

Spix's macaw

South America

Cyanopsitta spixii

Also known as the little blue macaw.

Spix's macaw was thought to be extinct in the wild until birds were rediscovered in the late 1980's. For several years the remnant population of 3 birds was monitored closely by Brazilian biologists until 2 were captured by poachers. A single bird survived and was joined by a released bird for a short time until both disappeared. Now there are no known birds in their native habitat on the Rio Sao Francisco in the state of Bahia in Brazil.

Spix's macaw is a medium sized, light blue-grey Macaw. The beak is black, the feet gray and the undersides of the tail and wings are dark grey. The tail is long and tapered.

Length 22-23 inches. Weight around 300 to 450 gm

Spix's macaw has a very limited range and the existing habitat has been severely damaged, although some suitable habitat still exists in tabebuia dominated gallery woodland growing along creeks. They nest and feed in Tabebuia trees.

For a while single wild male is paired with an illiger's macaw. They laid eggs and reared illiger's chicks which were placed in their nest. In 1994 a captive female was released to repair with him but she disappeared and it was later revealed that she died when she flew into power lines.

Approximately 70 birds now exist in captivity and are being bred to supply birds for reintroduction efforts, however most of the captive population is closely related.

Spix's macaws show no obvious sexual dimorphism (visual difference between the species) therefore endoscopic examination (Surgical sexing) or laboratory sexing techniques are needed for accurate sex determination. Males are usually larger and have larger heads.

Spix's macaws have been successfully bred in the Philippines, Switzerland, Qatar and in Spain and the captive population is making steady gains. The

owners of captive birds cooperate in a consortium known as the Permanent Committee to Restore the Spix's Macaw and are working in cooperation with Brazilian wildlife authorities. Plans are being made for future re-introductions.

Conservation status – Critical – Spix's are protected under Brazilian Law. They are also listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Fauna and Flora. They are also listed on the Endangered Species list of the United States.

Through the work of the permanent committee to restore the Spix's Macaw, the dedication of field researchers, the sponsorship of donors such as the Loro Parque Foundation and the support of IBAMA, there is hope in the future for this beautiful bird to survive. For more information on Spix's Macaws visit Loroparque-fundacion.org.