

Notes on the diet of Peach-fronted Parakeet *Aratinga aurea* in the Serra do Cipó, Minas Gerais, Brazil

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Pouca informação ecológica existe, principalmente com relação à dieta alimentar de quaisquer das não-ameaçadas espécies do psitacídeos. Observações sobre o comportamento de um bando de Periquito-rei *Aratinga aurea* em Minas Gerais, Brasil, são apresentadas. A espécie é de alimentação diversificada, alimentando-se de sementes, flores e folhas (nesta ordem de preferéncia) de dez espécies de plantas de oito famílias.

The Psittacidae family is a conspicuous component of the Neotropical avifauna, but detailed information on breeding, behaviour and food is still lacking, even for common species^{3,10}. Recently several studies have been conducted on the ecology of endangered psittacids, but very little has been published on non-threatened species^{4,7,8,12}.

The Peach-fronted Parakeet *Aratinga aurea* is a small psittacid (27 cm, 84 g) common in deciduous and gallery woodlands, savannas and other semi-open habitats³. It ranges from southernmost Surinam, Brazil, principally south of the Amazon river, south to eastern Bolivia, northern Paraguay and extreme north-western Argentina³. Ecological information for this species is largely anecdotal^{2,9,10}. Although not threatened, Vriends¹¹ commented that "more and more" *A. aurea* can be found in the markets.

We observed the feeding behaviour of *A. aurea* from 5 to 9 November 1990 at Serra do Cipó, near Lagoa Santa (19°12'S 43°30'W), Minas Gerais, Brazil. The vegetation of the study area is a campos rupestres type, with some patchy areas of cerrado, covered by many shrubs, herbs and a few tall trees. Campos rupestres is a savanna-like vegetation that occurs at elevations over 600 m in the states of Bahia, Goiás and Minas Gerais, on rockier soils and is dominated by Melastomataceae, Asteraceae and Velloziaceae^{1,5}. All observations were made at a fixed point on a hill summit affording a wide view of the entire study area. Each time we observed parakeets eating a plant we collected a sample, after the birds had left, for later identification at the Herbarium at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, São Paulo.

About 60 parakeets congregated every evening at an overnight roost in a 20 m high *Eucalyptus* tree and a 10 m *Hymenaea* sp. In the early morning (around 05h00 to 06h00) they began to leave the trees in small groups of 5 to 7 birds. We ob-

served them feeding on the seeds, flowers and the leaves of 10 plant species from 8 families. They ate the seeds, but not the pulp, of *Ilex* sp. (Aquifoliaceae), *Banisteriopsis* sp. (Malpighiaceae), *Miconia* sp. (Melastomataceae), *Campomanesia adamantinum*, and *Eucalyptus* sp. (both Myrtaceae), *Symplocos* sp. (Symplocaceae) and *Aegiphylia* sp. (Verbenaceae). Flower-eating was observed once, involving *Qualea* sp. (Vochysiaceae). Seeds of *Campomanesia adamantinum* were the plant resource most used, and was the most abundant fruiting plant during our study. Parakeets were observed at leaves of two plant species, *Vochysia thyrsoidea* and *Ocotea* sp., but it is unclear if they were ingesting them as *Vochysia thyrsoidea* leaves, at least, are leathery and hard.

Aratinga aurea was the only psittacid and one of the few avian frugivores in our study area. The parakeets moved regularly from the gallery forest through the open and grassland vegetation to forage. They were seen perched on termite nests on the ground on several occasions but we did not see them eating the insects, as observed by Sazima⁹.

The genus *Aratinga* comprises 19 species, but few have been studied³. Novaes & Oren⁶ observed *Aratinga* (*Guaruba*) *guarouba* eating 13 species of plants in the rainforest of Maranhão. Roth⁸, during a two year study of psittacids in a South Amazonia forest, suggested that *Aratinga leucoptera* and *A. weddelli* were the most generalist psittacids, but recorded only six and five plant species consumed. Antas & Cavalcanti² observed *A. aurea* eating flowers of pequi *Caryocar brasiliensis* and ipê *Tabebuia* sp. in cerrado in Brasília, and Sick¹⁰ mentioned that *A. aurea* ate the pulp of cajú *Anarcadium* sp.

Our results, although limited by the short observation period, demonstrate that *A. aurea* has a generalist diet with the ability to occupy different habitats such as gallery forests, savannas and



Peach-fronted Parakeet *Aratinga aurea*
(Tomas Sigrist)

even campos rupestres. Seeds are the main food of *A. aurea* but, as observed elsewhere^{4,7}, flowers must also be an important resource for psittacids living in dry seasonal habitats. Long-term studies of common parrot species can provide a baseline for understanding the ecology and adaptative behaviour of this group in different habitats.

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