

LEVELED Book • M

# Parrots

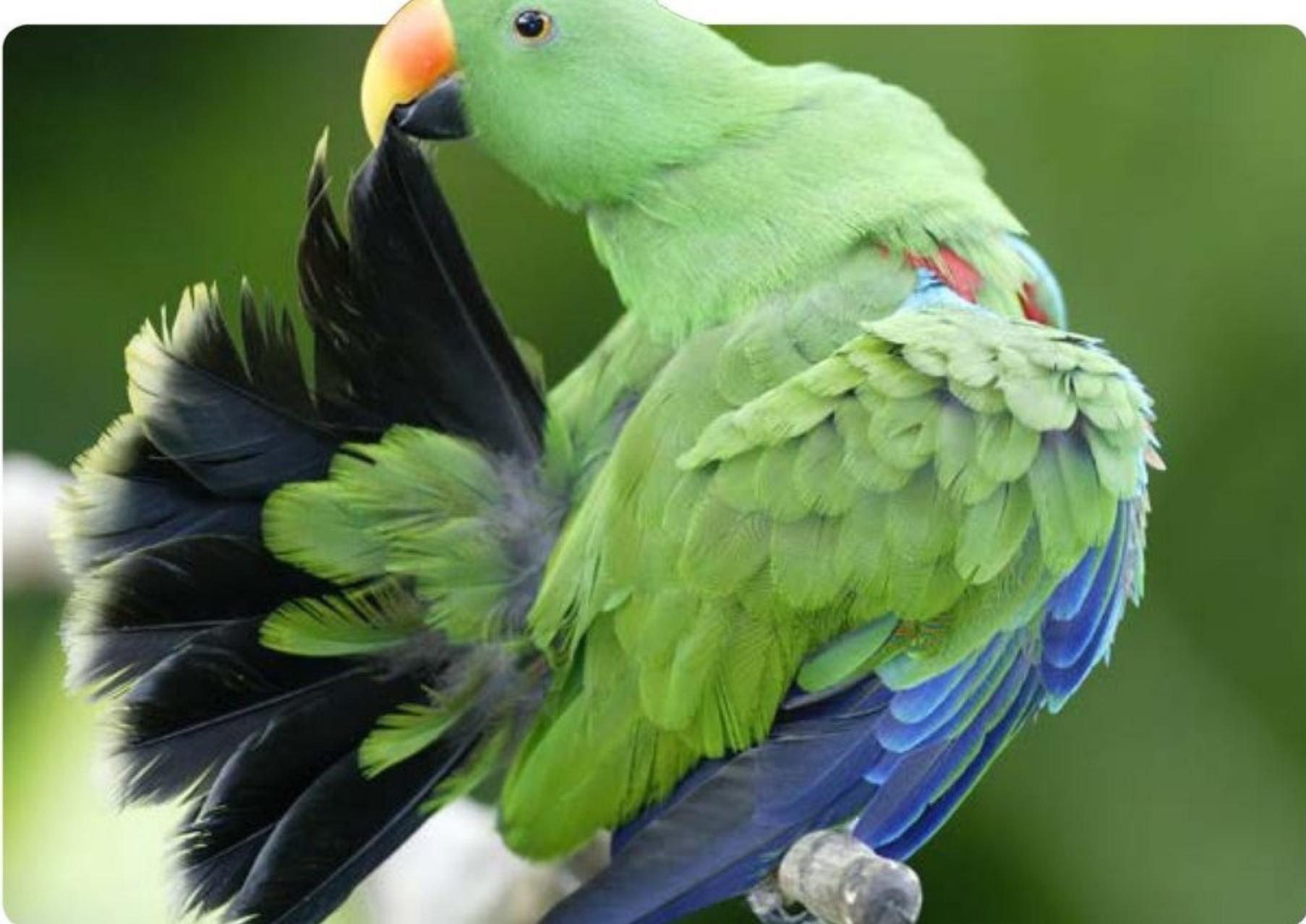
Written by John Rousselle

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# Parrots



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## Table of Contents

Special Birds .....	4
Pretty Birds .....	5
Smart Birds .....	6
Talking Birds .....	7
What Makes a Parrot a Parrot? . . .	8
What Parrots Eat .....	12
Where Parrots Live .....	13
Parrots Are Popular .....	15
Glossary .....	16



Two sun parakeets share a meal of leaves.

## Special Birds

There are many interesting birds in the world, and parrots are among the most amazing. What makes parrots so special?



Parrots come in many sizes, shapes, and colors.

## Pretty Birds

Many parrots are beautiful, with bright feathers in one or more bold colors. Parrots can be green, blue, yellow, red, or a mix of many colors. They can also be black, white, or gray. They can even be pink!



Dr. Irene Pepperberg studied the intelligence and communication skills of African grey parrots, such as Alex (shown here), for many years.

## Smart Birds

Parrots are super smart. Like humans, apes, and dolphins, parrots' brains make up a big part of their bodies. Large brains give parrots the ability to learn, remember, and **reason**. Scientists have studied some parrots that are as smart as children in kindergarten.

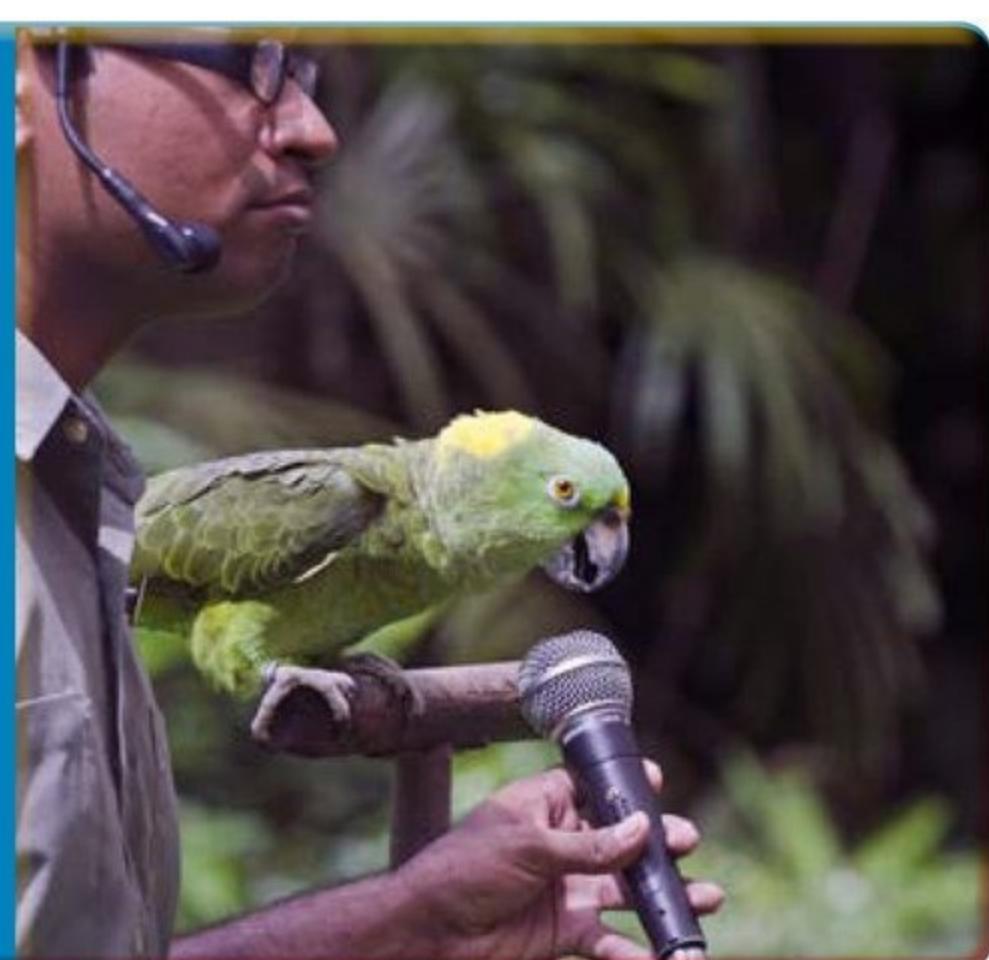
# Talking Birds

What parrots are best known for, however, is their ability to learn and **mimic** sounds. Many parrots can repeat words or sounds they hear. Some parrots can even speak using hundreds of different words.

African grey parrots are famous for their speaking ability. Some African greys can tell jokes, count, and correctly name shapes and colors. Some of them can even speak in more than one language!

## Do You Know?

Humans use vocal cords to talk, but parrots don't have vocal cords. Parrots have to change the shape of the walls of their throats to speak.





True parrots, cockatoos, and New Zealand parrots look very different.

## What Makes a Parrot a Parrot?

There are more than 350 different kinds of parrots. The three main groups of parrots are true parrots, cockatoos, and New Zealand parrots. Although parrots come in many different shapes and sizes, they are all alike in some ways.

### What's in a Name?

Parrots include many different birds, such as: Amazon parrots, African parrots, macaws, parakeets (including budgerigars or “budgies”), parrotlets, conures, lories, lorikeets, lovebirds, cockatoos, cockatiels, kakas, kakapos, and keas.

## *Parrot Beaks*

Almost all parrots have large, curved **bills** with a pointed upper half and a short, strong lower half. Parrots are sometimes called *hookbills* because their upper bills are shaped like hooks.

Strong bills allow many parrots to crack open nuts and fruits that other animals can't. Parrots also use their bills to hold objects, clean their feathers, and help them climb.



Parrots use their large, strong beaks to help them in many ways.



Parrots' unusual feet allow them to do things other birds can't.

## *Parrot Toes*

All parrots have four toes on each foot, with two toes pointing forward and two pointing backward. They use their feet for climbing, cleaning their heads and beaks, and grabbing and holding objects. They are the only birds that hold their food in one foot while they eat it.

### **Do You Know?**

Because they have toes pointing both forward and backward, parrots are good at hanging upside down. Some parrots, known as hanging parrots, even sleep upside down!



## *Parrot Heads*

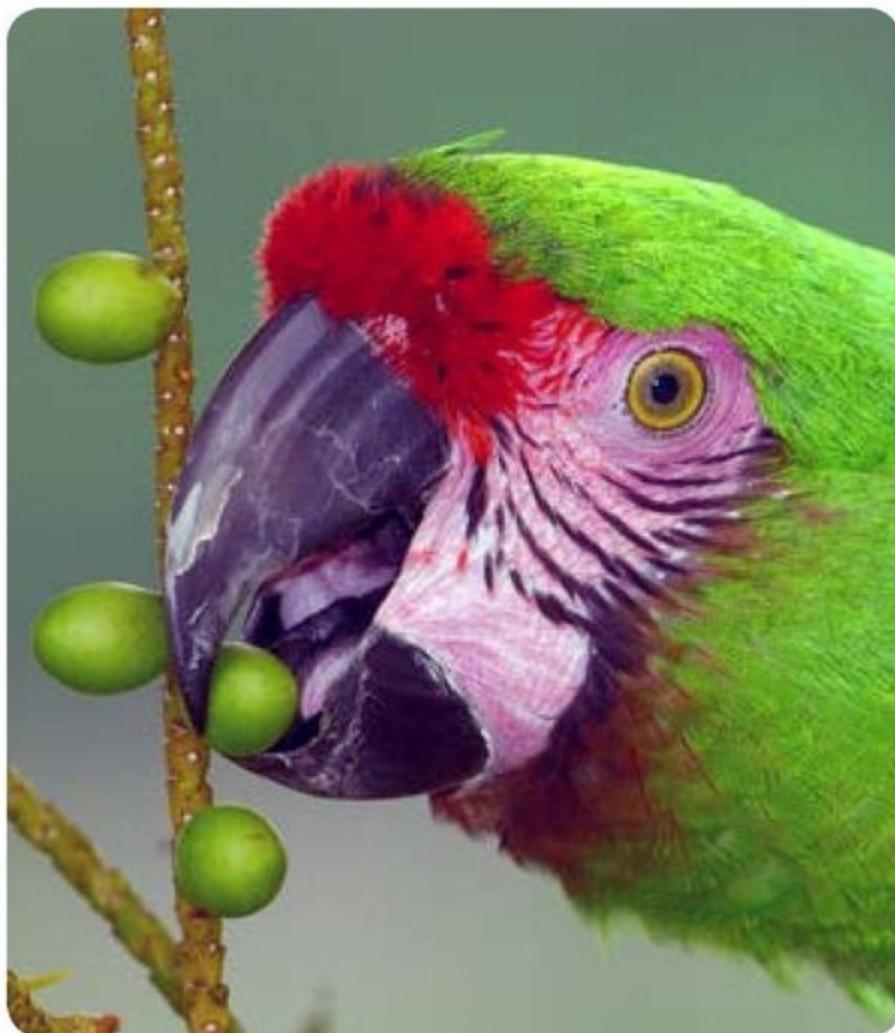
Parrots have large, round heads with eyes on the sides. Most have circles of skin around their eyes where there are no feathers. Some parrots have a **crest**, or crown, of feathers on the top of their heads. Cockatiels and cockatoos can raise and lower the feathers on their crests. They use their crests to **communicate** with other birds and to scare away predators.



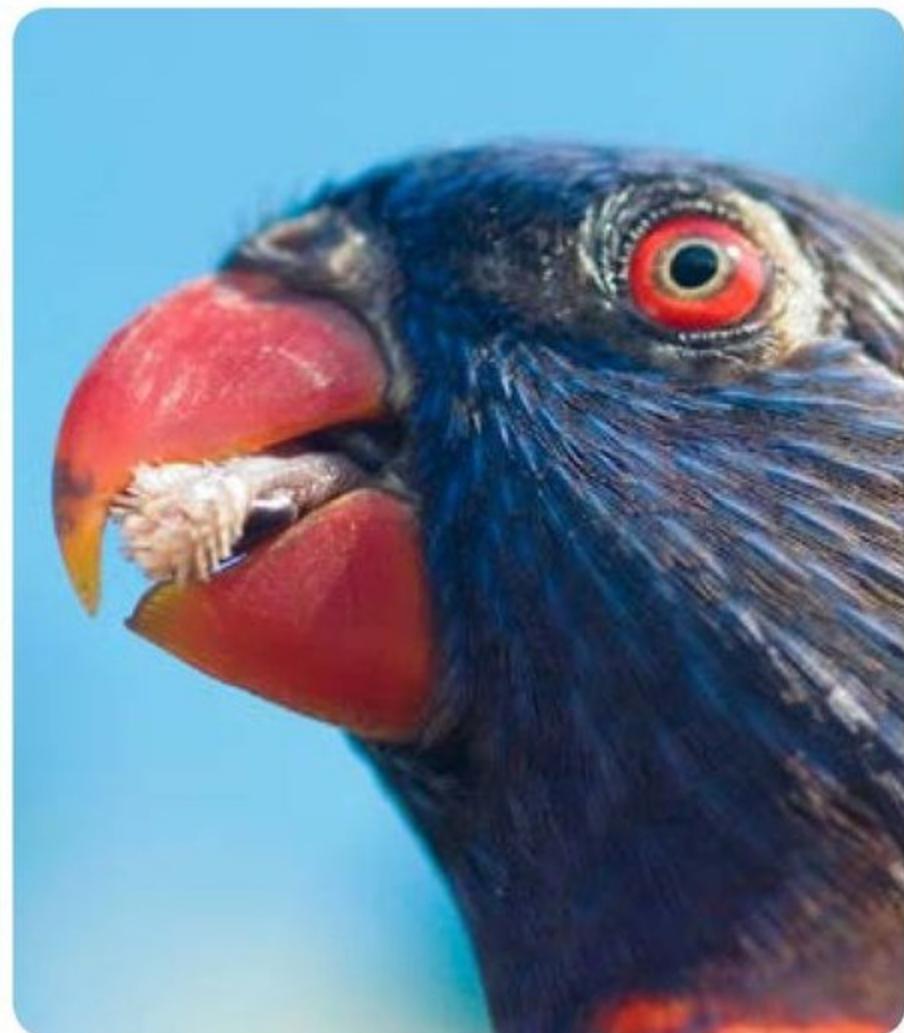
The bare patch of skin around a parrot's eye



A Major Mitchell's cockatoo raises its crest.



A macaw eats palm fruit in Ecuador.



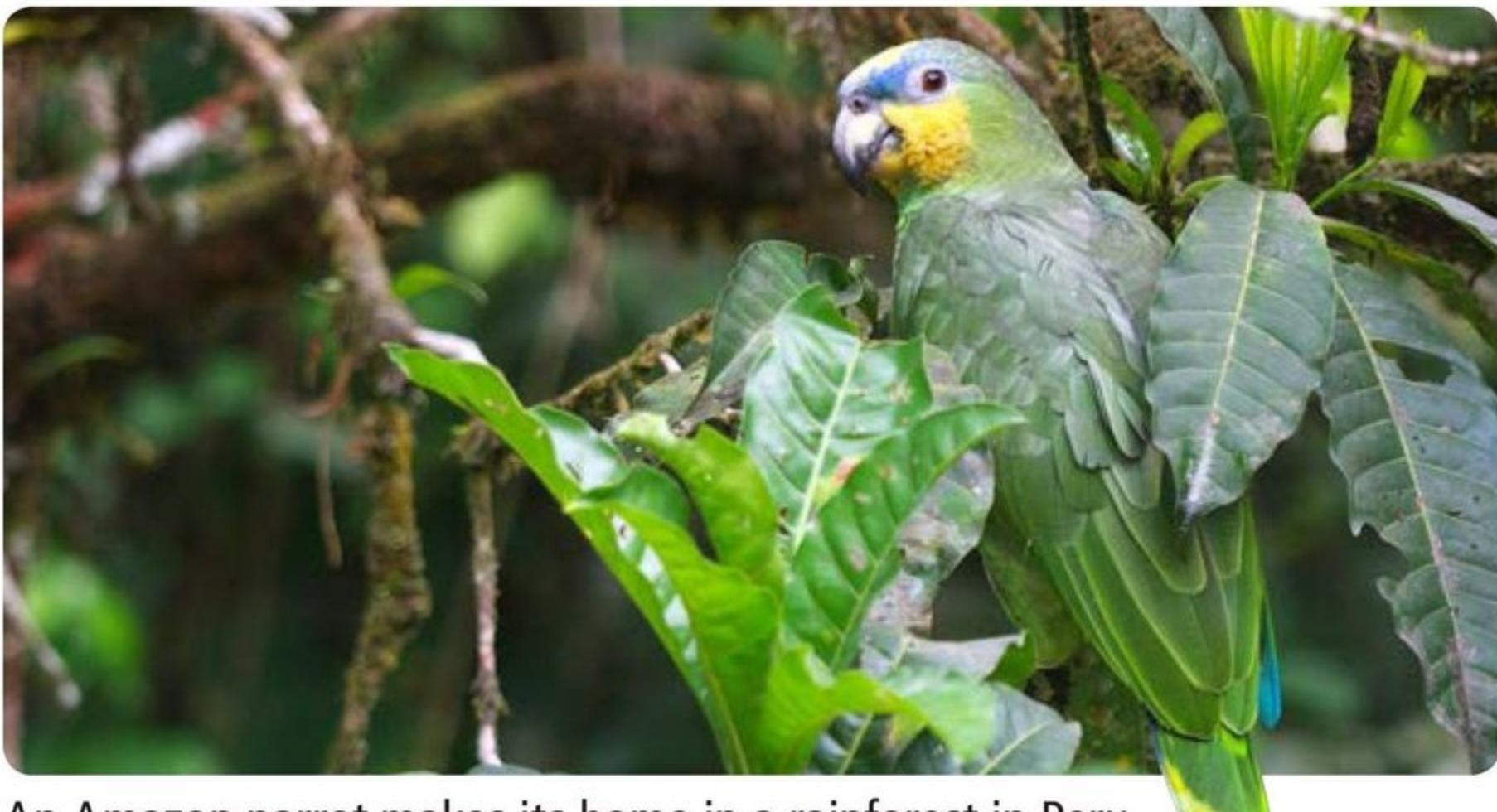
The brush-tipped tongue of a lori allows it to gather nectar.

## What Parrots Eat

Parrots eat fruits, nuts, seeds, flowers, and other plant parts. Some also eat insects and other small creatures. A few kinds of parrots feed on nectar, a sugary liquid made by flowering plants. These parrots have special tongues that help them get nectar from flowers.

### Wowser!

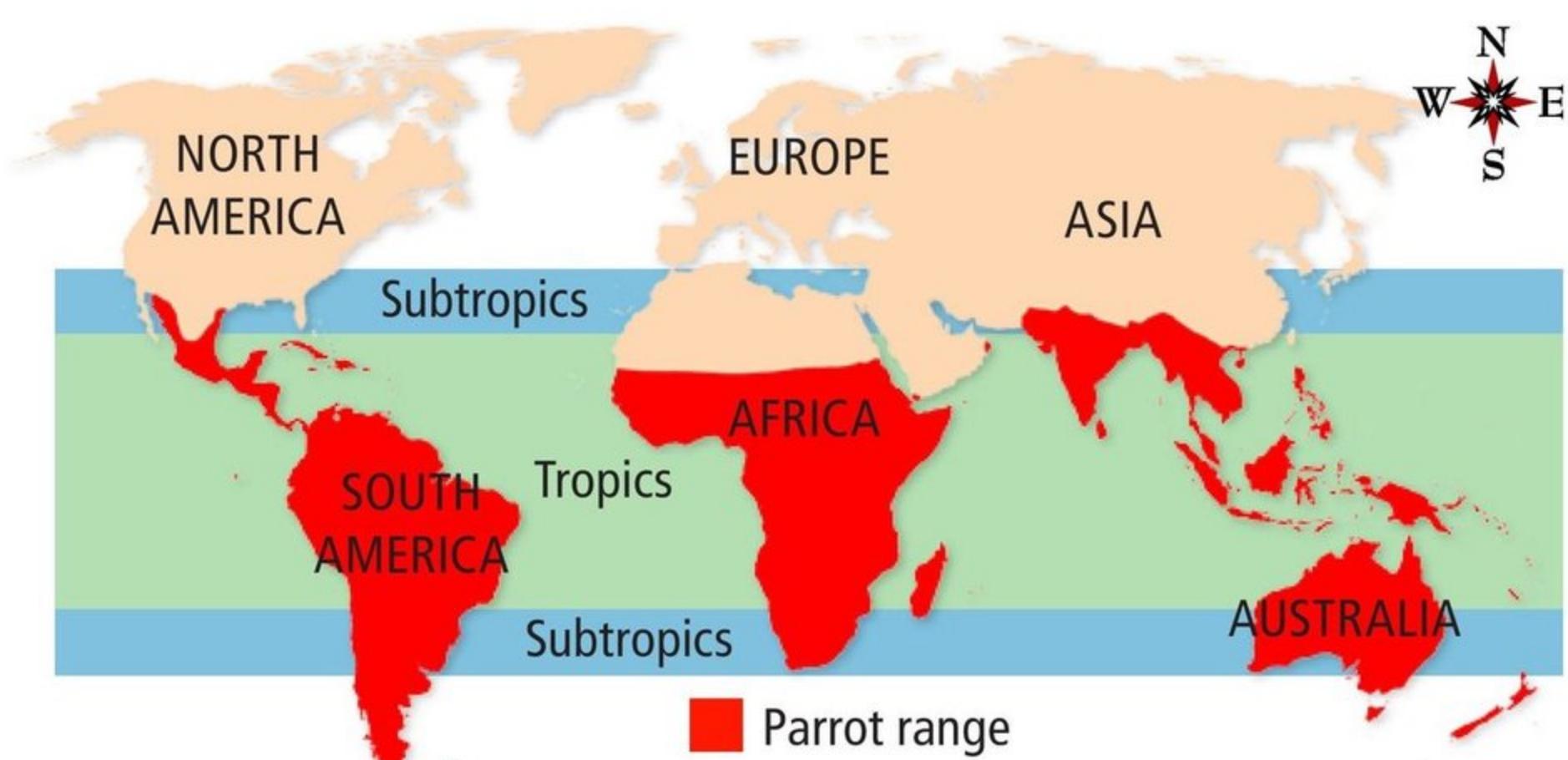
Parrots live a long time. Some larger parrots can live to be more than 85 years old!



An Amazon parrot makes its home in a rainforest in Peru.

## Where Parrots Live

Most parrots live in warm **rainforests** in tropical and subtropical areas. Central America, South America, and the islands in and around Australia have the greatest variety of parrots.





A blue-fronted parrot perches in a tree hollow in Brazil.

Only a few kinds of parrots build nests. Most parrots live in hollow spaces that grow naturally in tree trunks. Some dig holes in cliffs, banks, or the ground.

### Do You Know?

A parrot's beak never stops growing. The beak is made of hard keratin, a much stronger version of what your fingernails are made of. Parrots need to eat hard, solid foods often to wear down their beaks so they don't grow too large.

# Parrots Are Popular

Parrots are the rock stars of the bird world. Their beauty, intelligence, and playfulness have made them popular with people everywhere.

## Parrots As Pets

Many people keep parrots as pets. Unfortunately, parrots can be hard to care for properly. Because they are very smart, parrots get bored easily, so they need a lot of attention. Parrots are loud and messy. They naturally want to fly and be with other birds.

Parrots that are not cared for properly often become sick or sad. Parrots can live to be very old, so caring for them can take a lifetime. Animal shelters receive many unwanted parrots each year. For these reasons, the Humane Society suggests that people think very carefully before keeping parrots as pets.



## Glossary

<b>bills</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	birds' beaks or mouths (p. 9)
<b>communicate</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to make one's thoughts or ideas known using words, pictures, gestures, or other means (p. 11)
<b>crest</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a showy group of feathers or hair at the top of an animal's head (p. 11)
<b>mimic</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to imitate closely, often as a joke (p. 7)
<b>rainforests</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	dense forests, usually in tropical areas, that receive a lot of rain and contain diverse animal and plant life (p. 13)
<b>reason</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to understand or come to a conclusion by using good judgment (p. 6)

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Cover spread: A flight of blue and yellow macaws soars above a forest.

Title page: A scarlet macaw in flight with its flight and tail feathers clearly visible.

Page 3: A male eclectus parrot in Singapore uses its beak to clean its tail feathers.

Page 15: The hyacinth macaw is the largest parrot species that can fly. The flightless kakapo of New Zealand can be even larger.

Special thanks to Page and Pearre Williams and their parrot, Willie.

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