

To Wing on a



The two caged Mitchell's Lorikeets sat on alert as the priest moved slowly around them, making offerings, waving incense and chanting – a poignant ritual befitting the occasion. In time, the cage was quietly opened and the two birds flew immediately to freedom.

For years, our Indonesian partner, the Friends of the National Park Foundation (FNPf), has been developing a clever conservation programme akin to the New Zealander's use of offshore islands to rescue threatened birds from extinction. Their director, I Gede Nyoman Bayu Wirayudha (better known as "Bayu") has conducted several wildly successful releases of the Bali Starling (*Leucopsar rothschildi*) on a small island to the south of Bali called Nusa Penida. They are now starting releases of the critically threatened Yellow-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua sulphurea*) and the Java Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*) as well. By working with many of the communities on the island to raise conservation awareness and helping local people with reforestation of their habitats, Bayu and his team are creating a well protected sanctuary for these rare birds. Some are native to the island, like the cockatoo, and others are not, but Nusa Penida is a safe place to release them initially. Once their numbers build up there, the birds can then be translocated back to the main islands of Bali, Java, and Lombok.

For over ten years, Bayu has been breeding Mitchell's Lorikeets and occasionally acquiring birds from traders so they aren't lost into the pet trade. In April 2008, the FNPf team released three Mitchell's on Nusa Penida to see how they would fare in that environment, particularly in terms of whether they were able to find sufficient food. One bird, which

Lory Conservation Network

The Lory Conservation Network (LCN) was formed by the World Parrot Trust in 2009 with the specific goal of connecting zoos, bird parks and lory exhibits around the world to build effective conservation programmes and save some of the most endangered birds in the world – the lories.

Members of the network partner with parrot enthusiasts, researchers, local communities and government leaders to save these amazingly diverse birds.

Three LCN projects are featured here. "To Wing on a Prayer" is WPT Director Dr. James Gilardi's story of the release of a pair of rare Mitchell's Lorikeets, a subspecies of the Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) in Indonesia.

The stories that follow portray the experiences of two Master's students whose research in the Cook Islands was supported by the LCN this past year. Their reports, on the Blue Lorikeet (*Vini peruviana*) and the Rimatara or Kuhl's Lorikeet (*Vini kuhlii*), are summarised here and available, in their entirety, online.

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Prayer

By Jamie Gilardi



(P6) After months of preparation, two Mitchell's Lorikeets await release on a small island in Indonesia. They joined one remaining wild bird released with a group of 3 in 2008. Post-release (ABOVE) their continued survival (and visits for nectar) bring hope for future releases to their former range.

had only one foot, disappeared in the first week. The other two were seen frequently for well over a year, apparently doing well in what are now mostly coconut plantations with small patches of secondary forest scattered about. Over the past four months, only one bird has been seen in the release area. It's not known if the second bird dispersed or died.

This past year, the FNPF acquired two young Mitchell's between six months and a year of age. They appeared to be strong fliers and therefore good candidates for release. On the 13th of July 2010, I joined the FNPF team in Bali. We took a "fast" ferry for about 90 mins across the choppy waters to Nusa Penida followed by a short drive to their bird sanctuary where these birds were being held. They also had several pairs of adult Mitchell's and dozens of Bali Mynahs both in captivity and in the wild.

Bayu had already made all the arrangements for the release which took place in a large Hindu temple very close to the bird facility. The local priest presided over a special pre-release ceremony which involved about forty minutes of chanting, making numerous offerings, incense burning and other rituals. Once the ceremony was over, we set up the cameras and Bayu and the Priest together opened the cage. The birds immediately flew into the nearby trees. Both appeared to be strong flyers, and although they were separate at first, they called constantly and flew together within minutes of the release. We soon heard the wild bird calling in the distance.

During the hours after the release, we saw the two released birds flying into the coconut palms and other trees, preening and sampling various bits of leaves and flowers.

I stayed on for two more days, monitoring the released lorikeets in the mornings, and spending my two evenings there across the island with the last four remaining Yellow-crested Cockatoos on the island (three wild females and one released male). The morning after the release, both lorikeets were staying within 100 meters (330 ft) of the temple. They were flying strongly, sampling fruits, flowers, and seeds, and staying close together. The following morning there were two Mitchell's Lorikeets in the trees above the sanctuary, one of the released birds and the one wild bird which has been in the wild for over two years now. They were coming and going and seemed quite happy to have access to nectar provided by the sanctuary. It was unclear what the status of the third bird was, but we've supported one of the FNPF staff to track their post-release activities. As we go to print we've gotten news from Bayu that his team has seen five Mitchell's together, indicating that all of the released birds survived. We certainly hope they are in fact thriving.



The Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) is native to hundreds of islands through Indonesia, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia, and much of northern and eastern Australia. It is also a hyper-variable species with some 20 recognised subspecies – more than any other parrot. The Mitchell's Lorikeet (*T. h. mitchelli* above) is one of them and is actually the most westerly distributed of the entire lorikeet family. It was historically found only on the Indonesian islands of Lombok and Bali. In recent decades, capture for the pet trade has eliminated all these birds from the popular tourist island of Bali, and has left populations on Lombok very low, possibly with tens to hundreds of individuals remaining on the forested volcanoes there. The birds on Lombok are currently unprotected, continue to be trapped, and they sometimes show up in bird markets, especially in Bali.

