such verdict in the country.

The incident occurred in August last year in the town of Świebodzice in Poland's Lower Silesia region.

According to prosecutors the 42-year-old man, fully aware of the presence of fledglings in the nest, deliberately knocked it down from a second-floor corner window.

A witness to the event found the fledglings, one of which had a severed leg.

The woman took care of the injured birds, handed them over to an animal rescue group and notified the police.

The Świdnica prosecutor's office charged the man with the attempted killing of three house martin fledglings by destroying their nest.

"The perpetrator did not achieve his intended goal as the fledglings received veterinary care," Świdnica district prosecutor Marek Rusin said.

The court found the man guilty and fined him 1160 euros.

"The verdict is satisfying for us and sets a precedent nationwide," Rusin said.

House martins are under strict species protection in Poland.

Regulations allow for the removal of swallow nests only between mid-October and late February, and solely from buildings or green areas.

Birds moved after emu killed

SHANNON McCarrell still wakes up expecting to find her pet emu running around the large enclosure outside her rural Haldimand County home in the US.

But the Fisherville-area property known to locals as the bird house is missing its signature residents after a break-in left McTavish — one of McCarrell's emus — dead, prompting her to find a safer home for her remaining large birds.

McCarrell does not want to reveal where she moved her three other emus and an ostrich to last month.

She fears another attack from whoever got onto her property around 3am on March 13 and snapped McTavish's neck after striking him over the head.

The intruders then dragged the 120-pound carcass to the centre of the enclosure, leaving the bloody mess for the family to discover in the morning.

"I rehomed the birds to a new, secure location where they would be safe," McCarrell said.

"I didn't want the intruders to come back and do it again."

The animal-loving veterinary technician said it was a heartbreaking decision to let her big birds leave the nest even if it was for their own safety.

"I've had them all since they were two days old," McCarrell said.

"The day I was rehoming them, my daughter just held me on the couch while I cried."



Shannon McCarrell with an ostrich and an emu.

Scientists lead birds to new winter ground

By LESLIE SATTLER

IN 2023 determined scientists embarked on a daring mission to save the critically endangered northern bald ibis from the brink of extinction according to the BBC.

By teaching the rare birds a new migration route they aimed to protect the species from the devastating impacts of our polluted climate.

Biologists Barbara Steininger and Helena Wehner took on the role of foster mothers for 35 newly-hatched ibis chicks, bonding with them day and night.

Their hope?

That the young ibises would trust them enough to follow their ultralight aircraft on an unprecedented 1400-mile journey to a new wintering ground.

Atmospheric pollution has disrupted the bald ibis' centuries-old migration path over the Alps.

Delayed departures due to warming autumns mean the birds reach impassable frozen peaks.

Dozens have been stranded in snowy mountains facing likely starvation.

Steininger and Wehner's innovative solution charted a new course through lowland Ger-

many, France and Spain where the ibises can soar over hills and plains aided by uplifting thermals, reaching a safe haven.

Along the way Wehner found inspiration in the sight of hundreds of storks riding thermal uplifts along the same route.

"We really felt part of this worldwide migration because we were on a route where many, many birds migrate," she reflected.

"And we were crossing our fingers for all of them and willing them to succeed."

Why go to such extraordinary lengths for one bird species?

The northern bald ibis is an umbrella species — protecting it helps many other animals that share its habitat.

The team's work with power companies to insulate lines also prevents electrocutions of storks, eagles and more.

Throughout the six-week migration the birds astounded their human companions.

Gliding in graceful V-formations and joyfully swooping along coastlines the flock covered up to 62 mph and even a run-in with an eagle couldn't deter them.

In the end most of the ibises

"We really start behaving a bit like birds over time because we look at our environment in a totally different way compared to humans," she said.



Researchers showed the ibis the way to a new wintering ground.

safely reached their Spanish sanctuary.

A bittersweet farewell ensued as Steininger and Wehner let their charges fly free.

The hope is that these birds will lead their own migrations back to breeding grounds, rejoining another reintroduced ibis population.

"Whenever we have a chance to save a species we should use it," said Wehner.

"It offers a glimmer of hope."

Their daring mission proves how innovative thinking and dedication can help vulnerable

species to navigate a changing world.

As Steininger muses forging such a unique bond with the birds is special.

"We really start behaving a bit like birds over time because we look at our environment in a totally different way compared to humans," she said.

Perhaps we could all benefit from considering the planet from other species' perspectives and taking action to protect the wondrous creatures with whom we share this Earth.

Eagle to become national bird

SEVERAL members of the United States Congress from both sides of the aisle have introduced new legislation that will officially designate the bald eagle as America's national bird.

Unlike the national mammal the bison or the national tree the oak the bald eagle does not hold the title of national bird.

Instead it is designated as the national symbol, a qualification that the National Eagle Center has been looking to change.

Many people would likely be surprised that the bald eagle is not already the national bird but

Director of Advancement and Marketing Communications for the center Ed Hahn said it isn't all that shocking.

"It's a very understandable position to be in," he said.

"When we come up in school or just living our lives there's eagle iconography and imagery pretty much everywhere we look in our society even if we don't realize it."

The National Eagle Center is playing a small part in getting the bald eagle the recognition it deserves thanks to the efforts of one particularly fanatic collector, Preston Cook.

"He has made it his life's ambition and work to collect all things eagle related," Hahn said.

During the past 50 years Cook has meticulously collected more than 25,000 objects featuring the image of the bald eagle, a small portion of which is now on display.

For those who work at the center the effort isn't as superficial as just a name.

"I think it's just, it's the right thing to do because it is so important both ecologically and historically to our culture," Hahn said.



Moves are afoot to make the bald eagle the US national bird.

How birds are able to fly without collisions

By MATT ROWE

WHEN you see a group of birds it's called a flock.

The practice of flocking serves two known purposes — to fly together during migratory periods or to forage for food.

It's the whole safety in numbers thing.

The visual appearance of a flock is an amazing view all by itself.

We're often awestruck by the uniquely beautiful synchronicity the birds exhibit with their ordered pattern of flights.

Flock flight requires amazing co-ordination and control otherwise you'd have a group of birds flying to their own whims which would result in unsatisfactory and unproductive intent.

Therefore applied natural science is in effect as the birds fly from destination to destination.

But what exactly are they doing to maintain such control, to attain a concerted effort for useful results?

Birds must be heavily involved in the attention of their closest neighbors in flight.

It is with that acute attention that birds can then pass on flight patterns to others with instant decision-making processes during their flight as a flock.

Essential rules in flight involve the interests of avoiding collision with other birds and matching the speed of others to maintain a useful intent.



Birds must be heavily involved in the attention of their closest neighbors when in flight.

Imagine the intellectual and computational forces those brains must have to calculate and convey immediate intent all within a moment's notice.

As the size of a flock increases the concern for predators seems to dissipate more than if the flock were a smaller group but it also increases dissonance for the growing group.

Starlings depend on at least seven of their neighboring flyers to gain information of intended flight patterns.

Science communities are continually evaluating those natur-

al efforts because they could also yield useful information for the development of more effective aircraft.

When the elements of aerodynamics are naturally used by birds we pay closer attention to their successes in the hopes that we can replicate them.

Birds take advantage of natural flow of air in the atmosphere.

Those flows, modified by their motion, offer a useful reduction of energy needed for the effort.

But as a group gets larger useful aerodynamics can be impeded to cause disruptions that can

lead to collision.

In fact it has been noted that larger groups experience the problem of late-following birds becoming more disconcerted in their attempts to fly with the flock.

They seem to have to work harder to stay effective.

In smaller groups leading neighbors leave behind a flow of air that can lift and help maintain flight levels of following birds.

Studies have shown that the lead birds help create a better airflow for their nearest neighbors but the wave-like oscillated air created by lead flyers gain more intensity further down the line making it more difficult for late-following birds within the flock to maintain an effectual flight pattern.

Recent studies were done at New York University's applied mathematics laboratory where a small team of researchers conducted experiments with 3D-printed flappers that simulate birds' wings.

The flappers were powered by motors in an effort to replicate and watch how air flows around birds' wings.

The experiments yielded surprising results that show how birds might specifically organize to create essential forces and use those forces to help them in their flights in various groupings.

We're learning from birds with their use of natural physics.



Planning for change

PARROTS have long lifespans and some species can survive for 60-80 years in captivity — our companion parrots may outlive us.

Let's face it, we are all going to die, so what will happen to our birds when we no longer walk this Earth?

Most will think of our pet's fate as we enter retirement age but it should concern all caregivers regardless of age, status or condition.

A contingency plan for birds is a must so avoid the thought process that it will never happen.

We may die young in a tragic accident or peacefully in our sleep at a ripe old age.

Decide now what will happen to your companion parrot if you die tomorrow and take steps to ensure that your bird keeps a quality of life after you pass away.

There is a list of challenges your companion parrot may encounter with your passing.

As most of us know, parrots can be sensitive to change — the sudden loss of a caregiver along with a drastic change in the daily routine or a new home environment can be stressful for a bird.

You can take steps now to help the transition, that way there will be less or no doubt about what you requested for your companion parrot with a plan in place.

First you will need a caregiver who will provide the specialised care a companion parrot needs such as specific diet, housing, out-of-cage time, foraging, various forms of enrichment and availability of avian vet care.

The new caregiver must be sensitive to the behavioural issues of a parrot which has lost its owner.

Being separated from a human that they have bonded with over the years or decades can lead to various types of unwanted behaviours.

It boils down to a matter of trust when asking yourself who can take care of your beloved pet when you're gone.

There are other key attributes to consider — the new caregiver has to be 100 per cent willing and have the ability to meet the pet's needs.

Perhaps the smoothest transition for a parrot is for the current caregivers to make plans with a family member or friend.

That can work out well for the bird — it will find a new home

with someone that the bird is already familiar with.

When workable you might set up visits to the new environment or keep a schedule of regular visits at your home.

There are often people in your immediate circle who will offer to take on the responsibility but they may have no previous experience or knowledge of caring for parrots — good intentions but lacking skills needed to care for a parrot.

I've seen that happen many times with people who have decided to rehome a bird — caregivers feel that they cannot provide what the companion parrot needs.



New routines must be considered when rehoming a companion bird.

When a family member or friend steps up to take on the responsibility for the parrot it's not unusual that in just a few weeks they are contacting the original owner(s) to please take the bird back because they just can't handle it.

So choose wisely when considering a friend or family member and also be conscious that you do not guilt trip the person into taking your companion bird.

That will usually have a poor outcome, it's also a wise move to have two or three alternate caregivers in mind just in case you need to go with a plan B.

There may not be a particular person you can trust to take care of your parrot so this would be the time to look into parrot rescue/shelter organisations.

Do you trust the person or people at the sanctuary or rescue to care for your loved pet?

There are also pet adoption

groups that will help you find a future caregiver for your pet.

Most of those places have wonderful reputations but some don't.

Your due diligence is required to find a responsible group — visit the group's facilities to get to know the staff and review daily procedures and perhaps even volunteer there to get an in-depth look at the operation.

You could go online to study reviews from other clients or search the agencies to find out if they have all their required paperwork such as tax forms or articles of incorporation.

Once you've identified a reliable organization you'll collaborate with them to ensure that

some of those organizations can be on the shady side.

They may not live up to their side of the bargain so again, your due diligence is required.

Visit the facility, talk to staff and review any online resources.

Those facilities will need to have legal contracts in place and this option can be costly.

It's important to make financial arrangements to cover the costs of caring for your companion parrot regardless of whether you leave it with a friend, rescue organization or sanctuary.

Of course you would want to find a caregiver who is not in it for the money however there is a financial obligation to maintain a parrot including the cost of food, toys, caging and vet care.

If your parrot was to live for another 20 years and the new caregiver spent \$75 month that would add up to around \$18,000.

Because you can't name a pet as a monetary beneficiary you may decide to create a trust fund — a legal arrangement to provide maintenance and care for your pet(s) when you die or are no longer capable of taking care of the bird(s) yourself.

Having a trust in place will often elevate any concerns, you should consult with a lawyer who specialises in estate planning and if possible has experience with pet trusts.

Its may be worth the additional costs to be certain that everything is in place.

Death and dying may not be the most comfortable topics to ponder.

Having a plan will often provide more peace of mind than you may have previously thought.

It's not only the most responsible thing to do but your companion parrot will be grateful for it.

Don't leave your companion parrot's fate up to chance.



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Galah tops air strike numbers

By **JACOB SHTEYMAN**

THE galah has earned the unwelcome accolade of the most common Australian bird species to have its life ended by the fuselage of an aircraft.

In the past decade 727 of the iconic cockatoos have perished in aircraft strikes according to an interactive dashboard published by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

Galahs beat magpies and plovers which were involved in 490 and 421 collisions respectively to take the honour.

Bats and flying foxes also featured heavily on the list, accounting for more than 1300 incidents between them.

The dashboard details all wildlife strikes in the past decade and includes information such as species of animal, severity of collision, location and aircraft involved.

Many pilots were unable to identify the species of animal annihilated on their aircraft with the source of almost 6000 bird strikes unknown.

It is hoped the granular data will help pilots, regulators and other aviation industry partici-

pants understand and manage the hazards of bird strikes.

“Wildlife strikes, particularly bird strikes, represent around a third of the 5500 aviation occurrences reported to the ATSB each year,” chief commissioner Angus Mitchell said.

Bird strikes were responsible for two fatal incidents between 2014 and March 2024, the period covered by the tool.

In September 2022 pilot Tom Grey was killed when an Australian bustard struck the windshield of his Air Tractor AT-502B while crop dusting.



Galahs are the Australian birds most likely to collide with aircraft.

Cool cockatoo turns heads in Invercargill

By **LOUISA STEYL**

HE'S well into his 40s but with all the cheek of a toddler Samuel steals hearts wherever he goes at Invercargill in New Zealand.

That's probably because, as his mum Lana Osborne pointed out, most people think he's just a bird until he opens his beak, gives you a cuddle or orders his cheese in the McDonald's drive-through.

The cool cockatoo has become something of a celebrity and a major attraction at Creativity Plus in Dee Street where he joins Osborne at work most days.

“He's quite a character,” she said while he squawks in with his two cents worth.

Samuel has been a member of the Osborne family for eight years after being rehomed from an elderly couple in New Zealand's North Island.

The family had experience caring for birds and wanted to give another bird a chance at a good life.

It took him about six months to realise he was safe with them Osborne recalls.

Two years later Samuel and Osborne lost her son and the two helped each other through their grief.

“They have emotions just like we do,” she said, explaining how Samuel went through stages of grief like anger and depression.

“It's a bit like having a companion dog but he's a bird.”



Samuel the sulphur-crested cockatoo has a car perch he uses to get around Invercargill with Lana Osborne.

Most days he travels to work on his perch on the passenger seat of Osborne's car.

He spends the day hanging out on his cage, unpacking his toy box and sharing cuddles with customers — some who come in just to see him.

Samuel is fairly well known around other stores in Invercargill and staff often stop what

they are doing to greet him Osborne said.

“He's pretty spoiled that way.”

On Wednesdays Samuel stays home for a spa day, he gets a shower and a massage and dries off indoors.

“He just loves it but he's got a real routine he's got to stick to,” Osborne said.

Samuel knows when it's time

for a meal and he takes himself off for a nap when he gets home from work.

Trips to McDonald's are fairly predictable too and Samuel will start ordering before Osborne has pulled up to the drive-through window.

“He's got to make sure he gets his piece of cheese and they know him,” Osborne said.

A freak accident last year left Samuel with one wing.

His ladder fell on him and in the best option for him was amputation but it hasn't slowed him down.

“He's such an idiot, he forgets he doesn't have a wing,” Osborne said with a laugh.

“Sometimes he needs to be caught because he rolls down his cage, sometimes he gets overzealous and falls off his perch.

“It's like having a toddler 24/7.”

When he's with her Osborne has to make sure Samuel is warm, has his snacks and toys and he's entertained.

But she does miss him when he's not there.

“You get used to having him around,” she said.

The two are busy winding down their social life on Dee Street as Osborne prepares to close her Creativity Plus store-front.

There are likely to be a few Southlanders who may miss Samuel but Osborne said they'll just have to see him around in different places.

Crows playing us with primate-sized brains

By STEPHEN HOWIE

CROWS are ubiquitous to Seattle — a single roost at the University of Washington Bothell campus is home to as many as 16,000 birds.

The sight of thousands of crows flying toward the campus at dusk has become one of Seattle's signature attractions for those in the know.

A crow-filled sky might stir Hitchcockian visions for some, a murder of crows harassing people when they venture outside.

This is the time of year when Seattleites take to social media with tales of protective crow parents dive-bombing them for unwittingly wandering too close to fledglings too young to fly.

The advice to those pleading for help is almost unanimous — befriend the crows.

But researchers have observed another facet of the human-crow relationship — crows, which have brains the size of a small monkey, may be playing us.

Kira Jane Buxton, 42, lives in the Bothell area and has developed relationships with several crows over the years.

But her most endearing relationship was with a female crow she named T.

"I still joke to my husband that she was the love of my life," Buxton said.

"It was such an honor and a privilege to be that close to a wild bird and to share space with her and to see her sunbathing, just all these little quirky behaviors and I miss her, I do."

Wait, crows sunbathe?

"They splay their wings out and they lift their beautiful heads to the sky with their beaks open," Buxton explained.

"It's very relatable, they're just enjoying the sun."

The unique connection between humans and crows was the focus of a study by two longtime University of Washington professors and corvid enthusiasts, John Marzluff, a wildlife biologist and Marc Miller, a cultural anthropologist.

Marzluff and Miller went to the places where Seattle residents interact with crows and studied not only the behaviors of the crows but also the behaviors

of people who befriend crows, an approach Miller referred to as anthrozoology.

"Instead of studying creatures to see what's our influence on them, say their population, size, or their health or their movements it could be, well, what does an animal of some kind mean to a human, to a child reading a book?" Miller said.

The scientists divided their subjects into three overlapping categories in terms of their relationships with crows — crow

Buxton began spending more time in her yard to get to know T and her more standoffish partner who Buxton named Dart.

Because she was outside more she started feeding and observing hummingbirds as well as her crows.

T brought Buxton gifts but not the shiny things crows are known for bringing to the people who befriend and feed them.

Instead T brought Buxton an apple from a neighbor's yard.

Another time she delivered an

kind of look down at whatever he'd put there and kind of move it around," she said.

"Then he'd look up at me."

When she finally went into the yard to investigate she found the body of a dead hummingbird, perfectly intact.

"I'll never know whether he found it and brought it to me or whether he had, you know, captured it himself," she said.

"It was amazing to me, it was an offering."

Whether crows are capable of feeling and expressing gratitude there is no doubt that they recognize and remember people, both those who provide them with sustenance and people they consider dangerous.

Sixteen years ago Marzluff and his team caught crows on the University of Washington campus while wearing caveman masks.

Their research was featured in a PBS Nature documentary called *The Murder of Crows*.

Every year since then Marzluff or one of his students walks around campus wearing the same mask.

All these years later the crows still react violently to what they perceive as a threat.

"Most of the birds that recognize us have never encountered us directly," Marzluff said.

"Those birds are all dead now and some of this information seeps through the social group."

After Katie Brotten lost her dog in 2023 she continued going on long walks she used to take with him along a river loop.

She started feeding dry cat food and peanuts to the crows she encountered along the way.

"They would recognize me, they recognized my car," Brotten said.

"They would fly over as soon as I pulled into the trail parking lot and we've just sort of developed this relationship."

Like Buxton, Brotten started finding gifts along a secluded section of the trail that she assumed were from her new crow friends — a wallet which Brotten returned to the bank, a gold-plated bracelet, a woman's shoe.

■ *Continued next page.*



A crow flies away with a cashew scattered by Katie Brotten.

friends, crow feeders and crow observers.

"These people are really motivated by having a bond with a wild animal and the crows reciprocate that strongly," Marzluff said.

While science suggests that crows do what they do to keep people feeding them Buxton and others who have developed relationships with crows believe the bond is much deeper.

empty carton of chicken nuggets and what Buxton described as a lovely, imperfect acorn.

"My favorite thing was they used to line up pieces of moss perfectly," she said.

Then one day from inside her home Buxton saw Dart, who generally kept his distance from her, fly down and put something in her yard.

"He kept looking up at the window at me and then would

Crows playing us with primate-sized brains

■ *Continued from previous page.*

As Brotten got to know the crows she found that their sounds changed from the typical “Caw! Caw!” to a more gurgling sound almost like a purring that she took to mean they were happy.

She was so affected by her growing connection with crows in the wake of her dog’s death that Brotten wrote and published a non-fiction book *Worthy Caws: A year of healing and communing with crows*.

“Sometimes when we’re with friends or family members there’s this expectation to talk or to be a certain way or whatever,” she said.

“But with my crows it was just this really wonderful relationship where I would take my walk, I would see them, I would interact with them.

“They were exhibiting a lot of communicative techniques and we started to understand each other.”

Buxton was similarly inspired by her relationship with T who she believes died in 2021 after the crow gradually got sick from what may have been a neurological disease.

One day Buxton heard a commotion in the trees where T and Dart nested.

She never saw T again.

Dart came back a final time and sat for a long time on Buxton’s roof.

“He was alone,” she said.

“I had never seen them apart.”

In the wake of T’s apparent death Buxton wrote and published an apocalyptic novel from the perspective of a crow based on T called *Hollow Kingdom*.

Hollow Kingdom was described by author Karen Joy Fowler as “a foul-mouthed crow is humanity’s only chance to survive Seattle’s zombie problem”.

While human-crow relationships can be inspirational, at least for humans, they can also remain strategic and functional.

Stephanie Stonesifer who lives in the SeaTac area feeds crows to protect her chickens.

Last autumn while on a family vacation at Disneyland Stonesifer watched in horror as one of the chickens she had raised from a chick was attacked and eaten by what appeared to be a hawk with the grisly scene captured live by her backyard camera.

“Circle of life and all that but it’s still a bummer,” she said.

“So I was trying to figure out, how can I protect my birds?”

Stonesifer decided that the best way to guard her chickens was to encourage the presence of crows which she had seen harass-



Professor John Marzluff from the University of Washington bands a crow.

ing birds of prey above her wooded neighborhood.

Her husband built a flat platform where she puts her crow offerings — peanuts and the occasional chicken egg.

She claims that at least for the past six months the increased presence of crows has reduced the number and frequency of raptors circling above her yard.

“It’s been working so far,” she said.

“The attack happened in October of last year and I haven’t lost any chickens to hawks or eagles or anything else since then.”

Another source of scientific interest in crows revolves around crow funerals.

Kaeli Swift, a postdoctoral researcher in UW’s environment college, wrote her dissertation about the way crows react to death.

To do her research Swift put dead crows at different spots and observed the response of other crows.

“When the first bird discovers the body it will produce an alarm call and that alarm call will often result in the recruitment of other crows,” Swift said.

“This is a very noisy event, they’ll fly around occasionally

landing in trees and the whole thing kind of lasts about 15 or 20 minutes.”

Buxton’s first meaningful encounter with crows, before she befriended T and Dart, involved a dying crow.

One day she came upon a mob of crows in her neighborhood which was cawing loudly above an injured crow on the road.

Buxton didn’t know what to do. She went and grabbed a box and as soon as she put the injured crow inside the crows in the trees around her went silent.

“I had this feeling that the crows understood that I was there to help,” Buxton said.

She took the crow to a wildlife facility but the bird died.

From that moment Buxton’s relationship with crows changed.

“They started following me and I was watching them and there was never any sense of it being an aggressive thing,” she said.

“They were observing me and I was observing them.”

Swift has a more scientific explanation for the crows falling silent.

They might have just completed their crow funeral and were preparing to disperse or

they might have seen the injured crow disappear and figured Buxton had eaten it or was planning to eat it.

“I would be very hesitant to say that crows understood her intentions,” she said.

Standing around Seattle neighborhoods waiting for crows to notice the dead crow she put on the ground Swift has had a lot of interaction with Seattellites who question her and then rave about the crows and explain their unique connection with the birds.

But Swift, an ornithologist who studies animal behavior, quickly realized that for the crows these human connections were far from exclusive.

“I would start to see the math,” Swift said.

“This person feeds their crows at 8am and then they don’t even know but their neighbor, they put the food out at nine.

“And then the guy down the street he does his walk with his dog and he feeds the crows the whole time.

“Every person in the neighborhood thinks that they’re getting this unique thing.”

But that commonality the shared experience of crow encounters that seems to span across Seattle does not diminish the impact crows have on the people who forge those bonds.

Crow friendships inspired both Buxton and Brotten to write books.

Crows have inspired artwork across the city including a 12-foot-tall crow eating a giant French fry in Auburn and crow-focused murals on Capitol Hill.

Befriending crows may not be as unique as some Seattleites imagine but for many it is an important way to bridge the gap between themselves and nature within an urban environment.

From a scientific perspective Swift points out that 40 per cent of a Seattle crow’s diet is garbage so feeding them peanuts or pet food is not going to affect their metabolism.

She and Marzluff encouraged people to moderate how much they feed crows — preferably a few treats as opposed to a giant bag or pounds of peanuts especially since the birds are likely getting food throughout the day from other crow-obsessed Seattleites.

From an anthrozoologic perspective crows help people find connections they may lack elsewhere in their lives without the complications of dealing with other humans.

“These birds, they can play a really pivotal role in people’s lives,” Swift said.

“They started following me and I was watching them and there was never any sense of it being an aggressive thing,” she said.

Bullets poisoning bald eagles

By **ANDREW PAUL**

AFTER reaching critically endangered population levels in the mid-20th Century bald eagles are continuing to steadily rebound across the US.

But hunters still pose a major problem for America's mascot — it's not poaching necessarily but bullets used on other animals, specifically lead ammunition.

According to a 2022 study published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* bald eagle population gains across the nation are stunted as much as per cent ev-

ery year due to lead poisoning.

That isn't from being shot but because the birds of prey accidentally ingest bullet fragments while eating leftover animal gut piles and carcasses left by hunters.

One wildlife rehabilitator said lead poisoning accounts for as much as one-third of all his centre's casework.

"From the rehabbers' perspective the overall eagle population is strong but we have environmental issues going on and we are concerned," Carol Holmgren, principal licensed wildlife rehabilitator and executive director of Pennsyl-

vania's Tamarack Wildlife Center said.

Raptors are more affected by lead than other scavengers

Digesting the heavy metal quickly metabolizes it into their bloodstream and organs.

From there it can wreak havoc on their nervous, digestive and muscular-skeletal systems along with impairing brain, kidney and liver functions.

Because a lead fragment as small as a grain of rice can kill an eagle the majority of lead poisonings prove fatal Holmgren said.



A lead fragment as small as a grain of rice is enough to kill a bald eagle.

Plan helps hen harrier

By **RACHEL BIRCH**

THE UK Government has approved a multi-agency hen harrier action plan to address its dwindling population in the country according to a spokesperson for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan was developed by an inter-departmental steering group chaired by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in response to the rapid decline of the species which is facing extinction.

The NPWS, which is responsible for the action plan's implementation, collaborated with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications on the plan.

A public consultation was launched on a draft Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan early this year and all submissions and observations received were considered.

The plan is now expected to be published in the coming months according to a Department of Housing spokesperson.

The draft plan was commissioned after the 2022 National Hen Harrier Survey estimated that the breeding population was in the region of between 85 to 106 pairs, which compared to a 21 per cent decline from the previous survey conducted in 2015.

Due to the critical threat facing the bird the hen harrier was flagged under the EU Birds Directive which assigned conservation responsibilities to the Irish government.

Six special protections areas



The draft plan was commissioned after the 2022 National Hen Harrier Survey estimated that the breeding population was in the region of between 85 to 106 pairs.

were designated to safeguard the hen harrier's natural habitats as well as a further two for wintering populations, most of which primarily exist in the Munster area.

The draft Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan for public consultation identified that primary potential threats and pressures to breeding hen harriers were loss of suitable habitat through afforestation, forest maturation, agricultural reclamation and intensification, and wind energy development.

The plan also highlighted that lightly grazed heath or bog with some scrub is the most suitable habitat for nesting hen harriers and that hedgerows are important to enable the birds to forage throughout the year.

According to the Department of Housing spokesperson the finalised plan recognises that landowners who depend on the land within hen harrier SPAs for their livelihood and upon whom the hen harrier depends for its habitat must be supported and incentivised to engage in hen harrier conservation.

In 2015 the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine published a report on the Designation of Lands as SPAs for the Conservation of Breeding Hen Harriers.

That report contained 18 recommendations and many were incorporated into actions in the draft Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan.

Specifically in relation to agriculture they included moni-

toring the effectiveness of the new rules in ensuring landscape features that are typically beneficial for hen harrier are supported throughout the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-27.

It also recommended continuing engagement and communication with farmers through farm advisers on the year-round ecological needs of hen harrier for nesting, roosting and foraging.

According to the Oireachtas report the current Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme and in particular co-operation projects in defined high priority geographical areas is a significant scheme that can deliver positive impacts for the hen harrier population level.

Black vultures eating cows and calves alive

By SARAH BOWMAN

SOMETIMES as many as a dozen black vultures circle above John Hardin's fields in southern Indiana's Scott County, poised for when they spot a cold, weak or vulnerable cow.

Unlike their turkey vulture cousins which are easy to spot with their red heads, black vultures don't always wait for their meals to be dead.

"The black vultures, now that is a very, very aggressive bird," Hardin said.

"They're basically waiting for the cows and calves to die or trying to kill them."

Black vultures survive like most vultures by eating carrion or the remains of dead animals.

That can serve as an integral part of the ecosystem — eating diseased remains that could carry sickness and spread to other animals.

But unlike Indiana's turkey vultures, black vultures also go for living animals — calves, piglets, lambs and other small livestock are their preferred targets.

Seemingly every day when Hardin walks out his door he sees them.

They are often perched on the roof ridge of his neighbor's barn or settled on a nearby fence post — watching, waiting.

It may sound ominous Hardin said and in a way it is.

The livestock farmer said he's lost at least two but possibly up to four animals in the past few years because of black vultures.

"When you're in the animal husbandry business one of the worst things you want is for an animal to die, especially the way vultures do it," Hardin said.

"Once they get a hold of them they pick the calf's nose off, pick around his mouth, face and navel.

"So then the calf can't make it very long after that."

Hardin is among a growing list of farmers who are dealing with what many describe as a reign of terror brought on by black vultures.

The birds are protected under an international law that regulates the hunting of migratory birds.

That has left livestock producers across the state with a limited



Black vultures roost on the roof of a barn near John Hardin's farm in Scott County. Hardin lost at least two cows and calves to black vultures which are much more aggressive than turkey vultures and will attack live animals.

set of tools for how to address the birds and with varying levels of success.

The Indiana Farm Bureau is trying to give them another option.

In August last year the insurance organization launched a new program in which livestock producers can apply for a permit to legally kill and remove a set number of black vultures from their property.

That initiative is several years in the making but the farm bureau hopes it will have a swift impact.

"When the initial volley of calls came in from those producers we tried to figure out how we

could help them," said Greg Slipher, Indiana Farm Bureau's livestock specialist.

"This gives them more control of what's happening on their farm."

Slipher first heard of black vultures around five years ago when he got a call from his colleagues in Kentucky warning him that they were coming.

Seemingly overnight black vultures started popping up everywhere on southern Indiana's landscape he said.

"I got a heads up that these birds were coming my way," he said "and by golly they were right."

Black vultures have continued to expand north in recent dec-

ades across the Ohio River from their original territory in southern states.

In the 1990s there were so few black vultures in Indiana that groups dedicated to protecting migratory birds didn't even have a clear estimate.

A recent study based on calculations from the US Fish and Wildlife Service estimated upwards of 17,000 black vultures in the state.

As their numbers have grown so too has the damage the black-headed birds have caused and the calls for assistance they've spurred.

The Animal and Plant Health

■ *Continued next page.*

Birds make things from memory

A STUDY conducted by a group of scientists has shown that grey crows are able to create objects according to their perception of color and size.

Scientists already knew that New Caledonian crows in their natural environment often create and use various tools such as sticks and hooks.

Similar abilities were found in Goffin's cockatoos.

The goal of the scientists' research was to find out whether grey crows are able to create objects based on previously received stimuli.

It is known that in the wild grey crows do not create tools.

Crows in the study were trained.

First scientists taught them to put pieces of paper into a gap for which the birds received a reward — a mealworm larva.

Then they were given sheets of paper and all three crows independently began to tear off pieces of the right size and put them in the slot.

Next the birds were taught to choose blue pieces from the offered blue and yellow pieces.

In tests crows tore off pieces

only from a blue sheet which confirmed their ability to distinguish colors.

In subsequent tests the crows successfully selected and tore off pieces of paper of the correct size, confirming that they could operate with visual representations when creating objects.

"Thus not only New Caledonian crows and Goffin's cockatoos but also grey crows are able to take into account during the production of objects some characteristics of stimuli that were previously reinforced," concluded the head of the study Anna

Smirnova.

The research opens new horizons in the study of the cognitive abilities of animals and can be used to study the development of intelligence in other animal species and in preschool children.

Earlier it became known that crows are able to remember people's faces and even take revenge during a meeting if they consider a person to be their offender or the offender of relatives.

If a person harms one bird the whole flock may attack him during the next meeting.

Black vultures eating cows and calves alive

■ *Continued from previous page.*

Inspection Service with USDA received an average of 8639 technical assistance calls from participants in 2020 nationwide.

That increase can mostly be attributed to producers who are looking for help on how to manage the vultures Humberg said.

The damage black vultures have caused is a little less easy to nail down — at least at the present.

A multi-year study of black vultures being led by Purdue University is underway.

One of its goals is to better understand how many farmers have been affected, how many animals have been lost and the resulting financial costs.

A survey of only around 20 livestock producers found they lost 25 animals to black vultures in the past three years including adult cows and calves.

A single cow can be worth more than \$1000 and for small producers the loss of just one cow can be a major disruption to their operation.

According to outdoorlife.com the black vulture reduction pilot program started in Kentucky and Tennessee and includes Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas.

The program allows farmers with vulture problems to obtain a depredation permit.

The US has migratory bird treaties with Canada and Mexico as well as Japan and Russia.

Those laws were put in place to protect migratory birds which often cross international borders from over-hunting.

Black vultures are protected under one of these treaties — The 1918 Migratory Bird Act.

Under that law it is illegal to maim or kill black vultures without a permit which costs \$100 in Indiana.



A black vulture on John Hardin's fields in southern Indiana.

Farmers can apply for one of those permits through the US Fish and Wildlife Service but they have found the process onerous and the cost a deterrent.

"It becomes a convenience issue and a dollars issue," Slipher said.

Indiana drew inspiration from Kentucky which pioneered the program several years ago.

Since then similar initiatives have popped up in Tennessee and most recently in Missouri — all of which have worked well and had positive results, Slipher said.

He hopes Indiana will see sim-

ilar success.

Indiana Farm Bureau is now taking on that part of the process for farmers.

The organization applied for a permit from FWS which it received in June.

With that approval the farm bureau is paying the permit cost and can award sub-permits to its members for free to lethally remove black vultures.

"That's going to be to our advantage," Slipher said.

"We have that relationship in place already and farmers will be more comfortable reaching

out to work with us on it."

Their goal is to make things as straightforward as possible.

There is no limit on the number of permits the organization can give out but it is authorized to take only 500 vultures this year.

Based on each individual producer's needs the farm bureau will set the number of vultures they can take not to exceed five.

Producers are excited about the program.

In the first week since it launched the farm bureau received 24 applications and Slipher expects that number to grow as the autumn calving season approaches.

Hardin is one of the farmers who applied.

"It's going to be hard to eradicate them but I hope it helps," he said.

"Everybody I know is on board and I think there is a sense of hope."

After receiving a permit producers must report the vultures that they remove and also ensure that they dispose of them properly.

That can include burying the birds but Slipher hopes farmers will do something else.

He is encouraging them to preserve at least one of the birds and hang them on the property in effigy which has been found to be an effective method for warding off more vultures.

Humberg envisions the program becoming a mainstay as long as it is successful.

"The vultures are here to stay and we are going to have to find ways that we can all live together," he said.

"If that means some birds have to be lethally removed hopefully we're minimizing the number of birds we have to treat that way and the number of cattle lost."

Pigeons improve flight routes

A NEW University of Bristol-led study looked at the social influences on pigeon flight routes.

Researchers compared flight patterns of pairs of pigeons to a computer model and found that flight paths are improved as younger birds learn the route from older birds and also make route improvements leading to more efficient routes over generations.

Like many birds pigeons navigate using the sun and by sensing the earth's magnetic field.

Those senses help pigeons find their bearings but they do not usually generate the most efficient routes.

cient routes.

Dr Edwin Dalmaijer, a cognitive neuroscientist at Bristol and the study's lead researcher, gathered data from previously-published studies where pigeons that were familiar with a route were paired with pigeons that had not flown the route before.

Those data demonstrated that when the inexperienced pigeon is introduced the pair flies a more direct route to its destination.

However previous studies could not determine how the paired birds generate more efficient routes.

Dr Dalmaijer compared the

pigeon flight data to a computer model that prioritised four main factors — direction to the goal representing the bird's internal compass, proximity to the other pigeon, the remembered route and general consistency, since the birds are unlikely to make erratic turns.

In the model the simulated birds referred to as agents made more than 60 journeys.

Once every 12 journeys one of the agents was replaced with an agent that had not made the trip before, simulating a young bird.

That resulted in generational

increase in the efficiency of the flight routes.

Those improvements are similar to those seen in the real-life data from pigeon pairs though the pigeon data did not match the most optimal version of the model likely because pigeons are influenced by additional factors that the model could not account for.

When some of the parameters of the model were removed such as memory of the route or the desire to be near the other pigeon there was no generational improvement.

New York bird feeder facing \$50k penalty

By PETER SENZAMICI

A PROVOCATIVE Upper East Side vegan in New York who once called humans "the shame of the earth" is being sued by her landlord for causing a literal s--t storm as she refuses to stop feeding pigeons outside her building.

Sharon Amram's flighty actions have resulted in massive amounts of guano covering the fire escape and a ground-floor commercial tenant's roof at the East 78th Street's building according to the Manhattan Supreme Court lawsuit.

"It's bulls--t," Amram, 46 said from the second-floor apartment that she's rented since 2011.

The French-Israeli restoration artist said she doesn't feed the birds from her apartment but walks across the street to a nearby synagogue and dumps bucketfuls of pricy artisanal Belgian birdseed on the footpath which costs her \$50 per 40-pound bag.

"Are you crazy? I don't feed them here," Amram, who has a pet pigeon named Kuku, said.

She insisted that the birds were there long before she was and that she's not the only person feeding them.

Neighbors were not buying her excuses nor was the landlord behind the suit who said he has asked Amram several times to stop her window-side meal service.

"People are complaining all the time," landlord Salvatore



Upper East Side vegan Sharon Amram is being sued by her landlord for feeding pigeons at her apartment building.

Gaudio said.

"It's not sanitary."

He said the problem started around five years ago and he has paid several city fines for the resultant pigeon poop.

The person most directly affected in the s--tstorm is the small business owner directly below Amram's window who has

seen his awning carpeted in bird dung, prompting him to fashion a tarp-turned-diaper to stop the poop from flowing down the fire escape ladder he shares with the pigeon lover.

His awning, which is caked in a heavy patina of pigeon poop, would cost around \$20,000 to replace he said.

"I see her feed the birds every f--king day," said the owner of the downstairs dry cleaning shop Tony, who's been at his spot for 24 years.

"The health department does not give a s--t."

He said that he has to clean his tarp-diaper once a week or so as it fills up with dark, dried-up pigeon poop, knocking it with a broom handle and sweeping up the faecal fracas.

Somehow pigeons have found their way into his basement, forcing him to prop up a decoy owl to scare them off.

A discerning eye can see the false owl is a sort-of mascot for the block.

In the cooler months Tony used to keep his front door open but not anymore now that a strong wind means piles of bird feathers rushing into his shop.

"God knows how many health issues I'm gonna have," he said.

Tony thought the law suit won't amount to much.

"She's never going to stop feeding them," he said.

Once a militant vegan, Amram has made statements on her old YouTube page that "If you (sic) not vegan you are the devil simple as it is."

The former PETA activist now says she doesn't care if people eat meat and "turn their stomach into a cemetery" but still views the world as black-and-white.

"There are two kinds of people," she said.

"Haters and blessers."

Birth control methods working

By DONNA WILLIAMS

THE scale of pigeon overpopulation is staggering with an estimated 260 to 400 million birds inhabiting every continent except Antarctica.

The implications are not just a minor inconvenience but a significant hazard.

Pigeons, notorious for littering from bin bags and defacing monuments, buildings, cars and people can become aggressive if regularly fed, posing a threat to public safety.

Scientists are exploring a potential solution to the pigeon overpopulation issue.

The proposed method involves using contraceptives to manage the population humanely.

According to Dr Giovanna Massei, Europe director of the Botsiber Institute of Wildlife Fertility Control and Professor at the University of York: "This problem will only worsen over the coming years and poses a critical ecological issue around the world."

With pigeons said to reproduce up to eight times a year and have

a life expectancy of five years it is no surprise that the issue has arisen and not for the first time.

In 2017 Barcelona became the first European capital to turn to birth control to cull the growing pigeon population in the city.

They administered Nicarbazine via automatic bird feeders around the city and monitored the results over three years.

The drug was deemed successful with some colonies reduced by as much as 55 per cent but others appeared completely unaffected and analysts believed that was

largely due to human involvement.

For the drug to work effectively pigeons must consume it consistently over time.

Missing just a few days can reverse the drug's effects and it is believed that happens in situations where alternative food is offered.

Last year Toronto reached its limits with the pigeons and deployed Nicarbazine via four automatic bird feeders.

That pilot program aims to reduce the city's pigeon population by 50 per cent annually.

King Charles drops pigeon connection

By MARGARITA SACHKOVA

PEOPLE for the Ethical Treatment of animals in the UK has applauded King Charles for sparing birds by banning foie gras from all royal events and residences and for refusing royal patronage to the Pigeon Racing Association.

Pigeons have served honorably in the military, saving soldiers' lives by delivering vital coded messages under fearfully dangerous conditions which earned them the most Dickin Medals — the equivalent of the Victoria Cross for animals — of any species.

PETA pleaded for them to be left alone in peacetime including by not exploiting the loyal, family-oriented birds by forcing them to cross the dangerous English Channel simply for human entertainment and gambling.

According to PETA pigeon racing is a blood sport in which birds are released far from home in foreign countries and unfamiliar surroundings, exploiting natural homing instinct to return to their families, their life partners and their young by compelling them to struggle through sea crossings so vast they can't see land for miles and may die in storms or drown due to exhaustion or disorientation.

By rejecting the Pigeon Racing Association's request for royal patronage PETA said the king has reduced the industry's social viability and PETA hopes his next bird-friendly act will be to disband the royal loft and convert it into a much-needed sanctuary for lost, injured and unwanted birds.



King Charles is no longer patron of pigeon racing in the UK.

The King's momentous news follows numerous appeals by PETA respectfully calling on His Majesty to do right by the brave birds by withdrawing his patronage from pigeon-racing events and associations.

It comes after PETA took possession of three birds from the royal loft which had been auctioned off and rehomed them to a sanctuary, protecting them from being used as breeding machines to produce yet more pigeons who would be forced to race.

PETA alleged that for nothing more than a whim or a bet pigeons are forced to fly vast distances on gruelling journeys that may — and in some cases usually do — end in death.

They may die in storms or from exhaustion or drown when they're forced to fly over large bodies of water with nowhere to rest.

They may collide with build-

ings or power lines which can cut their breasts open to the bone or be eaten by predators.

The birds can also become lost and with little experience finding food or water on their own die from starvation or dehydration.

One race from France to England is more than 600 miles long and includes a harrowing crossing of the English Channel, known as the graveyard by pigeon racers because so many birds die trying to cross it.

A PETA investigation in the US found that every one of the eight birds sent by Queen Elizabeth II to participate in the 2020 South African Million Dollar Pigeon Race died during the quarantine period when stressed birds from all around the world were housed together in the same loft, potentially transmitting diseases to one another.

PETA said even birds that survive those ordeals and make it home to their mates, young or eggs aren't safe because those deemed not valuable enough for future races or breeding may be killed by breaking their neck, drowning them or gassing them with car exhaust.

PETA said pigeons have their own unique culture, form lifelong partnerships and are nurturing parents who produce crop milk for their young.

"They display remarkable intelligence and self-awareness and deserve better than to be exploited in this cruel pastime," a PETA spokesman said.

Woman says bird ignored

By GENNY GLASSMAN

ONE woman on TikTok is sharing the important reason why we need to give pigeons way more attention.

She is a huge fan of the birds, she really sees them when it seems like no one else does. She said we've abandoned pigeons and in her opinion they're seriously misunderstood.

"I wish people understood how forgotten pigeons are, they love and need people," she said while patting one.

She said her bird is free-flighted which we assume means he doesn't live with her full time and could go anywhere but instead chose to fly to her for morning cuddles.

"Every pigeon you see needs a home," she said.

"They're all just trying their best to figure it out without us now that we've abandoned them."

People in the comments section were touched by her post.

"Pigeon history is my Roman Empire, so glad this precious baby is being taken care of," wrote one person.

"Pigeons were such an important part of history and saved lives.

"It's so sad that they're looked at so unkindly so often today," someone else agreed.

"I cry about pigeons at least once a week," a third commenter chimed in.

Hong Kong feral feeding ban

By EMILY HUNG

HONG Kong will impose a ban on feeding pigeons from August 1 after the passage of an amendment bill to the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance.

Feeding wild animals such as monkeys, boars and tree sparrows is prohibited citywide under the existing provisions of the ordinance with offenders liable to a HK\$10,000 fine if convicted.

But feral pigeons are classified as domestic animals under the common law, thus falling outside the definition of wild ani-

mals under the ordinance.

Law enforcement actions against feeding pigeons currently can only be taken under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation and the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness and Obstruction) Ordinance.

The amendment to the ordinance has closed the loophole and increased the maximum penalty.

The government has said that feeding feral pigeons threatens their survival because it alters their foraging habits.

It also jeopardises their ability

to survive on their own and increases the risk of disease and parasite transmission.

It can also happen to other species when they are attracted to eat what feeders offer them.

Feral pigeons' food and faeces can foul public places and cause inconvenience to residents and passers-by.

Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of HK\$100,000, 10 times the current amount and a year's imprisonment.

A HK\$5,000 fixed penalty system will be introduced, which can be issued on the spot.



Feeding feral pigeons in Hong Kong will be banned from August.

Rescue pigeon now a loved family pet

By LISA STEACY

WHEN Canadian Chrissy Chin volunteered to take in a fancy pigeon abandoned on a park bench she never imagined she would one day be ordering custom-made diapers for the bird which lives in her house and has become a member of the family.

Chin has a hobby farm at Aldergrove in British Columbia where she often takes in injured or abandoned birds temporarily.

So when she saw a Reddit post about an English trumpeter pigeon found in rough shape in a box she offered to help.

But the rescue took an unexpected turn and one year later Pidge has become a beloved pet.

"I'm so curious to know what his life was like before, where he came from," Chin said.

"It's so sad to leave a pigeon on a bench, who would do that?"

"But at the same time it feels like a little bit of fate for me like there was a reason why I was supposed to have him and he was supposed to be mine, he's definitely fate for me, he's family, truly."

Pidge was initially given a home in the barn where he slowly started to gain the ability to

fly.

Chin tried to introduce him to other birds including a few other pigeons that were ultimately rehomed.

However he was decidedly aloof with those would-be avian friends.

The bird was however quite interested in Chin.

"He started doing this thing when I'd walk in the barn where he would circle me really rapidly," she said.

"Then he'd start landing on me, laying on my chest and I was like 'strange'.

"Then he started preening me and calling to me, then he started escaping and circling my house and peering in the window."

When Chin told her husband and son she wanted to bring the bird inside they balked.

"I was like, OK he's just going to stay this one night on the dresser and one night turned into forever," she said.

Not only did Pidge resist being taken back out to the barn, he was unwilling to be caged or relegated to the deck.

"He's following me everywhere," Chin said.

"He's walking behind me down the hall, I've got to buy him a diaper," recalling that the trail

"He's walking behind me down the hall, I've got to buy him a diaper," recalling that the trail of poop Pidge was leaving started to become a problem.



Pidge the fancy pigeon is shown at his home in Aldergrove.

of poop Pidge was leaving started to become a problem.

An online search turned up an Etsy store run by a woman in Ukraine who makes what are referred to as pigeon pants Chin said, adding that she changes the bird every few hours, makes sure the bird gets a chance to take a daily bath and removes the diaper at night.

Pidge sleeps on a perch in Chin's bedroom and follows her into her bathroom every morning."

He hops up and down stairs, sits on the couch and takes rides in the passenger seat of the car.

And he has never tried to fly away.

He does however pick an occasional fight with one member of the family and it's not their pet cat or rabbit.

"He doesn't like my husband at all, he will randomly find my husband and beat him up for no reason," she said.

"He's definitely my pigeon but he tolerates everybody else."

Rawalpindi bans keeping birds

By **KAISER SHIRAZI**

A COMMITTEE at Rawalpindi in Pakistan comprising district administration, relevant institutions and military officers has banned pigeon cages, pigeon flying and pigeon keeping on roofs of houses, plazas and markets throughout the city.

Previously the ban was enforced within a 2km radius around Chaklala Noor Khan Airbase and the old Islamabad International Airport.

The ban has been extended to a 5km radius around the airport.

The areas now affected include Zero Point in Islamabad, the entire Ghauri Town, Khanna Pul and all surrounding areas as well as the entire city of Rawalpindi, Chaklala and all areas of the Rawalpindi Cantonment Board.

District officer in charge of the civil defence operation team Talib Hussain said all areas, union councils and neighbourhoods from Chaklala Noor Khan Airbase to Cantt Chohar Chowk, Misrial Road, Dhok Hassu, Lalazar, Morgah, Ghauri Town and Zero Point have been included in the area where pigeon flying is

banned.

Red notices have been issued to all pigeon keepers and the Pigeon Breeders Welfare Union in the entire 5km area, asking them to remove all small and large pigeon cages from the roofs of houses, plazas and markets within 48 hours by selling the pigeons or by moving them outside the city.

A major crackdown against pigeon cages will start across the entire city of Islamabad during which all cages and birds will be confiscated.

Fines will be issued and penal-

ties will be imposed on violators.

Those who refuse to co-operate will have their pigeon cages removed by the police.

Female police officers have been included in the operation team so they can enter houses to inspect roofs.

The Pigeon Breeders Welfare Union has rejected the move.

Union president Fayyaz Chaudhry said that initially the restriction was up to a 2km area which they had accepted.

“Extending it to 5km to include the entire city is unreasonable,” he said.

Singapore councils to cut pigeon numbers

By **NATASHA GANESAN**

THREE town council estates in Singapore with large clusters of pigeons — Ang Mo Kio, Bishan-Toa Payoh and Tanjong Pagar — will be increasing culling efforts during the next six months.

The pilot plan which started last month aims to manage the pigeon population in Singapore to safeguard public health and minimise disamenities.

That will be done by directly controlling the pigeon population and reducing food sources said the town councils in a joint media release with the National Parks Board, National Environment Agency and the Singapore Food Agency.

“As rock pigeons have high reproductive rates and few natural predators in Singapore removal of pigeons is required to complement food source reduction measures in order to reduce the number of pigeons and prevent exponential population growth especially in the near term,” they said.

NParks will kickstart the pilot plan with the town councils subsequently taking over management of pigeon populations in their areas.

The pigeons will be removed humanely by trapping followed by the use of carbon dioxide.

To address welfare concerns and increase the efficacy of operations NParks has developed a set of guidelines for town coun-



The common pigeon is seen widely in Singapore.

cils that use the drug alpha-chloralose to cull pigeons.

Under the guidelines contractors engaged by the town councils should select a site and time where the highest number of birds gather.

The contractors will be familiar with the required dosage and administer the right amount.

They should be present during the entire operation to monitor the situation and intervene if other birds or animals appear.

An extended sweep of the area of baiting will be conducted to make sure all carcasses and affected pigeons are removed.

The number of pigeons that will

be culled differs for each area.

NParks will work with each town council to bring the pigeon population down to a level that reduces the birds' impact and at the same time can be sustained in the long term.

Measures will be taken to reduce human food sources for birds.

Pigeons reproduce at a faster rate when they have access to food and shelter, resulting in exponential population growth the press release read.

According to a 2021 NParks study the number of rock pigeons at hawker centres dropped during the Covid-19 pandemic due to restrictions on dining-in

because there was less access to human food.

Rock pigeons were observed to have devoted more time foraging for food and had less time for resting which affected their reproductive capacity said the agencies.

Under the pilot plan NEA and SFA will work with the three town councils as well as stakeholders including hawkers' associations, food shop operators and cleaning contractors to improve refuse and food waste management at bin centres and food establishments.

That includes ensuring prompt clearance of food waste, trays and dirty crockery at tray return racks and refuse bins which will help to reduce food sources for the birds.

SFA will take enforcement action against food establishments that do not comply.

NParks will monitor feedback on illegal bird feeding and take active enforcement action such as physical surveillance and deploying closed-circuit television cameras at identified feeding hot spots.

The town councils and agencies said they will continue to educate the community on the importance of reducing human food sources for pigeons.

“The community's support is critical to keep the pigeon population down,” they said.

German city to kill all pigeons

CITIZENS at Limburg in Germany have voted to kill all of the city's pigeons.

The council had previously made a decision supported by 53.45 per cent of residents to hire a falconer to address the pigeon issue.

During discussions the idea of breaking the birds' necks to kill them was raised.

Earlier a count had revealed the presence of around 700 pigeons in the city.

The kill decision led to objections from animal rights groups and various responses from ac-

ross Germany.

The council responded by calling for a citizen's vote after enough signatures were collected against killing the birds.

Approximately 26,500 citizens in Limburg were eligible to participate in the vote which took place alongside the European election and the county council election in the Limburg-Weilburg district.

Mayor Marius Hahn said: "We didn't anticipate how the outcome would be today.

"The citizens have exercised their right and decided that the pigeon population will be re-

duced using a falconer who stuns and kills the birds within the next two years."

Animal rights activists expected a "compassionate outcome in the citizens' vote".

They believed that Limburg citizens would choose the morally correct option and therefore against the gruesome killing of pigeons by breaking their necks — "that's outdated and inappropriate when dealing with wild animals under human care."

The German Animal Welfare Federation and the State Animal Welfare Association Hesse along

with the Animal Welfare Association Limburg urged voters not to support killing the birds.

In citizen votes voters must answer a question that can be answered with yes or no.

The outcome is determined by the majority of valid votes.

This majority must represent a minimum share of eligible voters in the city which varies depending on the population.

In this case 25 per cent of the eligible votes in Limburg equated to at least 6662 participants having to cast a vote.

Turtle dove hunt ban ups numbers by 25%

NUMBERS of threatened turtle doves in western Europe increased by a quarter in just two years of a hunting moratorium according to conservationists.

The birds which migrate from Africa each year to breed in European countries including the UK in the summer saw numbers increase by 25 per cent — an additional 400,000 breeding pairs — from 2021 to 2023.

Conservationists welcomed the "exciting" news in a report to the European Commission which has led France, Spain and Portugal to confirm a fourth year of the pause in hunting turtle doves.

It provides hope that efforts in the UK to provide vital habitat for the birds who symbolise love and whose purring call was once common in the British countryside will help the red-listed species increase its numbers again they said.

The recent increase in turtle dove numbers across western Europe as a whole is really exciting news

The UK's turtle dove population has to migrate through France, Spain and Portugal on its way to its breeding sites in the UK, on the northern edge of its range.

The birds also need good breeding season habitats, a key issue for the UK where changes to the way land was farmed in the 20th Century deprived them of much of their seed food but



The turtle dove's purring call was once common in Britain.

where work is being undertaken to provide them with the habitats they need.

The report comes from an international team of scientists including from the RSPB advising governments on how to manage their populations of turtle doves sustainably and whose advice led to the temporary hunting ban across France, Spain and Portugal since 2021.

Hunting turtle doves has taken place for many years and prior to 2018 an "unsustainable" one million turtle doves were being hunted each autumn in those three countries alone the RSPB said.

The recent and rapid recovery across the whole of western Eur-

ope in the wake of the hunting ban now means there are nearly two million breeding territories overall experts said.

The recovery wave is expected to take slightly longer to reach the northern edge of the turtle dove's range in the UK according to the RSPB but "now is the time to double-down" on efforts to create the habitats they need when they arrive after their 3000-mile journey from Africa.

As part of Operation Turtle Dove conservation groups are working with farmers and landowners to provide key habitats including seed-rich flowering areas, ponds, patches of thorny scrub and tall, wide hedgerows to support the birds.

Rick Bayne, senior project manager for Operation Turtle Dove, said: "The recent increase in turtle dove numbers across western Europe as a whole is really exciting news, making our conservation efforts here in the UK for these birds all the more worthwhile.

"We are going to have a fourth year of no hunting in France, Spain and Portugal, the same countries through which all turtle doves breeding in western Europe — including all that breed in the UK — migrate.

"This means that now is the time to really double-down on our efforts and make sure we provide even more nesting and feeding habitat in the UK so that more and more of us can enjoy the summer purring call of this wonderful bird."

Guy Anderson, migratory birds program manager with the RSPB, said: "The start of a turtle dove recovery at continental scale is certainly something to be celebrated.

"The continued fantastic work of our nature-friendly farmers, land managers and communities will be crucial in order to ensure the right habitat is available to these special birds when they migrate here to breed."

He urged UK governments to support farmers through agri-environment schemes to deliver for wildlife such as turtle doves, as well as on climate change and food security.

Birds aid carbon storage

THINK of a toucan and you'll probably picture a toco toucan with its orange bill and white throat.

The largest member of the toucan family, the toco toucan can have a wingspan of more than a metre and fly more than 90 metres.

On those journeys it often carries something very precious for the natural regeneration of forests — seeds from the fruit it feeds on.

Like toucans, other species of large frugivorous birds — dusky-legged guans or jacus and curl-crested jays among others — contribute to regenerating tropical forests by dispersing seeds on the ground.

In doing so they help increase a forest's carbon storage by 38 per cent.

That's the finding from a new study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* by researchers working with the Crowther Lab at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich or ETH Zurich.

"Reducing deforestation and restoring forests play a fundamental role in decreasing atmospheric carbon and mitigating climate change," said study co-author Danielle Leal Ramos, an ecologist at São Paulo State University.

"However there are many barriers to large-scale restoration such as high costs, the level of soil degradation and the lack of seed banks."

In tropical forests like the Amazon or the Atlantic Forest she said most plant species depend on animals to disperse their seeds.

In degraded areas birds fill that role by transporting and planting seeds.

"Our aim with the study was to quantify the contribution of fruit-eating birds to natural regeneration and the potential accumulation of carbon in degraded areas," Leal Ramos said.

The researchers analyzed data collected in recent years in the Atlantic Forest by scientists, students, volunteers, ornithologists, field technicians and community members.

All frugivorous birds play an important role in forest regeneration.

The difference with larger birds which can eat larger fruits is that their seeds will grow into trees with greater biomass.

"Typically trees with higher wood density produce larger



Native to the Atlantic Forest the jacu has a strong preference for the araçá whose seeds it defecates almost intact.

fruits," Leal Ramos said.

"These trees have a greater potential for biomass accumulation and carbon sequestration.

"They are large, dense-wooded and slower-growing trees."

The study indicates that in degraded forests the movement of birds is restricted leading to less seed dispersal and carbon capture.

In those places forested patches are small and located far apart.

As a result birds have to make longer flights and are more exposed to predators and extreme weather conditions when going from one stretch of forest to another — a problem for species that are used to denser vegetation.

"To ensure effective bird-mediated seed dispersal it is essential to maintain at least 40 per cent forest cover and to keep forest fragments at a distance of no more than 133 metres," said study lead author Carolina Bello, a postdoctoral researcher at the Crowther Lab.

The study underlines the importance of the balance between

fauna and flora for the preservation and restoration of tropical forests.

In order for them to remain diverse and efficient with their ecosystem services functioning the role of animals in this process must be taken into account.

"Passive restoration is more economical than active restoration, planting trees, as it is cheaper and produces more diverse forests with greater carbon storage potential," Bello said.

"But for it to be successful we need to ensure that animals contribute to it."

Although the Atlantic Forest is considered to be the most devastated of the Brazilian biomes with just over 10 per cent of its original forests remaining a previous study pointed out that the decrease in carbon storage due to the loss of large frugivorous species is greater in the Amazon Rainforest especially when taking into account not only birds but also primates and mammals, such as tapirs and peccaries.

"The Amazon Rainforest and

the Atlantic Forest are tropical forests where frugivorous species are very important.

"The Amazon Rainforest and the Atlantic Forest are tropical forests where frugivorous species are very important," Bello said.

She said the Amazon region has faced a process of severe deforestation in recent years leaving highly fragmented landscapes where the movement of birds is also affected.

"It is to be expected that the effects observed in this study for the Atlantic Forest will also be observed in the Amazon but we need a more precise assessment to understand the magnitude of the effect," Bello said.

"Due to the higher proportion of trees that require animals for their dispersal in the Amazon we can expect birds to be even more indispensable for restoration there but we still need to assess the compensatory effect of other groups of animals."

The conservation and restoration of large forests is essential for combating climate change.

Trees capture climate-warming carbon dioxide from the air and convert it into oxygen and plant material through photosynthesis.

With birds flying less and dispersing fewer seeds we risk having fewer trees and more carbon in the atmosphere.

"The Amazon Rainforest and the Atlantic Forest are tropical forests where frugivorous species are very important,"

Extinct ivorybill rediscovered

By BOB ROSS

THE ivory-billed woodpecker, long thought extinct, has been found alive and well by Pennsylvanian man Steve Latta.

The largest woodpecker in North America, the ivory-billed woodpecker historically ranged from the Carolinas to Texas and up the Mississippi River to the lower Ohio River.

It was last seen with widely-accepted documentation in 1944 in Louisiana after the last extensive tract of virgin bottom-land forest was cut.

Since then sporadic reports of the Lord God bird — named for the response of people seeing one nearby — have surfaced but no credible evidence such as photos or physical remains have been produced.

Two decades ago various observations by Tim Gallagher, editor of *Living Bird* magazine, some backwoodsmen and a local college professor were taken seriously.

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology sent a field team to the White River site in Arkansas to attempt further documenta-

tion.

Despite careful analysis of their best photo obtained and testimony by knowledgeable ornithology students the bird's existence there was still not widely accepted by the scientific community.

Gallagher's popular book about his experiences chasing the bird titled *The Grail Bird* was published in 2006.

The ivory-billed woodpecker is indeed the Holy Grail of rare birds in North America and on the wish list of most birders.

Fifty centimetres long with a

75cm wingspan it is among the largest woodpeckers in the world.

The nearly-as-large pileated woodpecker of North America is a similar-looking bird that is relatively common throughout the US.

It is the bird usually seen by hopeful observers of the ivorybill.

The feet and claws of the ivorybill are much larger than those of the pileated.

If so I would not want to be mistaken by either bird as a grub-laden tree trunk to land on.

El Dorado bird found

IN a groundbreaking discovery for scientific research a new and elusive bird species has been found in Colombia's Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta by Nemesio Andrés Gulfo, a member of the Fundación ProAves team.

The find occurred near the El Dorado ProAves Reserve ec lodge where Gulfo stumbled on a massive antpitta — a thrush-like bird distinguished by powerful legs and an apparent lack of a tail.

The El Dorado Reserve protects more than 20 endemic bird species and hundreds of species of amphibians, reptiles and orchids.

It is very rare to find a new species of bird today and just three new species were described globally in 2023.

Colombia is the world's most biodiverse country for birds with more than 1979 bird species recorded but new species are still being found including the Chami Antpitta in 2020.

The identification process of the mysterious huge antpitta with powerful legs involved collaboration between ProAves ornithologists and Gulfo who initially believed the bird resembled the Undulated Antpitta *Grallaria squamigera* found in the main Andean cordilleras of Colombia.

Through intensive observations, song tape recordings and the careful capture, measurement and release of an adult bird the ProAves research team confirmed that the discovery represented a distinct and previously unknown species of Antpitta.

The new species, tentatively named the El Dorado Antpitta, exhibits unique characteristics including a gray head contrast-



The El Dorado Antpitta, discovered by ProAves in the Sierra Nevada.

ing with an olivaceous back and wings.

Its facial features are particularly striking with a bright white beard and black collar.

The vocalizations closely resemble another species in the reserve making it obvious that the elusive bird has gone largely unnoticed by bird-watchers and ornithologists visiting the El Dorado ProAves Reserve since 2005.

Approximately 10,000 ornithologists and birdwatchers have visited the El Dorado ProAves Reserve and surrounding area in the

past two decades and never seen or heard the species.

There was one sighting of a bird for five minutes in 2015 by Sophie Osborn and Chad Olson but only a distant blurred photograph was taken and which they thought was the Undulated Antpitta.

While additional evidence is being documented, such as ecological traits, measurements and vocalizations the research team composed of Nemesio Andrés Gulfo, Alex Cortés, Juan Carlos Luna, Paul Salaman and Thomas Donegan, plans to publish its findings in

collaboration with the University of Antioquia.

The university is undertaking phylogenetic studies using blood samples from a captured individual which was released unharmed after the study.

The discovery is even more remarkable considering the new species was found on the former property known as Vista Nieves, once owned by Melbourne Carriker, one of South America's most renowned bird collectors in the early 20th Century.

Despite collecting thousands of birds Carriker never documented this particular species.

ProAves ornithologists rushed to the El Dorado Reserve and worked with Nemesio to identify the species.

At first it appeared to be similar to the Undulated Antpitta — a species found across the main Andean cordilleras of Colombia.

However the discovery of the El Dorado Antpitta is accompanied by concern.

The bird faces a significant threat due to accelerating deforestation in the cooler subtropical forests around the El Dorado ProAves Reserve and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The region is experiencing deforestation driven by a property boom along the dry coastal plains and growing city of Santa Marta.

The demand for land in the world's highest coastal mountain range has led to unauthorized clearing of subtropical forests for holiday homes and new farms, putting the newfound species at risk.

The future survival of the El Dorado Antpitta hangs in the balance because its populations appear to be small and endangered.

The university is undertaking phylogenetic studies using blood samples from a captured individual which was released unharmed after the study.