

## *Amazona ochrocephala* (Yellow-crowned Parrot)

Family: Psittacidae (Parrots and Macaws)

Order: Psittaciformes (Parrots, Macaws and Cockatoos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Yellow-crowned parrot, *Amazona ochrocephala*.

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Amazona\\_ochrocephala\\_-zoo-8.jpg/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Amazona_ochrocephala_-zoo-8.jpg/), downloaded 25 September 2011]

**TRAITS.** This species of parrot has an average length of 13-15 inches and has a short tail which is squarish at the base (Johnson, 2010). They usually have a mass of about 500 grams (Brittain and Fraser, 2007). As seen in Fig. 1, it has a primarily green plumage with yellow and green on the under parts. At the back of the head the feathers have edges that are of a dark black colour, and a red colour is observed on the wing edges and speculum (Brough, 2011). Yellow colours can be observed above the beak at the crown, as well as the lores and the thighs, and similarly it may be observed around the eyes (Johnson, 2010). An orange ring surrounds a white ring and this surrounds the eye of the parrot. The beak is a light gray colour with a little pink on its upper part, and its legs are gray (Brough, 2011). Their feet are zygodactyl, which means that each foot has four toes, two at the back and two at the front (Santa Fe College, 2011). The large muscular feet are important to them as are their wings. They use their feet when picking fruits or nuts and

also for holding these while they are peeling or consuming them. The feet are also important for climbing in their forest habitat (Riley and Riley, 2005).

**ECOLOGY.** Found in habitats in South America, from Guiana and Venezuela to the Columbian Andes and Trinidad (Lantermann and Vriends, 1986). This species are found in tropical deciduous woodland, tall thorn scrub, humid forest, woodland along rivers and creeks, mangroves and pine savanna, in lowlands below 750 m as seen in Fig. 2 (Eberhard and Bermingham, 2004). They have been observed throughout parts of the range flocking by barreiros which are soils rich in minerals that are found on banks of rivers (Welch, 2011). They favour environments with space to stretch its wings and where climbing can take place (Brough, 2011). They are usually found in pairs or may be in small flocks of about 30. As seen in Fig. 4, these parrots may use hollow of trees for nesting such as palm or termitarium and about two or three eggs are laid. These eggs incubate for approximately 26 days, and after about 60 days from hatching, the chicks leave the nest (Johnson, 2010).

**ACTIVITY.** Yellow-crowned parrots are very busy in the wild and are very social birds. They remain in the same area throughout the year and may only migrate if there are changes in the availability of food (Grzimek, 2003). About 10 birds may gather together during the day and much of the time is spent searching for food and water as well as sites for nesting. They also use up a lot of time grooming themselves and socializing (Perrin, 2011). They tend to be rather quiet during feeding. At night time they could be seen in larger flocks at roosts. They can fly high and for very long distances and hence they are strong fliers. Gliding may be rare or absent but shallow wing beats can be observed (Grzimek, 2003). In captivity they enjoy chewing wood such as pine or fir. They prefer branches with leaves from which nutrients are obtained when the leaves or green bark is chewed on such as the willow, honeysuckle and eucalyptus (Gines, 2009).

**FORAGING BEHAVIOUR.** Yellow-crowned parrots usually forage during early mornings and late afternoons and can be observed gathering at the tops of trees in groups of about ten. They are referred to as opportunistic feeders (Grzimek, 2003). Their diet consists of fruits, nuts and seeds. When feeding, they may use their feet and beak for manipulating their food. This can be observed when extracting nuts from its shell (Brittain and Fraser, 2007).

**COMMUNICATION.** Yellow-crowned parrots give off loud shrieks. They also display “racaus squaks” which consist of a long rambling series of gurgles, barbles and thrills that are mixed with whistles and repeated screeches, some which sound quite human-like (Brittain and Fraser, 2007). In the wild, they call out to each other from branches early in the morning and again when the sun is sets. Both periods of the day, this typically lasts about 10 minutes (Brough, 2011). Apart from that, they seldom vocalize except when flying but perched birds may answer flying birds (Hilty and Meyer de Schauensee, 2003). During courtship, they may use visual displays (Brittain and Fraser, 2007).

**SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND REPRODUCTION.** These parrots do not display sexually dimorphism, the males and females appear similar (Brough, 2011). These parrots are normally bred in captivity. The birds that are to be mated must be at least 3 years of age and mature. The genders of the pair needs to be verified and the mates should be harmoniously, bonded to their pair as seen in Fig. 3. As such these birds are monogamous, having only one sexual partner.

Their sexual displays include drooping their wings, bowing, wing-flicking, dilating their pupils, raising their foot and wagging their tail feathers (Brittain and Fraser, 2007). In a study done by Rodriguez and Eberhard in 2006, it was found that pairs had nested in the trees which were of high-quality and cavities of one tree species were not favoured. The breeding season of these parrots begins in early spring when the weather begins to get warm and occurs in their natural habitat. As seen in Fig. 4, they nest in hollow spaces of trees, palms or mounds of termites, and usually lay approximately three eggs. During incubation the females stayed in their nests for long time periods and only depart early mornings or late afternoons to forage (Rodriguez Castillo and Eberhard, 2006). Males are not observed to enter the nest but it was observed that the males eat for both him and the female. The males regurgitate their food for their females to eat whilst the females would incubate their eggs and feed the young ones (Brough, 2011). The eggs are incubated for at least 25 days, and young chicks would leave their nests after 8 or 12 weeks from hatching (Johnson, 2010).

**LIFESPAN AND PREDATION.** Yellow-crowned parrots have a long lifespan. They can live for as long as 100 years in captivity (Brittain and Fraser, 2007). But not much is known about their lifespan in the wild. They do not have a lot of predators except for the *Boa constrictor*, which accounts for a decrease of about 9.5% in the breeding success yearly. They would feed on chicks or females that are in or around the nest (Brittain and Fraser, 2007). Poaching is another common form of predation for these birds. From studies, it was observed that the breeding success was found to be low, between 1997-1998, 10% and between 1998-1999, 14% of the nests were able to survive poaching and predation (Rodriguez Castillo and Eberhard, 2006).

**JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR.** Immatures are duller than the adults being more of a paler green. The yellow is not fully developed but can be seen around the forehead alone. There is very little red plumage visible on the wing. The bill is of a darkish brown or grey colour and their eyes are observed to be brown (World Parrot Trust, 2010). This is shown in Fig. 5. After moulting for a period of about 5 years, the full yellow crown as seen in mature birds is developed (Brough, 2011).

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**Fig. 2.** Yellow-crowned parrot in its natural habitat.

[[http://www.parrots.org/index.php/encyclopedia/profile/yellow\\_crowned\\_amazon/](http://www.parrots.org/index.php/encyclopedia/profile/yellow_crowned_amazon/), downloaded 15 October, 2011]



**Fig. 3.** Interaction of yellow-crowned parrots.

[<http://www.flickr.com/photos/slobirdr/3269627926/> downloaded 16 October, 2011]



**Fig. 4.** Nesting of yellow-crowned parrots.

[<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mfeingol/4161799897/> downloaded 16 October, 2011]



**Fig. 5.** Juvenile yellow-crowned parrots.

[<http://www.perkyparrots.com/news.cfm> downloaded 16 October, 2011]