



Endangered Species of The Bahamas



BAHAMA PARROT

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Amazona leucocephala bahamensis

DESCRIPTION

The Bahama parrot is a subspecies of the Cuban Amazon parrot. The Bahama Parrot's scientific name literally means "white headed Amazon parrot from The Bahamas." Its white head and mostly green body make the Bahama parrot easily recognized. It has patches of red feathers on its cheek, throat and sometimes its abdomen. Its flight feathers, usually hidden from sight when it is perched in a tree, are a beautiful cobalt blue. Viewers are often struck by this unexpected flash of colour. The Bahama parrot's short rounded bill is characteristic of all true parrots. The bill is a powerful multi-purpose tool used for eating, climbing, defending, preening (grooming) and playing. The Bahama parrot has two toes facing forwards and two facing backwards - a configuration known as *zygodactylus*. The Bahama parrot is 12-13 inches in length.

DIET

A variety of fruits from many shrubs are eaten by the Bahama Parrot. They feed on wild guava, poisonwood berries, pigeonberry, and the fruit from gumbo limbo and pond-top palm. Especially during the breeding season, Bahama parrots in Abaco eat the seed from the pine trees. This provides a rich source of protein, essential for the development of Bahama parrot chicks.

REPRODUCTION

Pair formation begins in early spring. Bahama Parrots are monogamous - they mate for life. In Inagua, the Bahama parrot seeks out cavities in large hollow trees. Our national

tree, *Lignum vitae*, the Mahogany and Black Mangrove trees are used by the Inagua parrots for nesting. Abaco parrots look for limestone cavities on the ground of tile pine forest to nest in. The female lays two to four eggs. For 26 days she incubates them while her mate, the male parrot assumes responsibility for food. The eggs open 12-72 hours apart. Parrot chicks hatch helpless, blind and almost completely featherless. By three weeks their eyes open. The chicks are fed regurgitated (predigested) food.

HABITAT

Historically, the Bahama Parrot occurred on seven different Bahamian islands. Today, they are found only on Abaco and Great Inagua Islands: On Inagua the parrots live in the coppice areas and Abaco parrots live in the Pine forest.

STATUS

Recent Bahama Parrot Research conducted over the past 5 years has shown that the population of Bahama Parrots is better than previously thought. A population census conducted on Abaco indicate that their numbers are considered stable between 3,000 and 5,000 birds. The Inagua population, which had not been previously counted, is estimated to be between 8,000 and 13,000 birds. These are the only two groups left of a species that once inhabited seven islands in The Bahamas.

Bahama Parrots are protected under the Wild Birds (Protection) Act. It is illegal to harm or capture or offer this bird for sale. The Convention for the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) list the Bahama Parrot in Appendix 1 meaning that it is a species which is near extinction or very endangered.

THREATS

A number of factors influence the survival of the Bahama Parrot. The ground nesting nature of the Bahama Parrot in Abaco makes these birds vulnerable to predation by feral (wild) cats, feral boars, crabs and snakes. Heavy rains during the nesting period can flood parrot nest holes, killing young chicks. Habitat loss is a constant threat to both the Abaco and Inagua birds, hence habitat protection is very important to the survival of the Bahama Parrot. The pet trade is another threat that is ever present.

INTERESTING FACTS

- The Bahama Parrot was recognized as the official Quincentennial mascot in 1992.
- Bahama Parrot bones found on New Providence have been dated back to the Pleistocene era, more than 50,000 years ago
- Christopher Columbus was so struck by their numbers when he made landfall in The Bahamas in 1492, he wrote in his log, "flocks of parrots darken the sun"!



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