

**Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times
by Sanjay Sondhi**

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MIYAN MITTHOO

A few weeks ago, along with a friend, we decided to go bird watching to Mussoorie. Even as we started our drive to Mussoorie, less than a kilometer from our home, we came across a large mixed flock of parakeets, feeding at a bird feeder, put out by one of the residents. The parakeet flock consisted of three species - Rose-ringed, Slaty-headed and Alexandrine Parakeets. Within a short while, however, the heavier built Alexandrine Parakeets, the “*goonda*” of the parakeets, had muscled its way to the bird feeder and chased all the other parakeet species away!

We stopped the car to observe the “*Miyan Mitthoos*” (called so because of their can easily be trained to say “*Miyan Mitthoo*” in captivity) at work. At least half a dozen Alexandrine Parakeets clustered around the bird feeder to eat. They jostled each other on the wall, in an attempt to get at the grain laid out for them. Every now and then, a couple of parakeets would get into a fight, and with loud screeches, quarrel over who had the right to feed first. And as these two quarreled, others took their place at the bird feeder. A sure case of “*Lado ge, to kucch bhi nahi milega!*”.



Each time a vehicle sped by, or a person walked close to the parakeets, they would fly away to a nearby Semal tree, and wait till the coast was clear. In less than a minute, the birds would be back at the feeder. And the screeches of excitement, feeding frenzy, and friendly fights would resume in earnest!

The Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) is the largest of all parakeets in India. It is easily identified by its large size, large red beak and a red shoulder patch. Males have a bright red collar, outlined with black, that female Alexandrine Parakeets lack. For the experienced bird watcher, its call-note - a loud, nasal “*kraaayooou*” is a giveaway, too.

The Alexandrine Parakeet is supposedly named after Alexander the Great. This parakeet's natural range extends from Afghanistan east to Pakistan and India and further east through to Thailand and Vietnam. Alexander shipped many parakeets to European and Mediterranean countries for keeping as a pet. Hence, the parakeet's range has spread and it is naturalized in many other countries.

Unfortunately for the Alexandrine Parakeet, it is a good mimic, and hence it is extensively captured, bred and traded. This has resulted in a decline in its population through most of its range. Isn't it a shame to see its numbers decline?

Making a difference: Can you do your bit? Yes, of course, you can. Desist from keeping wild birds and animals as pets. When I was young, I did so too, not knowing that I was an offender, too. Now, being wiser, I do not keep any wild animals as pets, though dogs and cats, being domesticated, are fine.

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

Photograph caption: Alexandrine Parakeet

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