

FIRST REPORT ON THE ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*PSITTACULA KRAMERI*) IN VENEZUELA AND PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON ITS BEHAVIOR

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In May 1996, several Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) individuals were observed in Parque del Este, a large park (85 ha) situated within the eastern Caracas City limits, Venezuela (10°30'24"N, 66°55'39"W). The present report corresponds apparently to the first record of the presence of this species in feral populations in Venezuela and for mainland South America as a whole.

The introduction of exotic psittacids in natural areas by accidental or intentional means occurs quite frequently (Long 1981). In Venezuela, two introduced species of psittacids: Budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) and Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) have been reported in feral populations (Badillo & Ulloa 1987, 1994).

The presence of *Psittacula krameri* would be thus, the third feral exotic psittacid species introduced and breeding in the country.

This species is very appreciated among bird collectors (Forshaw 1989), therefore its introduction and eventual escapes are frequent outside their distribution range (Long 1981). Their presence must be, certainly, a product of accidental or intentional escapes.

The distribution of the Rose-ringed Para-

keet has been described from China, India and Burma to Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988, Forshaw 1989). It has also been introduced and observed in a number of countries: Mauritius, Zanzibar, Egypt, Oman, Republic of the Yemen, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Hong Kong and Macao, Singapore, Cape Green Islands, Afghanistan, Kenya, Hawaiian Islands and continental USA, Great Britain, Adaman Islands, Spain, Germany (Forshaw 1989), Netherlands (Long 1981), Belgium (Perrins 1990) and Curaçao (Voous 1983, 1985).

Almost all observations noted in the present report were conducted in the large densely forested areas of the Parque del Este, and some nearby forested patches (less than 5 km from the park). The tree species represented in said areas and patches are mainly Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Jobo (*Spondias mombin*), Ceiba (*Ceiba pentandra*), Almendron (*Terminalia catappa*), Ficus (*Ficus insipida*), Jabillo (*Hura crepitans*), Bucare (*Erithrina glauca*), Guayabo (*Psidium guajava*), Pomarosa (*Syzygium jambos*) and Palo (*Triplaris caracasana*). The general tree height may vary between 2 and 30 m.

According to personal observations, the

Parque del Este hosts other Venezuelan psittacids not native to the Caracas area, such as: Chestnut-fronted Macaw (*Ara severa*), Red-and-green Macaw (*Ara chloroptera*), Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*) and Blue-and-yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*). An interview evaluation of the older park keepers establishes the presence (6 to 8 individuals) of *Psittacula krameri* in Parque del Este since 1984.

Data gathering, photographing and recording occurred in a 7-month period (May-December, 1996). Using a 1:10,000 map, divided in numbered sectors for easy location, the observations were made using 7 x 50 binoculars and recording equipment, in three continuous week day periods, during morning, noon and evening hours (06:00–9:30, 12:00–13:30 and 16:00–19:00). The observation periods were selected considering a generally higher bird activity when departing or entering nest, roost or sleeping areas, which were favorable for recording the behavior of the sighted individuals in each of the numbered sectors.

Tentatively, the observed species has been assigned to the subspecies *Psittacula krameri manillensis* (Neumann), considering the following characteristics in adult males: green color, with a black collar and a black band around bill, upper mandible wholly red, lower mandible blackish (Fry *et al.* 1988), red shining behind the black collar, belly and under tail-coverts yellowish green, uppermost tail feathers bluish green with yellow tips, yellow-orange iris, and gray feet (Vriends 1979). The adult females lack the black collar and the red shining behind it. The recorded individuals are larger than the subspecies *krameri* and present a larger bill (Forshaw 1989).

All the recorded individuals wander freely within the Parque del Este limits and nearby densely forested patches, in groups of 2–8 individuals and are rarely seen alone. They shelter in tree tops that provide lower sun incidence and less visibility. Their feeding

consists mainly of seeds and fleshy fruits: *Ficus insipida* (Moraceae), *Coccoloba podiformis* (Polygonaceae), *Spondias monbin* (Anacardiaceae), *Sida glomerata* (Malvaceae), *Melicoccus bijugatus* (Sapindaceae), *Erythrina glauca* (Leguminosae) and *Mangifera indica* (Anacardiaceae). These trees are also frequented by other species of psittacids such as: Chestnut-fronted Macaw, Orange-winged Parrot (*Amazona amazonica*), Yellow-headed Parrot (*Amazona ochrocephala*), Scarlet-fronted Parakeet (*Aratinga wagleri*), Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*), Orange-chinned Parakeet (*Brotogeris jugularis*) and Brown-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga pertinax*).

Their feeding occurs, most intensively, during morning and late afternoon periods (06:00–10:00 and 16:00–19:00). Noon hours are devoted mostly to preening and rest.

When flying, they generally produce a shriek that consists of three notes, but while at rest their shrieks consist of one to three notes. It is also frequent to hear a series of hisses and short notes when two individuals or more get together (Forshaw 1989). Pairs usually rub their bills together. Females, when near a male, tend to make fast forward and lateral head movements.

Occasional groups are formed exclusively by male adult or male juvenile individuals (5 to 8). These groups move freely through the observed area. When a group occupies a feeding tree, the individuals show an aggressive behavior towards each other, putting their bodies in an erected position and accomplishing a series of vocalizations and rapid movements of their wings, which they beat rapidly against their body. The observed juveniles when in presence of an adult male adopt a conduct of harassment for food, which the adult generally regurgitates.

It could be concluded that this feral exotic bird population is freely breeding and increasing in the Parque del Este and surrounding areas. This observation is supported by a high

proportion of recorded juvenile individuals, which are similar to the females, but differ by their central tail feathers which are shorter, the presence of a pink bill, a gray-white iris, and legs presenting a grayish tonality (Forshaw 1989).

The latest recorded total population for the studied area (December 1997) was estimated to 50–60 individuals with a 50–50% ratio between juveniles and adults.

It could be considered that the introduction of exotic psittacids in Venezuela may be a regional negative factor if the observed psittacids compete favorably with the native species to a point of complete displacement of the latter. Once, I observed the interaction between two individuals of *Psittacula krameri* and *Aratinga wagleri* (Chacaraco) competing for the occupation of a tree hole which was, finally, occupied by the former.

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