

Return to the wild



of 39 Grey parrots to
Kahuzi-Biega National Park



INTRODUCTION

This is the first time a "soft release" of Grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) has taken place in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This represents a huge step forward in the DRC's commitment to address the issue of capture and trade in this species and provides a model for conservation efforts elsewhere.

The trade in African Grey parrots has caused wild populations of this species to collapse in many parts of their range.

In Ghana populations have declined by more than 90% in the past two decades and declines have been detailed in the southwest region of Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria. In DRC similar declines are reported anecdotally in many other areas.

Grey parrots are particularly vulnerable to overexploitation because their highly social nature means they aggregate in high concentrations to roost, feed and nest meaning they can be trapped with great efficiency. They are also slow to reproduce and populations cannot withstand high levels of exploitation.

Concerns over the impact of trade on declining populations prompted,

governments around the world to vote overwhelmingly to transfer Grey parrots to Appendix I of CITES in 2016. This ended international trade in wild birds for commercial purposes, although trade in captive-bred animals is still permitted under certain conditions.

Before the ban, more than 1.2 million wild African Grey parrots were trapped and exported from Africa. The DRC has been one of the sources of Grey parrots for the international market where they are sold as pets or used in breeding farms. Most of the trapped parrots are destined for the Middle East and Southern Asia.

The DRC government together with ICN has made an international commitment to end exports. Although there are indications that trapping has decreased, trapping is still ongoing in eastern DRC.

In response to concerns over an increase in capture in the early 2010s, the Provincial Ministry of the Environment in Maniema Province issued a provincial decree prohibiting the capture and sale of Grey parrots in 2015 and conducted an awareness campaign via radio and community meetings. This led to several groups of parrots being confiscated.

HISTORICAL

The Lwiro Primate Rehabilitation Center (LPRC) sheltered 83 parrots. From 5 different confiscations:

September 2010

523 GREY PARROTS

confiscated at Kavumu airport. The dealer arrived with CITES permits and took them back. Three of our parrots came from this confiscation.

March 15, 2017

33 GREY PARROTS

from Shabunda (Kahuzi-Biega National Park).

April 4, 2018

27 GREY PARROTS

from Kindu (Maniema Province).

August 3, 2019

42 GREY PARROTS

from Kindu (Maniema Province).

October 21, 2020

6 GREY PARROTS

from Virunga NP in Mutsora.



Of the 83 parrots, 40 of them were selected for initial release on the basis of good health and flying ability.

IDENTIFICATION OF PARROTS FOR RELEASE

N°	RING	MICRO-CHIP	ORIGIN/ OBSERVATIONS
1	403	958 000 010 772 641	Kindu II
2	291	985 113 000 442 912	Shabunda
3	543		Kindu II
4	862	985 113 000 464 468	Shabunda
5	437	985 113 000 445 932	Shabunda
6	229	985 113 001 207 620	Shabunda
7	436	985 113 000 453 821	Shabunda
8	479	985 113 002 437 844	Kindu II
9	207	985 113 000 445 514	Shabunda
10	519	985 113 001 256 220	Shabunda
11	713	985 113 001 207 774	Kindu
12	492	958 000 010 772 305	Kindu II
13	381	985 113 000 445 545	Shabunda
14	513	985 113 001 160 576	Shabunda
15	410	985 113 001 166 110	Shabunda
16	239	985 113 001 166 103	Kindu
17	495	985 113 002 471 443	Kindu II
18	901	985 113 001 165 681	Shabunda
19	493	985 113 001 207 686	Kindu
20	256	958 000 010 772 436	Kindu II
21	400	985 113 000 445 268	Shabunda
22	701	985 113 001 165 320	Shabunda
23	857	985 113 001 165 527	Shabunda/ One eye
24	410	985 113 002 471 466	Kindu II
25	883	958 000 010 773 324	Kindu II
26	13	985 113 002 471 392	Shabunda
27	738	985 113 000 456 635	Shabunda
28	775	958 000 010 772 179	Kindu II
29	811	985 113 001 161 216	Shabunda
30	783	985 113 001 165 929	Shabunda
31	312	958 000 010 772 325	Kindu II
32	299	958 000 010 772 124	Kindu II
33	900	958 000 010 773 489	Kindu II
34	455	985 113 001 202 51	Kindu II
35	408	985 113 002 485 472	Kindu II
36	345	958 000 010 773 902	Kindu II
37	217	958 000 010 772 398	Kindu II
38	791	958 000 010 772 000	Kindu II
39	695	958 000 010 772 492	Kindu II
40	803	958 000 010 772 780	Kindu II

STEPS FOR REHABILITATION AND RELEASE

Confiscation

Parrots selected for release were confiscated between 2017 and 2019 in Shabunda Territory (South Kivu) and in Maniema Province, by ICCN and government officials.

Rescue

In all three cases, the parrots were transported by plane to Lwiro Primates Rehabilitation Center.

Rehabilitation

After confiscation each animal underwent a general examination, normally under anesthesia. The examination included a complete examination of the animals focused on the physical condition (weighing) and the condition of the feathers and blood collection. Faecal samples were examined at the Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles (CRSN) laboratory. They were dewormed against external and internal parasites and an additional multivitamin was administered in addition to subcutaneous and oral hydration. An anti-stress antibiotic treatment was administered in the water during quarantine. Each animal has been identified with a subcutaneous micro-chip on the back and a metal ring on the foot.

The state of arrival of animals was very poor, many of them had low fitness and their wing (primary) feathers had been cut, which did not allow us to release them directly to nature, requiring a recovery process of several months.

The physical recovery process is long. First parrots were housed in smaller aviaries to prevent injury from falling before they had recovered the ability to fly well. In a large aviary they faced the risk of falling and sustaining injuries, particularly to their furcula (wishbone). Most of the animals showed poor plumage condition. The first and secondary feathers were not well developed. We had to wait for the feathers to molt and sometimes remove the feathers to stimulate it.

When they were ready, they were transferred to a larger flight aviary that was purpose built with the support of the World Parrot Trust and partners. In this aviary where they had the space to fly to strengthen flight muscles and were encouraged to fly several times every day throughout the final stages of rehabilitation.

We provide food for parrots twice a day (Food weight for 40 parrots) :

Day	Food	Weight per parrot	Total weight	Hour
Monday	Sweet potato	0,1	4	6:30
	Pineapple	0,075	3	
	Pineapple	0,075	3	13:00
Tuesday	Corn	0,1	4	6:30
	Mango	0,075	3	
	Banana	0,075	3	13:00
Wednesday	Sugar cane	0,1	4	6:30
	Mango	0,075	3	
	Tomato	0,075	3	13:00
Thursday	Sunflower	0,1	4	6:30
	Mango	0,075	3	
	Mango	0,075	3	13:00
Friday	Peanuts	0,05	2	6:30
	Mango	0,075	3	
	Mango	0,075	3	13:00
Saturday	Beans	0,1	4	6:30
	Pineapple	0,075	3	
	Pineapple	0,075	3	13:00
Sunday	Banana	0,1	4	6:30
	Pineapple	0,075	3	
	Pineapple	0,075	3	13:00

Capacity Building

On September 19, 2020, Dr. Aristide Matata, a Congolese veterinarian who had followed the training at LPRC for a year, was chosen as the Parrots' focal person for the release.

He was given a specialized training in the care and rehabilitation of parrots, and he began to work to finalize the rehabilitation process of parrots chosen for release and for the release monitoring.

We carried out a final general examination of the animals, to make sure that they were all in good condition.

Habituation

On September 3rd we started building the release aviary at PNKB, in Bugulumiza. The location was selected together with the experts and the PNKB Direction.

On October 27th 40 parrots were transported by car to the release aviary, Dr. Aristide Matata stayed permanently on-site in Tsivanga for monitoring and to provide food to the parrots. At the same time Aristide provide capacity building for the park rangers on site in Bugulumiza for long term care.

A technical monitoring sheet was completed every day (See Appendix).

The parrots followed the same diet as in Lwiro, but together with the guards they were introduced to different fruits of the forest. Every day the guards look for the fruits with the branches and bring to the parrots so that they recognize the fruits available in the area. Energy-rich food supplement (corn and peanuts) was added due to the low temperatures observed during the night.

On November 4th a veterinary evaluation was made. All parrots were evaluated as being fit, eating and flying well with the exception of the parrot with Ring 493 which didn't fly and was not active. This parrot was isolated and returned to LPRC. We weighed her and had a weight of 348 grams, so she had lost 34 grams in 24h (the 04.11.2020 she weighed 382 grams).

Soft release

On Saturday November 14th, an initial group of 11 parrots was released. This staggered approach was used to encourage released parrots to remain close to the aviary where they could find food and be monitored. Based on experiences with releases in similar circumstances elsewhere it was anticipated that these behavioural patterns would be maintained when the rest of the birds were released.

We did not force the parrots to leave the cage, we waited 50 minutes before they decided to leave the cage of their own volition.

We have continued to provide food on the feeding platforms outside the cage and inside for the ones who stayed inside. The 11 parrots released were observed the following days.

On November 18, 2020 the rest of the parrots (28) were released. For this occasion, the Deputy Governor of South Kivu province Marco Malago and the Provincial Director of ICCN and Head of the Kahuzi-Biega NP De Dieu Byaombe were invited, as well as the media for informative coverage of the event.

After opening the cage, the parrots were not forced out, in one hour all the parrots left the cage. All of them flew well and they were together with the 11 parrots released on Saturday.

At the date of this report, the monitoring is still running, and the parrots continue to eat on the platforms. There is a decrease in the time and number of parrots next to the cage, which may be an indication that the parrots are decreasing the need for human support. The maximum number of parrots observed together after release was 32.

On November 30, Aristide Matata left the park, but the rangers still continue to feed the parrots on the platforms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Collaboration has been critical to the success of this project and we are deeply grateful to our partners, our primary partner Ivan Carter Wildlife Conservation Alliance and World Parrot Trust who provided timely financial support and have been critical technical partners throughout.

World Parrot Trust has been a technical partner from the start (i.e., from the time the birds were initially seized), they funded the construction of a new rehabilitation aviary in Lwiro, helped us finance the transport of the confiscated parrots to Lwiro and they supported the feeding of the parrots during their rehabilitation as well as the tests carried out for their release. They also brought technical experience from similar projects elsewhere in Africa and around the world.

We would further like to thank the Parrot Society UK, Zoo Atlanta and Celltei who made possible the construction of the release aviary, the capacitation of the team and the food support for the released parrots.



Annex

Daily monitoring sheet

PLAN AND EVOLUTION		
DATE	TRETEMENT	EVOLUTION/OBSERVATION
27.10.2020	-	As of 27.10.2020 We have moved 40 Parrots from Lwiro / CRPL to Tshivanga PNKB on the BUGULUMIZA site. All parrots are only a parrot Ring 857 has an eye affection to the left eye. However, it flies well like all the others.
28.10.2020	-	All parrots fly well and eat well. For the atmosphere it was cold all before noon. They had as food 4kg of sugar cane, 3kg of tomatoes and 3kg of mangoes.
29.10.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots fly well despite it being cold all day. They ate 2kg of sunflowers + 2kg of peanuts, 3kg of mangoes and 3kg of bananas.
30.10.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots all fly well and eat well. Only they did not like their beans that we have given. However, they ate the mangoes + the fruits that we collected in the forest among others (Ruby, Urera, wild coffee and Szigium gunensis) which they appreciated very much.
31.10.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots are well, eat well and fly well. The noon there ' was a bit of sun. They ate Bananas, Pineapples, Urera, Szigium gunensis, and Rubies.
01.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots are well, eat well and fly well. The noon there ' was a bit of sun. They ate Bananas, Pineapples, Urera, Szigium gunensis, and Rubies.
02.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots are well, eat well and fly well. The sun shone before noon. They ate sweet potato and pineapple.
03.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots are well, eat well and fly well. The atmosphere is not stable all day; sometimes it's cool, sometimes there ' s sunny. They ate mangoes, corn and bananas.
04.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots are well, eat well and fly well. The noon there ' was a bit of sun. They ate sweet potato, tomato mango, Urera, Szigium gunensis, and Ruby. We have weighed 5 perroquets: -Ring 229 weighed 528gram and body condition 3 -Ring 883 weighed 505gram and body condition 3 -Ring 207 weighed 520gram and body condition 3 -Ring 400 weighed 479gram and body condition 3 -Ring 493 weighed 382 gram and body condition 3

05.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	All parrots are well, eat well and fly well. Except the parrot with Ring 493 which does not fly and is not active. We the have isolated to return to CRPL. We the have weighed and had a weight 348gramme, and he lost in 34gramme 24heure, because he weighed 382gramme 11/04/2020. All other parrots fly well and eat well. They had as a meal: peanuts + sunflower, sugar cane and mangoes.
06.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	There are 39 parrots left and all are well. Despite the rain all day, however, they ate peanuts + sunflower, pineapple and corn.
07.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots all fly well. They ate bananas, pineapples, corn, peanuts. The atmosphere is good with a little sun.
08.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots all fly well. They ate sweet potato, pineapple, corn, peanut, ruby, Urera, and Szigium gunensis.
09.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots all fly well. They ate beans, bananas, mango, pineapple, ruby, Urera, and Szigium gunensis, Myrianthus. In the noon there ' was a heavy rain.
10.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots all fly well. They ate beans, bananas, mango, pineapple, ruby, Urera, and Szigium gunensis, Myrianthus. In the noon there ' was a heavy rain.
11.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots are fine, all flies. They ate pineapple, sugar cane and tomatoes. The atmosphere is a little good in the morning.
12.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots are fine, all flies. They ate pineapple, sweet potato, Szigium, Ruby, Urera, wild coffee, and Myrianthus. The atmosphere is good, there ' 's sunny.
13.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	Parrots are fine, all flies. They ate peanuts and mangoes. The minimum nighttime temperature was 11.6°C and the maximum 31.9°C. The sun is before noon.
14.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	The minimum temperature is 11.4 °c and the maximum is 31.9 °c We have released 11 parrots. They ate peanuts, corn, cane and mangoes.
15.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	The birds remained at 28 parrots after the 1 st release. 5 parrots among the released circulate and they come to eat the food on the platforms. The foods eaten are peanuts, corn, tomatoes, bananas, and pineapples. The minimum night temperature was 11.4 °C and the maximum was 39.6°C

16.11.2020	-Doxycycline 400mg/2l water -Introvit 1g/2l water	The 28 parrots are all well and 7 parrots among the 11 are flying over the surroundings of the cage. 4 parrots spent the night in the roof of the cage. The minimum nighttime temperature was 11.1 °c and the maximum 39.6 °c. The parrots ate sweet potatoes, pineapples, bananas, peanuts, and corn. The day was distinguished by heavy rain.
17.11.2020	-	The minimum nighttime temperature is 11.1 ° C and the maximum is 39.6 ° C The parrots are all fine. 9 parrots out of 11 released have returned and are circulating on the cage. The other parrots in the cage ate corn, peanuts, mangoes, and pineapples. The atmosphere is good in the morning with a little heat.
18.11.2020	-	All the other 28 remaining parrots are released today on 11/18/2020. The minimum nighttime temperature is 11.1 ° C and the maximum is 39.6 ° C
19.11.2020	-	On the evening of November 18, 2020, 6 parrots were walking on the tree and coming to get food on the platforms. On the day of 11.19.2020 we observed 15 parrots which flew over the surroundings and 6 others eaten on the platforms. The minimum nighttime temperature is 10.4 ° C and the maximum is 39.6 ° C
20.11.2020	-	28 parrots spent the night on the tree next to the cage.
21.11.2020	-	25 parrots are visible and come to eat the food on the platforms.
22.11.2020	-	32 Parrots were visible in the morning hovering over the trees at the top of the cage and 18 of them all came down to eat the sugar canes, corn, peanuts and sunflowers on the platforms.
23.11.2020	-	32 Parrots are coming eaten on platforms. They ate peanuts + sunflower, sugar cane and corn. No parrots spent the night on the tree next to the cage in Bugulumiza.
24.11.2020	-	The parrots have come eaten. They were with 19 visible parrots they ate peanuts + sunflower, sugar cane and corn.
25.11.2020	-	Only 9 Parrots are visible in the morning and have come to be eaten on the platforms. They ate peanuts + sunflower, corn and sugar cane.
26.11.2020	-	15 parrots were visible flying around, only 5 parrots came to eat on the platforms at 12:35 pm They ate peanuts + sunflower, corn and sugar cane.
27.11.2020	-	The 4perroquets morning are visible in the process of eating on the platforms. All the others were not visible. They ate peanuts + sunflower, corn and sugar cane.

28.11.2020	-	At 8:35 am we saw 20 parrots eaten on the platforms, 1 large hawk came, and all the parrots fled. They ate peanuts + sunflower, corn and sugar cane.
29.11.2020	-	At 9:26 am I had just seen 12 parrots flying around the area, but they did not come down to eat.
30.11.2020	-	At 8:44 am I only see 3 parrots circulating, but the guards tell me that they saw 25 parrots circulating very early in the morning. According to my constant it is observed on the platforms a large quantity of the foods distributed since 11/29/2020. Which suggests that they did not eat, and if they did eat what it was a small number that had come to the platforms. The food on the platforms we have left peanuts + sunflower, corn and sugar cane.