

# Squawk 'n' Talk

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## Presidential Perch Monthly Update

Phyllis Cotton

I sincerely hope that everyone had a great holiday as well as a safe New Year!

As I look back over the past year I can summarize it in just one word...Challenging! It was definitely the year of many trials and tribulations. However, with the continued support of a fantastic group of officers and board members, we made it through 2003 and can now look forward to a better 2004!

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all of the officers and board members who were elected last month. Each person elected is such an asset to the GPC.

You will see many exciting changes taking place this year. Please come to the meetings and get involved. We are always open to new ideas. Unfortunately, there has been a rumor circulating for quite some time, that the GPC is a clique. We are trying very hard to dispel that rumor. Recently, I was informed that yet another rumor has been circulating about the club. Someone stated the GPC was going to dissolve. That is completely untrue! In fact, our membership continues to rise.

We have begun working on the August fair already and need volunteers for numerous tasks. If you have some free time and are willing to help, please call me or Niki Shaffer and let us know. This a great way for new members to get to know other members and you will have fun as well.

## For the Birds

Do you have what it takes to  
be an avian rescuer?

*Thank you to the ASPCA for use of this article. It was the feature article in their Animal Watch. The article, with photos by Janet Herbert and PEAC, can be seen on their web site at:*

[http://www.asPCA.org/site/PageServer?pagename=awatch\\_birds](http://www.asPCA.org/site/PageServer?pagename=awatch_birds)

*There are also some interesting resources listed in a sidebar to the article on the web site.*

By Paula Fitzsimmons

It's morning at the Parrot Education and Adoption Center in San Diego, where PEAC founder and president Bonnie Kenk and her volunteers begin their day like most others—preparing breakfast for 85 parrots and cleaning soiled cages. On this particular day, in the midst of this activity, the phone rings. The caller is a woman who can't tolerate her parrot anymore, wanting to know if PEAC can take him. With a full house and 120 birds already on the waiting list, Kenk regretfully turns the caller down.

Like so many others who rescue birds, Kenk wears multiple hats. She oversees operations, completes mountains of paperwork and balances the books—in addition to feeding birds, cleaning cages, and fielding calls. And like other rescuers, Kenk has a deep emotional attachment to her work. For better or worse, she's in it for the long haul. As difficult as the work is, she has made this commitment because she cares deeply for birds and is well aware of the growing number of unwanted companion birds, especially parrots, but also canaries, finches and doves.

### A Growing Problem

The 2003/2004 National Pet Ownership Survey, prepared by the Greenwich, Connecticut-based American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, Inc., reports a U. S. companion bird population of 17.5 million. Birds are found in one of every seven homes, making them the nation's fourth most popular pet (cats, dogs and freshwater fish hold the top three slots). The passage of the federal Wild Bird Con-

*See For Birds, on Page 4*

## At the Vet's What to Expect

By Ken Welle, DVM

As a bird owner, you shoulder many responsibilities. One very important one is taking your bird to the veterinarian. There are lots of factors to weigh when choosing a veterinarian. And even after you've settled on someone, taking your bird in for an appointment can be a stressful experience. There are things the veterinarian does that you probably wonder about. Is that the best way to take blood, for instance? Should your bird be anesthetized? Should you insist on being present during procedures?

How your veterinarian decides to treat your bird depends not only on the situation, of course, but his or her own work habits, so in many instances there is no strictly wrong or right answer. However, the better you educate yourself about what to expect, the less anxious you'll feel and the better decisions you'll be able to help make for your bird. Here are a few tips.

### **Choose a veterinarian before you need one**

You should retain a good veterinarian well before you need one, ideally before your bird comes home. Waiting until a bird is sick allows little time to think through choice of doctor.

In some areas, especially rural parts of the country, there may be no veterinarians with avian experience. If this is your situation, it might be wise to contact a few local small-animal veterinarians and ask if any would be willing to provide emergency care for your bird. Then you can try to find an experienced veterinarian with whom your local vet can consult. Try to find an expert as close as possible. That way, if your bird has to be referred, you won't have to travel as far.

What makes a good veterinarian for your bird? The same things that make a good veterinarian for your dog or cat: knowledge about the species, compassion, and a willingness to work with you.

But if I had to pick one trait above all others, it would be knowledge. Veterinarians who know a lot about birds obviously are better able to treat their medical problems. They don't waste time on unnecessary tests. They're better able to advise you on behavior questions.

Knowledge also translates into confidence, and more confidence means less anxiety, for everyone. Stress can predispose birds to illness, and a visit to the veterinarian can be one of the most traumatic events of a bird's life. In birds already ill, stress can make a critical difference. Add to this the fact that many birds present loud, vigorously struggling challenges that can be, to put it mildly, unpleasant for the veterinarian, and it's especially important

*See **Vet**, on Page 6*

## Relinquish Survey

The following was taken, almost verbatim, from the NPRRP web site.

Please visit the National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project (NPRRP) site. The purpose of this site is to collect accurate and comprehensive information about the population of relinquished parrots in the United States. The main goals of this project are to generate much needed information regarding the number of parrots that have lost their homes, the reasons that parrots are relinquished by owners, and the support or resources individuals require so that they may provide for the welfare of their companion parrots.

There are two types of surveys that can be accessed from this website. The first is an owner's survey. This survey is for anyone who has made the decision to relinquish a parrot. This survey can be accessed by clicking the button marked "I am an individual who has chosen to give up my parrot".

The second type of survey is for anyone who is involved with the population of relinquished parrots. This includes individuals and organizations that accept, place, care for, or sell relinquished parrots. Examples include:

- Humane societies / animal shelters
- Veterinarians / behavior consultants
- Parrot rescue / sanctuary organizations
- Foster care providers
- Breeders / Aviculturists
- Pet Stores / bird shops
- Zoos
- Bird clubs
- Individuals who have taken in or purchased relinquished parrots

**PLEASE NOTE:** You do not have to accept or care for relinquished parrots to participate in the project. Anyone who receives requests to take in parrots or advises owners who wish to give up their parrots is invited to participate.

If you have any questions, please refer to our FAQ or feel free to contact project staff for assistance.

### Message From the Project Director

Hello and thanks for visiting the home of the The National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project.

The question of what happens to parrots after they go home with members of the public is certainly an important aspect of aviculture. Sometimes, parrots are sold into homes and live out their entire lives with one owner. Sometimes, parrots leave their original owner and are rehomed in a new household. Sometimes, parrots move from home to home many times over. Sometimes, parrots end up resid-

*See **NPRRP**, on Page 8*

## Tips for Recovering Missing Birds

By Jean Pattison (The African Queen)

Ms. Pattison is apparently the principal of the ParrotTalk.com web site. There is a clear emphasis on the African Gray in the web site and this excerpt, but the information is probably valuable for any breed.

<http://www.parrottalk.com/missing.html>

1. Birds can live for days-weeks months, and even years after an escape. Never give up.
2. Always look for a grey BEFORE sun-up while it is still dark, and AFTER sundown. They are the most vocal then, and the most active.
3. Day 3 is when they get hungry and try to come in for food, they will go to just about any one at that time if they are tame.
4. ALWAYS have a recording of your grey when he is playing and having the most fun. Play this recording intermittently as you look for him.
5. Throw food on rooftops. Place a small cage on the roof of your house, or anyone's where they grey has been seen.
6. Tell people to put him in a pillow case, and have friends carrying pillowcases while looking, or small cages. Sometimes greys are caught by inexperienced holders and they don't know what to do with them.
7. Water hoses do work if you can spray him shortly after his escape. Hit him with as much water as you can all at once. He is heavy from not having exercise, and the water throws him off enough to ground him for a bit. Do not drench just before dark unless you are sure you can get him.
8. If possible contact organizations 50 miles away. Sometimes people find them while traveling and go home with them. Greys can also get that far just flying.
9. Give all the children in the neighborhood a buck and tell them there is more if they can locate your bird. Kids tell on people that are hiding them also. (per Mattie Sue Athan) Police will not help you retrieve a bird from someone else's home. You have to plan that one very carefully if they decide they want to keep your bird.
10. Have someone watch the bird at all times if he is spotted and you need to go for help.
11. If you try to climb the tree, it often times scares them up. A long branch may be better to coax him onto. Use

*See Tips, on Page 10*

## Polite Parrot Cookbook

By Michelle Karras, Avian Behavior Consultant

[www.ThePoliteParrot.com](http://www.ThePoliteParrot.com)

### BANANA NUT MUFFINS

1/2 cup margarine  
1tsp. Baking soda  
2 eggs  
2 cup sifted flour  
1/2 cup sugar  
3 large very ripe bananas  
1 cup nuts, chopped fine

Cream together the margarine, sugar and eggs. Add flour and baking soda and mix well. Mash the bananas and fold into batter. Add the nuts and mix in well. Pour into muffin tins sprayed with vegetable spray (or use paper baking cups), about 3/4 full. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean. These freeze well.

### POLLY BISCUITS

1 cup uncooked oatmeal  
3/4 cup powdered milk  
3 1/2 cup whole wheat flour  
1/3 cup butter  
1/2 cup cornmeal  
1 1/2 cup hot water  
1 tsp. Beef bouillon  
1 egg, beaten

In a large bowl pour hot water over oatmeal, butter and bouillon, let stand about 5 minutes. Stir in powdered milk, cornmeal and egg. Add flour, 1/2 cup at a time, mixing well after each addition. Knead 5-7 minutes, adding more flour if necessary to make a very stiff dough. Roll out on a floured board to 1/2 inch thickness and cut into shapes with cookie cutters (cat shapes are nice!). Bake at 325 degrees for about 50 minutes. Allow to cool and place on wire rack to totally dry before storing. Makes approximately 1 1/2 pounds.

### BIRDIE BREAD

1 cup whole wheat flour  
2 eggs - wash the shells and save  
1 cup corn meal  
3 Tbsp. Vegetable oil  
2 tsp. Baking powder  
1 cup milk or buttermilk  
1 tsp. sugar or honey  
Oatmeal or wheat germ to sprinkle on top

*See Cook, on Page 10*

servation Act in 1992 spelled the end of the lucrative trade in birds taken from the wild in their countries of origin and sold as "pets" to Americans, but it has also had the unfortunate consequence of giving rise to a booming business in captive breeding operations in this country, with many of the same kinds of excesses and inhumane practices that pervade the commercial and indiscriminate breeding of dogs, cats and other animals—and this is now resulting in large numbers of birds being relinquished by disillusioned owners. As shelters began to report this trend, the ASPCA responded by declaring January 2002 as the first annual "Adopt-a-Rescued-Bird Month".

The initial attraction to a bird is understandable. Birds are exquisite and sociable creatures, possessing intelligence often compared to that of preschool-aged children. But because birds are sold in pet stores, unwitting consumers assume that birds are "easy"—requiring only food, water and a cage. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, birds are extremely high-maintenance animals who require a great deal of mental stimulation and regular periods of time to interact and socialize. As "flock" animals, birds adhere to a "pecking order" that may include the humans in the home, and because there currently is no readily available spay/neuter procedure for birds, their caretakers will need to contend with complex hormone-influenced behaviors. A little-appreciated fact about captive-raised birds is that while they may be tame, they are not domesticated animals as are dogs and cats, and therefore still display wild behaviors. Partly as a result of unmet psychosocial and physical needs but partly by nature, birds scream, pull out their own feathers and mutilate their bodies, engage in fierce displays of dominance and bite—hard. Not everyone, especially those who acquire birds impulsively or without adequate research, is prepared for these behaviors or the level of care required. Inevitably, a percentage of birds become victims of isolation, neglect and abuse. The large (read expensive) species are typically passed from one family member to another until, if fortunate, they end up in a reputable shelter. Smaller, inexpensive species such as parakeets and finches may simply be placed at the curb as garbage, cage and all. Many shelters, however, are still not well-equipped to house and care for unwanted birds, which unlike cats and dogs represent many different species with distinctly different needs. Avian rescues have evolved to fill the gap.

### Who Rescues Birds?

Julie Murad has shared her life with parrots since 1974. In 1993, she adopted Gabriel, a hyacinth macaw, who died prematurely less than two years later from a devastating illness. Murad's commitment to honor Gabriel prompted her to found The Gabriel Foundation ([www.thegabrielfoundation.org](http://www.thegabrielfoundation.org)), a parrot welfare organization—a phrase she coined because "rescue" is only part of the problem. Incorporated in 1997,

the foundation's mission is comprehensive. It serves as a research and educational model for proper avian care; it is involved with conservation efforts; and it rescues, rehabilitates and rehomes unwanted birds or, if necessary, provides unadoptable birds with permanent sanctuary. Located outside Aspen, Colorado, the foundation's primary aviary consists of an 8,500-square-foot building, complete with separate species rooms, play areas and outdoor flights. Murad and her staff—including an aviary manager and assistants, education coordinator, office manager, and licensed veterinary technician—care for approximately 150 to 200 birds at any one time.

In 1994, Bonnie Kenk was working with a wildlife group in San Diego when a fellow volunteer suggested she start an avian rescue. Pondering the idea for just 24 hours, Kenk decided to act on the suggestion and took in her first bird after just three months. Formally founded in 1996, the Parrot Education and Adoption Center ([www.peac.org](http://www.peac.org)), is headquartered in San Diego but has chapters in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Charlotte, and Anchorage. The all-volunteer staff cares for birds in their homes until permanent arrangements can be found. PEAC hosts monthly seminars and an annual educational conference, now in its eighth year. One of Kenk's objectives is to disseminate updated and accurate information about parrots, and to correct misconceptions people may have about them.

In 1998, Tracy Bockenbauer was already sharing her life with parrots when she rescued Amos, an African grey who remains part of her flock today. After she took in Amos, word traveled, and people began to bring her more unwanted birds. Bockenbauer knew she needed a formal plan to better accommodate the birds, so she founded LaCrosse Avian Rescue Rehabilitation & Adoption in her hometown of Lacrosse, Wisconsin. Until the latter part of 2001, Bockenbauer ran LARRA ([www.larra.org](http://www.larra.org)) from her home, but as demand grew, she moved the rescue into a separate 3,000-square-foot facility. With the help of an executive assistant and 10 volunteers who can manage the rescue without her, Bockenbauer takes in unwanted birds, works with them to develop trust and social skills and finds them good, permanent homes.

Ellen Gyberg and Tammy Azzaro cofounded Mickaboo Cockatiel Rescue ([www.mickaboo.org](http://www.mickaboo.org)) in the San Francisco Bay area in 1996, to address the cockatiel overpopulation problem there. They believe that too many of the smaller parrots are being bred, many of whom become victims of abuse, negligence and elective euthanasia. Mickaboo's focus is to find foster and then permanent homes for the birds. It draws on a bank of 55 volunteers to provide foster homes. The rescue is not limited to cockatiels. (Editor's note: At press time, we received word that Ellen Gyberg is no longer with the organization.)

*Continued on next page*

In 1998, shortly after bringing home a Quaker parrot as a companion for their cockatiel, Eileen McCarthy and her husband joined their local bird club in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. The Quaker turned out to be a "little terror," and soon sent his owners to the club in search of information about parrot behavior. McCarthy and two other club members volunteered to administer the organization's anemic adoption program and took in an astonishing 120 birds the first year. The obvious need for rescue and rehoming services led McCarthy to found the Midwest Avian Adoption & Rescue Services in 1999 ([www.maars.org](http://www.maars.org)), and the next year they moved into a facility that was large enough to accommodate the number of birds in need of their services. MAARS has cared for some 1,200 birds over the past four years. Sixty volunteers work 12-hour shifts to care for 240 birds at any one time, and there is presently a 60- to 90-day waiting period for birds in need of new homes. MAARS, the largest accredited avian rescue/sanctuary in the United States, has just launched a capital campaign to raise funds for a modern facility in the Twin Cities area that will allow them to meet the increasing demands for their services.

### Is Avian Rescue For You?

Being surrounded by exotic birds on a regular basis is appealing. There's also great solace in saving unwanted birds from an uncertain fate, rehabilitating them, and placing them in good homes. In many instances, avian rescuers are recognized as assets to their communities, because they educate people about companion birds and do community outreach. Kenk considers it a victory when people attend one of PEAC's seminars and subsequently make changes in their homes to better accommodate their birds. At the start of their second seminar, one elderly couple told Kenk, "I hope you're not going to cost us money this time. After the last workshop we stopped on the way home and bought a new cage because we realized that the one our bird was living in was inadequate."

On the flipside, avian rescue is no nine-to-five job. The hours are long, the work is physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausting. Murad rises at 5:30 each morning, and regularly puts in 16-hour days. She knows of couples who have divorced as a result of the stress and long hours involved. Sam Foster, an avian consultant from Florida and the off-site liaison for The Gabriel Foundation, believes that most people enter avian rescue with good intentions, but are often unprepared and become overwhelmed. Having to refuse at-risk birds for lack of space is common, as is regular contact with emotionally and physically tormented birds. Additional tasks include recruitment and training of adequate numbers of dedicated volunteers and the constant need to raise money to meet expenses. Fortunately, by teaming up in new ways with traditional humane organizations where they live, individuals who wish to become involved in helping displaced birds can do so

without necessarily setting up their own rescue.

### Avian Activism

In September 2000, a New York City-based avian rescuer named Denise Kelly, Minnesotan Eileen McCarthy of MAARS, and four other rescuers simultaneously came to the same realization: much more than individual rescue groups would be needed if the swelling tide of displaced birds was to be stemmed. Consequently, they formed the Avian Welfare Coalition "to create a voice in the animal-protection movement for captive birds." AWC, a St. Paul, Minnesota-based grassroots coalition of Association of Sanctuaries- or American Sanctuary Association-accredited avian welfare groups and national animal welfare organizations, maintains a resource-packed website ([www.avianwelfare.org](http://www.avianwelfare.org)) that promotes the coalition's three primary goals: educating the public about the true needs and nature of exotic birds; performing rescue and sanctuary services; and working for more laws to protect birds. Each year AWC sponsors an invitation-only "avian welfare roundtable" to identify initiatives for the coming year. Participants at the 2003 conference, held in Minneapolis in May, agreed to focus on two projects: to publish a handbook for shelters on caring for captive exotic birds (the ASPCA is collaborating on this, and a publication date of January 2004 is anticipated; watch the AWC website for updates); and to go all out in support of a consciousness-raising Second Annual National Bird Day on January 5, 2004. (For details on this campaign, go to [www.api4animals.org](http://www.api4animals.org) and type National Bird Day into the search window.) In the space of just a few years, avian advocates have gotten themselves organized!

As distressing as it is to learn about the large number of birds who need help, it's good to know that there are many ways to become involved. Making sure one's own birds will always be provided for is critical. Flocks of experienced avian caregivers are needed to assist less-knowledgeable staff in area shelters to care for the birds that are surrendered to them. Established avian rescues need donations and volunteers in order to sustain and expand their services. And for the estimated 10 percent of homeless birds who are assessed as unadoptable because they either cannot or will not bond with humans, permanent sanctuary is needed. To Marc Johnson of Massachusetts-based Foster Parrots, Ltd., this last option is the most important way in which a person can help. "Most people want a hand-tamed baby who will sit on their shoulder, talk and do tricks," he says. "But what we need to see are people who are motivated by compassion, people who are willing to provide a large cage or maybe an outdoor aviary to a pair of 'less-than-perfect' birds and not expect them to be anything other than the wild creatures that they are at heart."

Paula Fitzsimmons lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where she serves as education director of her local bird club, acts as a liaison with the area humane society and volunteers with the Fine Feathered Friends Avian Sanctuary. Additional reporting by Marion S. Lane.

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to find someone who is self-assured. Not all the unpleasantness can be eliminated, of course. But when birds are outside a veterinarian's comfort zone, he may dread your visit.

### **Finding a good bird veterinarian**

It can be tough for bird owners to assess just how knowledgeable a veterinarian is. There are obvious signs during an exam, of course, such as how smoothly the veterinarian handles your bird and whether he can identify the species on sight. But ideally, you want to find out a few things about the veterinarian before making an appointment.

One way to assess expertise is to pay attention to credentials and titles. Let's start with the term "avian veterinarian." People often tell you to find a good avian veterinarian, but what exactly does this mean? Any licensed veterinarian who professionally works with birds to any degree can call him or herself an avian veterinarian. An avian veterinarian may see a bird every 15 minutes - or one bird a year.

Some veterinarians may refer to themselves as an "avian specialist" or use the description "practice limited to birds." These mean that the veterinarian treats only birds. If they follow the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) guidelines for the ethical use of the term, avian specialists are certified by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (ABVP) as having completed a rigorous application and examination process. You'll often see the title "Dipl ABVP (Avian)" after the names of these veterinarians.

Certification indicates a veterinarian has gone the extra mile in formal education. However, that doesn't mean other veterinarians who are not formally certified don't have just as much or even more experience. They may have gained it in their practice, through continuing education, from other knowledgeable avian veterinarians, or all three.

In any event, it is not unreasonable to ask a veterinarian you are considering what continuing education specifically geared for birds she has attended in the past year or two. Most veterinarians are very upfront about their abilities. At the very minimum, the veterinarian should be a member of the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV). The AAV supplies the highest-quality avian continuing education available.

Beware veterinarians who say they don't know much about birds but are willing to do wing and nail trims. Botched grooming can cause serious problems for a bird.

### **In the office**

You've made the first appointment with your new avian veterinarian, and it's time to get acquainted. You'll see the office and meet the staff, and your bird will get its first exam. What are some of the things you should be looking for?

A passion for what they do is already a given for most avian veterinarians. Why? In the early 1990s, many small-animal veterinarians began to see avian medicine as an untapped market and entered the field. However, many found that avian practice was too labor-intensive to be an easy profit center and dropped out. Those who remained stayed because they were mesmerized by the charm of pet birds.

Beyond a love of birds, you should look for a smoothly run office and a willingness to take your needs into consideration.

Let's start with making the appointment. By the time you notice your bird is ill, the condition can be serious, so you'll probably want to make a same-day appointment. Mindful of this need, a good avian veterinarian will always leave a few empty slots open for emergencies.

Once at the veterinarian's office, you shouldn't have to wait long to see the doctor. A crowded waiting room is not a good place for a sick or even merely nervous bird. Long waits, especially when dogs or cats are present, can greatly increase the stress level.

A waiting room just for birds would be ideal, but since most veterinarians also see other animals and can't afford three areas - for birds, dogs and cats - the best you can hope for is that each doctor will have access to at least two exam rooms. That way you can go straight to an empty room to wait while the doctor finishes up with a patient in the other.

While you wait, the staff should be interviewing you for your bird's history or having you fill out a form. The veterinarian should review this information before he meets with you and your bird. This can save time in making a diagnosis and eliminate a lot of stressful handling.

### **Slow and easy**

Avian exams often take longer than those for traditional pets, so it's especially important that the veterinarian schedule enough time for an appointment. Overbooking will force her to rush through the exam and forego the patience and service you and your bird deserve.

For instance, the doctor should not walk in and immediately restrain your bird. She should spend at least a few minutes getting to know the two of you. While you chat, she should be observing your bird for overall health and temperament.

When it's time to physically restrain your bird, the veterinarian should use a capture method that makes the most sense. Years ago, when most birds brought in for exams were wild-caught and untamed, the rapid grab using a towel was an effective method. Today, however, most birds are tame companions that veterinarians should be prepared to treat accordingly. To do otherwise can hurt the relationship you have with your bird.

The best thing you can do for both your bird and the veterinarian who has to handle it is familiarize the bird with being held in a towel. If your bird considers the towel a friend, he'll

Continued on next page

be a lot calmer and the stress of going to the veterinarian will be greatly reduced.

Unfortunately, many birds are terrified of towels. If this describes your companion, consider keeping him in his carrier until the veterinarian is ready to examine him. That way, if he has to use a towel, your bird is less likely to fall and injure itself or bite someone.

Regardless, the exam will probably be one of the greatest stresses your bird will ever face, and the veterinarian should do everything possible to minimize the trauma.

If your bird is difficult to capture, the veterinarian should perform as many necessary procedures as possible before releasing. However, if your bird becomes increasingly upset while restrained, the veterinarian should give it rest breaks. Birds that pump enough adrenalin can stress to the point of cardiac arrest.

### **Just a trim, please**

Perhaps all your bird needs is some grooming. Properly executed grooming, an entire article itself, is more important than you might think. For instance, excessive wing trims can cause birds to be clumsy, which in turn can result in injuries to the beak tip, sternum, wings, and tail. Wing-trimming techniques are somewhat controversial, but cutting all of the primary and secondary feathers is excessive.

Drawing blood by clipping a toenail is the least risky method but the most painful. Claws should not be cut so short that they bleed. It hurts and will make your bird that much more fearful of restraint the next time.

A healthy bird provided with plenty of chewing material should never require a beak trim. If trimming is done without attempts at determining a cause, the stress of the procedure can be life-threatening. That's because some birds with overgrown beaks have serious underlying health problems such as liver disease.

### **How should blood be taken?**

Veterinarians routinely use blood test results to make diagnoses. Birds have a lot less blood to spare than dogs or cats, so it's important that your avian veterinarian know how to maximize samples. If you have one of the largest birds, such as a macaw, cockatoo, or Amazon, the veterinarian should draw enough blood to allow additional testing to be done if initial results call for it. That way, he won't have to stress your bird by taking more blood later, and test results won't be compromised by early supportive care.

Blood can be drawn in a variety of ways. Inserting a needle into any one of several veins - called venipuncture - is currently the most common method. The jugular vein, located on the side of the neck, is the largest available vessel. Properly done, drawing from the jugular is quick, minimally painful, and gives a high-volume, high-quality sample.

There is a small risk of serious complications with jugular venipunctures, but they occur rarely and primarily in small birds. The vessel can bleed into the surrounding space or into the cervical air sac, a potentially fatal situation. In my 14-year practice, during which I've performed over 10,000 venipunctures, this has happened just once.

The basilic vein, on the inside of the wing, is also easy to locate and puncture, but it may not yield enough blood for testing and it tends to form large blood clots. Also, bleeding sometimes continues for several minutes and requires applying pressure, which can be stressful to the bird.

The medial metatarsal vein is on the leg, just above the foot. Like the basilic vein, it's a small vessel from which the veterinarian may have trouble getting a sufficient sample. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to see, and if bleeding goes on too long it's easy to put a bandage on the leg.

One final method of obtaining blood is clipping a toenail. The major advantage to this method is that it is a very simple technique and involves very little risk. However, it's the most painful and yields the poorest-quality sample.

### **To "gas" or not**

Should your bird be awake or under anesthesia for a procedure? Veterinarians base their decision to "gas" on many factors, including how much pain your bird is likely to experience, whether he needs to be restrained, and how well he would tolerate restraint.

Procedures for which a healthy bird should not require anesthesia include routine examination, grooming, and most injections. Some veterinarians anesthetize birds for microchipping, but most don't. Procedures that often require anesthesia include radiographs, for which the patient must be strapped down.

The safety of anesthesia depends on many factors, including the length of time it's used, the type used (isoflurane and sevoflurane are safest) and the condition of the bird. For short non-surgical procedures, the risks are very low. Procedures lasting more than an hour have a much higher risk. Paradoxically, a critically ill bird may tolerate anesthesia better than manual restraint.

If anesthesia is necessary, your veterinarian will hold over the bird's head a mask that dissolves gas in oxygen. After a few minutes, the bird will fall asleep and the doctor will reduce the concentration of gas. For longer procedures, a breathing tube may be placed in the bird's trachea. At the end of the procedure, your veterinarian will turn the gas concentration to zero and probably administer oxygen until your bird begins to wake up. Tracheal tubes stay in place until the patient begins moving.

### Being there

It's difficult to watch your bird be whisked away by a veterinarian and not know what's going on. When a procedure is necessary, you want to be there to comfort him. Should you insist on being present?

A good avian veterinarian will be willing to discuss this issue with you. Most of the time, you can expect your wishes to be honored. Personally, I prefer to perform simple procedures such as drawing blood in the examination room where the owner can watch if she wants.

However, there are a few things you should keep in mind. Veterinarians have their reasons for performing some procedures out of sight. The first may have to do with location. Treatment areas may have better lighting, more elbow room, or the anesthetic machine. Clients are usually not allowed in these areas because they can get in the way of the staff.

Sometimes it's a liability issue. If you're bitten during a procedure, you could sue. In some cases, the veterinarian or technician may simply be nervous and not want you to see his hands shaking.

Are you the squeamish sort? If so, you should probably steer clear of watching. Another reason you might forego being there is that some birds associate painful experiences with those present. Watching a procedure that's traumatic for your bird could change your relationship.

If you watch, do your best not to hinder the process or distract the veterinarian. It's the last thing she needs when trying to concentrate on the tasks at hand.

### The best ways to medicate

When it comes to medicating, your veterinarian should make things as easy as possible on you and your bird. While somewhat painful, injections are by far the most effective and efficient means of delivering medications to a bird. However, more likely than not, you'll take home some type of oral medication.

Your veterinarian should formulate dosages to make them as easy as possible to administer. Ideally, you should have to medicate your bird no more than a couple of times a day. Each dose should not be unreasonably large (usually about 1 ml for a 1-kilogram - 2.2-pound - bird is about the most you want to give). If the medicine is bitter, ask if it can be ordered with a masking flavor such as tutti-fruitti.

### Bandages or collars?

If your bird has injured itself and the wound needs to be protected from the beak, your veterinarian should opt for a bandage first, a collar second - especially if the injury is on a foot, which is easy to bandage.

Restraint collars are not tolerated as well. Birds often react very strongly at first. Some will panic and flip wildly about for up to 30 minutes. Other birds "pout" and hold the head down.

If your bird is collared, he should be monitored at the veterinarian's office for a few hours before going home.

### What to expect from hospitalization

Whenever possible, your bird should recuperate at home. Not only is it a lot less expensive for you, but it's a lot less stressful for the bird than hospitalization with all its strange sounds, sights, and medical procedures.

However, there may be times when he needs continual treatment that can only be administered by veterinary professionals, such as intravenous or subcutaneous injections, tube feeding, or sinus flushes.

In the hospital, the barking of dogs, the sight of cats or even larger birds, and excessive staff foot traffic all can increase your bird's stress. He should be kept in a ward separate from dogs and cats. His cage should be elevated so he's looking down on people - that makes him feel more secure - and it should face in a direction that allows minimal visual contact with other birds.

### Partners

Whatever your bird's health needs, your avian veterinarian should be willing to help you understand your options and give you a say in the outcome. If he doesn't have much time to spend educating you, someone on his staff should make themselves available.

You should always hear all sides of the issue, including risks and cost. For instance, if your cockatiel has a chronic egg-laying problem, your veterinarian should be explaining the pros and cons of spaying, called a salpingohysterectomy (it's riskier than a dog or cat spay, but not as risky as the possibly fatal consequences of continued egg laying).

If you choose your veterinarian wisely, familiarize yourself with procedures, and make yourself a partner in decisions, chances are you will get to enjoy your avian companion for a long time to come.

### About the author

Kenneth R. Welle, DVM, Dipl ABVP (Avian) owns All Creatures Animal Hospital in Urbana, Ill.

Comments about this story? Send a letter to Mailbag. ParrotChronicles.com

<http://www.parrotchronicles.com/novdec2002/vet.htm>

NPRRP from page 4

ing in a shelter, rescue, or sanctuary. Sometimes, parrots are euthanized because owners are no longer able, or no longer wish to care for them. There are many possible permutations of why parrots are relinquished and where they may end up after leaving the home of their original owner. It is a complicated issue that requires careful research to fully understand.

The issue of relinquishment of companion animals is part of the full spectrum of animal ownership. The cat

Continued on next page

and dog communities have been investigating these issues for many years in an attempt to fully understand the situation. The National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project (NPRRP) is the first study of this kind to be conducted within the parrot community. In the absence of objective, comprehensive data, there has been much speculation as to the extent of the parrot relinquishment issue. Some people say that there is not an issue with parrot relinquishment, and that there are enough homes for all of the companion parrots in this country. Others will state that there is a rapidly growing problem with unwanted parrots. The NPRRP offers an opportunity to replace speculation with data, and to exchange guesswork for informed discussion. It is our responsibility as members of the parrot community to fully understand all aspects of parrot ownership, including issues of relinquishment.

The goal of the National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project is to collect objective data about the issue of parrot relinquishment. The NPRRP is sponsored by PETSMART Charities, through a grant to The Gabriel Foundation. Data will be collected at the project's web-site where people can fill out a survey about their experiences with relinquished parrots. There are specially designed surveys for individuals who have made the decision to relinquish a companion parrot, as well as surveys for those who accept relinquished parrots. The NPRRP hopes to include all members of the parrot community who have experience with relinquished parrots. There are specific surveys for those involved with parrot welfare organizations, rescues or sanctuaries, traditional animal shelters, zoos, pet stores, and bird clubs. In addition there are surveys for veterinarians, breeders, avian behaviorists, and individuals who have taken relinquished parrots into their homes.

The final results of the NPRRP will be made available to the entire parrot community. This data will be useful in evaluating the current parrot relinquishment issue, and planning for the future. In addition, PETSMART Inc. will use the data provided through this survey to evaluate their policies regarding the sale of birds in their stores.

I would like to thank those who have assisted in this project, including our staff and our advisory board. This advisory board is made up of representatives from many areas of the parrot community. This diverse and knowledgeable group of individuals was instrumental in the planning of the NPRRP. In addition, I would like to thank the over the 30 additional members of the parrot community who participated by reviewing and commenting on the surveys. This group included representatives from the avicultural, rescue, and education communities and their input was very useful.

The NPRRP was originally launched in early December, and many people visited the site and participated in the survey. However, due to an unfortunate server malfunction, much of the data that was collected was lost. To insure the integrity of the survey results, all of the data collected in the initial launch had to be discarded. The NPRRP has been re-launched with a revised survey and all members of the

parrot community are cordially invited to participate. Those who completed the survey once before are asked to return and complete the survey again.

The surveys will be available online through the end of February. All members of the parrot community who are involved with relinquished parrots are invited to visit the web site and learn more about the project. The NPRRP hopes to bring together as many individuals as possible to collect data about this important issue.

Thank you for your support.  
Sincerely,  
Cheryl Meehan, Ph.D.  
Director, NPRRP

## FAQ

### What is the purpose of this project?

The NPRRP is a research initiative which will gather objective data that will help the avian community better understand the issues involved with parrot relinquishment. It is similar to many surveys that have been conducted to understand the issues surrounding cat and dog ownership and relinquishment. Everyone in the parrot community will benefit from having good statistical data on this issue.

### Who should participate in this survey project?

There are two groups of people who should participate in this project:

Anyone who has made the decision to relinquish a companion parrot.

Anyone who is involved with the population of relinquished companion parrots. This includes individuals and organizations that accept, place, care for, and sell relinquished companion parrots. However, it should be noted that you do not have to accept or care for relinquished parrots to participate in the project. Anyone who receives requests to take in parrots or advises owners who wish to give up their parrots is also invited to participate.

### What types birds are of interest in this project?

This project seeks to collect information on all Psittacine species regardless of size. This includes: Macaws, Cockatoos, Amazons, African Greys, Conures, Pionus, Caiques, Lorikeets / Lories, Cockatiels, Budgies, Lovebirds, Eclectus, Poicephalus, Parakeets, and others.

This project will not collect data about other birds such as canaries, finches, pigeons, etc.

**For more information, please visit the NPRRP website at <http://www.nprrp.org/> also available as a link from our website...**

your head here. Raise his cage to where he is.

12. Have friends and family miles away in other cities watch the lost and found ads.
13. If he is roosted near dark, wait until dark before trying to retrieve him. They don't fly well at night, and they don't want to fly, but make sure you don't miss. You may use a high powered flashlight to momentarily blind the bird while another person nets or grabs the bird.

If sighted, keep the mobs of people away, and let the owner try and coax him down. Have your helping friends in tall trees or on roof tops to watch where he goes if he takes off. You NEED spotters prepared and willing.

Additional Information/Comments by Scott Lewis

I might add to all this that if the bird is hanging around but refuses to go in a cage or allow itself to be caught, a Have-A-Heart chipmunk trap may do the trick. This is a small live trap. We recaptured a hawk headed parrot with one. With this sized bird, which is roughly the same size as a Timneh African Grey, anything larger will not work because the bird can go in and out with impunity. We know this from experience. After watching in total frustration as the hawk head repeatedly walked in and out of a Have-A-Heart squirrel trap to eat, we got a chipmunk trap. She went in, she was back.

Place the trap high in the area the bird is frequenting. Remember that height equals safety to parrots and most other birds. Be sure to check it frequently. If the bird is caught, it may panic. And, there is a good chance you will catch native birds, which won't appreciate it a damned bit. I have released a few extremely irate grackles and such.

For little birds, such as lovebirds and budgies, a sparrow trap works well. We had a black-masked lovebird show up at the aviary. I suppose it was attracted by our birds' calls. Given that lovebirds can carry PBF, to which all our birds are very susceptible, two vets told me to get a pellet gun. I didn't have the heart to do it. But, I caught him in a sparrow trap within a half hour after I set it.

Finally, a hose does work, but don't be shy. The idea is to totally soak the bird in a big hurry to the extent that it can't fly. If you're shy with the hose, you will simply watch a damp bird fly away.

Mix the first 7 ingredients together and add any of the following:

Cooked sweet potatoes  
Squash, shredded or chopped  
Lima beans  
Black eyed peas (cooked)  
Grated carrot  
Pulverized egg shells  
Frozen cranberries (not thawed)  
Blueberries

Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour in a 13x9 pan or 30 minutes in an 8x8 pan

### BANANA BRAN MUFFINS

2/3 cup flour  
3/4 cup mashed bananas  
2 Tbsp. Sugar  
1/3 cup milk  
2 1/2 tsp. baking powder  
3 Tbsp. Melted shortening  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1 egg, beaten  
1/4 cup raisins  
1/2 tsp. baking soda

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Mix together flour, sugar, baking powder, soda and salt. Combine egg, bananas and milk, and add to flour mixture. Add shortening and mix only enough to dampen flour. Fold in cereal and raisins. Fill greased muffin pans (or use paper baking cups) two thirds full. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes.

### GRAPE-NUT MASH

1/4 GRAPE-NUT cereal  
1/4 Milk or soymilk (no sugar)

Combine and microwave for 1 minute on high, or bring to a boil in a saucepan on the stove. Cool until just warm and stir in any of the following: mashed bananas, yogurt, cottage cheese, any fruit cut up, Brewer's yeast, jarred baby vegetables.

### PINE CONE TREATS

Make sure you use CLEAN, DRY pine cones for this, and make sure they have not been treated or sprayed with anything! I go out on our property (where we don't use pesticides) and collect pine cones for my bird each fall, for use the following year. Wash them with soap, rinse well and lay out to dry or place in warm oven (250 degrees). You can then add peanut butter and add your favorite seed or pellets.

***Get more recopies online!***

## 2004 Schedule

Here is the plan for the rest of the year. With the exception of June, these are all third Sundays. Watch for the updated list with education topics as they are available...

- February 15 Geese Peace
- March 21
- April 18
- May 16
- June 13 ( Second Sunday )
- July 18
- August 27 – 29 Hookbill Fair
- September 19
- October 17 World Bird Sanctuary
- November 21
- December 19 Holiday Party

## Diane Grindol New Book

### Teaching Your Bird to Talk

Somebody give me a review. More info on web site and next month. Find out how to get a discounted, dedicated copy.

## Bobby Finds a Home

Speaking of the ASPCA, they coordinate a pet rescue service on the web, called PetFinder, [www.PetFinder.com](http://www.PetFinder.com). It is a clearing house for rescue activities for all types of animals. Their newsletter features a *Happy Tail of the Week*. Last week featured a Cockatiel named Bobby placed by **Perfectly Precious Rescue & Adoption**. Congratulations to Phyllis Cotton and Janet Draper, who are, Perfectly Precious.

By the way, you can sign up to receive the newsletter at:

<http://www.asPCA.org/site/PageServer?pagename=newsletter>

Following is the text of the article, printed with permission.

### **PETFINDER HAPPY TAIL OF THE WEEK: BOBBY'S GIRLS**

*Things looked bleak for Bobby, the 19-year-old cockatiel who had health issues that he wasn't expected to overcome. "Luckily, nobody told HIM that," says 15-year-old Katy from Illinois, who, along with her mom and younger sister, recently adopted the little bird.*

*When Katy and her mother, Renee, first logged on to Petfinder.com, the ASPCA's online partner and searchable database of homeless pets, they were actually looking for a dog for Katy's grandmother. "But then I saw Bobby's picture," recalls Renee. They kept returning to the bird's photo and description to get another glimpse.*

*The family made arrangements to adopt the cockatiel, who was being cared for at the St. Louis-based Perfectly Precious Rescue & Adoption. "He's absolutely adorable," says Renee, who calls him "a perfect addition" to their resident menagerie of two other cockatiels, a parakeet, two bearded dragon lizards and a hamster. Adds Renee, "He likes to play a game of chase around the living-room floor with the other cockatiels!"*

## Mission Statement

Gateway Parrot Club  
A not-for-profit organization  
Established in 1988

*Dedicated to the following goals:*

- To bring people together in a friendly atmosphere in the interest of exchanging information on bird care and breeding.
- To create an interest in bird care and breeding through monthly educational programs and annual bird fairs.
- To educate ourselves, and the general public, on the ever-present danger of extinction in the wild.

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