

# Squawk 'n Talk

March 2019

## **Gateway Parrot Club Meeting**

**Come Join Us**

**Sunday, March 17, 2019**

**Varietees Bird Store**

**Valley Park, MO**

**1:00 p.m.**

### **Guest Speakers**

**Dr. David Kersting, DVM and**

**Stephen Johnson, RVT,**

**CPBT-KA**

We are excited to have Dr. Kersting and Stephen report on the seminars they 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 a 2:00; raffle drawings after program.**

## Chirps from the Perch

This year the club will be able to donate grants of \$500.00 each to three different not for profit organizations for a total of \$1,500.00.

At our March 17th meeting, members will vote and select three organizations from the following list that were nominated at the February meeting:

St. Louis Avian Rescue (STAR), STAR is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to assist companion birds in need of homes and to educate the community regarding bird care and health. They have volunteers who foster a variety of bird species with the eventual goal of the placement of these birds in forever homes. [staravian.org](http://staravian.org)

Saving the Blues (Blue-throated macaws) (Funding nests for Blue Throat Macaws in the wild) Blue-throated macaws are very rare macaws endemic to a sea area of north-central Bolivia. They live in groups of palm trees that dot the level plains. They are not a forest dwelling bird. They are endangered because of illegal hunting for pets and a decline in palm trees needed to build nests. [www.birdendowment.org](http://www.birdendowment.org)

World Bird Sanctuary (WBS) - WBS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that preserves, protects, and inspires to safeguard bird species as part of the global community for future generations. Their mission is accomplished through education, captive breeding, field studies, and rehabilitation. [www.worldbirdsantuary.org](http://www.worldbirdsantuary.org)

Phoenix Landing is a 501(c)(3) all-volunteer organization located in Alexander, North Carolina, dedicated to the welfare of parrots. They provide education and special events in Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina; facilitate adoption for parrots; help veterinary students interested in avian medicine; sponsor research and conservation for wild parrots; advocate standards of care for birds; build and maintain a sustainable organization; and ensure that adopted Phoenix Landing Birds are physically and legally protected. [phoenixlanding.org](http://phoenixlanding.org) If you would like to see the March 2019 newsletter of Phoenix Landing, the Phoenix Landing website, scroll down on home page, and select the March 2019 newsletter.

Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) - AAV is the American branch of an international organization devoted to “Advancing and Promoting Avian Medicine and Stewardship.” The Gateway Parrot Club would donate to their Research Fund. [www.aav.org](http://www.aav.org)

Quaker Parakeet Society (QPS) - QPS strives to provide factual, detailed information on Quakers as companion parrots through education, encourages legalization of Quakers in states where they are currently banned, and strives to prevent further restriction of ownership, promotes protection and preservation of Quaker natural habitats, helps find homes for Quakers in need of a new home, and supports and encourages veterinary and avicultural research of all avian species. [quakerparakeetsociety.org](http://quakerparakeetsociety.org)

Echo BonAire - Echo’s goal is to ensure a stable and growing population of the Yellow-Shouldered Amazon Parrot by: reducing the poaching of chicks for the local and international pet trade, restoring the dry-forest habitat that the parrots call home, and reducing habitat degradation by non-native species such as donkeys, goats, and pigs. [echobonaire.org](http://echobonaire.org)

## **A Few Pictures from our February Meeting featuring Mark Glenshaw, “The Owl Man”**



# The parrots enjoyed learning about the owls!





## Loving Your Bird- Now and Forever

'Owning' a bird is never quite the right description when referring to life with a parrot. Having a bird own *you* is more accurate. Every person who has ever had the privilege of living with a bird knows how special the bond is between you and them. It is an irrevocable love that holds a special place in your heart. In addition, to sweeten the deal, birds live a long, long, *long* time so you may spend the rest of your life with this precious creature. Great for you, right? And great for them! Except, what happens to your sweet bird when you can no longer care for them, when circumstances become too heavy to bare? Where will your bird spend his life after he can no longer spend it with you?

Not everyone thinks about melancholy or unforeseen circumstances. Not everyone walks this earth with the thought that they won't be around forever. Unless you have discovered the fountain of youth, (in which case, please share) then the sad truth is that your bird may outlive you.

Meet Penelope and Phoenix.



These two birds have been together for 42 years and counting. They were previously owned by a wonderful woman who loved them unconditionally. They were her babies, and she never thought she would have to say goodbye to them. That is, until one morning she woke up feeling not quite right. The days that followed only reaffirmed her fear that something was wrong. This woman, the proud owner of Penelope and Phoenix, was soon diagnosed with a debilitating illness. Being the strong and positive woman she is, she continued on and fought her illness, believing eventually she would get better. Except, as days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months, her condition rapidly deteriorated. It seemed, faster than she could blink, she was bedridden, unable to walk the stairs to see her precious Penelope and Phoenix.

Luckily, this woman had a husband who could give Penelope and Phoenix food and water; he could not, however, give them the attention they so desperately needed. There they sat, alone in their cages, left to see only each other.

Those long months soon turned into years and Penelope and Phoenix were left isolated in a basement, left to sit and wonder what they did wrong to deserve no longer seeing their mom. These two, once sweet and tame birds, became fearful of humans and their once sweet kisses turned into bites. A human face was, after years of being left alone, no longer a welcome sight.

After 4 years of being sick, this woman realized that she was not going to get better. The decision on what to do with Penelope and Phoenix tore at her heart, at her soul. She cried at the thought of no longer having them, but she cried more at the condition they had been living in since she became ill. This brave woman contacted STAR and gave Penelope and Phoenix another chance at life.

Due to their years in isolation, both Penelope and Phoenix have developed behavioral problems and require an abundance of time each day to be worked with. They have reverted into an untamed, wild state which will take time and love in order to get them back to the sweet birds that they can be. Luckily, STAR has the time and resources to gift these wonderful birds with a new start.

Penelope and Phoenix have slowly started to emerge from their shell during their time at STAR. Phoenix is getting used to be touched once again and Penelope is learning that humans are entertaining to talk to. Both birds are

making leaps and bounds since being surrendered, and they will make someone very happy when they find their forever home.

Knowing that tomorrow is never a guarantee, and knowing how much we, as an avian community, love our birds, it is greatly important to recognize the need for a rescue like STAR. Without your continued support and love for what we do, we would never be able to save birds like Penelope and Phoenix from a life of neglect. We love what we do, and we hope you do too.

Sincerely,

Haleigh Wagner, on behalf of all members and supporters of STAR – St. Louis Avian Rescue

## **Gateway Parrot Club**



### **Meeting Dates 2019:**

- March 17, Dr. David Kersting & Stephen Johnson, Report on 2018 AAV (Association of Avian Veterinarians) Conference
- April 14 , Dr. Jason Crean, "Avian Raw Whole Food Preparation"
- May 19
- June 9
- July 21, Toymaking Party
- August 24 (Saturday) All American Hookbill Fair
- September 15
- October 20
- November 17
- December 8, Holiday Party

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

## 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 and to support not for profit organizations. 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!

To help celebrate St. Patrick's Day, Chef Christine will be making a delicious corned beef and cabbage meal. She will also be making a pasta salad with no meat for those that do not care to eat meat, and a cake for dessert. As usual there will be water and an assortment of soda.

## Membership Report (Renee Davis)

If you are not a member, we would love to have you join. You can do it online, at the meeting, or via snail mail.

### February Meeting Attendees:

Georgia Fletcher	Kari Klecka
Dick Grommet	Nancy Marron
Cathy Timma	Julie Morgan
Renee Davis	Katherine Mueller
Heidi Hellmuth	Richard Mueller
Dixie Danzeisen	Karen Tabaka
Carole Grommet	Karen Triplett
Steve Johnson	Sharon Wilkins
Aubrey Kiener	Anita Woods
Christine Kinkade	Dorene Olson
David Kinkade	Christi
Beth Poll	Connie
Barbara Agathen	Donna
Paul Agathen	Kenya
Amanda Brantley	Michael
Jess Ellis	Michaeline
Dan Fogarty	



# Association of Avian Veterinarians

## January 2019 AAV Bird Club News Release

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### **Hormonal Behavior in Pet Birds: What It Is and What You Can Do About It**

*By: Jodi Berls, CVA, LVT*

Some of the most aggravating problem behaviors pet parrots exhibit are believed to be related to reproductive activity and the various hormones associated with reproduction. You may have heard this referred to as "being hormonal" or "acting nesty." These behaviors can be very stressful both for the bird and its owner, and they can lead to issues such as feather plucking and aggressiveness, or potentially serious medical conditions, such as dystocia (egg-binding).

Unfortunately, many bird owners may actually be part of the cause of these frustrating and difficult situations. The good news is, if your bird is young, you may be able to make some changes that can prevent or at least mitigate these behavior problems. If your bird is older, you may already be in the throes of dealing with them. Before you start tearing your hair out, let's look at hormonal behavior and what you can do about it.

#### **What causes hormonal behavior?**

The age at which birds reach sexual maturity varies by species. Small hookbills, such as budgerigars, cockatiels and lovebirds, tend to mature at about six months to one year of age, while larger parrots,

such as cockatoos and macaws, tend to mature at about three to six years of age. Note, however, that females tend to mature at a younger age than males, and birds in captivity often reach maturity at a younger age than those in the wild.

Female birds can produce eggs even if they haven't been exposed to a male bird. On the other hand, it's not uncommon for a bird to be presumed male because no eggs have been laid for years, and then begin producing eggs at a surprisingly late age. Hormonal behaviors can be seen in both sexes, beginning early on in the bird's life.

Birds are triggered to begin engaging in reproductive behavior by environmental cues: photoperiod (the number of light and dark hours in a day), abundant rich foods, temperature, rainfall amount, vocalizations, the presence of nesting material and the presence of a mate - or a surrogate for a mate, such as a favored person or toy. Despite the fact that your bird may be kept indoors at all times, he or she still can detect changes in day length, temperature, rainfall and other cues that occur outside your home.

Of those cues, photoperiod is the most important. Most birds reproduce in the springtime, when days are longer and nights are shorter. Longer days stimulate reproductive hormones and prompt birds to begin their reproductive cycles. Birds are so sensitive to photoperiod that any disruption in the sleep cycle can influence their hormonal response. Just turning on the light for a moment to check on your bird during the night can trick your bird's body into reacting as if it has just been a really long day. Birds need a period of *uninterrupted* darkness every night, without the flickering light from the TV or other device. Covering your bird's cage won't be enough to prevent this phenomenon.

An over-abundance of high-fat, calorie-dense foods is another common trigger. In the wild, the food supply increases in the breeding season. Captive birds tend to have plentiful food all the time, regardless of the season. Fruit and seeds provide ample sugar and fat, and for many birds, they can be found at all hours in a large bowl that may look to them like a wedding buffet. Indoor lighting

and an all-you-can-eat food supply create a kind of endless summer of ideal breeding conditions for your bird.

Providing your bird with a nest also may trigger hormonal behavior. A bird may interpret a plush hiding hut, a box, a towel or any dark, confined space such as an open drawer or accessible cabinet as a suitable site for nesting. While you may be concerned about keeping your bird warm or giving him or her a place to hide and feel safe, a bird who grows too attached to such spaces may be deriving more than just warmth and security from them.

If you only have one bird, you may think you don't have to worry about the presence of a mate. However, birds can find "mates" in a variety of unexpected places: a mirror, a shiny toy or, especially, a person they like. This tendency appears to be stronger in birds that have been reared by humans - hand rearing can result in birds imprinted on humans who are more interested in mating with people than with other birds. Some interactions with a favored human, such as hand-feeding warm foods and cuddling, can unintentionally emulate breeding behaviors. Wild birds use mutual preening, especially in areas they can't reach themselves, as a way to strengthen and maintain the pair bond. Stroking your bird over the back, on the tail, under the wings or around the vent may create an inappropriate pair bond that can lead to trouble.

If you do have another bird or birds, be aware that their presence can stimulate hormonal behavior, as well. The sight and sound - even from another room in the house - of another bird can be a strong trigger.

### **What medical problems can result from hormonal behavior?**

Behavior problems associated with reproduction may be a prelude to serious medical issues to come. Chronic hormonal behavior in female birds can lead to excessive egg laying, egg binding, oviductal impaction and egg-related coelomitis. While these issues often are more obvious and more severe in female birds, male birds also can exhibit hormonal behavior and can be at risk for conditions such as cloacal prolapse caused by masturbation. Excessive reproductive behaviors in both sexes can contribute to feather destructive

behavior, screaming and the kind of aggressiveness and territoriality that often leads to rehoming of the bird.

### **What does hormonal behavior look like?**

The type of behavior your bird displays when hormonal can vary by species and from one individual to another within a species.

Poicephalus parrots, such as Senegal or Meyer's parrots, for example, do a particular set of movements with their bodies - turning around and lifting or fluttering their wings - that sometimes is called a "skirt dance." Some African grey parrots engage in nesting behavior that involves scratching or digging at newspaper or other material at the bottom of their cages. Many parrots will regurgitate their food onto a favored person or object, similar to the behavior of wild birds feeding a mate or a baby bird.

While your bird's behavior may not be exactly like that of other birds, here are some common activities you can watch out for:

- Seeking a small, dark space in which to nest or hiding under papers or similar material.
- Paper shredding, increased chewing of wood - also a nest-building activity. Lovebirds are known for tucking paper or other nesting material into the feathers on their backs.
- Becoming territorial or aggressive when in or near the cage.
- Droppings may become larger and/or looser and wetter.
- Change in how the bird relates to you or to other members of the family. Your bird may become aggressive toward a family member who is viewed as a threat or competitor for the attention of a favored individual.
- Displaying a receptive posture or panting.
- Excessive vocalizations.
- Excessive preening, which may lead to feather destructive behavior.
- Rubbing the cloaca on objects such as toys or perches, or the hands of a favored human.

### **What can be done about it?**

Medical treatments are available (see below), but they usually are more effective when accompanied by environmental changes. In

fact, just changing your bird's environment may be enough to solve the problem (or at least make the situation livable).

Environmental adjustments that may deter hormonal behavior include:

- Reduce the number of hours of light to which your bird is exposed. Your bird needs a period of undisturbed sleep every night, usually at least 10-12 hours. Covering the cage won't help, especially if the cage is in a room with a TV or with people talking and moving around. You may need to consider moving the cage at night or providing a "sleep cage" to which you can move the bird at his or her bedtime.
- Limit the amount of high-fat, calorie-rich food items. Such foods include sunflower and safflower seeds, millet, nuts, pasta, bread, peas, corn, and beans, as well as sweeter fruits like apple and banana. A pelleted diet supplemented with healthy vegetables such as carrots and broccoli is best. You should also consider providing food in meals, rather than ad-lib, and encourage foraging for food to give your bird a natural outlet for his or her energy.
- Control cavity-seeking behaviors by removing any objects that your bird is using as a nest, such as a plush hiding hut or box. Don't let your bird access small, dark spaces, such as a drawer or closet, which may be perceived as nest sites.
- Avoid interacting with your bird in ways that may stimulate breeding behaviors, such as cuddling close to your body or letting the bird climb into a shirt or pocket. Interact with your bird by providing training or play opportunities, instead.
- Make sure you are petting your bird in a way that doesn't send the wrong message. Restrict petting to the head; avoid areas under the wings, on the tail, around the vent and along the back.



*Photo Courtesy Jodi Berls  
Restricting petting to your bird's head is a way to show your affection but reduce the risk of sexual stimulation.*

## **Medical Treatments**

In dogs and cats, unwanted reproductive behavior is most often

treated with surgery - spay or neuter procedures. Such surgery is much more difficult and risky in birds, so it's rarely performed except as a last resort to address a serious medical issue. Instead, drug therapy is generally used.

The most common medical treatments used involve hormone agonists - medications to suppress the hormones that trigger the breeding cycle. Two that are often used are leuprolide acetate (Lupron) and deslorelin acetate (Suprelorin). Lupron generally is administered as an injection, while Suprelorin is an implant that is placed under the skin between the bird's shoulders. The implant is designed to release drug slowly over a longer period of time than a single injection of Lupron. Both drugs have variable duration of action, however, and many birds need long-term treatment. You should note also that neither medication is likely to solve the behavioral problems by itself - the environmental triggers also must be addressed.

### **Overview**

As with most health concerns, prevention is easier and less expensive than treatment. Think about the environmental conditions in which your bird lives, and what triggers might be present, then address them before your bird begins to exhibit reproductive behaviors. If you're already dealing with hormonal behavior in your birds, consider how you can rearrange the environment to alleviate the problem, then make an appointment with your avian veterinarian to discuss the medical options.

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