



PEOPLE HELPING PARROTS

No. 9 LoraKim Joyner

by Rosemary Low

On February 15 1987 I gave a presentation on Endangered Parrots at the IFCB Symposium on Breeding Birds in Captivity in California. The speaker who was on immediately after me was Dr Kim Joyner, the veterinarian for one of the biggest parrot breeding facilities ever to have existed in the USA. I don't recall if our paths crossed again at another conference, but a few weeks ago I had an e-mail from her. She was trying to track down an old and vague reference to the Military Macaw in Guatemala. Could I help? As it happened, I could, but in one of her e-mails she mentioned a book she had written that caused me to immediately make an Internet search for a copy.



A few days later *Conservation in the Time of War* (published by One Earth Conservation) fell through my letterbox. Despite the title suggesting that it is a review of conservation in war-torn zones, the Scarlet Macaw on the cover left one in no doubt that this was actually a book about parrots – or should I say LoraKim's passion for them. Yes, she even changed her name! (*Lora* is Spanish for parrot.)

In April 1987, the director of Aviculture Institute, the breeding facility where she worked, told her



ROSEMARY LOW
United Kingdom
Sunday, 8:30-9:10



DR. KIM L. JOYNER
United States of America
Sunday, 9:15-9:35

Left: Page from the 1987 IFCB programme

that 200 Yellow-naped Amazon chicks had been confiscated from poachers in Guatemala. Many were dying, so the help of an avian veterinarian was desperately needed. After acquiring the

documentation to enter Guatemala, with two caseloads of veterinary and surgical equipment, Kim was on her way.

Guatemala suffered more than 36 years of internal conflict, which formally ended with the signing of the Peace Accords at the end of 1996. It resulted in increased poverty, in a country of very low incomes. Some families took a chick or two from nests, but it was the middlemen who made most of the money.

The journey to Central America was to change her life. Her desire to work with captive birds faded. She wanted to help save parrots in the wild, specifically in Guatemala where she had been monitoring nests of the Amazons. She moved there in 1992 with her beloved Nanday Conure, Exodor. She discovered to her horror that nearly every nest was poached and hardly any chicks were fledging. No wonder then that in 2017, this desirable parrot received the IUCN status of Endangered. Throughout its range poaching was rife.



LoraKim Joyner treating a Scarlet Macaw chick at La Mosquitia
Photo: LoraKim Joyner

LoraKim treating the Scarlet Macaws for parasites in La Moskitia, Honduras. The indigenous people rescue macaws confiscated from poachers. Before they could build the rescue centre, the macaws were released from their porch using the "soft release" method. The birds came in once or twice a day to eat
Photo: LoraKim Joyner



The situation was even worse for the conures. There was so much competition to take chicks that people resorted to taking eggs and incubating them under ducks. Few of the eggs hatched. How these people could rear conure chicks from the egg I could not imagine, but Kim told me that these days, illegal traffickers have incubators in suitcases.

There were several strands to her work in Guatemala, monitoring the nests of the Amazons and conures for scientific purposes (taking blood to check for diseases, etc), preventing chicks from being poached, trying to educate the local people about conservation and looking after confiscated parrots. She also acted as veterinarian to a parrot collection in the area.

In this brutal environment where guerrillas and robbers lurked around every corner, it was terrifying to go out at night and neighbours were killed in broad daylight. Kim and her very small team risked their lives almost daily. To the poachers, she was the enemy and to the guerrillas, she was a suspicious woman carrying what looked like military equipment. In fact it was the telemetry devices used to track the Amazons. Once she was forced to unload her vehicle with a gun in her face, but fortunately a passing ranch owner explained who she was to the paramilitary gang who had accosted her.

Checking nests was dangerous also because of the many bee swarms attracted to them. Sometimes chicks were stung to death and at other times she had to chase armed poachers. In one season

only eight young fledged from 28 active nests. The poachers were relentless, but for Kim's bravery and determination not even eight would have fledged.

Most people in Europe have no idea of the dangers and problems for people working in the field of conservation, also of those that beset a pair of parrots attempting to produce the next generation. Too often the parrots fail due to human greed and interference. Only rarely does a passionate and dedicated individual like LoraKim come along to try to reverse the decline and to teach compassion towards wildlife to the local people.

LoraKim's book recounts her experiences from 1990 to 1995. She continues to work with the same parrot species, currently in Nicaragua. As I wrote this I received an email from her:

"I write this as the sun comes up over Lake Cocibolca on Ometepe Island. I have been working with a group of young people for about six years and their project is really coming along. They got a big grant through Loro Parque Fundacion. It is the post-fledging time when the chicks are still flying with their parents. This is the time to count parrots in Central America. At midday we meet up with the 20 youths who will be spread out over the island to do simultaneous counts. We are here to count as much as to involve youth in citizen science and support them economically in these tough times in Nicaragua." ■

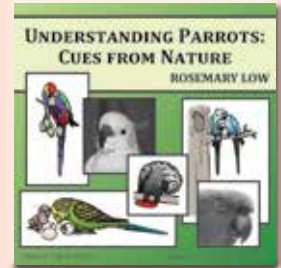
For further information about LoraKim's work and to donate please visit www.onearth.conservation.org
You can contact her directly by e-mail: amoloros@gmail.com

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