

Peach-fronted Parakeet (*Aratinga aurea*) feeding on arboreal termites in the Brazilian Cerrado

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RESUMO: Periquito-rei (*Aratinga aurea*) se alimentando de cupins arbóreos no Cerrado brasileiro. Hábitos insetívoros em psitacídeos são raramente observados. Registro aqui o consumo de cupins (Isoptera) pelo periquito-rei *Aratinga aurea*, numa mata ciliar em Goiás, no Brasil central, em 8 de setembro de 2005. Três indivíduos deste periquito escavaram um cupinzeiro arbóreo e consumiram alguns desses insetos. Apesar do Periquito-rei ter uma dieta generalista, que inclui sementes, frutos e flores, os cupins possivelmente representam um recurso casual para este psitacídeo na região do Cerrado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Psittacidae, hábitos insetívoros, Isoptera, comportamento alimentar.

KEY-WORDS: Psittacidae, insectivorous habits, Isoptera, feeding behaviour.

Parrots are rarely recorded feeding on insects. Forshaw (2006) reports on insectivorous habits for the genus *Calyptorhynchus*, an Australasian cockatoo, and New Zealand *Nestor* spp., regularly feed on insects. However, records are less scarce for Neotropical psittacids. Fly larvae were found in the stomach contents of the Bronze-winged Conure (*Pyrrhura devillei*), but this was considered as a case of accidental ingestion (Moojen *et al.* 1940). Likewise, insects found in the stomach and/or crop contents of four additional psittacid species examined by Schubart *et al.* (1965), viz. several insects species for the White-eyed Conure (*Aratinga leucophthalma*), moth and fly for the Peach-fronted Parakeet (*A. aurea*), hymenopterans for the Maroon-bellied Conure (*P. leucotis*), and fly larvae for a Santarem Conure (*P. amazonum*), were regarded as accidental ingestion of infested fruit. On the other hand, Peach-fronted Parakeet were recorded feeding on winged termites (Sazima 1989), and the Maroon-bellied Conure was recorded feeding on Homoptera gall larvae (Martuscelli 1994), both records in Southeastern Brazil. Here I report on the Peach-fronted Parakeet feeding on termites (Isoptera) from an arboreal nest in the Cerrado of Central Brazil.

The Peach-fronted Parakeet is a small psittacid locally abundant in deciduous and gallery forests, savanna woodland, and open habitats from Suriname, Brazil (mostly south of the Amazon River) to eastern Bolivia and northwestern Argentina (Sick 1997, Forshaw 2006). The record on termite feeding was made at the Campo Alegre Reserve (14°17'13"S, 47°49'56"W), Alto Paraíso municipality, in the state of Goiás, Brazil. The arboreal termite nest was about 10 m above the ground in a riparian forest in Couros River. This forest type is common within the Cerrado biome, with trees 20–25 m tall, and 50–90 percent canopy cover (Ribeiro and Walter 1998, Oliveira-Filho and Ratter 2002).

On 8 September 2005, at 0830 h, I watched seven individuals of the Peach-fronted Parakeets as they flew and vocalized above the forest. After a few minutes three of these parakeets

perched in nearby trees, about 40-50 cm from the arboreal termite nest. For about 20 min three parakeets dug with their bills into the nest and ate several termites; one individual consumed at least 30 termites. The three parakeets perched on branches nearby for a few minutes before revisiting the termite nest. After 20 min of activity, the parakeets left the termitaria with only a few small holes resulting from their bill-probing activity. Two days later I returned to the site, but observed no additional holes in the termite nest.

Sazima (1989) suggests that Peach-fronted Parakeets digging in termitaria may eat some nest occupants during the excavation, which is consistent with my observation. Some parrot species, including *Aratinga* spp., use arboreal termitaria for nesting (Sazima 1989, Collar 1997, Sick 1997, Brightsmith 2000, 2005, Forshaw 2006), which lend additional support for the above mentioned suggestion. Peach-fronted Parakeets have a generalist diet that includes seeds, fruits, flowers and insects (Schubart *et al.* 1965, Sazima 1989, Galetti and Pedroni 1996), which may allow occupation of several different habitat types, including grassland, savannas and gallery forest (Galetti and Pedroni 1996, Sick 1997, Forshaw 2006, this study). The observation reported here is consistent with the suggestion of Sazima (1989) and Martuscelli (1994) that some Neotropical psittacids are far more insectivorous than is generally assumed.

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