

A Red-tailed Tropicbird is perched on a light green branch. The bird has a black cap, a bright red breast, and green wings. The background is a soft-focus green forest.

Unusual Victims: Pet Birds

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Presenters & Contributors



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Dr. Anthony Pilny is a graduate of the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine. He completed an internal medicine and surgery internship at Florida Veterinary Specialists in Tampa, Florida and a residency in Avian and Exotic Pet Medicine and Surgery at The Animal Medical Center in New York City. He is a diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners certified in Avian Practice since 2005, and currently serves as vice-chair for the maintenance of certification committee.

Dr. Pilny has lectured nationally and internationally about avian and exotic pet medicine and has published numerous scientific articles and book chapters on birds and other exotic species. He also served as an adjunct professor at LaGuardia Community College where he taught avian and exotic pet medicine to prospective veterinary technicians for eight years. Dr. Pilny is a member of the Association of Avian Veterinarians, Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians, Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians, and the Southern California and American Veterinary Medical Associations. He currently serves as the National Medical Director of the House Rabbit Society and serves on the advisory boards of The Avian Welfare Coalition and One Earth Conservation.

Agenda

- Introduction
- Overview
- Laws
- Abuse of Birds:
What Does It Look Like?
- Case Study
- Resources and Additional Materials



The Big Problem

Opening Remarks

Much is known about standards of care for domesticated animals such as dogs, cats, and horses.

Numerous resources for evaluating their welfare exist to aid humane enforcement officials and prosecutors in identifying cruel treatment and bringing cases to trial.

Little is known or available to prosecutors and humane enforcement officials on non-traditional 'pets' and undomesticated animals such as birds, reptiles, and other exotics.

Moreover, these animals suffer in ways not often recognized as mistreatment or neglect but which may, in fact, violate cruelty laws.



Birds And Cruelty Laws

State cruelty laws generally cover birds, usually through very broad definitions of “animal”

- **CA:** “every dumb creature”
- **NJ:** “the whole brute creation”

Sometimes more specifically:

- **AZ:** “a mammal, bird, reptile, or amphibian”

But the laws are not always equal opportunity guardians.

- **AL** provides for higher felony provisions for certain acts involving dogs and cats only.
- **AR** doesn’t include birds in its provisions regarding torture, which apply only to dogs, cats, and horses.
- **IA** has a separate prohibition on the abandonment of dogs and cats only. There have been numerous cases involving abandoned birds so you will want to know if your state covers that situation.



**What
Constitutes
Cruelty?**

**What
Constitutes
Neglect?**

In **AR**, a person commits a misdemeanor for, among other things, knowingly failing to supply an animal in his or her custody with a sufficient quantity of wholesome food and water or with adequate shelter. What constitutes a sufficient quantity of wholesome food or adequate shelter for a parakeet? For an African Gray parrot?

In **AZ**, a person commits cruelty to animals if he or she, among other things, intentionally, knowingly or recklessly fails to provide medical attention necessary to prevent protracted suffering to any animal under the person's custody or control. Conditions necessitating veterinary attention that would otherwise result in "protracted suffering" in dogs or cats are generally evident to most people.

***But what does that
look like for birds?***



Other Laws

You may become involved in cases that have a federal component. This is most likely to involve wildlife trafficking and the Endangered Species Act, the Wild Bird Conservation Act, and the Lacey Act. Breeders of birds for the pet trade technically are subject to the federal Animal Welfare Act, but the US Department of Agriculture has failed to promulgate standards.

Besides addressing cruelty and neglect, 27 states (and DC) have set humane care standards for pet stores; 11 regulate breeders and dealers (though generally they don't set humane care standards); and 6 set minimum care standards applicable to commercial operations and private owners. Only CA restricts the sale of unweaned baby birds.



How Are Birds Different?

- **Many have very unique captive care requirements**
 - Too complex for most pet owners?
 - Thus, is this neglect?
- **Ability to recognize pain and suffering**
- **Is the lack of routine veterinary care abusive?**
 - Many do not seek help unless an emergency
- **Veterinary knowledge base, experience, and quality as an expert**
- **Only animal capable of flight**

What Makes It Cruelty?

When minimal care standards are not met under current law:

- ✓ Enclosures
- ✓ Food & Water
- ✓ Temperature and ventilation
- ✓ Lighting
- ✓ Signs of illness and distress
- ✓ Handling
- ✓ Sanitation
- ✓ Environmental safety
- ✓ Disease risk to persons and other animals

What is Cruelty?

EVALUATING THE **FIVE FREEDOMS**

1 Freedom from Hunger & Thirst

By ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor.

2 Freedom from Discomfort

By providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

3 Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease

By prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

4 Freedom to Express Normal Behavior

By providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

5 Freedom from Fear and Distress

By ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Note On The Veterinarian's Role

Since animal victims cannot testify, it is up to the veterinarian to establish the cause or nature of the injuries or death, the severity of the animal's injuries or illness, and the duration of the animal's injuries or death (e.g., was death instantaneous or protracted?).

Also, proving and describing the extent to which the animal suffered or experienced pain or harm at the hands of the suspect or defendant is essential to supporting the elements of a crime. Since only the veterinarian can answer these questions, he/she is the **most important witness** in prosecuting animal cruelty and neglect.

A physical examination of the animal by a veterinarian and a written report of her findings are necessary in all criminal cases involving animal cruelty and neglect.

Parrot Facts



intelligent
sensitive
unpredictable



**Largest Population
of Captive “Wildlife”**

4th

most popular companion animal

?

M

F

Lack color dimorphism
for gender determination

352

recognized species
of parrots worldwide



Not domesticated –

physical and behavioral needs of
birds bred in captivity remain intact

Parrot Facts cont.



More threatened and endangered species than other families of birds

High metabolic rate,

Body temp around

105°



Routine spay/neuter not readily available



Few legal protections – should fall under **Animal Welfare Act** but no specific regulations!

Longer life expectancy than other pets



Prey animals –
flight or fright response

- Survival instinct is to exhibit fear and may show aggression
- May mask illness or injury

Commonly Kept Species



Passerines

canaries, finches

Psittacines

budgies, cockatiels,
conures, macaws,
cockatoos

Columbiforms

pigeons, doves

Wildlife

Pet chickens



Welfare In Captivity

- **Increased interest and concern for parrots in captivity**
- **Better understanding of biology and behavior**
 - Aids in assessment of welfare
- **Significant aspects of behavior denied in**
 - Flight, foraging for food
 - Social interaction, flocking
 - Breeding, chick rearing
- **Serious welfare and conservation challenges**

A close-up photograph of a blue parrot with a bright red beak, perched on a metal bar. The parrot's head is turned slightly to the left, and its eye is visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus yellow and orange. A white-bordered box on the left side of the image contains the text "What makes it cruelty to birds?".

**What
makes it
cruelty
to birds?**

Evaluating Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness



Parrots and other exotic birds often suffer in ways not readily recognized as mistreatment or neglect.

The following signs – ***both visible and not so visible*** – may indicate that the physical condition of the bird and the surrounding environment warrant further investigation or intervention...

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Environment

Conspicuous Signs:

- Housing too small to allow birds to move freely about, to hop, jump, or fully extend their wings in all directions
- Overcrowding: birds unable to roost without physical contact or harassment from other birds
- Inappropriately sized perches, or no perches at all
- Perches, cage bars, and grates encrusted with feces, mold, and debris
- Rotting food or lack of food appropriate to the species
- Contaminated water, or no water at all
- Unsanitary cages; excessive moisture or dust; presence of insects, including maggots, flies, or roaches

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Environment cont.

Conspicuous Signs:

cont.

- Exposure to toxic fumes, chemicals, or strong odors, or to lead or other hazardous materials
- Exposure to extreme temperatures (below 50° F or above 95° F), rain or drafts; lack of shade from direct sunlight
- Lack of ventilation
- Live or dead rodents in or around cages
- Dead birds (these should be removed for necropsy)
- Excessively bright lighting, insufficient natural or artificial light

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Environment cont.



**Conditions found during
bird seizures:
Ulster County, NY,
and Houston, TX.**



Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Environment cont.

Less Conspicuous Signs:

- Excessive Confinement
 - Kept in cage 24/7
 - No access to out-of-cage exercise
 - Barren cage
 - No access to free flight in a safe area
- Lack of Socialization
 - Isolated from like-species companionship
 - Kept alone without human contact

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Environment cont.



^ Macaw pair found hidden in basement during seizure of hoarding case in Ononoco, MN.



^ Abandoned Cockatoo found in a Bronx, NY park.

A white cockatoo is perched on a black metal cage bar. The bird has its crest feathers raised and is looking towards the left. A colorful, multi-colored toy is attached to the cage bar near the bird's feet. The background is a soft, out-of-focus orange and yellow gradient.

Signs of Stress

- Excessive screaming or repetitive alarm calls
- Extreme silence
- Sleepiness or withdrawal
- Fearfulness or cowering
- Self-injury, feather picking
- Stereotypic behaviors (pacing, thrashing, or biting on cage bars)
- Aggression, hissing

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness — The Bird

Signs of Discomfort, Stress, or Fear

- Repetitive, functionless behaviors: pacing, biting on cage bars, head bobbing, constant rocking back and forth, or walking in circles
- Excessive vocalization: screaming, repetitive chirps, or alarm calls
- Unbroken silence
- Fear behaviors: cowering, crouching, trembling or lunging; thrashing against the cage bars
- Apathy or excessive sleeping; lack of motion
- Attempts to retreat when approached by a casual observer
- Aggression towards people or other birds
- Hyperactivity and anxiety; hissing, panting; fanned tail, wings held away from body, or raised head feathers
- Injury, feather destruction, or self-mutilation

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Bird cont.

Signs of Neglect

- Overgrown beaks or nails
- Ragged, soiled, or missing feathers
- Dull or matted plumage; darkened “bars” on feathers (often a sign of malnutrition or prolonged stress)
- Abrasions, calluses, ulcerations; broken or missing toenails; swollen joints; unhealed wounds; eye damage



^ Self-mutilating Cockatoo.
Medical attention is required.

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Bird cont.

Severe skin condition >



< Overgrown beaks and nails



KNEMIDOCOPTES – scaly face and leg mites >



Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Bird cont.



Birds experiencing any of the following conditions, or any combination of these symptoms, require immediate medical attention

Signs of Illness or Injury

- Respiratory distress: difficulty breathing, gasping, or excessive wheezing or sneezing; prolonged open-mouth breathing with tail bobbing accompanying each breath
- Discharge, redness, or inflammation around nasal area, eyes, or mouth
- Protrusions or wet or soiled feathers around bird's bottom
- Injuries: open wounds, sores, animal bites
- Excessive scratching, irritated red skin, scaly lesions, or missing feather patches (possible signs of lice or mites)

Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Bird cont.

Signs of Illness or Injury

- Lethargy or extreme physical weakness
- Fluffed up feathers, shivering
- Vomiting, or gagging to expel
- Bleeding, skin lacerations, swelling or masses
- Lameness or dragging a wing or a leg
- Inability to perch or walk
- Bloody, bright green, or extremely watery or formless feces; yellow, rusty brown, tarry black, or malodorous
- Protruding bones
- Lying prone at the bottom of cage or enclosure grasping on cage bars to maintain balance
- Distended or bloated abdomen (coelom)

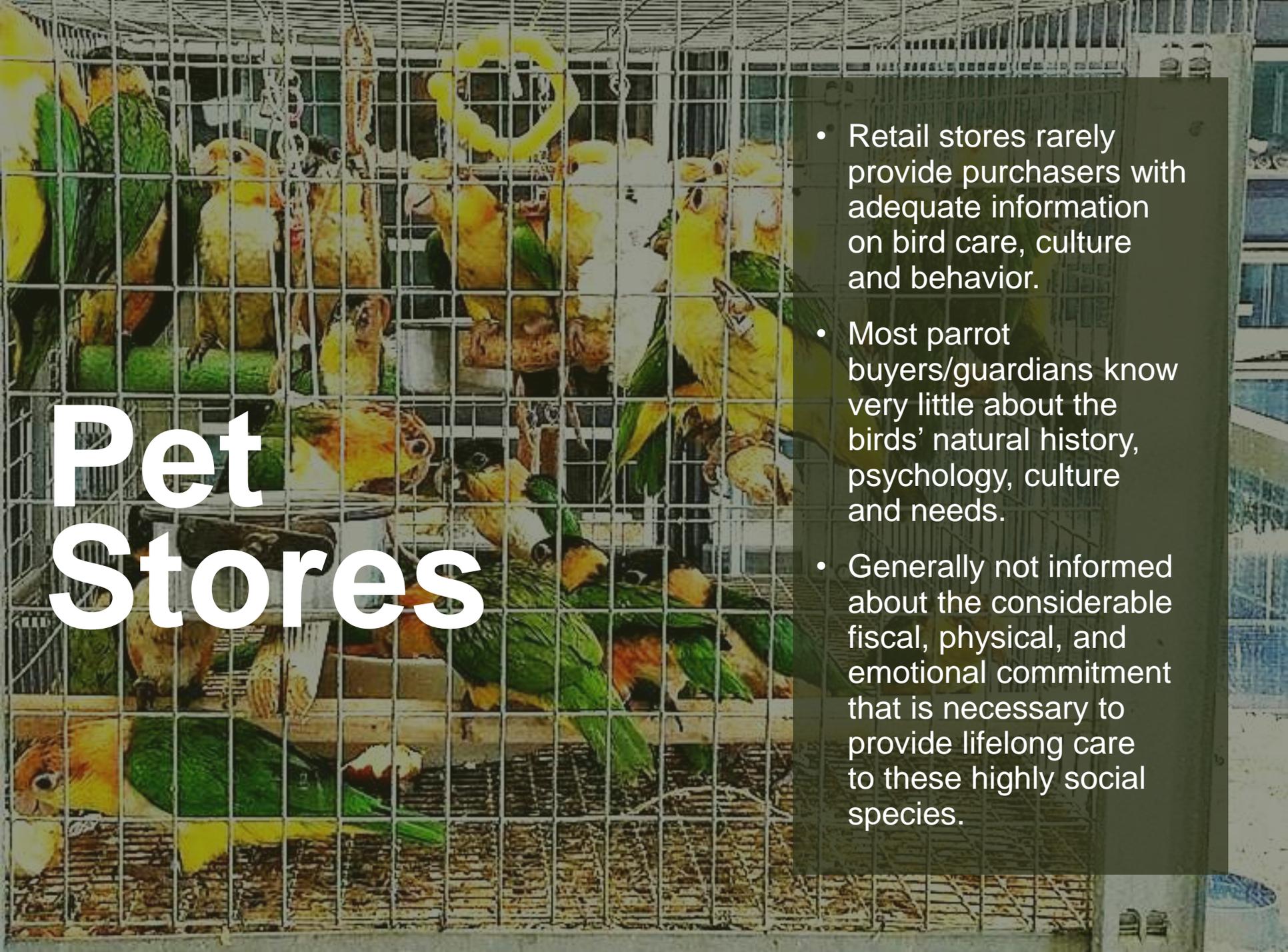
Signs of Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness – The Bird cont.



^ Critically ill bird



^ Paresis (partial motor paralysis) from heavy metal poisoning



Pet Stores

- Retail stores rarely provide purchasers with adequate information on bird care, culture and behavior.
- Most parrot buyers/guardians know very little about the birds' natural history, psychology, culture and needs.
- Generally not informed about the considerable fiscal, physical, and emotional commitment that is necessary to provide lifelong care to these highly social species.

Pet Stores

Pet shops typically sell parrots with little or no training of prospective caretakers, and place an emphasis on the sale of juveniles or un-weaned babies because a parrot's "pet quality" is highest prior to reaching sexual maturity.

Common problems associated with captive birds in retail stores include:

- ✓ Overcrowding, all-seed diets, constrictive cages, lack of environmental enrichment
- ✓ Lack of veterinary care, disease testing and origin documentation
- ✓ Sale of un-weaned birds and lack of adequate exercise



The “Weston House of Horrors”

- **NYC Exotic pet store owner and breeder**
 - Considered an expert in this field
 - Model store owner/employer
 - Started a conservation fund and effort
- **Called one of the worst hoarding situations ever experienced by responders and investigators**
- **224 neglected and dead animals found**
 - 153 birds taken to local rescue group
 - Extreme filth, horrible stench
 - No water or food, no running water at the property
 - Dead animals in cages with live ones - “deplorable conditions”
- **Could face \$1000 fine and year in prison based on convictions**
- **Sentence: Mr. Kopulous must attend weekly therapy and meet with a psychiatrist every month and can't get arrested. If he abides by those rules for 2 years, his charges will be dismissed.**

CASE STUDY – The “Weston House of Horrors”



Links

- https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2016/09/30/he-was-known-for-rescuing-animals-now-hes-accused-of-starving-hundreds-of-exotic-pets-to-death/?utm_term=.4b03303d5d8d
- <http://fox61.com/2016/10/24/court-docs-describe-horrific-scene-where-224-neglected-dead-animals-were-found-in-weston/>
- <http://fox61.com/2016/10/12/weston-man-arrested-after-224-neglected-and-dead-exotic-birds-reptiles-found-in-home/>
- <https://themonstersamongus.com/2017/04/07/update-on-daniel-kopulos/>

Resources

- **Gresham man accused of neglecting scores of birds, leaving them wallowing in feces and waste**
http://www.oregonlive.com/gresham/index.ssf/2016/10/gresham_man_accused_of_neglect.html
- **Iowa City man who owned neglected birds charged**
<http://www.1630kcjj.com/pages/23188539.php?rand=550730142>
- **He was known for rescuing animals. Now he's charged with animal cruelty.**
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/amhtml/news/animalia/wp/2016/09/30/he-was-known-for-rescuing-animals-now-hes-accused-of-starving-hundreds-of-exotic-pets-to-death/>
- **Hundreds of birds seized from abandoned Solon property. Authorities still deciding whether to file charges.**
<http://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/public-safety/johnson-county/hundreds-of-birds-seized-from-abandoned-solon-property-20171212>
- **“The man accused of nearly beating a talking bird to death last Thanksgiving was found guilty Friday.”**
<http://www.greatfallsribune.com/story/news/local/2015/08/21/jury-deliberating-great-falls-bird-abuse-case/32148297/>

Avian Law & Care Resources

Information related to current laws governing captive birds in the U.S.

- Avian Welfare Coalition Law Resource Page:
<http://www.avianwelfare.org/laws/index.htm>
- Downloadable Guide to Evaluating Bird Abuse & Neglect
<http://www.avianwelfare.org/laws/BirdAbuse-NeglectGuide.pdf.pdf>
- Avian Advocacy – A Special Report by the American Anti-Vivisection Society
https://issuu.com/aavs/docs/aavs_av-magazine_2016-1_birds
- Current Law and Suggested Approaches to Improving Captive Bird Welfare
http://www.bornfreeusa.org/b4a2_birdwelfare.php
- Summary of State Laws Relating to Birds in Pet Shops
http://www.avianwelfare.org/laws/StateLawMaps_BIRDS.pdf
- There Ought To Be A Law – Webinar Presented in Partnership with Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riGM2r7JqAY>
- Summary of State Laws Relating to Birds in Pet Shops
http://www.avianwelfare.org/laws/StateLawMaps_BIRDS.pdf

Information related to the care of birds in shelters

- Avian Welfare Coalition Shelter Outreach Resource Center:
http://www.avianwelfare.org/shelter_outreach.htm
- Avian Webinars
<http://www.avianwelfare.org/webinars>

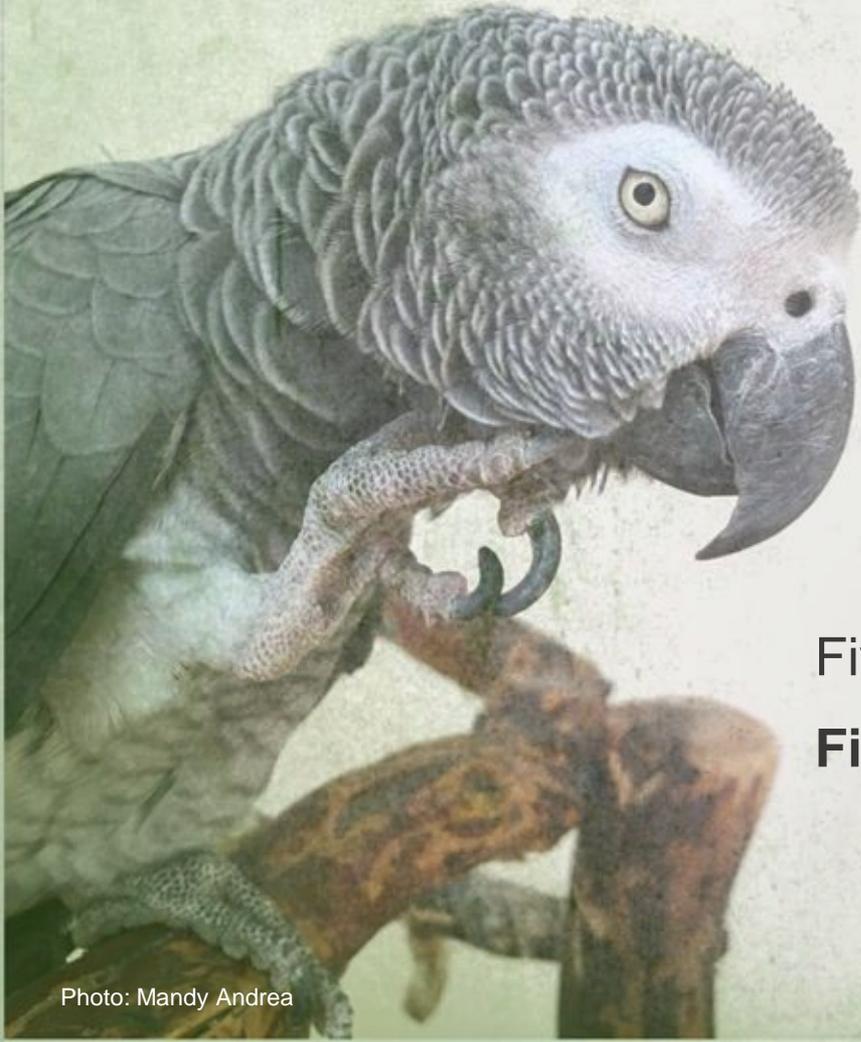


Birds in Captivity

Can captive environments truly serve their needs?

The effects on people and the environment

Suitable Pets?



Schuppli and Fraser developed a framework of suitability as pets*

Three main criteria:

1. Welfare of the animal – enhance their lives
2. Welfare of others (humans, other animals) – improve owner's life
3. Welfare of the environment – no risk or potential harm

Five categories for pets to fall into

Five Freedoms are part of this assessment!

Welfare of the Animal

1. Is there adequate knowledge of the species with respect to:

- nutritional requirements?
 - health care?
 - environmental requirements for physical and thermal comfort?
 - recognizing/preventing negative states: fear, pain and distress?
 - requirements for exercise, social interaction, and natural behavior?
- If there is adequate knowledge of the species' requirements, might the owner still have practical difficulty in providing:
- suitable food?
 - veterinary services?
 - an environment that meets the animal's needs regarding comfort, psychological welfare, exercise, social interaction, and natural behavior?

Welfare of the Animal

2. Is the animal's size:

- so large when mature that the owners may not be able to accommodate it?
- so small that the animal might easily be injured?

3. Is the life expectancy so great that the owner may lose the commitment or ability to provide care throughout its life?

4. Is there any appreciable risk of suffering, injury, illness, or death arising from:

- procurement?
- transportation?



^ “Lola” 60+ years old. Large parrot species often outlive several owners.

Welfare of Others

5. Is the animal poisonous or venomous?

6. Is there any appreciable risk of the animal attacking or injuring:

- humans?
- other animals?

If a risk of injury exists, can it be made acceptably low by selecting safe individuals or by proper management?

7. Is there any appreciable risk of the animal transmitting disease to:

- humans?
- wild or domestic animals?

If a risk of disease transmission exists, can it be made acceptably low by finding safe individuals free from the disease(s) or by proper management?

Welfare of Others

8. Does the animal have objectionable characteristics (eg. noise, odor, uncleanliness, unruliness, destructive behavior) that can prove unacceptable to:
 - the owner?
 - the community?

9. Does the animal have other characteristics (eg. solitary, sedentary or nocturnal nature) that may cause the owner to lose interest and commitment?

Environmental Risk

10. Is there any appreciable risk of the animal causing ecological damage if it escapes or released?
11. For species that exist in the wild, are trade and transportation subject to adequate regulation and enforcement?
12. If there is ongoing wild capture, is there any appreciable risk that capture might have undesirable effects on native populations and ecosystems?

If a risk of disease transmission exists, can it be made acceptably low by finding safe individuals free from the disease(s) or by proper management?



^ Quaker parrots (AKA Monk Parakeets) are among several parrot species that have established wild populations in the U.S.



Photo: Nik Borrow

Suitability?

- **Categories of animal species classified according to their degree of suitability as companion animals:**
 - Categories A – E defined
- **Category E:**
Species that are unsuitable as companion animals because of undue harm or risk of harm to one or more of: the animal, the owner, the community, or the environment.

***Unfortunately, parrots
fall into this category!***

Minimizing Stress

Enrichment

Housing Considerations

- Quiet, safe area or separate room
- Away from predatory animals
- Birds can interact and be observed

Cage Placement

- Avoid center of room, on floors, or in high-traffic, noisy areas
- Allow birds a view of their surroundings
- Create a privacy area (cage against a wall or partially cover)

Birds may be agitated or startled by:

- Sudden movements, loud noises
- Directly staring at birds; looming over their cage; items hovering overhead
- Brooms, hoses, boxes or objects being moved around the cage and surrounding areas.
- Cleaning appliances and vacuum cleaners

Minimizing Stress

Enrichment

- ✓ Providing a variety of species appropriate toys that encourage foraging, preening, chewing and manipulation of objects can help to alleviate boredom and reduce stress.
- ✓ Opportunities for play, socialization, and bathing or spray baths also help birds to exercise and expend energy!
- ✓ Many birds also enjoy playing games and listening to music or watching TV.



Minimizing Stress

Socialization

- Flock animals—birds enjoy and are comforted by the sights and sounds of other birds
- Do not house unfamiliar birds together in the same cage: birds may become more stressed and/or act aggressively towards one another
- Bonded pairs and birds already living in the same cage can be housed together
- Keep a safe distance between cages to avoid injury
- Birds should not be kept solitary unless for medical reasons
- Provide out-of-cage time only under supervision



Think Solutions



**Time to
rethink the
cage as:**

Total living environments

We are so accustomed to seeing parrots in cages, that we fail to recognize the abuse inherent in overuse of the cage or inappropriately small/restrictive cages.

- ✓ **A place where birds retreat when caretakers are away**
- ✓ **Where birds can choose to go to eat, play or to sleep**
- ✓ **Safety in a shelter or emergency situation or for medical reasons**



Solution

Inspire owners to create a total living environment!

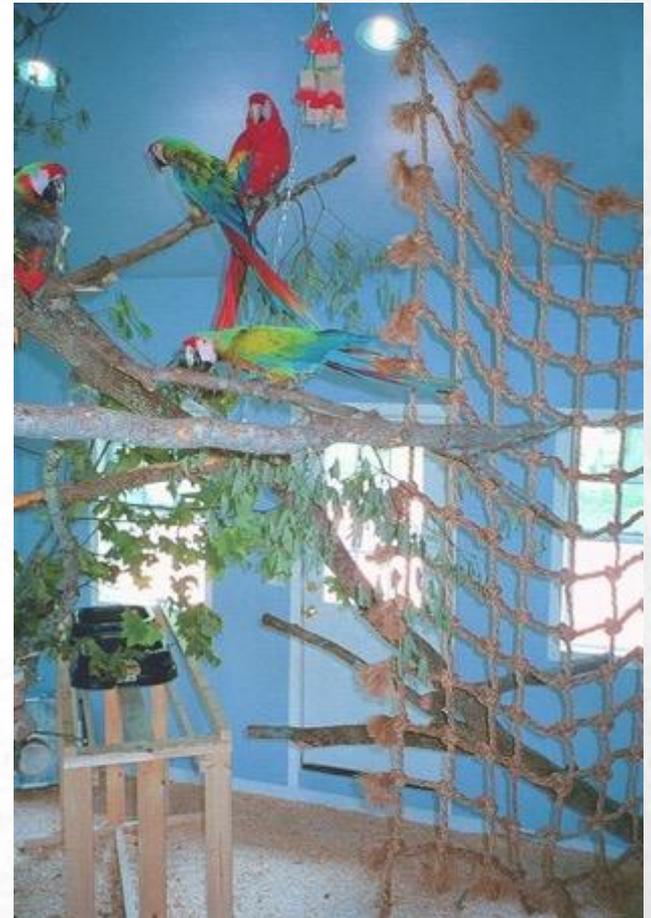
Cages/enclosures large enough to:

- Accommodate wingspan, tail, and exercise
- A variety of perches, toys and food bowls

Living space outside the cage:

- Hanging play frames, ropes and nets for climbing
- Cage-top and free-standing play gyms, t-stands
- Various perching options throughout the house

Solution



Solution Outdoor porch-type environments



Indoor / Outdoor Aviaries



Birds fly.

Its their thing!

Does depriving a bird from flight matter to the bird and keep them safe?

Flight is a bird's most fundamental function and has both a physical and psychological impact on overall avian health

Why people clip wings

- Guardian “bonding” and compliance
- Safety concerns
- Told to do so



Birds Flock

Social isolation has been proven to cause psychological trauma in highly social, psychologically complex animals like humans, elephants, apes, dolphins –

and birds!

**Wired for
connection
to a partner
and flock**



Conservation

1992 Wild Bird Conservation Act

- U.S. banned importation of most species of captured birds
- Most other countries continue to allow trapping and export or import of wild-caught birds, and a significant number of the captive parrots now in homes and rescue programs are wild-caught.

▶ **As a result, parrot species have suffered devastating and irrevocable depletion of populations.**

Habitat destruction, encroachment of human development, indigenous peoples culture, toxins, and consumption of natural resources are partly responsible for the numerous species at risk of extinction.



Recent studies have proven that poaching for the legal and illegal wild bird trade plays a far greater role in the global decline of parrot populations in the wild.



Free To Decide?

Wild-caught and captive-bred birds lack coping mechanisms that may evolve through long-term acclimatization during domestication.

In addition to radical reduction in physical and social activity, captivity prevents what health care professionals consider an essential factor in well-being: agency, or

free will!



Thank you!

We will never replicate the environment that captive birds would experience if they were flying freely in their natural habitats.

Therefore, as their caregivers, we must see to it that they are allowed to perform as many of their natural daily actions and behaviors as possible.

We have an ethical responsibility to provide the best care we can for all birds living in captivity.