

PARAKEETS

Pest or Welcome Interloper?

With the peace of our Parks in South West London being rudely interrupted by the rapidly growing numbers of raucous parakeets, there are two widely different views on this new bird in the British skies.

First, there are the large group of wildlife enthusiasts, be they bird-watchers or general conservationists, who find this interloper both a potential threat to our native birds and a “nasty” infringement to the peace and natural wildlife sounds. On the other hand, there are those people, with little previous interest in wildlife, who are now aware of a bright, noisy bird and are just thinking that maybe our wildlife could be interesting. Wearing my education hat, I have to accept that anything that can encourage new converts to the rich biodiversity of our outdoors should not be dismissed lightly.

Whatever your views on this bird, there are many stories about its introduction to the UK. The most common seems to be that a number escaped from a late-1960s film set somewhere in South West London, and they have thrived ever since. Whilst there are at least 3 different species of parakeet now loose in the UK, largely confined to the South East, and then mainly South West London, the main bird is the Ring-necked Parakeet.

With interests include walking and birdwatching in my local Richmond Park (not as a twitcher but someone more concerned with changing patterns and conservation eg where are the house sparrows), I have recently become involved with the local bird group and the regular Friends walks. Whilst it is estimated that there could be as many as 100 parakeet nests in the Park, our main concern is that this early, and prolific breeder may be taking over sites from the many other tree cavity nesting birds in the Park. It is mainly anecdotal at the moment, but we shall soon have to start monitoring the situation seriously

To the many people, myself very much included, who enjoy the sounds, and peace, of the Parks, these parakeets are a rapidly increasing source of “noise pollution”. Whilst we all endure them during the day, even in our gardens, I do have a great deal of sympathy for the people living near the huge evening roosts in South London at which numbers in excess of 6,000 birds have been recorded!

So what about the future? With populations apparently growing by up to 30% a year, something serious has to be done soon. Is it the next major wildlife pest? Quite possibly. Whilst it is unfortunately a protected bird under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, are there any natural ways to curb it? As it seems to have no natural enemies, how about introducing a few goshawks? Any other ideas?

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