

# Blue and Yellow Macaw

*Ara ararauna*

**Class:** Aves    **Order:** Psittaciformes (parrots)    **Suborder:**    **Family:**

Ara (macaws)

**Other names:** Blue and gold macaw

**Other subspecies:**

**Other Relatives:** There are 9 species of macaw in the genus *Ara*



## Zoo Macaw 0.1.0

'Chelsea' 0.1 – female

**DOH:** 01/01/1991 **AQ:** 05/13/2013 **Weight**

*About Chelsea*

Chelsea was a relinquished pet

## Status

Least Concerned

Despite the fact that the population trend appears to be decreasing, the decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the population trend criterion [1]

## Geographic Region

From Venezuela to Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Paraguay, also found in Mexico and are restricted to Panama in Central America [2]

## Habitat

Subtropical and tropical forests, woodlands, and savannas in South America [2] They are mainly found in swampy, riparian areas [2].

## Characteristics

**Size:** *Height:* 81 to 91.5 cm (31-35") *Wingspan:* 104 to 114 cm (41-45") *Weight:* 0.9 to 1.8 kg (2-4 lbs) [2]

**Longevity:** **Wild** anywhere from 30-100 years [3], though 30-35 is probably most likely [2] **Captivity** Their life span is 30-70 years in captivity [3], but 30-35 is average [2]



## Physical Description

- They are blue on their backs and wings, with yellow under parts, green forehead feathers, and green tips on the end of their wings. Their under-wing coverts and breast are yellow-orange and they have black beaks, throat, and legs. [2]
- Their eyes are yellow and their facial area consists of bare white skin with several black feather lines around their eyes [2]
- The macaws have a very strong, hooked bill and flexible tongue to open nuts as well as preen.
- Their feet are **zygodactyl**: they have two back toes and two front toes to use for perching and for holding and manipulating food.

## Dimorphism

**Males:**

**Females:**

## Diet: Herbivores

**In the Wild:** Fruits, nuts, seeds

**In the Zoo:** parrot Mix (seeds, dried peppers, dog kibble) fruits, vegetables.

## Behavior

- *Diurnal*, day-active
- They use their bill as a third foot to help the bird climb.
- Like humans, macaws can be left footed or right footed.

## Feeding Behavior

- In early morning, flocks leave to fly to feeding grounds (may be some distance away). Return flights commence just before sunset. [3]
- They use their strong beaks to break open nut shells and to crush seeds. In some cases, they consume clay found at riverbanks which allows them to digest the toxins from unripe seeds that they may have ingested. [2]

## Social Structure & Communication

- Mainly found in monogamous pairs, but will congregate in flocks [2].

- Even within large flocks, they tend to stay with their partner. They will fly close together, with wings almost touching. [3]
- They have the ability to mimic voices which may be the way that young parrots learn to communicate in the wild. Macaws fly in pairs, family groups, and small flocks, one bird acting as a sentinel.
- Their long tails are used for display and signaling.

### Defense Mechanisms

- Blue-and-yellow macaws are extremely wary, at any sign of danger they fly into the air screeching loudly [2]
- When danger comes near, the flock falls silent and then all at once takes off with a loud and confusing array of color and noise. This often will startle the predator and save the parrots from danger.

### Reproduction

- Mating pairs are monogamous and often pair for life.
- Breeds January-July, and typically occurs for pairs every 1-2 years [2].
- Macaws nest in the holes of trees, usually these hollows are made by other animals.
- 2 to 4 white eggs are incubated by the female for 24-26 days [3]. The eggs are incubated solely by the female, while the male feeds her.
- Macaw babies are **altricial**, born blind and helpless. They stay in the nest for about 13 weeks, or 3 ½ months. [3]
- They attain sexual maturity at 3-4 years [2].
- The young remain in the nest for, at which time they resemble adults with shorter tails [3].

### Conservation

- **Use & Trade:** The species has been heavily traded: since 1981, when it was listed on CITES Appendix II, 55,531 wild-caught individuals have been recorded in international trade [1]
  - Although these birds are rewarding companions, their large size, behavioral complexity, and longevity requires a large home and extensive commitment [2].
  - Even the most well-tended blue-and-yellow macaw will "scream" and make other loud noises.
- **Threats:**
  - Habitat degradation in South America from pollution, development, and logging is also affecting populations of blue and yellow macaws [2].
  - Their removal from native habitats also often results in deaths of parents in order to obtain fledglings and destruction of important nesting trees. The illegal pet trade results in much destruction. [2]
- **Predators:** harpy eagles (*Harpia harpyja*), hawk eagles (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*) and orange-breasted falcons (*Falco deiroleucus*) attack while the birds are in flight. Humans are also predators because they hunt these birds for the pet trade, food, and feathers.

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The bright coloration of their plumage, blending with the bright sun light and blue sky, provides the birds with dramatic camouflage.
- Blue-and-yellow macaws are important seed predators in tropical forests, they may influence forest dynamics through seed predation and dispersal [2].

**Glossary:** List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

**Altricial** - hatched or born in an undeveloped state and requiring care and feeding by the parents.

**Zygodactyl** - having two toes pointing forward and two backward.

### References

- [1] IUCN Red List, "Ara ararauna," The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22685539/0>. [Accessed February 2015].
- [2] K. Catania, "Ara Ararauna," Animal Diversity Web, 2011. [Online]. Available: [http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Ara\\_ararauna/](http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Ara_ararauna/). [Accessed February 2015].
- [3] Oakland Zoo, "Blue and Yellow Macaw," Oakland Zoo, 2015. [Online]. Available: [http://www.oaklandzoo.org/Blue\\_and\\_Yellow\\_Macaw.php](http://www.oaklandzoo.org/Blue_and_Yellow_Macaw.php). [Accessed February 2015].