

# Squawk 'n' Talk

Volume 4, Issue 5

July 2004



## Presidential Perch

Monthly Update

### Phyllis Cotton

The annual fair is just six weeks away. Let's all pitch in now and tie up the loose ends. We need several items for the Big Cage Raffle such as swings, toys, shredders, carriers, etc. Please donate as much as possible to fill these cages. We also need items for the Silent Auction and Raffle Table. We would also really appreciate cash donations to help offset our advertising costs.

I have said it a hundred times and will say it again...this is your club, too. Please, help make our fair a success again this year. We have some wonderful seminars lined up and a Micro-Chipping Clinic for Birds as well. If you have a bird that you would like to have micro-chipped, this is your chance to do so at reasonable cost by a local avian vet. Dr Georgia Reger from Webster Groves Animal Hospital will be performing the micro-chipping.

Side dishes and desserts for our Saturday evening hospitality dinner are also welcomed. We have had a request for more vegetarian dishes as well.

Don't forget, setup for the fair and show catalog assembly will take place on Friday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, beginning around 9:30 AM. We need as many volunteers as possible that day. Refreshments & snacks will be provided. Fair flyers will be available at the next meeting. Please take as many as possible to distribute to area stores, vet offices, etc.

The good news is, we are nearly sold out of vendor space and we have a lot of new vendors signed up this year!

I hope to see as many members as possible at the next meeting. The Gateway Parrot Club is counting on you!

## Biting Parrots

### Michelle Karras

Dealing with an aggressive parrot does not have to be a daily chore. Many times we are not meeting their needs and they show us that through aggression. So instead of getting angry at our parrots for biting we need to evaluate why they are biting. Many times parrots bite to get a reaction out of us. A negative reaction is just as good as a positive reaction in their eyes.

Some things you can do to prevent yourself from being bitten?

Make sure your parrot has the absolute largest cage possible.

Make sure your parrot gets at least ten to twelve hours of uninterrupted quite darkness each night.

### EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE!

Challenge their mind with working toys and many different textures throughout the cage and play gym area.

Place a perch on the inside of the door of the cage so that when the cage is opened the perch comes out with the bird on it. Walk all the way up to the perch with your body pressed as close as possible and ask the bird to step up. This technique allows your body to block from a bite. Next go straight into the step up command and ladder your parrot at least five to ten times. This shows him what you expect of him and reinforces the wanted behavior. Praise each time with much enthusiasm when your bird steps-up.

Never raise your voice or your hand to your parrot. **AGGRESSION STIMULATES AGGRESSION!**

Always talk calmly and ask for what you would like your parrot to do.

Set yourself up to succeed in training by exercising your parrot prior to handling so that he is more relaxed and not anxious.

Anticipate a bite. When you see your parrot heading down for a bite, give a little earthquake to throw off his attentions

See *Biting*, on Page 4

## REHABILITATION OF RESCUE AFRICAN GREY PARROTS

**By Dorene** (avian behavior consultant) **and Pauline**  
(avian) **Olson**

Many of us are blessed to have been chosen to share our homes with second hand, abused, fostered, or rescue birds. Each being is an individual and comes with their own baggage based on life history, early socialization and learned social skills, not to mention his or her characteristics based on breed.

We will focus this discussion on the African Grey bird, in our concern to help Gandalf and others like him that may come into our lives.

It is difficult to find good lay literature about the needs of these birds, those sources either being general and full of much harmful mis-information or consisting of encyclopedic texts, which describe their capture and housing but do not address the animals such as Gandalf who are living in our homes as our companions. We will focus our discussion on the basis of sound behavioral psychology and from the advice of several who work in the field or rescue and rehoming of African Greys.

According to Kathy Pietig, founder and formerly with Midwest Avian Adoption and Rescue Services in MN, she found that Greys posed their own sets of problems. "If they were wild caught {Timnabs or Congos} or abused, our only recourse was to send them to sanctuary, as they do not seem to be able to forget and see past that abuse". She discussed one hapless Grey who came in with both his wings chopped off by his breeder; despite aggressive treatment, the bird died. "If we got birds in that were socialized to people, we did not house them at the Landing," she explained. "They are far too sensitive and intelligent, they react differently to their trauma, and they always were placed into foster homes until adoption."

Pietig noted that problems with these birds seemed to be linked to their high intelligence levels, which arguably all birds possess, but which tends to be a handicap to a Grey. Pietig felt that Greys easily regress if their schedules, caretakers or routines vary alarmingly, and do not easily forgive and forget. Such stress is often self-directed towards the bird, most notably in the form of feather destruction (watch for Michelle Karras' lecture on this topic at our August Fair! Michelle lives with 5 rescue Greys), self mutilation, and a peculiar habit of nervously biting their toes and toe nails. Additionally, when these birds are frightened, they are particularly prone to screaming and throwing themselves piteously on the bottom of their cage floors, where they growl in terror and try to strike defensively with their feet. They of-

See *Rehab*, on Page 4

## The Drama Reward

### How To Reward Your Parrot Without Really Trying!

**Liz Wilson**

Not long ago, I received a phone call from a very excited lady who wanted to know how to stop her budgie from chasing her children around the house. My answer was simple: "Tell your kids to stop running!" Obviously, the budgie was having a wonderful time -- he would swoop over, shrieking his head off, and the kids would scream and run. What a great game!

Inexperienced parrot owners often make the mistake of rewarding their birds without realizing it, and this can obviously lead to problems -- especially when the person thinks he or she is punishing the bird. The most common way to do this is through what we call The Drama Reward

#### Sally & Bongo Marie

Sally Blanchard tells a wonderful story that really illustrates this concept. Years ago, Sally's African grey parrot, Bongo Marie, had been chewing on the wooden cafe doors next to her cage, and Sally had understandably been trying to discourage this. So whenever Sally heard the sound of splintering wood, she would come running, yelling "Bongo, BAD BIRD -- Get back on your cage!" This routine went on for several months, with the behavior continuing despite Sally's best efforts. Then one night, with Sally sitting in the same room, Bongo started *making the sound of splintering wood!*

The moral of the story? Bongo *enjoyed* Sally's running in and yelling -- that was even more fun than actually chewing on the wood (and heaven knows, parrots LOVE to chew on wood)! Bongo loved the drama of her pet person yelling and she also liked making Sally appear when she wanted. Sally may have thought she was reprimanding Bongo for being destructive, but in actuality she was *rewarding* her!

#### Rewards for Screaming

I do phone consultations all the time and one of the more common problems I'm confronted with is excessive screaming. When I ask the owners what they do to stop the bird from making a racket, people usually tell me they do one or more of the following: they rush back into the bird's room and yell at it, or let it out of the cage, or they give it something to eat to shut it up.

And then the human can't understand why the hideous noises don't stop! Obviously, the behavior is going to continue and probably get worse, because the owner is actually *rewarding* the bird -- NOT punishing it.

See *Drama*, on Page 5

## ON THE PERCH WITH PAULINE

### Pauline Olson

#### Behavioral questions answered by the GWC's resident parrotlet

Pauline apologizes for the lateness of her reply; it can be very difficult for her to type as no matter how hard she jumps on the keys, she frequently is not heavy enough to make an impact to type a letter.

Pauline decided that this standard piece of advice is going to be included at the start of her column each month, as neither her mother nor herself will agree to help birds until after an avian veterinarian has declared them free of disease, which might complicate the behavioral plan or make worse the medical condition:

BEFORE we make ANY behavioral advice to a new parrot, it is IMPERATIVE to rule out any underlying metabolic disease which may be causing or contributing to the behavior problem. At the very least, this should include an annual complete avian exam by a qualified avian veterinarian; blood work to rule out psittacosis, polymer, aspergillosis; and an avian chemical profile/CBC. We as birds all know that we tend to sit very still and quiet when we feel ill so that our flock does not drive us away, and it is hard for humans to recognize these signs as potential signs of illness, which sometimes tragically makes it too late to save us from our disease.

So, Welcome Gandalf!

Dear Ms. Pauline:

I am new to parrot motherhood so I do not know what the norm, usual, is 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,

Gandalf's Mom

See *Pauline*, on Page 6

## Fair Schedule

### 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.

### 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, 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.

## Education Schedule

Following are the educational themes for upcoming meetings.

- July 18 Annette Jonczyk, Certified TellingtonTouch Practioner. 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

from biting. An earthquake does not work once your parrot has made contact, it is meant to be used as a distraction. Once you give the earthquake and the bird does not bite go right into step-ups and reward.

Teach your parrot how to be gentle with his beak by touching it and caressing it when he is tired and saying "Good gentle". Then when he goes to bite you can say, "Be gentle" and once again reward the wanted behavior.

Do not allow an aggressive bird above your chest level or on your shoulder.

Do not allow an aggressive bird to play on top of his cage or come out of the cage without stepping up onto you. And please do not place an aggressive bird near your face.

Work with your parrot in a neutral or unfamiliar environment where you are the only thing familiar to him.

Give him a choice. If he does not step up to come out of the cage simply close the door and walk away, trying again in five to ten minutes. If on the third try he does not come out, hold an unfamiliar item in the opposing hand and offer him a choice. Would he like the unfamiliar item or the familiar one being your hand? They will almost always step-up on your hand. Praise them for at least ten seconds when they step-up onto your hand.

Work one on one with them daily to strengthen your bond of trust.

Give no response when you are bitten no matter how much it hurts, simply place their feet on a flat surface and they will let go. Then ask for a step-up several times and reward.

We have to remember that these parrots do not understand us yelling at them or getting angry. This is still attention and they will take it anyway they can get it. So stay calm and set you and your parrot up to succeed during training. We should want to delight them as much as they delight us.

Remember that anticipation of an unwanted behavior along with redirection and exercise is the key to having a wonderful companion parrot.

Michelle Karras  
The Polite Parrot  
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ten damage themselves at this time, breaking blood feathers and occasionally even bones, and are then prone to over grooming and or plucking the area, causing further injury to themselves. This can start a nasty, viscous cycle of Elizabethan collaring of the bird and the bird falling into mental disrepair, failing to thrive in a collar but continuing to self mutilate once it is removed. Many of these birds, often wild caught or severely abused, are not candidates for the stresses of life in captivity and MAARS policy often rehomed them with Sybil Erdin's sanctuary at <http://www.the-oasis.org/st-kc.php>. On this page, see in particular K.C.'s story – he was one of Kathy Pietigs's birds that now happily resides at the Oasis. Further on the site are areas where you can make donations to help offset the care of these animals.

True to her perky, upbeat personality, Michelle Karras (avian behavior consultant, founder The Polite Parrot, Chicago) was all action and minced no words.

"I would get this bird (Gandalf) to the vet ASAP. Then I would acknowledge that these creatures have the intelligence levels and minds of a five year old child. They need at LEAST 10 toys in their cages. These toys are often not what you see marketed as Grey toys, so do your homework. Greys like soft woods – if you cannot make an impression in it with your thumbnail, it is too hard. They like to think, they like toys to challenge their minds."

The chosen number of 10 toys in the cage comes from Michelle's firm belief that birds need special places to hide; that in their wild, natural world, these creatures could not be easily seen from the ground due to their vegetation camouflage. She feels that many birds are stressed and that it goes unrecognized when they are on constant display in the full open for anyone to happen to walk past their cage

She recommends a treat maize where you can hide food in a puzzle and make the bird work to get it out, available at [www.windycity.com](http://www.windycity.com). She advised a perch conveniently below this toy, to be hung on the door, for mental and physical stimulation. In total, Karras advises at LEAST 3 soft chewing treats (piñatas, phone books, wheel to hold TV guide in a roll for chewing, handful of straws in their paper wrapped together in a big ball), 3 puzzle toys to challenge the mind, and 3 toys for chewing (as opposed to shredding) made of soft woods. Karras also observes that Greys like leather and untying knots, and that they like bells.

For some creative ideas, please see the last two issues of Squawk and Talk for more ideas of home made toys for birds.

When providing a home to a rescue bird or a baby bought from a breeder, you will go far to remember that these animals are not domestic animals. These are wild animals that in only the last few generations (at most) have been plucked from their natural habitat. They retain their natural wild instincts which serve to ensure the survival of their species. Those instincts include the energies required to roam up to 20 miles a day in search of food,

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flock, mates, and escape from danger. It includes the loud voices and need to use them to keep contact with a support group spread over a 20 mile radius. It includes the need to defend oneself as a prey species (something that gets eaten and has no natural defenses) against predators (such as human beings who kill meat for consumption).

It is amazing to look at this perspective from a bird's point of view and wonder how they ever could get comfortable enough to love us in return!

Janet Draper, of St. Louis' Perfectly Precious Parrot Rescue, has so far not had any Timnah African Greys come into her rescue program, only Congos. But her behavioral assessment of their needs closely echoed Michelle's and Kathy's. Her concerns were first and foremost the need for a complete medical exam by a QUALIFIED vet, who generally is not Dr. Fido or Dr. Fluffy's main vet. She had a heartbreaking experience with a foster of hers who came in with a myriad of medical conditions which could not be solved, despite love, sleepless nights, out of pocket specialty-vet expenses, and sheer determination. Calcium deficiencies, among other things, were one of the many medical maladies of her rescue Grey and a very common problem in the breed.

Behaviorally, other issues tend to be the inclination to sit still in one spot, so vigorous wing flapping exercise and shower exercise are imperative, says Karras, who bikes regularly with her Blue and Gold Rescue, Rocky. Pietig says that they can easily fall into being a one person bird, and it is not necessary related to any link between the sex of the bird and the opposite sex of the person, but can just as often be a preference based on previous experience of the bird. Aggression is not a trait of Greys that comes as easily to mind as fearfulness, and they are usually a fairly dominant (if quiet) bird.

Gandalf, it's me again, here, Pauline: I would suggest that you keep looking at those fresh fruits and veggies. Have your mom eat them WITH you, and make lots of yummy noises, and cut them into lots of different shapes and sizes every day, hanging them on toys and on your cage bars and showing you how to play with them.

I was a 3 year old parent raised breeder bird when I met my Mom and I LOVED her at first sight, but Claire, my Eclectus sister and Whimmer, my U2 brother, have taken well over a year in their first year hear to come out of their shell, talk, snuggle, eat well, and trust. Tell your mom to ease up a bit, when she dusts in your room, tell you to put on a fun, dancing song, and sing to you while she dusts. You DEFINITELY need to get tout and wing flap, move off your cage, man! See some new scenery; it will help your brain.

Or call any of the people listed here, they all can help you! Good luck!! Tiny Not Green Pauline, the Pacific BLUE Parrotlet

### **Fun & Games, Parrot Style: BITING**

Parrot owners make the same mistake when they yell at a parrot for biting -- the reality is that parrots LOVE it when we yell at them. From the parrot's point of view, there are few things in the world as much fun as getting your person mad enough to yell at you. Watch closely, and you'll see the little monster's eyes flash in excitement! And the next time the little fellow gets bored, don't be surprised if he bites you, again -- just for the fun and excitement of it!

### **TOE CHASING**

Another fun parrot scenario is The Foot Chasing Game. The rules are simple. The parrot gets down on the floor and runs at the feet of the nearest human. The human, anticipating tender toes being bitten, lets out a whoop and dances around the room, waving their arms and yelling. Now, put yourself in the parrot's place -- how could any game be better than this?!!

### **KEEPAWAY**

Another nifty game is what I call "Catch Me If You Can". It is generally played when the parrot is on top of its cage and the human is late for work and in a hurry to get the bird back in the cage. The owner reaches for the bird. The parrot, fully understanding the joys of this game, ducks and runs to the back of the cage, well out of reach. The human, reacting in true play fashion, yells at the bird, then rushes around to the other side of the cage and makes a grab. The parrot, really getting into it now, faints to the left, dodges to the right, and escapes again. The human is now yelling and getting red in the face, which REALLY tickles the parrot! Times like this, I've known certain little feathered individuals to gleefully yell, *Bad-Bird-Bad-Bird!!* while playing this game. What fun!

### **Illogical Higher Life Form**

In all of these cases, the bird is not trying to be bad at all -- it thinks the human is playing, too. It does not understand that the person's yelling indicates anger -- after all, parrots yell simply for the fun of it, right? So it is illogical of us humans ("higher life form" that we're supposed to be) to expect that they should perceive a human yelling as a reprimand. We humans consider yelling to be negative feedback because we don't like it when someone yells at us -- so we mistakenly assume that our parrots feel the same way -- and we are very wrong!

### **Negative feedback a lá Nurturing Dominance**

Since parrots love drama, the point is obviously to avoid drama when you want a particular behavior to stop. If you have a relationship of nurturing dominance established then reprimanding a parrot *in a manner it understands* is easy. If you are late for work and need to put it in its cage, you simply say *Up* and your well-trained parrot will step

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onto your hand, so putting him/her away is ridiculously easy. If your parrot screams from another room, you do *absolutely nothing*. Under NO circumstance should you go into the room to punish them, because if you do, the next time they want you to appear, they will yell. If your parrot screams for attention when you're in the same room, you give it a REALLY ugly look (the Evil Eye) and say *No* in a firm, unfriendly but *not loud* voice. If your parrot bites, you quietly and firmly say *No* and ladder the little monster from one hand to the other several times, using the Up command in conjunction with the Evil Eye. (I never felt the need to de-fine the word "several" until I discovered a client laddering her parrot 35-40 times as a reprimand. So *several* is hereby defined as *five or six*.)

#### **NOT a fun game....**

Parrots do not care for these disciplinary techniques, so the techniques constitute negative, *not positive* feedback. Consequently, if you are consistent (and that's the key word) in their use, your parrot will learn not to do the behaviors that result in them. In this manner, you won't be accidentally rewarding your parrot for behaviors that you would like to eliminate, not reinforce.

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*Pauline from page 3*

Dear Gandalf's Mom:

Pauline here, I am doing a lot of fluttering from perch to perch trying to answer your question fairly. I believe that you have several issues at stake here that you mentioned, and a few more that you did not, so I am going to address the former first.

Among my many questions would be:

- What kind of toys does Gandalf have that he is not playing with?
- What new toys have you tried?
- How many toys are in his cage?
- How big is his cage?

- What are his awake and sleep hours?
- What hours during the day do you interact with him?
- What is your household like? Quiet? Many children?
- How is your household different from Gandalf's original home?
- What kind of exercise does Gandalf get everyday?
- Is he getting showered every day?

Moving along from your toy question to your food question, I might need to know before answering:

- How many droppings does Gandalf have a day and what are color, size, shape and consistency?
- How does his keel feel? Is he a thin bird?
- What liquids does he drink?
- How long have you been offering him the new food? What are the variations?

Other questions which crop up in my birdy brain would include:

Realizing that you have been together for 2 months, I wonder where he was before that. In foster? How long? In his home? In what conditions? Sometimes people die and their bird gets put in a garage, a shed, a basement, etc. long before they are rescued. Does Gandalf come with some baggage?

Was his other person a man or a woman? Is he used to people like you?

Is he used to being handled, and do you handle him?

Did he have other birds, or a mate, with him that are now gone?

How significant of a change is your household routine compared to what he had at home or in foster?

You see, it is hard for me to answer this question completely for you because I do not know all the variables

I think that it sounds like Gandalf, in his short period of time with you, has already become affectionate towards you and started to bond to you. This is evidenced by his need for contact calling when you leave the room, his nuzzling your hand and his regurgitation (the greatest sign of birdie love right after masturbation).

I have several suggestions for you. One would be consulting a qualified avian behavior consultant to assist you both through your transitions, AFTER your qualified avian veterinarian has given the green light. I am going to have my mother write a general article on Greys here which may give you some more insight. And I would highly encourage you to

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get to the August Fair, where you can talk with Michelle Karras, Dorene Olson, and Liz Wilson, all avian behavior consultants, more in depth. Dorene Olson lives locally and can be of help; Michelle Karras has 5 rescue Greys of her own and the experience that goes with loving and rehabbing this wonderful species.

Gandalf, I hope that you can understand why I cannot yet specifically answer your questions. I found them to not give enough information for all the questions that they raised in my mind. I hope that the following article will generally help you, and if you would like some personalized help, please feel free to call my mother, she can talk to your mother at length.

I hope this finds you swinging and singing,

Pauline the Parrotlet

## 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.