

Position Statement

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RING-NECKED PARAKEET

The ring-necked, or rose-ringed, parakeet has been introduced into the wild in Britain as a result of escapes and deliberate releases of captive birds. Now commonly found in parts of London, where its bright plumage and noisy calls have brought it to the attention of many, there are some concerns expressed that it might have an impact on other wildlife.

1. Position

- London Wildlife Trust advocates an evidence-based and pragmatic approach to introduced animals.
- Ring-necked parakeet is now an established wild bird within London, and its presence reflects the historical ecology of the Capital and the dynamism of urban ecosystems.
- There is no sufficient evidence to suggest that ring-necked parakeet is causing a significant adverse impact on wild bird populations (or other species) in London (or elsewhere), although we recognise that there may be localised impacts.
- Until there is evidence to support otherwise, we will not endorse support or carry out the control of ring-necked parakeets to protect native species or habitats.
- Where parakeets are demonstrably causing significant damage to crops, or affecting public health and safety, there are existing legally approved measures to control or reduce their impact on a site by site basis.
- We will, within the resources available, oppose schemes to control or eradicate colonies of ring-necked parakeet in London where these are unsupported by evidence of damage, and/or where they cannot demonstrate that they will have the intended impact.
- We will endeavour to highlight and discourage control measures that are inhumanely or illegally carried out.
- We will support the collation of and, where possible, gather contemporary data about ring-necked parakeet populations and their behavioural impacts on other wildlife in London and in neighbouring counties, in order to inform any future policy or actions.
- We will encourage the gathering of information on the values people in London place on ring-necked parakeet, in order to inform any future policy or actions.

2. Origins, habitat and habits

Ring-necked parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) is a gregarious tropical species, its natural range being a broad belt of arid tropical countryside stretching from west Africa across lowland India south of the Himalayas. Wild populations have declined as the pet trade has expanded and eventually brought them to 35 countries across Europe and the Middle East. The parakeet is one of a handful of parrot species that has coped extremely well to deforestation and urbanisation.

The pet trade first introduced parakeets to Britain in 1840 and they have increased rapidly since the 1980s following escaped individuals becoming naturalised. They have now been recorded in all English counties, Scotland and Wales. Across London, population numbers are estimated at about 30,000.

Heavily urbanised areas are particularly attractive to parakeets given that there is good availability of food, particularly with the artificially high presence of food (e.g. bird feeders); and there are plenty of nesting/ roosting locations in mature trees in open areas in our parks, gardens, small wooded areas and green belt beyond. The urban heat island effect provides a shortened, mild winter and enables a longer growing season and high mean temperatures during the parakeet's breeding season.

Foraging and food

Although they are generally sedentary birds parakeets may fly up to 25 kilometres to forage. Feeding activity peaks in the early morning and late afternoon, with the time between devoted to preening and 'loafing'. In the wild, seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, flowers and nectar are eaten. In London, parakeets are most often observed feeding in small groups in parks and gardens especially from trees. Food put out on garden bird tables and in hanging feeders can be particularly important in the winter months.

Breeding

Ring-necked parakeets are early and prolific breeders. In Britain, breeding starts in January, but the breeding season timing varies and incubation and rearing takes longer in the UK than in their native countries. They nest in tree holes and wall crevices and will have a clutch of up to 6 chicks who fledge in about 8 weeks. Parakeets can be particularly noisy in the breeding season, especially near the roosts but this should not last any longer than a couple of months.

3. Causes of concern

Crop damage

Parakeets are a well-known pest in their native range for agricultural crops. In Britain, concern is primarily expressed by those with an economic interest e.g. land owners that cultivate fruit in orchards and vineyards. Similarly, gardeners complain of parakeets eating garden crops and damaging bird feeders.

Climate change will drive agricultural changes over the next 50 years, and predictions suggest that conditions will favour wine production, and more novel crops in the south-east at the expense of traditional fruits. The prospect of ongoing increases in parakeet numbers is likely to have an impact on some of these crops.

Harm to native species/habitats

Concerns have been expressed about the potential for ring-necked parakeet to out-compete other tree hole nesting species such as woodpecker, little owl, nuthatch and bats. Anecdotal reports suggest that the parakeet will drive out other hole-nesting species, but these individual sightings do not constitute an ecological impact at a population scale. A Belgian study has indicated that under environmental stress (e.g. cold winter) parakeets may have an adverse impact on nuthatches' ability to secure nesting holes. However, there is as yet no evidence to suggest that native species are adversely affected by ring-necked parakeet.

Noise

Parakeets are noisy birds, squawking in flight and in their roosts, which is compounded by their gregarious nature. Nuisances have also been reported where people live close to their roosting sites, as some roosts can encompass more than 1000 individuals.

4. Implications and potential controls

Ring-necked parakeets are thriving in London and there is no expectation that any natural factor will be able to reduce numbers significantly. London's peregrine falcons have been reported to take parakeets, but they are few in number and likely to concentrate on the more numerous pigeons. The increasing numbers and distribution of parakeets is a cause for concern, and we support the call for a Government strategy to assess their population trends and potential impacts.

Protection and licensing

Ring-necked parakeet is afforded protected under existing legislation for wild birds. However, recent changes by Natural England to licences to control birds (under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981) have now listed ring-necked parakeet as a species that can be killed for reasons of economic damage to crops, public health, and harm to native birds, fauna & flora. Licences allow certain actions to be carried out that would otherwise be illegal under the legislation. These licence changes are due to come into force on 1st January 2010. However, attempts to control parakeet numbers for other reasons will, almost without exception, remain unlawful.

5. References and useful links

Strubbe, D. and Matthysen, E. (2007), Invasion of Ring-necked Parakeets in Belgium: habitat selection and impact on native species, *Ecography*, 30, 4, August 2007, pp578–588.

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/117966241/abstract>

Strubbe, D. and Matthysen, E. (2009), Experimental evidence for nest-site competition between invasive ring-necked parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) and native nuthatches (*Sitta europaea*), *Biological Conservation*, 142, 8, August 2009, pp1588-1594.

Strubbe, D. and Matthysen, E. (2009), Establishment success of invasive ring-necked and monk parakeets in Europe, *Journal of Biogeography*, 36, 12, pp2264–2278, December 2009, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2699.2009.02177.x/abstract>

Newson, S.E., Johnston, A., Parrott, D., and Leech, D.I., (2011). Evaluating the population-level impact of an invasive species, Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, on native avifauna, *Ibis*, 153, British Trust for Ornithology.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1474-919X.2011.01121.x/abstract>

Natural England licences:

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/wml-gl04_tcm6-24149.pdf

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/wml-gl05_tcm6-24150.pdf

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/wml-gl06_tcm6-24151.pdf

6. Related Policies

LWT: *Non native species* (in development)

7. FAQs

Didn't Jimi Hendrix introduce them to London?

- There are many myths surrounding the origin of ring-necked parakeets in London, including escapees from the filming of *The African Queen* in Shepperton Studios in 1951. However, the evidence suggests a more prosaic source – the pet trade, and escapees and deliberate releases.

Where is a good place to see ring-necked parakeets in London?

- Whilst they can now be seen throughout much of London, they are commoner in the south and south-west. There are large concentrations either side of the Thames upstream from Kew Bridge

(for example in Kew Gardens, Syon Park, around Petersham Meadows and Ham Lands) in Richmond and Kingston. They are more visible in trees during winter.

How can I deter ring-necked parakeets from damaging my allotment or garden plants?

- It is not easy to deter parakeets from gardens, but the usual methods of protective netting, half-full plastic bottles or CDs hung on sticks will help.

I'm worried about parakeets using a feeder or nest-box for song-birds

- Research and purchase a robust bird feeder to overcome these problems. It had been previously suggested that parakeets were only surviving UK winters due to the bird table bounty, but recent trends suggest this is no longer the case.

Can I shoot parakeets in my garden if they annoy me?

- No. The new licensing arrangements require demonstrable evidence of negative impacts on economic crops, human health, and native species and if issued by Natural England licences will clearly state when it will be justified to kill the birds and when it won't. The ring-necked parakeet remains a protected species and there will be no "free for all" to kill them. Shooting the birds because they are a nuisance would not be permitted.

How can I encourage ring-necked parakeets to visit my garden?

- An ordinary bird-feeder should encourage many birds that are within the vicinity, including, if they are present, ring-necked parakeet. However, the Trust suggests that specific encouragement of ring-necked parakeet should be avoided, and that due consideration should be given to neighbours in respect of the noise that these birds can cause.