



# Invasive Species

By Rana Hijawi



Male rose-ringed parakeet enjoying the figs in Palestine. Males of this invasive species display a red and black ring around their necks, whereas females and juveniles lack the ring completely or display a shadow-like pale- to dark-grey neck ring.

**I**n a world so big yet at the same time so small with all the available means of connections under our vast sky, it is no surprise that many animal and plant species have found their way outside their natural environments. Invasive species are those that have been introduced to a land, mostly by human means – either by accident or to serve a purpose – which includes being transported on a ship by chance or escaping from a cage. Some species might be introduced to serve the initial goal of pest control before multiplying and causing deviations in an ecosystem. Invasive species cause harm to other organisms native to the host land just like invaders.

Invasive species disrupt the natural balance of an ecosystem. With a favorable climate and no natural predators in its new land, the invader will flourish. Invasive species have been multiplying rapidly and spreading to many regions of Palestine, especially cities. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that there is a decrease in the population of native species in Palestine, including that of the house sparrow and the white-spectacled bulbul.

The rose-ringed parakeet, also known as the ring-necked parakeet, is native to India and is therefore considered an invasive species in Palestine. It is believed that a few of



The invasive monk parakeet, also known as a Quaker parakeet, photographed in the city of Ramallah.

these birds escaped from being exotic pets in some Palestinian homes and have been increasing in population ever since. To native birds like the woodpecker, this newly introduced bird is too aggressive to be around as it competes with native



Two common mynas, nonnative birds like the myna compete with native species for food and nesting spots.

birds for nesting spots and food. The danger created by these species affects not only birds but also humans, as in many cases these nonnative parakeets cause damage to crops, which leads to financial losses for farmers. Males display a red and black ring around their necks, whereas females and juveniles lack the ring completely or display a shadow-like pale- to dark-grey neck ring.

Monk parakeets, known as Quaker parakeets, are also invasive species

here in Palestine, as they are native to Argentina and the surrounding countries in South America. After escaping from being pets, these parakeets established wild populations here and are now enjoying figs and freedom.

The common myna is not native to Palestine but rather to India. Mynas are believed to have been introduced in the



Two white-spectacled bulbuls, a native species.

1990s after escaping from being cage birds and have become common in cities, parks, and fields around towns. The myna is a very intelligent bird.

Female rose-ringed parakeet. This species of parakeets usually feeds on buds, fruits, vegetables, nuts, berries, and seeds.





Male Palestine sunbird feeding on the nectar of wild Jerusalem sage.

Millennials would know that the talking bird known as SHERA (*Yasameena* in Arabic) from *Sinbad's Adventures* was actually a myna. Myna birds can mimic the human voice and learn up to 100 words! Like the invasive species mentioned above, they are loud and aggressive.



Eurasian jays share fruits and seeds with parakeets as part of their diet.

Raising awareness about the threat that invasive species presents to native birds is the key to finding an ideal solution to a problem that has major consequences

if not mitigated. Having taught ecology, I love to ask students about the birds they notice in their neighborhoods – to describe their appearance, their feather colors, beak-size and shape. We use these observations to determine a bird's diet and to differentiate between native and nonnative species.

Planting native plants is important in



Syrian woodpecker, a native species in Palestine, threatened by parakeets taking over its nesting spots.

order to attract native birds such as warblers and the Palestine sunbird. Unfortunately, many people remove Jerusalem sage and globe thistles that naturally grow on their lands, even though they attract the Palestine sunbird because of their nectar and insects. Urbanization is believed to have aided

Male Palestine sunbird searching thistles for a protein-rich snack.



in the growth of the invasive species population as they adapt quickly and have diverse diets. According to science, invasive species should be controlled. The problem is not their identity but their location.

They mimic settlements in Palestine, as they claim the land as their own, draining resources and leaving it hard for native birds to survive.

In the end, the balance of life must continue, and every species must have its own role to play in an ecosystem. The introduction of a new species would mean an interruption of the normal food chain as well as the creation of competition that is mostly won by the fittest and most adaptable species, as seen in the invasive bird species now thriving in Palestinian cities such as Ramallah, where large numbers of mynas and parakeets are frequently seen. With fig season now upon us, we can watch rose-ringed parakeets and monk parakeets picking and enjoying figs. Their loudness deters other bird species, such as the Eurasian jay and the woodpecker, from reaching the tree, signifying their dominance.

As a birder, I grew to love the presence of all bird species; however, the number of invasive species has been increasing noticeably, which sparks concern and the need for immediate action. What do you think is the best solution for these difficult "guests" that have now become intruders that seem to love their new home at the expense of everyone around them?

*Rana Hijawi is an enthusiastic and innovative biology graduate who is passionate about science and research and believes in directing curiosity and wonder towards discovering and cherishing the world around us. She has been documenting and sharing wildlife information in Palestine since 2016.*



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A common myna, the real angry bird.