

CREATURE FEATURE

the great green macaw

by Cyril Brass



As a member of the parrot family and a close relative to the brightly colored Scarlet Macaw, the Great Green Macaw possesses vibrant lime green plumage with blue wing tips and tail feathers of red and blue. This gentle green giant in the parrot world, also known as Buffon's Macaw, is highly endangered in the world today.

The life cycle of this arboreal bird species is totally connected to a single tree species; the Swamp Almond tree, which grows only in the humid lowlands of the Atlantic plains of Central America. This is an example of one species, the Green Macaw, dependent on the existence of another species, the Swamp Almond tree. Without this particular tree, there is no habitat for this macaw.

The Swamp Almond tree provides all the living essentials for the Green Macaw; food, water, shelter and nesting.

The large fruit produced by these endemic trees is the preferred food supply for this picky eater. The large curved bill with a puffy red brow above, is adapted to cracking open the hard golf ball size nuts in order to reach the tasty seeds inside. The macaw's drinking water is provided from rain water collected in small cavities in the tropical tree.

This towering tree is the macaw's chosen habitat with nesting sites high in the canopy, built in large cavities created when a branch breaks away from the massive trunk. Breeding

pairs evaluate the nesting conditions and feeding territory before mating. They stake out an area with sufficient food resources to raise a family. If they do not find a viable location, mating does not occur during that season.



These enormous Almond trees can reach some fifty to sixty meters in height and one to two meters in diameter. It is one of the hardest, heaviest and densest woods in the world. Those qualities make this tree a profitable natural resource for humans to harvest. But for this threatened green parrot, it means lost habitat.

Finding the Great Green Macaws in the wild can be very challenging, given their dwindling numbers. You may hear a loud squawking flock of

Green Macaws in flight moving through the forest searching for fruit-bearing Almond trees. However, looking for a green bird in the lush green vegetation is like looking for a white rabbit in the snow. The intense green plumage blends into the surrounding vegetation providing excellent camouflage.

I have yet to see these magnificent birds in the wild, only in zoos and nature parks. Being able to watch these birds in their natural habitat would indeed be an incredible sight.

Once abundant and widespread throughout Central America and northern South America, the Great Green Macaws are now critically endangered due to loss of habitat, poaching of young birds for the pet trade and hunting of adult birds for food.

Because macaws are known to be extremely selective regarding what they eat and where they live, it is challenging to determine a specific habitat in which to rebuild their decreasing population. But it is happening. Ongoing efforts are being made to rebuild a protected corridor of private reserves and national parks, which are home to the Swamp Almond tree, from southern Nicaragua and into northern Costa Rica.

The Great Green Macaw... an endangered species... a picky eater ... a stunning green parrot. **ca**

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