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To residents of Brooklyn, New York, and Edgewater, New Jersey, feeding flocks of parrots in the local park is all in a morning's work but to visitors the birds are a constant surprise.

While there are many theories as to how the Wild Quaker Parrots (also known as Monk Parakeets) arrived in these two spots, one thing is for sure said Steve Baldwin, founder of Brooklyn Parrots: "They didn't fly all the way from their native Argentina."



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The most widely believed story, is that a shipment of birds destined for sale in New York area pet stores were accidentally released at Kennedy Airport in the mid to late 1960s. The earliest reported sighting of these birds in the wild was in the 1970s.

"There are other theories: that a pet store on Flatbush Avenue went out of business and released them, that a truck overturned on a highway, but the JFK airport escape theory is the one I believe is most reliable," said Baldwin, who leads guided parrot walks around the Brooklyn College campus where the birds reside.

Across the Hudson, Alison Evans-Fragale, who founded Edgewater Parrots, also leads tours to introduce people to the parrots living in her town. Both bird enthusiasts hope that by showing off the birds' condos — intricately woven nests — and sharing information about how they mate for life and what wonderful parents they make, people will become champions of the Quakers.

Public support is critical for the parrots, Evans-Fragale said, because they are on the Division of Fish and Wildlife's "Potentially Dangerous Species List," giving them no rights at all.

The parrots were placed on this list when they first became prevalent in the Seventies,

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used with that species of birds, etc. to enhance their nesting sites.  
 with either. As the birds are being granted the ground  
 again, are big fans of clover and cherry blossoms.  
 During the winter months they often turn to the  
 kindness of humans for some of their meals.

One longtime resident of Edgewater fills a plastic bag with old bagels from neighborhood businesses, and rides his bike to Memorial Park to feed the parrots. "He's in his seventies and told me he has been doing this every morning for years," Evans-Fragale said.

But all is not well in the world of his feathered friends.

The birds — along with their New York City counterparts and wild parrots throughout the country — are constantly under threat from local power companies that destroy parrot nests built alongside transformers for fear of fire and power outages.

In New York and New Jersey, Con Edison and PSE&G respectively, have agreed to work with friends of the parrots groups to tear down the nests during months when there are no eggs or babies. While for now this is the most humane approach it is very traumatic for the birds, Evans-Fragale said.

"As soon as someone approaches, the parrots squawk up a storm; then they sit on a nearby tree and continue to screech as their nests are destroyed," she said. "It breaks my heart to watch them."

Wild parrots in Connecticut fare even worse at the hands of United Illuminated Company. There, Evans-Fragale said, sleeping birds are caught in nets during the night and put into boxes where they are gassed to death. These actions have been caught on tape, she said, and now both Edgewater Parrots and Brooklyn Parrots are working with friends of parrots in Connecticut to put a stop to the massacre.

Baldwin said local power companies only have to look to other states and countries to find a better way to co-exist with the parrots. In Florida, specially designed alternative platforms have proven successful in luring the parrots away from electrical power infrastructures. In Texas, utility workers trim back nests without destroying them, and in Britain where many wild parrots now live, new techniques have been developed to insulate utility wires that stop the short circuits or voltage drops caused by the nesting birds.

Evans-Fragale spent some time last year learning from friends of parrots in Florida how to construct platforms. She is currently enlisting the help of volunteers to mount platforms in Edgewater to lure the birds to safer homes. She is also looking for residents willing to construct these structures on their properties.

"PSE&G can't be blamed for removing the nests from their poles, but the fact that these wild parrots enjoy absolutely no protection in New Jersey is, I believe, a major error that must be addressed," Evans-Fragale said. The parrots, she added, were born in the U.S., have been living in our communities for at least 30 years, and "deserve a modicum of respect."

"Especially because they have all of the great qualities we associate with the American character: they're industrious, loyal to each other, they're amazing little engineers, they coexist well with other native birds, and they just won't give up, even when the deck is stacked against them," Evans-Fragale said.

Armed with the facts about Quaker Parrots and plenty of research to back them up, Evans-Fragale approached the mayor and council of Edgewater asking them to help protect the birds. In June 2005, the council passed a resolution to adopt a much more humane

approach to removing nests from power lines, and urging the Department of Fish Game and Wildlife to remove the birds from its Dangerous Species list.

Also in June, Assemblywoman Joan Voss introduced legislation into the Assembly to remove Quaker Parrots from a state list of potentially dangerous species. Evans-Fragale hopes that the bill, which is now before the Assembly's Agriculture and Resources Committee, will be voted on soon. She is urging concerned citizens to write or call the committee asking that the legislation be passed.

If the bill passes, it would mean that Quaker Parrots, their eggs, and nests must be protected by the Department of Environmental Protection, or any other state agency, or local government entity in the same way as they protect any non-game species of bird indigenous to the state.

"Given the status of things in Connecticut, it's crucial that parrots be removed from the Dangerous Species List," Evans-Fragale said. "Otherwise, we run the risk of having our parrots suffer the same fate."

Alison Evans-Fragale conducts guided monthly tours to visit with the Edgewater parrots and offering an opportunity to see these wild birds at work and play in many locations throughout town. Bring your camera. To register e-mail [Alison@edgewaterparrots.com](mailto:Alison@edgewaterparrots.com).

Steve Baldwin takes people to visit with the Brooklyn parrots the first Saturday of the month. For more information contact [steve@brooklynparrots.com](mailto:steve@brooklynparrots.com). For more information on the group and how you can help protect wild parrots visit [www.brooklynparrots.com](http://www.brooklynparrots.com).

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