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FACT-SHEET ON:

**Endemic subspecies of Parrots: Grand Cayman *Amazona leucocephala caymanensis* and Cayman Brac *A. l. hesterna***  
**UK Overseas Territory: Cayman Islands**

Human development and habitat loss have put the Cayman Brac Parrot and the Grand Cayman Parrot into fairly dire straits. Both birds are subspecies of the Cuban Amazon parrot and can only be found on the islands that bear their names, but the loss of many of the trees that they used for shelter and food have made it harder for the otherwise hardy birds to withstand the hurricanes – increasingly severe due to human-caused climate-change – that frequently batter the region. Hundreds of birds died during hurricanes Ivan (2004) and Paloma (2008).

By 2012, the Grand Cayman Parrot was down to an estimated 4,300 birds, and the Cayman Brac Parrot to about 425, including just 20 to 60 breeding pairs. Biologists warned that the Brac Parrot could be extinct in as few as 40 years. The biggest danger now is that the trees the birds would use for reproduction and nesting are disappearing as new subdivisions pop up across the islands. Frank Rivera-Milán, a biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), commented that “the Brac [parrot] is going down the drain very fast. Development there is too fast.”

The Cayman Brac Parrot previously inhabited also nearby Little Cayman but its prime nesting sites were destroyed in a 1932 hurricane. It now has the smallest known range of any Amazon parrot in the world. Its survival depends entirely on the protection of remaining old-growth forest, a little of which can still be found on Cayman Brac.

The Cayman Brac Parrot Reserve, run by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, maintains 280 acres of protected old-growth forest, 34 hectares of which was acquired in 2005 with the help of a grant from the FWS. But that might not be enough for the long term. The reserve’s website says “The long-term future of the parrots...depends critically on the conservation of enough old-growth forest areas on the Brac to support this inherently endangered species.”

These two Parrot subspecies both represent the national bird of the Cayman Islands. They are subspecies of the Cuban Parrot, which occurs in Cuba, the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands and was formerly called the Rose-throated Parrot. The Cayman Brac Parrot is smaller in size than the Grand Cayman one, and has a more pure white forehead with a large maroon area on its abdomen.

As is typical of parrots, they are active during the early morning, when they go out in search of fruits and berries. During the breeding season they look for food as well as for tree cavities in which to raise their young. When resting quietly after their morning activities, they ‘comb’ and clean their feathers using their beaks. It is almost impossible to spot them at this time as they are perfectly camouflaged among the leaves of the trees. In the late afternoon they return to their roost.

Both Cayman Islands parrots face additional threats. As on many islands, predation by cats and invasive rats is an ever-present



*Above: Grand Cayman Parrots, © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF.*

*Below: Adult male Brac Parrot, © Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet.*



danger. The birds are also sometimes illegally captured from the wild for the black market pet trade, although they rarely survive long enough to be sold. These parrots have been highly sought “gifts” and pets, even though they are protected by law. It is illegal to trap, sell and keep the birds in captivity. Yet, many people still keep them as pets. In an effort to curb the illegal trade in the national bird, Cayman’s

Department of Environment (DoE) set up a 6-month amnesty programme, running from September 2019 to February 2020, so that owners of existing pets could register legally their birds without the risk of their pets being taken away. Each pet parrot was checked by a veterinarian, given an identification number printed on a small band around the parrot’s leg and implanted with an identification chip, similar to the ID tags used to register dogs and cats, at no cost to the owner.

In 2019, DoE started a collaboration with a private member of the public to open a much-needed Parrot Sanctuary in East End, Grand Cayman. This has native plants and trees. Parrots that are not yet able to return to the wild are housed in secure, clean and spacious aviaries. The Sanctuary takes in injured parrots and provides rehabilitative care, with the goal of releasing the

birds back into the wild population. The birds have a much higher chance of survival in the wild following releases from the sanctuary. They are given thorough medical exams and their health is monitored. Parrots are also taught how to be wild birds again. They have natural foods to eat and learn where to find

them; they are also able to form social bonds with other parrots. Following every release, the birds are provided with temporary supplemental feeding stations. Their behaviour and movements are monitored in the wild. By early 2020, seven parrots had been released.