Changing the Captive Bird Paradigm
Me every day...
Me every night...

Our goal is to be PART OF THE SOLUTION and not just focus on the problem!
Agenda

- Basic facts about parrots and other captive birds
- Suitability as pets/welfare concepts
- Issues with keeping pet birds
- Conservation issues
Parrot Facts

- Largest population of captive “wildlife”
  - Fourth most popular companion animal
- 352 recognized species of parrots worldwide
- Not domesticated – physical and behavioral needs of birds bred in captivity remain intact
- Lack color dimorphism for gender determination
- Flight or fright response
  - Survival instinct is to exhibit fear and may show aggression
  - May mask illness or injury
Parrot Facts

- Intelligent, sensitive, and unpredictable
- Longer life expectancy than other pets
- High metabolic rate, body temp around 105°F
- Routine spay/neuter not readily available
- More threatened and endangered species than other families of birds
- Few legal protections – should fall under Animal Welfare Act but no specific regulations!
Commonly kept species

- **Passerines** – canaries, finches
- **Psittacines** – budgies, cockatiels, conures, macaws, cockatoos
- **Columbiforms** – pigeons, doves
- **Wildlife**
When you give your soul to help the helpless
you open your heart to pain
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 captivity
  - Flight, foraging for food
  - Social interaction, flocking
  - Breeding, chick rearing
- Serious welfare and conservation challenges
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 owners 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 behaviour?

   - 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 be unable 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?
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 individuals free from the disease(s) or by proper management?
Welfare of others

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

9. Does the animal have other characteristics (e.g. 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 exists, can it be avoided by use of captive-breeding that does not depend on continued wild capture?
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!
The 5 Freedoms

The ‘five freedoms’ of the Farm Animal Welfare Council (1992) have been used to evaluate animal welfare for many species:

- Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition
- Freedom from disease and injury
- Freedom from physical and thermal discomfort
- Freedom from fear, distress and other negative psychological states
- Freedom to carry out most normal forms of behavior
Freedom from hunger...

- Typical cages provide for food and water
  - Most owners vigilant about feeding pets

So it would seem this is met........BUT - - - >

The nutritional requirements must be known and appropriate foods available to assure full health!

- Dietary standards nonexistent
- Nutritional requirements of all species unknown
- Any diet really complete and balanced?
Solution

- Learn the natural wild diet
  - Overall diet generally consists of fruit, seeds, nuts, insects, bark, nectar, and other plant materials
- Highest quality seed mixes
  - Dr Harvey’s, Noah’s Kingdom
- Formulated diets
  - Harrisons, ZuPreem etc
- Fresh foods, fruits and vegetables
- Healthy treats, nuts
- Water always available
Bigger Issue

Standard, commercial seed-based diets alone are nutritionally deficient and should never form the basis of a parrot’s diet.

- What’s healthy for humans is healthy for parrots in most cases!
  - Fresh, unprocessed produce bulk of a parrot’s daily diet
    - Emphasis on fruits, omega 3 & 6 fatty acids, vitamin A rich vegetables
  - Variety is the spice of life!
Freedom from disease...

Existence of adequate veterinary knowledge needed:

- Advancement of avian veterinary medicine
  - Specialty avian practices
  - Board certification
- Only 11.7% bird owners seek veterinary care (AVMA data)
- Most bird owners unwilling to spend for veterinary expenses compared to dogs and cats
- Often seek veterinary help when it's too late
Solution

- Routine veterinary care
- Annual wellness exams
- Preventive medical program
  - Post adoption/purchase screening
  - Quarantine
- Relationship with avian veterinarian, nurses, boarding facilities, specialty stores
- Responsibility as pet owner
Freedom from discomfort...

- Physical and environmental needs must be known!
- Warm-blooded animals
  - Thermal needs similar to most pets
  - Avoid extremes in temperature
- Cage living provides protection, shelter

Only suitable size cage is when bird doesn’t know its in one!
Solution

- Largest cage possible
- Bird room when possible
- Comfortable home temperatures
- Out of cage time with supervision
- Predator-free lifestyle
Freedom from fear...

- Must avoid mental suffering
- Must rely on physical expression of behaviors
- Social relationships critical to survival
  - Predator avoidance
  - Foraging efficiency
- Self-trauma and injury
Solution

- Provide safety and prevent trauma
  - Predators
  - Environmental dangers
- Removal of stressors
- Nests or hiding places
- Location of cage, protection
Freedom to carry out normal behaviors...

- 90% of day spent foraging and preening with partners
- Large social flocks
- Flying miles each day
- Nesting, breeding, chick rearing
Solution

- Never de-flight a bird!
- Allow for social interactions beyond the owner
- Out of cage time
- Foraging techniques
- Provide toys and activities
Research and experience over the past two decades forces us to re-evaluate what we thought we knew about captive birds. It’s time to raise the bar and redefine the accepted standards of care for captive birds.

- Widely accepted industry endorsed standards of poor care actually compromise a bird’s well being and are largely responsible for setting up birds for failure in a home.
- Animal shelter and care facilities, rescue organizations, and veterinary professionals all need to be educated and focused on new standards in avian welfare – and in turn educate bird placement partners and clients.
Reality check

Most people have unrealistic expectations of what’s really involved in living with a highly social, flight-adapted, wild animal

- High relinquishment rates
- Growing number of sanctuaries
  - Many are full!
- Some birds are intentionally set free
- Average bird owned for 2-3 years
- Most common complaint is messiness followed by noisiness
- Incessant screaming leads to neglect and abuse
Some parrot relinquishments are due to changes in the lives of guardians- not issues directly related to parrots.

- Divorce, marriage, new baby or children leaving home
- Moving, loss of home or other family situation
- Landlord restrictions/no pet policies
- Health issues, allergies
- Guardians growing too old
- Death
Watch this!

Parrot Confidential

Meet Lou. Abandoned in a foreclosed home, Lou is one of thousands of parrots in need of rescue.

From the wilds of Costa Rica to suburban America, a lovable, quirky cast of parrots will reveal their unforgettable tales and the bittersweet world they share with humans.

Photo: ArgoFilms
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
Minimizing stress

Environment

- 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
Some things in life are meant to be FREE
Before you adopt a bird

- Parrots bite and chew you and your home!
- Parrots are messy and active!
- Parrots scream, but many do not talk!
- Most parrots won't learn cute tricks!
- Parrots are social and need daily attention!
- Some parrots never bond with humans!
- Parrots need to be served a varied diet!
- Parrots are sensitive to household products!
- Parrot cages, toys, and veterinary visits are expensive!
- Large parrots can live up to 60 years — will you?
Challenges

- Aggression, territoriality, and mate defense
- Screaming
- Social demands
- Flight
- Failure to entertain
- Destructive chewing
- Complicated diet
- Mess
- Longevity
- Household dangers
- Re-homing
- They are WILD!
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 unweaned babies because a parrot’s “pet quality” is highest prior to reaching sexual maturity.
  - As a result, animal abuse and neglect regularly occur in private homes and in retail establishments.

- 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 unweaned birds and lack of adequate exercise
Promote welfare

Pet stores/breeders:

- Enact laws which require humane care of animals in pet shops.
- Ensure that existing pet shop laws include birds as protected animals.
- Ensure that pet shop laws are comprehensive and include provisions requiring: sufficient wholesome food and water, adequate space, ventilation, temperature control, enough hours of light to enable normal animal behavior, humane housing and handling, and veterinary care.
- Prohibit any animal dealer from selling unweaned animals including specific language that prohibits the sale of unweaned birds.
Promote welfare

- Extend laws which apply to pet shops to all bird breeders and dealers.
- Require a license for the possession of exotic birds. Empower animal control officers to inspect licensed premises to ensure that birds are kept in legislatively defined humane conditions.
- Change laws which give authority to euthanize animals which are confiscated from noncompliant parties. Provide instead that wherever possible animals should be surrendered to a sanctuary, humane society or some other organization equipped to house or find homes for confiscated animals.
- Devise model language relating to care, housing, and treatment of birds, which possessors must comply with and introduce the bill as an amendment to the state's animal cruelty statute (assuming of course that the state's animal cruelty statute covers birds).
AWC 5 F’s

BETTER BIRD WELFARE

1. Fresh food – beyond commercial diets
2. Flight – mental well being
3. Fun – toys and games
4. Flock – living with other birds
5. Freshen up - bathing
Issues

Parrots should be purchased/adopted as single pets in order to insure the bond between the parrot and the human?

- Social isolation has been proven to cause psychological trauma in highly social, psychologically complex animals
- Wired for connection to a partner and flock
  - Bonded partners should not be separated
  - The human flock
  - Avian companionship in the home
Think outside the cage!

A parrot requires one hour of out-of-cage interaction time daily?

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

Time to rethink the cage as:
- 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

- Alternative housing
  - Dedicate a room or section of a room
    - Convert a garage or porch
    - Build an indoor or outdoor aviary
Solution
Solution

Converted garage
Solutions
Solutions

Outdoor porch-type environments
Indoor/outdoor aviaries
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
Dangers

Flighted birds are especially prone to these potential hazards in the home:

- Ceiling fans
- Wood burning fireplaces or other open flames
- Open doors and windows
- Clear glass or mirrors
- Buckets or tubs of water, open toilets
Training

- All pets need training
- Social enrichment for birds and owners
- Beyond doing tricks
- More training = less problems
Vacation/Travel

- Domestic travel requires a health certificate
- International travels requires a lot more
- USDA regulations, CITES permits needed
- Diagnostic testing required
- Quarantine protocols
- Medications, parasite tx
Conservation: the sad truth

- Trafficking in rare and exotic wildlife is a global business, worth $20 billion annually.
- Birds are most popular animals sought after for the exotic pet trade.
- Almost a third of the world's parrot species are threatened with extinction due to the combined pressures of habitat loss and collecting for the pet trade.
- The trade in wild parrots seems to be driven by market demand coupled with the large profits to the pet industry and the rural poverty in many countries with wild-parrot populations.
Countries with high demand for legally obtained wildlife are suspected to be the same countries with the highest demand for illegally obtained wildlife. These countries include the United States, Peoples’ Republic of China, and members of the European Union.

Poor to no enforcement of laws continues to be a major conservation challenge, especially where illegal practices are viewed as socially acceptable.

The decline is almost entirely attributed to trapping birds for sale as household pets!
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.
Captive breeding

- Captive-bred and raised parrots are not domesticated animals!
  - They are wild creatures — often only one or two generations removed from their native habitats.
- The role of private breeders and collectors has largely been one of a willingness to collect rare specimens, breed them outside official conservation plans, and then trade, sell, the offspring for self aggrandizement and/or profit.
- Breeding birds in captivity contributes little or nothing to conservation efforts because most captive breeding is done outside official species survival plans or other directed conservation efforts.
- Captive breeding for conservation purposes involves:
  - Setting of target populations, definition of genetic and demographic objectives, allocation of habitat, and coordination with field conservation projects.
  - The vast majority of parrots bred in captivity including those bred in zoos are not involved in these types of programs.
In captivity...

- Wild-caught and captive-bred birds live in environments significantly different from those to which they are evolutionarily and ecologically adapted.
- Captive conditions deviate hugely in terms of foraging, food, sociality, ambiance, sound, smell, and habitat.
- A bird’s ability to successfully adapt to various captive situations depends on:
  - Basic genetic and psychobiological makeup
  - Developmental experience
- “Successful adaption” is a highly relative term because, by definition, all captive situations exceed the types, levels, magnitude, and duration of stress that define free-living environments.
Free to decide?

- Wildcaught 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 healthcare professionals consider an essential factor in well-being: agency, or **free will**!
Let’s do this!

Replacing the demand for birds as "pets" with a demand for preserving birds in the wild will reduce inherent welfare problems associated with captivity while increasing the support of conservation efforts (such as ecotourism that helps local people and protects wildlife) by allowing people to see that birds are more beautiful in the wild.
Changing the world

The rescue of one animal doesn't change the world, but for the animal the whole world changes.
Sincere Gratitude For Sponsorship

www.zoocheck.com
I hope that shelters/rescues will look to the online resources provided at www.avianwelfare.org/shelters as a guide to help ensure the comfort, well-being, and safety of the birds in their care.

For guidelines relating to best practice standards for the care of birds in sanctuary facilities providing long-term care, contact the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries: www.sanctuaryfederation.org

A great parrot conservation and rescue resource: www.oneearthconservation.org
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.