

Parrot Welfare & Rescue

The World Parrot Trust has written about these critical matters in past PsittaScenes, notably our issue for May 1998, and also in our previous issue for August 2000. In 1998 we commented that perhaps as many as 50% of all pet parrots were kept in cramped and inadequate conditions, and we went on to propose the following action:

Support a complete ban on the trapping, trading and export of wild-caught parrots from their countries of origin, unless for approved breeding programmes.

Voluntarily reduce the numbers of parrots being bred in captivity. The aim should be quality, not quantity.

Educate potential new pet parrot owners, so that they properly understand the commitment they are making.

Help rescue groups wherever possible, with funding and facilities.

We also proposed the following Guidelines for Parrot Rescue:

These are simply a draft for

discussion, based on information supplied by rescue groups. We invite further input from all sources of expertise and opinion.

1 Any group engaged in this task should ensure it has sufficient funding, wide experience of working with parrots, suitable accommodation, expert veterinary support and sound methods of assessing foster homes.

2 The motivation must be nothing other than the rescue, rehabilitation and longterm welfare of the birds. The profit motive has no place in parrot rescue.

3 Stability is vital. This means a

total commitment on the part of the people involved, plus reasonable financial status. A business plan is recommended.

4 Some expertise in public relations is important, to maximise publicity about parrots in difficulty, the rescue service available and the need for funds and other forms of support. It is also important to work effectively with local parrot people, clubs and authorities.

5 The quality and range of facilities must be adequate. Separate quarantine, hospital, rehabilitation and pre-release sections are essential.

Supervision at all stages by an avian veterinarian is strongly recommended.

6 Re-homing of rehabilitated birds is a key element in the work of most rescue operations. This requires inspection of would-be foster homes, the education of those taking on responsibility for the bird, a document recording the precise commitment being undertaken and effective follow-up to ensure that all is well.

Integration of rehabilitated birds of endangered species into an EEP or other approved breeding project is recommended.

Recent Developments

In the August 2000 PsittaScene we picked up on the question raised by Peter Them of Denmark: 'should aviculture continue to mass-produce parrots?' Rosemary Low wrote an article on this, answering the question with a resounding 'NO!'

We have now re-visited Peter Them's 'Parrot Data Email Club', and selected the following quotes from a variety of correspondents:

"I really believe there are too many parrots. I've been in bird rescue for four years now, and I'm amazed at how many babies are being produced. It really saddens me to know that most of them will end up in rescue. I think it's very much like the dog-breeding scene now. There are some good breeders who will take responsibility for all the lives they produce for the rest of their lives, and there are others who just want money, and they produce so many babies that there end up being not enough homes for them all."

Robinn, USA

"I took time to read some of the responses to your original query before responding. There were, by PIJAC (Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council) statistics 14 million exotic birds in 5 million homes (in the US)



NOT A PRETTY SIGHT – As seen in earlier PsittaScene.

in 1990. By 1996 the numbers were 40 million in 5.5 million respectively. We have extrapolated, at the continuing rate of growth that today, in 2000 there are approx. 60 million exotic birds in only 6 million homes in the US. Apparently, based on what our writers have said, in parts of Europe there is a "glut" as well.

The Oasis Sanctuary Foundation, Ltd. incorporated in early 1997 with 68 birds. By the time we received our 501(c)(3) in Dec. of the same year we had over 90 birds. Today we have over 260 birds and a waiting list of approx 20 birds due to arrive this fall

after our move to larger facilities. (A 71 acre ranch in Southern Az.).

Most frighteningly we have turned away over 100 birds in the past two months. These birds, without exception, were the "left-overs" the non-breedable or pet quality birds from large "collections" whose owners were either unable or unwilling to pay the \$150+ per bird that their vets would charge for the medical testing we require. (In individual emergency cases we will pay for this but cannot do it, at this time, for large numbers of birds.) Who knows what will happen to these birds? It keeps us up nights with worry but we do not

have the \$15,000 to spend either.

In addition to what we see as overbreeding of some of the birds who are "high maintenance" and perhaps are not suitable for most pet homes (Example: we have over 30 cockatoos including numerous "mate-killers", mutilators etc.), we are now receiving many 15-20+ year old birds, whose owners are undergoing life-changes: having families, career changes, retiring and whose family members, friends etc do not want the animals. The market is so saturated that plucked or more hormonal birds cannot always find good homes. They end up here...

...If breeders insist that they should continue unrestricted breeding, then we believe it is time that they give good and long thought to supporting the long-term care often two or three generations of humans per bird, costing tens of thousands (\$36,000+ for 50 years is our conservative estimate) of dollars.

There are no simple solutions. Legislation certainly only creates more problems. Education, self-examination and introspection leading to a larger more holistic view of the birds and their place in the world and in our lives is a goal more in keeping with our views."

Sybil Erden, Director
The Oasis Sanctuary, USA

"...Speaking for myself, I am not "mass-producing" birds, and so far, I have been able to sell youngstock within a few weeks, or occasionally months, at moderate, but to me quite satisfactory prices.

To conclude, we will have to adjust to changes resulting from advances in aviculture, but bird-breeding remains a wonderful and rewarding hobby."

Sue Embury, UK

"We have not noticed any lessening of demand for our birds. We have over a hundred pairs of larger birds. African greys and amazons make up most of them but we do have some pairs of macaws and some pairs of pionus and moustache sized birds. We sell all we hatch, primarily to qualified hand feeders at 2 to 4 weeks of age. We don't seem to be able to hatch enough to lessen the demand. The only thing that we have had a problem selling this year was some green cheek amazons. They tell me that large numbers of them are still being smuggled into the U.S. and destroying the market."

Bob, Golden Oak Aviaris

"...I'll send you now some of my thoughts about "Are there too many parrots...".

Perhaps you know that I'm writing some articles for German-language bird-magazines.

So I have many contacts to breeders and owners of neotropic parakeets (and other parrots, too) all over the "German-speaking world" and the neighbouring countries.

So I can give you some information about the situation of parrots in captivity here in Germany.

The last few years the "parrot market" has collapsed completely.

The prices for the most parrot species are at the lowest point. Even the rarest species you cannot deal.

So a little group of parrot breeders (like myself) have decided to stop the breeding for a certain time.

Some breeders (I hope it will become more and more) want to reach a "really good life" for their birds; they want to have less birds in the same room, that means more room for flying. I think this is a good development, isn't it?..."

Volker Würth, Germany

"I read this post/request with bewilderment and a sense of astonishment.

Here in the U.S. all parrots remain in high demand. Even the common Cockatiel has seen a resurgence of demand. It is true that research and import restrictions have made the business self-sufficient as you say. But the idea that we are able to "Mass Produce" parrot babies is highly laughable...

We have waiting lists for our babies and almost all have deposits placed on them prior to weaning. We deliver only weaned, healthy, vet checked, banded and guaranteed babies...



A tame Scarlet Macaw is a companion for life.

Like any business, there are those that do not advertise, have poor people skills, lack any marketing talent, or are just lousy business people...

In conclusion, the term mass production and serious Aviculture in the U.S. do not mix. The price structure and demand are remaining stable, and we see many more families owning numerous pet birds. Pet quality is of high importance to most buyers. As is health certificates and DNA sexing. A sweet, gentle hand fed baby bird is what the pet market is demanding, there is no market for young wild caught or parent raised birds any longer. I see an up turn in demand in our future, not the dumping of unsold stock as you suggest."

Take Care and God Bless,

John,
The Shop Out Back Aviary, USA

"...The Cleveland Zoo receives up to 200 calls a year from people wanting to "dump" the parrot/s that they no longer want to keep

in their home because they have suddenly realized that these creatures are not so easily cared for and live a long long time!

The number of rescue organizations continues to grow and many are already bursting at the seams and turning birds away because they just cannot accommodate all the ones needing placement. And these are just the ones who are at least fortunate enough to have an owner who is willing to "place" them in a rescue or sanctuary situation.

This does not include the parrots that have been relegated to the basement or the garage or other

realization hits home and the problems begin, the majority of these people (whose original intentions were probably good) are ready to bail out... get rid of the bird!

It is my opinion that there are far too many people in the US breeding parrots for one reason only and that is to MAKE MONEY! Some raise their babies in a caring manner, others don't, many sell unweaned babies (misleading buyers by telling them the handfeeding will provide that ultimate bond), and YES many mass produce as many babies as possible by pulling the eggs, incubator hatching, gavage feeding the babies.

It is my opinion that in the US we absolutely DO have situations with parrots that are nearly identical to the PUPPY MILLS that have been exposed as being breeding pits of horror run by unscrupulous, money hungry, thoughtless people. Have I seen this first hand? The answer is YES!...

My conclusion is that there are far too many parrots being bred in the US for sale into the pet trade by far too many breeders whose only goal is to make money. If one realistically looks at the plight of the companion parrot in the US, it is hard not to think that we will eventually see these magnificent creatures facing the same fate as the millions of dogs & cats that enter shelters and never again live in someone's home as the companion they were once intended to be."

Judy, USA

"YES, YES, YES. There are too many breeder birds, baby birds, and people who breed birds, in the pet trade today. I know that in the US, many healthy birds as well as sick, injured, handicapped birds are being deliberately killed at an alarming rate.

As the US's first and largest parrot sanctuary, we are against the euthanasia of healthy birds, but fear that because of a lack of places for these unwanted birds, the nightmare has already begun.

Breeders and their advocates, are butting heads with the advocates of sensible parrot care. Most of the birds we get into our sanctuary (we house them all here permanently... no adoptions...no sales) are coming from pet bird owners who are just now finding out for themselves that these animals are WILD, yet very human

like creatures. This mix of wildness, beauty, ability to talk and to understand human language on some level, coupled with their ability to think, reason, and make decisions (if allowed) is what makes them so attractive to the pet trade.

We are on the brink of a disaster here in the US, and I would imagine worldwide, of where are all of these unwanted birds to go. The market is already dropping, and so are prices. Many who have purchased parrots are now warning their friends NOT to indulge in getting one, therefore, the trend to euthanising these nearly extinct creatures crawls nearer every day.

I have some ideas as to the solution to the problem, one of which (that tops the list) is to STOP breeding these birds IMMEDIATELY. So much for the excuse that they are bred to preserve the species. They are being bred for PROFIT and nothing less. If not one more baby bird were to hatch out in this world, we already have more in captivity that humankind can manage."

Mary Bradford,
The Tropics Exotic Bird Refuge,
USA

"I recently heard of one parrot rescuer with 85 unwanted birds. She struggled to care for them as long as she could. Her heart was simply too big for her pocket book. Now why she did not turn to the community and ask for help I do not know. However, her solution for her rescued flock as she faced what I assume was imminent bankruptcy, was to have all 85 of them killed with the aid of a veterinarian. She found this preferable to seeing them suffer a miserable existence in the hands of humans. It was her way of being responsible for them. I do not fault her. I weep for her, for it must have taken incredible courage to endure such a thing. She was after all a rescuer of the unwanted.

In 1988 I found parrots. I wanted to do my part for conservation of the species to keep them on the planet. We were still importing birds. I selected 2 species of amazon not common or currently being bred in the US. By the time I had 2 pair of juvenile Panama Amazons and my pair of Mealties in 1991 - 92, things were beginning to change. My birds are just now of an age to breed. Guess who will not be breeding her birds. I cannot bear the thought of my babies ending up discarded...

I heard that BirdTalk was undertaking a survey of all the rescuers in the country trying to inventory the birds in their care to get some sort of reliable figure of the actual number of discarded parrots and the species. I anxiously await their results. I am not looking forward to their revelations, however. It is my hope that all who breed birds will also look at those figures, acquired in one to possibly two decades of concerted breeding efforts in the US. Then decide whether or not you are serving the birds or yourself when you produce more."

Eileen Michaels, USA



Two bright eyed and stimulated Yellow-fronted pet amazons.

"As parrots are bred for the US pet market they will enter into the same realm as dogs and cats. Every week thousands of dogs and cats are killed in animal shelters in every significant city Millions are killed each year. Refuge and sanctuary will not be able to cope with the problem. We will have to humanely destroy parrots.

This will be fact if parrots continue to be marketed as pets... they will receive no better treatment than man's best friend."

Jack C Eitniew, USA

"I would like to make comment brought up by several readers. Some are of the opinion that the mere existence of a business that claims its primary purpose is to "rescue" unwanted parrots, supports the idea that there are too many parrots. I could not disagree more strongly. My disagreement is based on many different facts about many of these "operations". For example, before we saw the advent of these operations, where were unwanted parrots being sent? If memory

serves me right, generally they were being sent to zoos or back to breeders. There are always companion or livestock animals being "recycled", it is nothing new.

I have interviewed a few owners of some of the better known "rescue" operations in the United States. It turns out that a greater percentage of the owners that are offering birds to these people actually want money for them. Therefore, they are being sold, not rescued-or at best, they are being rescued from owners that want some money. But there are also the owners that have valid reasons to give up a pet bird to these

the salaries of the PhDs that work on many projects. If we cannot "profit" from all we do, then the whole system breaks down again and we might as well just eat the parrots. A little "profit" is actually what is needed to support conservation of wild parrots etc. Without it, there is no incentive to conserve the animals or the habitat. Emotion, and the "warm and fuzzy feeling" only goes so far after that, someone better have some money or the end result will be disaster."

My Opinion... Rick Jordan,
USA



By this greeting from Denmark I have the pleasure to introduce the worldwide:

PARROT DATA E-MAIL-CLUB

The aim of Parrot Data E-Mail-Club is to collect and report data and news about the Parrots - Psittaculture in the wild as well as in the aviculture protected environment.

BUT please note: Parrot Data E-Mail-Club will not deal with Pet Birds or Cage Birds.

You and your friends are welcome to subscribe to this free Parrot Data E-Mail-Club.

All mails will be sent as BCC (blind copy holders), to avoid spammers getting hold of the list of addresses.

You are most welcome to send me news about or related to Parrots.

But, please note: Do Not send large mails, pictures, sound-files or attachments

Best wishes from
Denmark

Peter H Them
Parrot Data

Email:
parrotdata@post4.tele.dk

A Parrot Welfare Proposal: Hands Across the Water

by STEWART METZ

I do not personally direct a parrot rescue and adoption center, a foster home or a parrot sanctuary. However, I do have a deep and abiding concern about the welfare of parrots; therefore, I offer one person's vision for the creation of an international organization overseeing the stewardship of abused or abandoned parrots.

Parrot Welfare Organizations or PWOs (as I will combine them) are springing up all over. Some have heroically rescued many parrots from horrid abuse at the hands of man, at considerable personal sacrifice. Unfortunately, others are more interested in their own aggrandizement. Others simply do not have the means to do the job well. Money is scarce and different sanctuaries may even be competing for some of the same donors or sponsors. Thus, an individual trying to donate or acquire a rescue bird faces a quagmire having to choose from among all the listings. It quickly became clear to me, after examining those web sites purporting to provide links to PWOs in the U.S., that none has a complete, up-to-date list or can provide sufficient information required to guarantee the quality of each PWO. I concluded that a single, united organization is needed which can set minimum acceptable standards and ethical practices for sanctuaries, as well as provide a readily accessible "international clearinghouse" to whom others can turn for information not only on the most proximate Sanctuary, but on its standing in the "parrot community" at large. Until that happens, PWOs will remain like a quilt whose patches have not yet been sewn together.

Several small versions of such an oversight organization have been established by leaders of a few respected PWOs. In my opinion, however, this can create an appearance of a conflict of interest, tantamount to asking the owner of the Yankees to become Commissioner of Baseball! However these efforts may therefore prove divisive, no matter how well-intentioned. The time has come for all those concerned about parrot welfare to come together to objectively and dispassionately develop and implement a single set of common ethical and practical guidelines applicable to all PWOs. They must be willing to toss ego aside and work together with others for the parrots' sake. The

clout in this approach lies in the fact that failure of a particular PWO to satisfy the standards developed by such an organization would result in the international disapproval or even outright condemnation of that



All the best parrots read PsittaScene.

Photo: Rosemary Low

Organization; consequently, donations of both parrots and money to it would be restricted.

A working committee – a summit, if you will – should be convened to deal with these issues. I propose that the following be among the distinguishing characteristics of the Organization arising out of the deliberations of such a working committee. It should be:

1. **IMPARTIAL** – It should be overseen by an independent, respected authority which can disseminate the principles adopted by the Committee under its aegis. The World Parrot Trust would be the logical choice. It has branches in many countries and an official publication (*PsittaScene*) edited by Rosemary Low, indisputably one of the most respected and compassionate leaders of the parrot community. WPT has years of expertise in psittacine matters, a selfless dedication to improving the lot of parrots, and the knowledge and participation of some of the most respected minds in the field. Of course, such oversight should work hand-in-hand with other actively involved organizations (ie,

veterinary organizations) and would complement, rather than replace, the local teaching and outreach efforts of each individual member PWO.

2. **INCLUSIVE** – It should allow for a range of views and approaches to be expressed during open, face-to-face discussion, and for the contributions of anyone seriously devoted to the welfare of psittacines.
3. **INTERNATIONAL** – Despite the tendency of those of us in the United States to see ourselves as the center of the universe, parrot welfare issues (and solutions!) involve many other countries as well.

4. **FLEXIBLE** – There is often more than one way to deal with each issue. For example, an excellent sanctuary might be non-profit; non-profit with 501(c)3 status, or for-profit. The key is that the approach taken must be clearly identifiable and, above all, it must be clear that the only critical outcome will be to safeguard the welfare of its parrots. I know of Sanctuaries which are limited in funds and resources and perhaps cannot do everything as "finely" as they might like; yet they provide great love and an improved quality of life to those parrots under their stewardship. Sam Foster has suggested that, added together, the total number of parrots helped by such "Mom and Pop" PWOs may exceed the number of parrots aided by the more polished, but less numerous, organizations.
5. **ENFORCIBLE, ENFORCED AND UNBENDING** – Once acceptable standards are worked out, means must be established to determine where they are or are not being met. As indicated above, there is need for some flexibility in determining acceptable approaches, but once

an approach is deemed unacceptable or unethical, denunciation of it, and of any PWO using it, should be unbending and unequivocal, until the problem is corrected. Therefore, some form of inspection and accreditation process will be needed.

6. **FUNDED** – Activities of such an oversight committee will require funding, and therefore, in all likelihood, an initial accreditation fee plus smaller annual dues (perhaps pro-rated based on size) would be assessed. However, the banding together into a single, respected international body should facilitate application to large national and international agencies and philanthropies for support, which can then be redistributed (in part) to member PWOs. Furthermore, a percentage of dues can be held back in an emergency fund designated for use by member organizations as a safety net during crises such as sudden illness or death of a major caregiver at a member PWO. Some funds could also be donated for avian research.

7. **SCHOLARLY** – One shortcoming which ensues when each Sanctuary acts in a virtual vacuum is the failure to systematically analyze and disseminate experience (and hopefully, formal scientific studies) accrued from dealing with the unique problems of rescue birds. Which approaches worked? Which didn't? Until such information is gathered and disseminated, PWOs will continue to act empirically, rather than using systematic approaches based on experiences worldwide. The oversight Organization itself might periodically release (via e-mail and, where desired, snail-mail) a non-glossy, non-'slick' newsletter, addressing practical and ethical issues involved in the treatment of sanctuary birds.

We all SAY we love parrots. I throw down a gauntlet and ask: Do we love them enough to work TOGETHER for their betterment? Can an international body be convened to hash out the specifics for a truly global approach to parrot abuse, and to fight on their behalf? Look into the eyes of any mistreated parrot who has had the look of trust and joy replaced by one of fear and withdrawal. You'll find a clear answer there: for "the birds of the air...they will tell you"

An insider's look at Rescue and Sanctuary

By Julie Weiss Murad, Founder and President
The Gabriel Foundation, Post Office Box 11477, Aspen, Colorado 81612 USA

It is clear that the parrot is a creature generally admired, coveted and sought after by man. Today's parrots in captivity have virtually no say or control in the manner of their being kept. The small amount of "commentary" they have is usually demonstrated in a negative manner that may cost them their home. Parrots can bite, act aggressively and develop other types of behavior related problems that label them as undesirable. Parrots may fail to thrive and die as a result of their captive situation when the keeper fails to meet the critical needs of the bird. Where do our responsibilities as keepers belong? Unwanted parrots and sanctuary efforts are considerable in countries where parrots are commonly kept captive. Observation suggests that reasons for "getting rid of the bird" are universal. We are failing the creatures that we profess to respect, love, admire and protect.

Serious attention must be given to the numbers of organizations emerging to cope with the problem of discarded parrots. According to a colleague, "A basic truth is that many of the behavior problems which cause a parrot to lose its home are the result of a really bad environment and poor nutrition. Simply providing advice regarding a healthful diet, exercise, adequate light, proper caging as well as mental and physical stimulation will resolve many problems." To improve the parrot-human relationship, consider how does one evaluate the substantial commitment, cost and quality of life required by the provider to appropriately care for an animal that may potentially live for decades? How does the concerned aviculturist, veterinarian, conservationist or breeder tackle the plight of birds "owned" by uninformed caretakers or those living in uncaring, neglectful and/or abusive situations?

Living with an animal that is essentially not domesticated provides a challenge to supplement the needs of a creature removed from its natural environment. The reality of living with a parrot might be

substantially different than originally perceived. Parrots are essentially loud, messy and destructive. Proper housing, diet and veterinary care can be costly. If well educated prior to a purchase, the prospective parrot "owner" has some clue about the responsibility that he/she is about to undertake. The purchaser needs valuable support



Birds will sometimes pluck one another – as seen with these rescued cockatiels.

concerning their bird regarding the environmental, psychological and physical factors that must be created to satisfy some of the parrot's natural, instinctive behaviors to pre-empt the "behavior problems" often the factor which costs the bird its home. The human individual or family essentially becomes a substitute flock for the highly social psittacine bird, whether a budgie or a macaw. Committing to a long-term relationship with a parrot is not unlike living with another human being. Learning how to have and maintain a compatible relationship with one's pet bird begins by having a healthy respect for who and what it is, as well as a willingness to accept complete responsibility for its emotional and physical well-being. Incompatibility usually begins with the human's unrealistic expectations of the animal. This can be the result of lack of knowledge or misinformation. The person who chooses a parrot as a pet must acquire many useful skills to live successfully with that animal if the relationship is to thrive.

Is there a need to establish

standards of biosecurity and veterinary protocol for humane societies and sanctuary groups specializing in parrots? Is there a need to establish standards of care for individuals and groups that are performing rescue functions and creating permanent sanctuary for the rising number of parrots entering such facilities? Keeping parrots can be costly. Many sanctuaries with bare bones paid staff or volunteers close for a variety of reasons. We must be responsible for standards and protocol established for long-term flock health of the avian population. Observation of this emerging field in aviculture suggests that this type of facility

must follow a strict and conscientious biosecurity protocol to avoid potential disaster. Working with immune compromised birds presents a unique set of problems. Medical care can be costly due to unknown bird histories. Daily upkeep and housing require substantial financial support. Many persons and organizations have suffered repercussions from the financial and emotional drain caused by providing for displaced birds. If thousands of birds keep pouring into the "recycle and rescue" market from homes and breeders, mass depopulation might be the management tool used for several reasons: cost effectiveness, ease of application, and a dearth of alternatives to house the unwanted populations.

No business, whether for profit, non-profit or philanthropic, can survive for long in the complicated business and legal world without a strong base. Most emerging organizations are responding out of need, a deep sense of love and commitment. The costs associated with keeping ex-breeder birds, unwanted or unsold physically challenged

birds, and former pets can be substantial when the numbers are factored in. Often, the caring pet owner with a heart of gold in his or her desire to help displaced birds becomes overwhelmed. Time involved in the birds' care is twenty-four/seven with a high rate of burnout. With no standardized criteria for the care and provision for birds in a sanctuary, rescue or rehabilitative parrot facility, the necessity of establishing a healthy prototype and database is critical to the longevity, success and reputation of all of these organizations and the birds.

Where do the monies come from? Some funding sources are memberships, donations, grants and potential corporate underwriting and gifting resultant from estate planning, endowments and trusts. Fiduciary responsibility to the financial contributors of these organizations is imperative. The parrots are forever our responsibility. This type of organization is a fledgling and needs your help with education, support, and liaison. If rescue and sanctuary organizations are to succeed and continue to provide this invaluable service to the public and to the birds, we must become an integral part of aviculture. A protocol for standards and accountability from each rescue and sanctuary organization is imperative if the number of birds entering these facilities is to have the quality of life that they deserve. Community involvement, strong veterinary contacts, assistance from bird clubs, humane organizations, school systems, rotary and retirement organizations, pet stores, retailers, breeders and the media are imperative. Passion and good intentions are not enough; they do not pay the bills. How do we make our concern YOUR concern? How do we spread the message that "this living fragment of the rainforest" needs our help, now more than ever?

The Gabriel Foundation's motto from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de St. Exupery reminds us, "Many have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You remain responsible, forever, for what you have tamed."

For further information contact The Gabriel Foundation at www.thegabrielfoundation.org or Sam Foster, Symposium coordinator at 352.686.8955 (ph/fax) or e-mail at GabrielTGF@aol.com

The Parrots of the World - a critical question for us all

by MICHAEL REYNOLDS

It is now nearly twelve years since we launched the World Parrot Trust, dedicated to the survival of parrot species in the wild and the welfare of captive birds. Despite our efforts, however, during that time the position of both wild and captive birds has continued to deteriorate severely.

The birds in the wild are subjected to accelerating habitat loss and trapping for the pet trade. If we make a global estimate that half a million young parrots are stolen from the wild each year, that's six million birds lost to the wild and condemned to a variety of levels of distress as captives.

A small number of parrots kept as pets in the developed world may be fortunate. Their owners may have the financial resources and the intelligence and understanding to give their birds adequate accommodation, food and veterinary care. Even so, such conditions cannot possibly be equated to the freedom and fulfillment that a wild bird will experience, from enjoying a glut of figs, to producing young, even to the drama of sudden death inflicted by a predator. Pet parrots in the parrot range countries number many millions, and again, only a minority of these will enjoy a decent quality of life. If we say that perhaps ten percent of all captive parrots are kept in satisfactory conditions, that would be a generous assessment.

What can we, the 'caring parrot community', do to help the remaining 90% of pet parrots, denied space, stimulation, a proper diet, veterinary care and sensitive concern for their welfare? Estimates vary, but the World Parrot Trust believes there may be between fifty and sixty million captive parrots worldwide. In the USA there are thought to be over 5 million parrots, not surprising in a nation that is a hotbed of parrot keeping and breeding. Even with the restricted inflow of parrots from wild sources brought about by the Wild Bird Conservation Act, the ease with which parrots are now aviary bred means constant pressure of an excessive supply of young birds at ever lower prices. The result is a vast population, perhaps in the millions, of parrots in transit from one home to another, or to a shop, or some kind of 'sanctuary'. It is a testament to the genuine commitment of so many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of concerned parrot people, that all over the developed world parrot sanctuaries are being opened. We

have to hope that many of the deprived 90% of parrots will eventually encounter adequate standards of care, but in reality



only a tiny fraction will be so fortunate.

Let us speculate that in the USA five hundred capable parrot sanctuaries are each looking after an average of one hundred rescued parrots. That adds up to 50,000 birds, or around one percent of all captive parrots in the USA. Frankly, my opinion is that the total of birds in sanctuaries is far less than 50,000. At any rate, we still have around five million parrots in the United States suffering miserable lives. We simply have to accept that all this misery cannot be eliminated by the caring parrot community taking over responsibility from the uncaring people.

Trouble is, writing about this in 'PsittaScene', 'Pet Bird Report', 'Bird Talk', 'Parrots' or other specialist publications, is preaching to the converted. The people who are mistreating the parrots are most unlikely to read anything that might improve their knowledge or understanding. What we propose,

on behalf of the birds we all care about so deeply, is the following: Stop breeding so many birds. Back in 1989 I wrote a piece in 'PsittaScene' about how our hobby was one of the few in which one might be able to earn a little money and thus pay for our interest. In our furiously commercial western societies this has been taken to extremes and the time has come to call a halt. Aviculturists of all kinds should consider reducing their breeding activity, going for quality rather than quantity.

Educate the ignorant. We need to reach the kind of people who buy a parrot on a whim, find it interesting for a week or two, then just neglect it or move it on to

the wild, to thrive in our homes'. We consider that this statement is still very relevant and if parrot organizations, publications, bird clubs, zoos and conservation and welfare activists were to get behind this campaign, it could open many doors to create publicity for the plight of the parrots.

One of our assets is the video made for us by John Cleese. In this, John explains the importance of our PARROTS NEED HELP slogan. This video was shown twice on UK television, but not in the USA or other countries. It could well be used globally, supported by every kind of publicity arranged by our associates and supporters in the parrot community. It will be essential to distribute a simple leaflet that explains our concerns and is suitable for reproduction in print media generally. We should aim for a 'World Parrot Week', to be held towards the end of the year 2001.

The World Parrot Trust and its 13 branches around the world are willing to coordinate this activity. So who would like to join us in this endeavour?

This brings me to the critical question mentioned above: do you care most about the parrots themselves, or more about the money you make from them? This is the crunch question. Do you support the reduction of mass, abusive, sub-standard parrot keeping, or would this objective be unwelcome to you for financial reasons? We hope you will decide that the welfare of these marvelous birds has to be the priority.

Five years ago in our 'Manifesto for Aviculture' we introduced the concept of 'responsible aviculture', which encouraged 'high standards in avicultural practice and the need to accept a degree of responsibility for the conservation of wild populations, from which all captive birds have sprung.' This concept has been taken up and repeated by many parrot groups and individuals, but perhaps now we should make it clear that the conscientious keeping of pet parrots is a vital part of the whole.

In this issue of 'PsittaScene' we have inserted a new print of our PARROTS NEED HELP car sticker, and a copy of our 'Happy, Healthy Parrot' leaflet. Please take a look at these and consider how we can all work together to improve the quality of life for our friends, the parrots. If you want to take part, please write directly to me.