

# RESEARCHERS, VOLUNTEERS WORK TO SAVE PERU'S WILD MACAWS

*National Aviary Trainer Mike Faix recently traveled to Peru to assist researchers gathering information on wild macaws as part of the Tambopata Macaw Project. The following article describes his experiences there.*

It's hard to deny our connection to macaws. Few birds have that inherent magnetism for people, that charisma to connect with us, and the beauty to inspire our imagination. The first birds on display upon entering the National Aviary are macaws, and for good reason. Benito, our Hyacinth macaw, is a charming and handsome bird... and he's willing to do whatever it takes to make you realize this. People have gravitated towards macaws for many centuries, and it is partially this love which threatens them today.

Wild populations of several macaw species have been decimated by the illegal pet trade because their demand is so high. Other problems that seriously threaten the long term survival of macaws include deforestation and poaching.



The numbers are staggering... out of 17 species of macaws, nine are now endangered or extinct. What can be done to help them? The obvious answers are habitat preservation and regulation of the pet trade, but that's just the beginning. In order to help any threatened species, it's important to have a thorough understanding of them through research.

As one of the Aviary's FliteZone™ bird trainers, I've had the amazing opportunity to care for and train several of the Aviary's macaws. Because of their high level of intelligence, macaws are capable of many complex trained behaviors and often play a big role in our bird shows. Few words can describe the feeling of having a macaw fly to your hand after circling in the sky around West Park. Needless to say, these birds have me captivated.

I decided to look into opportunities to research macaws in the wild and was able to connect with the Tambopata Macaw Project in Peru.

Founded in 1989, the studies the ecology and natural history of large macaws in Peru, and uses this information to protect them throughout their range.

The organization chose to focus their research on a stretch of pristine lowland rainforest in an uninhabited portion of the Tambopata National Reserve, adjacent to the Bahuaja National Park

and 500 meters from the world's largest macaw clay lick. Throughout the year, the project relies on research volunteers from all parts of the world who come to Tambopata and apply their skills. I was thrilled to be hired for a six-week stint as a "guacamayero", or macaw researcher.

After a long flight and an eight-hour boat ride up the Madre de Dios river, I arrived at the Tambopata Research Center. Because of its isolation and proximity to the macaw clay lick, it is an ideal place to conduct macaw research. The birds are quite abundant in the area, and their calls echo throughout the forest at all times of the day.

One of the primary responsibilities of the guacamayos is to monitor the progress of macaw chicks at nesting sites surrounding the research center. Sounds easy, except for the minor fact that natural nest holes and pre-placed artificial nest boxes are often over 100 feet into the forest canopy. Using heavy duty ropes and ascenders attached to climbing harnesses, we climbed to each nest approximately twice a week. Chicks were then roped to the ground in a bucket via a pulley system attached to our harness. The ground crew then measured and weighed the chicks, and removed any visible parasites.

Another major part of the research at Tambopata takes place at the clay lick, where hundreds of parrots congregate every morning to eat clay. Project researchers have studied this phenomenon for many years and have found that there is a lack of sodium in the surrounding vegetation on which the parrots feed. This dietary need is fulfilled by consuming clay. Also, it is theorized that the clay binds to toxins which are prevalent in the fruits and seeds the macaws eat. Even parrots that did not eat clay on a given morning used the clay lick as a meeting place, and it was not uncommon to see over a dozen species of parrots on a single morning.

The Tambopata Macaw Project has developed a great relationship with native communities in the surrounding area. Many locals who once actively hunted these birds, now realize that the birds play an important role in attracting ecotourism to the area, and thus hold great economical potential. During my time as a guacamayero, it was not uncommon to be accompanied by tourists who wished to see the clay lick and young chicks first hand. This full integration has involved local people and foreigners, whose money has helped sustain native communities and fuel further macaw research. For this reason, Tambopata's macaws have become intertwined with the fates of its people, and their protection in most parts has become a top priority.

In many ways, Tambopata's macaws have become a model in modern conservation, and one that I am proud to have been a part of.



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## PITTSBURGH FALCONCAM GOES LIVE

"People today can enjoy watching these remarkable birds only because a generation ago the right steps were taken to protect them," adds Katzner. "Whether or not future generations are able to enjoy these and other wildlife species depends on our ability to make the right management decision about today's threatened and endangered species in light of an ever increasing human population."

If the chicks hatch successfully and thrive, they will be banded by the Pennsylvania Game Commission in late spring and given a full medical exam by National Aviary veterinary staff.

Over time the chicks will lose their downy feathers and begin exploring the ledge area around their nest. Viewers tuning in to watch their first steps may also see the chicks vigorously flapping their wings from the safety of their nest box. This builds muscle strength and helps them prepare for their first flight, which tends to be a bit rough and tumble as they gain coordination and strength. As adults, peregrines are said to reach speeds in excess of 200 mph when diving for prey, which they hunt in flight. In normal flight, peregrines travel at 40 to 50 mph.

The urban peregrine falcon recovery project is a project of the National Aviary conducted in partnership with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, University of Pittsburgh, Cathedral of Learning, Gulf Tower, the Make-a-Wish Foundation and numerous private citizens who have lent their support.



## YOUR CONTRIBUTION MATTERS!

We hope that you will help us to reach our goal of making Pittsburgh's National Aviary one of the best in the world. Below is a form to use in making a gift to the Taking Flight campaign.

*Please select one*

- Take a Seat . . . . . \$1,000**  
*Become an advance patron of the National Aviary's new Helen M. Schmidt FliteZone™ Theater with a commemorative Theater seat.*
- Take Flight . . . . . \$250**  
*Support the Aviary by purchasing a beautiful origami bird that will decorate our hallways.*
- Meet the Penguins . . . . . \$100**  
*Become a permanent part of Penguin Point by purchasing a special African penguin plaque. Each penguin can be personally inscribed with your name.*
- LEED the Way! . . . . . \$50**  
*Shop with style and substance by carrying a reusable National Aviary tote bag.*
- Make a Statement . . . . . \$25**  
*Back the expansion by purchasing a National Aviary t-shirt.*
- Stick with the National Aviary . . . . . \$10**  
*Friends of all ages can support the Aviary by purchasing a fun bird-themed sticker.*

**Double your Gift – Ask your employer for a Matching Gift form!**

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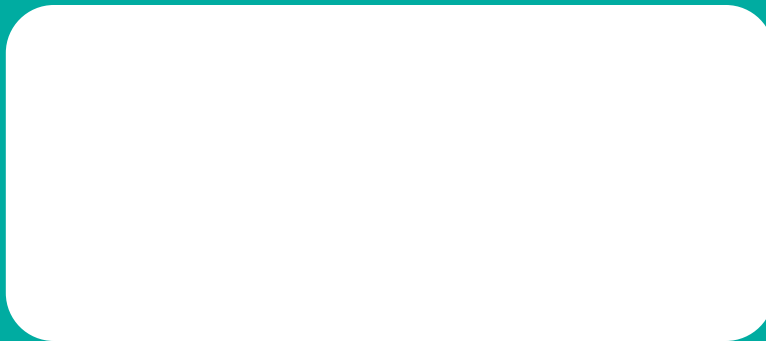
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# PHOTO CONTEST!

Help the National Aviary welcome its colony of African penguins to their new exhibit, **Penguin Point**, by entering our Photo Contest!

Visit <https://www.aviary.org/inv/photoEntry.php> and submit your favorite photo of one or more of the National Aviary's African penguins. The entries will be displayed in a slide-show at the **Penguin Point** exhibit during the opening months.

National Aviary staff will choose the top 5 entries and award the photographers a **FREE Family Membership** to the Aviary as well as a private African penguin encounter!

*Terms and conditions apply. All work must be submitted by the original author.*

