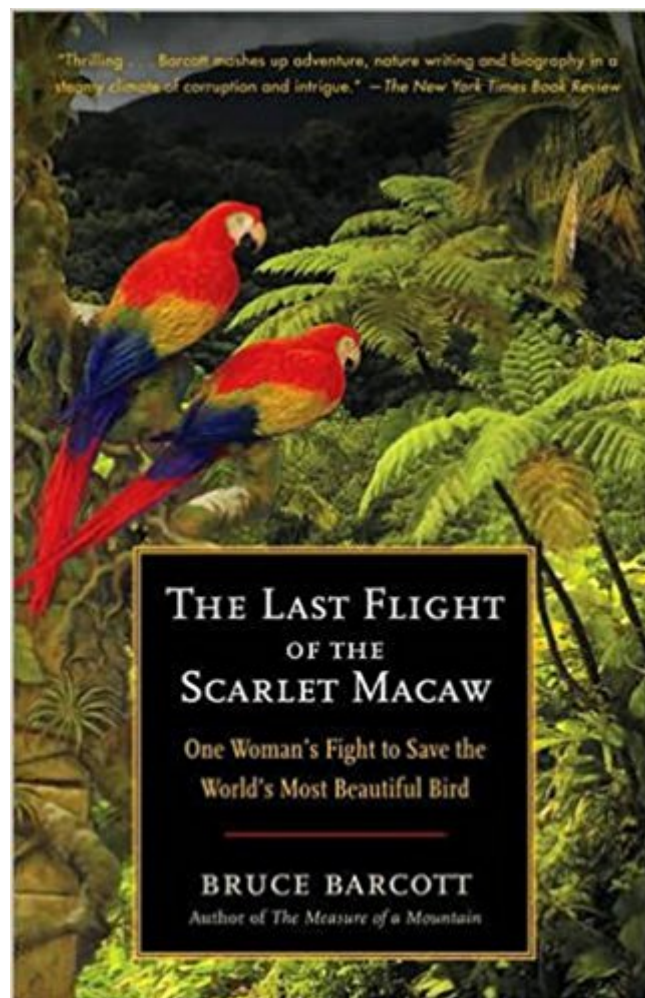




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The Last Flight Of The Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight To Save The World's Most Beautiful Bird



Synopsis

Caring for orphaned animals at her own zoo in the tropical country of Belize, Sharon Matola became one of Central America's greatest wildlife defenders. And when powerful outside forces conspired with the local government to build a dam that would flood the nesting ground of the only scarlet macaws in Belize, Matola was drawn into the fight of her life. In *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw*, award-winning author Bruce Barcott chronicles Sharon Matola's inspiring crusade to stop a multinational corporation in its tracks. Ferocious in her passion, Matola and her confederates lead a ragtag army of courageous locals and eccentric expatriates to endure slander and reprisals and take the fight to the courtroom and the boardroom, from local village streets to protests around the globe. Barcott explores the tension between environmental conservation and human development, puts a human face on the battle over globalization, and ultimately shows us how one unwavering woman risked her life to save the most beautiful bird in the world.

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Customer Reviews

Barcott (*The Measure of a Mountain*) relates the dramatic and heart-rending story of one woman's struggle to save the scarlet macaw in the tiny country of Belize. Sharon Matola, an eccentric American who directs the Belize Zoo, learned in 1999 that a Canadian power company planned to build a dam that would destroy the habitat of the 200 scarlet macaws remaining in Belize. Helped by native Belizeans and the Natural Resources Defense Council, Matola mounted a six-year campaign against the dam, undaunted by government officials who branded her an enemy of the state and

threatened to destroy her zoo by locating a new national garbage dump next to it—a vindictive act halted only when Princess Anne of Great Britain, which gives Belize millions in aid, planned to speak out against it. But the combined forces of a determined corporation and a corrupt government were unrelenting, even after it was revealed that the power company's geological studies of the site were faulty and the dam could put human lives at stake. Barcott's compelling narrative is suspenseful right up to the last moment. (Feb. 12) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Contributing editor to Outside magazine and author Bruce Barcott (*The Measure of a Mountain: Beauty and Terror on Mount Rainier* [1997]) has constructed a gripping and suspenseful account of one woman's crusade against corrupt foreign governments and multinational corporations to save the habitat of an endangered bird. Barcott's simple and eloquent prose, vivid descriptions, and ability to render the most complicated business deals and legal concepts in clear layman's terms allow him to tame this unwieldy tale, which has unexpected twists and turns. The biggest point of divergence? Most critics found Barcott's many narrative tangents informative, interesting, and even integral to the plot, while others called them tedious and distracting. Though the Chalillo Dam was completed in 2005, Matola's story proves that one person can make a difference. (The jury is still out on the fate of the scarlet macaws.) Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

Very well written, interesting book, especially if you have any interest at all in Belize. The book is actually less about the scarlet macaw than it is about getting things done (or not getting them done) in this relatively new, still developing country. Bruce Barcott presents much needed background on a variety of subjects -- birds, wildlife, Newfoundland, English Law, Belize politics -- all in a very readable manner. And the main character of the book, the "zoo-lady", is the interesting thread that ties it all together. Loved it and learned a lot!

interesting read for anyone wanting to see how governments can destroy whatever they want.

A multifaceted approach to interlocking ecological and political problems. Fascinating!

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It's not only an inspiring story about an effort to save the environment, but it provides a lot of interesting information about the history and politics of Belize. I

had just returned from Belize when I read this book, and it helped put a lot of what I saw and experienced in context. Even though it covers a lot of material that could be dry (e.g., politics, law) it's well written and compelling.

THE BEST FIELD GUIDE TO BELIZE.EVER.You probably won't find Bruce Barcott's *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* in the travel book or nature guide sections of your local bookstore or of .com, but it just may be the best field guide to Belize you'll ever read.Ostensibly the story of Sharon Matola, founder of the amazing Belize Zoo, and her campaign to defeat the Chalillo Dam on the Macal River in Western Belize and to save the nesting ground of what are believed to be the last 200 Scarlet Macaws in Belize, it's actually a 313-page crash course on Belizean culture, society and politics.It's also the most riveting, gossipy and entertaining book on the country since Richard Timothy Conroy's 1997 memoir of British Honduras in the 1950s, *Our Man in Belize*.Barcott names names. He pulls no punches. As an American writer - he's a contributing editor to *Outside Magazine* and the author of a book on Mount Rainier, among other things - he doesn't have to worry about making a living in Belize or raising a family there. He points to the high-level corruption that Lord Michael Ashcroft, the British-Belizean politician and entrepreneur, helped introduce in Belize and who "turned the sovereign nation of Belize into his own tax-free holding company," to the fast-buck shenanigans of the second generation of People's United Party politicians, to the seamy Dark Side of the PUP's "Minister of Everything" Ralph Fonseca, to the shrill shilling of party spokesman Norris Hall, to the fellow-traveling of the Belize Audubon Society and even to the bumbling efforts of some well-intended but barely competent Belizeans.I've been banging around Belize for more than 17 years, but Barcott's book is full of insights I've missed or didn't understand. It took Barcott to tell to me why so many Belizean politicians wear guayaberas and other open-neck shirts (to set themselves apart from their English colonial masters who slaved in the heat in coats and ties). Barcott explained why and how the Belize Audubon Society, which one would think would be on the side of the at-risk Scarlet Macao, helped get the Chalillo Dam approved (the Belize Audubon Society, under President JosÃ©fÂ© Pepe Garcia, at that time a quasi-arm of the Belize government, claimed the Scarlet Macao subspecies wasn't really endangered in Belize and that the habitat of the Macal River Valley was duplicated elsewhere in Belize.)If there's a fault to Barcott's approach, it's that he relies heavily on the gringo side of the outsider-local divide so common in post-colonial countries, including Belize. Many of his primary sources - Matola, ex-Fleet Street newspaperman Meb Cutlack, Lodge at Chaa Creek co-owner Mick Fleming, butterfly expert Jan Meerman, geologist/dolomite miner Brian Holland and others -while long-time residents of Belize and in many

cases Belize citizens -- will always be viewed by some Belizeans as expat, white perpetual tourists. Barcott tried twice to interview George Price, Belize's ascetic, incorruptible George Washington, but was turned away: "He's too busy," the retired Price's sister told him. We hear little or nothing directly from Said Musa, King Ralph or Lord Ashcroft. It also bugs me that Barcott's publisher, Random House, didn't do a bloody index. Sharon Matola comes across as a complex and sometimes exasperating woman, neither Joan of Arc nor Wangari Maathai. A fluent Russian speaker, a fungi expert, a former bikini-clad circus tiger trainer, the founder and miracle worker of "the best little zoo in the world," Matola, at the height of the anti-dam, pro-Scarlet Macao effort, almost forsake the battle. She became depressed and for a while, as a long-time Rolling Stones fan, turned her focus to a new campaign to get the city fathers of Dartford, a small working class town near London, to build a shrine to native sons Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Even with Matola at her passionate best, the campaign to stop the dam failed, of course. With most of the economic and political power structures of Belize supporting the pork project, and the giant Canadian utility Fortis dead set on damming as much of the world as possible, there was never much chance it would succeed. Tellingly, however, Matola did win the Battle of the Garbage Dump. Vindictive members of the government allegedly planned to put Matola in her place by building a dump at Mile 27 of the Western Highway, virtually next door to the Belize Zoo. After some clever maneuvering, some of it involving Britain's Princess Anne, the government backed down and decided to locate the egregious dump elsewhere. One irony came too late for Barcott to include in his book. The environmental consulting company, Tunich-Nah Consultants, headed by JosÃ©fÂ© Pepe Garcia, the former Belize Audubon Society president, conducted the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for Ara Macao, the overblown planned development on the Placencia peninsula. Ara Macao, Spanish for Scarlet Macaw, received approval to build nearly 800 condos and villas, a marina, casino, 18-hole golf course and 400,000 sq. ft. commercial center, all this on a peninsula with no paved road access and a population of about 2,000. The beautiful, smart red parrots must have shuddered, as they searched for new nesting grounds in their fast-disappearing habitat. In the end, though, Belize is Belize. With a population of just 315,000, about that of a small provincial Canadian, U.S. or British city, everybody who is anybody knows everybody else, and it's hard to stay mad. As Barcott visits Belize for the last time in researching this book, in 2005, Matola is getting ready to attend a party at Beer Baron Barry Bowen's Belikin headquarters. Bowen, one of Belize's wealthiest men and the country's political check writer extraordinaire, had helped kick Matola's butt. Now, Barcott learned, it was time to kiss-kiss and make up. That's Belize for you.....

Review and Opinion by Lan Sluder

Really tough to read this, as Belize is one of my favorite places to be. This book is really well written, and felt very vivid for me.

I live in Nicaraguan which has some of the same issues and a large number of people who want to sell used cow pastures as great sites for eco-tourism lodges. This book covers the birds, the tapirs, the politicians, the issue of paper parks and green washing, and how important it is to keep moving toward a world where we haven't paved it all over.

I first read this book some years ago. I am now rereading it. It is well written and totally engaging. If you are interested in Belize and the constant struggle to protect the fragile environment, this is a great read. I particularly enjoyed reading of Sharon Matola's constant efforts to fight the imbeciles who seem determined to line their own pockets and trash this wonderful country.

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