

Shannon Hong

Monk Parakeets: The So-Called Avian Intruders

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As I stroll along the serene crosswalks outside my home, it is almost impossible to overlook the clusters of intricately woven brown twigs and sticks adorning the tall telephone poles. Ever since I was in elementary school, I would always see the great masses on my way home from school. They appear on almost all of the poles, with many of the twigs and sticks poking out unorderly. Although these masses may seem like just a messy bundle of tree limbs from afar, if you squint and look hard enough, you will see that they house a particular kind of chatty and gregarious green bird: the monk parakeet.

Monk parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*), native to Argentina (All About Birds, 2023) were first introduced to the United States as a product of the rapid expansion of the exotic pet trade in the 1960s (Lund, 2015). As time went on, some of these parrots escaped their caged homes into the wilderness, where they have now adapted to the frigid winters of the North-Eastern region United States despite their tropical origins, with their population having exponentially increased since their introduction here (Avery & Lindsay, 2016). However, many people have expressed their concerns about the introduction of this species outside of their native home of Argentina. Some states and countries have even called for the mass extermination of the monk parakeet using governmental policies as they perceive the monk parakeet as an intruder and a threat to agriculture and the well-being of native wildlife species (Faber, 1973; Woodyatt, 2019). But is opposition to such policies justified? After all, monk parakeets are an invasive species that may potentially wreak havoc on native wildlife populations. Do these policies not benefit the environment and wildlife in the long run?

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Although being an invasive species, monk parakeets have not shown to be a severe threat to the new states in which they inhabit. Their populations in new places of the world, such as the United States, have become stable (Lund, 2015), and monk parakeets have not been found to compete with any native bird species for nesting spaces and food. In fact, they may actually help native bird populations, as a study found that other bird species have been found nesting inside monk parakeet nests (Briceño et al., 2019). The same study also suggested that the monk parakeet should be called “an ecosystem engineer” due to the benefit they bring to the ecosystems they are in (Briceño et al., 2019). In addition, parrots like the monk parakeet have not been shown to carry or transfer any diseases that may negatively affect humans and wildlife (Avery & Lindsay, 2016), and they mainly reside in suburban and urban areas in the United States, so they do not hinder agricultural production here (Committee To Abolish Sport Hunting, 2007). All of this evidence points toward the notion that monk parakeets may not be the great intruder and pest that we have perceived them to be, and they may actually be beneficial to our native animal species and wildlife. Of course, many invasive species have greatly impacted our ecosystems negatively, including other bird species. But the truth is, not all of these invasive species do so, and the monk parakeet is a prime example of that.

However, many people and organizations are not aware of this. The monk parakeet has been falsely labeled as a pest in many parts of the world for decades, which facilitates the murdering of these parrots by companies and organizations who view them as a threat (Committee To Abolish Sport Hunting, 2007). Hundreds of monk parakeets have been murdered with carbon dioxide (Committee To Abolish Sport Hunting, 2007) here in the North-Eastern part of the United States, which results in the birds feeling great agony before their death as carbon

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dioxide kills animals through suffocation and burns their lungs (Rollin, 2018). This is after being captured and ripped away from their nests atop telephone poles like the ones outside of my home, causing great stress to the parrots. Many others who escaped capture also died horrible deaths from hypothermia and freezing, as their nests would be destroyed by these companies and organizations, meaning that they had no shelter to return to amid the brutal winter (Committee To Abolish Sport Hunting, 2007). Their killings are justified by potential repair costs that may ensue due to the fact that they like to nest on telephone poles which may cause power outages. But even if monk parakeets did pose a threat to our society and our power here in the United States, what justifies them being murdered in such horrendous and painful ways? If they did pose a threat, these birds could easily be relocated instead of murdered brutally. And if they did have to be killed as a last resort, they could be humanely euthanized using an injection of pentobarbital, a euthanasia drug, so that they do not suffer before death (Rollin, 2018).

What makes this situation worse is that since the monk parakeet is an invasive species, it is not protected by laws like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a law in the United States that bans the killing of migratory birds without the authorization of the Department of Interior U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Burdyshaw, 2011; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2020). This further incentivizes and encourages people and organizations to kill them because there is no consequence for doing so. Without a law that protects this species, it seems like innocent birds are being killed to our society's misconceptions about them. I could never imagine how I would feel if the monk parakeets outside of my home were snatched from their nests and brutally murdered in inhumane ways. Throughout the years, their calls have always cheered me up and helped me wake up on school days. But, as time goes on, it seems like these friends outside of

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my home could be killed at any instant, and the possibility that there may be one day when I would not be able to see them again looms over me.

So what could we do to stop this? Well, one way we could prevent the murdering of monk parakeets is by spreading awareness of the benefits that they bring to our ecosystems. If people see that monk parakeets are not as bad as they perceive them to be, they will be more reluctant to murder them and allow organizations and companies to murder them as well. I personally volunteer at an environmental center called Alley Pond Environmental Center, which houses a monk parakeet named Boon. Many children and their parents come to the environmental center to see the animals that they have there. When they come, I like to talk to them about the ecological benefits of monk parakeets and encourage them to spot these birds on telephone poles and trees as I show them Boon. But, in order to effectively reduce the murder of this species, governmental action must be initiated. As humans, we have a duty to speak for and give a voice to animals that do not have one. We must show our representatives that the conservation and well-being of monk parakeets are wanted in our communities. Currently, in my state of New York, Assembly Bill A1783, which would protect the well-being of monk parakeets in New York, is currently still in the assembly committee, despite the first version of this bill being introduced over one decade ago (The New York State Senate, 2023). Although citizens like me currently support this bill, the issue of the inhumane murder of monk parakeets is not known enough currently to show governmental officials that their citizens want bills like this to be passed. This is why I plan to organize speeches in the environment center as well as in my school in an effort to further spread awareness of this issue regarding monk parakeets. Without the

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protection of the law, monk parakeets will be continued to be falsely perceived as an intruder and pests in our society and be murdered.

In conclusion, to make a change to society's image of monk parakeets, we must dispel our current misconceptions surrounding their impact on ecosystems and wildlife. While monk parakeets are an invasive species, these birds have not posed severe threats to their newly inhabited regions, and evidence suggests they may even benefit native species. Yet, public awareness remains limited, which leads to the brutal and inhumane murder of individuals from this species and a lack of legal protection for these birds. Spreading awareness through educational initiatives and advocating for protective legislation is crucial in fostering a more informed and compassionate approach toward monk parakeets. By working together, we can ensure the conservation and well-being of these magnificent creatures and that the amount of suffering that they may face will be reduced.

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