The Flight of Cornelius Cockatoo: A Fable for Children and Adults

A New Children’s Book About Parrots and Their Conservation, Inspired by a Life-Changing Experience

San Francisco Bay Area, California (PRWEB) May 05, 2011 -- 1997 was a turning point in the life Dr. Stewart Metz. Until then, he had followed the typical route for a physician practicing Medicine in the university setting—seeing patients; doing research in Diabetes; teaching; and Administrative work. Eventually he became Head of the Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism, and Diabetes as a Tenured Physician at the renowned University of Wisconsin-Madison, with about 130 research publications under his belt. But he sensed, increasingly, that something important was missing—and that ‘something’ was parrots. In 1993, he recognized that passion, which grew by leaps and bounds with the acquisition of China, a very special Salmon-crested cockatoo (Cacatua moluccensis). But in 1997, when he turned to the then-fledgling Internet, he found only a striking paucity of knowledge about these cockatoos, which were endangered in the wild. So in 2000, he became a member of the Indonesian Parrot Project (originally called “Project Bird Watch”) and in 2002 became the Director of the project. This NGO is a small, all-volunteer non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of endangered Indonesian parrots, including the Salmon-crested cockatoo.

This cockatoo is one of the most spectacular of all parrots and is a favored pet bird. However, they can be found in the wild on only one single island in Indonesia -- Seram Island in the “Moluccas”, once called the Spice Islands. These cockatoos have been trapped nearly to the point of extinction. Their continued survival in the wild is threatened by two major factors: trapping to supply the now illegal wild bird trade, and illegal logging (which reduces the number of large trees which provide cockatoos with nest holes).

Although a part of the objectives of the Indonesian Parrot Project is to work with governmental officials in Indonesia to reduce the trapping of cockatoos and other parrots, the current focus of IPP is more on a diversified educational program for schoolchildren on Seram—as well as on other islands and cities in Indonesia. The program is designed to introduce the children to the special parrots of Indonesia, to increase pride in ‘their’ parrots, and to teach them the basic concepts of conservation. This multi-faceted program involves, in part, DVDs and slide shows to familiarize the children with their cockatoos, and bird-watching outings to see the parrots in the wild --about which they know vanishingly little.

Eleven years later and Dr. Metz is still passionate about parrots and this is the backdrop for his recently published book. The Flight of Cornelius Cockatoo was designed to bring information about the threat to the survival of Salmon-crested cockatoo but in a “fun” context. The name of the book implies that is it is a fable aimed at children (principally 7-11 year-olds) but also one which adults would enjoy reading to younger children—and even read themselves.

The story starts when Cornelius, a young cockatoo living on the island of Seram, is told by his parents about an unnamed Menace threatening the survival of his family and his friends. As a consequence, he is sent to America, the Land of Freedom, to avoid the Menace himself. After flying to America, he lands on the Statue of Liberty.

And so begins a series of adventures (some hilarious, others more serious) involving a cast of unique characters which enrich this 103 page book. However, each of these adventures is designed to subtly reflect the events both on Seram Island, as well as in some pet stores, and the cages into which these intelligent creatures are held.
‘prisoner’ for their long lives as pets. Eventually, Cornelius’ (mis)adventures are interrupted when a letter from his parents calls him back to Seram…

The issue of freedom is a theme integral to this fable. In fact, “freedom” is incorporated into the name of a Rehabilitation Center founded by the Indonesian Parrot Project for the care of cockatoos and parrots on Seram Island. The Center is called “Kembali Bebas” which is Indonesian for “Return to Freedom.”

This Center receives parrots which are confiscated from smugglers by the Indonesian authorities, who, in turn, turn them over to Kembali Bebas. Those Salmon-crested cockatoos which can be fully rehabilitated are then released back into the Seram forest from which they initially were trapped, symbolized perhaps by Cornelius’ return to Seram. The first release of Salmon-crested cockatoos back into the wild occurred in March of 2008. Ironically, the care and release of these cockatoos are carried out by former trappers who once took these same parrots from their home in the forest. Thus is completed the “circle” tying the fictional story of Cornelius to the reality of life in the wild for these spectacular but endangered cockatoos.

By coincidence, this message about parrots and the illegal trade is currently being spread worldwide in the film “Rio in 3D”. This film sends to our children messages about the conservation of parrots and all birds and respect for our forests. Apparently, these themes struck a passionate chord, because this film is currently #1 at the box office -- a fact which ironically reflects the same feelings which had drawn Metz to parrots himself.

A recent book review of The Flight of Cornelius Cockatoo by world-renowned parrot expert Rosemary Low states:

“From the first page you know this is no ordinary book. Its 18 enchanting illustrations of doe-eyed, Salmon-crested cockatoos (made by cockatoo owner Joan Tilke) might mislead you into thinking this is another child’s story book. How wrong would you be! To start with, the author’s prose, written with poetry and fluency, can move you to tears. The tale becomes a poignant one as the author cleverly introduces the reader to the sad but factual fate of so many Indonesian cockatoos that have been trapped, exported and become unwanted -- and often abused. The Author is a rare, unsung hero of parrot conservation. He receives $7 from the sale of each book, all of which he donates to the Indonesian Parrot Project to conserve Indonesian cockatoos… Please buy this book: you will love it and you will be making a direct contribution to the survival of Seram’s cockatoos.”

The Flight of Cornelius Cockatoo is available for purchase on-line. All proceeds will be donated to the charitable work of the Indonesian Parrot Project towards the conservation of Salmon-crested cockatoos like Cornelius. In addition a 37 page detailed report on the work performed at Kembali Bebas by the Indonesian Parrot Project is also attached to this release.

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