

Groups continue efforts to save Yacolt parakeets

Despite the efforts of two bird rescue organizations, only two poles for parakeet nests have been constructed in Yacolt. More such poles are in the planning stages.

Christopher Driggins of N.W. Bird Rescue and Adoption Orphanage said last week that he obtained permits Feb. 14 from town officials to erect nine poles and platforms, delayed due to a paperwork mix-up. While he had hoped to have as many as 18 poles and nesting platforms in place by now, none has yet been erected so far.

Nick Peck of the Yacolt Parrot Preservation Association said two poles are in place and his group has permits for five more.

The Association announced an agreement Feb. 15 with officials of the town of Yacolt and Clark Public Utilities that could lead to the long-term preservation of wild parakeets in the community.

The issue arose in November when Clark Public Utilities removed parakeet nests from power poles and transformers, stating that the nests posed a safety and reliability hazard for



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the power system.

Since then the utility has continued to remove nests or partial nests as they have been reconstructed by birds on utility poles.

Utility spokesman Mick Shutt said no further efforts have been taken to kill the birds since November other than the continuing removal of nests.

Pursuant to the new agreement with the Association, Clark Public Utilities will acquire plastic orange sleeves and install them on 15 utility poles in Yacolt to discourage nesting. This will be done at the utility's expense.

The utility also agreed to turn over twig nesting materials removed from poles to the

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Parakeets

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Association, and to not disturb inhabited nests.

How many parakeets remain on the loose in Yacolt remains uncertain.

Driggins said the parakeet population in Yacolt has declined from about 20 in November to 5 or 6 today.

But Peck said volunteers have spotted as many as 20 at one time between Feb. 10 and 15, on the "outskirts" of Yacolt. "One possibility," said Peck, "is that the birds have chosen a place to congregate away from harassment that they have been under at the hands of people outside the town of Yacolt." He declined to identify what people or groups were harassing the parakeets or whether he includes Clark Public Utilities in that category.

Driggins said one dead parakeet was found by neighbors Feb. 11 on a Yacolt sidewalk. Driggins said he asked an area veterinarian to determine a cause of death. Alison Evans-Fragale, founder of Edgewater Parrots in New Jersey, who is working with Driggins and paid for the autopsy, said the bird died as a direct result of the removal of a nest. She declined to specify the exact cause of death or name the veterinarian.

Peck said his Association wants to disassociate itself from anyone outside Yacolt who wants to deal with the problem, "regardless of how well-intentioned."

Joy Tindall, president of the new Association, could not be reached for comment.

Driggins said the poles his group plans to install will be plastic and 30 feet tall. They will be removable, he said. Each pole will be equipped with nesting platforms in a configuration that encourages further nest building. He estimated the cost to construct each pole at about \$160 "to build them correctly". He said he has received

a donation of a concrete mixer, auger and other equipment, but a donation of pole-building supplies is pending.

Peck said the cost for each pole is about \$125. He said his group plans to install polls that are 18-20 feet tall.

Peck's group met Feb. 16 to organize for a work party.

Fragale alleged that officials of Clark Public Utilities had attended a training program offered by the federal Department of Agriculture on how to deal with parakeets. She said the language used by the utility is the same used by other utilities in explaining the need for traps and carbon monoxide. She said that some of the utility's claims are identical to those made elsewhere and are untrue--that the population doubles every two years, that a nest could weigh 2,400 pounds, and that nests have caused pole fires.

Utility spokesman Mick Shutt said no utility employees have attended a Department of Agriculture training program on dealing with monk parrots.



THIS PARAKEET was located on a Yacolt sidewalk. Cause of bird's death was investigated by a bird rescue organization.

Utilities conduct the planned eradication program in November,

said Fragale, to deplete the population during winter weather. They anticipate public outcry, she said.

Both Fragale and the Preservation Association said they asked Clark Public Utilities to suspend nest removal until the alternate nesting platforms are in place but officials have refused. Shutt confirmed that the utility has not changed its plan to remove nesting materials as they appear on power poles and transformers.

"Because of outside groups," said Peck, "it has been difficult to focus the attention of the community on the need to get these alternate nesting poles constructed. We have been working quietly behind the scenes to create a viable plan for the preservation of the quaker parrots."

More effective ways available to handle parakeets

When it comes to feral Quakers building nests on utility poles, safety can be an issue. It has been proven that more effective means of nest replacement has been successful in areas of Texas. Taking away nests in the dead of winter is beyond cruelty and obviously killing many of the birds. Most environmental biologists would agree that they are feral and a threat and must be destroyed anyway. To me, it is quite plain that parrots are surviving in multitudes of environments throughout the U.S. and so far, the impact studies have found little to no impact on

native species by these birds.

This is wholly untrue for starlings. I have not seen mass nest removal or extinguishing of this species.

So, I plead with officials to exercise humanity toward animals and realize that the environment in which Quakers are persisting is in the urban area, an area that is wholly displaced and unnatural by the things that people put out there. Those environmental biologists, I believe, live in a home. If they do, they have caused much more destruction of the environment and displacement, than the

Quakers will ever do.

There are humane ways to set up better nesting alternatives for the Quakers that will eliminate the safety threat and the threat of power outages. Tearing down the nest only causes resentment within the community and gives the Quakers opportunities to build a new one in the wrong place once more. Let's learn to live with our consequences and realize that we are the ones to cause what we see and hear about on our planet.

Debbie Goodrich
Auburn, WA

Democratic president would mean higher taxes, misery

No one will be ready for a democratic president in November, not even their supporters. We will watch with open mouths as our savings and incomes disappear as this country converts into a liberal and socialist nation. Taxes will rise along with fees and levies to suck up whatever wealth remains from the individual who will wonder what is happening to him. There will be talk of shrinking the military and boarding up the Pentagon and

who knows the outcome here.

Those who listened to Obama and Hillary shouting for change will wonder what and when any change is coming and will soon realize if it comes it will be all bad. There will come more misery, more anxiety and more taxation and more big government and it will be hard to figure why they shouted so loud and for what.

Old Ben Franklin, back in the early days of this nation, said that the power to tax is

the same power to destroy and this is what is happening in America today. High taxation is ripping apart the average family, not leaving adequate income to buy basics and survive in this world. Before voting in any election to give up more wealth and increase taxation or install liberals and democrats in office citizens should think at least three times and pray for wisdom to vote no.

Frank Krbec
Battle Ground, WA

Utility continues to kill Yacolt parakeets

I want to address your recent editorial in *The Reflector*, entitled, "Parakeet Furor".

In the editorial, you referred to an on-line petition that, among other things, calls upon the Mayor and Council of Yacolt to create a resolution calling for a cease and desist order against any future attempted parakeet killings. Your comment was, "That is, of course, unnecessary. Clark Public Utilities wants nothing more to do with killing parakeets".

Your notion that the utility doesn't want to kill any more

parakeets is incorrect. Attempted eradication followed by continued nest removals in the winter is a documented and deliberate tactic used by the utility companies to eradicate wild monk Parakeets that began in New York City in 1994. Most recently, this same tactic was employed by United Illuminating in Connecticut last November.

It's a classic example of the old "bait and switch" manipulation. They agree to stop "euthanizing" the parrots, and the public is pleased--so pleased, in fact, that they won't even notice

that the utility company has succeeded in their original goal--to eradicate the parrots--until it is too late.

The population in Yacolt is down to seven from the original 16 survivors. How many more parrots will disappear before someone takes action to stop them from removing any more nests?

Mr. Case, please wake up and smell the coffee before you imbibe any more of Clark PUD's Kool-Aid.

Alison Evans-Fragale
New Jersey

Opinion

Utility should leave Monk Parakeets alone

I, too, have heard the statements made by people who speak with authority on the subject of power poles and parrots. I have to question where they got their information.

I am not an expert on birds. However, for the past four years, I have been a near-daily observer of the Monk Parrots that built their nest under the transformer on a utility pole near my Yacolt home.

A few weeks ago, there was a power outage that affected just two neighboring houses. The utility worker who came to find the source of the problem discovered that a twig used in building the nest had touched a part of the transformer that had then done what it was designed to do--it shut itself off.

As we watched, the repairman cleared away a layer of twigs by hand. He then used a telescoping pole to nudge the switch back into proper position and the electricity was restored. The entire repair process took him about 15 minutes.

These nests are unique in that they are constructed like an apartment building. They are made entirely of slender twigs pruned from neighboring trees, with openings around the perimeter and at various heights to accommodate their comings and goings. Several birds of the small flock would be in there at the same time. This leads me to believe that parts of the inside were kept hollow. For someone to say that these nests, made entirely of twigs collected by

small birds and perched on utility poles could reach a weight equal to that of a Volkswagen borders on the absurd.

Another source was quoted as saying the species is tropical in origin, not native to the area. Vermont is not tropical but Monk Parrots thrive there, as they do all along the eastern seaboard, across the southern states and westward. Hardly escaped pets as has also been alleged.

Unlike parakeets and parrots, the only droppings left under the Monks nests are discarded twigs. Unlike parakeets and parrots, they are swift, strong flyers and know how to forage for their own food. People who came to trap the birds by leaving cages with open doors and containers of food inside went away empty handed. That may be the accepted method of getting tamed birds to return home but these are wild birds. They will always be wild.

Four years ago, when the nest first appeared and P.U.D. came to destroy it and run the birds off, a few concerned citizens sought a better solution. At that time, the utility company was amenable to suggestions. Protective devices were placed over strategic places on the transformer to insure the birds safety. It was implied that they would come yearly to maintain manageability of the size of the nest. Townspeople were pleased. The birds soon became somewhat of a tourist attraction. We were proud that

they had chosen Yacolt to settle in.

Then things changed. Utility crews came in the dead of night to trap the birds and destroy the nest. Supposed "experts" went public with dire predictions about the damage and even death that allowing these birds to exist on power poles could cause including fires, downed lines that children could touch, widespread power outages. If these actually are real possibilities, I am sure that precautions exist to counteract them that don't include the wholesale killing of our birds.

The latest outrage was learning that the Mayor of Yacolt held secret meetings with the P.U.D., agreeing to let them come during the night, gas the birds, and destroy all the nests. Not one person belonging to any of the groups formed to protect the birds was informed.

When he was confronted, the Mayor said that he thought it unfair for countywide ratepayers to have their money being spent to send utility workers out to trim bird nests in Yacolt. An honest opinion. However, I have one too.

I recently read where the federal government granted several million dollars to Clark Public Utilities. I think they can afford to send a crew to Yacolt a couple of times a year to maintain not only Monk Parrot bird nests but fantastic public relations, too.

Barbara Case
Yacolt, WA