

Large congregation of Red-breasted Parakeet in Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal

The Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri* (Linnaeus, 1758) is categorised as 'Near Threatened' due to its suspected decline in their global population. The species is found in southern and southeastern Asia. In India, it is reported as a common resident bird along the Himalayan foothills and in the northeast region (Ali & Ripley 1983; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; BirdLife International 2017).

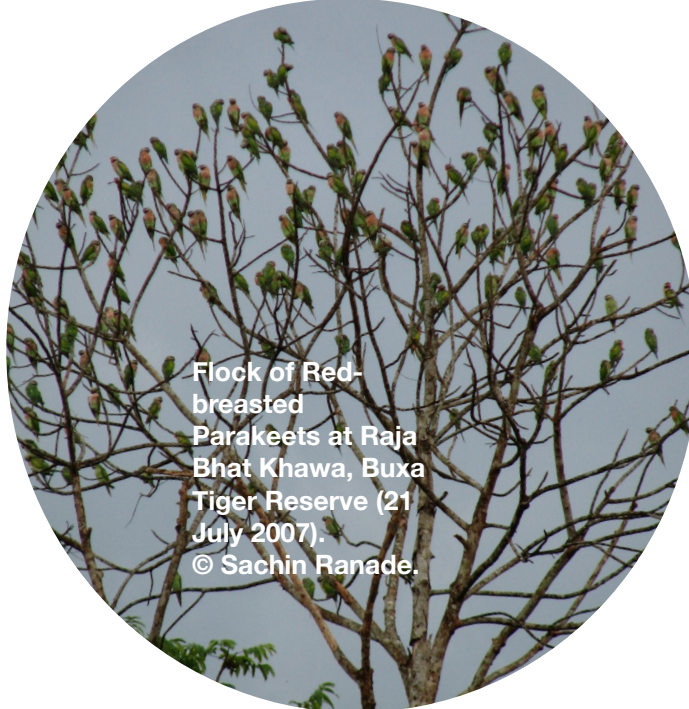
On 28 October 2019, while travelling along the Damanpur-Buxaduar road, a huge flock of Red-breasted Parakeet was observed. On the next day, on the same road at Panihora (26.588N, 89.526E), the parakeet flocks were observed and photographed. In the morning, the flocks were observed from 0705 to 0720 h while it was 1530 to 1600 h in the evening. In the evening, 12 flocks were counted that included four small flocks (30–50 individuals) and eight large flocks (from 1500–3000 individuals). Altogether, more than 18,000 parakeets were counted during their flight from roosting to feeding ground and back. In the bird abundance study in Buxa Tiger Reserve during May 2000–July 2001, the densities of the Red-breasted Parakeets were quite high with 34.7 parakeets/km² in the monoculture plantation, 30.5 parakeets/km² in semi-evergreen forest, 85.7 parakeets/km² in riverine forest and 8.0 parakeets/km² in the village edge forest of Buxa Tiger Reserve (Sivakumar et al. 2006). During the months of July and August, a few hundred individuals of this species were observed being attracted to fruiting wild jackfruit tree *Artocarpus hirsutus* and to the paddy fields during October–November at Raja Bhat Khawa since 2005.

Globally, the population of Red-breasted Parakeet is on 'moderately rapid decline' due to on-going trapping pressure, persecution and habitat loss. At Buxa Tiger Reserve, this species gets assured nesting habitat, protection against trapping for trade, and the paddy fields in and around the protected areas serves as feeding ground. This species lays 3–4 eggs per clutch (Ali & Ripley 198) and the population has natural ability to bounce back from decline. It is known to breed during December to March, occasionally as late as May (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The flock with
backdrop of
hillocks in Buxa.
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Red-breasted Parakeet near its nest hole in late June (27 June 2012). © Sachin Ranade.



Flock of Red-breasted Parakeets at Raja Bhat Khawa, Buxa Tiger Reserve (21 July 2007). © Sachin Ranade.

During last decade, species breeding till end of June was witnessed which could be a result of their successful exploitation of the habitat. During the non-breeding season, they flock together for foraging and roosting. This opportunistic sighting is worth to record as an indicator of successful forest management. But, in uncontrollable situation, it could turn as the pest of paddy

and orchards due to its raiding in huge numbers. In the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Kerala, this species has been introduced by human and has received invasive status (Butler 2002; John et al. 2016; Neo 2012). In this context, the detailed study of Red-breasted Parakeets for its breeding biology and flocking behaviour should be carried out in the Dooars landscape.

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