

Squawk 'n' Talk

Volume 4, Issue 4

May/June 2004



Presidential Perch Monthly Update

Phyllis Cotton

The details for our August fair have been finalized. This year we are going to something just a bit different than previous years. With bird fairs popping up all around us it was time for a change. Anyone can put on a bird fair but the GPC has an obligation to aviculture to go that extra mile and do more than just hold a fair. We strive to educate the public on the proper care of birds in captivity. Not only do we attempt to educate but we donate proceeds of our annual fair back into avian education, conservation and research every year. Therefore the title of our August fair will be the Gateway Parrot Club All American Hookbill Fair & Educational Seminar.

The schedule of events is:

Saturday, August 28, 2004

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 9:30 AM | Doors Open To The Public |
| 11:00 AM | Katy McElroy, Cockatoo Breeder from Hornbeam Aviaries |
| 12:30 PM | Liz Wilson, Parrot Behavior Consultant |
| 2:00 PM | Michelle Karras, "The Polite Parrot", Bird Talk Magazine |
| 3:30 PM | Georgia Reger, DVM "Micro Chipping Clinic" for birds |
| 6:00 PM | Doors Close To The Public. Private dinner for vendors, speakers, and volunteers hosted by the Gateway Parrot Club. |

See **President**, on Page 6

Feather Destruction and Your Parrot

Michelle Karras, The Polite Parrot

Note: Michelle Karras will be our guest speaker at the Fair, Saturday afternoon.

There are so many reasons that a parrot may become self-destructive. Until recently there has been very little information to help us along with our feathered friends. Feather destruction can be a very difficult behavior to deal with and not all birds are able to recover from this bad habit. There are many ways however to help make your parrot happier and feel safer in their environment simply by adjusting their surroundings and improving stimuli.

If you have a parrot that is self destructive to his feathers you need to take a good look at his environment from a bird's point of view. Is he located in front of a window? If so you should place the bird where it still has a view but not directly in front of the window. Parrots do not understand that they are in a home where the predators cannot get to them, so things they see outside are very frightening for them. You will also want to cover the back half of the cage to give the bird a sense of security when perched toward the back of the cage. This also provides much needed privacy for preening, napping and masturbation. It is important for your parrot to have privacy at his choice. Being on display twenty-four hours a day is very stressful and may cause feather destruction habits. You also want to place a perch high up in a back corner of the cage with several toys around and in front of the perch, so that when the parrot is back there he can watch his surrounding undetected as he would in the wild.

Sleep is very important, many of these parrots come from areas very close to the equator and they receive a full twelve hours of both night and day. Some parrots are a little more nocturnal, with a parrot such as an African gray you would want to give them ten hours opposed to twelve, whereas a cockatoo requires a good twelve hours of quiet uninterrupted darkness each night. If your parrot's cage is located in a family area I highly suggest buying a smaller sleeping cage that you can place in a quiet area for nighttime.

Exercise is another area we tend to overlook with our parrots. Sitting on a play gym is not exercise. We need to take a better look at our birds' daily habits and incorporate more exercise into their routines. You can have your bird go up and down stairs in your home, you can gently swing them around to make them flap their wings, or you can even toss them in the air (with

See **Feather**, on Page 4

Book Review

Teaching Your Bird To Talk

Diane Grindol, Tom Roudybush

By Dorene Olson

I received the book *Teaching Your Bird To Talk* with delight, as it was signed by both authors and inscribed "...in honor of Cinnamon, Dorene's first bird - The World's Most Perfect Bird". I found that quite generous, as Cinnamon was my Cockatiel and Diane Grindol raises cockatiels – surely she might think some of her birds were perfect, as well!

When people think of parrots they often assume the gift of gab. Many folks seem to want their birds to talk – it is certainly the first question people ask me when they meet my birds – and the authors present a very easily readable, clearly understood guide of the issues surrounding bird speech.

While this book may or may not successfully teach a guardian to teach her bird to talk, it is extraordinarily well rounded and fascinating to read. The basics of bird care and training are included here as inseparable to the fringe benefit of speech. Proper avian veterinary care and a very nice introduction to learning theory and positive training are discussed in detail, hand in hand with speech training. Anatomical lessons on sound and speech, wild parrot communication in natural settings, and much discussion of Dr. Irene Pepperberg's research with Alex are also included. Field research on the differing dialects and languages of wild parrots were especially interesting to me as a linguist who is interested in the linguistics of other species. And as a behaviorist, I was delighted to read about how to address behavior problems - such as excessive screaming and the use of foul language - in the context of how to work with birds while doing speech training.

Other areas that I thought would be very helpful to novices and interesting to advanced aviculturists were discussions of which breeds of parrots were more or less likely to talk, problem solving for both the overly verbose as well as the reticent birds, and a chapter on birds other than psitticines that have talking abilities. And for those of us who have been out of college a while and are rusty on our study skills, each chapter contains a helpful "Points to Ponder" summary.

Although I have a few picky criticisms, such as a picture of a bird in a cage absolutely devoid of toys and the endorsement of a few harassment trainers despite the otherwise terrific discussion of positive training, one has to look hard to find them. Instead, fun discoveries abound at each turn of the page. One of my favorite was Grindol's idea of the benefit of "No". Dreading a discussion of punishment, I was delighted to find instead the suggestion that teaching your bird the concept of No now opens up a world of empower-

See Talk, on Page 4

On The Perch With Pauline

Pauline the Parrotlet is well known to regular Gateway Parrot Club meeting members as the tiny blue ricochet that lands in your hair. Pauline is a four year old, parent raised ex-breeder bird who was retired after she chewed off all her own toes. She is adored by the Olson Frei household, where she rules the roost. Very opinionated by nature, Pauline has volunteered her services to offer birdy advice. Questions to Pauline from your parrots can be sent to the Gateway Parrot club yahoo group, or to Pauline's Personal Assistant at taradorene@charter.net. Pauline regularly consults with professionals other than herself and includes their recommendations in her column. And now, over to Pauline:

Dear Pauline:

I am noticing that my friend Bandit is going bald in spots, and there are a lot of feathers on the cage bottom recently. He seems a little itchy, and more crabby, too. Is there anything that I can do to help?

Sincerely,

Peggy the Parrotlet

Dear Peggy:

It sounds like Bandit is going to be making a veterinarian appointment very soon. Feather picking can be a birdie's nightmare, and it is helpful to get it addressed before it becomes a habit or before Bandit does permanent damage to his skin or feather follicles.

So hop in the car pronto for a complete avian exam, which should also include examination for external parasites. If there is a yeast or bacterial infection, it should be treated immediately, and often a fecal exam is warranted, particularly in birds such as African Greys and Cockatiels, who are prone to internal parasitic infections and to Giardiasis. Cultures can be taken at this time as well, to check for the presence of illnesses common to birds and linked to plucking, such as Chlamydia. Veterinarians need to carefully examine your friend to also make sure that the plucking is not confused with Psitticine Beak and Feather Disease (Pbfd), a fatal disease involving hypertrophy of the beak, nails and skin.

After the avian exam, some environmental changes are in line next. Boredom can play a factor in feather chewing or shredding, which is a different problem than is feather plucking. Birds that pluck or chew on their feathers without removing them tend to be behavioral pluckers. Birds that pull out their feathers are more often suspected of a

See Pauline, on Page 5

Health & Illness in Birds

Dorene Olson

Birds are prey animals in nature and depend upon their flocks for the safety of numbers. When a singular bird is ill or injured, it can call the attention of predators to the flock, which can endanger the safety of the entire population. As a result, the flock will usually drive the ill or injured bird away from it as only hope for survival. Consequently, birds are masters at masking their illnesses until they can sometimes be in quite an advanced state of disease. It becomes essential, therefore, to learn to recognize and respond to signs of subtle and overt ill health in captive parrots.

It is helpful to have in one's mind a picture of a bird in good health in order to make a comparison to one lacking in overall fitness. A well bird should have an active interest in its environment and present an overall smooth silhouette without flaw or exaggeration. The eyes should be bright, shiny and clear and seem able to respond to stimuli in front of, behind, and to both sides of the bird. The eyelids should open and close without effort and should not have any discoloration, swelling or scaling. Its nares (nostrils) should be clear of any exudate, swelling, abrasions, scales, (which might indicate parasites, especially in budgies, also called Parakeets) as should be the rest of the beak and any skin surrounding the beak on the face. The beak should be smooth and the surface level free of layers, chips, or dents. The beak should meet evenly and the bird should be able to eat, preen, and open and close its mouth without effort.


The feathers of the bird should be smooth, glossy and full, held nicely as a silhouette against the body. Wing and tail feathers may appear ragged if the bird has been caged in too small of housing or received bad trimming, but there should never be any bald patches, raw skin showing, or downy undercoat present on any of the body or appendages. The feathers around the vent should be clean and free of droppings. The feathers near the face should be free of any discharge from eyes, mouth or nose.

The feet of the bird may show signs of stress or trauma, such as missing toes or toenails. A complete set of toes in captive parrots consists of four per foot: two facing forward and two facing backwards. If there are missing digits, carefully inspect to ensure that the wound is old and completely healed; there should not be any raw, open or infected wounds. Otherwise the feet should be able to firmly grip a perch, the nails should be of moderate to short length, and the legs sturdy, straight, and capable of bearing the full weight of the bird. A bird will normally rest with one foot or the other tucked up into its belly feathers. Ensure that each foot is capable of bearing the weight of the entire bird during these resting times. Feet should not appear to have scales, layers, draining sores or discoloration. Inspect the bottoms of feet to make sure that the surface is level and the tissue is sound. Bumblefoot is a condition whereby portions of the feet (most often what would be the "heel" in a

person) can swell, become crusty, or have open lesions.

A sick bird, on the other hand, presents a radically different picture from one in good health after one learns to recognize a problem free creature. Sick birds are often very still on the perch, frequently with head tucked over its shoulder, feathers fluffed around it for warmth, and perhaps standing on one foot. Sometimes the bird is huddled so low on the perch that no feet appear present; at other times it may appear to be laying horizontally on the perch. Observe the tail if the above symptoms should be present: frequently a bird in respiratory distress will appear to bob, dip, or sway its tail as it struggles to breathe. Watch the rise and fall of such a bird's chest to determine if breathing is heavy and labored. Conversely, a bird may be appearing to stand very tall with its head stretched out, or even hang from the side of the cage by its beak in an effort for better breathing. Eyes are frequently closed to any activity going on around the bird, and the bird may be subtly or noticeably inactive compared to its cagemates or its own earlier behavior. Eyes and or nose may appear to have discharge, or may be clogged with debris. Frequent sneezing may be observed, as well may be loud or noticeable breathing. Wings may appear to droop at the sides.

Behaviorally, a normal bird may vomit as an offering of affection, but a sick bird can vomit without social interaction and may or may not remain clean from the waste. A soiled or pasty vent, and abnormal dropping are all very common signs of sick birds. A well bird can have a variety of dropping types but most should consist of an outer urate center and an inner fecal content. Abnormal dropping can be malodorous, watery, clear, have diarrhea content, and tend to be consistent in their abnormality. Normal activities (preening, play, social interaction, and talking) will cease in an ill bird, and feeding behaviors usually cease. Some birds can have an odor if feather health has not been routinely addressed through bathing, but any particularly strong or offensive odor is worthy of further investigation.

It is important to create the discipline of a quick mental scan of the health of each bird in your care routinely during the day. Get to know each bird's time tables for napping, playing, eating, vocalization and interactions. Become familiar with the patterns and consistency of its dropping (which should be monitored on newspaper rather than any other substance which could interfere with interpretation of its content). Visually scan any incoming birds for glaring signs of illness, then monitor closely over the next few days. A sick bird has a compromised chance at a good prognosis for recovery once signs of illness are readily apparent. A bird with only subtle signs of illness, or of questionable health, is usually in an earlier state of disease and will usually be stronger and better able to respond to treatment. 

Feather from Page 1

proper wing clips, if the cut is too short I do not recommend this) and let them fly gently down, doing this several times in a row. You can also run around with the bird above your head allowing them to flap their wings vigorously. You can take them outside and let them climb a small tree up and down, or run in the yard, supervised of course. There is also the option of allowing your bird flight, although this can be dangerous and you need to weigh the benefits and dangers of having a flighted parrot. When a parrot is properly exercised each day they are less likely to be problematic in the household. So sit down with the family and discuss an exercise routine for the parrot that will fit into the family's routines. Children can be included even if the parrot does not care for them. You can have your children work with the bird inside the cage by playing music loudly and having the kids dance with the parrot. This is great exercise for both the kids and the bird. Always supervise small children with parrots.

Showering is very important; whether you use a misting bottle or place the bird in the shower does not matter as long as it is done on a daily basis. Do not blow dry; they do not have hairdryers in the wild. The fact is that wet birds do not pick...so if you have a feather picker keep the bird wet, just make sure it is warm enough in their environment. Most homes are kept around seventy degrees and this is a fine temperature for most parrots. If you feel your bird is going to be too chilled you may purchase a warming light bulb to place near the cage after a bath.

Some birds will only bother their feathers during spring time because this a time of year when they would be building a nest and raising babies, so we need to increase the amount of things for them to chew during these times. If you know that your parrot picks badly once the weather gets warmer then start preparing the cage prior to the warm months by packing it with different shapes and textures for your parrot to explore and shred. This will deter the parrot from chewing on himself. Use several different types of household items such as; adding machine tape, corn husks, paper towels, cotton socks, willow tree branches, grape vines wreaths, card board, TV guide, newspaper, tissue paper, Dixie cups, wooden spoons, whisk broom, raffia, Popsicle sticks, tongue depressors, shoe laces, straws, and also weave their leafy greens into the cage bars instead of just placing them in a bowl in front of them. Place the greens all around the cage, not worrying whether or not there is a perch in front of them.

Working toys are also very important. Your parrot should have at least three toys in the cage that make

them work for their food. Toy manufacturers have recently come out with several wonderful working toys, plus you can make some right from home such as using an old pill bottle, washed, and filled with food. Fill a cotton sock and hang in cage or a small cardboard box or egg carton filled. Working toys should be rotated with other working toys so the parrot does not become bored.

Your parrot should receive at least two to four hours of out of cage time a day with at least one hour of one on one time with you. One on one time is time that you spend directly with your parrot each day. This time can be broken up throughout the day it need not be all at once. You will want to be careful not to give this attention when the bird is feather picking, you will want to give this attention when the bird is being good. If the bird is picking distract his attentions away from his feathers before you go and give attention to him. This is very important as we tend to want to tell the bird no or go over and stop them. Instead make a noise by either knocking or clapping to distract, then praise the bird the moment it stops, and give attention. Lengthen the time between the praise and attention each time. Eventually, the destruction will be less and less if you are consistent.

Okay let's recap; Evaluate cage location and move cage if necessary, sleep 10-12 hours depending on breed, shower daily even several times a day, working for food, toys that are easily shredded with different textures, and of course EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE!!!!!!

politeparrot@aol.com



Talk from Page 2

ment to the bird. Now, instead of biting the owner, the parrot can communicate her reticence to step up with a firm "No", and the caretaker can leave unscathed. I'm definitely going to have to work on that one with Whimmer! And Grindol emphasizes many times the necessity of a full, rich, natural diet, the imperativeness of toys and out of cage entertainment, and surprisingly, takes the new but as yet unpopular stance of advocating free flight for all pet parrots. I hope that this book sets a trend for aviculture in the future, and benefits all captive birds from pets to those imprisoned in small breeder cages with only a perch and box for their daily existence.

Teaching Your Bird To Talk deserves a good read, and I am delighted to add it to my shelf.



metabolic or severe physiological/medical problem; pulling feathers HURTS and it is not often done for enjoyment or from boredom. Moving the cage toys around and providing new, interactive chewing toys (see article by Michelle Karas) will give Bandit an appropriate outlet for his shredding tendencies that. Veterinarian Sheila Jarasek at Tri-City Animal and Bird Clinic recommends that Ott lighting, or other whole spectrum lighting, be added to the cage, and that a strict sleeping schedule be followed to monitor light and dark cycles. 10 to 12 hours of quiet, dark privacy a day are essential. She also suggested adding Missing Link as a food supplement and mentioned that the avian veterinary community has been seeing tremendous success with the product for overall health. Fresh foods can be hung and strung creatively in the cage to encourage foraging and better nutrition, and a daily spraying with water is essential to complete the environmental regimen. If Bandit is itchy, adding some aloe water into the misting water can help alleviate that problem.

If Bandit is having emotional frustration, his social schedule needs to be addressed, as well. Some breeds, such as Cockatoos, develop abnormal pair bonding and the resultant stress of being "abandoned" by their flock during a normal work day can cause feather plucking or shredding. These birds typically present themselves as young, 2 1/2 - 3 year old birds who were fine until the onset of sexual maturity. If these birds begin plucking in the spring, it is imperative to make sure that when their humans handle them it is not misinterpreted as sexual behavior. Keeping the petting limited to the head, and not down the back, under the wings, or on the tummy will help. Sometimes a hormone injection of Lupron or HCG can relieve some of their frustration.

If Bandit continues picking despite these changes, then we go back to the vet. This time we will need to ask for some radiographs to make sure that he has not gotten into any lead or heavy metals. These metals can be picked up by nibbling on paint, curtain weights, or other household hazards. We also can take blood to detect any other metals that might not show up in the x-rays, such as zinc, and to check his body functions: bile acids, liver levels etc. Many times medication can fully correct these abnormalities. By the way, diarrhea can sometimes indicate zinc infection, and any diarrhea should be viewed with an eye towards monitoring a potential ill health.

Let's hope we get to the source of Bandit's condition by now, because if not, our next step is a feather follicle biopsy and culture. Do you see why this can be a complicated condition?! A feather biopsy and culture can determine if there is an underlying or deep seated fungal or staff infection, or if there are primary skin changes indicating allergy or hormonal related conditions. If chewing is resulting in damage to the body, then collaring is warranted so that

Bandit is prevented from doing further harm to himself. We have now used human anti-anxiety and anti-depression medicine in feather pluckers, such as Prozac for obsessive compulsive disorders or Chlomipramine for mental dysfunction, but our success is limited with drugs without behavior modification therapies. It is very important to monitor the liver while taking these medications, and unfortunately rather than cure they can just mask the symptoms, and plucking will resume when the bird is allowed. Increasing dosages can also cause neurological impairment.

I hope that this helps your friend! Good luck,

Pauline

Pauline's advice is not meant to replace that of your veterinarian, please contact your avian vet instantly if you suspect that something is wrong with your bird.



Mail to Pauline

Pauline's first installment generated response mail. The following letter to Pauline came in too late for a response this month, but look for it in June...

If you would like to ask Pauline a question, please direct it to her personal assistant, Dorene Olson, at:

TARADorene@Charter.net, or
51 Bal Harbor Drive
St. Louis, MO 63146

Dear Ms. Pauline:

I am new to parrot motherhood so I do not know what is the norm, usual, or expected with my African Grey, Gandalf. Perhaps you can give me some insight. Gandalf, age 11, has been with me for about 2 months. He doesn't seem very active although he seems happy. He never plays with the toys in his cage (although I have changed them and moved them around). He is noisier in the morn and in the late afternoon but otherwise sits pretty quietly on his perch or on top of his cage door all day. He refuses to eat peanuts, vegetables, nuts, oatmeal. But he does like his Pretty Bird pellet food, dried corn and licorice of all things. I think he likes me because he nuzzles my hand when I change his water, gets noisy when I leave the room, and tries to regurgitate food for me. Should I be concerned that he doesn't play with his toys? Should I be concerned that he isn't getting fresh vegetables or nuts? I anxiously await your squawk.

Sincerely yours,

Galdalf's Mom

June Meeting Education Topic Nutrition

The education segment of our June meeting will be a discussion of nutrition for your bird. Featured members of the panel will be Tom Becherer from El Mel and Helen Porter. Many of us are familiar with Tom, and El Mel, as a vendor at our annual fair. Following is some background information on Helen Porter.

Helen Porter has been a Registered Clinical Dietitian for over 30 years (for humans in the hospital setting). She has always been interested in animal nutrition also. Independent research on the nutritional needs of animals has always been an active pursuit. In 2001, Helen completed a Masters degree in Animal Science from the University of Missouri in Columbia. Much of her research and experience is avian related, as she was the volunteer staff nutritionist at the World Bird Sanctuary in Eureka, Missouri for about 10 years. She also holds a Masters degree in Public Health Administration - emphasis Health Education from St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Currently she is working in Private Practice as an Animal Nutrition Specialist, and her company is called Porter Pet Pals Animal Nutrition Services. Helen consults with Veterinarians for specialized needs such as planning diets for exotic animals, dogs and cats with chronic or acute nutrition related problems. Also, she has presented many health related topics (both animal and human subjects) to small and large groups. One project that is eagerly anticipated is to research specialized nutrition needs for a subject - and then present it to the Veterinarian or client to implement a way to maximize health. With any plan, it is most important that it be practical, not too expensive, and easy for the client to follow.

Education Schedule

Following are the educational themes for upcoming meetings.

- June 13 Nutrition, Expert Panel. Dawn Breer, Toys 20% off.
- July 18 Annette Jonczyk, Certified TellingtonTouch Practitioner. TTouch Training for Companion Animals
- August – All American Hookbill Fair
- September 19 Wild Bird Rehab will be speaking
- October 17 Annual Open House - World Bird, meetings will be held at this facility
- November 21 Beak/wing/nail trimming
- December 19 Party, Dawn Breer will bring toys

President from Page 1

Sunday, August 29, 2004

- 9:30 AM Doors Open To The Public
- 11:00 AM Liz Wilson, Parrot Behavior Consultant
- 2:00 PM Heather Hilvert, DVM
- 3:15 PM Silent Auction
- 3:45 PM Big Cage Raffle
- 4:00 PM Raffle Table
- 5:00 PM Doors Close To The Public

In addition to the great lineup of speakers in the seminar room, our own parrot expert, the infamous Pauline (the Pacific Blue Parrotlet) of the "Ask Pauline" column in our newsletter will have a booth in the vendor room! Pauline will be available to answer questions or speak on specific topics at scheduled times of the day. She is still deciding what she wants to do.

This is going to be a very exciting event! We are recruiting all sorts of help for the fair from setup to dishes for the Saturday dinner as well as both days of the fair. This is your club so let's all pitch in and make it a successful event! Please contact me or anyone else on the Board if you can help in any capacity. Many thanks in advance. Our color flyer is featured on our website at

<http://www.gatewayparrotclub.org>

Feel free to make copies and distribute them to any places you can. If you want me to send you color copies to distribute, call me at 314-427-3679 and I will mail them to you.

Tan Your Bird

Someone forwarded an email posting discussing the benefit of, or need for, full spectrum lighting. The email was on the mail discussion list, BirdMed@Murdoch.edu.au.

The question asked was: *Is anyone recommending full spectrum (UVB supplementation) for Psittacines?*

The response was: *There is a paper on this subject at ICE this year. We recommend full spectrum UV-B for grey parrots. We have demonstrated that by providing UV-B to greys in the Northern latitudes it is possible to significantly increase the ionised calcium and vitamin D concentrations. Initial research shows that this might not be the case in other species of birds but papers have shown that UV-B is useful for bird behaviour especially mating rituals. Poultry kept indoors require only 30 minutes UV-B daily for adequate vitamin D synthesis but I recommend that owners attempt to copy the situation in the wild for captive parrots. Anecdotally we have seen improved behaviour (i.e. better tempered greys) and better plumage (? improved preening behaviour) under these lights. We have them placed in lamp holders on the cage. At the moment we use full spectrum 2.4% bulbs as they worked in the greys.*

Interpret that as you will. Check out the mailing list at:

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/birdmed>



Volunteer!

**Make the fair
Happen**

Just filling space...

But it's a good thought.

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.