

New population of critically endangered parakeets found in Brazil

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Grey-breasted parakeets feed on fruits and seeds. Credit: Fabio Nunes.

A team of scientists searching for remnant populations of the Critically Endangered grey-breasted parakeet has found a small group nesting in a small crevice on the top of a rugged mountain ridge in north-east Brazil.

Only around 300 of these birds are thought to remain in the wild, all of

which are found in the Brazilian state of Ceará.

As part of a national action plan for the [species](#), researchers from local organisation Aquasis have searched more than 20 sites for signs of the parakeet, focusing their efforts on areas identified as having high habitat potential or historical sightings.

This new discovery brings the total number of known groups up to three. By comparison, historical data show that at least 15 separate populations once existed.

Coffee and cages

The colourful grey-breasted parakeet stands at just over 20 cm tall and is distinguished from similar species by its brown cap, maroon cheeks and red shoulders. Found in tropical mountain forests in north-east Brazil, it feeds on fruit and seeds in the canopy.

This species faces two major threats today: the destruction of its forest habitat (primarily to make room for coffee plantations) and ongoing trapping for the illegal local, national and international pet trade.

Rare beauty

The newly-discovered population consists of just five individuals, some of which are showing deformities.

The long isolation of the different groups has led to genetic differences that only add to the difficulty of saving this species, however.

The animals in each of these populations have their own 'cultural' knowledge and genetic adaptations that help them survive in their

specific environment. They know where to breed, where to find water and food, how to escape from predators, and so on.

This therefore raises the question of whether mixing individuals from different groups (to boost the number and genetic diversity in the newly-discovered group, for example) would actually benefit the species, or whether this would simply add more risk.

Given these complexities, the researchers say that the successful conservation of the species will require a mixed approach to conservation that addresses the real and imminent threats while boosting people's awareness and appreciation of this rare tropical beauty.

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

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