

ENVIRONMENT



THE green parrot seen around TT.

Charismatic green parrot

By KRIS SOOKDEO

THERE are probably very few people living in Trinidad and Tobago who are not familiar with parrots.

These charismatic birds have enjoyed a long history of close contact with people on the island but there is a lot more to know about our parrots than many people realise. Perhaps the most familiar native parrot is the common green parrot which is more formally known as the orange-winged parrot (*Amazona amazonica*). True to its name, this parrot has lovely orange feathers on its wing, which are just barely visible when the bird is perched, along with orange tail feathers. Other than that, the general colour is green except for a yellow cheek patch and forehead.

The orange-winged parrot is found almost everywhere in TT from forests to swamps to savannahs. They are even found around Port-of-Spain and are a regular sight in the trees around the Queen's Park Savannah, while an evening walk up Lady Chancellor Road is guaranteed to produce dozens of screeching birds as they head to their roosting sites. Outside of TT, they are found throughout much of South America.

Their widespread success is partly due to their diet which includes a wide range of vegetable matter including fruit, tree nuts, seeds and flower blossoms.

The orange-winged parrot, like many other species of parrot, nest in holes in trees and are particularly fond of dead palm trees for this purpose. They probably pair for life and it is a common sight in the morning and evening to see a pair of birds flying together to and from their feeding ground. In the evening these birds roost communally in very large flocks and the sound that is generated can be unbelievably loud.

The orange-winged parrot is common enough that, unfortunately, they can sometimes cause damage to agricultural plantations and because of this they are currently classified as vermin. This means that it is legal to exterminate these parrots once found on private land. This does not apply to birds found on State land.

Despite their relative abundance, for many North American and European visitors to our islands, the sight of our tropical green parrots is a memorable highlight of their trip, given that these colourful birds are not found in temperate climates in the wild.

Indeed, these parrots are often captured for the pet trade. Parrots are usually captured when young and are still at the nest, as adult parrots are less manageable. Unfortunately, this practice of taking baby birds often results in the death of the bird as they are very vulnerable to illness and malnutrition at this stage. Oftentimes, baby parrots are fed a mixture of milk and bread, however, birds are not capable of processing dairy and this could cause diarrhoea, dehydration



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Trincity Mall Easter Extravaganza

Fri. 27th March

Face Painting, Crazy Colour Hair & Glitter tattoos • 2pm - 6pm
(Payless Atrium)

Sat. 28th March

Tv6 - 'Winner Takes All' Gaming Competition • 11am - 6pm
(Radio Shack Atrium)
Kool Kids Activity Corner • 12pm (Micles Atrium)

Wed. 1st April

Shop n Win Promotion • 2pm (Micles Atrium)
Face Painting • 2pm (Food Court, Sportsworld)
Nestle Easter Village • 2pm (Radio Shack Atrium)
Magic & Puppet Show, Balloon Sculptures & Cartoon Characters • 3pm (Payless Atrium)

Thur. 2nd April

Kool Kids & Chubby Aqua Blast • 12pm (Payless Atrium)
Nestle Easter Village • 2pm (Radio Shack Atrium)
Lasco Food Drink, Duncan Hines & Tiffany Chocolates • 2pm (Micles Atrium)
Crazy Colour Hair & Glitter tattoos • 2pm (Food Court, Sportsworld)

Sat. 4th April

The Eastern Horticultural Club • 12pm (Micles Atrium)
Easter Kids Corner • 1pm (Radio Shack Atrium)
Easter Bunnies & Friends with lots of giveaways • 2pm
Crazy Colour Hair & Glitter tattoos • 2pm (Food Court, Sportsworld)



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Some bird catchers will cut down trees in which parrots have made their nests which can result in the bird being crushed or injured from the fall. Perhaps the more serious problem with this destructive habit is that it destroys the nest site which can never be used again. A suitable nest hole is a scarce resource and the destruction of even a few nest holes is likely to have a serious impact on orange-winged parrot populations and all other bird species that would have used the same hole, including other parrots, toucans and woodpeckers.

Parrots are prized in the pet trade because of their charismatic nature and the close bond they can develop with their owners. While parrots are relatively intelligent animals, it is incorrectly believed by many that they are capable of talking. Parrots mostly make a series of screeches and whistles but they are mimics and will attempt to reproduce sounds that they hear often. In this way, domesticated parrots may repeat phrases and words that they hear in the home but do not actually form sentences for the purpose of communication. They may also mimic other sounds in their environment, including car alarms and cellphone ringtones!

The orange-winged parrot is one of just a handful of members of the parrot and macaw family which inhabit Trinidad & Tobago, some of which will be dealt with in future articles. So the next time you see a noisy pair of parrots flying overhead or feed your pet parrot at home, keep in mind just how lucky we are to share the country with these wonderful birds. Let us minimize the damage we do to their homes and help support a healthy parrot population!

For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@tffnc.org or visit our website at www.tffnc.org. The Club's next monthly meeting will be held on 9 April 2015 at St. Mary's College, POS. Next month's lecture: "Webs and what they are for" by Dr. Jo-Anne Sewlal, UWI.



Green parrots feed on a variety of food items including these immortelle flowers



A pair of green parrots at their nest site.