

The Need for Rescue and Sanctuary in the 21st Century

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Introduction:

Exotic birds, predominantly parrots, are the fourth most popular “pet” animal in the US, ranking after dogs, cats and freshwater fish.

The Avian Welfare Movement was born during the last decade to address the issue of the increasing number of homeless, long-lived exotic birds.

With 76 million “baby-boomer” Americans soon to retire, the problem of unwanted and/or homeless birds will dramatically increase over the next ten to fifteen years. (1,2,3)



Photo: Jerry Buley - 2006

There are between 10.1 and 16.6 million exotic birds kept as pets in the United States. (5,6) While the number of companion parrots kept in the US has slightly decreased since the mid 1990's, increased longevity due to medical and dietary improvements will increase the need for multiple homes during the bird's lifetime. The average age of "pet" birds has risen in all age categories over the past 4 years. (1,5,6,7) The number of homes currently keeping parrots as companion pets has grown from slightly over 5 to 6.1 million house-holds, with 36% of these households keeping more than one bird. (5)



According to HSUS, of the 164 million cats and dogs currently living in US homes, 6-8 million animals (4-5%) will end up in shelters this year. Half will be destroyed due to lack of homes. (1,4)

Therefore, if the statistics for cats and dogs holds true for birds, there is a need to rehome 404,000 - 505,000 (4-5% of 10.1 million) or 664,000-830,000 (4-5% of 16.6 million) birds annually. No statistical information is available of the numbers of birds being destroyed at shelters or in veterinary offices at this time.



With 3% of retired US couples' households caretaking birds, 4.5% of "older" (i.e. "baby boomer") couples households with birds, and another 2% of single person "older" households with birds the need for re-homing birds is expected to increase with the aging population. (5)

If 3% of the 76 million “baby boomers” live with one or more exotic bird, over the next 10-15 years, as this aging population needs to rehome their parrots due to death, personal illness, financial decrease, death of a spouse, moving into smaller quarters, or the simple desire to free oneself of the responsibility of caregiving, the avian community will need to find placement for +/- 2.28 million birds (based on one bird per “baby-boomer,” bird “owning” household.)



Unfortunately, the often heard “reasons” for relinquishment will also still apply. People find birds too destructive, time consuming, loud or expensive.

They give up their birds due to new jobs, new spouses, and new babies. (10)

In a recently conducted study, the National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project, 779 respondents including Avian Welfare and Rescue organizations, individuals, breeders, pet stores, veterinarians, accepted a total of 5,391 relinquished birds in the calendar year 2003. (9)



This table shows the number of participants NPRRP had in their survey and how they were classified.

User Group	Count
Individual (not affiliated with any of the groups below)	455
Parrot Welfare Organization	85
Humane Organization	53
Breeder	47
Veterinarian	41
Foster Care Provider	41
Bird Club Representative	38
Parrot Behaviorist	9
Store	8
Zoo	2
Total number of respondents = 779	

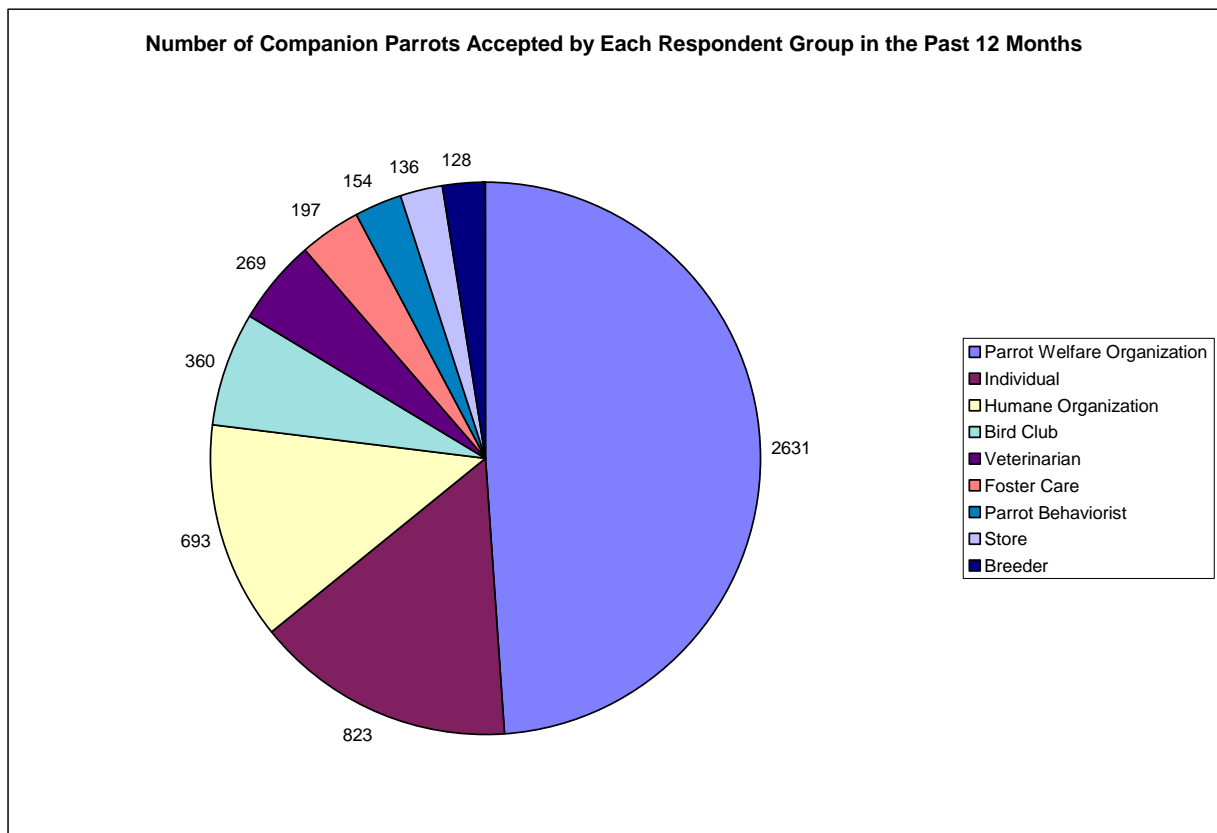
Of these 5,391 birds, 2631 (49%) were accepted by adoption programs and sanctuaries.

An additional 693 birds (13%) were accepted by Humane organizations.

Only 264 (5%) of the relinquished birds were accepted by the “pet trade” i.e. breeders and pet stores.

An additional 5% (269 birds) were accepted by Veterinarians.

In this study, it appears that Avian Welfare and Rescue organizations are the fail-safe for the majority of birds needing placement.



National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project

With the birth of the Internet in the early 1990's, there was an increased ability to exchange information about the plight of captive parrots in the US. At that time there were few adoption programs and/or life-care facilities that did not breed birds or provide birds to breeders.

The expansion of the Internet made more people aware of parrot overpopulation, the need for secondary homes and other venues for permanent placement of these long-lived and complex animals.

In 1997 The Oasis Sanctuary became the first organization to receive tax-exempt status (501 (c) (3)) from the IRS as a "life-care" parrot sanctuary. (10)

Over the next few years, new organizations joined the nascent Avian Welfare movement.



The early leaders included PEAC (San Diego CA) The Gabriel Foundation (Colorado) MAARS (Minnesota) and Tucson Avian Rescue and Adoption (Arizona)

Today a Google search for "avian rescue" on the Internet brings up over 1.3 million hits. (11)

The Oasis Sanctuary receives emails and telephone calls daily, asking for help with the placement of between 1000 and 1500 parrots a year. This is a growth of 200% from less than 500 birds needing placement as recently as 5 years ago. (10)

The vast majority of the birds that The Oasis hears about can find new homes through adoption programs. These birds are referred to programs across the country. However, many adoption programs have long waiting lists due to lack of foster homes, and /or funds for care. There are an increasing number of birds who are not suitable for adoption due to age, infirmity, aggression, or other asocial behaviors.

60% of the birds taken in by The Oasis Sanctuary come from adoption programs or veterinarians unable to find homes. Life-care organizations in particular need the Avicultural community to take responsibility and help provide funding for the on-going costs of care for birds who will live 20-80 years.

Standards for care are being established with the help of organizations such as the American Sanctuary Association (ASA), and The Association of Sanctuaries (TAOS) as well as the input from the Veterinary community.

The greatest need in order to insure the survival of the Avian Welfare programs and that the continuing safety-net for this increasing number of animals is in place, is awareness and funding.

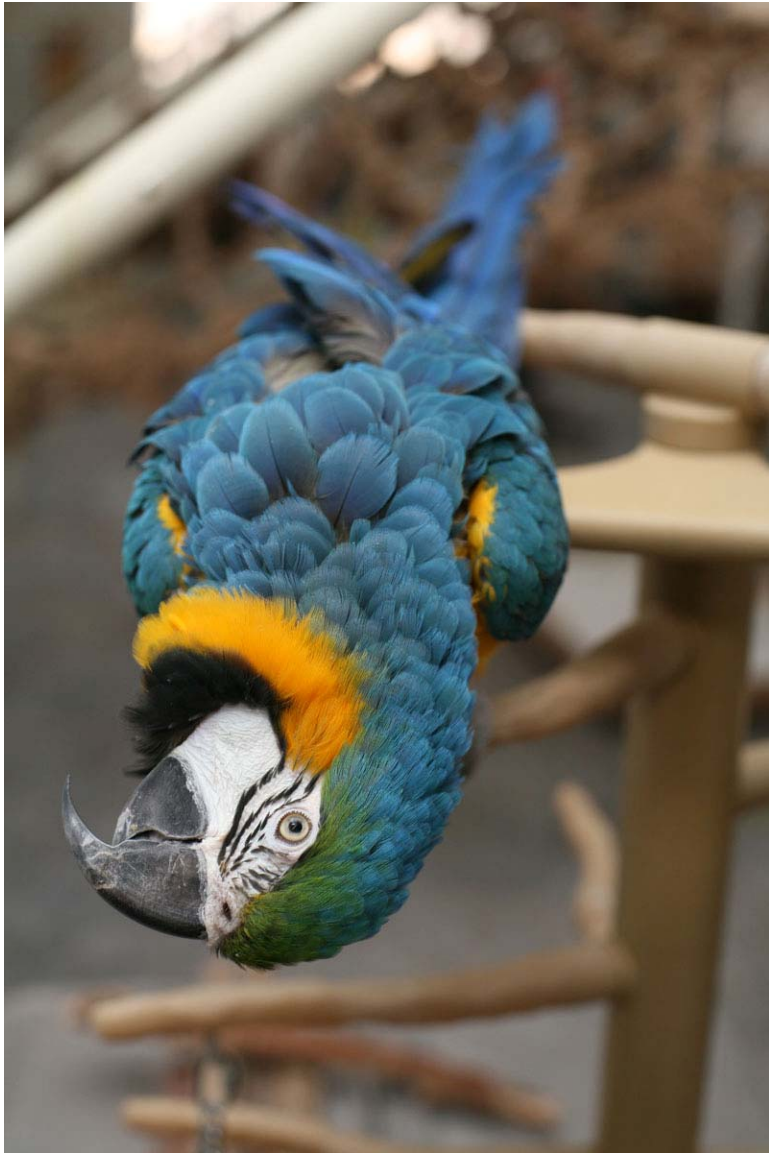


Photo: Jerry Buley 2006

(Note: The Oasis Sanctuary also hears from breeders attempting to find placement for elderly or non-productive breeding birds. Breeding birds, birds in zoos, entertainment or educational venues, do not find their way into AVMA or APPA statistics of "birds in homes.")



Photo: Jerry Buley – 2006

Conclusion:

With large numbers of long lived parrots in the homes of an increasingly older US population, the need for rehoming of birds has been established. The Avian Welfare fills a much needed niche by rehoming or providing life-care for many birds in the US. To avoid the mass destruction of many thousands of these intelligent animals, we must be ready for the anticipated additional influx of birds.

The assistance of the Veterinary community, working with the public as educators, and as a resource providing medical care and financial resources to the rescue groups in their communities, is urgently and immediately needed.

If the Veterinary community does not wish to find itself involved in “euthanizing” large numbers these birds we all love and care for within the next 10-15 years, they must begin to help now. Only by supporting bona fide adoption programs and sanctuaries, enabling them to build their infrastructure to support rapid growth and development, can a catastrophic scenario be avoided.

This support must be provided through direct financial aid. Simple things such as collection jars for a favorite group or donations to a facility in the name of a clients deceased companion are helpful. Education of the public is as simple as the dissemination of literature to clientele and the encouraging them to help *today* so that the facility can help their beloved parrot in the future.

Summary:

Parrots are one of the most popular “pet” animals in the US as well as among the most long-lived. If birds are to avoid the fate of six million cats and dogs annually, the avian community must support the newly established Avian Welfare organizations.

The Internet has brought into clear focus the overpopulation problem of exotic birds. To insure a safety net for birds, especially as the “baby boomers” become unable to continue care for their animals, the Veterinary community’s help is required.

With “baby boomers” aging, and parrots living longer, healthier lives, more placement options will be needed over the next 10 to 15 years.

The Veterinary community is asked to help educate and provide resources to insure that the +/-16 million birds in US households do not meet the fate of unwanted cats and dogs.

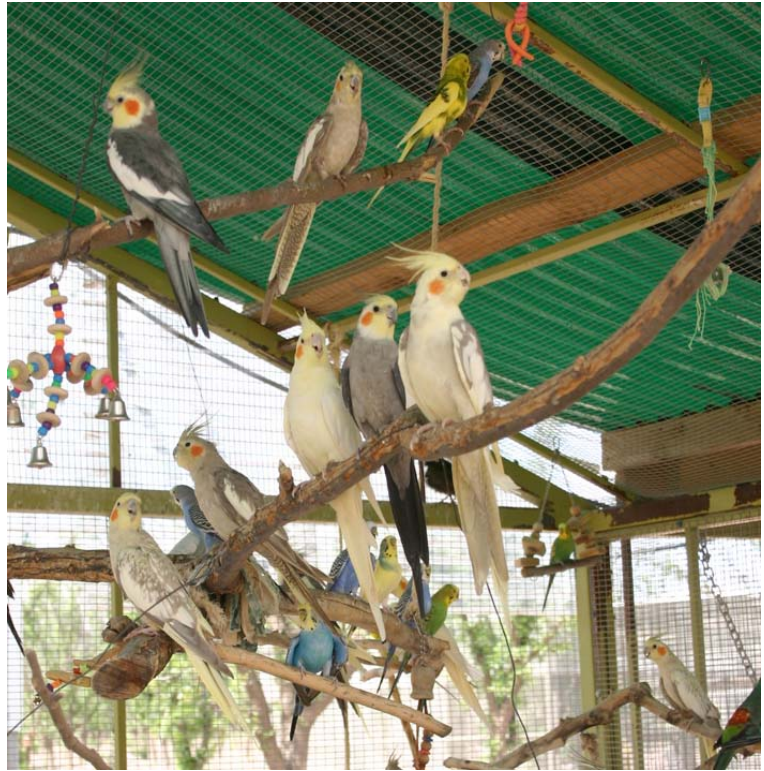


Photo: Dave Chrono - 2006



*Photo:
Jerry
Buley
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