

Squawk 'n Talk

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May 2009

Greetings From The Presidential Perch!

Now that May is here, I think spring is here to stay. Leaves are growing on the trees. Flowers are blooming, and the grass is growing. A time for hikes, picnics, and BBQs.

Our Bird Fair is progressing very well. All booth and table spaces have been filled! The floor is packed! We originally planned on having our Saturday evening buffet dinner on the exhibit floor next to the concession stand. But, we needed the space for more vendors. So, the buffet dinner will be in one of the upstairs rooms.

Also upstairs will be our seminar room for the Fair speakers. (Access to the upstairs rooms is by stairs and by an elevator at the far end of the hallway near the back.) We now have four confirmed speakers and possibly one other speaker lined up for the Fair. Dr. Irene Pepperberg of the Alex foundation will be our featured speaker and will be speaking on both days of our Fair.

Once the speakers' schedule is set we can begin making up the Fair flyers, programs, and updating the website concerning the Fair.

I encourage everyone to make the effort to attend the meetings and get involved. Your ideas and knowledge are needed to help move your club forward. Visitors are always welcomed. Bring a friend! And, your birds!

See you at the meetings! Dave

Tidbits

Earth Day Outing – We made our annual appearance at the St. Charles, Jefferson Middle School, Earth Day Event. The kids all enjoy seeing and handling the birds. Thanks to Niki for the appearance.

GPC Fair Update – Members, volunteers prepare! We need help both at the Fair and before, so step up and let us know when you can pitch in. Jenn Moore and Penny O'Grady will be coordinating volunteer activities.

Sad News – Cliff Patterson died recently. We will all miss Cliff as a member, the Baby Bird Farm and as an author. If you have contact information for any of Cliff's family, please contact Niki, listed as the Membership Secretary.

All-American Hookbill Fair Update

Our featured, national guest speaker will be Irene Pepperberg, so spread the word and plan on hearing her speak both days. Irene was a hit when she was at our event a few years ago. Find out what is happening at the Alex foundation. Take the opportunity to meet Irene and ask questions...

We are all looking forward to the first event in our new location, Machinists Hall in Bridgeton. Phyllis tells us vendor attendance will be high, so look forward to a great selection of birds, cages, toys and everything you or your bird needs... or wants.

Machinists Hall is conveniently located on St. Charles Rock Road. For those using their GPS, the address is 12365 St. Charles Rock Road, 63044. It is about 2,000 feet East of I-270. From I-270, use Exit 20-B.

There is lots of parking in front of the building for visitors, and in back for vendors. Inside is a space designed for meetings and exhibitions. (Better than a hockey rink.) New this year, we will provide our own concessions. We're looking forward to seeing what Christine will cook up, and we have a full kitchen to prepare our Saturday evening banquet, which by the way, is open to members and public alike. So come enjoy a great meal and visit with our speakers, vendors and other GPC members.

We will have everything you have come to expect from our Fair, birds, merchandise educational speakers, raffles, auctions and hospitality. We look forward to seeing you there.

At the Pond

Heidi Keifer

We have a pond across the street from our house. About a month ago we noticed a familiar pair of geese had taken up residency. When they first arrived this spring, they would follow me around my yard while I was weeding and got to know me. Soon, only the male, whom we named Bruce Goose, would accompany me. Lucy, as we named her, took her nest responsibilities seriously. She would only come off the nest for a quick bath and feeding some mornings before the rush to work hour.

Lucy and Bruce Goose soon hatched the eggs. One day there were only eggs, the next day there were six waddling fuzzy goslings. They took their family to another pond a day after they were born, hours after some kids were throwing candy at them and screaming in their beaks at their nest. We told the kids to move away from the nest, and they crossed their arms and considered whether we had violated their second grader's rights before leaving the nest alone and glaring at us in disgust.

Three days later the geese returned, with another goose family who had five goslings. I tried to see who I thought was Lucy and Bruce due to their being a family of eight, but they clearly weren't them since they didn't recognize me. Then I noticed one chick was peep-peeping and the parents were pecking his little behind no matter what he did. That's when it occurred to me that he was with the wrong family. The one with five goslings were really Lucy and Bruce, not these imposters.

So, we chased the poor helpless thing around to the other side of the pond where his real parents were. Along the way he tried to waddle up to a couple of goslingless geese who gave them the same hisses and pecks to the hind region.

Just as he was near his family, he gave up and swam in the pond for safety--perhaps his tail couldn't take another lashing. The

wrong family took his brood across the pond and they all honked and hissed and pecked near his poor little tail, until he finally climbed up to his real family. He was met by the siblings with a few cautious hisses, but, then the whole family peeped in recognition and rejoicing.

It was just another day in the subdivision pond. Happy Spring!

Wing Clipping

Trey Shaffer

Following are two articles with the same title. The first, by Jeff Coltenback, comes from The Real Macaw newsletter, a group in New York with whom we exchange articles. Jeff takes the middle ground saying the decision depends on the individual bird and its surroundings. I wrote the second article a while back, around 2002. Sometime after that, 2004, my Greenwing, Q, got spooked while outdoors and flapped away, eventually spending the night in a nearby tree before being rescued by the Creve Coeur Fire District the next day. The end of that story is that Q has been clipped ever since.

I'll share some newbie experience here... Q is the first bird I had that was friendly, socialized and relaxed enough to take outdoors and other places. When I got Q, at about age four months, around Christmas 2001, his wings were clipped. He never tried to fly or even flap his wings as though attempting. So complacency set in, on my part, and new feathers grew in. I don't know the details, because I was out of town at the time, but I got a call telling me Q was up in a tree.

Things worked out, and after the fact I found out this is not a unique story. Thinking that he had never attempted to fly, I somehow thought he wouldn't. No. That just meant he didn't know how to fly... well. Any fully flighted bird can, when scared, fly away. If we are surprised to see them fly, you can imagine how *they* must feel.

The problem is that they don't understand this new ability, and apparently flying down, or landing, is more difficult than flying up

and away. So each time the bird is scared or disturbed, they go higher.

In speaking with the world-class behaviorists and trainers visiting our Club, I've come to the conclusion that if you want a flighted bird, you should train them from a very young age. Encourage them to fly, and train them to return on command. Easier said than done of course. Unfortunately, consensus is that birds a few years old, or older, who have not developed their flight skills, probably will not. So Q is now just a feathered monkey...

To Clip or Not to Clip

Jeff Coltenback

Written October 2nd, 2004 revised December 26th, 2008

Clipping a bird's wings has long been debated by aviculturists. I am sure many of you reading this may have read similar articles. Some say it's cruel. Some say it's like chopping off a human's leg. The more cautious bird owners may ridicule the owner whose bird flew out the door; "If you clipped the wings, this would never have happened". Or they offer; "it's safer for the bird". I can go on and on with similar examples. I am not here to judge anyone's opinion or position on the matter. Unlike many radical viewpoints, my intention is not to "sell you" or force my opinion on you. I am simply going to try my best to offer an unbiased point of view.

A few years ago, I was bombarded with emails from a bunch of out of state bird club members about a post on the internet from a potential new member of their group (we'll call her "Jane"). Jane wrote a comment about me stating that I said that all pet birds should absolutely have their wings clipped and that I knew what I was talking about and that she trusted my opinion. Jane was just trying to offer advice and really was being nice about it and trying to promote me and my business. After all, I do appreciate referrals! But, I have absolutely no idea where she got this from. So, I felt compelled to respond, which I did. After I responded, I felt compelled to get an article out there discussing this very sensitive subject. It was then that this article was born. This has been up-

dated to present tense and my current state of belief about the subject; which hasn't really changed.

The fact of the matter is that I have no strong opinion either way. I truly believe it is an individual choice for each bird owner. Every bird is different. Everyone's situation is different. Who am I to judge if I do not know all the circumstances. The only firm opinion I have is that flight cage birds should not be clipped. Finches, canaries, small soft bills that will live their lives in a flight cage should be afforded the right to free fly in their cages. Other than that, I have heard and experienced reasons to clip and reasons not to clip. The following are reasons, not necessarily mine, but reasons why people clip or don't clip. Clipping is sometimes safer for the bird. Large families with children or other pets pose a potential risk to birds getting out of the house. Children tend to leave doors open. Dogs often are allowed in the yard on their own. Some people have ceiling fans on a lot and don't want the bird flying into the blades. Some people believe clipping a bird's wings keep their "attitude" in check and makes them easier to handle. Some people clip wings for health reasons. I have personally had a foster bird that came to us with one formerly broken wing healed. When she would fly off the cage she would land in this whirlwind fashion and "crash land" because she had no control (she could not gain flight). Slightly clipping her healthy wing allowed her to learn to land in a more stable manner. Some folks just don't want their bird pooping all over their house.

As for not clipping, the reasons are just as many. Letting birds fly is natural. Flight is healthier for them mentally. Flight allows adequate exercise. Clipping is just cruel. Clipping causes feather plucking. The wings are so beautiful. I have many parrots. Some are clipped. Some aren't. I have had accidents with clipped birds. And, I have had accidents with unclipped birds. I have 3 pit bulls that can sit and watch TV with our Macaw and Cockatoo. But, if our Senegal is flying around, forget it. Do I clip the Senegal? No, the situation does not require any action, so none is taken. If it becomes a problem, I may have to. But, she sure loves to fly around the house. Our Macaw and Cockatoo are just happy sitting down next to us. They don't try to fly. Our cockatiels and lovebirds are all flighted. Our Amazon is clipped. We decide what is right for each bird and each situation.

In conclusion, I hope I was able to offer both sides of the spectrum for you to absorb. Again, I really try to remain open minded to people's different situations. I don't openly recommend clipping, nor do I oppose it. Keep in mind; we did not discuss how to properly clip a bird's wings. You should consult your avian veterinarian

or pet professional about how to do so, if you so choose. If you keep your birds flighted, just be careful about your environment. The bottom line is that you need to do what is right for your bird and your situation.

Jeff Coltenback, President
Paradise Pet, Inc.
48 West Passaic Ave.
Bloomfield, NJ 07003
(973) 338-0795
www.njpetshop.com

To Clip or Not to Clip

Trey Shaffer

Now that is a question...

And like great and ageless questions there is no clear answer, but everyone has their opinion. Taking an abstract approach for the moment, perhaps there is guidance in the meaning of the word **bird**. According to Webster, a bird is...

A warm-blooded egg-laying vertebrate characterized by feathers and forelimbs modified as wings

That doesn't seem to answer our question, but what about the wing? Again according to Webster, a *wing* is...

A movable organ for flying (one of a pair)

Now we may be on to something! If a bird is "characterized by feathers and forelimbs modified as wings," and a wing is "an organ for flying," and we somehow render the organ useless for flight it would no longer be a wing, which would leave us with a warm-blooded, egg-laying vertebrate characterized by feathers" and capable of climbing on cage and perch. At which point we no longer have a bird but a **feathered monkey**.

Source: Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.

Book Picks of the Month

Christine Kinkade

Here are the library picks for this month. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have a book request, and I will bring the book to the next GPC meeting. A complete listing of books and videos can be found on the GPC website (www.GatewayParrotClub.org).

The book "Alex & Me" has been donated to the Gateway Parrot Club library by Sherry Miles, a friend of the GPC. Thank you very much, Sherry, we will all enjoy reading this book.

Irene Pepperberg will be our featured speaker at our 2009 August Bird Fair. "Alex & Me" is her latest book.

Alex & Me by Irene Pepperberg

Alex, an African Grey parrot, died at the age of 31. This book is a tribute to Alex and the bond that existed between him and Irene Pepperberg. Alex and Irene had worked together in animal research for over 30 years. Through Alex, Irene showed the world that Alex was capable of independent thinking, including the ability to add; understand concepts like bigger, smaller, more, fewer, and none; and to sound out words. (232 pages).

Cockatiels by Dulcie & Freddie Cooke

A short book with practical information on how to choose, house, and look after your pet cockatiel. Packed with full-color artworks and photos. (62 pages).

The New Parrot Handbook by Werner Lantermann

A comprehensive book about parrot husbandry, purchasing, housing, care, diet, diseases, breeding, and more. Includes data on 35 species, 30 drawings by Fritz Kohler, 50 full-color photos, and 35 maps indicating distribution of parrots. (144 pages).

Parrots by Petra Deimer

The handy pet owner's manual that answers questions about purchase, care, feeding, illness, and behavior. Color photos. (80 pages)

First Aid for Birds by Julie Rach with Gary A. Gallerstein

This book is for pet owners that focus on administering first aid to birds. You will learn step-by-step information on emergency situations, how to quickly save your bird's life by taking actions, and how to prevent emergencies by feeding your bird a balanced diet, regularly trimming his wings and nails, and bird-proofing your home. Several color photos. (126 pages).

Birdkeeping Made Simple by Yvonne Patterson (Wings of Love)

This DVD covers which bird may be best for you, bathing your bird, nutrition importance, perch training, toy safety, feather picking, micro chipping, wing trimming, and more. Yvonne instructs you through this video with her pleasant, easygoing manner.

GPC members can check out any of these featured picks at this month's meeting. Please note that some books are quite old and some of the information may be a little outdated. Please keep this in mind when reading the books.

A complete listing of the GPC library is available on the GPC website www.GatewayParrotClub.org. If you wish to check out any of these, or any of our books, please contact me prior to the next GPC meeting by phone (636) 343-8097, or email at Librarian@GatewayParrotClub.org, and I will bring them to the next meeting.

All books checked out should be returned at the following GPC meeting. If that is not possible, please return the books by mail to Christine Kinkade, 2412 Angela Dr., High Ridge, MO. 63049-2848.

Happy reading!

Search for Justice: Avian Forensic Identification

September 2007

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Joy Halverson, DVM, MPVM

Disputes involving the individual identity of lost or stolen birds occur occasionally. Disputes involving the individual identification of lost or stolen birds are frequent. In a recent case, an African grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) escaped from an apartment. A visitor

had inadvertently walked into and knocked out a screen door. Startled, the bird had flown from the high-rise condominium into the forest below. The owners contacted all the local veterinary clinics and animal shelters but failed to find it. A month later, the owners canvassed the shelters again and were told that an African grey parrot had just been adopted from a local shelter. Using the Freedom of Information Act, the owners compelled the shelter to provide the contact information of the adopter. The adopter refused to let the subjects see the bird and rebuffed their offer to buy her another African grey if the bird turned out to be theirs. The subjects then embarked on a pursuit of justice. They contacted Zoogen and QuestGen Forensics. Unfortunately, a sexing sample submitted many years earlier had been discarded. But luckily, they had saved molted feathers from the bird. DNA typing was then possible for comparison with the adopted bird.

Mitochondrial DNA analysis has become increasingly important for forensic identification. Although it is less informative than nuclear DNA markers, which can be used to assign identity beyond question, it becomes the method of choice for sample with minimal or degraded nuclear DNA.

After a year, the found bird was taken and a blood sample was drawn by a local veterinarian with no opportunity to witness the draw by the purported former owners. A second sample was subsequently drawn, witnessed by one of the former owners.

DNA extraction was performed on a molted feather from the lost bird. In addition to DNA extracted from the lost bird's feathers, the found bird's sample (#1), and the witnessed sample (#2), DNA from 16 African grey parrots (routine gender testing samples from Zoogen) were sequenced and compared.

Results

Twenty-five mitochondrial types were identified in the Genbank sequences and Zoogen samples combined. The Zoogen samples showed 11 types; 1 type was common (28%) suggesting a genetic bottleneck of the U.S. pet population of African gray parrots. The 2 samples reputedly from "the found bird" had different mitochondrial types; only the first non-witnessed sample matched the feathers from the lost bird.

Discussion

Twenty-five MtCR haplotypes were identified in the combined Zoogen samples and Genbank accessions. This finding suggests that MtCR haplotyping can be a useful tool in avian identification for species in which no nuclear DNA markers are available or in situations when the sample available for DNA testing is not ideal.

However, caution should be exercised in the interpretation of results. Although our starting database is small, the finding that some MtCR types are common means that in some cases DNA results will match by chance and not because the samples came from the same bird. For that reason, forensic scientists often speak of MtCR testing as a powerful tool for exclusion rather than as an identification method. However, in this case, the results are unequivocal. Despite the fact that the original bird and the first submission of the found bird had the most common type seen in our small database, the second submission most definitely came from a different bird. A second bird had been brought to the witnessed collection so that the former owners would not recognize their bird. Ironically, if the new owner had just presented the bird for a witnessed collection as instructed, she could easily have argued that the type was common enough that it didn't prove ownership. Why did she allow the real bird to be sampled the first time? Perhaps she thought the DNA testing was just a ruse to allow the owner to see the bird and didn't believe DNA identification was possible.

As of this writing, the bird is still in the new owner's possession. One of the former owners died in April 2005 before hearing of the test results. Exhausted from the ordeal of his friend's death and in debt for legal fees, the former owner is continuing the pursuit of ownership in memory of the co-owner.

Release #9, September, 2007. The Association of Avian Veterinarians welcomes membership from veterinarians with an interest in avian medicine. Annual meetings and a quarterly journal provide a format for the latest in avian medical information. Is your veterinarian a member?

2009 Schedule

May 17
June 14 (Second Sunday)
July 19
August – All-American Hookbill Fair
September 13 (Second Sunday)
October 18
November 15 – Nominations for office
December 13 (Second Sunday) Elections and Party

Contact Information

We welcome your comments and suggestions...

Officers

President	Dave Kinkade	(636) 343-8097
Vice President	Phyllis Cotton	(314) 427-3679
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Trey Shaffer	(314) 432-4317

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