



My Drift

Title: Hawaii Wild Parrots

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There is a flock of parrots that fly over our house in Mililani twice every day – morning and evening. There are about 30 to 40 wild parrots and they make a lot of noise – mostly loud squawking. I don't know where they come from or where they are going. Maybe we will find out before the end of this article.



Me and my dog Apache walk by the Mililani Golf Course every day. There are at least four green parrots living in the trees by the parking lot next to the 18th hole. We see them on a regular basis.



At lunch, a while back with friends, the subject of the wild Hawaii parrots come up for some reason. Someone said that there are a lot of parrots in Kapiolani Park near the Honolulu Zoo.



Parrot in Kapiolani Park

So, next time you take a stroll through Kapiolani Park or go to the zoo or go around the Diamond Head area, keep an eye out for wild parrots. The best time to spot the birds is in the early morning, and late afternoon when they are most active.

Honolulu KHNL Channel 8 had an interesting TV special titled, “Tracking Oahu's Wild Parrots”. I didn’t see it but read about it on the Internet.

That was enough to spark my interest in parrots. In this article, we will learn a little bit about parrots in general and then zero in on those parrots living and flying around in Hawaii.

Parrots in General

The Parrot is a large group of birds with curved beaks with colorful plumage. There are nearly 400 known species of Parrots. Researchers divide these birds into three primary groups, or superfamilies. The three superfamilies are the True Parrots, the Cockatoos, and the New Zealand Parrots.



**True Parrots
(Scarlet Macaw)**



**The Cockatoos
(Yellow Crested)**



**New Zealand Parrots
(Rainbow Lorikeet)**

We will be talking about True Parrots in this article.

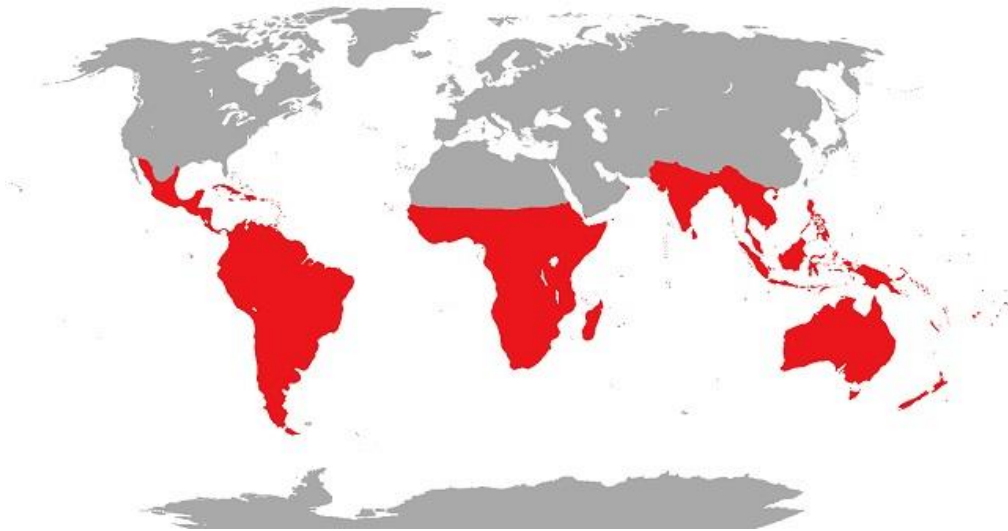
Though many species are quite similar, Parrots are an immensely diverse group of birds. They come in many different shapes, sizes, and colors. As a whole, all of them have curved bills and zygodactyl toes, meaning two facing forward and two facing backward.



Their coloration varies from species to species, and some are orange, green, blue, yellow, red, black, white, and more. They range in size from just 3 inches to over 36 inches long! The heaviest species, the kakapo, weighs up to 8 pounds.

Habitat of the Parrot

These birds live in a wide variety of habitats, but most live in tropical or subtropical regions. In the Americas, they live from Mexico into Central and South America, and the surrounding islands. They also inhabit Sub-Saharan Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the surrounding Australasian islands. Some of the different types of habitats that these birds live in include woodlands, rainforests, palm forests, savannas, grasslands, desert edges, scrubland, and more. Though some species live in more urban areas, like parks, gardens, and farmland, most inhabit undisturbed forests.



Where Parrots Live (in Red)

The greatest number of species lives in Australia and its surrounding islands, as well as South America. Different species have different ranges, and some populations overlap with those of other species.

Diet of the Parrot

While each species has a different diet, most are herbivores. This means they eat a variety of fruits, seeds, berries, nuts, buds, nectar, and pollen. These birds share a single characteristic related to foraging, their strong, curved beaks. They use their beaks to break open tough seeds and nuts. Most species specialize on a single type of food, like seeds and nuts, nectar, or even insects.

Parrot and Human Interaction

There are several different conflicts between humans and wild Parrots, all of which are quite detrimental to the birds. Perhaps the most damage human activity to these birds is habitat destruction, regardless of species or region. Habitat destruction for logging, farming, or spreading population, all result in a great many animal species losing their homes. Other detrimental human activities include pollution, climate change, hunting, feral cats, dogs, and rats, as well as capture for the pet trade.

Domestication

Parrots are wild animals, and humans have not domesticated them in any way.

Does the Parrot Make a Good Pet? Usually NO!

Even though these birds are relatively common pets, they rarely make good ones. Parrots are incredibly intelligent and long-lived, which means they require lots of time and commitment. Most true parrots live 30 to 40 years, but some large parrot species live up to 80 years or more! This makes them a generational pet, passing down from owner to owner.

Can parrots talk? Of the few birds that can imitate human speech, including mynah birds, crows, and ravens, parrots are clearly the best at it—they are vocal learners, meaning they grasp sounds by hearing and then imitating them. The best talking parrot is the African Grey with a vocabulary of up to 200 words. Next best is the Amazon Parrot with a vocabulary of up to 120 words.



African Grey Parrot

Parrots are great singers, and their songs are an ever-changing mixture of the bird's favorite noises, from gurgles and trills to whistles and squawks. Parrots are loud, destructive, and the veterinary bills are incredibly expensive. Unless you have the time to give your bird attention for hours per day, and the money to properly care for it, this bird is probably not the right choice for you.

Most all pet birds bite but when a large Parrot bites you, they can do some serious damage — even causing bone fractures and amputation of fingers! Yes, parrots like the Hyacinth Macaw and Black Palm Cockatoo have a bite force of around 12,000 pounds and can easily bite your finger off!

This leads us into why there are so many wild parrots in Hawaii and other places. People think it would be great to have a talking Parrot to keep them company, but they soon find out that Parrots are more trouble than they are worth. So, what do they do with the Parrot? Turn it loose – of course!



Parrots Return to the Wild

The Hawaiian Islands seems like a likely environment for parrots due to its lush rainforest environment. However, none of Hawaii's parrot species are native to the islands. All of Hawaii's parrots were introduced to the islands and are feral species, or wild animals that were historically domesticated. This means these parrots were pets that got loose on their own or the pet owners turned them loose. All of the primary Hawaiian Islands have substantial parrot populations. Let's take look at the parrots that live on Oahu, Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island of Hawaii.

Red-Masked Parakeet



Did you know that there are about 100 parrots living on and in Diamondhead?



The Red-Masked Parakeets are a medium sized parrot that have red feathers covering their head, while the rest of their body has green plumage. In Hawaii, these birds live on Hawaii island and Oahu. The first wild Red-Masked Parakeets appeared in the islands due to domestic birds that escaped from captivity in the late 1980s.

These are the parrots we mentioned earlier that can be found in Kapiolani Park near the Honolulu Zoo. No, they are not part of the zoo but maybe the zoo is a good place to get some easy food. Remember, parrots are very smart. Although the Red-Masked Parakeets can be found in that area during the day, they nest on and in Diamondhead Crater.

The Red-Masked Parakeet was first observed on the Big Island in 1988. These nomadic loud social birds forage along the Kona coast but roost and breed in pit craters at high elevations on the Hualālai Mountain. They now number in the hundreds and can be a pest to coffee and other farmers.



Red-Crowned Parrot



The number of Red-Crowned Parrots are declining in its native Mexican range. This species has been on the endangered list since 1994. However, feral populations are thriving in Texas and California, and to a lesser degree in Florida and Hawaii.



Red-Crowned Parrot

These parrots look a lot like the Red-Masked Parakeet and on Oahu can be found in the same general areas including Kapiolani Park, Diamondhead crater, and in the forests on Mount Tantalus above Honolulu. There, they nest in cavities in large, old trees and dine on seeds, fruits, flowers, and nectar.

The Mitred Conure Parrot



Mitred Conures favor semi-arid mountain slopes and valleys and are the second-largest species of conure. The bond between male and female pairs is monogamous and lifelong. Outside of the breeding season, they wander widely in flocks of up to 100 in search of food. They are known to be an agricultural pest, but usually feed in natural woodlands on seeds, fruits, and berries. These parakeets are popular pets, but when they escape, they endanger native species. A flock of about 50 birds lives in Waikiki, descended from one released pair.

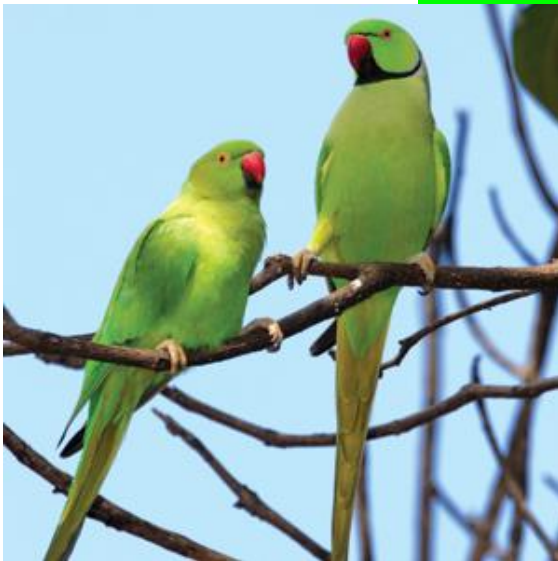
In 1986, a pair of pet conures were allowed to fly free in the community of Huelo on Maui by the resident owner of the parrots. From this founding pair, the Huelo flock increased to approximately 30 individuals by late 1995. Now there are an estimated 200 parrots living on the cliffs at Huelo Point and they have

state wildlife officials worried. State wildlife biologists call Maui's mitered conures "a ticking time bomb," an invasive non-native pest that threatens crops and native forest.

If the growing parrot flock isn't removed from the wild soon, it could become impossible to control, allowing the fruit-eating birds to accelerate the spread of Miconia, the state's most-feared weed and target of millions of dollars in eradication work. Botanists have warned authorities about the destructive nature of Miconia "It is the one plant that could destroy native Hawaiian forests."

Wildlife officials and Maui Animal Rescue and Sanctuary stepped forward with a plan to capture the birds and move them to an aviary at the group's Ha'iku property. Sanctuary officials said they wanted to prevent the state from shooting the birds. This plan has had only limited success – Remember parrots are very smart and not easy to capture.

Rose-Ringed Parakeet



Native to Central Africa's rainforests, the Rose-Ringed Parakeet was introduced to Hawaii in great numbers during the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Rose-ringed parakeets live on three of the Hawaiian Islands – Hawaii Island, Oahu, and Kauai. The largest population of Rose-Ringed Parakeets are on Kauai with about 5,000 and Oahu with about 1,500 birds. Rose-Ringed Parakeets have entirely lime-green plumage on their bodies, but their beaks are scarlet red.

Once you spot it, this lime-green bird, with its long tail feathers and red bill, is hard to miss, especially if you look in the trees on King and Beretania streets east of the state Capitol and on Tantalus and Makiki Heights Drives.



This parrot is the most destructive bird in the Hawaiian Islands. Here are a couple of examples:

Headline: The Rose-Ringed Parakeet was once a pampered pet. Now it's a plague threatening almost every crop on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai and they are multiplying fast.

Hundreds of these parrots will fly 200 feet above farmer fields looking for red fruit before diving down to eat. Farmers are reporting loses up to 30 percent of their breadfruit, longan, and lychee crops. Agriculture generates almost \$75 million in annual revenue for Kauai, making the industry the island's third-largest behind tourism and government.

There seems to be no solution to this problem, so farmers are taking matters into their own hands by killing the parrots with shotguns. As you have probably guessed, this action has resulted in legal issues with bird lovers and government officials.





Headline: Bird invasion threatens Waikele community on Oahu

They have a little different problem in Waikele – Parrot POOP!

A colony of a Rose-Ringed Parakeets that was about 100-strong four years ago has turned into almost a thousand. Every night, they roost in the palm trees lining the community's main entrance. They make a lot of noise, but this is the least of this community's worries. The toxic, acidic droppings of these birds concentrated in one area burned right through their mailboxes and decimated several palm trees. The community has spent over \$200,000 dealing with the damage these birds cause.

There are also potential health risks. The droppings are going in their backyards and there's pets in there, that stuff is dangerous, when it dries it makes a dust that can be a problem for human and pet respiratory systems.

The community Board of Directors has contacted both the Hawaii Department of Health and Department of Agriculture, who referred them to the O'ahu Invasive Species Committee. Nothing has been done to fix the problem. I guess it is time to break out the shotguns!



Green Cheeked Amazon Parrots



An Amazon parrot is a classification of several different kinds of parrots that originally hail from the Amazon. There are more than 30 different species of Amazons; 10 types are common as pets. These large-sized exotic birds can live for up to 50 years. They require consistent attention, exercise, and training, especially if you want a less noisy, gentle bird. Several species are good talkers and mimics.

Most Amazon parrots have a green body and depending on the exact species, they have distinct feather colorings on their head and forehead. The Green Cheeked Amazon Parrots found on Oahu have (surprise) green cheeks, a red crown, and a little blue color on their heads.



Green Cheeked Amazon Parrots in Flight

That flock of parrots that flies over Mililani every morning and evening are Green Cheeked Amazon Parrots. These parrots are by far the largest parrots in the Hawaiian Islands. Funny and engaging, Green-Cheeked Amazon parrots can make excellent pets for the right owners. They are intelligent, affectionate, and playful, and can learn entertaining bird tricks as well as becoming excellent talkers. These birds have a mild temperament compared to other Amazons. More than anything, they seem to at ease and happy around humans. They are, however, very noisy.



In the wild, the Green-Cheeked is an endangered species with only about 5,000 left. Its population decline is due primarily to illegal trapping for the pet trade as well as habitat destruction. This species also lives in urban areas of southern California, and feral flocks exist in Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. There are at least two flocks on Oahu with a total population of about 100 birds.

Here is some information I found on-line in an article titled, “Noisy Flock Identified as Amazon Parrots.” There is a Large flock of parrots that make a noisy racket as they fly between Pearl City and Aiea every morning and evening. They nest deep in the valley above Waimalu, between Newtown Estates and Royal Summit above Aiea.

I think these are the same parrots that fly over Mililani on their way to the isolated northwest side of Oahu to feed.

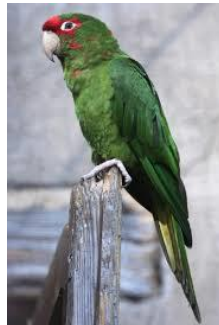
Amazon parrots, which have been traced back to a handful of pet birds that escaped from a house in Aiea more than 30 years ago. A parrot expert identified this species of Amazon parrots that flies over Oahu every day as the Green-cheeked Amazon Parrots. This species is protected under the Convention for

International Trade of Endangered Species and has never been deemed a 'pest species' by any government authority.

Some Oahu residents have requested that the government kill these parrots because they make so much noise. This is not going to happen! They may be too noisy, but they don't damage anything -- any crops or native plants. They just feed off the same forest trees and have been flying around Oahu for 30-plus years.

Hawaii Parrots Recap

- **There are a lot of wild parrots in Hawaii – about 13,000 birds.**
 - **Kauai – 5,500**
 - **Oahu – 3,000**
 - **Maui – 2,500**
 - **Hawaii Island – 2,000**
- **There are at least five species of wild parrots living in Hawaii.**
 - **Red-Masked Parakeet**
 - **Red-Crowned Parrot**
 - **Mitred Conure Parrot**
 - **Rose-Ringed Parakeet**
 - **Green Cheeked Amazon Parrots**



- **As you can see, all wild parrots in Hawaii are mostly green.**
- **They all have red colored feathers on their heads except for the Rose-Ringed Parakeet.**
- **The Rose-Ringed Parakeet does have a red beak and its overall color is more lime-green.**
- **The Rose-Ringed Parakeet has the largest population and is by far the most destructive.**
- **We learned that a large concentration of parrot poop is very toxic and can cause a lot of damage – it can make humans sick and kill small animals.**

- The most destructive thing wild parrots do, however, is eat farmer's crops, especially on Kauai.
- The largest of the wild parrots in Hawaii is the Green Cheeked Amazon which is also the best talker.
- We learned that parrots (as a rule) do not make good pets.
- I learned that those loud squawking parrots that fly over my house every day are Green Cheeked Amazon parrots. They live in the rain forest above Aiea and fly to the northwest side of the island to feed every day.

Sadly, the younger generation walks around like zombies staring down at their cell phones never looking up at the beautiful parrots here in Hawaii.

Let's end this article with a little parrot humor.

The Brothel Parrot....



*A woman went to a pet shop & immediately spotted a large, beautiful parrot.
There was a sign on the cage that said \$50.00.*

'Why so little,' she asked the pet store owner.

*The owner looked at her and said, 'Look, I should tell you first that this
bird used to live in a house of Prostitution and sometimes it says some pretty
vulgar stuff.'*

The woman thought about this, but decided she had to have the bird any way.

*She took it home and hung the bird's cage up in her living room and waited for it
to say something.*



The bird looked around the room, then at her, and said, 'New house, new madam.'

The woman was a bit shocked at the implication, but then thought 'that's really not so bad.'

When her 2 teenage daughters returned from school the bird saw and said, 'New house, new madam, new girls.'

The girls and the woman were a bit offended, but then began to laugh about the situation, considering how and where the parrot had been raised.

Moments later, the woman's husband Jerry came home from work.

The bird looked at him and said,



'Hi Jerry'

There will be no parrots for me! I will stick to dogs – they are loyal. You can't trust those damn talking parrots!

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