

Short communication

Repeated sightings of Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* in Rome (Central Italy) and its likely acclimatization

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Abstract - Alexandrine parakeet sightings have repeatedly occurred in the city of Rome, Italy in the Caffarella valley, within the 'Regional Park of Appia Antica' starting from March 2010. Several other sightings have been made since December 2014 onwards. Until now, nesting has not been proven, but it is believed that this may have already occurred.

Key words: *Psittacula eupatria*, Alexandrine parakeet, alien species, Rome, Central Italy.

Riassunto - Avvistamenti ripetuti di Parrocchetto di Alessandro a Roma, e sua possibile acclimatizzazione.

Diversi avvistamenti di Parrocchetti di Alessandro si sono verificati nella città di Roma, nella valle della Caffarella, all'interno del "Parco Regionale dell'Appia Antica" a partire dal marzo 2010. Nuovi avvistamenti sono stati fatti dal dicembre 2014 in poi. Fino a ora, la nidificazione non è stata provata, ma si ritiene che possa essere già avvenuta.

Parola chiave: *Psittacula eupatria*, Parrocchetto di Alessandro, acclimatizzazione, specie esotica, Roma.

Acclimatization and naturalization of alien species is now a very large and globally spread phenomenon (Mack *et al.*, 2000; Cassey *et al.*, 2004). Among birds, many species have become naturalized in Italy, including parrots (Psittaciformes) (Mori *et al.*, 2013).

Well represented in Rome (Central Italy) there are two species of Psittaciformes that breed regularly: the Ring-necked parakeet *Psittacula krameri* was sporadically recorded since 1978 (Zocchi & Panella, 1978; Angelici, 1986) and more regularly sighted probably until 1984 (Angelici, 1984). After the wave of intense cold of 1985-86, this definitely became a nesting species, starting in August 1987 in the garden of large metropolitan hospital 'Carlo Forlanini' (F.M. Angelici, pers. comm.) is now wi-

despread in all urban green areas where it breeds regularly (Mori *et al.*, 2013; Fraticelli, 2014). In addition, the Monk parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* since its first reported colony in Rome in 1993, and its first nesting in 1996 (Cignini *et al.*, 1996) is expanding gradually in various areas of the town (M. Maroni, pers. comm.).

The Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*, which occupies a natural range that extends from Afghanistan to Vietnam, including all of India, Sri Lanka and the Andaman Islands (Juniper & Parr, 1998), has been reported occasionally in Italy (Genoa, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Florence, Tigliole, AT,) (see AA.VV., 2015) but do not exist, based on the available data, cases of stable colonies nesting in the wild (Mori *et al.*, 2013). The first sightings were recorded in Genoa in the years 1996-98 (Borgo *et al.*, 2005) but then not have been more confirmed. There are sightings, of course, concerning some individuals that have escaped (or released intentionally) from captivity, being the Alexandrine parakeet a species very popular and sought after by breeders (Lantermann & Vriends, 1986). Probably the greatest number of sightings (n=21) that occurred in Reggio Emilia (North Eastern Italy), even up to 10 individuals recorded together, is to be linked with the International exhibition of cage and aviary birds including a large exchange market that annually, in November, is home for tens of thousands of fans from around the world, since more than 75 years (Società Ornitologica Reggiana, 2014), where often have escaped accidentally many birds from captivity.

In Rome, the first reports date back to March 21, 2010 within the valley of 'Caffarella' (Molajoli, 2010) then replicated at other times in the same year, but no more in the following years, even if, possibly, they were not followed periodically. More recently, the first sighting (a couple) was made on September 29, 2014 still within the valley of 'Caffarella', which at first were mistaken for Ring-necked parakeets. In fact, in the area of 'Caffarella', within the 'Regional Park of Appia Antica', (a large green urban-suburban area of about 3300 ha, which extends south along the ancient Roman road of the same name), stable colonies of both Ring-necked parakeet, and Monk parakeet have existed for some decades (Taffon *et al.*, 2008). The Alexandrine parakeet sightings have occurred mostly in poplar groves (Figs. 1 and 2), or even in flight, together with Ring-necked parakeets (Fig. 3). Several other sightings have been made

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Fig. 1 - Adult male *Alexandrine parakeet* (4 December 2014; photo Stefania Iovine).



Fig. 2 - Adult female *Alexandrine parakeet* (10 December 2014; photo Stefania Iovine).



Fig. 3 - Alexandrine parakeet pair mating (10th March 2015; photo Alessandro Fiorillo).

since on December 1, 2014 onwards, with a maximum of at least three individuals sure, with two adult males and one adult female recognizable. It is not excluded, however, the existence of other individuals living within the area. Individuals seem well adapted to feral life, and show a tendency to aggregate hetero specifically with *Psittacula krameri*. For now, we cannot attest to the successful reproduction of the species in the wild, but it is believed that this may have already occurred. In fact, it should be remembered, as already mentioned, that the Alexandrine parakeet might be present in the wild since long time, considering its possible confusion with the Ring-necked parakeet, species quite similar, despite Alexandrine parakeet is considerably larger (e.g., max length 58 vs. 40 cm). So it is, most likely, the first case of acclimatization of this species in Italy. Later, in the spring of 2015 and in the same area, we recorded and photographed several copulations in a pair (Fig. 3). We are conducting research in order to definitively establish that the species actually reproduces in the study area.

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