



Monk Parakeets: Tolerance and Territoriality

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Introduction

The Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) is a self-sustaining introduced species of parrot found in Bridgeport and surrounding coastal towns. This species is noteworthy for its elaborate nests that it often shares with other species of birds. It is also of interest because of its intelligence, beauty, and complex social life. Because they are non-native Monks are not protected by law, and power companies and others deem them a nuisance due to their noisy vocalizations and tendency to nest on buildings, generators and telephone poles¹. Monk numbers are on the decline in our area.

In previous studies, kestrels, owls, speckled teals, tree ducks, falconets, cuckoos, white monjita, cowbirds, squirrels, bats, and opossums have been observed in Monk nests.² We hypothesize, the Monks' tolerance of other species may expose them to parasites, predation and aggression. This study reports data from our observations of Monk Parakeets living on or near the UB campus.

Myiopsitta monachus

Subspecies: *monachus*, *calita*, *cotorra*, *luchsi*

Length: 12 in

Color: green body gray/ off white face, gray breast, blue flight feathers

Native range: subtropical and Temperate lowlands & mountain ranges in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil

Sightings: Bridgeport, CT. 11-12 individuals

Behavior: social, non migratory, tolerant, communal/ territorial nesters



Methods

Monk Parakeets nesting on campus were observed (ad libitum sampling) and counted each spring (2013, 2014, 2015). The presence of grackles, seagulls, crows, osprey, pigeons, sparrows, and other species were also noted.

Results

1. February 2013 a mating pair of Monks was observed adding to a large nest in the tall fir tree in the ABC parking lot. Common grackles were also observed in the tree and surrounding white pines. In March a pair of grackles, began adding to one part of the extensive nest, within two weeks the grackles usurped the nest and drove the Monks out. We observed the aggressive grackles attack the monks. In spring 2014 no monk parakeets returned to the site, but a pair of grackles were observed there.
2. 2013, 2014, 2015 house sparrows were observed residing in monk nests in Seaside Park. On April 1, 2014 an Osprey also flew over the nest. Two of the monk parakeet sentinel alarmed the colony with a cricket like sound. When seagulls were present the sentinel made low squawks. When crows passed over seagull-like squawks were heard. Parrots also squawk when leaving the nest and when approaching the nest.
3. The parakeets constantly add to their nests. On April 22, 2014 four crows landed on the top nest. They stayed atop the nest for 10 minutes. The monk parakeets squawked but did not attack the crows. The parakeets were distressed by the presence of the crows.

Bridgeport Monks Grazing 4/2014



Seaside Nests



Discussion

Monk Parakeets are tolerant of other species. Monk Parakeets are said to rival African Grey parrots in their speech leaning and capability¹. Our results suggest that the Parakeets mimic seagull vocalizations. They also have distinct vocalizations to signal the presence of predators and to communicate arrival and departure from the nest.

Monk parakeets do not migrate, they use elaborate nests for shelter year round. The nests help them survive hurricanes and harsh winters. The parakeets are tolerant toward other species living in their nests. This tolerance may lead to the demise of the Monk parakeets. Usurpation of the huge nests by other species may cause the colony to break apart and form new nests in smaller colonies threatening the rate of survival for those individuals. Sharing the nests with a colony of other social and communal birds such as the sparrows may also raise parasite numbers. In other case studies, allowing predators to nest with them may result in the loss of offspring or parents. However the ability to mimic the sounds of other species may increase survival. The sentinel makes alarm calls when predators and potential aggressive species are near the nests. Instead of using their normal shrill squawk they will sound like crickets, use low pulse tweets, or sound like other birds, such as the seagull when crows fly near. The main nesting site is on the south side of campus in Seaside Park. There are about 11-12 individuals there.

References

1. Davey, J.-M., Athan, M. S., & Davey, J. (2004). Parrots in the City: One Bird's Struggle for a Place on the Planet. Quaker Parakeet Societ
2. Wagner, N. (2012). Occupation of Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) nest cavities by House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Boletín SAO, 20, 1-6.