

Crimson-fronted Parakeet

In a park somewhere in the Central Valley of Costa Rica, you sit on a bench to relax and enjoy the pleasant, tropical climate. While pondering palm trees, you can't help but notice that bits of vegetation and fruit seem to be falling out of a large tree. Something is up in the leafy crown; you can hear it making cackling noises but just can't see it no matter how hard you look. A group of screaming, laughing kids run by and a dozen leaves appear to suddenly take flight from the tree! You become aware that the "leaves" are actually birds; a flock of Crimson-fronted Parakeets that zip off in screeching flight through the streets of the city.

Identification

Crimson-fronted Parakeets are a long-tailed parakeet species with red underwings and a red front. The red front and underwings can be difficult to discern in flight but the long, pointed tail stands out. This feature helps separate the Crimson-fronted from the only other species of parakeet likely to be seen in the Central Valley of Costa Rica; the smaller, shorter-tailed, Orange-chinned Parakeet. The Olive-throated Parakeet looks similar but is smaller, lacks red in its plumage, and only occurs in the Caribbean lowlands.

Behavior in Costa Rica

Like many parakeet species, the Crimson-fronted is typically seen in pairs. If a third bird is present, it is probably a youngster flying with its parents. Crimson-fronted Parakeets are strong, fast flying birds and are most often seen (and heard) as they zip overhead, screeching the entire time. When feeding in a fruiting tree, their green plumage blends in perfectly with the leaves to make them nearly invisible when bird watching in Costa Rica.

Habitat and distribution in Costa Rica

Crimson-fronted Parakeets are one of the common birds of Costa Rica that occur in semi-open areas and edge of humid forest. The key needs for this species are probably cavities for suitable nesting sites and fruiting trees for food. This parakeet has found cavities for nesting in the form of eaves and holes in the roofs of buildings in and around San Jose. It also finds plenty of food in the figs and other fruiting trees that shade the parks of the Central Valley. The Crimson-fronted Parakeet is most common in the Central Valley and also occurs in deforested areas of the humid lowlands.