

## Road Trip To Red-Fronted Parrots

**Follow these directions to find these elusive parrots endemic to a small slice of Mexico.**

*By Beth Clark*

If you have your own car, take the Toll Highway (Autopista de Cuota) from McAllen, Texas, to downtown Monterrey, Mexico. Continue southeast on Avenida Constitución (which starts as Bulevard Miguel de la Madrid) and turn right (south) on Avenida Eugenio Garza Sada (Route 85). After 35 or 40 minutes look for the sign to Cascada Cola de Caballo (Horse Tail Falls) and turn left. Set your odometer to "0." You will enter San Isidro Canyon at mile 19.6 (31.4 km).

At the junction at mile 22.4, turn right and head toward Saltillo. At this point, you are entering maroon-fronted parrot territory. At mile 22.8, stop and look at the huge cliffs to the south. There is a trail heading into the mountains where you may find several other interesting species of birds. Towering cliffs follow the road for the next 13 miles. We were told that the parrots can be encountered anywhere along this road. Stop periodically and listen for loud calls which can be heard for more than half a mile, and scan the cliffs and mixed conifer forest below with binoculars or a spotting scope.

At mile 43 you will reach the small town of Los Lirios. Continue, and at mile 47.6 turn left headed to Saltillo. After 9 more miles, turn left again toward Saltillo at the Saltillo-Matehuala junction. Enter the Toll Highway (Monterrey Cuota) after 3.25 miles, follow the signs to the city of Monterrey, and retrace your route to your lodging.

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Once there, you'll recognize the maroon-fronted parrot, sometimes called a macawlet, by its green body and its maroon feathering over its cere. This parrot is larger and darker than its similarly-feathered relative, the thick-billed parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*). At one time it was considered a race of the thick-billed, instead of a separate species. In flight, the maroon-fronted parrot lacks the thick-billed parrot's conspicuous bright yellow on its underwing-coverts. Also, the feathering above the cere and over the eye is a dark brownish-maroon rather than the brilliant scarlet of the thick bill.

\*\*For the complete article, "In Search of a Mexican Endemic," please see the March 2007 print edition of BIRD TALK\*\*