

Squawk 'n Talk

October 2018

Chirps from the President's Perch

Looks like we might finally be getting some Fall Weather this week. It's sad that it's mostly due to the Tropical Storm/Hurricane that's moving onto the Gulf Coast right now. I'll take it, and enjoy the cooler weather though.

October brings us back into Board of Directors Nomination Season again. There will be several positions that will need Nominations. We will discuss the nominations and the nomination process at the October Meeting.

Please start giving some thought toward this process:

1. Who would you like to Nominate?
2. Would you consider running for a Board Position?
3. Would you be interested in running for an Officer Position?
4. Would you be interested in Chairing or Co-Chairing the August Fair?
5. Would you like to serve on the Education Committee?

Our Guest Speaker this month is Alexandra Johnson who will be sharing her experience with ways to provide enrichment for our animal and bird companions. I'm looking forward to this very much.

October 21st. Meeting Time 1:00pm. See you then!

Georgia Fletcher

**Gateway Parrot Club
Join us on
Sunday, October 21, 2018, 1:00 p.m.
Varietees Bird Store
Valley Park, MO
Guest Speaker, Alexandra Johnson, Nestle Purina
"Designing Animal and Companion Animal Enrichment"**

We are excited to have Alex as our guest speaker at our October meeting. She will be sharing the last 15 years of her life researching, designing, and implementing various forms of Animal Enrichment. Her greatest challenge in animal enrichment has been in designing for the animals that live in our homes. The very emotional territory of designing for companion animals and exploring the routines and interactions that make them most effective takes careful consideration of the human-animal bond and the unique relationships people have with their pets. She will be giving us ideas and thoughts on some routines and parrot specific ideas.

**Come for a fun afternoon:
Meeting (1:00), Food (1:30), Program (2:00), Raffle (3:00)
You are welcome to bring your bird(s).
The only requirement is that wings be clipped (for their safety).
If fully flighted, please keep them in a carrier.
You don't have to be a member to attend.**

Thank you Michelle Vrbka for a great presentation at our September meeting!



Several parrot club members took birds to New Life Academy on September 28. We had so much fun watching the children's faces when they saw the parrots. We receive requests occasionally to take birds to schools, senior facilities, not for profit events, etc. Let us know if you would like to join us in the future to share our love of parrots with the community.



Special Offer from AFA. If you want to sign up for a special 90-Day membership, fill out the form and give to Carole Grommet or Georgia Fletcher at the meeting or mail to AFA (please list Carole Grommet or Georgia Fletcher as referring club member).

CITES: Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species


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General Meeting Information

Come and enjoy the fun and bring a bird (as long as it is clipped). It's so enjoyable seeing all the different species of parrots and talking to other parrot owners.

You don't have to be a member to attend, but we would love to have you join. Meeting starts at 1:00 and it will be a full afternoon of meeting, socializing, eating, program, and raffle. For members who have not renewed their membership or who would like to join, please see Renee Davis, our membership chair person. She will be at the meeting to sign you up. An annual membership fee of \$20.00 includes your family (two voting members) and brings you our monthly newsletter by email, and helps us to provide special speakers. Thank you for joining and helping support the parrot community in St. Louis.

We meet at Varietees Bird Store, 60 Meramec Valley Plaza, Valley Park, MO. Varietees will be open in the afternoon so you can purchase bird food, supplies, toys, cages, play stands, etc.

We do have a raffle most months so if you would like to donate item(s), they are always welcome. They do not have to be bird related. We sell raffle tickets for \$1.00 each or 6 for \$5.00.

For our October meeting, Chef Christine is going make baked mostaccioli with meat sauce. For those who do not eat meat, she is making baked mostaccioli with a vegetable sauce. She will also have bread and butter. For dessert, there will be an assortment of cookies, and as always, there will be water and an assortment of soda. Dave and Christine will be out of town for the meeting, but she again is taking care of us and cooking. We appreciate her dedication to feeding us. I know someone is bringing a large tossed salad. Please feel free to bring anything you want to add to our buffet table. We all love to eat.

Did you know that the Gateway Parrot Club has a group Facebook page? If you would like to join this group, search for “Gateway Parrot Club” in Facebook and request membership. We have over 500 members!

Gateway Parrot Club



Meeting Dates 2018:

**October 21, Alex Johnson, Companion Animal
Enrichment**

**- November 18, Adrienne Mock, Protecting the Flock
from Theft, Natural Disaster, Disease and Legislation**

- December 9, Annual Holiday Party

Meeting Dates 2019:

**January 20, Stephen Johnson, Report on 2018 AAV
(Association of Avian Veterinarians) Conference**

*** Meeting will be on 2nd Sunday**

Membership Report (Renee Davis)

Welcome new members:

Rhonda Benyo
Melissa McCoy
Greg Ruder

GPC September Meeting Attendees:

Dick Grommet	Jim Hermann
Cathy Timma	Esther Hermann
Renee Davis	Al Marks
Heidi Hellmuth	Janet Marks
Dixie Danzeisen	Nancy Marron
Carole Grommet	Julie Morgan
Christine Kinkade	Sandy Newcomb
David Kinkade	Penny O'Grady
Pamela Alsop	Barbara Peach
Jim Berk	Rick Ruderer
Julia Buckley	Pat Seiler
Cindy Burquin	Mary Staab
Scott Collier	Don Thompson
Georgene Collier	Michelle Vrbka
Janet Draper	Kasia Waniolka
Jess Ellis	



Association of Avian Veterinarians

Advancing & Promoting Avian Medicine and Stewardship

January 2017 AAV Bird Club News Release

Prior Investment in Training Significantly Reduces Stress for Treatment of Unexpected Illness

By: Barbara Heidenreich, Barbara's Force Free Animal Training, Austin, Texas, USA Reprinted from ExoticsCon 2016 Conference Proceedings, AAV Session #060

Abstract: A 44-year-old lesser sulphur-crested cockatoo (*Cacatua sulphurea*) presented with an obstructive aspergillosis granuloma at the base of the trachea. Prior to this the bird had been trained for behaviors such as accepting oral medications, accepting intra-muscular injections, allowing towel restraint, and standing on a scale. This paper will demonstrate how an investment in training significantly reduced stress and allowed voluntary participation in various aspects of treatment for an unexpected serious illness.

Introduction

In 2010 a then 38-year-old male lesser sulphur-crested cockatoo (*Cacatua sulphurea*) was integrated into a training program that was being established at a zoological park. Prior to that time the bird's primary routine consisted of stepping onto a dowel in the morning for transport from an off display holding area to perch in a public area. This was repeated in the evening for return travel to the off display enclosure. Prior to residing in the zoological park the bird had lived as a companion animal in a home. Methodologies utilized for handling in the home were unknown and the bird arrived with various behavior problems including aggressive behavior and lack of compliance or cooperation for stepping up, entering transport containers or voluntarily participating in any preventative healthcare procedures. Due to the behavior problems exhibited,

handling at the zoo was implemented using a dowel and the bird was not permitted to step onto hands of staff members.

The Training Program

The behavior and training program established at the zoo in 2010 was based in positive reinforcement and other force-free methodologies. The cockatoo and other animals were incorporated into the program and began learning behaviors to facilitate day-to-day handling and husbandry procedures.

This included target training. Target training involves teaching an animal to orient a body part towards something. This can then be used to direct an animal where to go.¹ The cockatoo was trained to touch its foot against the finger of a staff member resting on the dowel. This was used to train the cockatoo to voluntarily step onto and move up and down the dowel rod. The cockatoo also learned to orient its beak towards a closed fist as a target. This allowed staff members to direct the cockatoo's head upright or direct the animal where to walk.

Targeting was then used to train simple behaviors such as moving from point A to B, turning around, and holding position. While the bird held position staff members could work on teaching the bird to allow wings to be pulled out from the body and also palpate pectoral muscles and legs.

In one session the bird was also trained to accept water from a syringe. This was done by slowly introducing a syringe using systematic desensitization and pairing it with desired food items. Once the cockatoo was comfortable accepting water from the syringe, juice was offered from the syringe. This was then generalized to many other types of fluids including those that were not palatable. This behavior was trained in anticipation of administering oral medications if ever needed.² This behavior was easily maintained for years after it was initially trained by offering various fluids from the syringe on occasion followed by desired food items.

Because of the excellent success keepers were having training this once non-compliant cockatoo they were inspired to attempt the goal of training for an

intramuscular injection. At the time this facility was preparing to vaccinate for the West Nile virus and the goal was to train the bird to accept this vaccination without restraint. Because the team had not trained this behavior before, they were uncertain if the bird might attempt to bite when an injection was administered. Therefore, they included training the bird to allow a clear plastic cup to be placed on its head as a barrier between the beak and injection site at the pectoral muscle. However, this proved unnecessary for the procedure as the bird never showed an inclination to respond with aggressive behavior due to the training process being performed in such a manner as to never cause the bird to be pushed beyond its level of comfort. However, the cup training later proved useful for nebulization treatments.

Injection training included applying pressure to the chest using a dulled needle, snapping the chest with a rubber band to simulate stinging medications or higher volume of fluids, and piercing the skin with small gauge needles. Each approximation was always followed with the delivery of high value reinforcers and only attempted if the bird showed body language indicative of comfort. Once these steps were mastered injection of a small amount of saline was attempted. Upon successful completion of this step, the vaccination was successfully administered. The behavior was then maintained with occasional injections of saline or lesser approximations such as touching the chest with the dulled needle.²

Additional behavior goals included training for restraint in a towel and scale training. Both of these behaviors were trained in the veterinary hospital of the zoo. Training for restraint made it possible for the veterinary staff members to successfully collect blood samples with little to no stress. Scale training proved to be somewhat challenging due to the location of the immovable scale. The arrangement of the scale created a small cavity like area that was attractive as a nest site. However, this was overcome by strategic thinking of the bird's trainer. Essentially the nest-like area was covered during training and the area was slowly uncovered overtime as the bird mastered the behavior.

The following list summarizes the behaviors the cockatoo was trained to present:

- Targeting;
- Step onto a dowel rod for transport;
- Lift each foot;

Turn around;
Allow tactile on chest, legs, head, feet, under wings, on back; Allow wings to be pulled out;
Allow cup to be placed on head;
Accept various fluids from a syringe;
Allow intramuscular injection in pectoral muscle;
Allow restraint in a towel; and
Stand on a scale.

Illness Detected and Treatment

The scale behavior is what lead to the discovery of the cockatoo's symptoms. In November 2015 a staff member had retrieved the bird to bring to the veterinary hospital to demonstrate the scale training when an audible change in the bird's breathing was noticed. After collecting the bird's weight, the veterinary team and keeping staff members that had trained the bird worked together to immediately begin diagnostics and treatment. Veterinary staff members were able to successfully bring a stethoscope to its chest and back without restraining the bird. When restraint was required for blood collection, the bird sat calmly while a towel was draped over its body. Although restraint did require pressure to be applied to the bird, due to prior training the bird coped well with restraint and when released was relatively calm, responsive and was willing to accept food.

Later in that same day the bird accepted four injections without restraint as well as subcutaneous fluids without restraint. The bird also sat comfortably with its head in a cone shaped mask for nebulization. The cone was quite similar to the cup that had been used in injection training, which may have contributed to the bird's comfort with this procedure.

It took surgery to diagnose an aspergillosis granuloma on the syrinx. A cannula was placed in an air sac to assist with breathing and the bird continued to voluntarily participate in accepting oral and inhaled medications with little to no stress, according to the veterinary team and staff members who treated the bird over the course of several weeks after initial observation of symptoms. Unfortunately, the bird did not survive the obstructive fungal lesion. It returned and the bird passed under anesthesia during a procedure to recheck the trachea.

Conclusion

Although ultimately the bird did not survive, its final weeks of receiving treatment were relatively stress free thanks to an investment in training prior to onset of illness. Over the course of six years the cockatoo only needed to learn approximately seven behaviors to make medical care relatively stress free, some of which were trained in one twenty-minute session. Once the behaviors were trained, maintaining them required a small investment of time. The result was a significant reduction in stress for the treatment of a serious medical condition.

Animal training is often considered a luxury or extra activity to include in animal's life as a means to add enrichment and entertainment. However, more and more examples demonstrate that training significantly contributes to high standards in animal welfare. Training and training programs should be as essential as daily feeding, cleaning and veterinary care. When professionals begin to embrace training as a part of well-rounded approach to providing best practices in animal care we can set a precedent for the future and reduce or eliminate stress for many animals in regard to medical care.

References

1. Heidenreich B. An introduction to the application of science based training technology. *Vet Clin North Am Exot Anim Pract.* 2012;371-385.
2. Heidenreich B. Training animals to accept oral medications and injections without restraint. *Proc ExoticsCon.* 2015;619-624.

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