

SOME CASES OF NEST USURPATION BY THE RING-NECKED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

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Riassunto – Alcuni casi di usurpazione di nidi da parte del Parrocchetto dal collare *Psittacula krameri*. Il Parrocchetto dal collare è una specie aliena che provoca danni sia alle biocenosi sia alle attività umane. In alcuni casi, ha mostrato comportamenti aggressivi verso altre specie autoctone, come uccelli e pipistrelli, competendo anche per i siti di nidificazione. Vengono descritti tre episodi di distruzione di nidi di Passera mattugia e Passera d'Italia, di Ghiandaia marina, in questo caso con sospetto di eliminazione dei pulli, e l'uccisione di un pullo di Picchio verde. La competizione per il nido, anche in forma preventiva rispetto alle reali esigenze, potrebbe non essere l'unica causa di tali comportamenti aggressivi. Sono necessarie ulteriori valutazioni per comprendere meglio l'impatto della specie.

The Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is one of the alien bird species causing significant damage to ecosystems and human activities (Menchetti & Mori, 2014). In many cases, intense competition for cavity nesting sites has been observed, both with other bird species and bats (e.g., Strubbe & Matthysen, 2007, 2009; Czajka *et al.*, 2011; Dodaro & Battisti, 2014; Hernández-Brito *et al.*, 2014; Menchetti *et al.*, 2014; Martin-Albarracin *et al.*, 2015; Hernández-Brito *et al.*, 2018; Giuntini *et al.*, 2022). However, other studies have suggested that nest competition with some native bird species is actually very low or nonexistent (Stubbe *et al.*, 2010; Newson *et al.*, 2011), indicating that further evaluation of this phenomenon is needed. Moreover, there have been reports of fatal attacks by the Ring-necked Parakeet on native species (Menchetti & Mori, 2014; Covas *et al.*, 2017). In this note, we describe three cases of interspecific aggression towards native species in the Lazio region. In 2017, Annamaria Zoppini documented the arrival of several Ring-necked Parakeet individuals at her residence in the Aurelio district of Rome. These parakeets utilized oranges, lemons, and loquats from her balcony as a food source. In subsequent years, the species continued to frequent the area. In spring 2020, several Ring-necked Parakeets emptied five or six nests of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* and Italian Sparrows *Passer italiae*, throwing out the nestlings, eggs, and nesting material. The sparrows' nests were located in holes approximately 10 centimeters in diameter within an architectural brick pattern on a building wall. Despite the destruction of the nests, the parakeets did not breed in those cavities that year, but the following year, two pairs occupied the cavities for nesting. In May 2024, one of us (RS) monitored a nest of the European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, which had also been occupied by the species in the preceding three years. The nest was located about 7 meters high in a hole of a

concrete pole within the Special Area of Conservation of Macchia Grande di Ponte Galeria (Rome). Breeding proceeded regularly, and by July 8, the feeding activity of the chicks had been underway for several days, with their chirping clearly audible. In a subsequent check on July 16, the European Rollers were absent, and the chicks' calls were no longer heard, even though the nesting period should have lasted at least another 15 days (Cramp, 1985). On July 18, a Ring-necked Parakeet was observed entering the hole in the pole and was noted in the immediate vicinity in the following days, but the cavity was not used for nesting. In the subsequent month of August, several Ring-necked Parakeets were observed frequenting the vicinity of the nest and, on at least three occasions, visiting its interior, something that had never occurred in the previous three years of observations. Although direct evidence is lacking, it is highly probable that the European Rollers' brood was eliminated by this species. On May 25, 2024, Enrico Pirri observed a juvenile European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, almost ready to fledge, emitting continuous calls, likely begging for food from the adults, while perched at the entrance of its nest hole, located about 5 meters high in an elm tree within the Parco del Casale Vecchio di Aguzzano (Rome). Just one meter away, two Ring-necked Parakeets were present, and suddenly, one of them quickly entered the nest. The juvenile woodpecker's alarm calls became progressively weaker until complete silence ensued. At that point, the Ring-necked Parakeet appeared at the edge of the nest. It was not possible to monitor the situation further, as the park's elm trees, affected by Dutch elm disease, were felled in the days that followed. As also hypothesized by Covas *et al.* (2017), competition for food or nesting sites does not appear to be the primary cause for such aggressive behavior, which has been observed in other behavioral aspects as well (Battisti & Fraticelli, 2023). The available data sample is too limited to draw general conclusions, but it is noteworthy that this type of behavior has not been observed in areas with established breeding populations, such as the urban parks of the capital and historical areas with an *ad libitum* availability of suitable wall cavities for nesting. Instead, it has been recorded in predominantly agricultural areas or, in one case, in a peripheral area that had not previously seen reproductive activity. It can be hypothesized that this is a form of pioneering behavior, aimed at making nesting sites available, even if not immediately used. These findings demonstrate that the impacts on native fauna are still not fully understood, and further investigation is necessary.

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