

## Parrot's Personality Lives Up to Its Name

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
July 2018

---

### The beautiful sun conure is endangered in the wild



Before the federal Wild Bird Conservation Act was adopted in 1992, which banned the importation of exotic birds, hundreds of thousands of parrots were being trapped in the wild each year and sold here.

Citing disease risks, Australia banned the import of exotic birds in 1995, and the European Union implemented a similar ban in 2007, owing to fears of avian flu. Yet certain parrot species populations continue to dwindle. One species in trouble in the wild is the sun parakeet, also known as the sun conure.

*Aratinga solstitialis* is the scientific name of this exotic, with the second, or specific name meaning “of the summer solstice,” a reference to the bird’s bright sunny feathers. This is a medium-size parrot, about 12 inches long and weighing only four ounces. Mostly yellow on the top of its head, neck, chest, and sections of the wings, the sun conure has splashes of orange on its stomach and face, with white or gray eye rings. Wing feathers are mostly green, and the green tail feathers have blue tips.

## Parrot's Personality Lives Up to Its Name

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
July 2018

---

Juveniles are greener and less yellow and orange until they reach maturity. Other parrot species, such as the jenday conure, sulphur-breasted parakeet, and the golden-capped parakeet, look similar and can be confused with the sun conure. In captivity, these related species will interbreed, but in the wild, their natural habitats don't often intersect. As pets, their life expectancy is 15 to 30 years.

Just as vibrant as their color is the sun conure's personality. They are social animals, living in flocks of 20 to 30 birds in the wild. As pets, these parrots are desirable for their curiosity, intelligence, and affectionate behavior, as well as their beauty, and are good at imitating sounds like cell phone rings. Some sun conures have a knack for loud, piercing calls, which are necessary in the wild to keep in contact with the flock.

Bob of Beaks & Feathers Aviaries in New South Wales, Australia, has raised a hundred conures, by hand or in aviaries. He has a Facebook video of a line of perching sun conures eagerly waiting to give him kisses. "Sun conures are one of the most affectionate parrots," he tells the *BT*. "They form a really tight bond with their owners."

Sun conures are native to a small area of northeastern South America that includes parts of Brazil, southern Guyana, southern French Guiana, and southern Suriname. There have been additional sightings in Venezuela. This species prefers dry savannah woodlands and coastal forests, where they live in fruit trees and palm groves.

The reduced populations of sun conures in South America are concerning. Once common, the sun conure has been in a dramatic decline for the past 20 years. The biggest reason for their decimation is pet-trade trapping, followed by capture for their plumage, and loss of their native habitat. In 2008 the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed them under endangered status on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The organization estimates they number as few as 1500 to 4000 in the wild.

Between 1981 and 1985, an estimated 2200 sun conures were imported to the United States. Today only sun conures bred in captivity are sold in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

Toronto artist Sonja Hie-Hardy adopted her 15-month-old sun conure Lola six months ago from a previous owner whose husband developed tinnitus and couldn't tolerate the bird's noise.

## Parrot's Personality Lives Up to Its Name

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
July 2018

---

“Her wings had been clipped by the breeder,” says Hie-Hardy, “and she couldn’t fly. I found this made her very insecure. She was very loud and needy, depending on me to take her where she wanted to go.” Lola was constantly calling out to her quaker parrot buddy, Pugsley, so Hie-Hardy put them in the same cage, and Lola now dotes on him like a mother.

Luckily, clipped wing feathers grow back. “Right around her first hatch-day she took off flying and has since become a new confident woman,” she notes, taking on the role of flock leader to the six other birds in the household. Her noise has also decreased. “It was so beautiful to watch her flourish with her new wings.”

Really, who rescued who? A victim of an armed robbery and a witness to a bloody police shootout in front of her home, Hie-Hardy suffers from PTSD. “My birds provide emotional support and keep me busy and focused on things besides depression and anxiety. They make me get up in the morning for their warm greetings. When I do go out, I usually have a couple of birds with me on a harness or in a pet backpack. They distract me from my hypervigilance and the triggers that can scare me. The parallels in our learning to trust brings peace and understanding. I hope to one day get my wings back and fly free again like Lola.”

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)