

= Rodrigues parrot =

The Rodrigues parrot (*Necropsittacus rodricanus*) is an extinct parrot in the family Psittaculidae . It was endemic to the Mascarene island of Rodrigues in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar . It is unclear what other species it is most closely related to , but it has been classified as a member of the tribe Psittaculini , along with other Mascarene parrots . It had similarities with the broad @-@ billed parrot , and may have been closely related .

The Rodrigues parrot was green , and had a proportionally large head and beak along with a long tail . Its exact size is unknown , but it may have been around 50 cm (20 in) long . It may have looked similar to the great @-@ billed parrot . It frequented and nested on islets off southern Rodrigues to avoid introduced rats , and fed on the seeds of the *Fernelia buxifolia* shrub . The species is known from subfossil bones and from mentions in three contemporary accounts . It was last mentioned in 1761 , and probably became extinct soon after , probably due to a combination of predation by rats , deforestation , and hunting by humans .

= = Taxonomy = =

Parrots matching the Rodrigues parrot were first mentioned by François Leguat in 1708 and Julien Tafforet in 1726 , who were both marooned on Rodrigues . The parrot was scientifically described as *Psittacus rodricanus* by the French ornithologist Alphonse Milne @-@ Edwards in 1867 . He moved it to its own genus *Necropsittacus* in 1874 . The binomial , *N. rodricanus* , translates to " dead parrot of Rodrigues " , in reference to its extinction . The holotype specimen is a subfossil partial beak , but its current whereabouts are unknown . It may be specimen UMZC 575 , a rostrum that was sent from Milne @-@ Edwards ' to Alfred Newton after 1880 , which matches the drawing and description in Milne @-@ Edwards ' paper , but this cannot be confirmed . In addition , subfossil remains of at least four individuals have been found in the Plaine Corail .

After examining a skull of the Rodrigues parrot , Edward Newton and Hans Gadow found it to be closely related to the broad @-@ billed parrot due to their large jaws and other osteological features , but were unable to determine whether they both belonged in the same genus , since a crest was only known from the latter . Graham S. Cowles instead found their skulls too dissimilar for them to be close relatives . The skeleton of the Rodrigues parrot has similarities with the *Tanygnathus* and *Psittacula* parrot genera .

In his 1907 book *Extinct Birds* , Walther Rothschild placed two hypothetical parrot species in the *Necropsittacus* genus ; the Réunion red and green parakeet (*Necropsittacus* ? *borbonicus*) and the Mauritian parrot (*Necropsittacus* ? *francicus*) . The former was based on a single account by Sieur Dubois , and it is uncertain what the source for the latter is , so both are considered dubious today .

= = = Evolution = = =

Many endemic Mascarene birds , including the dodo , are derived from South Asian ancestors , and the English palaeontologist Julian Hume has proposed that this may be the case for all the parrots there as well . Sea levels were lower during the Pleistocene , so it was possible for species to colonise some of the then less isolated islands . Although most extinct parrot species of the Mascarenes are poorly known , subfossil remains show that they shared features such as enlarged heads and jaws , reduced pectoral bones , and robust leg bones .

Hume has suggested that they have a common origin in the radiation of the Psittaculini tribe , basing this theory on morphological features and the fact that *Psittacula* parrots have managed to colonise many isolated islands in the Indian Ocean . The Psittaculini may have invaded the area several times , as many of the species were so specialised that they may have evolved significantly on hotspot islands before the Mascarenes emerged from the sea . A 2011 genetic study instead found that the Mascarene parrot (*Mascarinus mascarinus*) of nearby Réunion was most closely related to the lesser vasa parrot (*Coracopsis nigra*) from Madagascar and nearby islands , and therefore unrelated to the *Psittacula* parrots , undermining the theory of their common origin .

= = Description = =

The Rodrigues parrot was described as large and with a big head and a long tail . Its plumage was described as being of uniform green colouration . Its skull was flat and depressed compared to those of most other parrots , but similar to the genus *Ara* . The skull was 50 mm (2 @. @ 0 in) long without the beak , 38 mm (1 @. @ 5 in) wide , and 24 mm (0 @. @ 94 in) deep . Its exact body length is unknown , but it may have been around 50 cm (20 in) . Its size has been likened to that of a large cockatoo . Its tibia was 32 % smaller than that of a female broad @-@ billed parrot , yet the pectoral bones were of similar size , and proportionally its head was the largest of any Mascarene species of parrot .

The pectoral and pelvic bones were similar in size to those of the New Zealand kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) , and it may have looked similar to the great @-@ billed parrot (*Tanygnathus megalorynchos*) in life , but with a larger head and tail . It differed from other Mascarene parrots in several skeletal features , including having nostrils that faced upwards instead of forwards . No features of the skull suggest it had a crest like the broad @-@ billed parrot , and there is not enough fossil evidence to determine whether it had pronounced sexual dimorphism . There are intermediate specimens between the longest and shortest examples of the known skeletal elements , which indicates there were no distinct size groups .

= = Behaviour and ecology = =

Tafforet 's 1726 description is the only detailed account of the Rodrigues parrot in life :

The largest are larger than a pigeon , and have a tail very long , the head large as well as the beak . They mostly come on the islets which are to the south of the island , where they eat a small black seed , which produces a small shrub whose leaves have the smell of the orange tree , and come to the mainland to drink water ... they have their plumage green . The ? Bois de buis ? [*Fernelia buxifolia*] is common there and very small . The perroquets eat the seeds .

The shrub mentioned by Tafforet , *Fernelia buxifolia* , is endangered today , but was common all over Rodrigues and nearby islets during his visit . At this time , the parrots , the Rodrigues starling and the Rodrigues pigeon frequented and nested on these islets to avoid the large population of introduced rats on Rodrigues .

Many other of the endemic species of Rodrigues became extinct after the arrival of man , so the ecosystem of the island is heavily damaged . Before humans arrived , forests covered the island entirely , but very little remains today due to deforestation . The Rodrigues parrot lived alongside other recently extinct birds such as the Rodrigues solitaire , the Rodrigues rail , Newton 's parakeet , the Rodrigues starling , the Rodrigues owl , the Rodrigues night heron , and the Rodrigues pigeon . Extinct reptiles include the domed Rodrigues giant tortoise , the saddle @-@ backed Rodrigues giant tortoise , and the Rodrigues day gecko .

= = Extinction = =

Of the eight or so parrot species endemic to the Mascarenes , only the echo parakeet (*Psittacula echo*) of Mauritius has survived . The others were likely all made extinct by a combination of excessive hunting and deforestation . The offshore islets of Rodrigues were eventually infested by rats as well , and this is believed to be the reason for the demise of the Rodrigues parrot and other birds there . The rats probably preyed on their eggs and chicks . The French astronomer Alexandre Guy Pingré visited Rodrigues to observe the 1761 transit of Venus . He indicated that local species were popular game , and found that the Rodrigues parrot was rare :

The perruche [Newton 's parakeet] seemed to me much more delicate [than the flying @-@ fox] . I would not have missed any game from France if this one had been commoner in Rodrigues ; but it begins to become rare . There are even fewer perroquets [Rodrigues parrots] , although there were once a big enough quantity according to François Leguat ; indeed a little islet south of Rodrigues still

retains the name Isle of Parrots [Isle Pierrot] .

Pingré also reported that the island was becoming deforested by tortoise hunters who set fires to clear vegetation . Along with direct hunting of the parrots , this likely led to a reduction in the population of Rodrigues parrots . Pingré 's account is the last known mention of the species , and it probably became extinct soon after .