

Puerto Rican Amazon

Amazona vittata

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A hurricane halved the wild population 20 years ago but with the help of released and captive birds and careful conservation management there is now more hope for this species.

Photo: © Jonathan M Morel

Rio Abajo Forest, Utuado, Puerto Rico, 2008

Population: 30-35	↔	REASON FOR CR-LISTING DECLINE POPULATION RANGE
THREATS Invasives, climate change		

History

1783 – Dutch zoologist Pieter Boddaert (c.1730-1795) describes the species.

1930s – the population is reduced to 2,000.

1968 – a recovery plan is implemented.

1973 – a first captive population is established.

1975 – 13 birds remain.

1989 – Hurricane Hugo reduces the 47 wild birds to about 23.

1992 – 22-23 parrots are in the wild and 58 in captivity. Record fledging increases the wild population to 39 or 40.

1993 – a second captive population is established.

2000 – there are 40 wild birds, another nine introduced to the wild and 100 in captivity in two aviaries.



2004 – thieves break into an aviary and steal captive adults. The wild population stands at 30-35 individuals.

2006 – 20 birds are released into the Rio Abajo State Forest marking the start of a second population in the wild.

2007 – more birds are released and the total of released birds is now 46, with a 55% survival.

2008 – four active nests are found in the wild resulting in six fledged birds. Eight birds are released using a precision release method. Two fledged and two released birds are predated by Red-tailed Hawks.

This amazon is endemic to Puerto Rico and once occurred throughout the forested areas of the island. Historically it occurred in forest and mangroves but today it is restricted to forest at approximately 200-600 metres. It lays three to four eggs in deep tree cavities and nests from February to June. It mates for life and starts breeding at four years of age. There has been an almost total loss of suitable forest habitat and hunting for food and pest control, and the cage-bird trade, has had crippling effects. The principal threats are now competition for nest-sites, loss of young to parasitic botflies, predation and natural disasters such as hurricanes. Predation by alien invasive mammals is also having a serious impact on productivity. Red-tailed Hawks *Buteo jamaicensis* predate parrots and hamper releases of captive-bred individuals while predator-aversion training before releasing has improved the survival of captive-reared birds after release into the wild. Between 2000 and 2002 raptor predation claimed 21% of all released individuals.

Major intervention, involving artificial nest-sites, control of nest predators and competitors and captive-breeding to preserve this species commenced thirty years ago, but on average the population has so far only increased by one bird a year. There are over 200 birds in two captive-breeding centres. The aim is to have it downlisted by 2020, with two viable, wild populations numbering over 500, that have been established for more than five years. The success of newly fledged parrots is monitored using radio-telemetry and nests are monitored by infra-red cameras. Trapping of exotic mammalian predators has been shown to be a highly cost-effective way of conserving Puerto Rican Parrots. From 2008 "precision releases", entailing releasing a sub-adult bird at a wild nest just after fledging of the chicks to promote intermediate and close interaction between wild and captive-bred birds, are taking place.

Population trends need to be continually monitored,

and the fate of released birds tracked. The integrated conservation management programme should be maintained and synchronisation (due to the low number of wild nests) of breeding of wild and captive birds to increase the number of captive-bred chicks that can be fostered by wild parents improved. Predator trapping should be integrated into the existing conservation management programme.



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