



## THE GREAT - GREEN MACAW RECOVERY PLAN LEADERSHIP

### **SAM WILLIAMS, PH.D.**

Executive Director, The Ara Project



#### **A Journey to Conservation: The Discovery of a Mentor and the Great Green Macaw**

Sam Williams began his conservation career at the young age of 15 when he read about Carl Jones' work in Mauritius in Douglas Adams' book, "Last Chance to See." After reading this life-changing book, Williams wrote to the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation to contact Jones.

Originally, Williams hid his age. Sure enough, Jones inquired and in response to hearing Williams was 15 responded, "My God, you're that young." During Williams' first visit with Jones, he was able to identify nearly every parrot in one of Jones' huge books, found out he was terrible at bird watching, much to Jones' dismay, and enjoyed a few laughs.

Williams later joined Jones in Mauritius. Despite some resistance from Jones' team, Williams worked in the Black River Breeding Center and cycled into Black River Gorges where he fed reintroduced kestrels in the afternoons. Williams later got to visit a field station in the forest and nearly refused to go back to the breeding center. The field station was Williams' "idea of heaven." Williams worked hard and showed that despite his age, he could pull his weight.

After that first trip, Williams returned to prepare for university. Before classes started, he cycled from the bottom of England to the top of Scotland, Lands End to John O' Groats and raised £2500 for the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation.

Williams worked on the Echo Parakeet recovery team during breeding season. The E team was supervised by Jones and thrived under his leadership. When Williams later became a project leader, he made sure to incorporate the leadership lessons he learned from Jones.

On weekends, Williams' team would return from the field station to do laundry and relax where they were often joined by Jones. The team and Jones enjoyed conversations about their work and conservation techniques, often leading to problem solving that fascinated the team. During this point in Williams' career, there were only about 12 Echo Parakeets left in the world. Every egg and every chick were imperative to the survival of the species.

After breeding season, Williams attended university in Scotland and studied ecology. During his undergraduate projects at Stirling, Williams left Scotland for Mauritius. Jones supervised Williams' study and has continued to be his mentor since.

Williams' career later led him to Brazil, where he spent six months observing Lear's Macaws. Following that, he received support from the World Parrot Trust to research the Yellow-shouldered Amazons on Bonaire.

In 2005, Williams and his colleague, Rowan Martin, each conducted research projects on Bonaire to benefit the conservation of these fantastic birds. On completing his doctoral studies, Williams launched



Echo, an organization benefiting the Yellow-shouldered Amazon. Echo's efforts in conservation, outreach, habitat restoration and research have helped the population rise from 365 birds to more than 1000!

Williams currently works with populations of the Great Green Macaw and Scarlet Macaw at the Ara Project, a Costa Rican non-profit. Williams brings diverse experience, from parrot keeping and wild parrot management to fundraising and operations, to his role as executive director. Williams, and the rest of the team at the Ara Project, are using scientific methods to implement the Great Green Macaw Recovery Program, which comprises four main pillars: wild population management, captive breeding and reintroduction, community outreach and habitat. With these pillars as a guide, the program's mission is to implement conservation action that restores healthy populations of native parrots throughout their historic range.

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