

The Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* as a naturalised breeding species in Italy: a proposal of integration to the national official checklist

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Abstract - This short report proposes to integrate the recent checklist of the bird species of Italy with an alien species breeding in Italy since 2011, the Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*. Two reproductive populations are currently present, one in Reggio Emilia with about 20 individuals and the other one in Rome, with 3-4 birds. Records of single free-ranging individuals of this species of Indian origin occurred in other locations of northern-central Italy, in one case recorded for several consecutive years and then disappeared. If this report will be accepted by the COI, the Italian checklist reaches a total of 20 naturalised and not yet naturalised alien birds, i.e. the 3.6% of listed species.

Keywords: *Psittacula eupatria*, Alexandrine parakeet, breeding species, alien species

Baccetti et al. (2021) have recently updated the checklist of bird species of Italy, with records collected between 1800 and 2019, also detailing subspecies, with 551 species and 702 taxonomic units (i.e. including subspecies) occurring in Italy.

As to Psittaciformes (i.e. parrots), Baccetti et al. (2021) only listed the Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* and the Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* in the Italian checklist, both of them with self-sustaining breeding populations resulting from intentional or unintentional releases

by humans. Those species represent the most widespread free-ranging parrots in Italy and Europe (Pârâu et al. 2016; Postigo et al. 2019), but also other not yet naturalised parrot species have occasionally bred in the wild in Italy (the Blue-crowned Conure *Thectocercus acuticaudatus*, the Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*, the Fischer's Lovebird *Agapornis fischeri* and the Turquoise-fronted amazon *Amazona aestiva*: e.g. Biondi et al. 2005; Mori et al. 2013, 2017; Baccetti et al. 2014; Laurenti & Paci 2015).

The Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* is instead a regular breeder in Italy since 2009 and we would like to propose it to be added to the Italian checklist. Two reproductive nuclei of this species are present in Italy, the largest one in Reggio Emilia since 2011, counting about 20 individuals in 2020 (Viviano & Mori 2021) and the smallest one in Rome, with 3-4 individuals (Angelici & Fiorillo 2015; Ancillotto et al. 2016). Records of single free-ranging individuals occurred in other localities in northern (Mori et al. 2013) and central Italy, in one case being observed for several consecutive years (Genoa, 1994-1998), but with no evidence of reproduction (Borgo et al. 2005). Therefore, the Alexandrine Parakeet should be integrated in the Italian checklist of bird species as a taxon with at least one established self-sustaining population resulting from introduction by man (AERC category: C), recorded in Italy throughout the last 10 years (general status code: 1) and as a regular breeder (breeding status code: 1).

Our proposal of update would bring the number of naturalised alien birds currently occurring in Italy to 20 (cf. also Baccetti et al. 2014), also including the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* which was not included by Baccetti et al. (2021) as pending a formal decision by the Italian Ornithological Commission (COI). This number represents 3.6% of the total number of bird species in Italy, and 6.3% of the number of breeding ones (considering that there is no evidence of breeding for two alien bird species recorded in Italy, the Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* and the Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*: Baccetti et al. 2021). Alien species, including also not-yet naturalised ones, deserve monitoring as they represent a growing threat to the native biodiversity and environment. For instance, together with the Mandarin Duck and the Ruddy Duck, the presence of the Blue-crowned Conure *Thectocercus acuticaudatus* in Villa Pamphili and La Caffarella Park in Rome requires further attention, given their constant presence since 2017 (although the only breeding event by this species in Italy dates back to 2011, in Maccarese: Mori et al. 2013).

Despite representing a lower proportion with respect to alien mammals (16.8% of the total species number: Loy et al. 2019), and alien freshwater fish species (57.3% of the total species number: Lorenzoni et al. 2019), occurrence and breeding status of alien bird populations need to be constantly monitored and updated to prevent impact on native biodiversity and ecosystems.

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