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Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*

The Monk Parakeet is probably the most widespread and successful parrot in Florida, due in large part to its highly colonial behavior. It is native to South America east of the Andes from Bolivia and southern Brazil to central Argentina (Forshaw 1973). Free-flying Monk Parakeets were first reported in the United States in the New York City area in 1967 (Neidermyer and Hickey 1977). They have been breeding in the Miami area since at least 1969 (Owre 1973). The Monk Parakeet was reported from 30 states by 1975, although large colonies were present only in California, Florida, Illinois, and New York (Neidermyer and Hickey 1977).

In Florida the Monk Parakeet has established strong breeding centers in Dade and Pinellas counties, with scattered breeding elsewhere in the state. Although single pairs will nest individually, the Monk Parakeet is highly gregarious and often forms large colonies. Small colonies tend to be somewhat ephemeral; 2 or 3 pairs may nest in an area 1 year and disappear by the next. However, many colonies in Dade and Pinellas counties number in the hundreds and have been present for many years (B. Neville, pers. obs.). While eradication programs have been attempted in other states, no concerted effort to control the Monk Parakeet appears to have been mounted in Florida.



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In South America the Monk Parakeet is a bird of "open woods, cultivated lands, [and] palm groves" (de Schauensee 1970); in Florida, it is a bird of suburban areas. Large flocks frequently descend on feeders, where they eat fruit, sunflower seeds, and cracked corn (Terres 1980). Monk Parakeets frequently feed on lawns (B. Neville, pers. obs.), probably on grass seeds and insects (Forshaw 1973). The species is considered a major agricultural pest in South America (Long 1981). At present the suburbanites of south Florida are very protective of their introduced parrots and do not begrudge them the occasional mango. If the Monk Parakeet should spread to the agricultural areas, however, it may become a serious pest.

The Monk Parakeet is the only member of its order that builds a nest of sticks (Forshaw 1973). The birds nest in an enclosed chamber within a large ball of twigs, generally built high in a tree, on the crossbars of utility poles, or on other human-made structures. The nests are used year-round for roosting by the adults, and material to repair the nest is brought throughout the year. In south Florida, royal palms, cabbage palms, and the introduced *Melaleuca* are favored nest trees (B. Neville, pers. obs.). Native oaks are frequently used in central Florida (B. Pranty, pers. commun.).

The communal nests may contain up to 20 separate chambers, each housing a breeding pair (Long 1981). The openings of the nest chambers are frequently oriented downward. The reported clutch varies from 4 to 8 white eggs (Forshaw 1973, Long 1981, Terres 1980). The breeding season in the Northern Hemisphere has not been well studied, but Terres (1980) suggests that they breed in summer. Neidermyer (Neidermyer and Hickey 1977) reported a case of double-brooding in Illinois, in which the first brood fledged in July and the second in early November.

Certainly, in the moderate climate of Florida, multiple-brooding is probable, and Long (1981) suggests that up

6 broods per year may be raised. Neidermyer and Hickey (1977) report that breeding is not necessarily synchronous within a colony. The incubation period is reported to be from 26 to 31 days (Terres 1980, Vriends 1984), and the young leave the nest in approximately 6 weeks (Forshaw 1973, Vriends 1984). Immatures are similar to adults in appearance.

Bruce Neville

Monk Parakeet

