

## The Influence of the Macaw

Day by day, people of the world act carelessly, and they don't even stop to think what exactly they're doing. Many peoples' negligence on earth has led to the extinction of many thousands of precious, priceless animals. It is estimated that 27,000 species become extinct each year, about three an hour. Since 1996, scientists calculated that 124 types of amphibians, 1,108 types of birds, 734 types of fish, 1,096 types of mammals, and 253 types of reptiles became endangered (W.E.S. Endangered Species). For instance, even since the 1960's, scarlet macaws have been decreasing in numbers due to a combination of factors. According to the World Conservation Union (also known as the ICUN), an organization that prepares a yearly "Red List" of species in danger, macaws are in big trouble (Glossopedia). The causes are particularly hunting, poaching and the destruction of their habitat through deforestation (Think Quest). Something must be done. Although the harming of animals and selling of them in the "black market" is illegal, it is still practiced worldwide. Through the words of many people, awareness can be conquered, and there can be hope for future animals.

Only about one million macaws are still living in the wild. A million sounds like a big number, but only three species remain, one being the scarlet macaw. Most species have very few members left (Glossopedia). The scarlet macaw, one of thousands of endangered animals, is a large, very colorful parrot. The macaw lives in the tropical humid environments of the Amazon Rainforest. Scarlet macaws are native to humid evergreen forests in the American tropics, from Central America and South America

(Think Quest). The usual habitats for this bird are the emergent layers and canopy layers of the rainforest. Although, some live in holes that they make in the trunks of trees, scarlet macaws mostly prefer the lowlands. The majority of the macaws are not very adaptable. When their preferred habitat is damaged, their breeding habits and health can be seriously affected. Therefore, because of their incapability to adapt to new surroundings, they are quickly becoming in danger of extinction.

Recently, the macaw was somewhat plentiful in the jungles of South America, but the northern subspecies that inhabits Central America is becoming increasingly rare due to habitat destruction (Berdan). The biggest predator on earth is man and his destructive machines (Christiansburg). Deforestation is the main cause to their threatened lives. More than 18,000 square kilometers of Amazon rainforest are cut down every year. That's an extremely large chunk of the rainforest. Just imagine what will be left after a few more years. Slash-and-Burn Farmers clear the forests to plant their crops. Ranchers clear the forests to provide a grazing area for their cattle. Additionally, companies that spray pesticides when cultivating and selling bananas for export are playing a significant role in decreasing Scarlet Macaw populations, also. Before long there won't be any rainforests to cut down. Human population could also be in danger along with them because the trees hold our oxygen supply. The more trees we cut down, the more chances of our becoming endangered, too.

Another factor is that the macaws' feathers are incredibly high prized. Together, they are like an array of bright colors, ranging from many colors in the rainbow. The upper part of the bird is a distinctive, scarlet red with yellow and blue showing beneath. A metallic, gold iridescence shines strikingly on the tips of the flight feathers (Think

Quest). Bruce Barcott, the author of *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird*, said "The scarlet macaw looks like a creature dreamed up by Dr. Seuss" (Barcott). Because of their naturally beautiful feathers, humans are effortlessly taking their lives for their own advantage. Feathers, especially from the scarlet macaw, were among the most highly prized materials in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica (Berdan). Today, the demand for the feathers still remains and is growing exceedingly, meaning more and more macaws are disappearing every day.

Additionally, macaws are not only becoming endangered because of the destruction of their habitat and the desire for their feathers. Another main cause to their dying out is the capture of the birds as pets. So many macaws have been captured and sold into the pet trade that this has become a serious problem. Scarlet macaws are famous for their ability in mimicking and imitating sounds made by the human voice, as well as performing tricks (Think Quest). Sadly, the young are immediately taken from their nests for pets by poachers. Apparently, these humans have no sense of concern for anything other than themselves. That is one thing that extremely needs to change fast. If something is not done, the world will be totally different than what we know it to be; a world without an abundance of nature or animals.

Although, macaws in captivity can typically live longer than macaws in the wild, they all have long life expectancies, ranging from around forty years to around eighty years or even beyond one hundred (Glossopedia). For that reason, there should be no rational explanation why macaws are growing extinct. Also, given their beauty and appeal, it's not surprising that macaws figure in the mythologies of peoples of Central

and South America. In Mayan mythology, the sun god was represented by a macaw, which is a natural role for a bird with such brilliant feathers (Glossopedia).

We must act immediately to help preserve these amazing animals. One of the most important steps is to establish and protect conservation areas, safe zones for macaws to live freely and in peace. This sounds simple, but it can be very costly. Rainforest land is exceedingly valuable. Many people want the territory for the resources it produces. However, when conservation groups pool their money and buy the land, they can set it aside legally so it won't be logged and destroyed. For example, ABC and Brazilian conservation group, Fundação Biodiversitas have partnered together to purchase and protect nearly 4,000 acres of macaw habitat, including nesting and roosting cliffs (Hance). Of course, spreading the word about macaws and their rainforest homes is another great step. The more people who understand that macaws are threatened in the wild, the more people that will help (Glossopedia).

There are small things people can do all the time, as well as big projects. An easy thing people can do every day to lend a hand is recycle. If you look at cereal boxes, packs of paper, cardboard boxes, and many other things, you might see a little symbol for re-cycle on it. That means that it was made of re-cycled paper. From now on, buy that instead of the non-recycled packaging. So that way, we don't cut down as many trees (Christiansburg). Also, try to buy wood products that come from sustainably managed stocks (having a legitimate seal of approval) or non-rainforest woods. Always try to reduce power and water usage, too. Americans use more resources per capita than any other group of people on earth. Much of the electricity we use is fueled by the combustion of fossil fuels which add to global warming. Recycle and reuse as many

materials as possible. Another thing we can do is stay informed and be aware of newly threatened areas and new developments in conservation methods, along with campaigns against forest destroyers. Write to your government representatives and let them know how you feel about environmental issues. Express your concern for the future of tropical rainforests. Join a biodiversity conservation group or rainforest organization and support campaigns and boycotts against companies responsible for reckless deforestation. If you resolve never to purchase goods from one of these firms, the companies lose tens of thousands of dollars of potential revenue over the course of a life time (Hance).

The macaws need all the help they can get because it is not long until their species dies out. These little, simple things that we can do daily can make a huge difference in the future. As the wise fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet once said, "Our ancestors viewed the Earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. It is not difficult to forgive destruction in the past which resulted from ignorance. Today, however, we have access to more information, and it is essential that we re-examine ethically what we have inherited, what we are responsible for, and what we will pass on to coming generations. Many of the Earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects, and even micro-organisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability, and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late" (Think Quest).

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