

Santa Ana High School Article of the Week #18

Red-crowned parrots find city living to their liking

Instructions: READ and ANNOTATE using CLOSE reading strategies.

Step 1: Skim the article using these symbols as you read:

(+) agree, (-) disagree, (*) important, (!) surprising, (?) wondering

Step 2: Number the paragraphs. **Read** the article **carefully** and **make notes in the margin**.

Notes should include:

- Comments that show that you **understand** the article. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important sections may serve this purpose.)
- Questions you have that show what you are **wondering** about as you read.
- Notes that differentiate between **fact** and **opinion**.
- Observations about how the **writer's strategies** (organization, word choice, perspective, support) and choices affect the article.

Step 3: A reread noting anything you may have missed during the first read.

Student _____ Class Period _____

Red-crowned parrots find city living to their liking

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — Researchers are beginning to study Mexico's red-crowned parrot, a species that is living in U.S. cities, mostly after escaping from the pet trade. The American bird population may now be as large as the population in Mexico. The research comes in the middle of a debate over whether some of the birds flew across the border into Texas. If they did, some wildlife conservationists say the parrots should be listed under the Endangered Species Act. This law protects threatened animals.

City Parrots Thrive While Others Are Endangered

The parrots that have made themselves at home in U.S. cities are interesting to scientists because of their intelligence, resourcefulness and ability to adapt. Some experts believe people living in cities might be able to help save certain species from disappearing. Parrots are thriving today in cities from Los Angeles, California, to Brownsville, Texas. Meanwhile, in the rest of the world, one-third of all parrot species are at risk of disappearing because of deforestation and the pet trade. Most of the parrots in U.S. cities are believed to have escaped from people trying to smuggle them in illegally as pets during the last half-century. During this time, tens of thousands of parrots were brought into the United States from Latin America. Scientists only now are starting to study them.

Parrots, People Co-Existing

After doing most of his research outside the United States, Donald Brightsmith is now studying parrots in cities in South Texas.

"Parrots living in cities are of great interest to me," the Texas A&M University biologist said. "I see these as kind of future insurance policies."

*Notes on my thoughts,
reactions and questions as I
read:*

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Brightsmith has received a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to get an official count on the state's red-crowned parrot population. The count will help him to determine whether threats against the parrots are increasing. The loud, screeching birds have been shot at by angry homeowners and their young stolen from nests. In San Diego, a reward is being offered for information about the six parrots found shot this year. The research could help influence ways to maintain the population that prefers the cities and suburbs.

"It's more of a city planning, landscape, ecology issue and not so much how do we protect an area of unspoiled nature," Brightsmith said. He said he would like to team up with scientists in California.

Counting Fewer Birds

Researchers want to someday study the genetics of the parrots. They want to determine whether there are still pure red-crowned parrots. The parrots could have bred with other birds over the years. If there are still pure red-crowned parrots though, these birds could help to replace flocks in their native land.

"We could have a free backup stock in the U.S.," Brightsmith said.

In Mexico, biologists are working on getting an updated count. The last study in 1994 estimated the population at 3,000 to 6,500 birds, declining from more than 100,000 in the 1950s because of deforestation and the pet trade.

"We suspect the population in South Texas could rival the number found in the wild in Mexico," said biologist Karl Berg. He received a grant to study the red-crowned parrot in Brownsville, Texas. Biologists estimate the population at close to 1,000 birds in Texas and more than 2,500 in California.

Determining What Protection Is Best

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department listed the red-crowned parrot as a native species in 2011. It is thought the parrots flew north across the border as lowland areas in Mexico were cleared in the 1980s for ranching and agriculture. However, scientists who study birds debate that theory. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that same year announced that the red-crowned parrot deserved federal protection because of deforestation and poaching for the pet trade. It could still get the protection, but the agency has not yet decided. Pet traders fear that federal protection could stop them from breeding the birds and moving them across state lines. Conservationists, who fight to protect animals, are not sure whether any of the parrots are native to Texas. They believe native species should receive federal protection first. "It seems odd to me," said Kimball Garrett, a parrot expert at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. She does not believe there is "enough evidence" to show that the birds left their native habitat and flew to America on their own.

Parrot Rescue

Brooke Durham said the birds need more protection. Durham runs a parrot rescue center called SoCal Parrot in the town of Jamul, which is in California. She treats up to 100 birds a year.

Recently at her sprawling home-turned-sanctuary, dozens of birds were being nursed for broken bones and pellet gun wounds. Most were red-crowned parrots. Because the birds are not native to California, animal cruelty laws are about the only protection for them. "People complain about the noise, but they're just not educated about the birds," she said. "They don't realize these birds are endangered."

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Comprehension questions – answers may be in phrases.

1. *What is the MOST important reason why Donald Brightsmith wants to study parrots living in cities?*
2. *What makes parrots that adapt to city life interesting to researchers?*
3. *What does “Endangered” mean in this article?*

Answer each question in one or more complete sentences.

4. *Describe two theories about how the parrots reached America.*
5. *Why does Brooke Durham believe the birds need more protection?*

6. *Describe the author’s tone in this article. What was the author’s purpose in writing this article? Is it more of an article or a summary? Defend your answer with examples from the text.*