

## PARROTS — FAMILY PSITTACIDAE

### Red-crowned Parrot *Amazona viridigenalis*

The Red-crowned is by far the most numerous parrot naturalized in California and the only one considered thoroughly established by the California Bird Records Committee. The population in the Los Angeles region is well over 1500 (K. L. Garrett and K. T. Mabb); that in San Diego County, at least several hundred. The species has a rather small natural range confined to northeastern Mexico, where its numbers have been seriously depleted by both deforestation and trapping for the cage-bird trade.

**Breeding distribution:** The Red-crowned Parrot has two centers in San Diego County, Ocean Beach/Point Loma and El Cajon. The Point Loma population is the larger, with up to about 360 roosting together near Point Loma High School (R8) 31 January 1998 (J. A. Martin). The birds have been nesting in this area at least since 1997 (injured fledgling picked up in Ocean Beach, R7, 3 July, B. Kenk). In El Cajon (Q13), the parrots concentrate between First Street on the west, Second Street

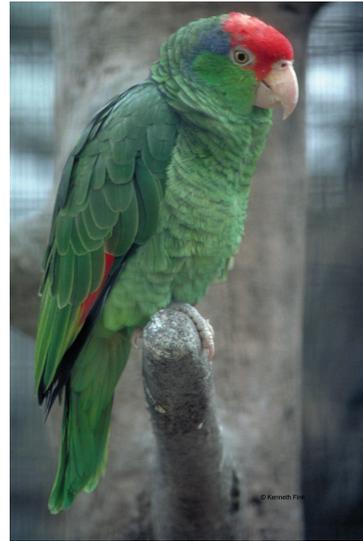
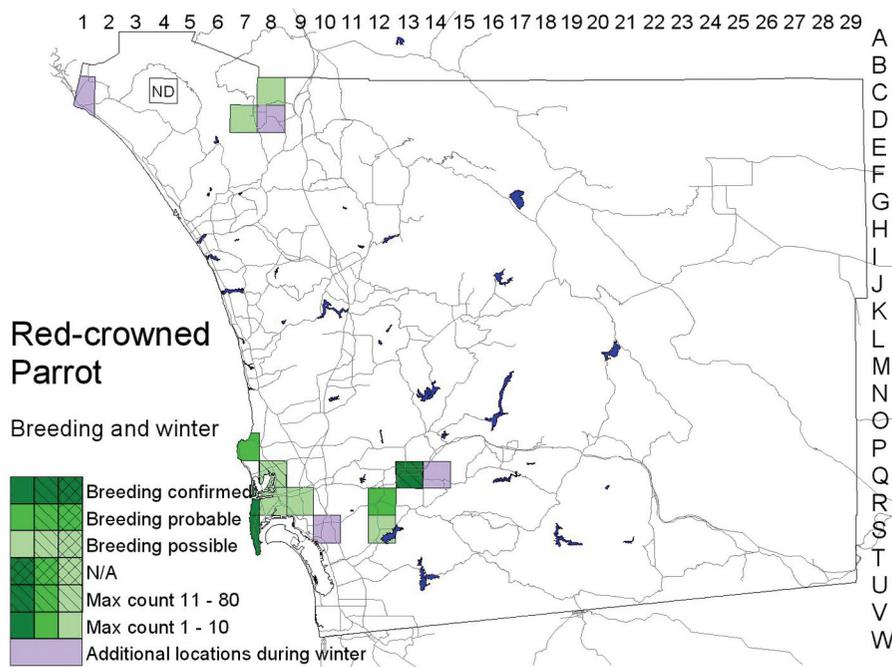


Photo by Kenneth W. Fink

on the east, Broadway on the north, and Interstate 8 on the south. Our highest count there was 80, including fledglings being fed by adults, 17 September 1997 (D. C. Seals). From these centers the parrots scatter widely over San Diego and probably nest in other places, such as La



Jolla (P7; population noted 17 April 1999; six, including a juvenile, on 11 July 1999, M. G. Mathos). Our only sightings outside of metropolitan San Diego were one of two birds at San Onofre (C1; M. Lesinsky) and three of single birds around Fallbrook (C8/D7/D8; K. L. Weaver, M. Freda). As yet the Red-crowned Parrot is breeding only in densely developed residential areas and not invading rural areas or orchards. Apparently the Red-crowned Parrot's establishment in San Diego was independent of that in Los Angeles, and population exchange between the two cities is little or none. The Los Angeles population extends southeast to Tustin in central Orange County.

**Nesting:** In its native range, the Red-crowned Parrot nests in cavities in a variety of trees, the cavities being the result of natural decomposition or woodpecker excavation (Enkerlin-Hoeflich and Hogan 1997). In the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles County, the birds nest mainly in silver maple trees; pruning of the trees exposes heartwood that rots out and leaves a cavity (Mabb 1997). Data from San Diego County are few but suggest that palms are the principal nest site here (probable nest in a palm in Ocean Beach, V. P. Johnson; apparent nest holes in the sawed-off leaf bases of Canary Island date palms, J. A. Martin; nestling found under a palm at Point Loma, J. Colclough).

Data on the species' nesting schedule are likewise

few. Young fallen prematurely out of nests have been found in April and on 25 June; fledglings still dependent on their parents have been seen from 3 July to 17 September.

**Migration:** Since 1998 J. A. Martin has found the Red-crowned Parrot conspicuous in Ocean Beach from early March to about late August and only sporadic from August to February. In winter perhaps the entire Ocean Beach population clumps into a single flock, as suggested by the numbers at Point Loma High School 31 January 1998. Around El Cajon the birds move considerably as well, taking advantage of the pecan and walnut trees planted commonly in that area (D. C. Seals).

**Winter:** In contrast to the situation at Ocean Beach, at El Cajon the Red-crowned Parrot remains in winter in the same numbers as in spring and summer, with up to 60 on 12 February 2001 (J. R. Barth).

**Conservation:** The cage-bird trade has been the principal factor driving down the numbers of the Red-crowned Parrot in its natural range. Poachers taking parrot chicks often cut down nest trees, and most of the range has been converted to cattle pasture (Enkerlin-Hoeflich and Hogan 1997). The decrease in Mexico combined with establishment and increase in southern California means that the latter area may now account for a significant fraction of the species' entire population. The Los Angeles population is reproducing vigorously (K. T. Mabb), but whether the San Diego population is self sustaining is uncertain. How much input continues as a result of escape and release from pet owners and smugglers is unknown.

**Taxonomy:** The Red-crowned Parrot is closely related to the Lilac-crowned Parrot, the counterpart of the Red-crowned in western Mexico. A few instances of probable hybridization are known in Los Angeles County (Mabb 1997). In San Diego County an apparent hybrid was picked up, injured by gunshot, in Ocean Beach 22 May 1999 (B. Kenk).