



SCARLET MACAW

PSITTACIFORMES

Family: Psittacidae

Genera: *Ara*

Species: *macao*



Range: Southeastern Mexico to Amazonian Peru, Bolivia and Brazil

Habitat: humid evergreen forests in lowlands up to 500 m (1,640 ft) (at least formerly) up to 1,000 m (3,281 ft), prefer undisturbed rainforest

Niche: Arboreal, diurnal, herbivorous

Wild diet: fruits, nuts, and seeds, including large hard seeds

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 30 – 40 years

(Captivity) up to 50 years

Sexual dimorphism: none

Location in SF Zoo: Children's Zoo, Koret Animal Resource Center

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Scarlet Macaw's plumage is mostly scarlet, but the rump and tail-covert feathers are light blue, the greater upper wing coverts are yellow, the upper sides of the flight feathers of the wings are dark blue as are the ends of the tail feathers, and the undersides of the wing and tail flight feathers are dark red with metallic gold iridescence. Some individuals may have green in the wings. There is bare white skin around the eye and toward the bill. Tiny white feathers are contained on the face patch. The upper mandible is mostly pale horn in color and the lower is black. They have a keen sense of hearing.

Weight: 2.0 – 2.5 lbs
Length: 35 in (90 cm)
Wingspan:

Scarlet Macaws are seed predators. They eat and destroy seeds rather than eating the fruit and leaving the seeds. Their beak curves strongly downward and is adapted to breaking the hard shells of some seeds. By eating and destroying seeds, parrots limit the number of seeds that can germinate into new trees and plants. Macaws use their beaks as an aid in both eating and as a "third foot" when climbing. A macaw's tongue is dry, slightly scaly, and has a bone inside it, all of which makes it an excellent tool for breaking open shells and pulling the kernel out so that they can eat it. Macaws grasp fruit or nuts in their beak then use their dexterous tongue to maneuver the object into optimal cracking position. They have zygodactyl feet (two toes forward and two backwards). Members of this family are the only birds to use their feet for feeding. They have wide strong wings allowing macaws to reach speeds of 35 miles per hour.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Not globally threatened. CITES I. The primary threats to the scarlet macaw are habitat loss from deforestation and heavy exploitation for pet trading. They still occur in large numbers in some parts of their territory, where they are described as "common," the World Conservation Union evaluated the species in 2004 as "Least Concern". Scarlet Macaws are disappearing from Central America but are in relative abundance in South America, which keeps them off the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Scarlet Macaws make very loud, high & sometimes low-pitched, throaty squawks, squeaks and screams designed to carry many miles to call for their groups and make their presence known in dense rain forests. At the sight of danger, this species will group together to fight off predators.

Macaws usually live in pairs and a number of pairs may congregate with others to form a flock of several hundred individuals. They spend a lot of time preening when not eating. There are regular roosting sites and in the early morning the flocks fly some distance in search of food. They return to spend the night in the roosting trees just before sunset, flying above the forest canopy. They may gather at clay licks. The clay is thought to neutralize plant poisons. Macaws eat mud from the side of cliffs to obtain minerals that will aid in neutralizing the acid in their system.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Macaws mate for life and their allies are monogamous and often appear very devoted to their mate. They are cavity nesters; nests are in holes high up in deciduous trees. Mated adults lay up to two eggs per year, and preen each other and their offspring for hours, cleaning bugs from their feathers. Both parents incubate the eggs. Hatchlings are altricial and are fed by both parents via regurgitation. The young stay with the parents for up to 2 years.

Incubation: 24 -26 days	Sexual Maturity:
# of eggs: 1 - 3	Fledging: ~ 10 wks

MISCELLANEOUS

It is frequently confused with the slightly larger Green-winged Macaw, which has more distinct red lines in the face and no yellow in the wing. The Scarlet Macaw has a bare facial patch and the Green-winged Macaw has feather lines on its face.

To the Maya Civilization Scarlet Macaws were Sacred. They represented the daylight and the rising Sun. They used to hold ceremonies in their honor, like they did for their gods as well as for the Sacred Quetzal and the Lord of Night, the stalker, the Jaguar. Many lords and rulers of Maya cities took the name "Macaw" for themselves to magnify their personality and power.

Sources:

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The Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol IV © 1996, Lynx Edicions

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<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/kids/species-profiles/macaw>

<http://www.honolulu zoo.org/macaw.htm>

<http://www.sandiegozoo.org/animalbytes/t-macaw.html>

The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw © 2008, Bruce Barcott, Random House Trade Paperbacks