

Squawk 'n Talk

January 2019



Gateway Parrot Club Meeting

Come Join Us

Sunday, January 20, 2019

Varieties Bird Store

Valley Park, MO

1:00 p.m.

Guest Speaker

Stephen Johnson,

Member, Gateway Parrot Club

We are excited to have Stephen report on the seminars he attended at the 2018 AAV (Association of Avian Veterinarians) conference. The AAV is a diverse global professional organization dedicated to advancing and promoting avian health, welfare, and conservation through education, advocacy, and science.

You don't have to be a member of Gateway Parrot Club to come. We would love to have you as our guest. You are welcome to bring your bird(s). The only requirement is that your birds' wings be clipped (for their safety). If fully flighted, please keep them in a carrier. Business meeting will be at 1:00; food served at 1:30; program at 2:00; raffle drawings after program.

Chirps from the President's Perch

Happy New Year to All!

We open our new year welcoming our newly elected Board of Directors. Thank you very much for being willing to serve Gateway Parrot Club. I look forward to many new ideas and input from our new board.

Dick Grommet	Vice President
Renee Davis	Membership Secretary
Carole Grommet	Board Member
Dixie Danzeisen	Board Member
Megan Augustin	Board Member
Steve Johnson	Board Member
Aubrey Keiner	Board Member

At the December Board of Directors Meeting it was decided to re-affiliate with the following Associations:

American Budgerigar Society
Association of Avian Veterinarians
American Federation Of Aviculture
Quaker Parakeet Society

It's also time for Gateway Parrot Club to determine which Not for Profit organizations to issue our annual grants. Our purpose in doing this is to help groups who focus their activities toward helping birds. The organizations we donated to in 2018 were:

World Bird Sanctuary
Wild Bird Rehab
Association of Avian Veterinarians
Saving the Blues

If you wish information about any of these organizations please go to our website and scan below the list of our Board of Directors.

[http://www.gatewayparrotclub.org/about the GPC.asp](http://www.gatewayparrotclub.org/about_the_GPC.asp)

The Board will look at our financial status and determine the amount of total grants we can issue for 2019. This total dollar amount will be determined at our BOD meeting in January. You, the Club Members, will be asked in our January

meeting, for suggestions of organizations to consider this year. A vote will be held at our February meeting.

Our educational portion of our January meeting will be focused on updated Avian Veterinary information; What is new and what is happening in Avian Medicine. Our own Steve Johnson and hopefully Dr David Kersting will be with us to fill us in regarding what was presented at the 2018 Association of Avian Veterinary Annual Conference. I always look forward to learning what's new and how that knowledge will be beneficial for our own birds.

Please join us at at Varieties on January 20th at 1:00pm. Bring your birds and share the day with your Avian Friends

Georgia Fletcher



A few pictures from our fun Christmas Party:





Gateway Parrot Club



Meeting Dates 2019:
January 20, Stephen Johnson, Report on 2018 AAV
(Association of Avian Veterinarians) Conference
February 17, TBD
March 17, TBD

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

The Gateway Parrot Club has invited STAR (St. Louis Avian Rescue) to submit a monthly update on what's going on in their organization. It is important that all parrot lovers in the area work together to help all birds in need. Below is STAR's first article outlining their goals for 2019.



STAR—St. Louis Avian Rescue

A Look Ahead at 2019

New Year's Greetings from STAR—St. Louis Avian Rescue! Many of you will already know something about our organization, but for any who might not: we are a 501(c)3 companion bird rescue serving the St. Louis metropolitan area. To quote from our mission statement:

"It is the sole purpose of St. Louis Avian Rescue to help companion birds transition to competent, nurturing homes."

Over the last decade we've taken in, cared for and adopted to vetted applicants between 68 – 120 birds each year. We've had many wonderful volunteers in that time, whose diligent efforts have made that possible. Still, most of you will already have noted that those numbers represent only a tiny portion of the birds that likely need help in our area. A quick look at Craigslist always drives this fact home for me in a particularly traumatizing way ... I suspect many of you may have had similar experiences.

2019 is an important year for STAR as we put a major focus on building ties with the broader St. Louis community—believing that this is the best way to grow our capability and make a more substantial impact for the better. We're looking forward to engaging further with local resources, professionals and community organizations like Gateway Parrot Club.

Our first work of the year though will be a little closer to home. January will see our annual elections and appointments. The incoming Board of Directors will include at least two newly seated members. Once the new board is in place, we'll be voting on a package of changes and updates to our Policies & Procedures including substantial changes to the structure of rescue leadership, the addition of an Advisory Board, and new executive officers who will focus on making our procedures more consistent and robust; as well as on improving our relationship with our volunteers. We plan to have our first volunteer training meeting at the end of January as a way to standardize practices in our foster homes, but more importantly as a first step in more closely supporting and interacting with all who generously share their time with us. All these changes will be detailed for the public once approved. Our Bylaws & Policies & Procedures are always available to the public and additional information will be added directly to our website over the next few months.

On a more personal note, I am very excited about taking these steps and about the prospects for a transformative and highly productive 2019. I look forward to continuing to update the public about our progress and hope that with continued communication, many of you will come to share my enthusiasm and help STAR contribute to a very good 2019 for our community and our beloved feathered friends.

Sincerest thanks to Carole Grommet for working us into the newsletter and to all of the GPC for offering us this opportunity; and indeed for all that they do for birds and bird owners here in St. Louis.

Justin Reis
President
STAR—St. Louis Avian Rescue

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.

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

For our January meeting, Chef Christine is cooking soup. There will be a variety of soups, one being vegan. Christine will also be making a cake. As always, there will be water and an assortment of soda. If you would like to bring a food items to share, please do. Come hungry because usually we have an abundance of food.

Membership Report (Renee Davis)

It's that time of year to renew your membership for 2019. You can do it online, at the meeting, or via snail mail. If you renewed at the August bird fair, your membership will run through 2019. Members who have not paid their dues by January 31 will no longer be in good standing and will not be able to vote on club matters.

Welcome New Members:

Craig Clubb
Mona Delgado
Kari Klecka
Karen Triplett

GPC November and December Meeting Attendees:

Georgia Fletcher	Jim Hermann
Dick Grommet	Esther Hermann
Cathy Timma	Debbie Hixson
Renee Davis	Kari Klecker
Heidi Hellmuth	Linda Kraft
Megan Augustin	Nancy Marron
Dixie Danzeisen	Edwin Massie
Carole Grommet	Julie Morgan
Steve Johnson	Penny O'Grady
Aubrey Kiener	Barbara Peach
Christine Kinkade	Shawn Poll
David Kinkade	Cheryl Ruder
Beth Poll	Greg Ruder
Barbara Agathen	Rick Ruderer
Paul Agathen	Pat Seiler
Jorg Augustin	Christy Sigwerth
Jim Berk	Perry Sigwerth
Amanda Brantley	Karen Tabaka
Craig Clubb	Sharon Wilkins
Ramona Delgado	Adrian Mock
Jess Ellis	Dorene Olson
Ginny Feikert	Denise Shibe
Katie Spurr	



10 Tips for Relationships with Parrots

Pamela Clark, CPBC

It has occurred to me that this blog post could turn out to be just a piece of self-indulgent fluff. However, the topic fascinates me. How do we best craft long-term relationships with our birds? So, I ask for your patience as I sort out my thoughts and I will leave it to you to be the final judge of its worth.



Recently, I asked someone whether it might be possible that they had *fallen out of relationship* with their parrot.

I've never asked anyone that before, and the question just popped out. It derived from an intuitive sense about what might be going on. My friend, an excellent caregiver whom I have known for years, just hadn't been aware of what was really going on with his parrot. The bird had been startling and falling more often, but this had gone unnoticed until it created a wound.

It would make sense, wouldn't it, if we did fall out of relationship with our parrots from time to time? Our relationships with people we love certainly go through ups and downs if they last for any period of time. We aren't always kind and loving; at times we may fall into a state of disconnect. Obligations, guilt, and the needs of others can become overwhelming at times, generating the need to create some emotional distance.

Why should it be any different with our parrots? They live a long time, affording the opportunity to have a relationship that spans decades. They are socially sophisticated and have a deep sensitivity to us and our moods. They are emotional and intelligent, as are we.

I find it very odd that, in conversation with each other, we don't seem to focus ever on the quality of our relationships with our birds. Do we even recognize that we have a relationship with each parrot?



Do we instead have a tendency to objectify them?

When I read comments online about parrots, I see plenty of labels like “cute,” “needy,” “cuddly,” “sweet,” “aggressive,” “nippy,” etc. But I rarely hear anyone talk about their relationship with their birds. That is good cause for concern because *relationship difficulties* often evolve into *behavior problems* over time.

Everyone agrees that relationships take work. Relationships with parrots *certainly* take work. Despite all of their good qualities, parrots don't appear to exhibit much gratitude or awareness about all the work we put in to keep them well-fed and healthy in a clean, enriched environment. Not a one of my parrots has ever said “thank you” as I cleaned sweet potato off of the wall or “I'm sorry” as I scraped the bottom of my shoe off after having stepped on a piece of fresh pear. Beyond that, they apparently lack any awareness of the need to be *nice*. They are, to a one, incredibly unapologetic.

If I look back at my own life with birds which spans four decades now, I can easily identify periods when I was not as motivated to provide enrichment, got lazy about diet, and was not much inclined to provide behavioral guidance. I often surfaced from these times after attendance at a good parrot-related conference or a workshop with Barbara Heidenreich, once again motivated and re-energized.

My conclusion is that it's normal for us to fall out of relationships emotionally with those we love from time to time, those with our birds included. Given that, the question becomes: *How can we form the very best relationships with our birds and prevent them from falling apart?*



When we take a new parrot into our homes, we should be forming a relationship by looking to the future and imagining what we want that to look like, just as we would with a small child we had adopted. I don't think we do that. Evidence to support this would come from the number of parrots relinquished daily to second, third or fourth homes. If the number of parrots living in rescue and adoption organizations like [The Gabriel Foundation](#) or [Phoenix Landing](#) is any evidence, we don't put much thought into this at all.

It's quite popular these days to refer to our birds and other pets as "family members." However, saying so doesn't make it so.

I think most of us fall into relationship with parrots in the same way we form them with dogs and cats. Aside from their daily care, we interact with them physically by holding and petting them. It is soothing for us to have a well-loved cat or dog on a lap or right beside us and we have promoted parrots to a place alongside them, keeping them on shoulders much of the time. All of that physical contact meets our needs for love and companionship, but does it meet our birds' needs?



Parrots are not yet domesticated, as are our mammal friends we keep as pets. Their needs are diverse and complicated – so much so that we still don't know exactly what they are. Much of their behavior is rooted in instinct. When that peach-colored head rests on your chest does it mean that your cockatoo loves you or does it mean that he seeks to form a mate-like bond with you? Reproducing is high on his list of instinctive priorities, while this possibility might not even be on your radar.

Forming a relationship with a parrot by focusing on physical affection may be a feel-good practice, but it creates a host of problems. Based upon my experience

as a behavior consultant, engaging in a lot of close physical contact not only encourages dependence for the bird, but serves as a trigger for the development of a pair bond. Once the parrot has formed a pair bond with you, what comes next is not a feel-good experience at all if you happen to live with other people. Parrots with pair bonds typically display a host of unproductive and problematic behaviors – aggression toward others in the home, increased noise, and a tendency to destroy feathers. They develop a desire to get down on the floor more often, looking for “nesty” spots and destroying woodwork in the process. They slowly lose their desire to interact with enrichment or do much of anything except pursue activities related to nesting.

For the human in the pair-bonded relationship, problems also derive from this focus. I would describe this primarily as a *lack of vision* when it comes to really seeing the parrot in front of you for all that he is.



Author Henry Beston once wrote: “We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature, and living by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the creature through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth.”

There's nothing wrong with showing our birds we love them by offering physical affection, but when we focus on cuddling with our parrots to the exclusion of other ways of interacting, I think we forget that they *are* "other nations." Instead, we see only the "feather magnified" – a distorted image at best. The only way to stay in functional relationship with our parrots is to see them as the resourceful, complicated creatures that they really are, rather than as simply objects of our affection.

If you search through articles and websites about success in human relationships, the number available is staggering. It's an amazing reflection of just how self-absorbed we can be as a people. Further, no one agrees what a healthy relationship really depends upon. The *10 Signs That You Are in a Healthy Relationship* published on the Psychology Today website serves up quite different criteria than does *7 Signs Your Relationship is Healthy* on the Huffington Post website.

How can we know that we are creating healthy, i.e. functional, relationships with our own birds that will stand the test of time? Here are a few thoughts, about which most of those publishing information on human relationships agree:

Respect: If we respect our birds, we don't use force with them. Instead, we learn to use positive reinforcement to teach them to do the things we want them to do. If a parrot won't step up, we *don't* push our hand into his abdomen to insist. Instead, we decide on a preferred food for which he will work, set up the request so that he is likely to comply, and reward him consistently when he does. We afford them autonomy.

Good Communication: We don't assume we know how they are feeling. Instead we learn to read body language and change our own behavior according to what the parrot communicates. The only way our birds can "talk" to us is through body language and we understand this and respect them enough to learn their ways and preferences. If a parrot leans away from us when we offer petting, we don't

insist. Instead we back off and give him his space. Further, we make sure that our own communication is understandable. If asking for a behavior, we give clear, distinct cues so that he understands what we want.



Anger Control: If a parrot bites us, we don't blame him. No matter how much it hurts, we control ourselves and instead of lashing out, we look at our part in the problem. Much biting stems from a lack of sensitivity to the body language *they* have tried so hard to use. If the biting continues, we take responsibility and seek help from someone who knows how to solve the problem. That does not include taking the problem to social media to have strangers weigh in. No one that I know who really has a foundational knowledge of how behavior works hangs out on social media answering questions for free. There is no reinforcement for doing so.

Empathy: We strive to see things from the parrot's perspective. If a bird is driving us crazy with screaming, we examine what we expect from him and wonder if perhaps we are asking too much. Are we meeting *his* needs? Is he getting out of his cage for sufficient time each day? Is he getting enough enrichment, bathing opportunities, and exercise? Expecting a parrot to stay in his cage 22 hours a day or remain isolated in a bird room most of the time without exhibiting problems is simply expecting too much. In addition, if a parrot ever displays fear, we stop in our tracks and rethink what we were about.

Commitment: When things get difficult, we don't automatically look at the option of giving the parrot up.

COMMITMENT MEANS
STAYING LOYAL TO
WHAT YOU SAID YOU
WERE GOING TO DO
LONG AFTER THE
MOOD YOU SAID IT IN
HAS LEFT YOU.

Instead, we remind ourselves that this is a long-term commitment. Things won't always be wonderful. Sometimes they get hard. We can accept this fact with some patience and perhaps a sense of humor and wait for other answers to come. We pay money for help when we can't solve the problems that have arisen.

Problem Solving: We realize that keeping an undomesticated creature inside of four walls is a daunting task. We don't blame the parrot when problems arise. Instead, we seek solutions and release our preconceived notions of how things have to be. Rather than staying stuck in black and white thinking, we open ourselves to other possibilities.

Compromise: I'm a great believer in the idea of creating balance in any social flock or family. Everyone must have a way to get their needs met, husbands and parrots included. This takes an open-minded approach that allows the family to strike a balance.

Enjoying Time Spent Together: We find ways to enjoy our birds that don't involve cuddling and petting. We devise games. We put on music and have a dance party. We teach them to perform fun behaviors. We spend time outdoors together in a safe enclosure. We honor their need to enjoy parallel activities and bring them to the bathroom while we get ready in the morning or into the kitchen as we chop vegetables. We think about what they might enjoy.



Acceptance: We appreciate and respect the parrot for what he is... a flighted spirit. We don't mutilate his wings to prevent flight without determining that this is absolutely necessary, rather than a matter of convenience for us. We *accept* him as the "other nation" he is, including his ability and need to fly. Every aspect of a bird's physiology has evolved for the purpose of flight and this birthright should not be removed without an absolute need, such as preventing him from losing his home.

Trust: Each relationship is a bank account. Each trust-building interaction creates a deposit. And every time we spray the bird with water to stop screaming or force him to do something, we make a withdrawal. We cannot expect to have trust in these relationships unless our account balance is far in the green and

stays there. It is possible to become overdrawn and it's a difficult road back from there.

It is easy to get sucked into conversations about how these birds shouldn't really be pets. That ship has sailed, my friend. Instead, let's expand our thinking. Our parrots aren't dogs or cats or rabbits or reptiles or horses. We need to create a new category of "pet ownership" that calls upon us to take into account their exceptional intelligence, resourcefulness, emotional sensitivity and long, long life spans. And, that takes some thinking!

This post isn't about making anyone feel guilty. I get it that sometimes we must relinquish a parrot to another home.



I get it that sometimes we do have to clip wings. I get it that there will be times when the parrot can't get out of his cage for enough time. I never blame anyone for making those hard decisions. However, I think we can set the bar a little higher than we have in the past by simply thinking a bit more about how we should be shaping our relationships with our birds.

I would love to hear your thoughts about being in relationship with the parrots who live in your homes. Please send me a comment and I will be sure to reply. *Thank you for reading my blog. I am Pamela Clark, an IAABC Certified Parrot Behavior Consultant and licensed veterinary technician. My passion is helping people with parrots. To access many free resources or subscribe to my newsletter, please visit me at <http://www.pamelaclarkonline.com>. Until next time!*