

# Natural History Snippets

Brief reports by members based on their observations of nature

## PARROTS OR PARAKEETS?

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Parrots have a curved beak and zygodactyl feet (two toes pointing forwards and two behind), while most other birds may not have these features. Generally, the larger birds are known as parrots, while smaller birds are referred to as parakeets. Parakeets have long,

tapered tails while parrots have short, square-ended tails [1] This generalization does not, however, hold true in Sri Lanka, since our smallest member of the Psittaculidae—or Old World Parrots—is called a Parrot and the bigger ones are named Parakeets.

For convenience, the words parrot and parakeet will be used interchangeably in this article.



Fig. 2

to large flocks. It is immediately distinguished by its large size and the characteristic maroon shoulder-patch which both sexes bear on the front top edges of their folded wings. The male (Fig. 1) has a pink and sky-blue neck stripe and a black chin stripe which are more prominent during the breeding season. The female (Fig. 2) lacks the neck banding and chin stripe. Their beaks are heavy, much larger and generally redder and brighter looking than in other parrots.

## THE ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET

*Psittacula eupatria*

The Alexandrine Parakeet is an uncommon breeding resident seen in the lowlands and lower hills of Sri Lanka. It is locally more common in some areas and is not found in the hill country. Out of the around 115 species of parakeets worldwide, we have 5 species that are breeding residents; there being no migrant parrots or parakeets in Sri Lanka. Parrots are highly social birds and tend to live in small to large flocks, often moving and feeding together and generally roosting together on trees with dense, green foliage. The dense foliage serves as camouflage while they rest during the night.

The Alexandrine Parakeet is usually seen in pairs and sometimes in small



Fig. 1

Images and text by Sri Srikumar

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Parrots are diurnal. They generally feed on seeds and fruits and will also partake of bread and cooked rice as we observe in our home gardens. Both parents engage in feeding their young (Fig. 3).

They nest in holes in trees and are often seen on coconut and palmyrah trees, the tall, slender trees offering them greater safety from predators.



The Alexandrine Parakeets are a treat to watch when they feed on cashew; they peel away the shell of the young cashew nut and then feed on the inner kernel which they hold in one foot while they feed. After the meal they are seen rubbing their beaks on tree branches to rid themselves of the sticky remnants of the cashew shells.



They have a distinctive call which is harsher and louder than those of the Rose Ringed Parakeet.



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## THE SRI LANKA PARAKEETS

### **The Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot aka Lorikeet** *Loriculus beryllinus*

The only endemic, the smallest (14 cms), fairly common in the foothills and mid hills. They are the only ones with a short tail. The male has a crimson crown, that of the female being duller. They have orange bills.



### The Rose Ringed Parakeet

*Psittacula kramera*

The most commonly seen all over the Island. The male (right) has a black chin stripe and pink collar which are absent in the female (left). They have a red upper mandible and a black lower mandible.



### The Plum Headed Parakeet

*Psittacula cyanocephala*

An uncommon breeding resident, seen in the foothills in the low country and in the mid-hills. The male (right) has a plum-red head, the female (female) a grey one.



### Layards Parakeet

*Psittacula calthropae*

An uncommon breeding resident, seen in the foothills in the low country and in the mid-hills, a bit smaller than the Rose Ringed Parakeet. The male has an upper red mandible and a black lower one, the female has black mandibles.



### The Alexandrine Parakeet

*Psittacula eupatria*

The largest (53 cms), spread all over the Island, though uncommon. Female (left), male (right).



#### REFERENCES

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjZSBKQWdfI>  
And other internet sources

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