

Animal Advisory Commission, June 12

Below, please find (1) text from Jason Garza's e-mail and (2) the message regarding monk parakeets from Austin Energy's General Manager

(1)

All,

Below is a message from Austin Energy General Manager that was sent to the Mayor and Council earlier today. The department is also responding to media inquiries and are communicating with the Audubon Society regarding the parakeets. Let us know if you have any questions.

Thanks

Jason

(2)

Dear Mayor and Council,

The public and news media have begun to respond to Travis Audubon's social media efforts to bring attention to the removal of birds' nests by Austin Energy. We wanted to provide the Mayor and Council with background and complete information about our practices and how they protect safety and reliability while taking care to protect wildlife wherever possible. We have received many news media requests and social media posts on this topic, as we are sure you have.

Monk parakeets are native to South America. Brought to Austin as pets decades ago and released into the City, the monk parakeets have spread throughout the Austin area; their territory continues to expand. Monk parakeets live in colonies, where they weave large nests out of sticks. Electrical infrastructure offers an attractive platform for monk parakeets to establish nests.

Wildlife of all sorts, typically squirrels, buzzards and snakes, are among the most common causes of electrical outages. Now in Austin, monk parakeets contribute to electrical outages. Nests built on electrical infrastructure result in fires, electrical outages and added risks to electrical maintenance crews. In many locations, Austin Energy leaves the nests in place because they cause no safety or reliability risk.

Austin Energy makes every effort to avoid disturbing monk parakeet nests except when those nests create imminent risks to public safety and electric infrastructure. In some instances, however, nests must be removed to assure the safety and reliability of the electric system. In particular, six high voltage circuits in the City that serve sensitive customers, such as hospitals and data centers, have active parrot populations on the high voltage infrastructure. Those lines are maintained on a monthly cycle, which can include removal of nests. These nests have caught on fire and fallen to the ground, where they are dangerous to life and property. These must be removed to keep the public and Austin Energy crews safe.

Removal of monk parakeet nests from high voltage lines is particularly hazardous work because the nests are built into live electric circuits. Crews removing nests must look out for their own safety and the safety of the electric system. The work is performed typically on energized electric lines from a bucket truck, using an eight-foot long insulated pole that protects the worker and the electric system. Crews take extreme care to ensure that their actions do not cause a fire or electrical interruption or personal injury. Typically maintenance is performed at night to avoid disruption of traffic and minimize traffic risk to maintenance crews.

A recent post circulating on social media from the Audubon Society of Travis County claims callous treatment of Monk Parakeets by Austin Energy. Austin Energy strives in its wildlife and vegetation management practices to minimize the impact on the environment of needed maintenance. Where possible, Austin Energy defers maintenance during the nesting season, but in instances of imminent hazard or risk to the electric system, Austin Energy crews take proactive steps to mitigate those hazards, which may include removal of monk parakeet nests from electrical infrastructure. Austin Energy team members strive to perform their work without harming wildlife.

Austin Energy is committed to the safety and security of our crews and all the members of our community. Reliable electric service keeps our community safe and promotes the local economy. Austin Energy welcomes input from the Audubon Society of Travis County and other interested parties to discuss best practices for maintaining the safety and security of our community.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Jackie

Jacqueline A. Sargent M.S., P.E. | General Manager | Austin Energy