

# Lear's Macaw update

Rosemary Low

In the April issue of *Parrots* magazine I described the tragic deaths by electrocution of the Endangered Lear's Macaws in north-eastern Brazil. With the decrease in the coverage of native trees, the power grids become obvious perching places for the macaws. Sadly, they can become death traps and happen more often during the breeding season near to roosting sites. I reported that Kilma Manso told me that attempts were being made to sue one power company for failing to modify the structures of its power lines to avoid more macaw deaths which started in 2018. This is not the only threat to their existence. It has been widely reported that the French company Voltalia plans to build a huge wind farm near the macaw's main breeding areas. Representing the conservation organisation ECO, which Kilma works tirelessly for, she told me: "These will be hard battles to fight, but be completely sure that for ECO's team, they are our top priority goals."

## A true disaster in the conservation efforts

On March 23rd, Kilma, who has worked in Bahia since 1998, gave me the latest news. It was encouraging: "I'm so glad to share with you that our collective efforts were able to make the power company, COELBA, start the activities to adapt the components of each electric pole in order to solve this very serious problem of electrocutions of Lear's Macaws." The elements adapted on the power lines included the distance among cables, distance between cables and crosses, and larger insulators. There had not been a single occurrence of electrocution since these steps were taken. Compare this with the period from the last week of last December to the first week of January when three Lear's Macaw were electrocuted. "Three macaws in less than 10 days – a true disaster in the conservation efforts", said Kilma. Unfortunately, two days later she reported another death under a power line in Euclides da Cunha on March 23rd. This underlines the urgency of the actions needed to be taken by the power company.

Kilma acknowledged the help of Dr Luciana Khoury of the Bahia State Public Ministry who is the Public Attorney in charge of the Region of Raso da



*Kilma Manso (left) visits a farm where Lear's Macaws have destroyed some of the maize crop (in background). ECO pays compensation in corn to these farmers*

Catarina's environmental problems. "We are very fortunate in having her on our side. Her personal dedication to the Lear's Macaws problems is helping greatly in solving them," Kilma said.

## More recent deaths under power lines

The tragic deaths have attracted a lot of media coverage. On March 22nd the newspaper *Correio* reported: "Frozen in a freezer, on a farm in Euclides da Cunha, in northern Bahia, three Lear's Macaws await an outcome. In the last ten days of last year, they fell dead from the sky of the Caatinga. It wasn't what you could call a novelty in the region, where the death of macaws is becoming more and more frequent. Since 2018, at least 31 have died in similar conditions near power poles. The Lear's Macaw is threatened with extinction and exists in only 12 areas in Bahia. The main ones are Canudos and Euclides da Cunha, where they spend most of the day in search of palm fruits for food, such as licuri."

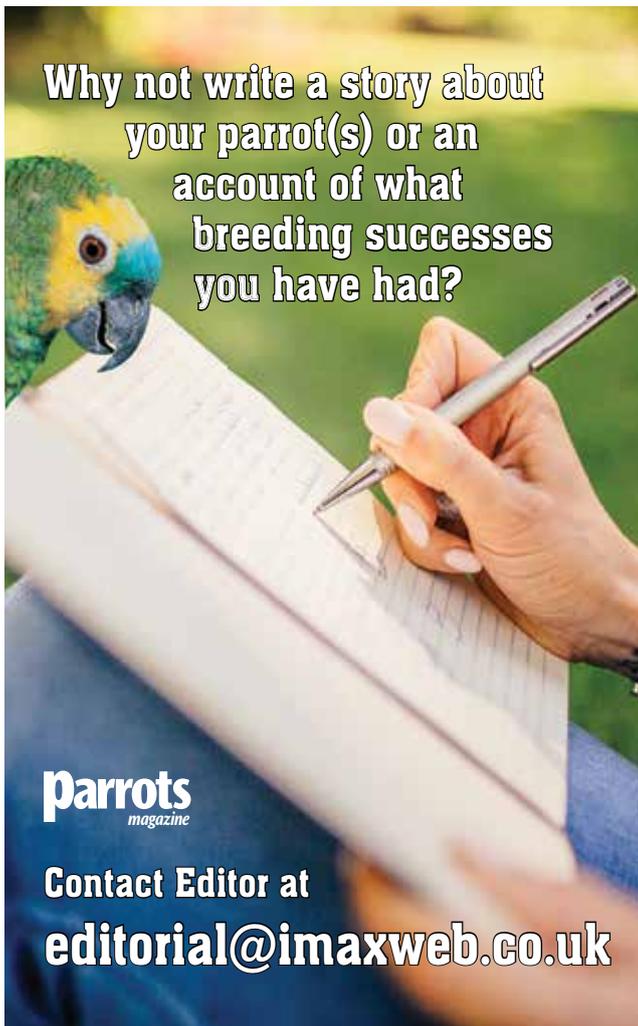
Marlene Reis is the owner of the farm where the three refrigerated macaws are stored in a plastic bag. She and her husband, nature expedition guide Mário Reis, are two of the people who, with the help of local populations, collect dead macaws from the ground. Technicians from the Institute for the Environment and Water Resources (INEMA), will be performing the necropsy, the examination that determines the cause of death. Until the end of the report, the wait continued, as well as the problem associated with animals hitting power poles at Neoenergia Coelba.

"Electropesion" is the technical term given to death caused by an unintentional electrical discharge. It happens if a macaw touches, simultaneously, an energized wire and another one not energized or with different energetic power. In this way, the macaws close the energy circuit and are electrocuted - something similar to what happens, for example when barefoot, you get an electric shock when you are in the bath.

In 2019, the last year of the survey, there were 1,469 Lear's Macaws. The numbers have increased from an estimated minimum of 60 individuals in the 1990s due to the strong conservation programmes, but there is no room for complacency. One problem that has been identified is the small number of breeding pairs. However, this macaw is one of the most closely monitored of all parrots and with the recent action by the power company COELBA, and the continued vigilance of several conservation NGOs, there is every hope that the population will continue to grow.

The most common argument to defend power lines, wind and solar farms, is the fact that they use renewable energy, which reduces global warming. However, protection of the environment and its precious biodiversity is of crucial importance and must be taken into account when permission is granted for 'green' power projects. Respect must also be paid to wildlife, so much of which is already endangered, and to local communities, their lands and cultures.

As we go to press, we learn of yet another death on March 28th. Dr Luciana will request an emergency meeting with the power company to request that they immediately modify the poles that have not been adapted. The rate of two deaths in one week must not continue. ■



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The shop will be open between 10am and 4pm both days.

On the Monday bird trainer Mike Simmons will be available to answer your queries.



Tickets for this free event are expected to run out quickly.

The shop is at their offices in Ramsbottom, which has excellent transport links to Manchester and the rest of the country. There is free parking at the venue.

To register for this event, please visit [www.northernparrots.com/popup4](http://www.northernparrots.com/popup4)