Plants, Perches & Pinecones

Disclaimer:

Although I have researched all the information in this presentation, and believe all information is accurate, and would personally offer any of the mentioned plants or materials to my own birds, you are responsible for the correct identification of and the assurance of the absents of pesticides on any plants, or branches you give your parrot. Always supervise your parrot when giving her any new item. Always trust your own judgment, if I present information that you feel uncomfortable with, by all means don't do it! With that said let's get on with the fun!

Garden in a Pot

If you don't have the time or the space for a big garden, consider creating a container garden. By choosing and a variety of textures and shades of healthy greens, mixing in a few vegetables, berries, herbs and some edible flowers, you can have a container garden that is delicious, nutritious and beautiful.

Choose A Container

As large as possible.

Bird safe finish, if the bird is going to have access to the container. Plastics or unglazed terracotta. Powder coated steel frames, with coco fiber lining are becoming very popular and are an attractive and safe choice.

Avoid glazed terracotta, as many glazes contain heavy metals and other toxic substances.

Soil Selection , Organic, Made specifically for containers (NOT garden soil)

Fertilizer selection, Organic, Granular, time released or Liquid, fish, seaweed

The Plants

Whenever possible choose Organically grown seeds or plants.

Gently remove the soil from the roots of non organic plants, and replant in organic soil, wait at least 30 days before offering to your parrot.

Avoid plants that have been treated with pesticides or chemical fertilizers.

Greens & Veggies

Kale – leaves, stems, flowers and seed pods. Lowers risk of heart disease, stroke, and cataracts, anticancer compounds, immune system stimulant. Vitamins C and E, beta carotene, calcium, potassium, manganese, iron. Among highest sources of chlorophyll.

Mustard Greens – leaves, stems, flowers and seed pods. Vitamin A,C,E,K and calcium, magnesium, folic acid, beta carotene, anti-inflammatory, good for heart health, reduces cholesterol

Cabbages (all varieties including Chinese)- leaves, stems, flowers and seed pods. Vitamin A, high in calcium, good for the digestive system.

Broccoli, Broccoli Rabb, Rapinni– leaves, stem, crowns, flowers. Antioxidant, antibacterial. Vitamins A and C. The leaves are actually the most nutritious part of the plant.

Arugula – leaves, stems, flowers, seed pods. Vitamins A and C, folate, calcium ,and magnesium.

Swiss Chard – leaves and stems. Vitamins A and calcium.

Celery – stalks, leaves, seeds. Supports kidneys, helpful in treatment of gout, rheumatism, and arthritis, is tranquilizing, aids in treatment of depression. Celery detoxifies the body, stimulates the nervous system and mineralizes the body. Vitamins A, C, and B-complex, Carotenes, folic acid, potassium, calcium, iron.

Peas – stems, leaves, flowers, pods. Vitamin A & C, phosphorus, thiamin, niacin

Sweet Potato - leaves and roots (tubers) . Beta catotene, Vitamins A, C, B6, helps to stabilize blood sugar levels and to lower insulin resistance (NOT regular potato, which is toxic!)

Beets – leaves and root. Cleansing to kidneys, regeneration of liver cells, increase oxygen in the blood, support formation of new blood cells, normalize body's pH. Vitamins A and C, niacin, biotin, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, betaine, betacynin, beta carotene, leucine, tyrosine.

Carrots – greens, roots, flowers & seeds. Beta carotene vitamin A, B,C,D,E calcium, potassium, thiamine, folic acid, and magnesium. Cholesterol-lowering, rematerializing and sedative properties.
Purple carrots (usually orange inside) have even more beta carotene than their orange cousins, full of powerful antioxidants that help prevent heart disease by slowing blood clotting and are good anti inflammatory agents. Black Carrots contain antioxidant properties, as well as inhibitors of LDL (the bad) cholesterol, anti-bacterial and fungicidal properties.
Carrot tops are rich in protein, potassium , high in vitamin K, which is lacking in the carrot itself, outstanding source of chlorophyll, the green pigment that studies have. Chlorophyll contains cleansing properties that purify the blood, lymph nodes, and adrenal glands, shown to combat the growth of tumors. They have antiseptic qualities, and are also diuretic and can help treat kidney disease and edema. Oil made from seed can help control scalp itchiness and provides essential nutrients for hair(feather?) growth.
Radishes – Greens, roots, flowers, seed pods. Vitamin C, beneficial for symptoms of colds, flu, fever, cough, respiratory problems, and digestive disorders.
Turnips – Greens and roots. Vitamin A, Beta-carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin B6, folate, copper, calcium. Assist with treatment of arthritis and atherosclerosis, lowers cholesterol.
Parsnips – Greens and roots. Vitamin B, folic acid, potassium, lowers cholesterol

Herbs & Weeds

Basil – leaves and flowers. Mosquito repellant. Antimicrobial, antibacterial, fungicidal. Soothes itchy skin. Liver decongestant. Balances blood sugar.
Chickweed -leaves, flowers and seeds . Chickweed contains high amounts of Vitamins A,C, B complex, beta carotene, calcium, magnesium, iron, copper, zinc, coumarins (soothes the vascular system),and genistein (cancer fighting compound) Chickweed is known for its anti-inflammatory properties and used to treat arthritis, is a fat & protein metabolizer, boosts the immune system, promotes cardio vascular health, and relieves bronchitis. A tea made with the stems and leaves can be used as an astringent, to relieve itching, and promote wound healing (good for feather pluckers).
Cilantro – leaves, stems, flowers and seeds. Removes heavy metals, lead and aluminum from the body. Antiviral, antibacterial. Seeds are also known as the spice Coriander
Parsley – leaves and stems. Increases resistance to infections and diseases. Anti-cancer compounds. Blood builder. Vitamins A and C, iron and chlorophyll.
Dandelions are exceptionally high in calcium, have more beta carotene than carrots, more iron than spinach, are very high in potassium, contain abundant amounts of Vit. A, C, D, K, B-complex, as well as biotin, inositol, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc, and 15% protein. The Latin name, *Taraxacum officinale, literally* means “disorder remedy”. Today, in India, dandelions are grown commercially for their medicinal value. Dandelions leaves and roots are one of the most effective detoxifying herbs, especially for supporting the liver. The flowers contain luteolin, an antioxidant. The leaves are a good diuretic that does not deplete the body of potassium, helps relieve joint pain, reduces uric acid, reduces cholesterol, benefit the treatment of high blood pressure and congestive heart failure, flushes bacteria from the bladder, and assists in treatment of yeast infections. The roots reduce inflammation and help balance enzymes for better digestion. The dandelion seeds contain an antibiotic that is a great treatment for lung infections. Dandelion tea soothes skin irritation
Fennel – leaves, stems, flowers, and seeds. Digestive aid, cold and flu remedy.
Peppermint – leaves, stems and flowers. Stimulates nerves. Oxygen to blood stream. Digestive aid. Vitamins A and C, magnesium, potassium, niacin, copper, iodine, iron.
Plantain- leaves, flowers,and seeds.The roots, leaves and seeds of the plantain plant contain powerful anti-toxins. The leaves and seeds reduce LDL cholesterol & triglycerides, supports the kidneys, sooth the mucous membrane of the respiratory tract, reduce inflammation, promote wound healing, speed up cell regeneration, and are antibacterial, antimicrobial, antihemorrhagic, astringent, antiseptic, and decongestive. A tea made with the leaves can help treat and prevent crop infections, and relieve sinus congestion. Juice from the leaves is used externally to promote healing of wound and smooth skin irritation (good for feather pluckers).
Purslane – leaves, stems, flowers and seed pods. Purslane is one of the richest sources of alpha-linolenic acid, Omega3. It also contains high amounts of Vitamin C, beta carotene, magnesium and potassium.

Purslane supports heart and liver health, has been used as a remedy for arthritis & inflammation, lowers bold pressure, cholesterol and blood "stickiness", helps support the respiratory system, and is good for diabetics because it helps regulate blood sugar. (Use in moderation though, as purslane in high in oxalic acids.)
Rosemary – leaves, stems and flowers. Stimulates circulatory system, strengthening nerves and heart. Anti-cancer compounds. Antibacterial.Soothing to the lungs.
Red Clover – leaves and flowers .Anti-inflammatory, diuretic and antispasmodic properties and is also well known as a cleansing herb for skin complaints, including eczema and psoriasis. Its ability to improve lymph functioning and reduce lymphatic swellings helps to purify and detox the system.

Flowers

Calendula - flowers. Soothing and regenerative to the skin. Anti-inflammatory, astringent, antimicrobial, antifungal, antiviral. Heals wounds, cuts, scrapes, rashes, bee stings, burns, and bruises by stimulating white blood cells. Carotene, iodine, and manganese.
Chamomile – flowers, leaves, stems. Soothing to the digestive system. Rejuvenates skin. Decreases feather plucking. Relaxing for nervous birds. Decreases night thrashing.
Marigolds – flowers, seeds. Repels insects. Carotene, Vitamin A. (Lemon Gem and Tangerine Gem have the best flavor, although all varieties are edible.)
Nasturtiums – leaves and flowers. Supports respiratory system
Pansies, Violas, Violets – leaves and flowers. Soothes itchy skin. Supports and strengthens capillary heath. Helps treat and prevent glaucoma.
Some other SAFE flowers are- African Daisy, Baby's Breath, Bachelor Buttons, Begonia, Carnations, Dahlia, Daylily, Gardenia, Honeysuckle, Impatiens, Lilac, Passion Flower, Petunia
Some TOXIC flowers are-Buttercup, Calla Lily, Clematis, Daffodil, Foxglove, Heliotrope, Hyacinth, Hydrangea, Iris, Lantana, Larkspur, Lily-of-the-Valley, Lupine, Morning Glory, Peony, Primrose, Sweet Pea
NEVER give flowers from a Florist to your Parrot!!!!

Berries & Fruit-Many berries are a good (and yummy) source of alpha-linolenic acid, Omega 3, as well a Vitamins Commercially available berries are high on the pesticide list, so growing your own is the safest choice.
Strawberries can easily be tucked into a mixed plant container garden, or grown alone in a hanging basket or strawberry jar.Shrub type fruits, like blueberries, and dwarf variety fruit trees, can be grown in containers too.
Neem Tree - Leaves, Twigs& Bark. Antibacterial, Antifungal, Anti-Inflammatory, Antiviral, Antioxidant, Anti-Cancer, boosts the immune system, supports liver health, vitamins A, C and E. In tropical regions, can grow to 40 ft., but can be grown as a house plant in more temperate areas.
Houseplants -Safety First! Please make sure that all plants in your house are safe. If you find that you have plants that are on the toxic list, or that you are unsure of, give them to a friend or neighbor without inquisitive parrots in their home. Always use organic potting soil.Use parrot safe containers.Never use pesticides, or chemical fertilizers.
Keep soil covered with plastic mesh or river rock, if your bird has a tendency to dig in the soil. Mix some GSE into watering solution to inhibit the growth of fungus in the soil.
Some common SAFE houseplants - ALOE, African Violet, Asparagus Fern, Boston Fern, Bromeliads, Coleus, Norfolk Island Pine, Prayer Plant, Schefflera, Spider Plant, Staghorn fern, Swedish Ivy, Wandering Jew.
Some common TOXIC houseplants- Amaryllis, Dieffenbachia, Philodendron, Poinsettia
ALOE is a houseplant that every parrot owner should have a least one of.Aloe contains powerful pain relievers, anti-inflammatory compounds, relieves itchiness, soothes the digestive tract, heals abscesses, cysts, kills E.Coli, fungus, mycobacterium, strep and staph infections, salmonella, treats respiratory infections, yeast infections, and parasites.
A Note On Mixed Toxicity As you start to research and offer more plants to your parrots, please be aware of the issue of mixed toxicity. That is, some part of a plant is safe, even beneficial & nutritious, other parts are toxic. Some examples of this are tomatoes and potatoes, members of the nightshade family, whose foliage is deadly. Elderberries flowers and fruit are safe and help stimulate the immune system, but the branches and leaves are poisonous. Honeysuckle branches, leaves and flowers are very safe, the dark colored berries, however, are toxic.

Perches

Some Bird Safe Varieities of Wood -Ash, Apple, Aspen, Bamboo, Beech, Birch, Butterfly Bush, Cottonwood, Crabapple, Dogwood, Grapevine, Lilac, Magnolia, Mulberry, Pear, Poplar, Sassafras, Sweet Gum, Sycamore, Viburnum, Willow

Some Toxic Varieties of Wood-Apricot, Azalea, Black Locust, Box Elder, Cedar, Cherry, Hemlock, Holly, Hydrangea, Juniper, Laurel, Mountain Laurel, Nectarine, Oak, Peach, Privet, Rhododendron, Walnut, Witch Hazel, Wisteria
Cleaning -For smaller branches, wreathes or baskets, you can run them through the dishwasher, using a non toxic detergent such as Oxy-Clean. For larger branches, baskets or wreathes, soak & scrub thoroughly with 3 parts warm water and 1 part white vinegar, and a few drops of organic non-toxic soap. Rinse well. Set in the sun to dry.
Construction -Smaller branches can be wedged between cage bars, or the ends split and slipped around a bar, or zip tied in place. Larger branches will need to be notched on the ends with a saw, or fitted with hanger bolts.
Notching ends -To calculate the length of a perch to be notched, measure to the *outside* of the cage bars, and add two inches. Use your choice of saw, hand, table, band or jig, to cut a slot slightly wider than the cage bars, and an inch to inch and a half long. Sometimes you will only need to notch the thicker end of the branch, and the thinner end can be wedged between bars or zip tied into place. Take care if notching both ends that you have the notches going in the same direction.
Hanger bolts -A hanger bolt is threaded on both ends, one side looks like a screw, the other side a bolt.
In an effort to make all my perches as safe as possible, I always try to use stainless steel hardware. The hanger bolt is the only hardware item I have not been able to get in stainless steel. Since more than 50% of the bolt will be inside the perch, and the majority of the rest of the bolt will be covered by washers and wing nuts, with the tiny remaining portion on the exterior of the cage, I feel that in this instance zinc is an acceptable substitute.(But if you can find stainless, by all means use that!)

Pinecones -Pinecones are another natural element that you can provide to your parrot.
You can purchase pre-sterilized pinecones loose or already incorporated into toys.
Or you can collect and sterilize your own.
Selection -Cones from Pine and Fur trees are safe to give to your parrot. Although white Pine Cones are very sticky and should probably be avoided. Collect cones freshly fallen from the tree, or if braches are low enough collect directly from tree. Cones are “ripe” in late summer through fall. ***The tiny cones from Hemlock trees should NEVER be used, they are toxic.***
Cleaning -Soak pine cones in vinegar water (about a cup of white vinegar to a gallon of water) for at least 10-15 minutes this gets all the dirt and bugs out. Rinse well and let air-dry, about 24 hrs.(Wet Pinecones will close up, then open again as they start to dry)Put the pinecones on a foil covered cookie sheet and bake at about 150 to 200* degrees for 20-30 minutes to kill bacteria, molds, etc. , leave in the oven until completely cool.*Pinecones will combust at 240 degrees.

Resources
Toxic & Safe Plant list
http://www.mdvaden.com/bird_page.shtml
http://www.secondchancebirds.com/safe_plants_1.html
http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=15+1912&aid=2236
http://www.birdsnways.com/articles/plntsafe.htm
http://www.petbirdbreeder.com/safeplants.htm
http://www.liparrotsociety.org/toxic.htm
http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html
http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/poisonousplants.html
http://www.chelonia.org/Articles/plantsthatpoison.htm
http://www.plannedparrothood.com/plants.html
Gardening , Gardening for Pets & Veggie Nutrition sites
http://www.landofvos.com/articles/index.html#aloe
http://www.iguanaden.org/diet/oxalic.htm
http://www.guinealynx.info/charts.html
http://gardening.about.com/od/vegetablepatch/a/ContainerVeggie.htm
Sites with Info on Aviaries
http://naturalbird.com/

http://naturalbird.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54-carport-aviary-toms&catid=36-resources&Itemid=63
http://cockatoorescue.org/index.htm
http://clover.forest.net/kwcages/index.html
http://www.cagesbydesign.com/c-63-suncatcher-outdoor-bird-aviaries.aspx
http://cornerslimited.com/out_aviaries.html
http://expandablehabitats.com/custom.htm

Sources for Seeds&Plants

http://neemtreefarms.com/
http://www.territorialseed.com/
http://www.cooksgarden.com/
http://www.seedsofchange.com/
http://www.sustainableseedco.com/
http://www.victoryseeds.com/catalog/index.html

Helpful Yahoo Groups

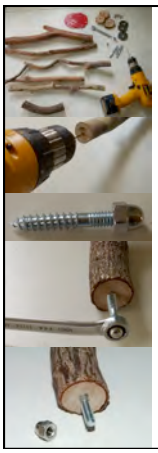
http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/phoenixlanding/
http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/naturalbird/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ExoticPetsGardening/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GardeningOrganically/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Organic_Gardening/

Sites to order unusual perches

http://www.birdontherocks.com/content/view/12/27/ (flagstone)
http://estarbird.com/cgi-bin/esb06/rtl/phd.cgi?Autoincrement=000150&tag_rf=Extra%20Large%20Large%20Extra%20Large%20Medium%20Small%20Small%20Toys (get a grip nets)
http://mpbirdtoys.com/ (atoms & orbits)
http://bigbeaksbirdtoys.com/playstands.htm (kitchen sink playgyms) http://bigbeaksbirdtoys.com/images/med-monkey-bars-new.jpg (rope playgym)

To see Gracie's hammock http://www.picturetrail.com/sfx/album/view/2770415
Instructions on how to make you own climbing net
http://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=310382.0
Instructions on how to build a cageoller (in the files section of the Phoenix Landing Yahoo Group)
http://f1.grp.yahoofs.com/v1/QLbMS_otXDVI0f4FZ5Oxxnys5GneGtv54uplQKQfqPmuqGszbhmuLDlgFyBM-dt79rSzA9JsMSj0CUxBk1hJR7Gk0DUtCS0GbCBu5qmqd9zupGjS0NMLMK0/How%20To%20Build%20A%20Cageoller.pdf

Contact me Laura@phoenixlanding.org



Natural Wood Perches

Collect an assortment of bird safe branches, hanger bolts, cap nut, washers, wing nuts drill and wrench.

Drill a pilot hole into the end of a branch.

Screw cap nut onto hanger bolt.

Using wrench, screw hanger bolt into branch up to center of bolt, the blank space between the threads.

Remove cap nut.

Using your choice of washers,

and a wing nut install in desired location.

phoenixlanding.org

A slice across a thicker branch can be used to make a natural platform.

Again you need a drill, wrench, hanger bolt, wing nut, cap nut, and your choice of washers.

Drill a pilot hole.

Screw hanger bolt into the wood slice.

Hang desired location, using your choice of washers and wing nut.

phoenixlanding.org

Folding PVC Stand

This stand can be used as a training perch, a shower perch, or a travel perch, or small playstand. It folds flat when not in use.

The following directions can be adapted to fit your own needs.

You will need 10 ft± of pvc pipe in the diameter of your choice.

6 or 8 pvc tees, depending on design choice.

6 caps, or 4 caps and 2 bends (90 degree)

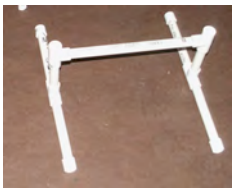
PVC cutter (buy a good one, it's worth it!)

Measuring Tape

phoenixlanding.org

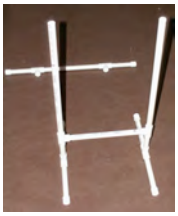
Cut four 7" sections of pvc. Push one section into each side of a tee. Push a cap on each of the remaining ends.

Cut two 2" sections, push into the top of the tees. This forms the feet.



Cut two 12" sections. With the first section add tee to each end. Push onto top of feet. This forms bottom brace.

phoenixlanding.org

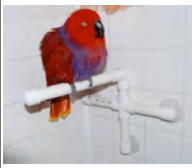


Cut two 30"± (but identical length) leg sections, push into remaining openings in tees in bottom brace.

Add tees (or bends) to each end of the remaining 12" previsouly cut section. Push onto top of legs.

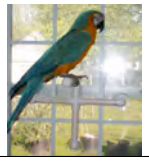
Cut two 2"± pieces, push into last ends to tees, cap.

Sand or wrap the perching surface as desired.



Suction Cup Shower Perch
(This perch can also be placed on a window)

2 ½ feet ± of PVC (½" or ¾")
1 PVC cross
1 bend (90 degree)
4 caps
3 Large suction cups
PVC cutter (buy a good one, it's worth it!)
Drimmel tool
Measuring Tape



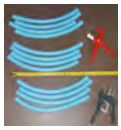
Using Drimmel tool, cut a groove into three of the caps.
Slide suction cups into the groove.
Cut three 6" sections of pvc. Push three section into the cross, and push caps on ends.
Cut a 1 ½ " section of pvc, push into cross.
Cut one 6-8" section of pvc, place cap on one end, and push other end into bend.
Push bend onto 1 ½" section.
Sand or wrap perching surface as desired.

*If caps with suctions cup do not fit extremely snuggly, I recommend using PVC glue on them.

Make sure to use this glue only in a well ventilated area, away from the birds, for it's fumes are toxic. Allow to cure for at least 24 hours. Once cured it is completely safe.

PVC Orbit

Roll of ribbed PVC electrical conduit (½" or ¾")
(Carlon Flex-Plus Blue Electrical Nonmetallic Tubing)
6 PVC crosses, size to match conduit
Stainless screw eye(s) 1 for hanging, optional additional screw eyes for hanging toys.
Your choice of hanging material, such as plastic chain.
Drill
Measuring Tape
PVC cutter
(buy a good one, it's worth it!)



Cut pvc into 12 equal length pieces,
12 ½" for ½"
16 ½" for ¾"

Drill a pilot hole in the center of one of the crosses, screw in eyescrew for hanging. If using additional eyescrews for hanging toys, do those now too.

Push (hard) the ends of two sections of pvc into two oppisite sides of first cross. You will notice that the pvc does not go all the way into the center of the cross.

Add crosses to the other ends of these two first sections of pvc, then two more sections of pvc to those crosses, then add the fourth cross to form a complete circle.

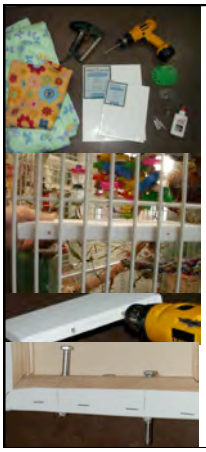
Form a semi circles with a cross and two pvc sections, make two.

Add one semi circle to the circle.

Add the second semi circle to the opposite side of the circle.

Insert remaining pvc sections into crosses.

Hang and add toys as desired.



Sleeping Perch

Artist's Canvas
(2)2 ½" bolts
Washers
Fleece
Elmer's Glue
Drill & Staple Gun

Place Canvas frame up to cage bars and mark where you want to place bolts.

Drill holes that will allow bolt to fit snuggly.

Push bolts into holes.

Cut 2 pieces of fleece. One large enough to wrap around frame and overlap the edges, the second slightly smaller than the outside edge of the frame.

Wrap canvas frame, mitering corners (like wrapping a present) and stapling as you go.

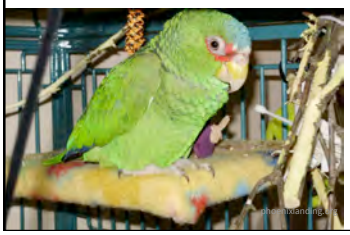
Push bolts so that you can see where they are, and cut a tiny hole.

Push bolts all the way through.

Run glue around the backside edge of fleece. phoenixlanding.org

Place smaller section of fleece to cover the back. Press firmly into the glue. Check to make sure that all edges are glued down. Allow to dry completely.

Using your choice of washes mount in cage.



PARROT RECREATION: Playgrounds, Puzzles, Diversions

Prepared by Michelle Czaikowski for the Phoenix Landing Foundation, 2008.

Day in the Life of a Wild Parrot

Primary activities include (during non-breeding seasons):

Sleeping
Foraging, Flight, Exercise (some parrots may fly 50 miles in a day)
Resting/Grooming/Socializing
Foraging, Flight, Exercise
Sleeping

Other factors that affect their daily activities:
Alert to predators at all time
Their senses

Birds' Senses

- Vision - Very important sense for birds
  - acuity 2 – 8 times greater than mammals
  - Clear lens permits them to see ultraviolet light (mammals have a yellow tinted lens that filters out these rays)
  - Have tetrachromatic or pentatchromatic color vision, while humans have trichromatic color vision

- Hearing & Vocalization - Also very important
  - Bird calls are complex auditory signals
  - Able to differentiate between types of contact calls and calls of different individuals
  - Non-predatory birds not believed to be good at localizing sound

- Taste & Smell
  - Parrots have between 300-400 taste buds (humans have about 9,000)
  - Response to different flavors varies
  - Not much research has been done regarding smell, but it is believed it is used to locate food, navigate, return to nesting sites, reproduction, parenting and selecting nest material
  - Touch
  - Receptors for touch, heat and pain in skin and beak (including feet)
  - Some receptors are vibration sensitive

"Sensory Capacities of Parrots." Manual of Parrot Behavior. Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

What is an Activities Plan?

An Activities Plan is a set of ideas and goals for providing a physically and intellectually engaging environment based on an analysis of current activities and surroundings.

An Activities Plan has several components.

- ASSESS your birds' current activity levels based on activities witnessed and signs of activity.
- CREATE GOALS: Are there activities you'd like to see your bird engaging in more frequently?
- ADJUST the birds' playground to reflect the level and types of activities you'd like to encourage.

All birds are individuals and activity levels and activities will vary.

Note: There is no equation for an "ideal day" for all birds.

It may vary by specific birds' needs, abilities, and personality.

Keeping the basic activities of wild parrots in mind is a good place to start.

PLANNING PLAY AREAS & ENRICHMENT ITEMS

ELEVEN EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. SAFETY: Is it safe for my bird?
2. INTELLECTUAL: Is it intellectually engaging?
3. SENSORY: Might it appeal to their senses?
4. FORAGING: Are there foraging opportunities?
5. CHEWING: Are there materials to chew/shred?
6. EXERCISE: Does it encourage movement?
7. INTERACTIVITY: Can they manipulate items? Are there areas to socialize?

Additional criteria for play areas:

8. VARIETY: Is there variety?
9. PROTECTION: Are there multiple routes of escape in all areas?
10. PRIVACY: Is there a place to retreat from threats or others? A place reserved for sleeping?
11. MAINTENANCE: Will I be able to maintain this?

We can encourage desired activities by providing sufficient opportunities for them.

Brainstorm and Plan

- Plan your "ideal" bird area. You may focus on one room/area or several. Make sure elements from all criteria are present and sufficient to accommodate the targeted activity levels.
- What items would be rotated or periodically embellished?
- What elements might appeal to birds' senses?
- What games or puzzles will be incorporated? Include any ideas for foraging opportunities.
- How will it be checked for safety and maintained?

Where Might You Go For Inspiration?

- The people around you! Share at: http://www.parrotrecreation.com

- Educational workshops (like the ones put on by Phoenix Landing)
- Kris Porter wrote most of *The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book, version 2.0,* and compiled all of it. Many great ideas for enrichment, foraging, training and much more - all available for free! http://www.phoenixlanding.org/PEAB_V2.pdf
- Books, videos, magazines including: *Parrot Toys and Play Areas* by Carol D'Arezzo and Lauren Shannon-Nunn. Captive Foraging video, Barbara Heidenreich's training videos, Good Bird magazine, and more!
- Online - Web sites, Yahoo! Groups, Forums & more

Remember to scrutinize all ideas provided in this class, in books, online, etc. with your bird's safety in mind. Nothing is 100% safe for every bird.

Resource List

Clark, Pamela. "The Optimal Environment." Parts I – IV. http://www.parrothouse.com/pamelaclark/ 2000. (Other articles listed on the same site are also very helpful!)

Luescher, Andrew U. ed. *Manual of Parrot Behavior.* Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

- Graham, Jennifer, Timothy F. Wright, Robert J. Dooling, and Ruediger Korbel. "Sensory Capacities of Parrots." 33 – 41.
- Seibert, Lynne M. "Social Behavior of Psittacine Birds." 43 – 48.
- Bergman, Laurie and Ulrike S. Reinisch. "Comfort Behavior and Sleep." 59 – 62.

Porter, Kris. *Parrot Enrichment Activity Book Version 2.0.* http://www.phoenixlanding.org/PEAB_V2.pdf 2007.

Rodriguez-Williams, Angela. "Expanding Their World: Part I: Changing the Way Your Bird Sleeps." http://macawdreams.com/Expanding.html

"Expanding Their World: Part II: Expanding Playgrounds & Playthings." http://macawdreams.com/expandingtwo.html

Wayne (from Wayne's Bottlebrush Stuff.) "Play Cage, Roosting Cage Concept." http://www.waynesparrotstuff.com/play_cage_roosting_cage_concept.htm

Contact me!

Email – MICHELLELCZ@GMAIL.COM

Facebook – Michelle Czaikowski

The Optimal Environment: Part Four – The Social Climate
By Pamela Clark

The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions –
the little soon forgotten charities of a kiss or smile,
a kind look, a heartfelt compliment, and the countless
infinitesimals of pleasurable and genial feeling.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1828

We can not, in any discussion of optimal environment, ignore the issue of "social climate." However, as humans living in a busy society, this is an issue that we *do* largely ignore in our own lives. We have to. So many of us live in cities too populated for our tastes, or in families wherein too much animosity exists. We work at jobs in which we are treated as if we do not matter. Our feelings are expendable. We have to disregard our own personal feelings, if we are to keep our homes, our jobs, and our families…or at least we think we have to. Thus, we have evolved into a way of living in which we largely ignore our feelings about the social climate of the work place and even our homes.

No so with our parrots. Parrots are, by definition, social creatures. They are flock animals, traveling and feeding together as a group. The majority of the activities in which they engage are done as a group. As prey animals, the health and integrity of the flock is essential to their ability to survive. However, the flock brings to a single parrot many other things besides feelings of safety and security. The flock provides opportunity for frequent and variant social interaction, learning skills, and just good fun.

The emotional and physical health of the flock is of paramount significance to them. It is critical to their feelings of safety. Thus, they are masters at ascertaining and measuring this from watching the other flock members. This does not change just because they live in our homes, rather than in the wild.

There are both positive and negative elements of the social climate in our own homes that can have a significant impact on our parrots. The most extreme example of this would be the female African Grey who destroys her feathers, the very things that would insure her survival in the wild, solely because of the feelings of constant anxiety and fear that she senses from her owner, who remains in an abusive relationship.

The History of Skepticism

There are those who will readily dispense with the idea that our own feelings can have a significant and ongoing detrimental impact on our birds. There is even historical basis for skepticism regarding the emotional lives of animals and birds, as well as their intelligence. This skepticism has had its roots in an event that occurred in the early 1900's and concerned a German mathematics professor and his horse, Hans.[i] This professor had given Hans lessons in counting, spelling, simple arithmetic, the concept of color and musical theory and believed his horse to be a prodigy because Hans was able to correctly answer questions designed to test his knowledge by tapping his foot the correct number of times in response. The originally skeptical scientific community was eventually won over, and agreed that Hans was a genius.

It was an experimental psychologist named Oskar Pfungst who eventually exposed the true nature of Hans' gifts. After a long and intensive study he was able to prove that Hans was merely reacting to subtle visual cues from his trainer and observers. If observers did not know the correct answer to a question posed to Hans, or if Hans was unable to see their faces, he could not answer even the simplest question correctly. The horse had been taking his cues from almost imperceptible shifts of body posture or facial expression in members of the audience, which occurred due to their involuntary relaxation of tension when Hans reached the correct number of taps in response to a question.

The scientific community reacted to this discovery in such a manner that they no longer entertained open-minded investigation into the animal mind, or animal emotions. Since then, and until very recently, skepticism in regards to the emotions and intelligence of animals and birds has been a common and widely held attitude.

However, fortunately, this is changing due to the investigation of many animal researchers, among them Donald Griffin, author of *The Question of Animal Awareness*. Thus, we are once again taking a more open-minded approach to evaluating the emotional lives of other species, and no where could this be more appropriate than in our experiences with our companion parrots. At the same time that this shift in attitude has taken place, other researchers have been investigating the essence of human emotions and thoughts, and the energies created by these. Some of their findings, which follow, will also bring light to this discussion.

Emotions Have Energy

William Collinge, Ph.D. provides an elegant discussion of human emotions and how they translate into measurable and tangible energies in his book, *Subtle Energy.* Dr. Collinge writes, "Earlier this century, Albert Einstein showed through physics what the sages have taught for thousands of years: everything in our material world – animate and inanimate – is made of energy, and everything *radiates* energy. The earth is one enormous energy field – in fact, a field of fields. The human body is a microcosm of this – a constellation of many interacting and interpenetrating energy fields."[ii]

He goes on to discuss many studies proving this statement, one of which was performed by Rollin McCraty at the Institute of HeartMath in Boulder Creek, California.[iii] McCraty and his colleagues found that the effects of our thoughts and emotions on the heart could be seen in the wave forms that show up in our electrocardiogram. Stress, depression, anxiety or frustration shows up in a more irregular wave pattern. When a person is in a state of calm or peace, the wave form is "smoother and more coherent." Mr. Collinge finishes his report of his study with the statement, "As you might expect, our heart signal does not stop at the skin, but radiates into the space around us. The field of the heart can actually be measured four or five feet away with a magnetometer. Since the wave forms of this field change with our thoughts and emotions, you can see how it is possible that with our magnetic sensitivity, we can sense "bad vibes" or "good vibes" from someone around us and why we feel uncomfortable around someone who is angry or agitated, depressed or fearful."

Dr. Collinge is not alone is his assessment of the manner in which our emotions affect the energy that we transmit to those around us. In his discussion of the principles behind the relatively new science of *vibrational medicine*, Richard Gerber, MD states, "This theoretical perspective is based upon the understanding that the molecular arrangement of the physical body is actually a complex network of interwoven energy fields…. There is a hierarchy of subtle energetic systems that coordinate electrophysiologic and hormonal function as well as cellular

structure within the physical body…. These unique energy systems are powerfully affected by our emotions and level of spiritual balance as well as by nutritional and environmental factors."[iv]

Parrots and Children…
Sensitive "Receivers"

One of the underlying principles taught in family therapy is that children are very sensitive to the tensions or underlying problems in their parents' marriage, and that much so-called acting out behavior is unconsciously aimed at restoring balance or harmony. It is often recognized that children are quite sensitive to the energies of others. Even most adults would admit that being in the presence of someone who is feeling love and tenderness feels very different from being in the presence of someone in a state of agitation.

Parrots are equally as sensitive as children to the energies emitted by the humans around them. I believe that parrots, like children, also sometimes become the "symptom bearers" of imbalance and disharmony in their owners, or the entire the household, and that a percentage of screaming and feather picking behaviors fall into this category. I remember a statement that avian behavior consultant Chris Davis once made to the effect that African Greys will "show us our own issues." The same is true, more or less, of all parrots to some degree, although I believe it to be truer of greys than any other species.

Further, it is also widely recognized that those who offer emotional support and/or physical care to people, such as therapists and nurses, often become burnt out and either change occupations or somehow distance themselves from their clients' emotional neediness to the point where they often become less effective at their jobs. They may have entered their profession with lots of enthusiasm and energy, but were unable to conserve their own vital energy and had this gradually sapped over time by continual interaction with those who were sick or had low energy.

If a person is depressed or sick, he will absorb energy from those around him who have an abundance. This is why it usually feels good to be around someone of high energy. It raises our own.[v] From my observations, parrots who sit in cages or on stands all day are often involuntary "receivers" for low or negative energies prevalent in their environments. Further, they have no relief from this and little exercise that might allow them to work off some of the tension this can create.

Happy People Make for
Happy Parrots

I have repeatedly had the same conversation with different clients. I will suggest that perhaps the stress they are experiencing could be affecting their parrots. Typically, the reply states, "Oh…but I'm not *acting* stressed!" I believe that the work of Dr. Collinge and Dr. Gerber, coupled with the story of Hans, the horse, and his incredible ability to perceive subtle changes in body language and facial expression of the humans around him would convince us that we do not have to *act* "stressed" for our parrots to pick up on these emotions we may be feeling.

Accordingly, I will assert that our parrots are extremely sensitive to the subtle changes in our own emotions, as well as the emotional health of our households. Simply stated, *emotions have energy*. *Any actions we can take to insure greater happiness and harmony within our households and ourselves will* ***significantly*** *benefit our parrots.* Parrots enjoy the greatest emotional and physical health when living in happy households.

Elements of Wild Society

Further, there are many practices that will serve to increase our parrots' sense of safety, as well as their satisfaction with their social experience in our homes. In seeking to discover these, we must resort to using imagination in regards to their social experience in the wild as our initial guide, as well as the few bits and pieces of information we have about how birds live in the wild.

What might be some of the elements of a parrot's emotional life in the wild? We know that, as prey animals, feelings of safety are crucial to them. We also have been able to observe, from studies of wild behavior, that parrots enjoy participating in group interaction with seeming enthusiasm, which is evidenced by physical play, mutual vocalization and group movement and interaction. We also, both from observations made in the wild and amongst the parrots in captivity, understand the strength of the pair bond and the affection that can exist between parrots that are producing young.

Cues can also be obtained from observing their lives with us. Watching young African Grey parrots learn to fly and land skillfully provides an awareness of their satisfaction and enjoyment in achievement. The happy tail wag and fling of the head at the end of a successful flight makes this apparent. Parrots need to feel competent. They instinctively know whether or not they are "successful" in our homes, and whether or not we like and appreciate them. In the book *Wild Minds* this is underscored in a discussion of parrots in general, and especially the grey parrot, by the simple statement, "As it is for human infants, imitation is fueled by a clear social payoff."[vi] Parrots look to their human caretakers for information as to whether or not they are successful.

Predictability and Rituals

Our challenge then is to attempt to replicate some of these essential elements in the domestic environment. When we examine what might make a parrot feel safe and secure, aside from wise arrangement of the physical elements in the environment, the matter of predictability comes to mind. When we might choose to try to "imagine" a parrot's life in the wild, rarely do we see him in relation to his surroundings. However, patterns in nature and the behavior of other animals are supremely predictable. The sun rises and sets predictably on schedule. Other species of birds, as well as ground dwelling animals, will enter the area and feed at certain times of each day. It is only the behavior of predators that often carries the quality of wild unpredictability.

The simple addition of "rituals" to our interactions with our parrots can serve to reproduce some of this most appreciated predictability in the domestic environment. These are especially useful during the morning and evening social times many of us enjoy. My own parrots take quite apparent delight in the simple rituals I have created here. In the morning, I uncover each psittacine individual. In an affectionate duet of behavior, each parrot and I have a few brief moments in interaction *that is always the same*. The parrots have been as much responsible for participating in the creation of these as I have been. Over time, through intimate and loving fun, we have taught each other a subtle duet of greeting.

And, each greeting is unique to each individual parrot. With my African Grey, Rollo, I must wait until he yells his typical, sing-songy "hell-o-oh" before taking him out of his cage, whereupon he throws himself upside down in my hand and I raspberry his tummy. My little Senegal, Ruby, simply crawls up under my chin for head scratches and purrs like a kitten. As I place her on top of her cage to await breakfast, she ducks her chin quickly in a silent request for one more scratch…and I am happy to oblige. Golding is always antsy from hunger in the morning, manifesting some food anxiety…a lasting vestige of his too-early weaning perhaps. As I uncover him, I greet him with the question, "Do you feel like a nut?"…followed by the

nonsensical observation "Sometimes you feel like a nut, and sometimes you don't!" as I hand him a walnut or other healthy and immediate beginning to his breakfast. And so it goes…. I travel around the room, extending my unique greeting to each individual and always in the same order, never deviating from my established pattern in any way. Their delight in this morning ritual could not be more evident, as each rushes to play their part.

Our "flock language" also serves to create a measure of predictability for our group of parrots. I will feed the birds, always in the same order, saying the same things. "Do you want some water?" "Are you hungry? Here's your breakfast." When I leave the house, I proclaim, "Mama's goin' bye-bye. I'll be right back!" Once again, their behavior indicates significant satisfaction with my own predictability. There is nothing that brings more happiness to some parrots than to be able to predict what their favorite human will do.

Paying Attention

And, in an even more direct way, we can re-create the sense of security inherent in living within a flock by paying attention to what scares our parrots. It is important that we watch their body language for indications of alarm or fear, take this reaction seriously, and seek to reassure them verbally, as well as physically. Many things about our world can be frightening to a parrot. After all, it is our world, not theirs. I have noticed that many phobic parrots are owned by people who tend not to pay attention, nor take their bird's fears seriously, or who simply can't read the body language of a frightened bird. They don't think ahead about what will be likely to make the bird afraid. Or if they do notice, they do not respond with a nurturing approach, out of a simple lack of understanding of the importance of doing so. For instance, it is a simple enough matter to ask the friend wearing the frightening baseball cap to remove it when he enters our home.

On the other hand, it is important to guard our parrots in whatever way we can against unpredictability that is frightening. Violence, anger resulting in loud noises or too-swift movements…all can be unsettling to a parrot. When it's a grey parrot, the resulting anxiety can often be cumulative, resulting in increased behavior problems over time.

The Flock Dynamic

The instinctive delight in group interaction can also be re-created in our homes, especially those in which more than one parrot resides. In the morning, my Double Yellow-headed Amazon will often be the one to beat me to the punch, by asking with loud enthusiasm, "So, do you want some music?!" And on goes the stereo to play their musical favorites while I prepare their breakfast. All react with much vocalizing and ready participation in this special social time. Predictably, I usually play one of several children's favorites by the Canadian artist, Raffi. His music touches the heart of adults, children and parrots alike.

Another way in which I have found I can recreate the more social interactions of the flock is to simply go around and share a morsel of whatever meal I am enjoying with each parrot. Predictably, I travel in the same order, dishing out a piece of this or a piece of that.

Homes in which only one parrot might reside will have a greater challenge to re-create a "flock dynamic," but such owners can certainly include their parrot(s) in the more social human rituals, such as grooming/preening in the bathroom in the morning, and enjoying meals together. Much use can also be made of the visits from friends. Here, we take the opportunity provided by such visits to order pizza and this is shared by all, humans and parrots alike.

Parrots in the wild are playful and have even been observed to make snowballs and play with them.[vii] If we allow ourselves to become more playful, our parrots will respond happily and with appreciation of the exuberance and abandon such silliness can manifest. Physical play, such as tossing things back and forth can also be appreciated. However, the majority of my parrots adore it most when we engage in mutual silliness. There is nothing my Amazon loves more than when I stand by his cage, calling him over dramatically saying, "Come 'ere you! Come 'ere you sexy Amazon. **Give** me a kiss!!!"

The Matter of Affection

The affection needed by parrots in their interactions with us is an ephemeral matter to contemplate, in terms of how we choose to recreate this. We must maintain a balance in our interactions with them so that they do not come to see us as "mate." However, as any small child does, they are hungry for our love and attention. For most, this is not a difficult thing to provide. And, this affection is actually most effectively provided in small doses. I usually do not spend large quantities of time with each parrot, interacting in a close physical manner. I neither have the time for this, nor do I want to encourage the type of "mate bond" in which large quantities of physically close time spent with a parrot often results. Instead, I will travel around the room several times a day, showing them my love in small ways for a few minutes at a time.

Admittedly, they seem to thrive on this type of frequent, cheerful, loving and silly interaction. Again, parrots know how we feel about them. If we take the time to get in touch with how much we love them, they will understand this in whatever manner we choose to display it.

The Social Pay-off

Lastly, in their greed to obtain our attention, parrots are very much like small children. They want a reaction to their behavior. They are happier when this is an appreciative reaction, but they will make do with a negative reaction as well. Psychologist Fitzhugh Dodson once wrote about this in his book, *How to Discipline With Love.* He discusses in this book the "Law of the Soggy Potato Chip," using the analogy that children would rather have a soggy potato chip than no potato chip at all. Similarly, they would rather have negative attention than no attention at all.[viii] And, so it is with parrots.

In attempting to provide the optimal social environment for our parrots, it is important that we train ourselves to catch them in the act of "being good." This is especially critical with young parrots who are under the age of three. Any desirable behavior, including eating, bathing, playing with toys, vocalizing in pleasant ways, should be noticed and rewarded verbally with effusive praise and attention. Thus, the parrot will have clear guidance as to how it can be successful in our home and life with us. When "negative" behaviors initially manifest, it is often best to simply ignore these as a first reaction. As Mr. Hauser illustrated above, the social payoff is a powerful reward for parrot behavior. It is important that we structure any social payoffs we are providing so that our parrots have the opportunity to learn the behaviors that will lead to success in captivity.

On a subtler note, frequent are the stories of parrots who are "in tune" enough with their owners to instinctively know when a behavior they manifest elicits a reaction of irritation in the human. Thus, we must also guard against "involuntary" teaching. Our emotional reactions to a parrot's behavior, even if not manifested overtly, are often enough to encourage or reinforce the behavior if the parrot is bored and lacks other challenges in his life. As with Hans, our own involuntary and subtle body language is at work in these situations, and the only path out of the

downward spiral between parrot and human in which such a dynamic can result is to work with our own emotions inwardly. *It simply never works to hand over to a parrot the power to upset you.*

The Importance of Learning

It is equally important that we not flag in our efforts to allow them opportunities for learning new skills. Learning is important to growth in all species. Taking the time to provide the focused attention necessary to teach tricks, skills, or verbal labels will go a long way toward balancing a parrot's emotional life in such a way that they can benefit from the pleasant feelings any intelligent animal feels when successful in some accomplishment.

I believe that the last two techniques, providing positive social payoffs for desirable behavior and teaching new skills, are actually the two fundamentally most powerfully methods we can use to keep ourselves firmly in the position of "flock leader" because each patterns the parrot to look to us for guidance and instruction. This sets the tone for a deeper relationship, wherein the parrot comes to trust and rely on the human caregiver rather than simply becoming "obedient." And once again, it is with parrots as it is with children… being able to rely on another for guidance as well as care will create a greater feeling of security in the dependent one.

Expressions of Love

Lastly, one of the best things we can ever do for a parrot is to be able to look at him, and say, "I love you so much. You are the most magnificent creature I have ever seen. I am grateful for your presence in my life, and I will take care of you well. I will never forsake you."

This is a broad statement, and yet I'm sure it is not unlike those which wild parrots convey to each other every day. Conditional affection is not usually a part of the bonds animals manifest. The measure of difficulty we might have in saying the same thing is only a manifestation of our distance from nature, our dissociation from all things wild. I write often about the lessons parrots teach us. This is a good example. The above statement springs to my lips unbidden in response to a gift of communication from one of my parrot companions, or simply when I view a newly bathed Blue and Gold Macaw preening her beautiful feathers.

I am so grateful to have felt that emotion…it makes me a better person. And, certainly, the energy behind that emotion is not lost on my parrots. They know that they are in my heart to stay…that I will not forsake them.

When any one of us can feel that emotion toward a companion parrot, it is difficult to say who is more the winner…the parrot or the person. For, the emotional resources necessary to make such a declaration run deep and are "wildish." And, isn't this the direction we'd like to grow in as humans, anyway?

---

[i] Gould, James L and Carol Grant. The Animal Mind. New York, NY: Scientific American Library, 1999: 1
[ii] Collinge, William. Subtle Energy. New York, MY: Warner Books, 1998: 2
[iii] Ibid: 47
[iv] Gerber, M.D., Richard. Vibrational Medicine. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1988:43
[v] Collinge, William. Subtle Energy. New York, MY: Warner Books, 1998: 40
[vi] Hauser, Marc D. Wild Minds: What Animal Really Think. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company, 2000: 132
[vii] Gould, James L and Carol Grant. The Animal Mind. New York, NY: Scientific American Library, 1999: 1
[viii] Dodson, Fitzhugh Dr. How to Discipline With Love. New York, NY: Rawson Associates Publishers, Inc., 1977:14

www.phoenixlanding.org

Phoenix Landing presents:

TOY-MAKING FOR PARROTS MADE EASY

Presentation created by:
Debbie Russell, MD Adoption Coordinator

Disclaimer

Not every toy is 100% safe for every parrot. As the owner, you need to supervise your parrot with each new toy you purchase or make yourself. Phoenix Landing and Debbie Russell takes NO responsibility if your parrot gets hurt from a toy that you make.

Some parrots can not have safe wood because they ingest it.

Some parrots can not have plastic because they ingest it.

Some parrots can not have toys with chains because they wrap them around their heads.

You as the parrot owner you need to know your parrot. They are a study of one.

Why do Parrots Need Toys?

- Toys are a part of an overall program called "environmental enrichment"
- Environmental enrichment is the means of providing activities to occupy time and outlets for energies
- A parrot in the wild spends most of it's day:
  - Foraging for food
  - Flying
  - Chewing branches
  - Playing/Interacting with their mates and other parrots
  - Protecting their nest sites

- Parrots in our home are given their food in bowls at the end of their perches, are locked in their cages 8+ hours a day when we go to work
  – not much energy is being used in captive parrots –
- It is up to each parrot owner to provide their companion parrot with substitute activities to prevent boredom from creating destructive behaviors like:
  - Plucking/Self Mutilation/Feather Destruction
  - Screaming
  - Biting/Aggression
  - Chewing on household items

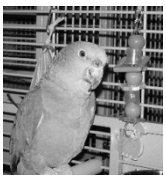
A parrot with LOTS of toys is a HAPPY parrot!!

Types of Play Styles

- High energy
- Low energy
- Manipulators
- Buzz Saws
- Weavers
- Gathers
- Acrobats
- Hide & Seekers
- Companions

Types of Play Styles






- High energy
  - Parrots that are always on the move
  - May or may not be serious chewers
  - Tend to be rambunctious and sometimes mischievous
  - They like to do battle with their toys
  - In their exuberance they may forget to keep their balance and then blame their toy
- Low energy
  - These are the parrots that are perch potatoes
  - Peaceful and sedate
  - Tend to be more detail-oriented
  - Some are heavy chewers, many are not
  - Prefer to have toys within easy reach, and may not go out of their way to reach a distant toy
  - They prefer toys to preen and weave, puzzles that require concentration, softer destructible toys and toys with multiple textures

Types of Play Styles (cont.)



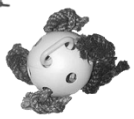
- Manipulators
  - Parrots that loves to take things apart
  - Disassemble their toys, their cages and gyms
  - Accomplished escape artists
  - Satisfaction from unscrewing the quick link that holds up a toy and watching the toy fall to the bottom of the cage with a satisfying crash
- Buzz Saws
  - Parrots that need wood and plenty of it
  - Beak-oriented and need a constant supply of things to chew
  - Will often destroy their perches
  - Destructive nature can be challenging
  - Larger buzz saws enjoy the challenge of hard wood toys

Types of Play Styles

- Weavers
  - Artistic types
  - Can spend hours weaving things in and out of plastic chain links or through cage bars
  - They like to stuff things into tiny holes in other toys
  - Strands of sea grass, palm fronds, raffia, ribbon, leather or jute provide endless fun for weaving and preening
- Gatherers
  - This type of parrot likes to collect things like:
    - Bits of toys
    - Foot toys
    - Food
  - Some pile up their collection and some hide their treasures inside other things in their cage






Types of Play Styles

- Acrobats
  - These are the clowns of parrots
  - Enjoy hanging by a toenail than standing on two feet
  - Like lying on their backs or even standing on their heads
  - Swings, hanging rope or chain, and bungees/boings are favorites for these guys
- Hide and Seekers
  - Parrot that peers out at you from their secret spot
  - Shy
  - Like their own private hideaway like huts and tubes
- Companions
  - Parrots that substitute toys for a cage-mate rather than something to chew up/destroy
  - Rarely destroy their toys - snuggles next to them





Types of Toys for Parrots

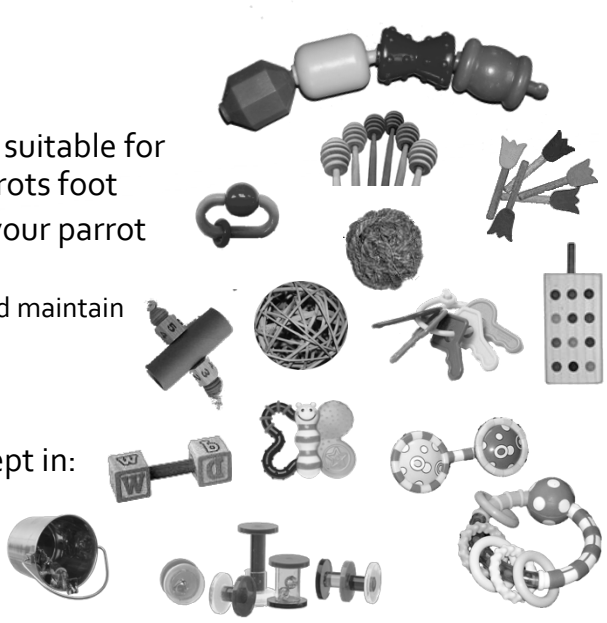
- Foraging
- Foot
- Destructible
  - Wooden
  - Shreddables
  - Plastics
- Comfort
  - Cuddlers
  - Preening
- Interactive
  - Take apart/puzzles
  - Sound /noisemakers

Foraging Toys

- Foraging is a natural behavior!
- Foraging toys provide your parrot with:
  - Purpose
  - Mental challenging
  - Increased opportunities for exercise
  - Essential play time
  - Rewards for their effort!

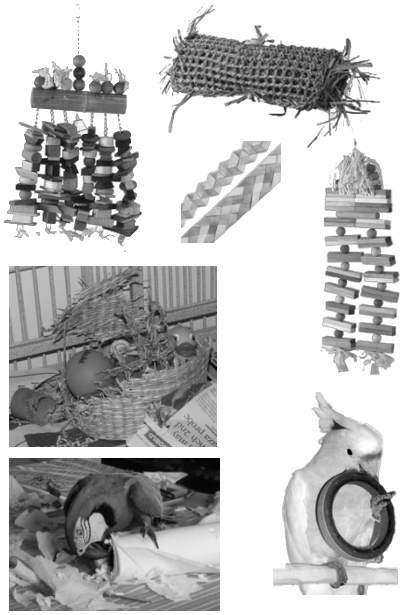
Foot Toys

- Small toys that are suitable for grasping in the parrots foot
- Foot toys provide your parrot with:
  - Exercise to build and maintain dexterity
  - Balance
  - Strength
- Foot toys can be kept in:
  - Stainless steel pails
  - Baskets
  - Bowls



Destructible Toys

- Destructible toys provide your parrot with:
  - An outlet to express the natural urge to chew
  - Encourages and teaches your parrot to chew on acceptable items
    - Saves household items
- Destructible toys can be:
  - Wooden
  - Shreddable
  - Plastic
  - Baskets
  - Any parrot toy



Comfort Toys

- Comfort toys provide your parrot with:
  - A sense of security
  - A safe place to hide and sleep
- Comfort toys can be:
  - Tents
  - Rings
  - Swings
- Comfort toys can be soft, furry pieces of material that your parrots can cuddle and preen

Interactive Toys

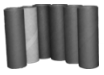
- If your parrot likes to undo locks and escape from it's cage, you should try some interactive toys
- A lot of interactive toys for human babies/small children have sound – parrots love sound
  - These could be any baby type toys
  - Different type parrot safe puzzles

Why Make Your Own Toys

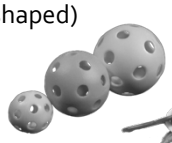
- Cheaper – saves you money!!
- Fun to do
  - Something your children could do with you or for you
- You know your parrot(s) likes and dislikes

Materials for Making Your Own Toys

- Any human-grade food container and lids
- Bamboo (skewers too)
- Baskets (natural seagrass, wicker, willow, straw hats, maize mats, seagrass mats)
- Beads (pony, animal, flower shaped)
- Birdie Bagels
- Buttons
- Children's Toys (Lego's, plastic keys, wiffle balls)
- Coconut shells
- Cornhusks
- Corrugated Boxes

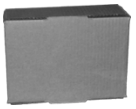






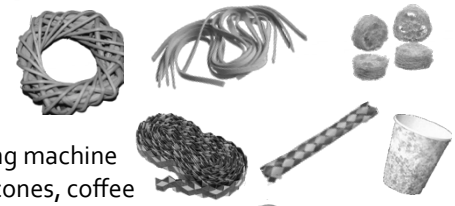
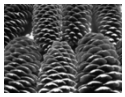






Materials for Making Your Own Toys (cont.)

- Grapevine wreaths
- Leather (veggie tanned only)
- Loofah Logs
- Paper products (colored paper, adding machine paper, muffin cups, paper cups and cones, coffee filters, brown lunch bags, egg cartons, finger traps, coin rolls, telephone books)
- Pine cones
- Plastic (toys, links, chains, PVC plumbing joints, straws, needlepoint canvas)



Materials for Making Your Own Toys (cont.)

- Rope (100% cotton, paulie rope, poly rope, sisal, hemp, jute)
- Rubber ducky's or other rubber shaped toys
- Stainless steel (bells, pails, skewers)
- Vine balls or wreaths
- Wood (blocks, balls, wheels, popsicle sticks, wooden ice cream spoons, spools, untreated pine, dowels, chop sticks)





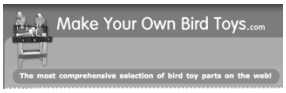




Where to Find Toy Parts

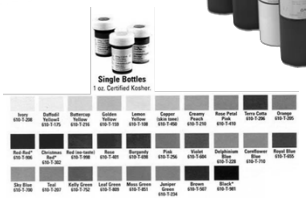
- Michaels or A.C. Moore craft stores
- Home Depot, Lowes or other home improvement stores
- Thrift /Second hand stores
- Dollar stores
- Garage and Yard sales
- IKEA
- **Your Very Own RECYCLING BIN**
  - Food containers
  - Plastic lids off bottles and food
  - Cereal boxes/food boxes
- Your children's toy box
- At Phoenix Landing events

Where to Find Toy Parts (cont.)



- Websites (just to name a few):
  - Make Your Own Bird Toys (makeyourownbirdtoys.com)
  - Big Beaks Bird Toys (http://bigbeaksbirdtoys.com)
  - Bird Safe Store (http://birdsafestore.com)
  - California Bird Nerds (http://www.cabirdnerds.com)
  - Casey's Wood Products (http://www.caseyswood.com)
  - Fastenal (http://www.fastenal.com)
  - Mother Plucking Toys (http://mpbirdtoys.com)
  - Oriental Trading (http://www.orientaltrading.com)
  - Parrot Toy Angels (http://www.parrottoyangels.com/supplies5.html#sspails)
  - The Coconut King (http://www.coconutking.com)
  - Rhode Island Novelties (http://www.rinovelty.com)
  - Twin Leather (http://www.twinleather.com/birdtoys/strips.html)
  - ULine for boxes (http://www.uline.com/product/BoxListing1.htm)

Wood Dying Information



Safe colorants:

- Kopykake Kroma Kolors
- VitaCritter
- Wilton's Gel Food Coloring
- USDA Food Coloring

Note: Most parrots don't care if their wood is dyed! We like color because it's eye pleasing.

Toy Safety

- Avoided toys or parts with zinc
  - Zinc is toxic to parrots if ingested
- Painted toy blocks (i.e., ABC blocks) make sure they were only painted with non-toxic, children safe paints
- Make sure the type of rope can't get tangled around a parrots foot or neck and should be cut in short lengths
  - Check ropes toys daily and cut back or discard rope toys when they become frayed or present a hazard to your parrot
  - Make sure your parrots nails and beak are trimmed to avoid accidents with rope toys
- Toys and toy parts should be appropriately sized for the type of parrot you own

T	XS	S	M	L	XL
TINY	X-SMALL	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE	X-LARGE
Canary	Parakeet	Conure	Small Cockatoo	Amazon	Macaw
Finch	Cockatiel	Quaker	Mini Macaw	African Grey	Large Cockatoo

Toy Safety (cont.)

- Safe woods: (partial list)
  - Pine, Balsa, Bamboo, Apple, Arbutus, Aspen, Beech, Birch, Cactus, Cottonwood, Crabapple, Dogwood, Elm, Hawthorn, Larch, Manzanita, Ash, Poplar, Willow, Ribbonwood, Grapevine wood
- Unsafe woods: (partial list)
  - NEVER use pressure treated woods, plywood, cedar, cherry or oak
- Website about safe and unsafe wood http://www.mdvaden.com/bird_page.shtml
- Leather
  - Use only veggie tanned leather
  - Do not buy dyed leather or leather tanned with chemicals as most are toxic to birds (i.e., chromium, formaldehyde)
  - Do not retire old shoes, belts and purses to your parrots toy chest as these too can have toxic chemicals
- Baskets
  - Make sure they are all natural. If they smell or have a shiny finish, do not use them. If they have string , either cut the basket or don't use it. Wash all baskets first either in your dishwasher or bathtub with either OxiClean or white vinegar.

Toy Safety (cont.)

- Other things to avoid:
  - Baskets with varnish finishes.
  - Colored Magazines – they contain harmful inks and chemicals, when ingested can cause harm
  - Toothbrushes - contain nylon fibers and some contain lead metal parts to hold the bristles in place
  - Toilet Paper and Paper Towel Cardboard Tubes – they contain harmful glues which contain zinc
  - Felt, Plastic Bags, Cellophane - will not pass through a parrot's digestive system and can cause a blockage
  - Plastic Coated Wire coat hangers – may contain zinc

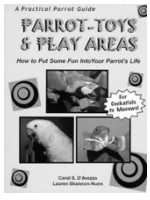
Use common sense and supervise your parrot when you first give them a new toy. If you have doubts, take it out.

Additional Tips

- All parrots play differently, so **know your parrots playing style**
- Make sure beak and nails are properly trimmed
- Place new toy on the **outside** of the cage or within eyesight for a few days
- Supervise your parrot with any new toy
- Keep your parrot's mind stimulated by providing:
  - A wide variety of toy types
  - Periodically introducing new toys
  - Frequently rotating out old toys
- Birds are like kids and they can get bored of their toys quite easily!
- **Parrot toys are meant to be destroyed!!**

Resources

- Websites
  - Parrot Enrichment by Kris Porter (http://parrotenrichment.com)
  - Avian Enrichment newsletter and website (http:www.avianenrichment.com)
  - Feathers and Forage: Foraging ideas for small parrots (http://www.feathersandforage.co.uk)
  - Foraging for Parrots (http://foragingforparrots.com)
- Books
  - A Practical Parrot Guide Parrot-Toys & Play Areas: How to Put Some Fun Into your Parrot's Life
    Carol S. D'Arezzo and Lauren Shannon-Nunn
- DVDs
  - Captive Foraging DVD - Scott Echols
  - Enriching Your Parrot's Life - Robin Shewokis



Resources (cont.)

- FACEBOOK: The Parrot's Workshop
- Yahoo Groups
  - Cheep Parrot Toys & Tips or their website (www.cheepparrottoysntips.com)
  - All Parrot Play yahoo group
  - ParrotToyAngels yahoo group
- Magazines
  - Good Bird (only on-line now)
- Blogs
  - Captive Foraging for Parrots: Let birds be birds (http://community.livejournal.com/captiveforaging)
  - Good Bird Blog (http://goodbirdinc.blogspot.com)
  - Teach Your Birds to Forage for Food (www.avianweb.com/foragingfood.html)
  - Best In Flock (http://bestinflock.wordpress.com)

Have Fun and Be Creative

- Please join the Phoenix Landing yahoo group and share your new toy ideas with everyone

The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book
Version 1.0

The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book
Version 2.0

Download the activity books at: http://parrotenrichment.com

PLANTS SUITABLE FOR USE IN AVIARIES

Developed for South Florida Aviaries by George Staples

SUGGESTED LANDSCAPE PLANTS

Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Acacia	*Acacia* sp.	Prickly shrub, nesting sites
Areca palm	*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*	Young plants good foliage, background
Bouganvillea	*Bouganvillea* sp.	Prickly plants for shelter, nesting; colorful blooms in full sun
Ceriman, monstera	*Monstera deliciosa*	Large split-leaf philodendron
Cycads	*Cycas* sp., *Zamia* sp.	Foliage, ground cover
Fan palm	*Livistona chinensis*	Foliage, shade tolerant, small size
Fig, creeping	*Ficus pumila*	Covers walls, stone, wood, as background
Fig, fiddle-leaf	*Ficus lyrata*	Foliage plant, small size for a fig
Fig, laurel-leaf	*Ficus microcarpa*	Dense foliage, requires trimming
Fig, weeping	*Ficus benjamina*	Trailing foliage, requires pruning
Firethorn	*Pyracantha* sp.	Dense foliage, edible berries, nest sites; likes full sun, requires trimming
Lady palm	*Rhapis excelsa*	Forms clumps, small size, shade tolerant
Natal plum	*Carissa* sp.	Forms natural hedge, **thorns**, edible fruit
Philodendron, self-heading	*Philodendron selloum*	Tropical foliage, likes sun
Philodendron, split-leaf	*Philodendron pertusum*	Tropical foliage, shade
Pittosporum	*Pittosporum tobira*	Evergreen shrub, likes sun, dense growth
Shrubby yew	*Podocarpus* sp.	Evergreen, trim for compact growth
Silk oak	*Grevillea robusta*	Tree, requires pruning to maintain size
Strawberry guava	*Psidium cattleianum*	Evergreen shrub, edible fruit, sun
Umbrella tree, schefflera	*Brassaia actinophylla*	Evergreen, requires pruning, edible fruit

TREES PROVIDING SUITABLE PERCHES

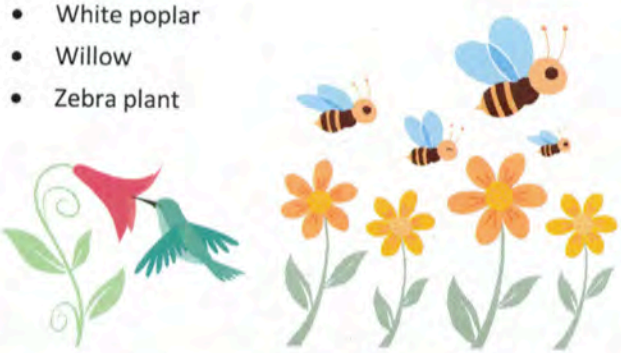
Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Australian pine	*Casuarina* sp.	Brittle when green, dries like iron
Guava	*Psidium guava*	
Florida holly, Brazilian pepper	*Schinus terebinthifolius*	Berries edible; beware of herbicides
Hibiscus tree, mahoe	*Hibiscus tiliaceus*	Flowers and seeds edible
Melaleuca, paper bark tree	*Melaleuca quinquenervia*	Soft wood, spongy bark, edible flowers
Oak	*Quercus* sp.	Hard wood
Seagrape	*Coccoloba uvifera*	Wood not readily chewed, edible fruit

FLOWERING PLANTS THAT PRODUCE NECTAR OR ATTRACT INSECTS

Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Flame vine	*Pyrostegia ignea*	Abundant nectar, large vine
Geiger tree	*Cordia sebestena*	Small, slow growing tree, sun
Ixora	*Ixora coccinea*	Abundant nectar, berries, good hedge
Lantana	*Lantana* sp.	Nectar, insects drawn to plant, edible berries
Orange jessamine	*Murraya paniculata*	Flowers attract insects, berries edible; good hedge or specimen plant
Orchid tree	*Bauhinia* sp.	Deciduous, nectar, attracts hummingbirds
Melaleuca	*Melaleuca quinquenervia*	Edible blossoms, insects drawn to tree
Hibiscus tree, mahoe	*Hibiscus tiliaceus*	Edible flowers and seeds, insects
Bromeliads	*Aechmea* sp., *Guzmania* sp., *Neoregelia* sp.	"Tank" in center of plant attracts insects

List of Safe Plants for Your Birds *(from previous page)*

- Acacia
- African violet
- Aloe
- American bittersweet
- Autumn olive
- Baby's tears
- Bamboo
- Barberry
- Bayberry
- Beech (American, European)
- Bladdernum
- Blueberry
- Bougainvillea
- Chickweed
- Christmas cactus
- Cissus (Kangaroo vine)
- Coffee plant (NOT Coffee bean, Rattle bush, Rattlebox or Coffeeweed)
- Coleus
- Comfrey
- Coralberry (NOT Coral plant)
- Corn plant
- Cotoneaster firethorn
- Crabapple
- Dogwood
- Donkey tail
- Dracaena varieties
- Elderberry (common, European, red)
- Ferns (Asparagus, Bird's nest, Boston – and related, Maidenhair)
- Figs (Creeping, Rubber, Fiddle leaf, Laurel leaf, Weeping)
- Fir (Balsam, Douglas, Subalpine, White)
- Gardenia
- Grape Ivy (vine) – Hen and Chicken
- Herbs (such as Oregano, Rosemary, etc ...)
- Huckleberry
- Ivy (ONLY Grape & Swedish)
- Jade plant
- Kalanchoe
- Magnolia
- Monkey plant
- Mother-in-law's tongue
- Natal plum
- Norfolk Island pine
- Palms (Areca, Date, Fan, Lady, Parlour, Howeia, Kentia, Phoenix, Sago)
- Pepperomia
- Pine (Ponderosa, Spruce, Virginia, White)
- Pittosporum
- Pothos
- Prayer plant
- Purple passion (Velvet nettle)
- Raspberry
- Rose
- Schefflera (Umbrella)
- Sensitive plant
- Snowberry
- Spider plant
- Spruce (Black, Norway, Red, White)
- Swedish ivy
- Thistle
- Umbrella plant
- Velvet nettle
- Viburnum
- Wandering Jew
- Wax plant
- White clover
- White poplar
- Willow
- Zebra plant



Appendix 7.

PLANTS SUITABLE FOR USE IN AVIARIES

Developed for South Florida Aviaries by George Staples

SUGGESTED LANDSCAPE PLANTS

Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Acacia	*Acacia* sp.	Prickly shrub, nesting sites
Areca palm	*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*	Young plants good foliage, background
Bouganvillea	*Bouganvillea* sp.	Prickly plants for shelter, nesting; colorful blooms in full sun
Ceriman, monstera	*Monstera deliciosa*	Large split-leaf philodendron
Cycads	*Cycas* sp., *Zamia* sp.	Foliage, ground cover
Fan palm	*Livistona chinensis*	Foliage, shade tolerant, small size
Fig, creeping	*Ficus pumila*	Covers walls, stone, wood, as background
Fig, fiddle-leaf	*Ficus lyrata*	Foliage plant, small size for a fig
Fig, laurel-leaf	*Ficus microcarpa*	Dense foliage, requires trimming
Fig, weeping	*Ficus benjamina*	Trailing foliage, requires pruning
Firethorn	*Pyracantha* sp.	Dense foliage, edible berries, nest sites; likes full sun, requires trimming
Lady palm	*Rhapis excelsa*	Forms clumps, small size, shade tolerant
Natal plum	*Carissa* sp.	Forms natural hedge, **thorns**, edible fruit
Philodendron, self-heading	*Philodendron selloum*	Tropical foliage, likes sun
Philodendron, split-leaf	*Philodendron pertusum*	Tropical foliage, shade
Pittosporum	*Pittosporum tobira*	Evergreen shrub, likes sun, dense growth
Shrubby yew	*Podocarpus* sp.	Evergreen, trim for compact growth
Silk oak	*Grevillea robusta*	Tree, requires pruning to maintain size
Strawberry guava	*Psidium cattleianum*	Evergreen shrub, edible fruit, sun
Umbrella tree, schefflera	*Brassaia actinophylla*	Evergreen, requires pruning, edible fruit

TREES PROVIDING SUITABLE PERCHES

Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Australian pine	*Casuarina* sp.	Brittle when green, dries like iron
Guava	*Psidium guava*	
Florida holly, Brazilian pepper	*Schinus terebinthifolius*	Berries edible, beware of herbicides
Hibiscus tree, mahoe	*Hibiscus tiliaceus*	Flowers and seeds edible
Melaleuca, paper bark tree	*Melaleuca quinquenervia*	Soft wood, spongy bark, edible flowers
Oak	*Quercus* sp.	Hard wood
Seagrape	*Coccoloba uvifera*	Wood not readily chewed, edible fruit

FLOWERING PLANTS THAT PRODUCE NECTAR OR ATTRACT INSECTS

Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Flame vine	*Pyrostegia ignea*	Abundant nectar, large vine
Geiger tree	*Cordia sebestena*	Small, slow growing tree, sun
Ixora	*Ixora coccinea*	Abundant nectar, berries, good hedge
Lantana	*Lantana* sp.	Nectar, insects drawn to plant, edible berries
Orange jessamine	*Murraya paniculata*	Flowers attract insects, berries edible; good hedge or specimen plant
Orchid tree	*Bauhinia* sp.	Deciduous, nectar, attracts hummingbirds
Melaleuca	*Melaleuca quinquenervia*	Edible blossoms, insects drawn to tree
Hibiscus tree, mahoe	*Hibiscus tiliaceus*	Edible flowers and seeds, insects
Bromeliads	*Aechmea* sp., *Guzmania* sp., *Neoregelia* sp.	"Tank" in center of plant attracts insects

Birdkeeping Naturally
EB Cravens
September '12

"Pods"

One of the 'hottest' topics in the psittacine world the past few years has been "environmental enrichment," which is ostensibly the improving of our pet and breeder parrots' lives here in captivity. Hand in hand with this concept is the offering of circumstances in order that the birds may forage - that is work to seek out items to eat and chew up. One general term coined for fresh organic branches and greens offered to parrots is "browse." Not a bad expression, I would deem, since hookbills often spend leisurely hours disassembling and masticating tree parts once they have satiated their initial hunger. Giving domestic birds browse is not a new concept, however; in fact I first wrote an article about my use of fresh boughs and greenery in my psittacine cages back in 1991 in a *Watchbird Magazine* article entitled, "*A Look at Chewing in Parrot Behavior.*"

Enrichment benefits aside, chewable organic plant material offers all sorts of life-sustaining micro-ingredients, minerals, enzymes, etc. to the sampling bird. Moreover, it is easy to see how we can take this a step further and seek out wild crafted and cultivated food items for our flocks - those plants growing in our yards and gardens, hillsides and meadows that wild birds enjoy when in season. This is one of my favorite means of supplementing my psittacine diets. And at the top of my list for nutrient freshness and content... I love *pods*.

Pods are those seed-containing normally elongated green casings with which many lucky birds are familiar. Peas come in pods, beans and soybeans come in pods. Once a parrot has learned to extract the fleshy food from one such dehiscent (splitting naturally to eject seeds when dry) capsule, it will recognize all other pods. That's where the fun begins!

There are literally dozens of garden vegetables that produce seedpods once they have been allowed to "bolt" at the end of their growing period. The photo with this article shows a single turnip we allowed to linger in the patch, eventually flowering and forming spicy, attractive pods. The same occurs with a few leftover plants of Chinese cabbage, broccoli, bok choi, radish, safflower, arugula, rape, black-eyed peas and more. Even buckwheat and chives produce seeds, though not specifically elongated. Provided one grows non-hybrid varieties of plants which are vital and seed-viable, the end of the growing season feast their pods produce for one's birds is nothing short of amazing.

With the pea and bean pods, it is best to let the growth continue until the seeds inside are bulging and ripe but still moist

- instead of offering typical flat, immature super market string beans or stir-fry pea, both of which have little to offer to a parrot trying to open them up for a rewarding fresh nugget. Birds will quickly tire of such early-harvest pods and discard them after a cursory chomp or two. Farmer's markets are an excellent place to get pods that are older and more bulging with seeds.

The exciting thing about feeding pods to parrots is that they are basically a natural *green seed* - that is, they are a seed for the seed-eating species, but also a fresh green for the birds that are normally used to getting fed only the seeds which are harvested, dried, milled, and the like. Green seeds are perfect nutritional 'veggie' packages for amazons, eclectus, greys, macaws, cockatoos, cockatiels, lovebirds, and parakeets of all sizes. My lorikeets used to love them. Even species such as Bourke's and Princess Parakeets which do not normally hold morsels in their claws,

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

soon learn to take a small pod like a rape or broccoli pod in the beak, and "typewriter" down it from one end to the other, extracting and chewing up each tiny green seed at a time! 'Tis very entertaining to watch, and very much like what Australian parakeets do with seeding grassland plants in the wilds of the outback.

Baby psittacines entering the weaning phase at a home or facility learn beak dexterity and the wisdom to look inside a package to find good food - something that will translate to in-shell peanuts, almonds, cracked macadamia, etc. later. Pods are interesting to fledglings. They are bright green or yellowish. They crunch agreeably. They teach foraging and foot-mouth coordination among other things. It takes some practice for a 12-week neophyte parrot to hold a three inch cluster of radish pods on a stem and efficiently work over one pod after another.

As for our adult and breeder parrots - they tend to love pods year round, though certainly summer and breeding season are the most natural times to present them. Often a flight of birds will seek out first the pods in a mixed dish of cooked and soaked and sprouted fruit and veggie mix. If you have picky parrots that will not touch large vegetable chunks, this might be a solution. Pods are by far one of the best fresh vegetable materials you can give your flock. Next year, why not set up a container or three - say those half wooden wine barrel planters from the garden supply store - and begin sprouting some of your left over birdseed or a seed mixture of pod-producing greens. Younger plants at any stage can be used as green stems in the diet while the old ones mature and begin seedpod formation will be the ultimate reward...

Aloha and good eatin', EB ∞

(Continued from page 14)

[PDF]. Parrots in particular are intelligent, social animals that need lots of attention. And they have long lives: once you buy one, it may be with you for several decades.

It's also important to buy a legal, captive-raised bird rather than one that was taken from the wild. I was ignorant of shady dealings in the caged bird industry when, as a teenager, I bought a parakeet from the pet store down the street. The three-month old bird was a little green bundle of personality with a long, maroon tail and a smoky head, which he liked to have scratched through the bars of his cage. Enthralled, I never thought to ask for the documentation proving he was captive-bred. I simply brought him home with me - naming him Thalo after one of my watercolor paints, which matched his brilliant blue primary feathers.

I should have checked the metal band on his leg to make sure it was smooth and seamless on all sides - showing that a breeder slipped it over his foot when he was a small nestling. If there's a seam, the bird could have been banded as a wild-caught adult. After talking with Iñigo-Elias the other day, I double-checked Thalo's band, and I'm relieved to report that it's seamless and legitimate.

My captive-bred parakeet is now 12 years old and just as mischievous as ever, and I'm still glad I bought him. But as I've spent more and more time watching wild birds in their natural habitats, I've come to value those experiences just as much as keeping a pet. If I ever get an urge to buy another

caged bird, I'll be a lot more conscious of its wild relatives - and the sinister side of the pet trade.

(Illustrations by Abby McBride: Thalo, her Green-cheeked Parakeet, Palm Cockatoo, and Painted Bunting.)

∞

To Fly Or Not To Fly
That Is The Question

Written by Steve Martin
President, Natural Encounters, Inc.

Published in PsittaScene Magazine
Publication of the World Parrot Trust, November 2002

Prologue:
It happened again, someone sent me an email asking how to teach his parrot to fly free outside. If I only had a nickel for ... you get the point. My standard response to this question normally involves a short, professional cautionary note couched within a biology lesson detailing the fundamentals of learning flight skill. My politically correct response does not include the questions I really want to ask like, why in the world would you want to let your parrot fly outside exposing it to all the dangers a caregiver is supposed to protect a bird from? And, have you asked your bird if it wants to be forced into this risky, great unknown? The bird's entire life has been spent indoors, protected from the dangers of the highway, pond, dog, electric wires, and countless more hazards awaiting the naive parrot. "My bird loves to go outside" is the chorus I have heard too often from well-meaning owners who often misinterpret the flapping of the half-panicked, clipped-winged parrot gripping tightly to their fist closed securely over its feet. "He loves to exercise his wings when we go outside. If I let his wings grow in he will be able to know the joy of flight." This scene has been played a million times, and unfortunately will be played a million more.

Introduction
One of the hottest topics on the parrot list serves these days is whether or not a parrot owner should clip the wings of their bird. One side says "it is your responsibility as a parrot owner to clip the bird's wings to protect it from injury and allow it the freedom to experience the outdoors without fear of it flying away." The other side counters that "it is cruel and unusual punishment, indeed it is abuse to clip a parrot's wings. How can you deny the bird it's right to freedom?" It is amazing to me that the two camps are so far apart. I believe when two sides are so adamant about opposing views the best answers usually lie somewhere in the middle. So, I'll take this opportunity to share my views and explore this contentious subject.

To Clip Or Not To Clip
Whether or not to clip a parrot's wings depends on many factors. I believe the most important of these factors should be the health and welfare of the bird. For a true assessment of the value of flight to parrots you should start with its natural history. Why do parrots need to fly in the wild? It occurs to me that the most important reasons parrots fly in the wild is to locate and establish breeding sites and territories, locate and acquire food, access safe roost sites, and, very importantly, they fly to escape predators. I am sure there are other reasons parrots fly, but these are the most important. Some people might say that parrots fly for fun. This may be true, but let's leave it for later.

Can we accept the reasons I mentioned above are the main reasons parrots fly in the wild? If so, can we also accept that these reasons are not important in captivity? Parrots have food, water, territory, safe roosts and no predators in their captive environments. So, is flying important to companion parrots? Some people believe flying is important because it helps keep birds more physically fit and healthy. I personally think this may be true. However, I suspect if someone researched the longest-lived parrots in history they would find those birds had clipped wings. Some other people believe it is important for a parrot to fly-free because it is fun, enriching and as much a part of a parrot's nature as walking is to humans. This may be true as well.

Let's fly

Ok, for whatever reason, let's suppose that you have decided you want your parrot to have the power of flight. The next step is to investigate whether or not your bird is capable of flight. The fact that your bird has flight feathers does not necessarily mean it is going to be a competent flyer. Many parrot owners have let their companion parrot's clipped wings grow in only to be disappointed when the bird did not exercise its new flight power. Parrots, like most other birds, develop their flight skills in the first few months of their lives. Nature provides motivation for a young parrot to launch itself out of the nest cavity and try its wings for the first time. Like a child learning to ride a bicycle, a young parrot will make many mistakes as it develops the skills and coordination required to become a master of the sky. A companion parrot that had its wings clipped before it learned to fly will miss out on this very important period of its life and may never develop good flight skill. When the owner lets the birds wings grow in, the bird's first attempt at flight may be similar to putting a person on a bicycle for the first time in his or her life and sending them racing down a steep hill.

The Techniques

For the past 26 years, I have flown many parrots outdoors in the shows we produce. The training I give these birds before they ever fly outside is far more involved than most people might think. We raise our birds in groups, or pairs, in large cages where they can fly from perch to perch (usually around 8 feet apart). We also have three large flight pens (up to 50 feet long) where we conduct two or three training sessions per day … every day. It takes about two months of intensive training before I am comfortable flying a parrot outside. Plus, I have a great staff of professional animal trainers who play a very important role in educating these birds. They have an excellent working knowledge of Operant Conditioning and Positive Reinforcement training techniques, and they have developed insights and sensitivities that are simply not required when working with parrots that have clipped wings. One more thing to consider, what I have mentioned here is only a fraction of our training process. There are many more key elements, and several more steps that we take to insure the safety of our birds. I believe anything less would be putting the birds in jeopardy.

The flight pens I mentioned above are great alternatives for anyone who wants to allow their birds to express their power of flight without the risks associated with flying free outdoors. The size and materials used for the flight pen would depend on the budget, but the larger the cage the better for flight confident birds. I believe a flight pen should be at least eight feet wide, eight feet tall, and 16 feet long. Of course, larger is better. Strong wire mesh is the best material to use for most parrots. However I have used a strong nylon netting for some parrot flight pens with good results. It is important to note that most parrots can chew through the nylon netting so the perches should be situated in the center of the cage and not come close enough for the bird to grab hold of the netting. Also, it is best to monitor the birds anytime they are in the flight pen, and do not leave a bird in a nylon netted flight pen over night. Owls can startle a bird in a flight pen and can easily grab the parrot as it hangs on the side of the nylon netted cage. A large flight pen is very beneficial, both mentally and physically, for birds that are confident flyers. It is also a great place for young birds to learn their flight skills. However, a bird that did not learn to fly at an early age will have some trouble learning the flight skills required to use the entire facility and may just choose not to fly at all. One last point, be sure the flight pen offers shelter from the sun and easy access to food and water.

The Human Factor

My job not only involves training free-flight birds, I also train people. I have trained over 500 professional bird trainers to fly many species of birds in free-flight programs. I have also given countless workshops and talks to companion parrot owners. These experiences have taught me that the most important factor in free-flying (or even owning) parrots is "humans." The human factor often outweighs the animal factor when I consider free-flying birds. Not all humans are created equal. Some people have a talent for understanding birds; an empathy that allows them to sense what is going on inside that bird's mind. Still, others are so far away from even the most basic understanding of what makes a bird tick that in my opinion they should not be allowed to have birds. These are often the people who obtain a bird simply for self-serving purposes. One guy wanted me to teach him to train his bird to do tricks so he could "pick up more chicks at the beach." Unfortunately, anyone can own a parrot.

Owning a parrot is like driving a car ... anyone can do it. However, free flying a parrot outside is like driving a car in the Daytona 500. It should be reserved for only the most experienced and talented people who have the right equipment. In the case of flying parrots free outside, the equipment must begin with a good working knowledge of behavior modification techniques that are based on positive reinforcement, and a bird that is a confident and capable flyer.

Flying birds free outside is something I can readily discourage. Flying parrots free inside is something that I choose to leave up to the individual parrot owner. However, I will offer the following thoughts. Many parrots enjoy the opportunity to use their natural flight skills. These birds are the ones that have good flight skills and confidence, the ones that can maneuver around corners, change direction in mid air, and make controlled landing each time they fly. These flight-confident birds are less likely to get injured than birds with lesser flight abilities, but they are not immune to accidents. Even the best flyers have drowned in toilets, crashed into exposed windows, gotten hurt landing on hot stoves, or have flown out open doors or off the shoulder of their owner who forgot they were with them. This list of lethal possibilities is probably just as long, or longer, for parrots with clipped wings. For instance, many parrots with clipped wings are stepped on by their human caregivers each year, something that rarely happens to parrots with good flight skills. Even parrots with clipped wings have flown away when taken outdoors. Clipping a parrot's wings does not guarantee that it cannot fly. Plus, a parrot with clipped wings outdoors is still vulnerable to accidents involving cars, dogs, cats, bodies of water, traumatic impact with the ground or other hard objects, etc.

Summary

The debate over whether or not to clip a parrot's wings will likely continue as long as humans keep parrots as pets. There are valid points to consider on both sides of the argument. My hope is that people will consider the health and welfare of the birds, plus their own personal abilities and living situation, when making this very important decision.

I will continue to caution people on the dangers of free-flight parrots and will avoid encouraging anyone to free fly a parrot outside through my books, lectures, or videos. For me, this is the only ethical position I can take. If I include free-flight in a book, lecture, or video it would be similar to giving instruction on sky diving without following up with personal attention. I would have to assume that the person would read the book and understand it enough to be successful. If something went wrong, I would have to share in the responsibility.

I believe most parrot owners are responsible people who want only what is best for their bird. Sometimes this means leaving the bird full-flight, and sometimes this means clipping the bird's wings. The choice is yours to make and your bird's to experience. Let the choice be made with the bird's health and welfare in mind.

The Feather Magnified
By Pamela Clark

The most melancholy of human reflections, perhaps,
is that on the whole it is a question whether the
benevolence of mankind does most good or harm.
Walter Bagehot, 1826-1877

My life has been deeply entwined with the lives of parrots now for over 30 years. I have delighted in them as my companions. As a breeder, I watched in awe and wonder as young African Greys claimed themselves in flight and began to discover their surroundings. As a behavior consultant, I both exult and despair in my attempts to help parrot owners better understand their birds and cope with the challenges they face with them. As a trainer, I felt the accomplishment of teaching parrots to fly freely outdoors and come when I called. In an informal role as a rehabber, I felt the gratification of taking in neglected parrots, teaching them better living skills, and placing them into better homes. And now, as a veterinary technician, I help to heal them when they are ill. And, sometimes I watch them die.

These varied experiences have given me a deep knowledge of parrot behavior and an ever-growing desire to help them live happier and healthier lives in captivity. Many things must change in our care-giving practices before we can feel good about the fact that we have taken these birds from the wild, made them our own, and now breed them and keep them for our own purposes. For, the sad truth is that they are living neither happy nor healthy lives in our world. While many individual parrots are well cared for by their owners, the majority are not. And, improvement is possible in even the best of homes.

I realize that the introduction to this article is heavy hearted. However, the simple truth is that, while my experiences with parrots and their owners have brought me much joy, I continue to grow more troubled daily as I contemplate their plight with us in captivity. In this article, I will address what I see as the primary problems in our common approach to parrot keeping. I will also provide an outline for improvement. It is my deepest wish that readers will come away with a new understanding of themselves and their birds and a renewed conviction regarding improved care.

I began an exploration of this topic in another article titled, "*Caught in the Net: the Self, the Soul, and the Psittacine,*" published several years back. Essentially, topics explored in that article can be summarized in one statement: People often unknowingly acquire parrots as companions in order to meet their own emotional needs. I'd like to now expand on this subject a little further. I believe it is one of vital importance to the future welfare of parrots in captivity. Their quality of life in our world is determined by the manner in which we see ourselves in relationship to them.

First, it is crucial to understand one basic, fundamental difference in perspective that divides parrots from humans. Humans divorced themselves from nature thousands of years ago. All sentient, intelligent creatures have a wide range of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical needs. Physical, or survival, needs must be met first. Living apart from nature in a very "domesticated" lifestyle, humans are no longer primarily concerned with meeting their survival needs.

It has been quite some time since the meeting of these needs had to be our primary focus, as it did when back living close to the earth, depending upon her for food and shelter. Then, just maintaining the assurance of a food supply was a full time job. My hunch is that meeting love, or relationship, needs probably did not loom quite as large in the human consciousness back then. We all only have so much energy. In those times, too heavy a focus on getting love needs met might result in the leaving of a relationship. Leaving a relationship might result in an insufficient supply of food or lack of shelter.

Now however, most of us have a lifestyle that allows us the luxury of focusing more on our emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs. Of the three areas, the need for love and relationship looms largest for most people, in terms of preoccupying our thoughts. I don't know anyone who doesn't have a need to feel loved. In our society, feelings of loneliness, isolation, and being misunderstood rattle us all. Some of us experience them fleetingly, and some of us live with them daily.

This relates directly back to my statement that many people acquire parrots to help meet their own emotional needs. It is our need to fill our longing for love that often is at the forefront of our motivations when a young parrot is purchased. Couple this longing for love with a need to nurture, and you have the basis for every impulse purchase of a baby parrot from a pet store that's ever been made. Sadly however, whereas baby parrots may seem especially well suited to fill these needs, the same parrot five years later has usually "moved on," in terms of his developmental needs, while the owner has not. I will speak more about this later.

This "mindset" we have when acquiring the young parrot, and our focus on "relationship needs," then often leads to problems down the line. It dictates in large part our expectations of our new companion. It colors our observations and our interpretations of his behavior. Such misinterpretations of his behavior then too often serve as the basis for the decisions we make about his care. And then we truly can not see the parrot for what he really is. Unlike us, the parrot is an undomesticated creature, still concerned primarily with "survival" and physical needs.

As Henry Beston wrote in The Outermost House, "*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 splendour and travail of the earth."

Truly, in our present practice of keeping parrots as pets, we see only the feather magnified…and the whole image in distortion. We assume them to be brethren. We see them as underlings. What we must learn to see is their autonomy, their presence in our world as *other nations*. Then, and only then, will we do our best work with them.

I first saw this with the greatest clarity when rearing African Greys. In the beginning, I knew of them only by what others had said. They were described as "nervous," "sensitive," "clumsy," "neurotic." The first year of breeding, I allowed them two weeks of fledging and flight before clipping their wings so that they could go to new homes. With each successive year, I allowed longer periods of flight, until in my last year, I did not clip wings at all. I sent all babies home that year fully flighted, having never experienced a wing clip, and trained to fly to their owners on command.

That experience was a revelation. I saw with clarity that most of what is written about parrot behavior applies only to clipped birds, and is not true at all when it comes to describing true parrot behavior. I realized that almost nothing written to date about African Greys was true at all. Today, living with a flock of six, flighted African Greys, I can describe them as bold, curious, opportunistic, loving, funny, determined, playful, investigative, destructive, clever, quick…and extremely coordinated. Truly, they are "other nations"…creatures with a wealth of intelligence and resources.

Let us return now to my assertion that we err when we purchase a parrot with our own emotional needs in hand, and proceed to focus on our "relationship" with him when caring for him. Such a focus often leads directly to the day when the parrot loses his home.

I will give you an extreme example. More than one individual has commented to me that her bird was her "soul mate." While this is often announced with pride, it is a statement that makes me squirm. *Soul mate*. That's a term that carries a heavy burden, if applied to an undomesticated species relatively new to captivity. Parrots are not exactly well-suited to this role, in my opinion, and I suspect that a single parrot could be profoundly unaware of his "job" in such a relationship.

I remember reading as a teenager Linda Goodman's Love Signs. I was lonely and emotionally needy, searching for a relationship that would "fill me up." I searched the text in this book for information, for clues as to how to find the right love relationship, and I happened upon the words "soul mate." They leaped off the page at me, and I was instantly alert. I wanted a soul mate. If I had a soul mate, I would be happier and life would be much better. I knew instantly that finding a soul mate was the answer.

Many years later, having achieved a measure of emotional maturity, I came to understand that this is more likely to occur if one is in possession of and has a familiarity with one's

own soul, and has learned to meet one's own emotional needs. I do believe also that, should a soul mate appear (and I'm still waiting…), it is likely to be a same-species relationship. Simply put, I get nervous when we expect a parrot to meet our own emotional needs. A single bird given this weighty job is almost sure to fail in one way or another.

Consider, for example, the all-too-common phenomenon I often describe as the "lover's triangle." This occurs primarily in homes with cockatoos, although sometimes Amazons are the unwitting victims.

Many are drawn into cockatoo ownership when they first meet the baby Moluccan. It is gratifying to hold such an exotic animal, have him place his huge, peach-colored head on our shoulder, and relax into our human chest as we stroke those soft feathers. Such possession of the wild…of the exotic…is quite beyond anything ever visualized or previously experienced. It makes us feel very special. For those of us who might be a little lonely or a little needy, the experience is intoxicating and compelling. For some, it may even be enough for us to regard this creature as a soul mate. We hold him on our lap while at the computer. He sits on our shoulder as we fold laundry…a soft, exquisite, reassuring feathered presence, reminding us we are loved. A *very* strong bond forms.

However, it is the very differences in perspective held by parrot and human, which we examined earlier, that allow the two to reach entirely different conclusions about that bond while it is forming. The domesticated human is reaching the conclusion: *soul mate,* while the undomesticated parrot is reaching the conclusion: *mate.*

In the majority of such cases, wherein this conclusion becomes part of the picture, such a peach-colored head usually is a young head when this relationship first forms. And, as most of us know intellectually, a young parrot behaves quite differently than a sexually mature parrot.

Such intellectual knowledge seems not to prepare the owner, however, for the day when the beak attached to the peach-colored head suddenly and unexpectedly bites deeply into the flesh of the forearm in response to the mere entrance into the room of the other person who lives there. It's a shock. It hurts our feelings. We search our thoughts for some reason. What did we do to deserve that? Nothing, we are fairly sure. This behavior often then escalates to the point where the cockatoo attacks and bites the other partner. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases the "other" human was not the one fondest of the parrot in the first case. Sometimes, not fond at all. Now, having to endure surprise attacks in one's own home from a creature of whom you are not fond seems to be more than many people want to deal with. Very sadly, this situation usually results in the bird's losing his home.

In our culture, "pets" are not as important as people and we have a whole slew of clichés which still, unfortunately, dictate decisions in some of these cases. "A man's house is his castle" seems the most fitting. Of course, few utter these words any more, but behind them is a rather strong tradition allowing for the issuing of dictates to others in the home.

Many parrots, well-loved by the woman in the home, are given up because of pressure from her partner. This occurs most often in these cases where a "lover's triangle" has been allowed to form.

If we are to be successful with parrots in captivity, and prevent the frequent "giving up" of companion parrots, we must realize the folly of placing "relationship expectations" upon them. It is time to take a step back and review our thinking in many areas related to parrots. We must again revisit and take to heart the truth that they are not domesticated, while we are, and explore the full ramifications of that. For, other problems also exist in the way we see and relate to our parrots.

I have observed that, once proof of an exotic specie's intelligence is irrefutable, we then proceed to sentimentalize that species and immediately want to "possess" the experience of being close to it. This has happened with dolphins and the latter are now subjected to having to "swim" with humans. I doubt a little if this was what dolphins had in mind for themselves as their next evolutionary step. They get no choice in the matter, however. They are ours for training and entertainment.

And so it is with parrots now. Parrots are dynamic and exciting pets, offering us a previously unexplored companion animal experience. We sentimentalize them, attributing our own emotions to them. We expect them to be "in relationship" with us, and to behave in ways that are consistent with the unspoken relationship rules we set up for them. Further, because of our unrecognized differences in perspective, we misunderstand their needs, misinterpret their behavior, and focus on *pleasing* them. This leads us to stray far from good parrot keeping standards, which leads directly to the development of behavior problems.

I did a consultation this past year with a wonderful woman. She and her husband have three parrots, all of whom were having problems of one sort or another. Her macaw engaged in repetitive behaviors that were loud and disturbed the family dog. This same bird would not come out of her cage. Both the cockatoo and the grey showed aggression through biting and engaged in feather abuse.

This woman and her husband were distressed by the problems they saw in their parrots. She contacted me because she could see that her parrots were not happy and was thinking about giving them up. She believed that she did not have enough time, because of her job, to care for them properly. We proceeded with the understanding that I would help her to examine her care-giving practices, advise her in ways to improve them, and then help her place the birds if, in fact, she found that their care was beyond her capabilities. My hunch when she first contacted me was that she felt the care of her birds was beyond her simply because she did not fully understand what those needs really are.

Before we started, I asked her to tell me what she would do for her parrots to make them happy if she had all the time she needed. Her response was quite revealing and consistent with what I have said above. She told me that, if she had the time to take really good care of them, she would spend between one and two hours a day with each of them.

She was focusing only upon their social needs, and this had allowed her to remain unaware of the manner in which their other needs were not being met. Together, we made changes in diet, environmental enrichment, and learning opportunities. Three months later, she happily reported that the repetitive behavior of her macaw had almost died away completely and she was now beginning to come out of the cage with some encouragement and training. The other two looked better and were growing in new feathers. The biting had decreased, as well. Further, the changes we made demand of this client *much* less time spent on a daily basis then she had envisioned, when she guessed what it would take to produce happy parrots. She has no further thoughts of giving them up and no longer feels guilty when she looks at them.

We also misinterpret our parrots' behavior because of our focus on relationship and our tendency to see only *the feather magnified.* The example that comes to mind is the owner who described to me the ways in which her parrot helps her clean. She reported to me that, when she scrubs the carpet, her African Grey also gets down on the floor and digs with one foot. When she wipes down the cage, he rubs his beak up and down the bars. He mimics her cleaning efforts because he is her "soul mate."

My own interpretation of these observations would be based upon greater familiarity with African Grey behavior. I feel concern about a parrot rubbing his beak up and down the bars of the cage. Not only might this expose him to ingestion of cage materials over time, but more importantly this could be a good indicator of a bird who is bored out of his skull and needs more to do in his cage. Further, many greys dig with their feet. This is instinctive behavior and is usually associated with sexual maturity. I simply have a hard time believing that parrots come to us out of the wild with a desire to help us clean. I don't care how bonded they are to us. If we are interpreting these behaviors in such a way that they flatter us, we are likely to encourage them… to the parrot's detriment.

We strive to *please* our parrots and make husbandry decisions accordingly. This observation was the basis for one of my previous articles, "*But He Doesn't Like It!*" In making suggestions for how to improve diet and environment, I am often met with protest by clients who assure me, "Oh… but he doesn't like vegetables." "He doesn't like showers." "He's afraid to ride in the car." These clients honestly believe that the reactions they observe in their birds when new things are introduced should dictate future care decisions.

Because of our focus on social relationships, we have a need to please. If our parrot doesn't seem to *like* vegetables, but really *likes* peanut butter-filled pretzels, guess which way the parrot's diet will evolve? Human nature being what it is, the parrot may get one pretzel a week in the beginning, but may well be getting a pretzel or two a day after several weeks. The majority of parrots in captivity suffer from malnutrition, and this is one of the reasons why.

I hope that these few examples are enough to elucidate the problems and convince readers of the fact that we have taken a rather profound wrong turn when it comes to

providing for our parrots in the home. It is essential that we take a step back and view our parrots a bit more dispassionately. We must recognize that they are complex, intelligent animals with a range of needs. *All* of these needs must be met if they are to have an adequate quality of life. Their need for social relationship is only one of those needs and it must be provided for in good balance with their other needs.

What are a parrot's basic needs? I will assert that, since they are only a few generations out of the wild at most, parrots still have a primary focus on basic survival and physical needs – the need for a high quality, appropriate diet that insures optimal health, the need to forage for food, the need to be busy, destroying things with their beaks, the need for social interaction and expression on multiple levels, the need to bathe, the need to exercise, the need for adequate rest, the need for safety, the need for fresh air and sunshine, and the need to learn new things.

I encourage all who live with parrots to adopt what I have come to think of as a *zookeeper's approach* to providing for them. I'm sure that any good zookeeper working with parrots enjoys them and even loves them. However, he recognizes that his responsibility to them is the most important thing, more important than any relationship he might have with any one of them. If we place ourselves in relationship to our parrots in this manner, then we don't worry so much about what our parrots "like." We don't worry so much about being rejected by them and we don't get our feelings hurt by their behavior. Instead we focus on our responsibility to understand and provide for their needs in the most excellent way we can. This, I will point out, is a *selfless* endeavor.

It is not within the scope of this article to provide a complete guide for parrot care. However, I will touch briefly on each of the areas of need I have listed above, in order to provide some ideas that I do not see widely recognized in much of the current literature on parrots.

First, parrots have a need to forage for their food, in addition to their need for appropriate nutrition. This need is not addressed by the current, widely-accepted, recommendation that we feed a pellet-only diet. Certainly, pellet-based diets are a vast improvement over seed-based diets, in terms of nutritional content. Each of my parrots has a dish of pellets, and I consider them invaluable in terms of achieving optimal nutrition for my birds. While many have been resistant to eating pellets, I have found ways over the years to get them into the diet of each of my parrots in one way or another.

However, they do not address a parrot's need to forage and make food decisions. I believe it essential that the parrot in captivity be provided daily with a chopped "salad" of fresh, raw foods that provides variety and food making decisions, as well as appropriate nutrition. In order to do this without too much trouble, I have long used a layered salad recipe for feeding my birds that requires chopping vegetables and fruits only once a week. This recipe can be found in the article "*But He Doesn't Like It*!" and is available at www.parrothouse.com.

I also question whether a pellet-only diet offers *appropriate* nutrition in all cases. I will not argue that parrots who eat only pellets enjoy superior feather quality and good health. However, they do sometimes exhibit behavior problems that I believe are directly attributable to eating such a nutrient-dense diet. Further, their plumage does not display the florescence of color obvious in parrots who also consume a variety of raw foods.

Pellets, especially the more processed varieties, lack certain classes of nutrients, including essential fatty acids, enzymes, and phytonutrients. Further, as mentioned above, some species do not thrive when fed such nutrient-dense fare 365 days a year. Having such a high-protein, high-fat diet in front of them each day sometimes leads to louder, more aggressive, behavior, especially in large cockatoos and macaws.

Jamie Gilardi, director of the World Parrot Trust, at the 2002 *Companion Parrot Quarterly* convention reported that studies of large macaws in the wild reveal that their diet contains approximately 29% fiber. Undoubtedly, this is true for most species in the wild, since they forage on plant materials as the basis of their diets. Parrots in captivity eating a wide variety of fresh, live, raw foods, in addition to pellets, not only reveal feather color and quality that is superior, but they also demonstrate steadier, calmer behavior. They reveal excitement when receiving their salad dishes and engage themselves throughout the day in important foraging activities. Such provisions go a long way toward meeting the standard of environmental enrichment that a good zookeeper strives for.

Parrots have an intense need to be busy, and it is the beak that is often the tool they use for this. They must have an adequate supply of "destroyables" in the cage. I have read a thousand times that owners should rotate toys. In my experience, I can rotate toys every day and it does not encourage my birds to be busy. My parrots take one look at the newly-rotated toy and play with it for about five minutes before returning to ignoring it. However, they will spend an hour tearing apart a well-constructed food skewer. My African Grey feather-picker, Catherine Sophia, never learned to play with toys in her first home, but she will spend all day shredding the pages of a paperback book I have placed through her cage bars. Every parrot should be patterned, i.e. trained, to expect a new project every morning and they should receive one that will keep them busy for at least a portion of the day.

Parrots are exquisitely social creatures and benefit from having a variety of relationships on many different levels. The quality of their most-enjoyed daily interactions has gone largely misunderstood, however. The majority of owners with whom I talk assume, because of their familiarity with their own emotional needs, that parrots want large blocks of time close to us or in direct communication with us. This misunderstanding has occurred because of our practice of keeping our parrots with clipped wings. A clipped parrot truly can not relate socially in a normal way.

When you observe a flock of flighted parrots, you will see that they enjoy most engaging in very brief social interactions. Trickery often plays a large part in them and the tone of these interactions is playful. If we strive to replicate this sort of interaction with our

birds, we can keep them happier than if we carry them around on our shoulders all day or have them sit on our laps for hours.

Now that my parrots are flighted, they take equal initiative in instigating social interactions. My grey, Marko, will fly to my shoulder, flip upside down yelling "whee!" and then fly off again. Zorba will fly over to Puffin and they will briefly "beak tussle" before one of them leaves to find another perch. This is very typical behavior for parrots. Parrots do not usually spend large amounts of time sitting next to one another unless they are engaged in breeding and rearing young.

Even with clipped parrots, owners can focus on providing social interactions that have the same quality to them. Frequent, small bits of attention are greatly appreciated by companion parrots and go a long way to insuring more balanced relationships with them.

Parrots can not enjoy good health without frequent bathing opportunities. This area of care, next to diet, is the one that seems to distress owners the most, in that they are reluctant to inflict upon their birds an experience that appears not to be enjoyed. However, parrots can and should be *taught* to at least tolerate bathing. Different parrots enjoy different bathing styles. My Goffin's Cockatoo, Topper, does not enjoy a shower in the house. However, he will hang upside down and flap happily when outdoors in an aviary in the rain. It is the responsibility of all owners to find ways to bathe their parrots that work for them. It is not okay to "wimp out" in this area. This is merely a training issue.

Parrots need to exercise and it is critical that owners really appreciate what constitutes exercise. When doing a consultation, I usually ask the client to complete a behavior questionnaire beforehand. When asked to describe how the parrot exercises, I often receive the explanation that he climbs around his cage. This is equivalent to saying that I exercise when I walk down the hall. Parrots need *aerobic* exercise to insure the greatest emotional and physical health.

Allowing flight is the most obvious way to provide for this need. This is not possible in many homes, but should be considered at least as a possibility. For a complete discussion of this topic, please refer to "*Feathers, Flight and Parrot Keeping*" which can be found at www.parrothouse.com. For those who can not allow flight, there are other ways to exercise a parrot aerobically. I taught my Blue and Gold Macaw to step onto a yard-long rope, stretched between two hands, which I would then swing from one hand causing him to flap his wings. Also, many parrots will be more athletic when outdoors in a larger enclosure.

Parrots, as prey animals, have a fundamental need to feel safe in their environment. Sadly, I have often observed owners discounting a startled parrot's response by stating, "He's so neurotic!" Many things that *we* take for granted will startle or scare our birds. We need to take their reactions seriously and find ways to make them comfortable in our homes. Cages should not be placed directly in front of windows, allowing the greatest visibility and exposure. Raptors *will* stare at companion parrots through windows.

We must protect our parrots from needless scares. Keep the helium balloons *out* of the house – no birthday celebration is worth badly scaring your bird. Make your friend take *off* the baseball hat before walking into the room. Leave a nightlight on at night and close the blinds so that headlights won't sweep the room when least expected. Be considerate of the fact that these *captive* parrots of ours have no choices when clipped and kept in a cage.

Parrots need fresh air and sunshine outdoors in an enclosure *that provides for physical safety*. This is not optional and it is not refutable. Think, for instance, how you would feel if told that you had to spend the rest of your life indoors …that you could never go outside and look at a tree, hear the sound of running water, or feel the sunshine on your skin or the wind in your hair…ever again. And yet, the vast majority of parrot owners do not ever consider seriously the expense of providing a large outdoor enclosure that also allows the bird to feel physically safe.

Nevertheless, countless parrot owners report the practice of taking their bird outdoors on their shoulder or to sit in a tree. *Do not do this!* Even if you do not recognize the very real danger from the presence of raptors, your parrot does. I have talked to more than one owner who watched as her bird was carried away by a hawk…the same parrot that had sat on the perch at her side a moment before.

To insure for safety and a sense of security, the aviary should have wire spacing that is no wider than ½ inch by 3 inch. At least one-half of the roof should be covered by a material that provides shade, in addition to protection from the eyes of predators. Size contributes to feelings of safety as well.

Parrots need to move about when outdoors. They need the freedom to move in or out of the sun, to be visible or to hide. As I have written before, parrots understand about enclosures and space. They will flap and move about more in a larger enclosure. Any outdoor aviary should be at least six feet wide. One of my favorites is six feet wide, four feet high and three feet deep. It stands up on legs and allows for plenty of room for even my large macaw to bathe and move around. There are many styles available and every parrot owner should budget for this expense as a necessity and research the many types available before selecting one that best meets his needs and those of his parrot.

Lastly, parrots have a profound need for learning opportunities, as any intelligent creature does. The often-voiced protests from owners to recommendations such as those above reflect most parrots' lack of learning opportunities in their early years. The best and truest statement I ever heard spoken is, "*Parrots are what you make of them*." If a young parrot is fed a diet of variety that includes fresh foods and pellets, then he will *like* those things when he gets older. If he is provided with destroyable objects when young, he will keep himself busy when older. If he is bathed when young, he will not resist the experience when an adult. If he has been allowed to enjoy the outdoors when young, he will continue to embrace the experience without fear when he grows up. If he is allowed

flight when young, he will learn to avoid dangers in the house and will exercise freely and joyfully when older.

Because of their genetic programming, parrots have a drive to learn everything they can about their environment in their early developmental periods before maturity sets in. After the reach adulthood, they automatically react with suspicion to anything new because of their status as prey animals. Thus, the learning opportunities afforded to a young parrot will directly determine the quality of his life during his entire captive existence. The length of this developmental period differs according to the size of the parrot. For smaller birds, such as cockatiels and conures, it lasts approximately a year to 18 months. For Amazons and African Greys, it lasts between two and three years. For larger macaws and cockatoos, it can last between three and five years. I oppose the purchase of a baby parrot by anyone who is gone from the house for more than nine hours a day and can not allow the parrot at least three to four hours out of the cage each day.

An older parrot that shuns fresh foods, displays fear of being outdoors, cringes when bathed, sits in one place all day, and avoids new things placed in the cage simply never had enough appropriate learning opportunities when young. However, that older parrot still *needs* learning activities. It is not acceptable to acquiesce and maintain the parrot's status quo offering the excuse that he doesn't *like* those things. Instead, the owner should learn more about training techniques and work with the parrot to teach him to accept these experiences and enjoy them. It is not as hard as it might seem at first glance.

Further, the majority of behavior problems will resolve when the owner steps into the role of trainer or teacher, and increases learning opportunities. I encourage any parrot owner to learn about and implement clicker training with his bird, teaching perhaps some "stupid bird tricks," in addition to teaching the parrot to enjoy new experiences. Such learning contributes hugely to a parrot's quality of life.

It is time that those of us who enjoy the presence of parrots in our homes stop placing relationship expectations upon them and instead treat them like the *other nations* that they are. Just enjoy them and provide well for them and let that be enough. See it as a way of honoring the parrots in the wild…as well as "the wild" itself. Stop requiring that parrots always show us affection and never react with less than that. Accept the truth that our own feelings of affection for our birds will come and go throughout a long life with them. The same will be true for them. This does not dispel our responsibility *to* them.

This recognition of our responsibility to provide *selflessly* for *all* of the needs our captive parrots have mirrors the same responsibility we have to wild parrots, of which we must remain cognizant. Our experiences with our companion dogs and cats do not call us to consider a higher level of responsibility, due to the fact that their link with the wild has long since been erased by centuries of domestication. However, parrots are not domesticated and their habitat is being destroyed with each passing day…. I assert that it is critical to our spiritual development as humans that we work to honor *the wild* in any way we are able.

Barbara Kingsolver wrote, in her collection of short essays titled Small Wonder, about some friends who had visited Cancun. They were dismayed at the devastation of the forested area that was becoming evident. Kingsolver reports that her friends, wanting to preserve something of that remarkable place, brought back with them some orchids they had collected.

Kingsolver comments, "*I admired their enterprise and empathized with their heartbreak at seeing delicate, rare lives crushed. And yet if it had been my choice to make, I think I'd have felt uneasy at the prospect to profiting in any way – even just aesthetically – from the destruction of a sacred place. Maybe I'm wrong about this, or maybe there really is no right way to look at it, but my heart tells me it's better to grieve the whole loss than to save a handful of orchids. Better to devote oneself to anger and bereavement, to confront the real possibility that soon there will be nowhere left to go, anywhere, to see an orchid in the wild, than to derive a single iota of pleasure from these small, doomed relics of a home that's forever gone. Anger and bereavement, throughout history, have provided the engine for relentless struggles for change. In a greenhouse these orchids will flourish awhile and then, after a few years or many, die. A jungle is a form of eternal life, as ephemeral and enduring as the concept of love or mystery. It can not be collected."*

And yet…that is just what we have done. We have collected our prizes… our greys and Amazons and cockatoos. We keep parrots, who naturally have the exuberance and energy of flighted creatures, in cages with their wings clipped to inhibit their movement…for nothing more than our own pleasure. As Kingsolver states, perhaps there is no right way to look at this. And certainly, I am not suggesting that we return our parrots to the wild. Nor am I suggesting it is wrong to keep them in cages and enjoy them. I am suggesting, however, that we do so consciously and with compassion and with respect.

…and with recognition of the fact that we owe a debt to parrots…those in our homes…and those in the wild. Accepting this and taking action upon this truth will make us better caregivers in captivity. It will serve to prevent us from taking for granted the feathers in our homes and help us also to remain aware of the need to ever search for better ways to provide for them in captivity, as well as preserve them in the wild.