



January 2015

# Amazona

*Welcome to the Belize Bird Rescue Newsletter*

## RECORD YEAR

2014 saw a record number of intakes at BBR with 236 birds coming through our doors. Because of our work with the Captive Wildlife Programme, many of those intakes were parrots (106), but as the only avian rescue and rehabilitation centre in Belize, we help whatever species comes our way. 2014 brought us 53 raptors, 21 waterbirds and 56 songbirds. It was also record-breaking year for barn owls: 24 of these much-maligned rat-eaters visited BBR, with all but 3 them being successfully released back into the wild.

Of the 236 intakes, sadly, 50 didn't make it, but 76 have already been released and most of those that remain are going through the lengthy parrot rehabilitation process or have been integrated into the breed-to-release programme.

We also were blessed in 2014 to have a record year of wonderful staff and volunteers. You all know who you are and you know we couldn't have done it without you. Thank you all!



*Red lored Amazon (Amazona autumnalis)*



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*“our rehab process works!”*

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Belize Bird Rescue welcomes volunteers and interns from home or abroad.

We have a multitude of tasks to suit all ages, skills and abilities.

- Feeding, cleaning, enrichment,
- Medical care
- Horticulture & aquaculture
- Drivers for rescues
- Education and public awareness
- Fundraising and grant-seeking
- Art and design
- Construction and maintenance
- Administration

*Visit our website for more information*

## BREEDING SUCCESS

Following on from the breeding success in 2013, we were delighted to learn that a pair of former captive red loreds on our release site at Witzoo had produced another baby.

In addition, to our absolute joy, Belize Bird Rescue became home to two babies born of our local white-front releases. The family visited us on several occasions throughout the season allowing us to get these gorgeous photos.

Moments like these make the hard work and heartache worthwhile. It cannot be said often enough: it **is** worth doing because it works! Our



rehab process allows former cage birds to revert back into wild, functioning parrots. Maybe not every time - but certainly often enough to make it worth doing over and over.

We hope that 2015 will bring us many stories like this.

## FD TRAINING WORKSHOP

In January this year we enjoyed a fun-packed 2-day workshop with the Belize Forest Department.

FD has taken on four Forest Officers who are also tasked with enforcing the new parrot registration programme.

It was our happy task to train them in all things parrot: from handling, to recognising illness, neglect and depression, to addressing these issues and more with the owner under the terms of the permits.

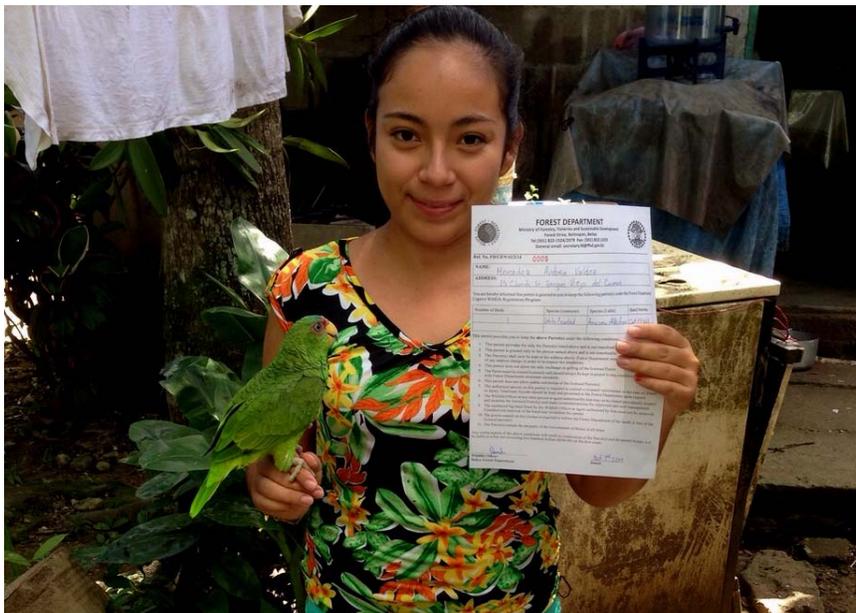
We think all of them were surprised at the depth of feeling and intelligence in parrots, and they were definitely surprised at how hard they bite!

All of them went away with a new-found respect for these much-abused creatures, and empathy for those living in poor conditions.



We also surprised them with some raptor handling experience.

Barn owls are a particular issue for FD as many homeowners call for assistance when these rather noisy birds take up residence in their roof.



*Parrot and owner receive their permit from the Forest Department*

## PARROT REGISTRATION PROGRAMME

Not many Belizeans were aware that it has always been illegal to keep parrots, or indeed any wildlife in captivity, as up until now the law has largely been ignored by the public and enforcement agencies. The registration programme is designed to improve the quality of life and thereby the lifespan of birds *already* in captivity.

The programme began in earnest late last year. With the approval of Forest Dept, we ran a catchy radio advertisement, informing the public that if they 'got a parrot? get a permit!' The application came with mandatory minimum standards of care and housing for the parrot. Once the deadline is officially closed off (likely Easter 2015) there will be no new licenses issued for parrots – thus stopping the illegal pet trade dead in its tracks. Simple!

Time will tell if this is sustainable, but for now there are many captive birds in Belize that are living in far better conditions than they were this time last year. As a result many owners are delighted to see “how much happier” their bird seems to be in his new conditions.

If you know anyone with a captive parrot and they do not have a permit or pending application, visit our website for details on how to apply.

We make no secret of the fact that origins of Belize Bird Rescue are firmly with the parrots of Belize. That day in April 2004 when we were handed two baby red loreds, instigated awareness and understanding of the plight of Belize's parrots that has continued to grow within us, and is reflected in the development of the Centre. It took us 10 years to work with, and yes, sometimes against the system to get to this point. Words cannot express how overjoyed we are to be part of this Government initiative to proactively protect and conserve future generations of parrots in Belize.

## NGO STATUS

2014 was also the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our humble beginnings, and in February of this year we were further recognised by the award of our much-anticipated Non-Governmental Organisation status . For us this also means a new chapter in our development: expansion of existing projects and opening up new avenues of specialist avian rehabilitation and education projects.



We look forward to continued close cooperation and support from the Belize Forest Department, and will work to strengthen our collaborative internship and training programmes so that Belize may benefit from the vast knowledge brought to us by the avian rehabilitation and conservation communities of the world.

## SPECIAL THANKS!

A highlight of 2014 was a visit by the Parrot Lover's Cruise passengers. Every year this small group of like-minded souls have the opportunity to come together for this flagship event.

2014 was their 6th annual cruise but only the second time the ship's schedule allowed them to visit Belize. As with their first visit, the cruisers were a joy to host. Their knowledge, passion and their generosity was absolutely amazing.



As promised, we put the donations to good use. We finally managed to convert part of the ground-floor area for a much-needed nursery facility.

We also printed 3000 copies of our two essential brochures for the Parrot Registration Programme: 'Taking care of your captive parrot', and 'Helping Polly Stay Healthy'



Thanks a million everyone - you know who you are! Hope to see you again in 2015!



## YELLOW HEAD HAND-REARING PROGRAMME

Last year we began a collaborative conservation effort for the charismatic yellowhead parrots (*Amazona oratrix belizensis*) of the Payne's Creek National Park, Toledo.

As a test sample, Rangers from the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment identified 4 chicks that were at risk from poaching, predation, nest destabilization and overcrowding.

The rangers carefully removed the birds and they were transported to BBR to be hand-raised.

It takes at least 6 months to raise the birds to the point of release.



*TIDE team removing a chick from an unstable nest*

Once they were fully weaned and flight-trained, they travelled back to Payne's Creek, along with an additional two yellowhead chicks that had been surrendered to the rehab programme that season.

The 6 youngsters spent 10 days in the soft-release enclosure constructed by BBR staff earlier in the year, and were then released into the local, wild population.

The birds had been banded for identification, and we hear from Mario Muschamp and crew that they are still in the area; hopefully not at all interested in humans!

There is little doubt that without intervention these 4 would have been perished or been poached. In the 2015 breeding season, we anticipate that the TIDE rangers will identify more chicks needing assistance.



## SPECTACULAR TRANSFORMATIONS

It's not only breeding success that gives us that warm fuzzy feeling.

We live turning around the saddest cases, bringing joy to a miserable parrot, stopping the pain and anxiety, introducing birds to members of their own species for the first time after being poached from the wild: all this contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of a captive bird.

Some of our most spectacular transformations this year were the over-groomed birds. Over-grooming is usually this is something a bird does to itself when it has parasites or more often when it is bored, miserable or stressed. It's the bird equivalent of excessive nail-biters in humans.

Breaking the behaviour is simple: give him an appropriate diet and enclosure, remove any stressors like aggressive cage-mates and give him space to grow.

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*“Breaking the behaviour is simple”*

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*Fluffy was caged with an older, more aggressive bird, in unsanitary conditions with a diet of only sunflower seed and corn. The enclosure was covered so they never got a bath, and they were forced to perch head-height to several huge Rottweilers.*

*Stress, fear, filth and malnutrition. No wonder he pulled at his feathers.*



*Butterball after 20 years in the same cage (top) and through his rehabilitation over a 5 month period (bottom picture with girlfriend Cranberry)*

## BELIZE BIRD RESCUE

**2004** Foundation of Organisation

**2006** Formal agreement with Belize Forest Department

**2012** Registered non-profit organisation

**2015** Registered NGO

**Belize Bird Rescue** has been almost entirely privately funded since its formation in 2004

The organisation provides educational materials and presentations in schools free of charge

Free health and husbandry advice to registered, permitted parrot owners in Belize is available on request

Tours of the facility are available to small, special-interest groups in return for a voluntary contribution to the daily feed costs

Volunteer and internship programmes are available

Contact us to discuss your requirements

## EDUCATION & PUBLIC AWARENESS

Over the last few years we have developed a range of educational materials: posters, hand-outs, leaflets, brochures, and flyers

For the start of the 2015 closed seasons for hunting, we have also been assisting Forest Department with developing and purchasing banners and posters for their campaign.

With kind permission from Belize Audubon Society, we erected a frame outside Guanacaste National Park in Belmopan which we can use to attach banners to convey the message of the day!

Visit our website to see the full range of materials, and contact us to find out more about our education programmes



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