



NOELIA VOLPE, THE MACAW GUARDIAN

Gingerly, Noelia tread through the murky water as swamp slime squelched between her toes. With each step, she hoped not to feel the scaly prick of doom—she didn't want to step on an alligator. The journey was long and daunting, nearly two miles of swampland, but the precious cargo tucked in a towel underneath her arms was enough to keep her going. Between folds of the downy fleece poked a bright, red and green head of striking brilliance and two gleaming, inquisitive eyes: she was rescuing a macaw.

Born and educated in Argentina, Noelia's journey into bird conservation has taken her from the bustling cities of Buenos Aires to the remote islands off Honduras. Her mission? To bring the endangered Red-and-Green Macaw back from the brink of extinction.

For the past 200 years, the Red-and-Green Macaw disappeared from Argentina. To help bring these critical members of the ecosystem back, scientists like Noelia started a project in Iberá National Park to raise and breed more macaws in captivity.

However, since the macaws weren't raised in the wild, it is essential to see if they have the skills to find and eat food on their own. While most scientists usually watched the birds to see what they ate, Noelia has researched and contributed to a method called DNA metabarcoding, which helps find out exactly what the birds have been eating by checking and analysing their droppings.

Her method has revealed that the birds consume a diverse range of plant species, and gives scientists hope for their ability to adapt to the available food sources in their environment.

Noelia's approach is hands-on and heart-driven. From showing macaws how to find food to helping them learn to avoid dangers, Noelia's job is like a bird survival coach. It's not just about science; it's about restoring life and hope. Noelia has rescued macaws from zoos, taught them to survive in the wild again, and carefully released them into their natural habitats. Each successful flight is her small victory in a much bigger battle against habitat loss and environmental threats.

Today, her work plays an important role in the ecological restoration of the Amazon. Noelia recognizes that macaws are a vital piece of the Amazon puzzle because they help keep the forest healthy and growing. These birds eat large seeds from many different plants and carry them far away before dropping them, which helps new trees and plants sprout in new places. Without macaws spreading these seeds, parts of the forest could stop growing and change forever. By protecting and reintroducing macaws, Noelia is helping to restore the balance of the Amazon's ecosystem, making sure the forest stays strong for generations to come.

However, she doesn't work only with one species. Noelia has studied everything from hummingbirds to penguins, her expertise weaving through different ecosystems across Latin America. Currently based on a remote island near Honduras, she studies Yellow-naped Amazons, adding to the vital knowledge that helps protect these beautiful birds.

What sets Noelia apart is her ability to blend science with storytelling. Her adventures remind us conservation is as much about courage as it is about data. Because for Noelia, every bird is a thread in the rich fabric of the Amazon and its surrounding forests.

Through her work, she invites us all to listen—to the calls in the trees, the rustling of wings, and the urgent need to protect these fragile ecosystems for generations to come. Will you join her in helping guard the brilliant wildlife of the Amazon?

