



Masked Shining Parrot Research

The Masked Shining Parrot *Prosoplia personata*, known locally as *Kaka*, is a beautiful large green and yellow parrot with a black facemask setting-off vivid orange eyes. It is endemic to Vitu Levu, Fiji's largest island, where it is mainly restricted to rainforest. The Masked Shining Parrot is officially listed by IUCN as a threatened species in the 'Vulnerable' category. As part of its wider programme aimed at conservation and sustainable management of Fiji's tropical forests, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has recently started a research project on this species. Although Masked Shining Parrots remain fairly common in large natural forests there is concern that logging and clearing forests for agriculture will cause population decline. Elsewhere in the world many large parrot species have proved to be prone to conservation problems and sensitive to changes in forest management.

Masked Shining Parrots have the advantage of being a spectacularly colourful bird that is widely recognised and already has a positive image amongst Fijians. In this respect they are an ideal 'flagship' species for wider forest conservation work in Fiji. Because parrots are large birds with relatively specialised requirements (large areas, old hollow trees for nest, fruiting trees for food) their successful conservation will also result in effective conservation for many of the other species of birds and other taxa that are only found in Fiji's rainforests.

The WCS project is the first ever study into the ecology of Masked Shining Parrot and the information gained will be used as a basis for defining their conservation requirements. The main research areas being addressed are the birds' ranging behaviour, nest-site choice and diet. It is planned that a few individual parrots will be fitted with tiny radio-tags so their daily movements can be tracked. The birds inhabit steep, dense rainforest and so following radio-tagged birds and finding nests is going to be a serious challenge. The project is being led by Dr Digger Jackson from the UK and local Fijians are being employed to collect field data.

Anyone wishing to see Masked Shining Parrots in the wild should visit Colo-i-Suva Forest Park near Suva where they are commonly seen. Alternatively, Kula EcoPark near Sigatoka has a number of individuals in captivity, together with the two other species of shining parrot found elsewhere in Fiji.