



ParrotNet



Invasive Parakeets in Europe: Problems & Solutions

This policy brief is produced by EU COST Action 'ParrotNet', which brought together researchers, conservationists and wildlife managers in order to address invasions of parakeets. To assist invasive species management, this policy brief summarizes research findings on where parakeets occur in Europe, their impacts on agriculture and nature, and the possibilities and challenges for minimizing parakeet damage.

Where are the parakeets now?

- Tens of thousands of invasive parakeets live in the EU, with the largest populations found in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece.
- Ring-necked and monk parakeets are by far the most common parakeet invaders, but several other parakeet species have established as well.
- In total, up to 200 different parakeet populations can be found across the EU, and many of them are growing fast, their numbers doubling every few years.

Why should I worry about invasive parakeets?

- Parakeets were released in cities, but are spreading into neighboring agricultural areas, especially across the Mediterranean.
- Parakeets can damage crops. For example, around Barcelona, monk parakeets have caused a 30% reduction in corn, plum and pear harvests.
- Parakeets compete with birds and bats for nesting or roosting cavities. They have also been observed chasing other birds away from backyard bird feeders.
- Parakeet impacts can locally be severe. For example, in Seville, ring-necked parakeets are displacing a rare and vulnerable bat species.
- Parakeet invasions are on the rise. Apart from the widespread ring-necked and monk parakeet, at least eight other species are gaining footholds across Europe.

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Key messages and policy recommendations

- Invasive alien species present an urgent economic, environmental and societal problem, causing €12.5 billion of damage to the EU's economy every year
- Invasive parakeets damage agriculture and nature. The extent of the impact varies across regions and habitats, but can be locally severe.
- Despite their negative impacts, charismatic invaders such as parakeets can be popular with the public.
- To minimize impacts of invasive parakeets, preventing the colonization of currently uninvaded areas is paramount.
- To avoid further introductions, alien parakeets should be designated as 'invasive species of local and regional concern' (as per Article 11 and 12 of EU Regulation No 1143/2014).
- Legal and financial constraints to the rapid removal of newly emerging parakeet populations should be lifted.
- Complete removal of existing, large urban ring-necked and monk parakeet populations likely is not feasible anymore.
- Looking to the future, removing populations of species still in the early stages of their invasion will avoid future parakeet problems.

Main image: Alexandrine parakeet; bottom left to right: Monk parakeet, Ring-necked parakeet, Nanday parakeet



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How can I manage these invasive parakeets?

- **It depends.** Early detection and a rapid management response are key. In line with biosecurity policies mandated by the UN's Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), **shooting of parakeets has been successfully used to remove newly emerging parakeet populations.**
- In densely populated urban areas, **trapping of parakeets using custom-built cages is an alternative.** Although less cost-effective, trapping is more acceptable to the public.
- Complete removal of existing, large urban parakeet populations likely is not feasible anymore.
- More research is needed to find best practices for minimizing agriculture damage, but a combination of shooting, trapping and scaring will likely be needed.

Policy recommendations

Preventing the problem of invading parakeets in the first place is **far cheaper and easier** than managing a problem once it has begun. Therefore, in order to **prevent invasions**, it is recommended that:

- To enhance regional cooperation, invaded EU countries should **designate all alien parakeets as 'invasive species of local and regional concern'** (as per Article 11 and 12 of EU REGULATION No 1143/2014).

- Stricter laws regulating the possession, transportation and commercial trafficking of invasive parakeets, such as the Spanish 'Real Decreto 630/2013', should be introduced and enforced across the EU.
- As pet parakeets are currently frequently released into the wild, systems that **enable owners to relinquish unwanted exotic pets** should be established and promoted.
- Efforts should be made to **increase public awareness** of the potential harms caused by invasive parakeets, and **public participation in preventing their introduction** should be encouraged.

Eradicating already abundant and well-established invaders is frequently very costly or even impossible.

- There is a **need for applied research into the most cost-effective methods** to limit further parakeet geographic spread, to reduce population sizes, or to locally mitigate any adverse effects posed by large, abundant parakeet populations.
- Early assessments of **feasibility of proposed management strategies** are needed to predict how likely stakeholders are to accept interventions. Enhanced public engagement and open and responsive communication strategies are needed to **minimize social conflicts** in invasive parakeet management.

Managing existing populations

- To stop parakeet invasions, **shooting is most cost-effective.** It has successfully been used to eliminate parakeet populations, such as for example, the ring-necked parakeet populations in the Seychelles.
- Purpose-built parakeet traps may be less cost-effective than shooting, but are **more socially acceptable** in areas where shooting inspires public concern.
- Encouraging the general public **not to feed parakeets and to use backyard bird feeders that cannot be accessed by parakeets** will help reducing parakeet population sizes in urban areas.
- **Agricultural damage** can be minimized by shooting, trapping and scaring away birds. Yet, **more applied research is needed** for assessing the most cost-effective pest management practices.
- **Optimal management options** for large, urban parakeet populations (including eradication, control, containment, or no action at all) are **dependent on the local context.** The presence of rare, native cavity-nesting species or the risk of damage to crops may justify stronger management actions.

Where can I find more information on Europe's parakeets?

ParrotNet's European Monitoring Centre provides distribution maps showing where parakeets occur across Europe, how they have spread throughout the years and how abundant they have become.

Visit the centre at www.kent.ac.uk/parrotnet/map.html

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