



GARDENS OF LEAR'S MACAW

JOÃO MARCOS ROSA
GUSTAVO NOLASCO

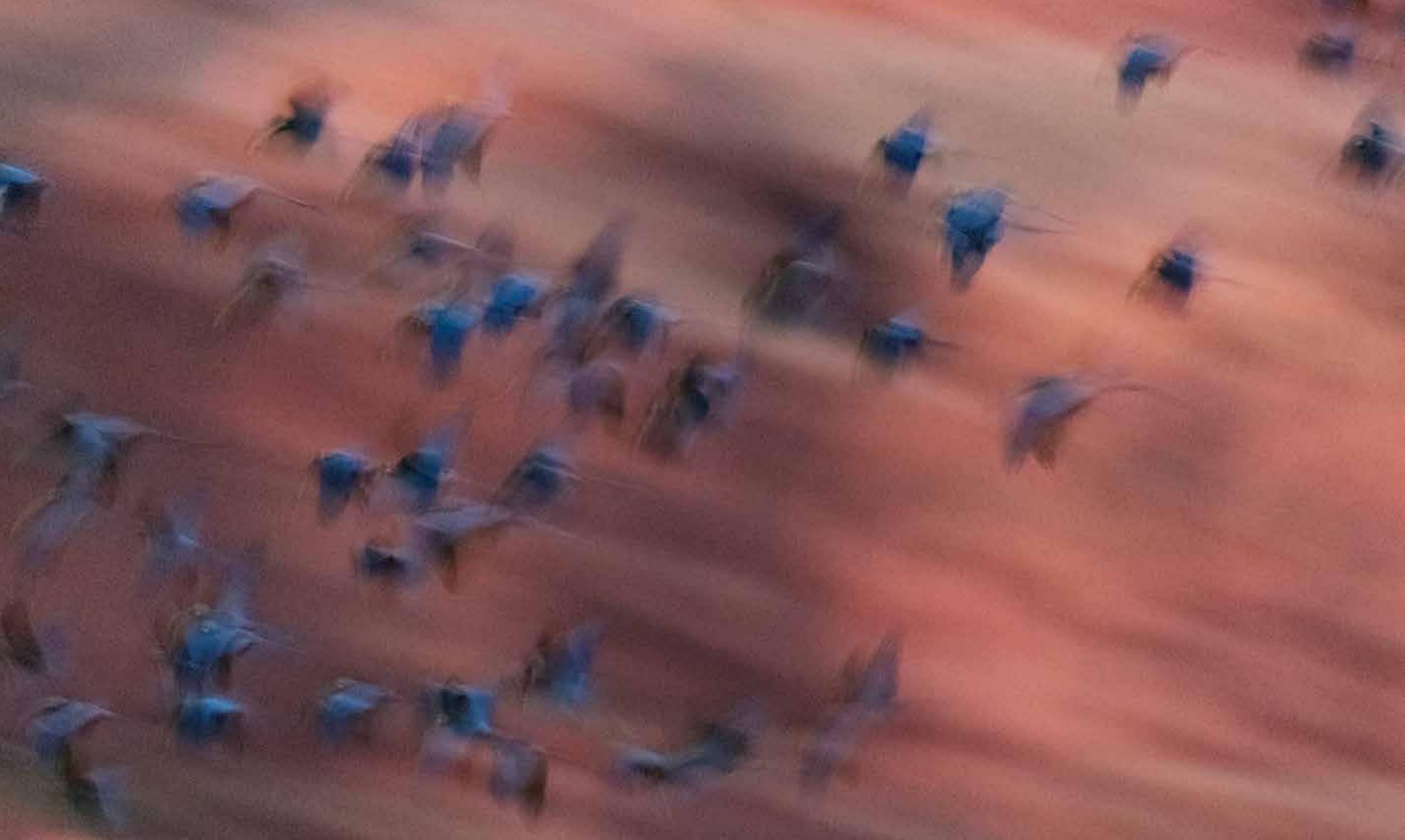












GARDENS OF LEAR'S MACAW

JOÃO MARCOS ROSA
GUSTAVO NOLASCO



INDEX

THE ENIGMA	21
THE RESISTANCE	38
TOUGH HINTERLANDS	45
THE END OF THE ENIGMA	67
EXPLOSION OF LIFE	87
MACAW TREE AN ODE TO FLIGHT	114
THE RAIN	122
THE ALERT	125
THE TREE	138
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE END	141
EPILOGUE	156
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	160



Use this QR Code for the english version.





THE ENIGMA



Few and long feathers shape an inverted V on the drawing board, outlining a tail. The chest's blue is given cobalt tones as the wings gain shape with slide of the paint. A dense and shiny animal is formed. More strength must be applied with your hands. Thus appear the traces of the curved black beak. Around the eye, a yellow drop shaped ring gives it a lively contrast. When the young illustrator begins coloring something resembling a triangle next to the beak in a paler shade of yellow, narrowing towards the center of the head, our attention is caught. On the bottom, in masterfully annotated letters, it registers a proportion of three quarters, revealing a true scale of approximately 70 cm with its feet resting on a branch and balanced by the wrapping of its nails over wood. Illustrator Edward Lear calmly compares the result of his drawing of that mysterious and beautiful macaw in a London zoo.

Those were the early 1830s.

It was precisely in 1832 when that drawing took the streets, libraries, bookstores and universities, printed in the recently released *Illustrations of the Family of the Psittacidae, or Parrots*. Without scientific knowledge to identify the peculiarities of the animal he had painted, the author registered only the generic *Macrocercus hyacinthinus*.

Lear was barely 19, and he was giving life to a repressed youthful impulse, a bright imagination for fantasy. He worked on commission drawing wild birds coming in from the New to the Old World, enough to pay his bills and to allow him to devote himself to his true passion: writing absurd poetry. On that same day, in the garden, his mind was already turned to the new style of literature by which his genius would be venerated decades later: nonsense.

Due to his detachment, not even in his deepest delirium, would he have imagined the greatness of what he had just done: the drawing on "board 9" of his book would become, for the next century and a half – precisely 146 years – a masterwork of one of the longest lasting puzzles in Zoology, especially in South American Ornithology.

While Lear left the realistic illustrations behind for good, that one drawing of the mysterious bird gained the status of the sphinx in Thebes. It made zoologists, biologists, and bird lovers feel challenged to decipher the riddle: what was that indigo macaw and where did it come from? Every one of them ended up devoured by their meager scientific knowledge, without there being an Oedipus to solve the mystery behind the drawing. Many were the other known species of macaws from the rainforest. It was thought that the macaw, drawn by the English illustrator, might be a variation of these.

Nothing but assumptions. No one knew where it came from.



Twenty-four years go by, and a new event gives even more challenging outlines to the enigma. Lear's drawing charms Charles Lucien Bonaparte, a French zoologist and nephew of the emperor Napoleon. He begins tenaciously studying it. Filled with confidence, he challenges and provokes the academic world by stating that the indigo macaw with a yellow drop on its eyes is, definitely, not a variation of the species already known or the result of a hybrid between them. Yes, the model on "board 9" was a new and mysterious species of the family *Psittacidae*.

It was the leap year of 1856.

The former beginner British draftsman, Edward Lear, had already become a well-known illustrator and writer. He scandalized the times with his absurdly comic limericks and his drawings of bizarre botanical species. He inspired other geniuses, like his contemporary Lewis Carroll, of *Alice in Wonderland*. He left behind writings and drawings that, in the future, would be the basis for names like James Joyce or for the construction of characters such as Burgess's young offenders in *Clockwork Orange*.

Impregnated with the fame of Lear and the admiration drawn to him, Charles Lucien, honoring the English prodigy, scientifically baptizes that species *Anodorhynchus leari*.

The enigma was given a first and last name.

Decades would pass and the flow of copies of *Anodorhynchus leari* on European ports increased. Locked away in ships and in indigenous legends brought across the seas by cunning sailors... The ones that survived the voyage arose in museums, zoos, royal and bourgeois families' collections and, at the same time, instigated the riddle in European universities.

After Lear and Bonaparte, no more than rumors emerged. They hinted that the indigo macaw came from the new country called Brazil. The imaginary map of that enigma would splash overseas and shed light, doubt, and a new breed of biology mystery-solvers in the green and yellow republic.

Decisively, the myth of *Anodorhynchus leari* became "brazilianized". The sphinx was taking its tropical shades and, following the thought of scientists, it was also being nicknamed Lear's Indigo Macaw.

The end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th had tainted Brazil with sun and blood. It flourished as a new country free of slaves, but it was a pro in the extermination of Indigenous Peoples, harboring a culture of inequality, addicted to smothering popular movements with iron and fire. In this scenario, *favelas* (shantytowns) erupted, plantations remained and Antônio Conselheiro and his people from Canudos were slaughtered.

In nature, species emerged slowly, much like our national scientific growth, and others disappeared rapidly: forests, rivers, the Atlantic Rainforest, the *Cerrado* (tropical savannah ecoregion in Brazil) and the *Caatinga* (thorn forest). Transplanted from Europe was the greed for a mysterious Lear's Indigo Macaw. The clue that it may be Brazilian did not change much. No one could decipher the epicenter of the enigma: after all, where did that indigo macaw come from; one not as large as the ones from the Amazon and Pantanal, but larger than the *Cyanopsitta Spixii*? Where did it reproduce; this species that began taking up the place of the extinct *Anodorhynchus glaucus* in offers made by smugglers? There were few clues and many disagreements, and yet they were instigating. Studies emerged. Expeditions reached the far ends of the interior of Brazil.



Alongside the enigma, Lear's drawing, and the new features on that mysterious map, there was an imaginary hourglass. Just as no one could find the home of that macaw, neither could anyone suspect that, with each passing day, increased the risk of it going extinct. The lifespan of Lear's Indigo Macaw would be approaching the end if nothing were to be done – or rather, discovered.

The sand flowed from one cone to the other.

The enigmatic game reaches the 1950s and gains the attention of the most illustrious contestant to Oedipus at the time. Olivério Mário Oliveira Pinto, author of the book *Catalog of Birds of Brazil*, decides to use his experience towards solving the mystery of Lear's Indigo Macaw. Quickly, the zoologist creates new outlines to the map. Expeditionary in the northeastern backlands, he is confronted with a specimen of the species in captivity on a farm. At that moment, a *sertanejo* (country man that is native to the backlands) gives a definitive clue to Oliveira Pinto, claiming that the animal had come from Juazeiro, a Bahian trading post on the São Francisco River. The Brazilian scientist, boasting confidence, takes the hint: Lear's Indigo Macaw was a brook bird of the *Old Chico* (São Francisco River), more precisely from the lower section of its basin.

On the ground, the dry and gray *caatinga*. Overhead, the boiling yellow of the scorching sun. In between, the blue of the macaw from the backlands.

Oliveira Pinto, then, traces a course and entrenches himself on the Pernambuco side of the backlands. He did not know it, but a small misalignment kept him from deciphering the riddle. He comes close,

but what he did find was mostly disappointment. That was not the nook of Lear's Indigo Macaw. The same happened to many other players that placed their bets on the Amazon, through the high Tocantins, Goiás, mid São Francisco, the Bahian area of Barra, Piauí, and even Guimarães Rosa's backlands of Minas Gerais. Nothing. It would require much more.

It was 1959, and the enigma would gain a German accent.

Two decades earlier, naturalist Heinrich Maximilian Friedrich Helmuth Sick disembarked in Brazil as an assistant to zoologist Adolf Schneider. Their goal was to collect birds for the Museum of Zoology of the University of Berlin. They start out as friends but end as foes when, in the final days of August 1942, dictator Getúlio Vargas – then in Rio de Janeiro and shaken by Brazilian ships sunk by German submarines – is forced to deny his own history of proximity to fascists and declares war on the Axis, which included Sick's Germany.

Through the streets, farms and forests of Brazil, the government and the people persecuted those displaying Italian, German, and Japanese accents and veins. To save his own skin, Schneider betrays his friend Sick and reinforces the rumor that he was collecting illegal Brazilian fauna. Aware of being wanted, Sick went into hiding, high on the Serra do Caparaó, in the state of Espírito Santo. He is captured and arrested.



The naturalist's obsession was so great that, while in prison on the islands of Flores and Grande, deprived of contact with the birds, he devoted himself to researching the only animals that were allowed to visit him: termites and ants. When he was released, in December 1944, he had already described dozens of species of his tiny cellmates.

Helmut Sick was set free, and an enigma awaited him.

Mysteries are solved either by chance or by someone's obsession. In the case of Lear's Indigo Macaw, there was no time left to chance. The sand flowed in the hourglass. It was time for an obsessed person. And it came in the form of Sick.

It was the 1960s. New political prisoners were tortured and killed. This time, however, they did not require a German, Japanese or Italian accent. It was enough to whisper "freedom".

Sick, at that time, was no longer a target. He could, thus, devote himself to something that consumed him on the insides: the riddle of Lear's Indigo Macaw. He chased it through Brazil, its stories and clues. In Teresópolis, he heard that they were from the Rio Negro, in the Amazon. In Rio de Janeiro, they told him they were from Maranhão. In Petrópolis, they hinted at Sergipe. When he visited São Paulo, they suggest he go to Bahia.

It was 1965, and the enigma had gone over a century without being deciphered. But what could be worse than it not being solved? If it were called a fallacy. And that is what happened. That year, a statement from Dutchman Karel H. Voous stirs the world of zoology: Lear's Macaw did not exist. Everyone was mistaken and it was nothing more than a hybrid of

the *Glaucus* and the Hyacinth Macaw from the Amazon and Pantanal.

That article was an outrage. It shook the pride of dry-skinned researchers cutting through forests, jungles and semi-deserts of the Brazilian backlands. The almost Brazilian German man, Sick, was one of the outraged. He had spent too much time trying to decipher the blue mystery to believe such a debatable statement.

Sick then participates in several trips to the Northeast. In neither of them did he find reference to Lear. What came closest was to know that "black macaws" nested in cliffs in northeastern Bahia. He wrote down this clue.

The answer to Voous' preposterousness, who dared to say that Lear's Indigo Macaw did not exist, comes in a straightforward manner, one which added more clues to the imaginary map of Lear's riddle. In 1978, Oliveira Pinto replies the Dutchman and decrees: not only did Lear's Macaw exist as a species, but its nook is the lower São Francisco.

That same year, taken by aches all over his body and with a mind completely abducted by his obsession to unraveling the mystery, Sick brings together a group of young scientists, and enraptures a legion of *sertanejos* through the northern portion of the backlands of Bahia. He listens to their stories and legends. And knocks down invisible obstacles on the mysterious map.

He ripped through the *caatinga* without a doublet. He cut his flesh, filled himself with the backlands.

It was December 1978 in Raso da Catarina, a hidden piece of hinterland after centuries of looting. A hostile and inhospitable Bahian plain forgotten on the map of Brazil. Few white men dared facing it. Almost all who did were found, days later, in the form of skeletons sitting at the foot of a *mandacaru* cactus, killed by thirst, trapped in that scalding maze.



In Raso, the pace of life is slow, hard, dry and with traces of banditry (*cangaço*).

Through the thorns, a leathered cowboy was gathering the lean cattle. Pankarare Indians carried cans across the soft sand in search of water. Maninho peered at game, hidden by the rocks, like a sneaky rattlesnake. Aderbal plowed the small farm, guided by the flowering of the *mandacaru* cactus. Elizeu, with his dagger, ripped the sides of the bleeding pig in Rosário Market. Up in the boiling sky, a pair of the Lear's Indigo Macaw flew by, carrying a bunch of licuri palm nuts.

All of this ceases with a strong and strange sound: it was the accent of a German man who had just arrived in the backlands of Bahia from the cities of Euclides da Cunha and Canudos, on the edge of Raso da Catarina.

He said his name was Sick, and claimed to have heard stories that this could be the place to decipher a so-called enigma.

In the scientific world, as a rule, "storytelling" may not be as relevant as evidence, research, numbers, and articles. After all, oral history carries emotions, and these may lead us to misunderstandings of reason.

If even science still knows very little about Lear's Indigo Macaw, we, visual and oral storytellers, would not dare to describe this photo literary saga in a thesis or dissertation. It would be irresponsible and underappreciative of the works of so many researchers who have delved into this species, such as Oliveira Pinto, Helmut Sick, Dante Teixeira, Luiz Pedreira Gonzaga,

Valéria Pequeno, Carlos Yamashita, Judith Hart, the entire family at Biodiversitas Foundation, Thiago Filadelfo and the tireless Érica Pacífico.

In the next pages and chapters of this book, take a reflective pause, go back to contemplation. Scenarios, characters, plots, and the climax help decipher the riddle of Lear's Indigo Macaw, using the same trick used by Sick: retelling stories heard from the *sertanejos*. This way, we justify our choice in adding poetry, romance and, mainly, contemplation to a love epic dramatically lived in the northeastern backlands.

Sick not only fulfilled the goal of dozens of other researchers, who, for over a century, tried to find the habitat of *Anodorhynchus leari*. The German naturalist and his companions from that voyage of December 1978, be them *sertanejos* or not, scientists or wise men, prevented a tragedy that was about to take over that beautiful, Brazilian, and *sertanejo* animal: extinction.

Sick solved the riddle because his dream persisted.

Lear's Indigo Macaw, *sertaneja* as it is, resisted.

Resistance is the history of women, men, animals, *sertanejos* in body, soul and life, who are behind every flight of a Lear's Indigo Macaw over the *caatinga* of our backlands.

Resistance. It's the word we chose to begin, right now, this beautiful story.

"In life, there's no time for everything".

SICK, Helmut









THE RESISTANCE

The man latched
Aware of his last chance
In the *sertão* you don't play with life

There's resistance,
If there's hope

The beast quickly surrounds him
Sneaking, lurking the man's dilemma
It brings discomfort
to measure bravery.

Resist
You shall be rough

No one should be harmed
If they've endured it,
they can go further
Hold back so he that must
not be named won't take away what
you got

Resistant,
There is will to live.









TOUGH HINTERLANDS

It's been called the land of nothing.

There are those who imagine the sun to be the only one not willing to abandon the hinterland. They swear it's an infertile place, where there is no happiness to be found, for it does not grow. Hunger and thirst are said to be synonyms of *sertanejo*.

But how does one explain the amount of will in a place that houses up to 20 million or so of the man-creature alone? If you count armadillos, macaws, snakes, bees, king vultures, boys, tegus, laughing falcons, toads, jabutis, black-chested-buzzard-eagles, roundworms, greater rheas, turquoise-fronted parrot, scorpion, boogeyman, white-eyed parakeets... oh my goodness, they add to billions.

There won't be enough numbers to count if we add goats, pregnant women and thorns.

River? Don't get me started, since most of them appear and disappear, there's no precise total. The São Francisco, alone, a river sea in that land, could be worth a thousand in this math.

The backlands, young ones, may seem like the region of nothing, but in truth it is the land of it all. Camouflaged, to shelter from evil spirits, brave men, the devil and death.

After all, how big is the hinterland?

How much of people, creatures, ghosts, weeds and thoughts can you fit into it?

How much of it is sung, plundered, cursed and exploited?



Until when will it be ignored, denied and prejudged?

Distances abound in the hinterland, enough for one to lose sight; leagues, hectares and chores, the latter measure, depending on the taste of the *sertanejo* from north of Bahia. A million square kilometers surrounding the paths of Minas Gerais, licking the state line of Espírito Santo and pouring dryness on all corners of the interior of the states of the Northeast.

It was hidden and preserved until the day came when the white man ate every creature, bush and land on the edges of Brazil, back in the 17th century. If we start counting the days when only the native Indians dwelled in the backlands, there won't be enough calendar sheets.

At that time, the São Francisco River debouched in the middle of the sea, and it was through it that one reached the waterfall of Paulo Afonso, right at the spot where Helmut Sick would unravel the enigma of the macaw, some 300 years later.

Today, the *Old Chico* is half dead and the waterfall is no longer there. But in those good days, when its waterfall broke into a ruckus, so high and gigantic, it got the native Indians and the white man thinking the world ended just behind it.

What'you talking about ending, boy? There was far more hinterland up above it. Once this was found out, colonels, corrals, the Tower House, counselors, ghosts and *marias bonitas* took over the land called *caatinga*.

Imagine an entanglement of thorny white bush! Very well, this is the *caatinga*. A type of vegetation found only in Brazil. It was nearly gone, because today there's only 1% of preserved *caatinga* – of all that was virgin land back in the day of the native Indians.

Even so, in what remains of *mandacaru* cactus, key-tree cactus, macambira bromeliad, nopal cactus, melon cactus, vine and blue cactus, when entering the bushes, one does not walk out without bruises and cuts. Strong enough to face this sea of thorns is the leathered cowboy.

His armor is called the doublet. Legs, chest and arms are covered. On his head, he carries the round hat with fine braids dropping over the ears and attached to the nape. The gloves hide the backs of the hands and leave the palms free to tame the destiny of the horse. In his pockets he carries the lash, to whip the back of the rebellious calf, and the bell, for the neck of the willful goat. There is also a well-tied bag holding a handful of herbs mixed together by the "prayerer", a protection against snakebites and dry-stick wounds.

It shoots out like a gust.

The cracking sound of branches breaking in half, branches ringing against the doublet and the fine cuts from thorns bleeding near the eye. Galloping without refreshment for the horse. The rocks under its hooves give rhythm to a *caatinga* swagger. Even protected, the cowboy goes home torn, full of hinterland.

Resist. Man, animal and bush. That's the way it is. Round trip. It's all the same, you battle where there's most scarcity.



Water.

When there's none, the forest becomes less green, brown, gray, and even white. White woods, White Mountains. It pours the colors of life to resist death. It seems dead.

The fight is worth it, for if there is beauty in this world, the resurrection of the *caatinga* is the most divine of them. This takes place in the almost never occurring rain, thin in winter or thick in thunderstorm. The first droplets to fall on the twisted branch, feigning death, drip into the dry land. What you see is white stick turning green. That's when one can hear even the sigh of the *caatinga* reopening in life.

Today, more and more, there is less to be resurrected. A sad and never ending damnation. The hunger of the man is so voracious that he is carrying away even the bush, by the mouth of the goat, by the fire in the field or by the sickle of deforestation. There are less and less sprouts of Brazil plum (umbu), favela bush, angios, cotton-silk tree, imburana tree, jua tree, braúna tree and licuri palm. The trees grow old and are not renewed. The *caatinga* agonizes, forgotten by botanists and with only 1% of its areas protected.

To live in such place requires grit. At the end of the dagger. In cowboy leather. In green camouflage of white. Withstanding thirst. Expecting providence and resisting its constant absence.

What you do not see is cowardice.

Some leave for São Paulo. But never unwilling to return.

Some *sertanejos* have fought so hard to stay that they perished of thirst, of hunger, of knife and even cannon bombs. Waste, Canudos, animal, boy, armadillo, ghosts, macaw and people. A deep love for the territory.

Mistaken are those who think that the *sertanejo* – man, beast, brown – struggles to survive. What he fights for is to not live without love.

Those who merely survive have no choices. Those who resist, on the other hand, choose a territory to love. The *sertanejo* insists, almost dies for his backlands. Because brave men do not ask for mercy. They fight for their honor.

If he dies, he dies fighting.

The last one died in October 1897, under hot fire from the army, which, for the forth time in a row, was in the backlands of Bahia to destroy the Village of Canudos. Men, women and children, the miracle worker of a leader, the pious Antonio Conselheiro, and that last desolate *sertanejo*... they all died fighting! There were some 20,000 on the banks of the Vaza-Barris River. To this day, one of the greatest massacres ever promoted by the Brazilian government against a popular resistance movement.

The story was not confined to the forgotten corners of the northeastern *caatinga* thanks to the reports of Euclides da Cunha, a journalist sent to the region near the Raso da Catarina to accompany the last offensive of the military against the followers of conselheiro.



Nourished by an appreciation for the government of President Prudente de Morais and a supporter of the fallacy that the Village of Canudos was a bunker of monarchists, “enemies of the Republic”, the journalist took on the task of bestowing glamor on the military campaign.

Whithin days, on the hills surrounding the battlefield, what he witnessed was the bravery of a mob of excluded, drought-stricken and former slaves led by a pious man who preached faith and equal distribution of goods among his followers.

Even against his ideological will, Euclides da Cunha watched and narrated one of the most epic struggles of a people against authoritarianism. Surely he was astonished, for he could not understand how the army had been humiliated and defeated on three occasions by those *sertanejos*, who gave their very last drop of blood for the ideal of their right to the land.

By the time the fourth and last offensive took place, in October of 1897, the writer was atop the Favela Hill, from where he could see cannons, bullets, guillotines, hunger and thirst finally exterminate that village led by Antônio Conselheiro. Ashamed, he left the slaughter camp four days before the final extermination. It took him five years to publish his book, in 1902 – *Rebellion in the Backlands* –, an almost confession of complicity with that sea of innocent blood shed in the Bahian *caatinga* by the Brazilian government.

In a mix of prejudice, recognition and literary primacy, Euclides da Cunha, still in that masterpiece, ended up creating the nickname for which the resilient people of the Brazilian hinterland would be universally renowned:

“The *sertanejo* is, first and foremost, strong”.

*“Since there is such a concept down South
That the northeast is bad, dry and ungrateful
Since there is actual separation
It must be made lawful*

*If the day comes when it is done
Both will profit immensely
Beginning a different life
From the one we have lived till now
Imagine Brazil divided
And the northeast becoming independent”*

TAVARES, Bráulio e VILANOVA, Ivanildo



Letter.

Dearly departed doctor Euclides da Cunha,

Wherever you may be now, 120 years have passed since the day of the ending of your writing about the massacre of my people. I'm sitting here on the Favela Hill, from where so many times the monkeys of your bunch left in an attempt to decimate Canudos. I decided to write to you as a remembrance for the many deaths in those days of the army's fourth cowardly expedition over those people.

As you well learned before your death in 1909, in this neck of the woods, having memory is also a sign of bravery. So my writing also carries with it a bit of desire to relieve the bitterness still stuck like snot in my throat.

*First of all, I apologize, because I do not want to be ungrateful. For six generations, what you wrote in *Rebellion in the Backlands* is read and taught to our children. Acknowledgement is what I have for you. The work is so good and written with such care that if it weren't for you, so dedicated to trying to soften the cowardice of that massacre of my people, there would've been teachers using your book to teach the scientific alphabet to the children of the caatinga.*

I hope that you, either in the peace of our lord or in the scorching lap of the demon, will not curse me as evil. Even cities have been named after you, in 1938: the village of Cumbe became "Euclides da Cunha", right next to Canudos. It's been said that Lampião has been seen there. And it must be true.

I've been avoiding the matter at hand in this letter, but I will tell you. In the city that bears your name, late in 1978, another stranger arrived. Unlike your bunch, he did not come to kill. He came to discover life. And what he found was precisely an indigo macaw from the hinterland. By the way, do you recall if there were any back at the village of the good conselheiro?

Very well, Dr. Euclides, without further ado. After you left and the army exterminated Canudos, the resilient people still returned, but your government, taken with shame, covered the stains of their shame with water, plunging the rubble of our resistance into the dam of Cocorobó.

The water is blessed in this dry way of life and also for the people who rebuilt New Canudos. But I must say beforehand: may you know that this does not pay the debt.

Repentance is not mine, but it has bestowed me with prejudice.

That is why, before I'm irritated by this bullshit, I say to you: my people from the hinterland are first and foremost strong, but they also fall sick; they need things; they are thinkers; they form opinions and ideas; they do things differently and, mainly, they preserve their identity wherever they go. Therefore, at last I dare to say to you: do not boast greatness to keep me down.

Sincerely.

Signed, The Backlands

















THE END OF
THE ENIGMA



On December 18th 1978, the day dawned in Rio de Janeiro. The newspaper seller adjusted his beret and delivered the morning paper on house porches. On the first page, a box informed the weather forecast. The climate still punished the capital of Rio. The forecast foresaw sparse rain throughout the day. Highest temperatures would not exceed 30oC in Bangu region.

As the sun rose and slammed hard on the chest of Christ the Redeemer, young researchers Dante Teixeira and Luiz Gonzaga adjusted the last of the equipment packs in the sturdy, diesel-powered Toyota pickup. In a nearby corner, the German master Helmut Sick, his mind obsessed with the enigma of Lear's Indigo Macaw, followed them. He meddled with a booklet about the newly created Ecological Station of Raso da Catarina. A large portion of dry land in northern Bahia. Feared by all and, at the same time, a paradise formed by dry canyons, slits of rivers, which were once live tributaries of the São Francisco and the Vaza-Barris.

Sick and his assistants had thought: if Lampião's bandits (*cangaceiros*) and the followers of conselheiro hid there one day, so could Lear's Indigo Macaw. After all, he was now sure that the enigmatic creature was indeed *sertanejo*, from the hinterland.

Raso da Catarina was the final destination of that journey in its final stages of preparation. Bangu and its possibly 30oC would feel like Siberia compared to the scorching backlands of northern Bahia, where that trio of investigators was headed.

Map in hand. Almost 40 years of evidence collected and experiences lived in Brazilian lands. The life of former political prisoner and an obsessive mind. Sick had survived it all. The hinterland was no longer a strange creature and it called to him at all times. They

traveled for more than 2,000 km through the interior of Brazil. He would not give up. Maybe he knew, maybe he didn't, but that would be his last chance to unravel the enigma of the indigo macaw from the backlands.

His body was ill and he would not have the strength for further endeavors. If he did not find it this time, the imaginary hourglass could determine the end of a beautiful animal before it was even found. A pre-death.

His German accent scraped the edges of Raso da Catarina on Friday the 29th, in the still calm streets of the city of Euclides da Cunha. The backpacks were locked and tied up inside the truck, packed with equipment. Sick, Dante, and Gonzaga brought with them only the two most obsolete of materials: mouth and ears. It was enough, at that moment, in order to ask around and listen to stories about the existence of indigo macaws around there.

From the pharmacy of Mr. Leonel's family, Dona Júlia's father, the *sertanejos* kept an eye on those foreigners. They did reveal their fright as they entered. Greetings exchanged, and the conversation turned to the indigo macaw.

From the street, a young man hears the cry: "Go, and fetch Maninho!".

Shortly thereafter, the hunter, known in the city for his skills with the shotgun, arrived. Maninho was rough in essence, experience and desire. Born in Sergipe in 1926, he soon got hold of a slingshot. In those days he hunted with his father and came back crying, afraid to run into Lampião. But all it took was one day with the shotgun and never again would he let it go. He made a craft out of it. When he grew



old enough, he soon killed a fox and experienced the hot bullet addiction. He prayed to God and God answered him, sending all sorts of things for Maninho to kill: deer, armadillo, six-banded armadillo, red-tailed boa and guan. He never got lucky with a rhea. Jaguar, luckily, there hadn't been. He had never risked a life. Men, he never killed.

In a circle filled with people, Sick, flanked by Maninho, saw a package open. Scientists were startled when, from the inside, appeared almost the entire tail of Lear's Indigo Macaw. On the corner of his notes, the German man scribbled yet another information to unravel the riddle. He was very close; he knew it. He snatched notes out of his pocket and settled the new assignment with the hunter, Maninho. He wanted to go where tails such as those flew, alive. A place called simply *sertão* (hinterland, backlands), which Maninho pointed out on the horizon, towards the city of Canudos and Raso. Maninho knew it was in a cave in Toca Velha (Old Burrow), but he had never been there. He would need help.

On Sunday, the last day of 1978, the three men of a peculiar speech were at the door of the hunter's house at dawn. Dona Maria, who was pregnant, rose with difficulty. She offered coffee. For Sick, there was no time to lose. He had never been so close to finding the enigmatic macaw. In a hurry, he thanked her.

Maninho had never known anyone in his life who wanted to catch an animal for any reason other than feeding. Also, for the first time, he was making money from something other than hunting. So he kept his doubts to himself and set out to keep his promise. He got into the truck and told the men to follow along the Rosario road. He did not know how

to get to the place where the macaws came from, but he knew precisely who would help him.

When the sun was already burning on Estaca Zero farm, young Aderbal was steering the cattle. At the age of 19, his thoughts drifted far when he heard friends reciting the verses of the holy book. The beautiful words were taking root in his desire. He dreamed of being a teacher, right there in the village of São Bento. The handle of the hoe would one day turn into a stump of chalk. Delighted, he awoke from the trance to the sound of a sharp horn coming from the road. He looked up and saw old Maninho waving. He nodded.

His father crawled to the door. Through the open crack, he saw three strangers jump out, none of them bearing the skin marks of someone from the hinterland. He overheard one of the strangest things he had heard in his life. Where would you find, dear god, grown men chasing little birds?

Answering to his father's cry, he went to talk to Maninho and the rest of them. One of them, Sick, pulled out some photos and began showing them. Aderbal understood it to be the macaw that the German man sought. Warily, the scientist wrinkled his face and did not believe it, even after Maninho joined the conversation and confirmed it. With the blessing of his old father, Aderbal worked as a guide for the visitors.

The first onslaught did not go far. Right on the first, dry, Brazil plum ahead were the macaws. Sick pulled out the telescope. The words of an almost Japanese German man to the *sertanejos* were of indecipherable euphoria. When he let go of the equipment, the decades long of wrong advice weighed heavily. He wanted more evidence. He could not admit that it



could've been so easy to find Lear's Indigo Macaw. Aderbal knew that they would have to go to the carvings of the Old Burrow, towards Canudos. He would not know the place on his own. The dreamy boy remembered a friend of his father's: old Elizeu.

It's a scorching early afternoon. After going to the Rosário Market, Elizeu chopped pork meat over a platform. A leathered skinned native carved in labor and scarce water, he did not have time to lament his woes. He had to honor his dues to his children's food.

The van stopped in front of the house. Elizeu put down the handle of the knife as he saw Maninho and Aderbal leap out. But he picked up the sharp blade again when he saw a different crowd approaching. The old hunter ran to explain: those three were looking for the macaw and he had told them that it would be old buddy Elizeu who would know where to take them.

Overcome with excitement after having spotted the macaws on the dry Brazil palm, Sick began cascading the *sertanejo* with questions. Before getting any answers, the German man went to the car and came back full of photographs. The red one, the green and yellow, the great one from Paraná. None of them. The only one Elizeu pointed to was Lear's Indigo Macaw. That was the one flying over the backcountry of Raso da Catarina and sleeping in dens of Canudos. They arranged a meeting the next day.

On his way back to Aderbal's house, Sick was pensive. In just a few hours, there was more evidence of reaching closure than in all of his decades of obsession. Especially when, in a few minutes, in the dusk of the hinterland, he, Dante and Gonzaga, flanked by the young *sertanejo* Aderbal, would witness, in the distance, three indigo macaws flying

toward their dormitory. It is certain that on the last day of 1978, Sick and his two assistants had become the first to not be devoured by the sphinx. They were the new Oedipus. They just couldn't believe such a feat. They slept on New Year's Eve under the starry sky of the hinterland, waiting for a new year to dawn.

When he woke up in 1979, Sick came upon Aderbal setting up a trap near a licuri palm tree, where bunches of coconuts hung. Later, Sick would turn into scientific account what, at that moment, was still an exclusive domain of the popular wisdom of the backcountry: licuri was the main food of Lear's Indigo Macaw. Sick did not know it, but Aderbal, he was born knowing this.

It was nearly 10 am that morning when Sick finally gave up and embraced his discovery: it was right in front of him, making perfect cuts on the hard shells of the licuri coconuts with its beak, the enigmatic macaw drawn 150 years ago by Lear, in London .

They still had to find the nest and the dormitory of that animal. Elizeu pointed to the course of Toca Velha, a few leagues away. Maninho warned his *sertanejo* mates to be careful: bring lots of food, because the foreigners would not settle down easily.

For days and nights, the group walked around the carvings of Toca Velha. This time they had grown accustomed to the overhead flight of the blue wings of the hinterland. Along the way, they collected tips from cowboys and villagers. One of them took them to a place called Saco de Hermógenes (Hermógenes' Bag).

They followed the dry riverbed and set camp. Soon they saw feathers, holes and a scene of unparalleled beauty, where the wind, for thousands of years,



shaped the red walls and, thus, created the dens where, finally, they saw the house of the indigo macaw from the hinterland. The perfect acoustics for the singing of the birds rounded off the characteristics of that amphitheater of paradise.

Ready for the unveiling of the show, they heard the ruckus. They made the first count of that animal in history: 21 flew that day. There was no secret beyond the reach of this group of scientists and *sertanejos*.

Raso da Catarina was definitely the home of Lear's Indigo Macaw. In one of the roughest, most hidden and marvelous places of the backlands was the treasure of that enigmatic map.

There cannot be a more perfect place in the world for such a happy ending. But the German man wanted more. When everyone was preparing to return, tired but happy, Sick inquired: was there another place in the Raso where one could find nests of indigo macaws? Aderbal and Elizeu remembered old Colonel Zuzu's farm.

Pain consumed the German man. His body was in tatters. The donkey's back provided so he'd spared of the walk in soft sand was not enough to reduce the suffering. He withstood all of this. They passed the Cabeça de Boi (Ox's Head), ran into some owls. As Saturday the 13th went by, they saw a group of marmosets on the banks of the Vaza-Barris. They crossed the Passagem Funda (Deep Passage). The reward came in the shape of a new paradise. From afar, they saw a giant pierced stone, right on the edge of an enchanted garden, in the town of Jeremoabo, a kind of southern portal of the Raso. A coliseum of stones surrounding virgin forests of a lush green

almost impossible to find in the typical scenery of the *caatinga*. A cradle of life called Serra Branca (White Mountains).

Then it came. The ruckus. A symphony of indigo macaws, parrots, white-eyed parakeets, black-chested buzzard-eagles and king vultures that was, to the ear of the German man, a dose of morphine to placate the pain shooting throughout his body. They rested. They needed to bring back to the scientists of the big city a proof of the resolution of the enigma. And it came from hot lead fired by Aderbal on January 16th, 1979.

The single specimen of Lear's Indigo Macaw that was shot down was carefully arranged in a box, where it journeyed ten days later, when Sick's expedition in Paulo Afonso – on the shores of the lower portion of the São Francisco River – came to an end. Years later, back in the capital of Rio de Janeiro and with his discovery received as a sensation in the world of zoology, the scientist would write: "These macaws can live to be 40 years old".

The writings of Sick, Dante, and Gonzaga were eagerly awaited by other obsessed scientists, also eager for the complete map to the enigma of Lear's Indigo Macaw. But only those three knew the discovery was actually secondary. The sand flowed even faster through the imaginary hourglass. They knew that Lear's Indigo Macaw was heading to extinction.

It was not yet the end. And certainly not the assurance of happiness.











NEAR

DEATH



EXPLOSION OF LIFE

The end of a riddle, the beginning of a dilemma.

Upon Sick's return to Rio de Janeiro, at the end of January 1979, his report revealed a doubt. Opening the secrets of an endangered species could accelerate its demise, but it could also mean an opportunity to stimulate its preservation and reproduction. Consumed by disease in his body, the German man passed the baton, challenging the new generation of Brazilian zoologists to prevent the point of no return of the imaginary hourglass, in which sand was still flowing towards absolute annihilation of Lear's Indigo Macaw.

A few months later, Dante and Gonzaga, companions in the discovery, returned to the hinterland. They flew over Raso da Catarina from end to end. On their feet, they knocked on the carvings of Toca Velha, in Canudos, resorting once again to *sertanejo* wisdom, without which they would never have solved the enigma. They allied themselves with a new guide.

In a twist of fate, much like old man Maninho, another hunter would join the tale of rescue of the indigo macaw. This time, a young bushman named João Carlos. With the skill and disposition of a 20 year old that he was, he would make way for the new offspring of heroic *sertanejos*, initiated by Aderbal and Elizeu.

João Carlos knew every slot of the carvings, the dry riverbed and mouth of the wall. He helped mapping the dens transformed into nests by inseparable macaw couples. Yes, they are monogamous, and if the male, by sorrow of fate, dies, the female bears her widowhood until her own perishing.



In one of these adventures, away from the shotgun and close to science, the small hunter made Dante and Gonzaga climb to the top of the walls. They named the trail Sick's Riser (Subidor de Sick), an homage to the German master.

Around the same time, in early 1980, also in João Carlos' Canudos, a message comes from afar addressed to the explorers Elizeu and Aderbal. The offer to become rangers of that paradise of Toca Velha. A recognition of the bravery of those two *sertanejos*, without whom Sick would have failed in his last attempt.

Elizeu already had a taste for putting bird traffickers on the run, those who went up and down the cliffs on makeshift steps to steal eggs in the nests. He quickly accepted and became the first official ranger of the sanctuary of Lear's Indigo Macaw, in Canudos. Aderbal, on the other hand, was grateful and went on to become a teacher in the village's school, never having enough courage to tell his students about the adventure of pioneering the solution of a mystery in the backlands.

Years went by. Both Elizeu and Mr. Carlos became guides and guardian angels of the dormitory of the indigo macaws of the hinterland. There was no season in which they didn't run into a scientist. "Hi, I'm Valéria Pequeno". "Mr. Carlos, I'm also named Carlos, but Yamashita". "João Carlos, it's me, Gonzaga. This time I brought Judith".

US physician Judith Hart was no tourist at Toca Velha. From 1990 onwards – and for nearly two decades –, she devoted herself to research the way of life of that endangered macaw. Her bravery stirred the admiration even of the rough cowboys of the hinterland. She spent days camping, alone, in the

vastness of the *caatinga*. From time to time, she would ask a *sertanejo* to bring her water and food so she would withstand a little longer. She cherished silence and solitude. She did not like to mess with the routine of macaws between nests, dormitories and flights in search of food.

The 1990s were advancing and, along with them, increased the threats to the macaw from the hinterland. The vastness of Toca Velha and the great distances that the birds had to travel to feed themselves made life easier for those who sought to kill them: hunters, traffickers and starvation. Around that time, the strong temperament of Judith, the hermit, gained the support of researchers coming from Minas Gerais. They wanted to find a way to permanently protect that sanctuary.

The doctor sent out a cry for financial aid from the scientific world. By 1993, Judith's wish comes true. The newly founded Biodiversitas Foundation buys out Toca Velha. The Canudos Biological Station was born, to assure peace for the reproduction of Lear's Indigo Macaw.

That's when life began defeating death.

Old feathers only fall off when new ones are ready to come out. It was time for Elizeu to lay his hard leather to rest. A new generation of rangers would arise to protect Toca Velha by the turn of the century. From Josimário to Zé Raimundo. From the angel Zequinha to Dorico and Caboclo, sons of Elizeu.

A miserable childhood in the backlands without water, a harsh and severe father and school; that's how Dorico and Caboclo developed an appetite for getting rid of hunters who perturbed the flight of the blue bird. Each one in their own way, more or less



rough. From the top of the cliffs, they descended like a flash, following the tracks on the rocks to destroy ropes, ladders and nets left in a hurry by the invaders.

The number of macaws was increasing. But Judith's strong grip had found no substitute since her departure. Then sertaneja Tânia took the reins of the Biological Station. And the reins had to be held tight. New *caatinga* angels allied themselves with the second phase of the rescue mission of the species still threatened of extinction.

That's how, in 1999, old Zequinha, one of the oldest and dearest inhabitants of Toca Velha, angel by divine vocation, officially joins the team of protectors of the blue bird. He remembers very well how it all began, one Friday morning, when he saw old man Elizeu and a white, strong and strange-sounding man, the so called Sick, arrive at his home. At that time, he learned how much the outsiders valued an animal that they, the *sertanejos*, thought was of no greater importance than any other.

Zequinha knew all the trails and holes through Toca Velha. Even with his carcass beaten down by so many years of hardship in life, he went out daily to check the nests and write down the times when the macaws set off in search of the licuri coconuts. He did it all on his own, even when he feared the traps of the *caatinga*. Like so many of the other angels, he grew fond of the blue-feathered bird.

With the paradise of Toca Velha preserved, the time had come for a guardian angel for Serra Branca to arise; that enchanted garden where Sick passed. But, as usual, the first words of the story were written with the trigger of the shotgun.

In the 1960s, Otávio, a boy on vacation from the capital, went to his old grandfather's farm in the hinterland of the city of Jeremoabo, one of the gateways to Raso da Catarina. During one of these trips, he took a shotgun and went hunting, an entertainment more than accepted in the roughness of the *caatinga*, at that time, still filled of animals. Walking through the thorns, he saw a white wing. He squinted one eye, caught his breath, smoothed the trigger, and forced his forefinger. The shot came out smoking and hit the black leather of a monkey, who saved the white wing.

The memory of the animal agonizing to death for having shielded the bird accompanied the boy as he grew. He became a man and never managed to rid himself of that guilt. Neither the macaw nor the colonel's grandson knew, but the promise to pay his debt to nature, imposed by Otávio on himself, would come to guarantee the reproduction of the species.

Upon his grandfather's death, Otávio took over the family business in Jeremoabo. He got to know the region in depth. Just as old Sick, on the epic journey of 1978/1979, he was taken by ecstasy when he hit the natural paradise of Serra Branca. Delighted, he recalled his debt to nature. The remission for making that small monkey begins, thus, with the purchase of those lands.

Otávio transforms Serra Branca valley, its cliffs, boulders, and woods into a protected area. There is no one who will challenge him in order to cut down a tree and, let alone, threaten the birth and flight of a single macaw. There, under the vigil of that ranger, death steps back.



It was mid 1980. The photographer Luiz Claudio Marigo returned from the backcountry of Jeremoabo with a roll of film wrapped in his bag. He barely landed in the big city and eagerly ran for the dark chamber. He meddled with the negative on chemicals and they were slowly revealed. One, two, three, twelve: 36 Lear's Indigo Macaws. For a long time to come, that photograph was the record of the largest group ever sighted until then. Whether due to confessed failure on the first counts or to the effect of the network of protectors of the hinterland, what is certain is that the known population was in full growth.

Soon came the drama: mouths increased, food was in decline. The hinterland was no longer inhospitable, and if hunters and traffickers were guarded, fire and farming destroyed the trees that were the source of life for the birds. It was already known that the licuri coconut was the basis of Lear's Indigo Macaw's nourishment. If in the past this species was counted in millions of trees, from Pernambuco to the south of Bahia, by that time there weren't so many.

From the threshold of his home – in the town of Serra Branca, in Euclides da Cunha –, Zé de Pedro was saddened every time he saw a licuri palm tree chopped down by an ax in a new cornfield. He feared never again receiving the morning visits of the macaws there in the fields of the village where there used to be licuri palm trees as far as the eye could see.

He heard a call on the fence. He spotted a beautiful woman with a heavy accent. To fend off the *sertanejo* mistrust, the biologist introduced herself: Simone Tenório. She came from Santa Brígida to share a new way of making money by saving the licuri palm trees from extermination. She had been teaching men and women to rationally remove the straw from the tree to turn it into art. Albeit suspicious, Zé de Pedro accepted the challenge.

The old *sertanejo* who was chatting with the macaws in his yard became one of dozens of artisans, protector of the source of food of the macaws. From Santa Brígida, passing through Chuquê and Serra Branca, arriving at the Serra da Chapada Settlement, where, until today, his daughter Elisângela gathers the people to dye straw from saffron, achiote, são joãozinho do jegue, jenipapo, umbu bravo, vargem do pau d'arco and acerola. Everything turns to color.

Not far from there, on the porch of Débora's house, in the village of Rasinho, Dalila is very moved and accompanies the growth of the network of artisans. The small cabocla was born in the community of Barreirinhas, the entrance for tourists on their way to Lençóis Maranhenses. She very well knows how thorny and, at the same time, magnificent the transformation of the centennial interaction between community and nature can be. A rolling stone, she delves into the backlands of Canudos and Raso.



She reaches out with her hands, her smiles and the sweat dripping from the corner of her radiant eye, wherever she goes. She helps to spread art as a means of protecting macaws and their sources of nourishment. Be it in the straw and the shell of licuri coconut, in clay, vine or the dead imburana wood. Stretching as far from Rasinho as the Settlement; from Caimbé to Macururé. In the latter, she uncovers a jewel in the history of the hinterland. That is where the blacksmiths who fled the War in Canudos settled down, 100 years ago. From the craftsmanship to forge weapons, they passed on that manual skill to the current generations, forging it into new craft.

Thus multiply the trees, artists and consciousness. Protecting and creating areas for licuri palm trees that keep the wheel of life turning; sunrise, growth and reproduction of the blue-winged species of the hinterland. Gardens of the indigo macaw emerge. The challenge of preservation undoubtedly involves the creation of new food oasis. Planting and sprouting more trees. There is no other way.

Right at the foot of a tree named Barriguda, Lúcio was born in the hinterland, in 1979. He grew up on a dry farm, fighting for branches, water and survival with the brave *caatinga* men. From there, you can almost see the Cocorobó dam, under which are the ruins of Old Canudos, the blood of the people of Antônio Conselheiro and shame of the Brazilian government, that only seeks the backlands to deceive it.

A *sertanejo* child that he was, Lúcio wandered like an animal in the woods: free. Living in the backcountry is freedom. But deliverance is not disobedience. Brother to fifteen others, from his father he was granted education. To this day, none are smokers.

I never wanted to go south, because what I saw most were departures filled with a desire to return. Meanwhile, in the hinterland left behind, everything was lost; when the migrant returned, he no longer found the memories he had come to reclaim.

The attachment to permanence did not do much for him. Although he stayed, Lúcio lives off of longing, as he watches everything go away. History, animals, joy, obedience, tranquility, and what hurts him the most: the woods.

He became a man and decided to do something for the world. He's always planting trees and telling stories. He sows braúna tree, Brazil plum, *mandacaru* cactus, licuri palm tree and *sertanejo* memory. Between two pits in the hard soil, where he tries to change the fate of the *caatinga*'s slow demise, he dreams of the good future of a *sertanejo* that does not need to leave the northeast. He longs for the day when the indigo macaw won't have to go that far to find and get fed of fruit.

Late autumn 2017. Thiago Filadelfo has an impenetrable expression behind his fully grown beard. Flanked by the old guides Dorico and Mr. Carlos, he adjusts the cage attached to the carabiner. He stares up at the stonewall.

Hanging some 50 m above the ground, biologist Érica Pacífico asks Gui for more rope. The friction with the rock makes her spin, off balance, but soon she is supported on her side by *sertanejo* Márcio. She takes advantage of her slim body and penetrates a dark den on the wall. She disappears. When she returns, full of insects punishing her face, she holds an indigo macaw cub in her arms.



For ten years, the smiley girl has been obsessed, as Sick, to know the ways and habits of the species.

The cage begins its ascent to Erica. In it, the cub descends back into the arms of the inseparable friend, Dorico. Measurements, data collection, ring on its legs. There are very few seconds to catalog yet another winner who will soon be flying and, perhaps, never returning to that abode. Which is all for the better, for it is a sign that indigo macaws are breeding and occupying new and old habitats.

If, in 1979, Sick counted two dozen and one more, almost forty years later, Lear's Indigo Macaws have multiplied to over 1,200. They can no longer fit in the paradises of Toca Velha and Serra Branca. They take over the world.

From the curve of Sento Sé, the presence of the bird stretches for 185 km until the end of Uauá. They nest in Barreiras; they fill Barra do Tanque; they feast on licuri coconuts in the gardens of Serrote; they hide in Caldeirão dos Cavalos; await death in Gruta dos Brejões and in Boqueirão da Onça and, once again, keep company to Pankararé indian, Binho, in the canyons of Baixa do Chico.

From "critically endangered", Lear's Indigo Macaw has gone into the not-so-exciting category of "in danger of extinction". But one should not mourn when it is time to thank the old and new guardian angels, *sertanejos* of blood and soul.

From near-death we've reached explosion of life.

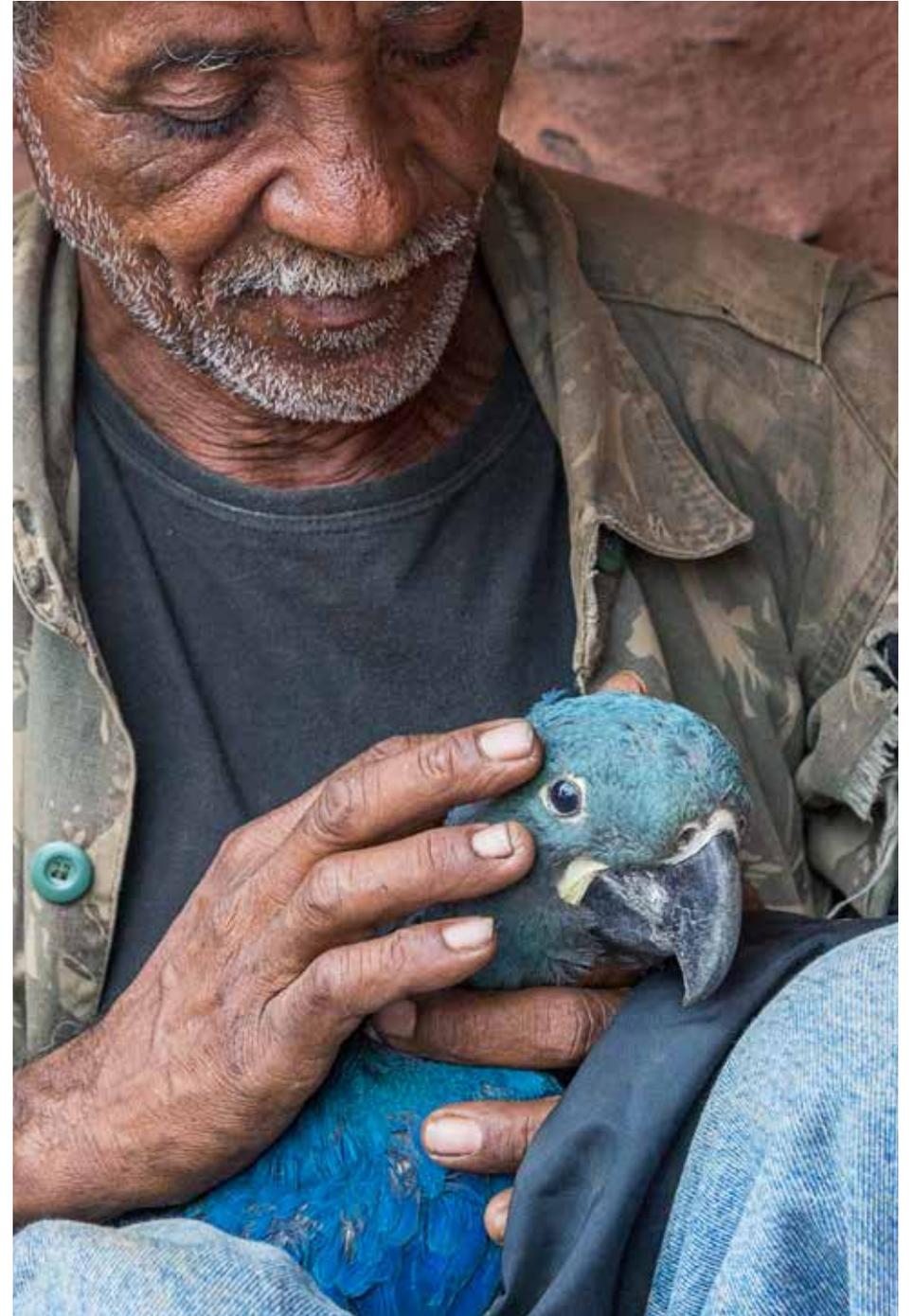


















MACAW TREE AN ODE TO FLIGHT

A dry stick, alone in the middle of a field in Barra do Tanque, towards Euclides da Cunha. Up close, it's a huge skeleton.

A blue landing on the shoulder of the skeleton, giving it the first contours of life. "Ara"... "rr-a". Echoes the first cry in the distance. Illuminated by the last rays of sun.

With one eye, the skeleton captures the horizon gilding behind Serrote. The remains of cloud, like dust, turn pink and then, purple.

In purple, another shout: "ara"... "rr-a"... "ã-ã"... "trã-rã". The skeleton wiggles one hand and, as if in a sonic nod, almost says: "come".

A couple rests on the chest. It fills up, as if it were taking a breath before a long dive, but what is indeed launched, on the horizon, are dozens of other macaws. They fly with certainty. In a slow dive, they create an extraordinary scene. They land perfectly, filling the skeleton with life. Turning into blue what was once flesh, arms, organs and groins.

When purple is borderline the pitch black of night, the "Macaw Tree" is now very talkative and turns into people. People full of shouts and that cherish the darkness of the night, in a damned pride of being macaw from the hinterland.

The winged giant prepares to flap its wings when the dream ends. They tear themselves apart like skin and leave in a burst to their true dormitory. They leave the skeleton naked, once again lifeless.

Just a dry stick.









THE RAIN

Silence, darkness, and the only one to speak is the wind. It comes as a breath: it inhales, turning nothingness into heat and, out of nowhere, releases a strong, rhythmic, and cold burst. It is as if the hinterland were God; as if His sleep were the night and as if the starry sky in the backlands were the most beautiful dream the Creator could ever have.

Is that so?

Time to wake up. It's a new day. The city fills with light and reality, when a thunderstorm is announced in the vastness. A spark, and what was bright again turns to dark. It comes without stars, muffled and without wind.

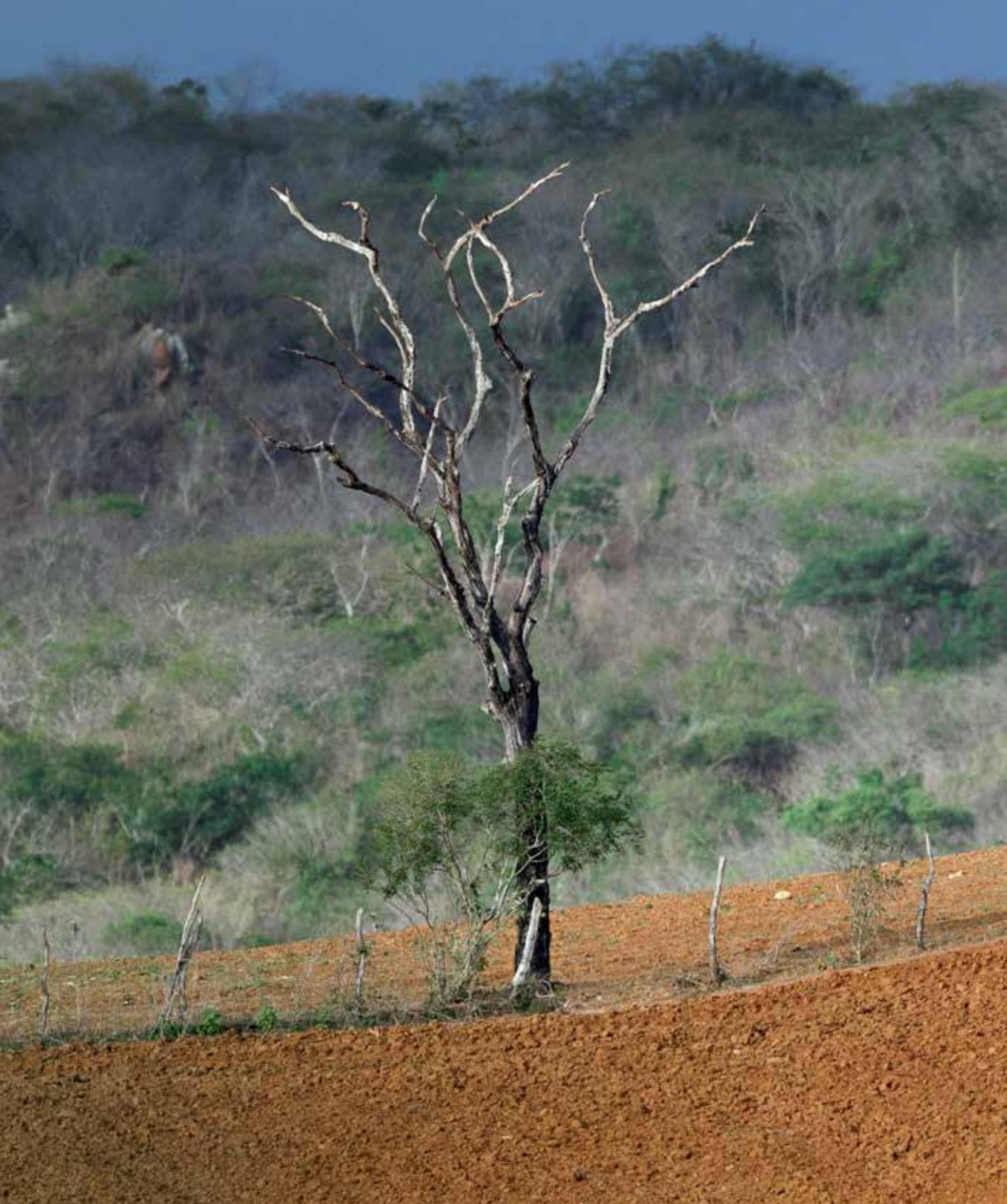
It rains.

Flooded streets. Children and elderly, together, jump on wet ground. They dip their wide smiles into thick droplets coming from the sky. They do not walk away until the last one falls.

But it's no bother. It's the hinterland, and this, the rain, is its true divine work.

In the stonewalls of Raso da Catarina, the rain bears joy. The macaws, *sertanejas* as they come, spread their wings and receive with pleasure the strong rainfall on their feathers.





THE ALERT



Lourinho wears his camouflage pants. On the edge of the bed, he settles down. Sleepy and with itchy eyes, he pulls out his boots and shoelaces from underneath. At the entrance of the tool-shop, he fetches a kiss from Marlene with his fingertips. She responds smiling. Dangling in his chest are the binoculars and the last words, a settlement on who would pick up the little one in school. The helmet encompasses his head. He cuts through the dirt road of Euclides da Cunha heading towards the farm in Juazeiro.

Along the way, he recalls his childhood. There were so many trees and so many bugs that the game of hide and seek lasted for hours, until a boy was uncovered. Even after his first locks of white hair showed up on the corner of his temples, he heads out to the bit of farmland where he grew up to do what he likes most since his youth: bird watching.

When he was younger, having only his eyes to see, he wrote down every species sighted in a beat up notebook. The matutos (simple local countrymen) often thought he was sick in the head. Jeez, why's the boy's head always in the clouds, looking up at the sky and writing? He didn't mind them. He kept on taking notes: rufous-collared sparrow, blue-crowned parakeet, laughing falcon, solitary sandpiper, scaled dove, *caatinga* puffbird, American kestrel, aplomado falcon, scarlet-throated tanager, turquoise-fronted amazon, turkey vulture, bat falcon, Lear's Indigo Macaw, roadside hawk, white-lined tanager, glittering-bellied emerald, red-headed cardinal, campo oriole, cliff flycatcher, purple-

throated euphonia. He recorded up to 183 different types of birds. He went further and beyond the old German man, Sick, who on the last expedition of the macaw riddle recorded 132 types of birds in Raso da Catarina, as well as a near-Noah's ark of other species: southern tamandua, six-banded armadillo, agouti, musk hog, fox, deer, lowland paca, eared dove, white-lipped peccary, tegus, jabuti, red-tailed boa, black-fronted piping guan and greater rhea.

Like Sick, Lourinho knows very well how important this record is, to allow oneself to be fascinated by the greatness of these birds, for others have already acquiesced to be drawn to them for the wrong reasons for over 500 years. The so-called enlightened ones constantly accuse the hunter that kills or the trafficker who climbs a cliff to steal a puppy. What will not scatter is the fog of prejudice that blinds the eye, preventing a clear view that the system is driven by the luxury market of collectors, sponsors of this black market. True militiamen in the destruction of the defenseless Brazilian fauna.

Even with hunters and traffickers targeted, thanks to the warnings of scientists and the attentive eyes of contemporary guardian angels like Lourinho, we cannot let down our guards. The unrest of Lear's Indigo Macaw now comes from starvation, deforestation and destruction of licuri palm trees, their favorite dish. It is known, from the writings of science, that the blue-winged creature of Raso da Catarina is not a fussy and stuck-up little girl. Sertaneja, she has learned to get by with very little, and although the licuri coconut is her delicacy, she eats what she can grab a hold of. There are 33



other food items in her breakfast. From pine nuts, *mandacaru* fruit, blue cactus, ceara copaltree, jurema-preta, Brazil plum, baraúna tree, deer-eye beans, sisal, and worse, it candidly takes corn from the sertanejo crops.

If starvation expands the menu, it does not solve the problem. Even eating everything, it is from the licuri coconut that the indigo macaw gets her greatest source of energy. Especially for journeys of up to 40 miles in flight from the dormitory to the feeding grounds, a marathon to fill her stomach and still carry some back to the cubs in their nests. Without their daily 300 coconuts, there's no escape.

Starvation. Death. Everything comes from the slow and methodical destruction of the natural gardens of licuri palm trees. They disappear year after year. Everything prevents the renewal of the trees and the blossom of licuri coconut that follows. The cattle's hooves, the sickle of man, the fire of the devil and, believe me, the mouth of a demigod of the *caatinga*, the goat.

Today, Lear's Indigo Macaws are not eaten and rarely shot down. Its assassin is starvation.











THE TREE

She's not a girl to go by unnoticed. She feels beautiful and full of charms around the time between January and Lent. It is when she adorns herself with fallen curls next to her green eye, protected by a long hair of shredded straw.

Graceful. In the midst of so many other thorny, misshapen and clumsy, in the *caatinga* she stands out. Slim and straight, she holds the trunk, from head to toe, pointed precisely at the sky. If legs she had, she would parade among *sertanejos* as if the white forest were a catwalk. She would go around stones, snakes and lizards without looking down or reducing her smiling.

Some call her licuri palm tree or oricuri. Perhaps a way to make it seem strong and allow no one to get angry ideas about striking it with a machete, fire, or hungry mouth. Feminine and powerful enough to maintain the life of so many others as she does, she is generous even in her narcissism.

When she is more visible, in a clean field, with no others hiding her as "whore", she loves to be courted. She allows beautiful indigo macaws on her long palm hair, making her magical.

She gives back to the winged admirers, offering them coconut pearls attached to her bunches. At the end of such an exchange of caresses, with a nod of the head with a gust of hot wind, she allows them to carry, at the tips of the beaks, to other places, entire bunches.

She yearns to stay alive, talked about and courted by other macaws, in nests where she could only go if feet and wings she had.





IN THE MIDDLE OF THE END

It was the first Friday of 1979, market day in Canudos. Zequinha adjusted the load of fruit and firewood on the animal's back, under the shade of a Brazil plum in Toca Velha. The sun was not yet at its peak when the old friend Elizeu appeared standing on the sand tracks. Frightened, he dropped a bag when he also saw a large, white, man, unmarked by the harshness of the hinterland. From the exchange of compliments, he gathered that the foreigner's name was Sick. They went on and met Zequinha's father at the door to this house, which was well set in the foothills of red stone sierra. He allowed his heart to go on at ease over the donkey, when he noticed his father's invitation to the two of them for coffee. They were friendly folk, albeit strange to him.

Zequinha hardly experienced that first day of the German man, Sick, at Toca Velha, because he spent hours in the market of Canudos. Once the dance of catira had come to an end, he mounted the animal and used the blue late afternoon to return to Toca Velha. That was when he learned from his father that those men would stay there with them for a few days. They were after the indigo macaw. Who knows, maybe they owned it.

Since the arrival of his now deceased his grandfather – José Henrique and his thirteen children, back in September 1907 –, the sky of Toca Velha has always been one big ruckus of macaws and white-eyed parakeets. People were the ones to come in the 1960s.

Back in the day, there used to be few men and lots of macaw. In the time of the German man, there were already many men and few macaws. Proof of this was the joy of those strange people, when they went away saying that Toca Velha was the lost paradise of a mystery that was over 100 years.



Zequinha go to marrying, pairing up with a cousin. He never wanted to leave Toca Velha. There, he lived and watched history turn its pages. Earlier there was Elizeu, later his son Dorico. He got used to seeing hunters wasting away. By the time his tanned leather skin had turned 60, it was his turn. He became a ranger at the place of his birth. For a decade and a half he helped avoiding a near-death.

All of these are reminders of the past, relived by Zequinha after lunch, now in 2017. Longing for a time when one lived like a native indian, loose in the white woods. Everything he saw in his life is between Toca Velha and Canudos. In the dream, the indigo macaws always accompanied him.

Under weary and aching feet, the beaten land. Sitting on a torn couch, Zequinha kept his gaze on the sleek combination of straight lines interspersed with glossy dry clay and wooden slats. He averted his gaze to the top of roof of the old house built by his father on the night of December 28th, 1947. The memory of that terrible adventure brought a grimace to his face and a wrinkle to the corner of his eye. It was the last day, the eve of a leap year, and it was well known that putting up a roof in one of those was a guarantee that it would crumble.

He tried adjusting the tired frame of the hard wooden couch without upholstery. It made his soul ache. He thought of his age, approaching eight decades. He stared at the crack in the window and, through it, the fragment of stonewall lit by the white sun at noon. Back in his days as a ranger, the beauty of the indigo macaw nesting up there dazzled him. He was fond of watching the dens, amazed by the wisdom of the grown birds that fetched food to feed the cubs. He liked taking the binoculars and observing the parents' insistent lessons until the offspring took their

inaugural flight. He felt his chest fill with pride when he remembered that right there, from Toca Velha, the only legitimate children were himself and the macaws. He looked out for so long that his eyes got tired. Then, his legs grew tired. And in time, his heart.

Zequinha's life turned into waiting for time to pass.

The sweet voice waited an answer from inside the house. Biologist Érica was preparing to return to the capital. She wanted to say goodbye to her dear friend and angel, Zequinha. His grandson, Márcio, was changing the tires in his grandfather's blue jeep and was about to go in and call him. No need. "Girl, come in here". He would not let his young friend leave without carrying on her lips the sweetness of his coffee, prepared on the wood stove.

The crackling of the fire followed the same pace as the prose. The old man told her, once again, how much he was used to the beautiful creatures in the afternoon, coming from the licuri palm gardens of Serra Branca to the dormitory in Toca Velha. He regretted no longer having the strength to climb the cliffs to meet them again. He got a hug and a farewell kiss. It was a simple combination of science with *sertanejo* wisdom. Erica went on her journey having her body tainted by the hinterland. Scratched, pierced by thorns, but mostly proud of maintaining the story of the explosion of life.



Night came in Toca Velha, where energy is but the moon. The place where Zequinha chose to withstand. When time was already turning a curve in the life of that tired angel, behold, everything surprises him. The day came with a singing dawn. The old man heard the rumble back in the old orchards of mango trees and guava trees, right where there had been an old owl's nest.

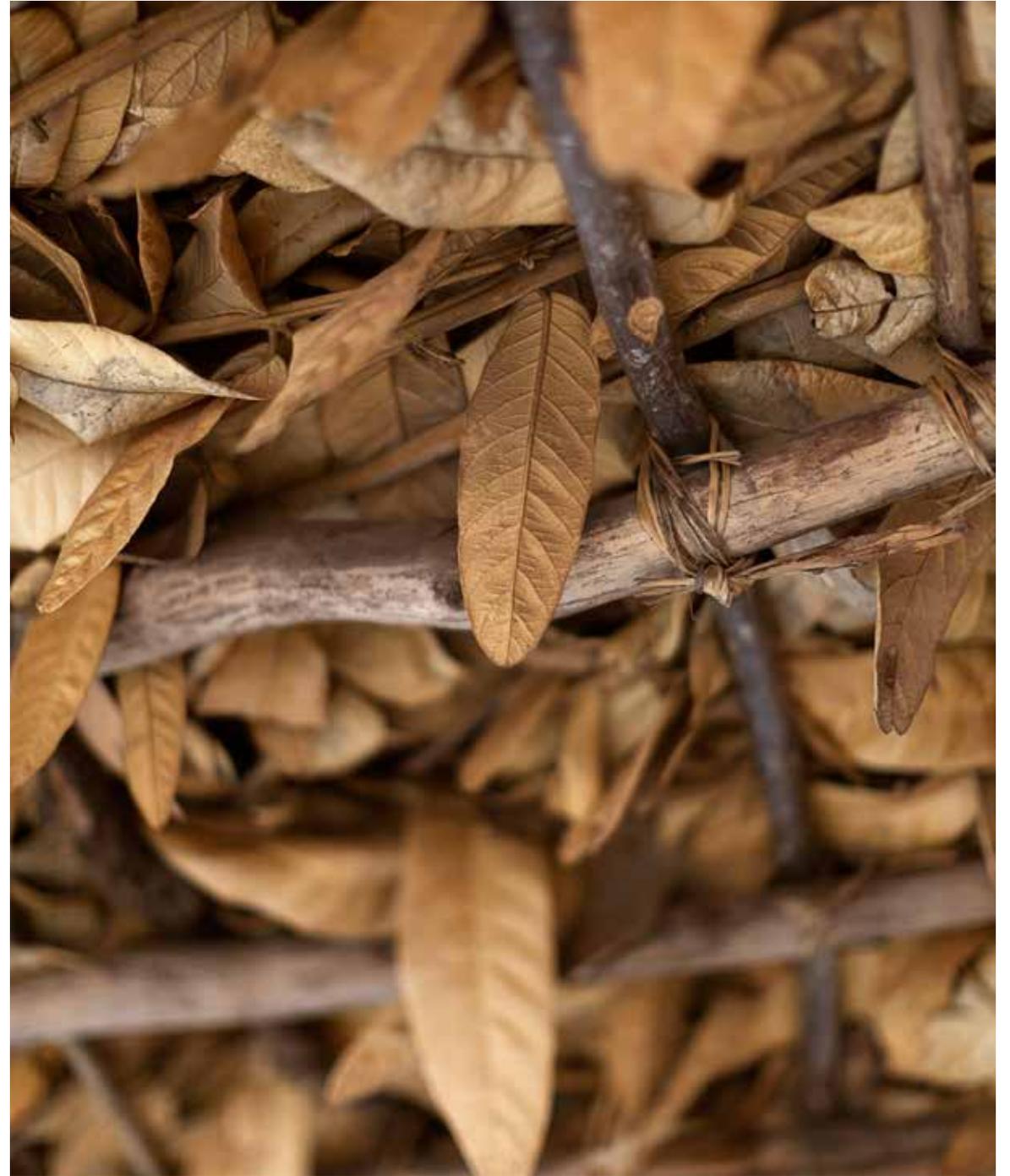
Dragging himself to the threshold of the house, he burst into happiness as he saw a pair of Lear's Indigo Macaws flocking by his home. Precisely when he had no strength left in his legs to cover vastness of the cliffs on foot, the macaws came so close to him for their nesting. It was a gift; whether out of nostalgia or certainty, he knew that so close to him, nothing bad would happen to them.

The End, for, in the middle of everything, there was Zequinha













EPILOGUE

Aliomar Almeida - a personal account

During Carnaval of 1979, I took my first trip to Bahia. It was a cultural experience that showed me a new world. A happy, mystical, affectionate, and creative people. I didn't know at the time that the most sought-after bird in the world had just been found in the backlands of Bahia, a discovery that put an end to one of the greatest mysteries of ornithology.

Only in 1994 did I become interested in birds. At that time, the agenda was the preservation of Curaçá's spix's macaws. I followed the matter in a mix of interest and impotence. It was a topic for experts, scientists and major government actions. Despite the many efforts that have been undertaken to save the species in the wild, the last living *Cyanopsitta spixii* disappeared in 2002.

At the same time, I read reports on Lear's Indigo Macaw, another genuinely Bahian macaw: population growth, discovery of small groups and repatriation of individuals from other countries. A desire grew in me, a calling that haunted me. I felt responsible for something I did not know.

In 2014, I attended a lecture by the team of Biodiversitas Foundation on Lear's Indigo Macaw at Avistar, in São Paulo. That presentation brought me an optimistic and inviting vision, showing efforts undertaken for a project of more than 20 years. I decided it was time to get to know that reality up close.

I arrived in Canudos on August 14th of that year. It was a unique experience, far greater than the one experienced in 1979. I was ecstatic; overlooking the

horizon, I could detect scents and the songs of birds, I saw flowers in cacti, campo orioles, pionus, parrots, many goats and sheep seeking any hint of green sprout.

I was still to meet the macaws in their home. The following day, I went to the sandstone walls of Canudos Biological Station. I arrived at four in the morning, and was welcomed by Tânia and guided by the park rangers Dorico and Caboclo. Soon enough I heard small noises. It was the awakening of the macaws. To me, they sounded like a familiar, ancestral voice. It touched on a sensitivity that I did not recognize; it took over my entire BEING.

They went out in groups: 20, 30, 50, 100... They passed us and went on their search for food. A grandiose and blue spectacle. It moved me in a way I believed unique, mine alone, until I looked to the side and saw that my guides, boys born there in those lands, living daily with the macaws, were still moved, perhaps because they knew of their enormous responsibilities in order to protect that sanctuary.

I returned to São Paulo profoundly impacted by everything I experienced; there was great concern between everyone for the macaws' feeding. I looked for information and I was able to realize that the incredible story of resistance of the macaw was also that of the *sertanejo*. There began the conception of the idea for this book, to record the beauty and the challenge of turning the coexistence and conservation of a biome so rich, fragile and beautiful into a possibility. I consider this work a gift to all who love nature and a tribute to the inhabitants of the backlands, portrayed in poetic form by Gustavo Nolasco and João Marcos Rosa.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE I First, to the creator of this work, Aliomar Almeida. Also to Aderbal de Farias, André Julião, Ângela Prochilo, Professor Ângelo Machado, Binho Pankarare, Caboclo, Camila Mendes, Carmelita Okura, Cecilia Marigo, Ciro Albano, Claudia Brasileiro, Rosario Community, Cris Veit, Dalila Mouta, Débora Souza, Dorico Alves, Eduardo Pedro, Elisângela and the artisans of the Settlement of Serra da Chapada, Érica Pacífico, Fernanda Riera, Flávio Ribeiro, Biodiversitas Foundation, Giovanni Pieve, Gláucia Moreira, Guilherme Feitosa (Gui), Guto Carvalho, João Carlos Alliegro, João Carlos Nogueira (Seu Carlos), Lélío Heleodoro, Lindomar Souza (Lindoka), Lourinho Reis, Lúcio Santos, Luiz Cláudio Marigo (*In memoriam*), Luiz Paulo Amaral, Marcelo Ricardo (Mazé), Marilda Heck, Marlene Reis, Maninho, Matthew Shirts, Máximo Cardoso (Márcio), Memorial Antônio Conselheiro, Neiva Guedes, Nobinho Pankarare, Otávio Nolasco de Farias, Patrick Pina, Pierre Jimenez, Raimundo P. Alves, Reginaldo Leone, Roberto Sakai, Ronaldo Ribeiro, Roubert Dormu Tone, Tiahasi, Thiago Filadelfo, Thiago Bernardo Pinheiro and Zé de Pedro.

Finally, to the NITRO family, Disa, Marcia, Marcus, Leo and, in particular, the coauthor of this work, a partner in this journey through the backlands and master of kindness, Bruno Magalhães.

JOÃO I To Ana Paula and Benjamin, my greatest loves. To my mother Sonia, for always trying to make me a more serene man. To my father, Francisco, for introducing me to the backlands and for showing me the importance of simplicity. To my grandmothers Lilita and Mary, for the affection and role models. To all who, somehow, I may have crossed paths with and who turned this journey into a notebook of great stories.

GUSTAVO I To my beloved ballerina, Camila Pacheco, for her smiles, her lightness, never-ending patience and unconditional support. For you, my blown-up heart gathering joy. Also to my idol and father, José Paulo Barcelos; to my sister-poet, Cristina Nolasco. Vastness has the power to make us think about the small simplicities that life brings our way. Therefore, to my beloved children ZP, Thor, Rafa, Carol, Antonio, and the girls Giovanna and Maria Tereza. To the backlands, always.

Executive Production
NITRO IMAGENS

Publishers
BRUNO MAGALHÃES
GUSTAVO NOLASCO
JOÃO MARCOS ROSA

Photography
JOÃO MARCOS ROSA

Texts
GUSTAVO NOLASCO

Graphic Design
FLÁVIA GUIMARÃES

Editorial Assistant
CRISTINA NOLASCO

Proofreading
ÉRICA ANICETO

Translation
MARIA BITARELLO

R788j

Rosa, João Marcos.
Jardins da arara de lear / Fotografias João Marcos Rosa; textos:
Guatavo Nolasco. – Belo Horizonte: Nitro Imagens, 2017.
164 p.: fot. col.; 21,5 x 18 cm.

ISBN 978-85-62658-12-9

1. Animais em extinção. 2. Arara-azul-de-lear – Obras ilustradas. 3.
Fotografias. I. Nolasco, Gustavo. II. Título.

CDD –598.71

THE AUTHORS



JOÃO MARCOS ROSA I

from Belo Horizonte, MG, he is a photographer and journalist, collaborator of National Geographic Brasil. With an eye that was forged in the woods and dust of Minas Gerais, he dedicates his career to documenting our relationship with nature. A member of NITRO, he's the author of *Harpia* (2010) and *Arara-Azul Carajás* (2015), and also co-author and editorial coordinator of several works related to environmental conservation.

GUSTAVO NOLASCO I

from Mariana, MG, he is a writer and screenwriter and a member of the Marianense Academy of Letters. Passionate about listening and telling stories from Brazil, he co-authored *Nossa sala de troféus* (2016) and *Os chicos* (2012), winner of the Jabuti Prize. Journalist and alumni from PUC Minas, he worked in several newspapers and created two others: *A Semana* and *A Sirene*. A member of NITRO, he is the author of several cultural projects, such as *Moradores – A humanidade do patrimônio histórico. Sertanejo* of soul and dream.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Cunha, E. da, 1927. **Os Sertões**, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo.

Gonzaga, L.P., 1991, **In memoriam: Helmut Sick**, Rio de Janeiro.

Julião, A.G., 2015, **Chô! Chô! Passarinho: a recepção brasileira às expedições científicas alemãs, 1933-1942**, São Paulo.

Julião, A.G., 2013, *Sertão azul*, São Paulo.

Lear, E., 1852, **Illustrations of the Family of the Psittacidae**, or Parrots, Londres.

Lugarini, C., Barbosa, A.E.A., Oliveira, K.G., 2012, **Plano de Ação Nacional para a Conservação da Arara-azul-de-lear**, Brasília.

Sick, H., D.M. Teixeira & Gonzaga, L.P., 1987. **Revista Brasileira de Zoologia**, São Paulo.

Teixeira D.M & Pavavero, N., **Um breve histórico das araras do gênero *Anodorhynchus Spix***, 1824, São Paulo.





It has undoubtedly been an unforgettable experience knowing, so intimately, the life of Lear's Indigo Macaw and discovering stories of a unique region. All done by sharing the eyes of João Marcos Rosa and the ears of Gustavo Nolasco. A truly transformative experience.

Flipping through the pages of this book, I realize how João's relentless quest for images and Gustavo's unraveling of epic tales reveal a far greater cause than fighting for an endangered species. I see in this work a desire to preserve culture, customs and ideals. All that encompasses the survival of this northeastern macaw. These are narratives from the backlands about struggle and resistance, which, albeit rough and harsh, sound charming and inspiring.

Gardens of Lear's Indigo Macaw is not merely a photographic documentary on wildlife. It materializes in a visual story that favors preserving the relation between man and nature. Gifted with a unique language, built with mastery, it presents Brazil, pulsating, and a sertanejo that is far beyond strong.

To resist is to believe in dreams, to fight for what you love. Many are those who surrender themselves in the name of Lear's Indigo Macaw. I hope that, after reading this book, you too will fall in love with the saga of the macaw from the hinterlands and the people who live for this cause.

Bruno Magalhães.

Agência Brasileira do ISBN

ISBN 978-85-62658-12-9



9 788562 658129

