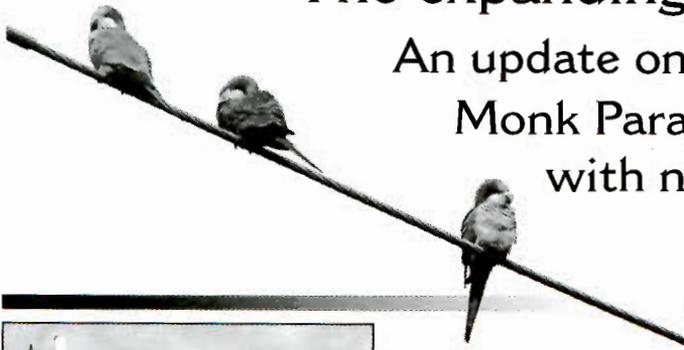


The expanding Monk Parakeet: An update on the Chicagoland Monk Parakeet expansion, with notes on cell tower nests

by Walter Marcisz



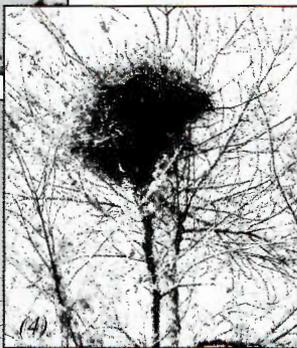
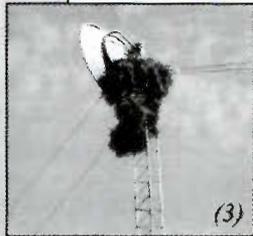
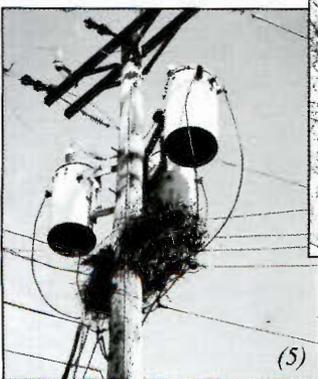
As I write this, I hear Monk Parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*) calling outside the window of my home in the Hegewisch neighborhood at the far southeast corner of Chicago. Monk Parakeets are very loud birds, and if they are around they are fairly impossible to miss. I hear them every day now. It was not always like this.

For many years, Illinois Monk Parakeets were a specialty of the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago (near 57th St. and the lakefront) with only a very few spin-off colonies in other areas. For at least the last five years, two of these spin-off colonies (Burnham and Wolf Lake/Powers Conservation Area) have been hosting nesting Monk Parakeets within a mile or two of my home. Since the inception of these colonies, foraging flocks of parakeets have been seen and heard on a semi-regular basis in my neighborhood.

But the Monk Parakeet population has remained anything but stable. It is headed in only one direction: up. In my area, the Burnham colony has added new nests on a virtually annual basis. Despite this local increase, I was still caught off guard by what was to come.

Over the past two years (2003 and 2004?), reports of Monk Parakeets in unusual or unexpected places have increased. I have numerous non-birder friends who have taken me to task on this issue: "Why am I seeing Monk Parakeets in Grant Park? I thought they were only found in Jackson Park." My personal Monk Parakeet observations were increasing in a way that was quite consistent with what my non-birder friends were reporting. Not only was I finding them in my home neighborhood, but I was also regularly seeing them where I work (the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago) and on my way to work (in the suburb of Blue Island).

Then, at a Memorial Day 2004 backyard barbecue, a non-birder friend who works as an arborist for the City of Chicago told me he was seeing Monk Parakeets "everywhere" throughout the city. He further opined that the parakeets were building nests on cell phone towers in many of the neighborhoods he visited.



(1) Top: Three Monk Parakeets. 21 November 2004. The location is 200 yards southwest of the junction of Villa and Fullerton Avenues in Addison, DuPage County, Illinois, where the nests are in a ComEd tower. Photo by Urs Geiser.
(2) Monk Parakeet nests on cell tower near 135th Street and Torrence Avenue (Cook County), Illinois. Photo taken 17 October 2004 by Walter Marcisz. (3) Monk Parakeet nest on satellite dish at Burnham (Cook County), Illinois. Photo taken 17 October 2004 by Walter Marcisz. (4) Monk Parakeet nest in a tree at Burnham (Cook County), Illinois. Photo taken 17 October 2004 by Walter Marcisz. (5) Monk Parakeet nest on telephone pole with transformers at Burnham (Cook County), Illinois. Photo taken 17 October 2004 by Walter Marcisz.