

Top ten bird species surviving thanks to zoos

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Ecuadorian Amazon parrot. Credit: Belfast Zoo

The African penguin, the Chinese Blue-crowned laughing thrush and the

Ecuador Amazon parrot are among species staving off extinction thanks to the help of zoos, according to a new report co-ordinated by a conservation biologist at the University of York.

Dr Andrew Marshall from the University of York and Flamingo Land Theme Park and Zoo led a team which compiled the report for the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) - which promotes the value of good zoos and aquariums. It lists the top ten birds most reliant on zoos in the UK and Ireland for their survival.

Developed with input from conservation experts based at BIAZA zoos, the report was co-ordinated by Dr Marshall, the Director of Conservation Science at Flamingo Land in North Yorkshire and a Lecturer in the University's Environment Department.

The report focuses on a number of species for which the "Ark Concept" of zoos is crucial, as they cannot be saved from extinction by field conservation alone.

Dr Marshall, a member of BIAZA's Field Programmes Committee, said: "This year's Top Ten report is the fourth in a series which highlights the contribution of good zoos and aquariums to conservation of the [natural world](#). To qualify for a position in the top ten birds list, a species had to be classified as seriously threatened on a global or regional scale. It also had to be associated with an ongoing field initiative by a BIAZA member which has had—or has the potential for making—an imminent and significant contribution to conservation in the wild.

"Such a brief list of species cannot be exhaustive, nor can it cover the multi-faceted work of zoos and aquariums. Our collections are not just arks for preserving species and their genetic diversity. Each year BIAZA members work to inspire their 25 million visitors with a love for, and interest in the natural world.



Blue-crowned laughing thrush. Credit: Belfast Zoo

"Globally zoos have contributed billions of pounds to conservation causes, have trained and employed thousands of experts in every aspect of conservation and have published thousands of scientific articles on biodiversity [conservation](#), in the fight to save both species and their habitats."

Dr Marshall leads the CIRCLE institute – Collaboration for Integrated Research, Conservation and Learning – based at Flamingo Land Theme Park and Zoo. Jointly funded by the University of York and Flamingo Land, the institute plays an important role in researching and protecting habitats and species both locally and internationally. This work includes the Udzungwa Forest Project in Tanzania, a project almost entirely funded by Flamingo Land.

BIAZA's top ten birds most reliant on zoos are:



Ecuadorian Amazon parrot. Credit: Chester Zoo

- **African penguin:** Numbers are plummeting in the wild due to oil spills, overfishing, shifts in food availability and human disturbance.
- **Bali starling:** These are seen as very desirable cage birds, and illegal trapping has brought them to virtual extinction in the wild.
- **Blue-crowned laughing thrush:** The [zoo](#) population of this Chinese bird equates to 50% of the total global population.
- **Ecuadorian Amazon parrot:** With fewer than 600 individuals left, its survival relies on the protection of remaining wild populations and their habitats.
- **Edwards's pheasant:** There is a small captive population, but it has never been seen or studied by a scientist in the wild.
- **Madagascar pochard:** Just 20-25 Madagascar pochard now survive in the wild.
- **Northern bald ibis:** Pesticide poisoning has had a devastating effect on their numbers. The BIAZA community is working together to ensure a genetically diverse bloodline within the captive population.
- **Oriental white-backed vulture:** Species restoration has been made possible by zoo-based expertise and funding.
- **Socorro dove:** A classic island species, numbers have been devastated by man-introduced pests like rats, cats and goats. Captive breeding has saved it from total extinction.
- **Visayan tarictic hornbill:** Two BIAZA zoos are actively supporting in-situ work to save and restore the wild habitat of this [species](#).

(This list is in alphabetical order.)



African penguin. Credit: Living Coasts



Northern bald ibis. Credit: Steven Dickie

Provided by University of York

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