



20 March 2007

The Honorable Senator B. Smith
Senator Bob Smith, Chairman
Senate Environmental Committee
216 Stelton Road, Suite E-5, Piscataway, NJ 08854
732-752-0770

Dear Senator Smith,

I am writing to request your support of Bill #S1768, which asks the Senate Environmental Committee to remove Monk Parakeets from the list of "potentially dangerous species".

My protest of the classification of these creatures as "potentially dangerous" arises from my general ecological knowledge (I am a professional ecologist) and my detailed knowledge of invasive species, as well as from balanced ethical considerations.

In the 1970's, when feral Monk populations became apparent in the United States, lawmakers became concerned that these populations would pose an agricultural threat, and a threat to other birds, so the parrots were placed on the list of "potentially dangerous species" for the purpose of monitoring their effects on crops and indigenous bird species. 30 years later, we now know that the wild Monks are neither agricultural pests nor menaces to indigenous wildlife populations.

Although the Monk Parakeet may be classified as an invasive species in warmer climates like Florida, this classification cannot be extrapolated at this time to the Monk parakeets of New England or northern climates in general. Populations in northern geographic regions like New England and Chicago suffer from high annual winter mortality (death) rates due to severe winter weather. Thus, while their numbers may increase significantly during the breeding season, they usually decline to a more or less stable baseline population number due to extreme winter mortality.

Population studies in Chicago report typical yearly figures that illustrate the point: In April 1992, Hyman and Pruett-Jones counted 64 birds and a total of 26 nests on power poles and one antenna tower in Hyde Park, a suburb west of Chicago. After the nestlings fledged in July, they counted a total of 143 birds, but after the winter of 1992-3, they counted only 95 birds in the same area (Hyman and Pruett-Jones 1995). The following websites provides more information on this species <http://invasions.bio.utk.edu/invaders/monk.html> and <http://www.brooklynparrots.com>.

Given this information, Monk Parakeets cannot be unambiguously classified as an invasive species in the northern reaches of their distribution at this time. Enough interest in these birds exists to allow detailed monitoring that would prevent any transition to 'invasiveness'. In the meantime, curtailing human activities like providing too much habitat and bird food for exotic species would be much more effective than removing birds for a reason that has not been scientifically validated. That the birds raise peoples' awareness, interest people in nature, increase local species diversity (we have caused the extinction of 2 parrots in the US, after all) and likely have little effect on native species, all add to the support for their cautious protection.

I ask that you please re-examine the classification of the Monk Parakeets in light of what is now known about them 30 years after they were placed on the list of "potentially dangerous species".

Thank you very much for your consideration, and I hope you will support Bill #S1768.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

David C. Morimoto, PhD
Program Director, Natural Science and Mathematics
Lesley University