

Status of the exotic Ring-necked Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*, in Oman

(Aves: Psittacidae)

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Abstract. The Ring-necked Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*, an invasive bird species, first appeared in Oman in 1950 but apparently died out and was not seen again until 1965, when it was re-introduced, probably through the escape or release of captive birds. From then on the species has gradually spread to its present distributional range that includes the Musandam Peninsula, all of the northern Batinah coast, the capital area of Muscat, occasional inland towns, and the area around Salalah in southern Oman. Its introduction to Masirah Island appears to have failed to establish a breeding population. The number of sightings of parakeets in Oman has increased from one per year in the late 1960's to over 65 per year in 2001-2002. Despite the sightings of a few large flocks, flock size has remained fairly small, increasing from a mean of 1-2 individuals in the late 1960's and early 1970's to a mean of 7-8 for most years between 1985 and 2002. To date, the parakeets have been observed in areas that are inhabited by humans and in areas of agricultural development. Thus, the spread of this species within Oman is strongly linked to human activities, probably due to the increased availability of food in such areas. This species has the potential to be a serious pest in Oman consuming cash crops, particularly dates and grains. .

Key words. Ring-necked parakeet, Oman, Middle East, invasive alien, distribution, status, GIS database.

Introduction

One of the global threats to native bird populations is the introduction and spread of exotic species. Exotic species can harm native bird populations in a variety of ways. They may, for example, compete with the native birds for nesting sites or food resources, or prey on native species' eggs or nestlings. Due to the absence of natural controls, they also may reach extremely high population densities thus amplifying their negative effects on native fauna. Until fairly recently, the introduced alien bird species in the Middle East did not appear to be common. However, numerous introduced species now seem to be breeding in this region, although the spread of these species has not been well documented (RICHARDSON 1990).

The Ring-necked Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri* (Scopoli, 1769), is native to central Africa, where it occurs naturally from Senegal and Gambia in the west to Sudan and northern Ethiopia in the east, and also in southern Asia (CRAMP 1985, FRY et al. 1988). This species has been introduced into a variety of habitats and sites worldwide, and in general has had high success as an invasive species (STRUBBE & MATTHYSEN 2009, SCHWARTZ et al. 2009). It now occurs almost worldwide, albeit with a very patchy distribution (FORSHAW 1988). In the Middle East, this species is a breeding resident in Egypt, Israel, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey (GALLAGHER & WOODCOCK 1980, LONG 1981, CRAMP 1985, FRY et al. 1988, SIBLEY & MONROE 1990, RICHARDSON 1990, SHIRIHAI 1996).