

“Support Your Local Invasive Species”: Animal Protection Rhetoric and Nonnative Species

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Abstract

This article explores protection efforts that have arisen in the New York City metropolitan area around the monk parakeet, a nonnative bird that has achieved a broad distribution outside its native habitat range. In some urban regions in which populations are established, controversy has developed around the parakeets' use of utility infrastructure and potential impacts on native species and agricultural crops. This case provides an opportunity to explore animal protection rhetoric about nonnative species, an understudied topic, considering the great extent to which species have become established in ecosystems outside their natural ranges and the persistence of public affinity for nonnative plants and wildlife. This article identifies four major frames through which advocates have delivered the birds to public and legal audiences and considers how they have mobilized and handled notions of “nonnative-ness” in their advocacy work.

Keywords

advocacy, claims-making, exotic species, monk parakeet, wildlife management

Introduction

Native to the lowlands of South America, monk or Quaker parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*) have established breeding populations around the globe (Butler, 2005). The international trade in exotic pet birds is implicated in their dispersal, with purposeful and accidental releases of individuals constituting the bases of colonies (Russello, Avery, & Wright, 2008; South & Pruett-Jones, 2000; Lever, 1987). Approximately 64,000 monk parakeets were imported to the United States between 1968 and 1972, and by 1973 there were an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 free-flying monk parakeets in the country (Neidermyer & Hickey, 1977).

In the early 1970s the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initiated a program to eradicate the wild birds, based on their reputation as notorious agricultural pests in their native range. An estimated 50% reduction in

population was achieved by 1975 (Avery, Greiner, Lindsay, Newman, & Pruett-Jones, 2002; Neidermyer & Hickey, 1977). Since the eradication campaign ended, parakeet numbers and distributions have increased throughout the country. The birds are currently found in about 15 states (Davey, Davey, & Athan, 2004; Van Bael & Pruett-Jones, 1996). In 1996 researchers estimated that between 5,600 and 28,200 wild monk parakeets were living in the United States (Van Bael & Pruett-Jones, 1996).

While the birds have not since become the major agricultural pests that the USFWS anticipated (Spreyer & Bucher, 1998), instead typically occurring in heavily urbanized areas, other problems have arisen. Their noisy, high-pitched calls are bothersome to some residents of urban neighborhoods that the birds have colonized. It is their choice of nesting substrates, however, that has brought them into more frequent and widespread conflict with humans. Monk parakeets often select electric utility structures as sites for their massive nests in urban areas. Nesting material is implicated in short circuits—which damage utility structures and cause power outages—and electrical fires (Pruett-Jones, Newman, Newman, Avery, & Lindsay, 2007; Avery et al., 2002). Economic impacts of the species include lost electric power sales revenue during outages, the cost of power restoration and equipment repair, the cost of nest removal and other control and mitigation measures, and the indirect cost of the diversion of employee attention from other work tasks (Avery et al., 2002). The birds also nest in lighting structures such as stadium lights, and institutions remove nests in the course of maintenance activities.

In some locations, utility companies' nest removal methods and population management tactics have met resistance from residents. Parakeets frequently become favorites of local birdwatchers and animal lovers, who view the birds as assets to their community (Avery, Lindsay, Newman, Pruett-Jones, & Tillman, 2006; Spreyer, 1994). Trapping and gassing birds has been controversial, and nest removal has also provoked outcry. Teardowns can send eggs and flightless chicks plummeting to the ground, and wintertime teardowns in northern states leave birds exposed to the elements until they can rebuild. Generally, parakeet supporters oppose these control techniques and seek to work toward more humane solutions that benefit both the utility companies and the birds.

This article focuses on the protection efforts of a network of advocates that has mobilized in the New York City metropolitan region in support of local parakeet populations. It examines how they represent the birds in their advocacy materials and particularly how they handle ideas about exotic species. Though this region does not hold the highest concentrated population of parakeets, the case is notable because of the extent of grassroots advocacy for

the birds. Throughout the region advocates have organized protests against utility company management tactics, worked with utility companies to develop more humane management strategies, sought support for humane management from local government, attempted to effect state legal protection for the birds, and made considerable efforts to garner the support of the public. The volume of support for the birds makes this an opportune case for a study of rhetoric in advocacy for nonnative species.

Over the past two decades a number of empirical studies have examined historical and contemporary rhetoric in activism around nonnative animals and plants, consistently noting the centrality of nationalistic and/or xenophobic sentiments to antinonnative species campaign rhetoric and to public discourse about exotic and feral species.¹ Historical perspectives on English sparrows in the 19th-century United States demonstrate how American ornithologists, naturalists, and outdoors enthusiasts marshaled nationalistic sentiments of the day to debase this nonnative bird and call for its destruction. In response to fears that sparrows—having become an abundant bird in the United States—would outcompete native bird species, sparrow detractors projected attributes associated with the reviled immigrant groups of the time onto the bird. This provided the means for Americans to relate to the birds. New immigrants were seen as posing a threat to the social fabric and economy of the United States, and metaphorically linking the sparrow problem to the immigrant problem resonated with Americans at the time. The perception of the birds as foreigners aroused ire in “native” Americans who were grappling with the human population explosion in New England’s cities (Coates, 2005; Fine & Christoforides, 1991).

Contemporary perspectives on attitudes and campaigns against nonnative flora and fauna indicate that nonnative and, in particular, invasive exotic species may still take on symbolic significance. In discourses associated with ecological restoration, “nonnative” is often conflated with “unnatural,” while to bring back natives is to bring back “real nature.” Further, nonnative plants and animals may become ensconced within a discourse of econationalism or ecoregionalism, in which they are devalued as destructive outsiders that pose a threat to something essentially Australian or Missourian, for example, through the perceived or actual environmental, economic, or other disturbances they perpetrate upon a landscape to which they do not “belong” (Eskridge & Alderman, 2010; Potts, 2009; Trigger, Mulcock, Gaynor, & Toussaint, 2008; Head & Muir, 2004, 2006; Smith, 1999). The foreign origins of the brushtail possum, for instance, are instrumental to how the New Zealand public and government agencies see the animal. Its impacts on native wildlife and habitats and on the country’s economy are interpreted

through a lens of nationalism, with the possum viewed as an “unwanted outsider”; “possum eradication therefore becomes a patriotic act that helps to preserve (an imagined) New Zealand figured in ecological and economic terms” (Potts, 2009, p. 3).²

Meanwhile, studies of rhetoric in animal protection campaigns have tended to focus on advocacy for native species (e.g., Goedeke, 2005; Herda-Rapp & Marotz, 2005; Munro, 1997), though instances of public affinity and activist group support for nonnative and feral species are by no means rare.³ Support or affinity for nonnative species may develop for a number of reasons, including concern that animal welfare or rights are at stake (Hall, 2003), perceptions of a species’ usefulness (Alderman, 2004) or beauty (Rotherham, 2005), a sense of familiarity facilitated by a species’ presence in a certain place over time (Trigger et al., 2008; Gilbert, 2005), and perhaps even from the “ironic celebration of what authoritative opinion says is an ugly, disgusting and worthless animal” (Trigger et al., 2008, p. 1279). In the face of extreme trepidation from the conservation science community about nonnative and feral species, which are implicated as serious agricultural pests, disease vectors, sources of damage to infrastructure and vehicles, and leading causes of native species endangerment (Czech, Krausman, & Devers, 2000; Pimentel, Lach, Zuniga, & Morrison, 2000), there are many instances of control efforts with the potential to provoke outcry from members of the public and animal protection organizations. Yet there appear to be no studies that have focused on animal protection campaigns, nonnative species, and rhetoric. The case of advocacy for nonnative monk parakeets in the New York City metropolitan area thus offers an opportunity to examine animal protection rhetoric around nonnative fauna, and to explore whether and how advocates deploy and address notions of “nonnative-ness” and “invasive-ness” in their campaign, as they attempt to negotiate the fate of a bird that ostensibly has two strikes against it: nonnative origins and a nuisance image.

After providing a description of the methodological approach and study site, the article presents findings on how advocates have framed the birds in their outreach and legal materials. The discussion considers three ways that advocates handle and mobilize notions of the nonnative, followed by concluding remarks.

Methods

Materials for analysis fell into four categories: advocate blogs and websites; books authored by advocates; media articles, reports, and interviews containing

direct quotes from advocates; and petitions and bills written by advocates. The earliest materials located were dated 2004, and data collection ended in October 2008. These materials were located through Web searches, and also through interviews with two of the most active advocates in the study region. Conversations with these individuals helped me to understand their extended advocacy network, and I sought materials created by these supporters as well. In addition, I analyzed field notes from participant observation in two guided public parakeet tours in Edgewater, New Jersey and Brooklyn, New York (September 2007, August 2008) led by these two advocates.

The approach to the materials was consistent with a qualitative content analysis methodology as described by Mayring (2000). I worked through a sample of my material to deduce tentative categories of descriptions of the parakeets, keeping in mind themes culled from other literature on the representation of animals.⁴ This step involved developing major themes; subthemes; and key words, phrases, and/or anecdotes for each subtheme. Deductive category application then involved reading through all the collected material and determining whether the text could be categorized into the tentative major themes and subthemes, using the qualifying keywords, phrases, and anecdotes. During this process, subthemes were modified and added, as were numerous qualifying keywords and phrases. Text was then recoded accordingly.

Study Site

The New York City metropolitan region includes about two dozen counties in New York and New Jersey, several in Connecticut, and one in Pennsylvania. Monk parakeets are distributed throughout coastal regions in this area, including Edgewater, New Jersey; the Bronx, Brooklyn, and possibly Manhattan, New York; and Bridgeport, Stamford, and New Haven, Connecticut. Colonies throughout the region appear to nest at locations characterized by grassy lawns (a food source) and high vantage points (typically utility poles, light poles, and trees). Nests have been sighted in parks, cemeteries, and playing fields, as well as along streets (Figure 1). Burger and Gochfeld (2009) estimated the 2006 Edgewater parakeet population to be approximately 100 pairs of birds, and Audubon Christmas Bird Count data for New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut show that 265, 80, and 466 birds, respectively, were counted in each state for the 2008-2009 survey.

The specific circumstances and advocacy goals surrounding the parakeets have varied among the states, in part because utility companies and facility managers have taken different approaches to management in different locations, and in part because laws governing human-bird relations differ among the states. Generally, in Connecticut, activism around the birds was at its



Figure 1. A monk parakeet nest on a utility pole in Edgewater's "Parrot Park."

height in 2005-2006 after resident parakeet fans learned that the United Illuminating Company (UI) was removing parakeets from their nests on utility poles and handing them over to the United States Department of Agriculture to be gassed. Supporters of the birds petitioned the company to use a set of nonlethal control methods, and collaborated with the animal protection group Friends of Animals in legal action against UI. Connecticut advocates also backed a state legislator who introduced a bill to take the birds off the state's invasive species list, a designation that would help to protect the birds from further eradication efforts.

Work for the New Jersey birds began in 2005 in response to nest teardowns by the utility company serving Edgewater, the Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G). In this case, A. Evans-Fragale, founder of an advocacy group called Edgewater Parrots, was able to work with the company to find mutually agreeable and more humane ways to approach the teardowns. This organization also received early support from the Borough of Edgewater, whose mayor and council passed a resolution in mid-2005 stating their requests for humane treatment of the birds by PSE&G and for research on diverting the parakeets from nesting on utility infrastructure. Efforts on behalf of the Edgewater parakeets continued through 2010 as advocates introduced a bill in the New Jersey Legislature to remove the bird from the state's potentially dangerous species list (a designation prompted by concerns about the birds as agricultural pests and threats to native species) and to afford the parakeets the same protection enjoyed by native birdlife. Meanwhile, throughout New York City advocates also lobbied for humane teardowns as well as protection for the birds from poachers, who presented a special problem in New York State, as the parakeets may be kept as pets there. Two bills addressing these issues were reintroduced in the state Senate in early 2011.

In addition to petitions, bills, and testimony oriented toward a legal audience, public outreach has constituted a major cornerstone of advocates' efforts, particularly in New Jersey and New York. Evans-Fragale and Brooklyn-based S. Baldwin continue to offer free tours of parakeet sites in their neighborhoods, and they maintain websites with photos, stories, and information about the birds and protection efforts. They have coauthored a book on their local birds, have created parrot merchandise, and speak frequently with reporters and local bloggers. Baldwin in particular considers public relations efforts to be vital for parakeet protection.

Results

Across the New York City metropolitan region, advocacy efforts for wild monk parakeets coalesced around the argument that these birds ought to be

protected from mismanagement and other cruel and unnecessary disruptions of their urban existence. Four primary representations of the parakeets were identified, each of which supported this argument in one of several ways: by establishing that the birds belong here, by casting doubt about the nature and necessity of management practices, and by suggesting that the lack of legal protection for the birds is illogical.

Parakeets as Urban Assets

This theme was one of three that represented the birds as “in place” in the landscape. The “urban assets” theme was characterized by the construction of the birds as a positive addition to urban life in the metropolitan area. Five subthemes comprised this theme: the parakeets as ornaments, miracle workers, moneymakers, learning tools, and community treasures.

“Parakeets as ornaments” was one of the most pervasive subthemes in advocate discourse. Supporters described the birds as enhancing the landscape through their beauty and antics. A multitude of adjectives was used to describe the parakeets’ aesthetic value, including “lovely,” “statuesque,” “surreal,” “beautiful,” “colorful,” and “cute as hell.” The birds’ flight skills and interactions with one another were consistently referred to for their entertainment value. Nests were also included in this conception of the birds as ornaments, described as “elaborate, beautifully engineered” and “architectural feats.” Images of the birds and their nests on one of the supporter’s blogs (Brooklynparrots.com) were another important way of demonstrating this aspect of the birds; high-quality close-up shots of the parakeets and their nests often accompanied text describing their beauty and entertaining interactions.

The framing of the birds as assets to the psychological and spiritual lives of urbanites (“miracle workers”) is exemplified by an anecdote one advocate shared in an interview (Davis, 2007) and with tour participants. Baldwin recalled a husband and wife who participated in one of his free tours of the Brooklyn parakeets several years ago; afterward, the husband approached him, telling him that the birds made his clinically depressed wife smile for the first time in five years. Advocates frequently testified in blogs and interviews to the joy the birds brought them personally. Supporters also attributed a sort of spiritual value to the birds, describing the parakeets as transforming the urban landscape, giving it a sense of nature, and lending the city a sense of other-place-ness, transporting observers to an implicitly desirable exotic rainforest setting. One supporter commented, “It’s absolutely beautiful to be a part of nature and not have to leave Brooklyn” (Greenleaf, 2007).

Diverse suggestions about the birds’ economic value constituted the representation of the birds as “moneymakers.” Supporters argued in front of the New Jersey Assembly’s Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and in

a State of the Borough (Brooklyn) address that the parrots were an ecotourism resource, and others have suggested that businesses near colonies benefit from the birds' presence. Davey et al. (2004) discussed building a client base of individuals who enjoy watching parakeets and quoted a Brooklyn restaurateur who said of the parakeets nesting nearby, "They've been an attraction for the last 14 or 15 years" (p. 67).

The parakeets were also conceptualized as "learning tools," or educational gateways into the world of urban wildlife. Supporters described the parakeets as a way to connect people better with their living environment. For example, Brooklynparrots.com featured a video of Judy Irving, director of the documentary *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*, describing urban parrot species as "a way into the rest of the natural world, and a way into other native species of birds that are not as colorful. . . . once you get into the parrots you may start looking around a little more, and you see the house sparrows and finches and bluebirds, and migrating birds, and hawks—there is a tremendous amount of natural life in the city that the parrots awaken in people!"

Finally, the birds were represented as community treasures. This subtheme painted the birds as a source of community pride and identity. As Edgewater Mayor Nancy Merse said, "We love them. . . . The town is proud to have them here. Edgewater's such a good community that the birds want to live here" (Zuckerman & Zuckerman, 2007). Davey et al. (2004) pointed out that the parakeets, "a treasured part of campus life at Brooklyn College" (pp. 66-67), are commemorated in wrought-iron sculpture on an adjacent fence. Evans-Fragale, the leader of parakeet protection efforts in Edgewater, took parakeet tour participants into the local Trader Joe's grocery store to view the murals of monk parakeets that decorate the store, impressing upon them that the birds are a source of local identity. One advocate speculated that Edgewater's local officials have been particularly motivated to help the birds, based on the understanding that supporting these "favorites" would put them in public favor.

Parakeets as Admirable Animals

This theme bore strong similarities to the urban assets theme, but it differed in that these representations were not tied to the ways in which the birds improved the urban landscape for human inhabitants. Rather, the three "admirable animals" subthemes concerned values that the birds possessed in and of themselves, with less regard for how these values improved the urban landscape and the lives of urban dwellers.

The characterization of the parakeets as industrious, skilled animals, or "worker bees," primarily revolved around their nest construction activities.

Monk parakeets build massive nests on utility poles and in trees, air conditioning units, and other tall structures, weaving twigs together to shape condominiumlike dwellings that may grow so heavy and large that they can reportedly collapse the supporting structure (Davis, 1974). The birds were repeatedly referred to as “master architects,” “industrious...amazing engineers,” and as “among the hardest-working animals in Brooklyn.”

The birds were also framed as “survivors”—tough, persistent animals making it in a big, (evolutionarily) unfamiliar city. This description was especially common in anecdotes about the birds facing and overcoming challenges thrown their way by urban predators, utility companies, and the climate. Supporters repeatedly described how the birds avoided predation through vigilance and alarm calls (termed their “Sentinel Alert System” by one advocate), began to rebuild nests only hours or days after teardowns, and faced the snow and bitter wind head-on.

Lastly the birds were described as “peace doves,” gentle animals who coexist with each other and with other urban animal species. Evans-Fragale described to one parakeet tour group how the birds open their nests to parakeets made homeless by teardowns and to orphaned chicks. In nearly all materials located for analysis, supporters made reference to the parakeets’ habits of bathing and feeding peacefully alongside members of other urban bird species.

Parakeets as Community Members

Along with representations of the birds as urban assets and admirable animals, this frame established the parakeets as “belonging.” The birds were constructed as members of cultural and ecological communities at multiple scales.

Humor characterized many of the representations of the birds as members of borough, state, and national-level cultural communities. Advocates played with stereotypes of Brooklynites and Bronxians, and of New Yorkers and New Jerseyans, finding parallels in the birds’ diet and behaviors. Descriptions of the parakeets enjoying pizza like real New Jerseyans and arguing like native Brooklynites were pervasive (Figure 2). The birds were also likened to immigrants, blending into the great ethnic and cultural melting pot that is the metropolitan area. According to one supporter featured on Baldwin’s blog, “The rest of us [aside from our trees and our American Indian population] all came from elsewhere just like our Quaker parrots. They fit in perfectly with Brooklyn, home to everyone from everywhere.” Elsewhere, the birds’ character was likened to that of Americans: “[T]hey’re industrious, loyal... and they just won’t give up, even when the deck is stacked against them” (Edgewaterparrots.com, n.d.).



Figure 2. Monk parakeets feed on pizza crust proffered by the leader of an Edgewater parakeet tour.

Representing the birds as part of the ecological community was a more serious task, since controversy surrounding their existence in the region always hinged partially on potential ecological disruption. This subframe involved a number of key anecdotes repeated throughout the materials, which painted the birds as highly integrated with the built urban environment and the urban ecological community. These included stories and assertions about the parakeets sharing nests with many other urban species including sparrows, starlings, bats, and squirrels; feeding and bathing in mixed flocks with other urban bird species; exploiting numerous urban food sources including grass seeds, pizza crusts, algae on Hudson River rocks, and bird feeders; using many built environment features for their nests; and their capacity to adapt to a suite of urban predators. Furthermore, at the national level it was suggested that the monk parakeets were a replacement for the extinct Carolina parakeet, a bird native to the eastern United States who was driven into extinction in the early 20th century. One supporter asserted this during a radio show segment, suggesting that the monk parakeet has “stepped into the niche of a long-gone native species” (Zuckerman & Zuckerman, 2007).

This subtheme not only attempted to depict the birds as fitting seamlessly into urban and national ecological communities, but also stressed a sort of ecological birthright for these birds contingent upon their tenure in the United States. Claiming that the birds at hand were “born in the USA,” are “native born,” and have “been here for 30 [or 40] years,” this subtheme argued that the birds are due the same sort of protection that other recognized native species are afforded.

Parakeets as a Marginalized Population

This final theme served to cast monk parakeet management procedures in a negative light, and to question the logic behind the lack of institutionalized protection for the birds. Four subthemes that revolved around the birds’ marginality were the birds as “war victims,” “deportees and refugees,” “illegal avians,” and “misrepresented innocents.”

The birds were represented as victims of war, under siege from hostile utility companies. A military lexicon was instrumental in building this metaphor, as supporters used phrases like “embattled,” “persecuted by death squads,” and “eradication campaign” to describe utility companies and their “assaults” on monk parakeet colonies.

“Illegal avians,” a phrase found throughout the materials analyzed, was a play on “illegal aliens,” a term sometimes used to refer to human foreign nationals who reside unlawfully in another country. This phrase, along with others like “outlaw parrots” and “support your local invasive species” (which appeared on merchandise commissioned to support the cause), was used tongue-in-cheek, in order to paint the birds in a sympathetic light, along with more serious statements about the protection, privileges, and rights that the birds do not enjoy because of their nonnative status. As Baldwin noted on his blog:

They are considered unworthy [of] protection because they are classified as “introduced.” This stigma is equivalent to “illegal alien” in the human world—“introduced” species don’t have the same rights, protections, and privileges. When bad things happens [*sic*] to them, society feels free to turn its back.

Supporters also often described what has happened and what can happen to the birds as a result of having no legal protection. For instance, advocates related that the birds may be captured and sold into captivity in New York, and that birds removed from their nests by maintenance workers in New Jersey cannot be rescued but rather must be taken to an animal shelter to be euthanized.

The “deportees and refugees” subtheme was a third frame that took a cue from contemporary global sociopolitical issues and human rights violations. It described the parrots as taken involuntarily from their native region and living wild in the United States as refugees of the exotic pet trade. For instance, in their children’s book about wild monk parakeets, Baldwin and Evans-Fragale (2005) described a frightening and cruel capture-and-transport scenario in which dozens of birds were removed from their native Argentina and shipped to New York’s Kennedy Airport. The book centered on one bird’s struggle to survive the “urban wilds” of the United States in the aftermath of her escape from captivity. Most of the language about deportation found in the collected materials was riddled with allusions to the human slave trade, as demonstrated by this excerpt from Baldwin’s blog: “Like many who live in America today, they didn’t arrive of their own will.”

The most pervasive subtheme in this frame was the birds as “misrepresented innocents.” It challenged what advocates perceived to be mistaken assumptions about the birds’ geography and ecology that have been used by state governments and utility companies to formulate and uphold laws and management practices detrimental to the birds’ welfare and survival. Supporters made these challenges in two ways: primarily with science claims, and secondarily by ridiculing the idea that the birds are “dangerous species.”

Both scientific knowledge and supporters’ observations were used to challenge notions that the birds were spreading outward from urbanized areas and challenging native wildlife for habitat, that the birds were agricultural pests, that their population was rapidly expanding, and that their nests were major fire hazards. While supporters acknowledged that government agencies’ concern about the birds’ potential for destruction upon their arrival in the region decades ago was understandable, they decried current suspicion about monk parakeets as a relic of old fears that are easily disproved by current knowledge about the birds (Malvasio, 2007). Materials created for the New Jersey state government contained numerous references to scientific studies conducted in other U.S. cities as well as quotes from biologists about the birds—for instance, in a petition to the state Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, a research scientist was quoted as saying, “Given that this species require [sic] a variety of fruits and seeds available year round, their current restriction to urban and suburban habitats, and their sedentary nature it seems that their potential for causing great damage to US agriculture is minimal” (Evans-Fragale, 2005). Several supporters were intensely interested in conducting their own studies of parakeet ecology, and shared their own observations with online and live audiences to emphasize that the parakeets were misunderstood. On a tour of the Edgewater parakeets, a supporter who once worked for a Florida electric company informed the group that squirrels and raccoons in

fact cause more damage to power lines than do monk parakeets. Another advocate described to a tour group how winter mortality rates keep the population from exploding, as evidenced by her observation of a decrease in flock size between the end of the fall and the end of the winter.

Supporters also attacked the inclusion of the bird on the New Jersey potentially dangerous species list by playing off one typical meaning of "dangerous," juxtaposing the parakeet against "truly" fierce and fearsome animals who are also on this list. They ridiculed the inclusion of the bird, implying that, compared to other animals on the list, there was nothing to be concerned about. One supporter posed this question to a radio audience: "When you look at this little bird, can you imagine this little bird is on the list of potentially dangerous species? Aside black bears, alligators, vipers?" (Zuckerman & Zuckerman, 2007).

Discussion and Conclusion

Monk parakeet advocates have constructed an extensive picture of the birds, drawing on aesthetic, economic, ecological, cultural, political, and ethical arguments to establish the birds as belonging in the region, to cultivate suspicion about the necessity of management practices used with them, and to suggest that the lack of legal protection for the birds is unjustifiable. The representational themes mobilized by advocates are for the most part familiar. Goedeke's (2005) work on otter politics in Missouri suggests that representations of animals in animal protection rhetoric may be organized into at least two themes. She points to the rhetorical strategies of "valuation" and of constructing "blameless victims" identified by Best (1987) in the context of work on rhetoric in claims-making. Subthemes within the "marginalized population" theme are in line with the blameless victim trope that has been noted in protection campaigns for persecuted or quarry animals. Defining animals as innocent of wrongdoing and therefore undeserving of death is a tactic described in studies of rhetoric and claims-making around mourning doves, ducks, red deer, and other animals (Goedeke, 2005; Herda-Rapp & Marotz, 2005; Woods, 1998, 2000; Munro, 1997). The "urban asset" subthemes appear to be manifestations of the valuation strategy described by Goedeke (2005) and Best (1987), wherein the subject is defined as a valuable resource that ought to be preserved. Here, the birds were portrayed as contributors to a positive urban experience.

Other frames noted here deviate from the valuation and victim tropes. The "ecological community members" subtheme, about "fitting in" or "belonging," seems to convey an ecological-aesthetic value, similar to that which Hardy-Short

and Short (2000) have found in Yellowstone wolf proponents' discourse, which argued for reintroduction on the basis that wolves, as wilderness incarnate, "complete" the Yellowstone landscape. The "admirable animals" theme also perhaps communicates a symbolic or aesthetic value that the birds have to humans, through the laudatory descriptions of their character. Finally, the "cultural community members" frame resembles the tactic of painting an animal as humanlike and thus familiar and likable. Other studies have identified the strategy of drawing parallels between animal and human behaviors in order to engender sympathy or understanding (Herda-Rapp & Marotz, 2005; Hardy-Short & Short, 2000). Portraying the birds as cultural community members, such as argumentative Brooklynites, is a means of constructing the birds as relatable.

Advocates' public discourse about the birds reveals some interesting ways of confronting and mobilizing ideas about nonnative organisms that have not been discussed in literature on animal protection rhetoric. Findings suggest that the birds' exotic status is critical to most of the representational themes, and that the subthemes engage with the birds' nonnative status in three markedly different ways: through playing up the birds' origins, through drawing on notions of the exotic, and through downplaying the birds' origins.

Several subthemes not only acknowledge the birds' exotic origins, but make them the crux of each representation. The "survivors" subtheme essentially praises the birds for having "made it" in a foreign land, painting their ability to survive in a far-away urban environment as an admirable quality. Constructions of the birds as "illegal avians" and "deportees/refugees" also engage directly with the birds' exotic origins, parlaying them into metaphors drawn from contemporary and historical sociopolitical issues in order to garner sympathy. The metaphorical linkage to contemporary illegal human immigrants is a surprising tactic, though, connecting an exotic organism to "nonnative humans" in the attempt to create a sympathetic portrayal of the animal. The focus on the political ramifications of illegality—the deprivation of rights and privileges—is key to constructing a sympathetic comparison to illegal immigrants. Yet this is risky. National publics differentiate between "good immigrants" and "bad immigrants," which are constituted by different qualities depending on place and time period. Illegality is one hallmark of "bad immigrants," as is the related assumption about "taking advantage" of social services (e.g., Honig, 1998). Thus, for some audience members, this sympathetic image of illegal immigrants may not ring true, failing to evoke pity even when tempered with suggestions about quality of life and rights violations.

Several urban assets subthemes mobilize the quality of exoticism rather than the birds' nonnative origins per se. As Mason (1998) explains, "The exotic is produced by a process of decontextualization: taken from a setting

elsewhere (it is this 'elsewhere' which renders it exotic), it is transferred to a different setting, or recontextualized. It is not the 'original' geographic or cultural contexts which are valued, but the suitability of the objects in question to assume new meanings in a new context" (p. 4). Suitability, in this case, especially concerns the birds' ability to appear as though they are from "elsewhere." Green feathers, hooked bills, and piercing calls inspire and substantiate advocates' evocations of lush tropicality and rainforests (though the birds in fact originally hail from rather more mundane grassland and savanna habitats). Being from elsewhere and looking the part also help the birds to become "real" nature incarnate in advocates' claims-making activities, something implicitly desirable to experience in a heavily urbanized landscape.

Finally, three subthemes acknowledge the birds' origins but downplay them. These subthemes show the birds as ecologically naturalized and culturally assimilated, and their foreign origins become history. Through the "misrepresented innocent" and "ecological community member" frames, advocates urged their audiences to consider and embrace the species on the basis of its current ecological behavior. That the birds are limited to urban areas, fit seamlessly into the urban ecosystem, and do so in such a benign fashion, are offered as testaments to their "good ecological behavior." A similar perspective has gained currency in academic debates about nonnative species, as scholars caution that a dichotomy equating nonnative to bad and native to good is overly simplistic in failing to account for invasive native species and relatively harmless immigrant species (Warren, 2007; Rotherham, 2005; Rodman, 1993). The "cultural community member" portrayal draws on similarities in experience and character to Americans and to stereotypical locals, presenting the birds as "just like us": once immigrants, now Americans, and rowdy pizza-lovers, too. Again, comparisons to human immigration are used to put the birds in a positive light, but here to point out a common identity based on a sense of pride about the region's multicultural, immigrant history. While metaphorical linkage to contemporary illegal immigration was a risky move, this parallel to a local immigrant history capitalizes on a sense of pride widely shared in the region. This maneuver in a sense co-opts the tradition of ecoregionalist and econationalistic discourses that typically devalue nonnative species as "outsiders," instead positioning the birds inside the fold.

Advocates have thus attempted to use the birds' nonnative origins to their advantage. The birds' origins have informed pragmatic, aesthetic, and socio-politically tinged arguments, and have in some cases paradoxically lent themselves to arguments about how "in place" the birds are in the region. These findings add new perspectives to the literature that considers animal protection rhetoric, for there is a dearth of information on how protectionists handle ideas of "nonnative-ness" in arguments for the presence of nonnative

species, though controversy around nonnative species constitutes a current and likely intensifying theme of struggle in human relations with animals and the environment.

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Notes

1. This has also been a topic of conversation among scholars considering the implications of rhetoric about nonnative and invasive species, which is tinged with allusions to insiders, outsiders, aliens, and invaders, with regard to the ways in which we think about immigrants and multicultural societies, and with regard to the ways in which immigrants and communities of color perceive the conservation biology community (e.g., Larson, 2005; Olwig, 2003; Simberloff, 2003; Subramaniam, 2001).

2. Of course, nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments do not characterize the entire range of negative reactions to nonnative and feral animals; see, for instance, Jerolmack (2008) on pigeons; Griffiths, Poulter and Sibley (2000) on feral cats, and Philo (1995) on livestock for discourses of disorder, disease, dirt, and immorality.

3. The southern California region, for instance, has over recent decades seen members of the public and nonprofit groups mobilizing in defense of feral cats, pigs, and peacocks, as well as nonnative ducks, pigeons, and bison in the face of various lethal control methods or other threats to their continued presence.

4. These themes consisted of those found by Lerner and Kalof (1999) (animal as loved one, as symbol, as nuisance, as tool, as allegory, and animal in nature) and Herzog and Galvin (1992) (animal as loved one, savior, threat, victim, tool, sex object and sexual aggressor, person, object of wonder, and the imaginary animal). They also consisted of more specific, descriptive constructions such as those found by Goedeke (2005) (hungry little devils, playful ecological angels, an animal like all others); Herda-Rapp and Marotz (2005) (the friend at the bird feeder, America's most popular game bird); and Woods (2000) (sporting foe, vicious vermin, cuddly cub/victim).

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