

Golden Conure proposal

GRANT APPLICATION COVER SHEET

Organization applying: BioBrasil Foundation, a registered Brazilian nonprofit conservation group based in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

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Contact person: Richard G. Hartley, Executive Director

Field researchers: Two local biologists or para-biologists to be selected and trained if the project is funded. These two field workers would be advised by BioBrasil's in-house experts on that region, who include one former trapper, and Mr. Carlos Yamashita, doctoral candidate at University of Campinas, Brazil.

Proposal: Mapping nests of the Golden Conure: the first step towards making this species into an ecotourism icon to assist conservation of Amazon rainforest.

Amount requested: \$5,000

Project start date: 3 March 2000

End date: 30 June 2000

Where did you hear about the Grants Program: From World Parrot Trust-UK

Have you been funded by ABC in the past? No.

Names of two referees from whom you have requested letters of support (to be sent directly to ABC)

Charles Munn, WCS, and Michael Reynolds, World Parrot Trust-UK

C.V.'s of Pedro Lima and Carlos Yamashita (coming)

Summary of project:

The Golden Conure (*Aratinga guaruba*), which also is known as the Golden Parakeet or the Queen-of-Bavaria Conure, may be the most beautiful of the 150 species of New World parrots (its only competition being the four most colorful species of large macaws). Yet it has never been studied in the wild and no data exist about the status of its wild populations. Furthermore, there are no targeted conservation projects for this species or for its rainforest home, which is the eastern part of the Brazilian Amazon. Surely this species should be able to generate support to save itself and large portions of its rainforest home if the conservation community can provide modest funding now to jump-start what should become a self-financing conservation program supported by visits by photographers, filmmakers, and parrot enthusiasts. Currently, the only way this species is utilized is as a cage bird, but with the support of ABC, the Golden Conure should become an internationally-famous flagship species for the conservation of Amazon rainforest.

Though found over a large swath of the Eastern Amazon of Brazil, the species seems to occur at greatest density in the tall rainforests south of Belem in the eastern Amazonian state of Para, particularly in the drainage of the Cupim River (Yamashita, pers. comm, and Carlinhos Lima, pers. comm). There are enough organized conure trappers in that part of the Amazon that without urgent action, the species could melt away without the slightest analysis of the situation or concerted attempts to save it in the wild. This part of the Amazon also is under great threat from deforestation for cattle ranching and

other agriculture as well as from destructive logging, so any incentive or projects to save major portions of this forest are extremely important. Properly studied, protected, and visible in the wild, this beautiful parrot species should be able to save considerable tracts of wild forest. The initial funding from ABC is critical to starting this conservation process.

What little is known of the biology of the Golden Conure suggests that it lives in what appear to be family clans of approximately 8-15 birds (Yamashita, pers. comm.). All the birds in one clan travel together all day to forage in the forest and then return each afternoon to play just outside and then finally to roost in a single, conspicuous cavity in the trunk or branch in a large, canopy tree. Their fidelity to specific roosting cavities (which also are used for nesting by the adult breeding pair in the nesting season) makes these birds easy to trap.

There are two favored trapping techniques. One involves walking to within 100 m of a roost/nest tree, erecting a pole with glue-covered branches, and tying a calling, live conure near the pole. When the resident clan of conures leaves from or arrives to their cavity, they hear and then see the calling conure and come to investigate. They land on the branches and get stuck, whereupon the concealed trapper jumps out, lowers the pole, and removes the birds using water to loosen the glue. The other method involves quietly climbing the roost tree at night while the birds are asleep and covering the cavity entrance with a baggy net. Pounding the tree will then drive the startled birds into the net. Both techniques require finding the widely-scattered roost trees, because the trappers cannot find and catch the low-density conures when they are off foraging deep in trackless forest.

The main thrust of the project would be to survey wild populations of this species in the best location known for the species and to locate active roost and nest trees. Once located, these trees and 100-1000-hectare forest tracts around these nests (larger if funding permits) should be purchased by BioBrasil Foundation and guarded year round by trained guards. Systematic phototourism would be developed at the most accessible or beautiful roost trees so that visitors can take predictably high-quality photos of these amazing birds, which are the national colors of Brazil (an unfortunate coincidence that has led to even more demand for the species as a cage bird).

The project envisions arming the guards and also unleashing trained guard dogs at the purchased nest sites. The guards or dogs might have to be active around the clock for the first year or two. After that, it might be possible to reduce the human guards to just daylight hours and rely on fewer dogs for nighttime duty. If it seems necessary, we are prepared to erect modest (but impassable) barbed wire fences to enclose a radius of 150 m or more from the roost tree. Using this technique, the entire extent of each tract purchased does not need to be fenced, because the main threat to the birds is from trappers working with impunity within 100 m or less of the roost tree. The rest of each purchased tract can be patrolled on foot, dirt bike, horseback, or car once or twice a day or several times a week (depending on the amount of property in the tract and the evaluated risk of bird trappers in the area.) After one or two years of conspicuous, aggressive guarding, bird trappers probably would give BioBrasil's forest properties a wide berth and protection costs will drop substantially.

Concurrently, tourism receipts should increase over a two-year period until selected roost trees would be self-funding in terms of year-round protection. This projection is based on the tangible results from BioBrasil's combined conservation and ecotourism preserve just north of Bahia in the dry forest state of Piaui. On 15 June 1999 BioBrasil purchased 2,000 hectares (5,000 acres) of intact dry tropical forest at that site to protect a large concentration of Hyacinth Macaws, Maned Wolves, and other spectacular wildlife. From 1 May 1999 through 15 August the BioBrasil preserve has received four groups of international ecotourists, numerous scientific researchers and photographers, and most recently a TV crew from the Los-Angeles-based Fox Family Channel. The gross receipts of the rustic camp have been about \$14,000 this year (about half of which was profit). These numbers are both surprising and encouraging because the official tourism program at this site will not even debut until the year 2000. The projected gross revenues of this Hyacinth Macaw camp site in calendar year 2000 are \$35,000-50,000. By June 2000, BioBrasil plans to open a small lodge at the Hyacinth site with en suite (private) bathrooms. In the calendar year 2001, the gross tourist revenues of the Hyacinth site should be more than \$100,000 and less than \$200,000.

In general, the ecotourism strategy of BioBrasil focuses on guaranteeing spectacular photo opportunities of each habitat's most photogenic mammals and birds. At the Hyacinth site, we hope that guaranteed opportunities to take "trophy photos" of such charismatic species as the Hyacinth Macaw, Toco Toucan, Maned Wolf, and others will attract up-market nature enthusiasts and wildlife photographers. These visitors will generate a lot of local jobs directly related to the conservation of the unique regional fauna. Additionally, profits from these lodges will be used to purchase more habitat for conservation in perpetuity and to start more of these conservation tourism ventures in other parts of Brazil. In Piaui, the main event that currently attracts visitors is a flock of 40-60 Hyacinth Macaws guaranteed at 14 m (45 ft.) from a large photo-blind with a green and brown background (rather than sky).

This same strategy of guaranteed attraction should work with the spectacular Golden Conure in areas identified and purchased by BioBrasil Foundation. The most viable sites for tourism-financed protection of Golden Conure nests would be those that can be reached within an acceptable length of time by conventional road or river transport from airports that have convenient, scheduled flights. In practice, Belem and Santarem are probably the two cities most likely to serve as jetports for visitors who wish to see protected, predictable Golden Conures.

The objectives of the project and its importance to bird conservation

The objectives of this proposal would be to search for and survey the species and locate roost/nest trees in the region of Cupim River south of Belem. This project requires two persons to spend three months driving remote logging tracks on a late-model, used dirtbike.

This search would pinpoint the best roost trees in accessible sites, which in turn will allow BioBrasil to unlock earmarked donations that currently are restricted to two activities: 1) habitat purchase around the nests of this species; and 2) implementation of ecotourism infrastructure. For each dollar that ABC contributes now to the search for roost trees, BioBrasil should be able to access as many as 5-15 dollars of matching funds for purchase of the finest and most accessible forest tracts and for the installation of permanent guards and rustic ecotour infrastructure. The matching funds are rigidly restricted to forest purchase and hard protection and infrastructure at the purchased habitat and cannot be used for the initial search or for other field research. Thus, \$5,000 of support from ABC could unlock at anywhere from \$25,000 to \$75,000 of restricted funding.

To unlock this funding, the nest tree search must be successful, because the donor agency is not interested in funding research, but rather hard protection of proven nest sites. The potential for ABC's support to unlock 5-15 times as much funding should make this project especially attractive, because it greatly increases the chances that the initial seed money will produce an ongoing, self-funding conservation program for this amazing, but little-known species.

The importance to bird conservation would be to show that a bird that is primarily known as a cage bird could become a symbol of conservation of intact Amazon forest and pay for its own protection in the wild at the same time. Of course, if Golden Conure nests can be used to generate protection of the entire forest ecosystem, then this project will have generated protection of about 300 other species of birds as well. The Eastern Amazon forests of the state of Para are under particular attack now by the forces of destruction, and any model projects that can add value to that part of the Amazon is particularly important.

Conclusion:

The lack of even the most basic survey data on Golden Conures makes it impossible to design a conservation strategy for the species. All current efforts at conservation of this popular cage bird focus on captive breeding without regard to the dire situation of the wild population. BioBrasil feels that the best hope of ensuring the species' survival lies in first surveying and mapping roost trees and then implementing a concerted program of land purchase and ecotourism to pay for recurrent protection of the sites.

How best can the project be evaluated?

The best ways to evaluate the success of this project are to send an experienced, Portuguese-speaking biologist to visit the identified nest sites after 1 July 2000. The results of this census should be published in peer-reviewed journals as soon as possible after the study is completed. If no visit is possible, then ABC can follow the progress of the future development of the project through detailed updates from BioBrasil or from the web pages promoting BioBrasil's trips to the site. What institutional support (other than financial) do you have for this project?

BioBrasil has basic institutional support for the 1999-2000 year that includes approximately \$50,000 of earmarked, administrative support grants from specific private donors and from the 10% administrative fee on a number of grants for conservation in other parts of Brazil. This administrative support pays for a full-time, bilingual executive director, a full-time, bilingual ecotourism expert, a full time secretary in the office in Salvador, office rent, office telephone, dedicated email account, and other items. BioBrasil also has four full-time field staff in other conservation projects in other parts of Brazil, and they can help provide advice to the field staff of the conure project. By supporting BioBrasil, ABC effectively leverages each dollar of support by five times or more by not having to pay for the already existing office and field infrastructure, training, and scientific advice.

Carlos Yamashita will contribute his field expertise at no charge in order to be able to observe Golden Conure behavior in the wild. Having Brazil's greatest parrot expert available to help design and execute this project is a great opportunity and should greatly increase the chance of success in locating nest sites. Mr. Yamashita currently is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Campinas, near Sao Paulo. His thesis topic is the genetics of Golden Conure clans, so after the ABC survey project ends, he may wish to visit some roost trees to take small blood samples from a few clans. At the most, Yamashita would capture and hold clans of Conures for a matter of minutes while he took small blood samples and then immediately released them unharmed. He would not mark the birds with bands or other markers, has handled thousands of live birds successfully during his research career, and will not carry out his thesis research during the ABC project, but only afterwards. BioBrasil mentions Mr. Yamashita's research plans in the interests of full disclosure so that ABC knows the possible directions that the conure project might take after the ABC project is over. If ABC would like to know more details of exactly how structured photo-tourism would work with Golden Conures (even though that work will not be part of the restricted ABC survey work proposed here), BioBrasil will be happy to send more information.

Budget information

Amount requested from ABC: \$5,000

Salary:

Two full time field researchers for three months to search for and map Conures and their nest sites: 2,400 (400 per researcher per month)

Travel:

Travel from home to the site where the researchers will begin the dirtbike trip and return at end: 150 (75 each)

Gasoline, lubricants: 300

Food in the field: 720 (90 days times 8 dollars per day of field food)

Equipment:

Used dirt bike: 1,150

Miscellaneous field equipment: 100

Administrative fees of BioBrasil (only 3.7% in this case):

180

Grand total: \$5,000

Cash from other sources: None.

In-kind: BioBrasil employs at its Hyacinth Project a former bird trapper who previously trapped Golden Conures in the study area of this proposal. Mr. Carlos Yamashita also knows the study area and has observed Golden Conures on site a number of years ago. To generate all that background information from scratch would cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000 if it had to be done today.

BioBrasil will lend a GPS unit to the team, as well as binoculars and possibly a video camera. The value of this equipment would be on the order of \$2,000 if it had to be purchased specifically for this project.

Finally, BioBrasil will provide backup support for the field team if they require advice or assistance during the work. This support is hard to quantify, but probably is worth more than \$4,000 and less than \$8,000. We specifically do not detail here all the office and administrative support that BioBrasil can provide the project, because it seems beyond the scope of this proposal.

Is this project part of a larger program? No. This project is a discrete unit, and if ABC does not fund it, it has a high probability of not taking place. If this project DOES take place, then at its completion, BioBrasil would ask Carlos Yamashita to come and carry out his sampling at the project sites in Para. Simultaneously, BioBrasil would gain access to the larger, earmarked funds that would permit purchase and permanent protection of the best conure nest sites. What percentage of funding does this request comprise of the total? According to the previous item, this request represents 100% of the total. There are no specific plans to carry out any work on the Golden Conure if ABC does not finance this project at this time.

The budget matrix does not seem necessary for such small grants, especially because the ABC funds would represent 100% of the funding for the survey work proposed here. If ABC nevertheless would like a real budget matrix for this proposal, upon request BioBrasil will provide one by fax or Excel attached file.

Curriculum vitae

Carlos Yamashita

Age: 38

Citizenship: Brazilian.

Languages: Native portuguese, fluent English, and fluent Spanish.

Education:

Bachelors Degree in Biology, University of Brasilia, 1988

Master's Degree in Biology, University of Campinas, 1994 (Thesis topic: Caiman distribution in the Brazilian Amazon and Pantanal).

Currently a doctoral candidate in Biology at the University of Campinas (1996 to present)

Work Experience:

1996-present: a variety of biological consulting contracts in field work all around the Brazilian Amazon

1986-to present: IBAMA biologist and consultant (IBAMA was previously called IBDF)

1991-1992: Hyacinth Macaw principal investigator for Wildlife Conservation Society research program the southern Pantanal of Brazil.

1985-1986: Director of the Pantanal National Park, Mato Grosso State, Brazil (under the administration of IBDF, which now is called IBAMA)

Curriculum vitae

Richard Gordon Hartley

Age: 35

Citizenship: U.S.

Current Address:

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Condominio Portal das Alamedas, Case 23
Stella Maris, Salvador, Bahia CEP 41600-080
Brazil

Work Experience:

1995-present: Executive Director, BioBrasil Foundation, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Responsibilities include managing several conservation projects for this non-profit environmental organization. These projects are located in the endangered Atlantic Rainforest of Bahia, in dry forest ("cerrado") of NW Bahia and adjacent Piaui State, and in semi-desert ("caatinga") of northern Bahia.

One of these projects, which involves the protection of a large population of Hyacinth Macaws in the state of Piaui, will be featured in a November 1999 article in "Geo" Magazine (of Germany) and in an upcoming Fox Family Channel show about wildlife.

Another project, which involves the protection of the extremely rare Lear's Macaw, will be featured soon in the U.S. magazine "International Wildlife" and was awarded one of Brazil's top environmental awards.

Designed and helps teach BioBrasil's "Ecological Immersion Course," which brings students from leading high schools of Salvador to spend four days studying rainforest ecology and socioeconomics in private reserves of Atlantic forest within a three-hour drive of Salvador. This new program has received 52 students in 1999.

Co-authored a "Forest Management Plan" for the private rainforest reserve of Michelin Tire Company and two other reports on the state of relic forest patches on the south-central coast of Bahia State.

1988-1995: Freelance writer, Washington, D.C., and Salvador, Bahia (Brazil)

Published articles in "International Wildlife", "PsittaScene", "Washington Post", "The International Business Chronicle", "The Foreign Service Journal", "Times of the Americas", "Patriots Publications", "Walkways Magazine", "MITI Japan", "The Council on Hemispheric Affairs", and the Salvador, Bahia's leading newspaper "Jornal A Tarde" ("The Afternoon Press").

1992-1995 Project Coordinator, Center for Foreign Journalists, Reston, VA USA

Helped manage the \$250,000 Knight International Press Fellowship program, which sends U.S. journalists to five continents as a sort of press ambassadors for improving relations between the U.S. and the international community.

Organized journalism courses on ethics, the environment and behavioral standards in media in Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and Panama, funded by USAID, the Mott Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The International Council on Education, among others.

Translates documents into English from Portuguese, Spanish and French.

1990-1992: Assistant editor, Times of the Americas, Washington, D.C.

Wrote and edited articles on politics, economics, sports, and culture for this biweekly newspaper on Latin American affairs. Translated Reuters wire copy from Spanish to English.

1987-1989: Administrative Assistant, The Ashoka Foundation, Rosslyn, Virginia

Performed administrative and research tasks in this foundation, which promotes "social entrepreneurs" in the developing world.

Education

Bachelor's of Arts in International Relations, American University, Washington, D.C., 1985

M.Ed. International Development in Education, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1990

Languages

Fluent Portuguese, Spanish and French in addition to native English.