

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* feeding on an old beehive

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The Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is a common and widely occurring bird inhabiting all kinds of habitats in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It is seen in good numbers in all parts of Gujarat also.

On 21 December 2010, at around 1100 hrs, near my house in Morbi, Rajkot district, Gujarat (22°49'N, 70°50'E), I observed a flock of four Rose-ringed Parakeets feeding on an old and abandoned beehive. This beehive is constructed in the same tree every year probably by the giant honey bee *Apis dorsata*, which is known to make large beehives in trees, buildings, etc. The beehive is abandoned annually at the beginning of winter. The bees return in late February or early March and reoccupy/rebuild it.

The four Rose-ringed Parakeets were perched on the abandoned beehive and were breaking it apart with their beaks. They would then swallow a bit of the beeswax, and in their usual fashion, waste a large part of it. They continued doing this for about ten minutes and then flew away. I was able to take some photographs of this behaviour for one bird (Fig. 1).

I believe the birds were, either eating the wax, or searching for, and eating, residual honey in the comb. Though the beehive is repaired/constructed every year, this was the first time I had observed the Rose-ringed Parakeets eating the beeswax.

The eating of beeswax by birds is well documented. In a study conducted in Africa, many species of birds were observed feeding at an artificial beeswax 'feeding station' with the Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* feeding regularly on the beeswax (Horne & Short 1990). Many seabirds, and Honeyguides (Indicatoridae) are also known to feed on wax. (Horne & Short 1990). In England, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, and Nuthatch *Sitta europea* have been

observed pecking at beehives (Micklewright 1998).

The Rose-ringed Parakeet is particularly known for its habit of wasting far more than what it actually consumes (Ali 2002). According to Ali & Ripley (1981), these birds eat fruits, cereals, grains, flower petals, seeds, and nectar of various flowers. These birds are known to eat various seeds (Chaturvedi 1995), leaves of *Salvadora persica* (Balasubramanian 1989) and even shoots, bark, and mature phyllodes of *Acacia auriculiformis* (Tessier-Yandell 1976).

However, the Rose-ringed Parakeet is not known to eat beeswax from abandoned beehives, and this could be considered an addition to its varied diet.



Fig. 1. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* feeding on wax from beehive.

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