



# MACAW CONSERVATION COSTA RICA

## A Parrot-dise in Costa Rica Humans Living as a Part of Nature, Not Apart From Nature

by Paul Brennan, supporter & friend of MCCR



*As the sun begins to drop behind the mountains of Corcovado National Park on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, twelve Scarlet Macaws make a series of large, sweeping circles over the trees at Finca Paradiso, screaming loudly and unabashedly at the setting sun before finding their night perches high in the Big Tree that towers over all others in the middle of the property. Dozens upon dozens of red-colored Amazon parrots also announce their arrival with a cacophony of exuberant whistles, crescendoing chortles and growly squabbles as they settle into their roosts in various fruit and nut trees that have been planted just for them.*

### A CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

In 2014, Foster Parrots Founder, Marc Johnson, had a novel idea to bring people and parrots together for what has grown into a model for community-driven conservation efforts. Foster Parrots worked to facilitate the launch of Macaw Conservation Costa Rica (MCCR) and the sister community for conservation support known as Finca Paradiso. Now, on 4 hectares (12 acres) of what was previously a scorched-earth, toxic rice field seemingly devoid of any life, there is a successful macaw conservation project, and an abundance of wildlife is thriving in a newly reforested habitat.

### MACAW CONSERVATION COSTA RICA

Foster Parrots worked alongside Chris Castles for the filming of the documentary Parrot Confidential and witnessed his amazing skills with wild macaws, which he has honed after more than two decades of conservation work in Costa Rica, and he continues to demonstrate this every day at Macaw Conservation Costa Rica (MCCR), working to rehabilitate and release injured or orphaned scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) back to the wild, and providing permanent sanctuary to more than a dozen disabled Scarlets and other exotic macaws. The property has been planted as a food haven for the birds that have been released, as well as their completely wild flock mates.

Twelve scarlets are full-time residents on the property, coming and going throughout the day to explore the river corridor into the mountains or down to the coast. Eight of those birds are releases from MCCR, and four of those have pair-bonded with wild local birds. At any given time of any day there could be up to 30 macaws gathering in the shade of massive figs and enjoying the bounty of almonds and other food trees provided for them.

Scarlet macaws are threatened in Central America, with the primary threats being poaching for the illicit exotic wildlife trade and habitat loss. Macaws only nest in



very select hollow cavities within tropical hardwood trees. Suitable nest sites are naturally quite limited in the jungle, and continued clearing of forest habitat has significantly reduced their ability to breed even in areas where populations may be surviving, such as in Costa Rica. MCCR has begun a program to erect artificial nest boxes in hopes that resident birds might be encouraged to breed. Already in the first box, two of MCCR's released macaws who have formed a monogamous bond, Monster and Mila, have claimed the site as their own!

Foster Parrots is dedicated to continuing our partnership with MCCR as they provide permanent sanctuary for displaced birds in need, construct more nest boxes, and expand educational awareness and conservation through ecotourism endeavors.



**ABOVE: MCCR Founder, Chris Castles with scarlet macaws.**  
**BELOW: Soft release techniques provide support that ensure success in re-wilding scarlet macaws**



## FINCA PARADISO

The “Finca Paradiso Conservation Society” was established as an Intentional Community to offer support and assistance for the growth of MCCR. Separated from MCCR’s property by no more than a hibiscus hedge, Finca Paradiso’s land has been developed to mirror the wildlife food forest painstakingly hand-planted at MCCR. Once a toxic dirt field polluted by rice farming, just like MCCR, Finca Paradiso has been transformed over the past 10 years, and the lush landscape is now a parrot and wildlife paradise.



**Howler monkey mama with baby at Finca Paradiso**

Throughout the day the macaws can be seen feeding, playing and zig-zagging between the trees - but it's not just macaws that inhabit the property. There are Amazons and parakeets, toucans and aracari, hawks and falcons, kiskadees and curassow. Howler monkeys, squirrel monkeys, sloths, anteaters and iguanas are commonly seen. Timid or nocturnal species like jaguarundi, ocelots, coati and tyra are regularly captured by the camera traps positioned strategically around the property by Dr. David Morimoto, who heads the biology department at Lesley University. Even glimpses of rarely seen tapir and grison have been captured on film, demonstrating the resilience of wildlife when we support the rejuvenation of natural environments.



The mission is Reforestation, and Finca Paradiso is laying the groundwork for a community-based conservation project where people can coexist harmoniously with wildlife, and where nature can be preserved and protected with human conservators included in the equation. The future for many endangered species - and the planet as a whole - rests in new approaches like this that engage humans as a part of nature, not apart from it. The Finca Paradiso conservation model is proof that this approach can achieve long-term, sustainable success.

## A BRIGHT FUTURE

MCCR and Finca Paradiso continue to evolve separately but in unison as sister organizations. The purposely planted trees are rapidly growing taller each season. More and more animals are calling this spot home and raising their families here, and the people are here to act as stewards of the land in what has become, essentially, a private wildlife reserve. The government agency MINAET, which is responsible for overseeing and regulating natural resources and wildlife in Costa Rica, has granted permission for MCCR to install macaw nest boxes on the Finca Paradiso property, furthering our conservation partnership. It will be exciting to monitor the next generations of macaws, hatched to fly free and to inherit the skies as Mother Nature intended. Because No Cage Is Big Enough.

Now, just 10 years after MCCR and Finca Paradiso joined together and planted the first beach almond tree in the dirt on the farm, the sun is beginning to set and to drench the sky in pastel colors, and we are watching dozens of Amazons flying in to gather in the trees around us. These birds used to roost at night in the trees at the waterfront in Puerto Jimenez, located 5 miles away. Now, what used to be merely a pit stop on the way to town is their new chosen home. "They have begun to roost here at the farm instead," explains MCCR Founder, Chris Castles, "because they feel safe here."

The only thing more incredible than hearing these rambunctious Amazons settling in for the night is what the next day shall bring: the dawn chorus when all of them erupt at once in their gargled morning song that greets the sunrise as they fly off in pairs toward the forested mountains of Corcovado.

