



# Monk Parakeet

Facts about the monk parakeet | *Myiopsitta monachus* (Boddaert, 1783)

The monk parakeet, also called the Quaker parrot, originates from South America. Adults are about the size of a blackbird, approximately 30cm. This small parakeet has a distinctive grey breast, a grey throat and forehead, and a yellow-brown beak. The wings are green with blue in the flight feathers, and birds have a stiff, relatively long and pointed tail.

## An exotic bird in our towns and cities

The monk parakeet is a popular cage bird worldwide. Over time, pet birds have escaped or have been deliberately released by their owners, and growing populations of parakeets have successfully established across many parts of Europe. The diet of monk parakeets includes seeds and fruits but they occasionally prey on small invertebrates too. Monk parakeets can often be seen foraging on the ground, squabbling with local pigeons for seeds or pieces of bread.

## Why might the presence of this species outside its native range be a problem?

Invasions of non-native species are a major threat to biodiversity and cause many economic losses worldwide. Monk parakeets have been reported to forage on crops in their native range, and in the areas where they have invaded, their bulky stick nests can cause damage to human infrastructures. In Europe, monk parakeets damage is currently only reported from the agricultural metropolitan area of Barcelona, where the parakeets forage upon corn, pears, plums, persimmons and tomatoes. Yet, if populations keep growing and expand outside their urban strongholds, these parakeets may pose a non-negligible threat to agriculture.



Invasive monk parakeet populations have been recorded in many European countries, including Austria, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Portugal and the UK, as well as in North America, and parts of Asia and Africa. These parakeets are well adapted to human-modified landscapes, and at least in Europe, invasive populations are mostly found in or close to urban areas.



In Europe, predators such as sparrowhawks occasionally hunt monk parakeets. Such predation is however unlikely to limit monk parakeet growth across Europe.

## 1 Communal nests

The monk parakeet is the only parakeet that builds nests, rather than breeding in tree or rock cavities. As social birds, they breed in large multifamily stick nests, whereby each chamber is inhabited by a family group. The nests are used year-round, either for breeding or for roosting.

## 2 And not only in trees

Monk parakeets also build nests on man-made structures such as power pylons, potentially damaging them. For example, in the USA, monk parakeet nests on electricity poles often catch fire, causing costly power outages.

## 3 Where do invasive monk parakeets come from?

Monk parakeets from across Latin America have been exported worldwide, yet genetic data show that invasive populations exhibit low levels of diversity and are similar to each other. Invasive monk parakeets may thus originate from a single, localized source area.

## 4 A complex social behaviour

Monk parakeets live in groups and young birds stay with their parents until the next breeding season. Some of the young parakeets start breeding the year after birth while the others form temporary social groups, huddling together in a chamber of the communal nest. Sometimes, several females seem to share a nest, breeding cooperatively but this behaviour is probably not too common. Monk parakeet social life is governed by a highly complex set of behavioural rules.



# RING-NECKED PARAKEET

Facts about the ring-necked parakeet | *Psittacula krameri* (Scopoli, 1769)

Ring-necked parakeets, also known as rose-ringed parakeets, originate from Africa and Asia. Adults are about the size of a turtledove, approximately 40cm. Ring-necked parakeets are predominantly green, with a large red bill and a very long graduated tail. Adult males show a rose-pink collar on the hindneck, and a broad, black stripe on the lower cheeks.

## An exotic bird in our towns and cities

The ring-necked parakeet is a popular cage bird worldwide. Over time, pet birds have escaped or have been deliberately released by their owners, and now large populations of parakeets have successfully established in around 90 cities across Europe. With an estimated total population size of at least 85000 birds, ring-necked parakeets are now commonplace at bird feeders in gardens and parks. Parakeets form large communal roosts, where up to several thousands of parakeets may gather.

## Why might the presence of this species outside its native range be a problem?

Parakeets start breeding before most other cavity nesters, reducing availability of nest sites for native hole-nesting species such as birds and bats. Whilst large roosts can be a source of noise disturbance to humans, in India, parakeets are considered a major agricultural pest, leading to concerns they may cause similar damage across Europe.



In the wild, ring-necked parakeets are usually green but you may occasionally observe blue or yellow individuals, which are colour mutations popular with bird breeders.

photo: Jacques de Speville

## 1 A global distribution

The ring-necked parakeet is the most widely distributed parakeet in the world. Outside of their substantial native range, they are established in over 35 countries, over five continents!

## 2 A successful invader

Adaptation to human-dominated habitats across their native Asian range has enabled ring-necked parakeets to thrive in similar, non-native environments elsewhere.

## 3 Where do invasive populations come from?

Genetic research has found invasive ring-necked parakeets in Europe predominantly originate from the more northerly distribution of their Asian range.

## 4 Prior-adaptation to colder climates:

Colder climates observed across these northerly parts of their native range suggest parakeets that thrive in Europe may have prior adaptations to our colder climates.

## 5 Agricultural pest?

In most of Europe, there currently is only anecdotal information on crop damage by these parakeets. In Mediterranean areas, where the parakeets are more likely to spread outside of their urban strongholds, loss of agricultural production is more likely, especially if populations keep growing.



photo: Alvaro Luna