

Project Update: January 2004

Our first three months of field work have been very busy, with some surprises, some setbacks, and a number of small successes. In October and November we conducted preliminary bird surveys at four sites in the Parana Pine forest district.

We were pleasantly surprised to find a number of our target bird species in secondary forest without Parana Pine, and in commercial plantations of Parana Pine. This suggests that:

- 1) More sites than we originally expected may merit protection as reserves,
- 2) It may be useful to promote reforestation using Parana Pine, as a way of conserving some associated bird species.

We have begun to negotiate with landowners for the creation of nature reserves at two of the sites we visited, and we are planning to conduct more in-depth biodiversity surveys in the New Year. When we arrived in Misiones, we were faced with the enormous pressure of nest-robbing on the Vinaceous Parrot, the lack of previous environmental campaigns in the region, and the widespread local perception that parrots are "better off as pets". We began tackling this problem by writing and presenting an action plan for the Vinaceous Parrot, which was approved by the Ministry of Ecology. Through this plan, we conduct outreach and education in rural areas, and treat captive birds on a case-by-case basis. In collaboration with the Ministry of Ecology, we will offer legal tenancy papers to the owners of some older parrots if they promise to collaborate with our project, but chicks will be taken to Guira Oga wildlife rehabilitation centre.

We now have one dedicated full-time outreach worker, who spends his time walking from farm to farm and educating rural people about the Vinaceous Parrot. We have also spoken on the radio, given a talk to 90 elementary school students, and published in a local newspaper. Beginning in January, we have a 1 hour weekly program on local radio, in which we will talk about the ecology, behaviour, and conservation problems of animals in the Parana Pine forest. Local people show a great interest in learning more about the Parana Pine forest and the Vinaceous Parrot, and young people are eager to participate in our project. We are excited to have been able to involve so many new people in our work, and we have great hopes for 2004!