

The Avicultural Journal

CONSERVATION



AACCC

THE AVICULTURAL
ADVANCEMENT COUNCIL
OF CANADA

The Voice of
Aviculture for
Canada



March - 2020



\$5.00

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The Avicultural Journal is the magazine of the Avicultural Advancement Council of Canada
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Cover

At the dawn of a new decade, the AACC has started with a new look for the Journal's cover.

This celebrates AACC's active support of the recovery of the Puerto Rican Parrot after Hurricane Dorian hit Puerto Rico last year, as well as its current support for the conservation of the Red Siskin.

Spring is a great time to inspire preservation of those special birds we know and love like the Blue and Gold Macaw, the Eastern Ontario Shrike.

Karen Faria – Graphic Artist

OBJECTIVES

1. To establish and maintain a national association of interested societies and individuals to promote the advancement of aviculture in Canada.
2. To represent the Canadian avicultural community internationally.
3. To disseminate information on the study and practical application on all aspects of the science of aviculture through the publication of *The Avicultural Journal*.
4. To support recognized expert aviculturists who are endeavouring to breed rare and endangered species to ensure their future preservation.
5. To foster a greater understanding of the proper care and management of pet birds among the general public.
6. To act on behalf of all Canadian aviculturists to assist all levels of government in preparing informed legislation and policy, where required, relating to aviculture; and to assist affiliate societies in similar endeavours on a provincial, regional, or municipal level.
7. To establish standards for the exhibition of birds in Canada, ensure their proper implementation through the maintenance of a national Judges' Panel, and to allocate and sponsor an annual Canadian National Bird Show to provide a large scale comparison of birds bred to these standards.
8. To provide a national identification leg band registry, coding service, and a Canadian source of supply of such bands for affiliate societies.





March 2020

In this edition of the journal, we wanted to focus on the conservation efforts being made by many in Aviculture to propagate dwindling species in the wild. It is important, as Paul Stevens points out in his article for us to be aware of how we can be of help in this area. There are forces at work who would like to harm our hobby because they don't understand what we do. Let's help make them aware, that what we do is helpful, not harmful, to the birds we keep and breed. The more that the public see and understand our birds the more they will be careful with their environment and aid in shaping sensible decisions on its care.

The AACC is always looking to assist in any conservation program where we can be supportive. We did donate to the Puerto Rico Parrot Fund and are actively looking to support the Red Siskin initiative in the South Rupununi, Guyana. We will have more to say of our endeavours, in future journals.

Also, these are troubled times with the spread of COVID-19. Please do your part as requested by the health authorities to limit the damage. Help our elderly in any way they request. It is a good time to stay home and spend time with your birds in this breeding season. Let's hope it all ends soon.

Regards,

Jeremy Faria

The Importance of and Challenges to Aviculture

By J. Paul Stevens

Aviculture is more than a hobby for most bird keepers; it is a way of life. In addition to the great pleasure the birds in our care provide, they also create responsibilities. Aviculturists need to provide proper care for each individual, but they also have a responsibility to manage and sustain the species for the enjoyment of future generations.

As well as pleasure for the bird keeper, aviculture makes available pet or companion birds to the public, thus reducing the illegal trade in birds from the wild. Aviculture provides opportunities for education about different species and conservation alternatives. Aviculture can play a role in the preservation of species at risk by way of the maintenance of a gene bank of rare species and the development of management techniques. Conservation aviculture is a term used to describe captive breeding when the purpose is for conservation. Breeding to establish a population in captivity can safeguard some species while threats in the wild are addressed. Aviculture is necessary for the survival of species that exist only in captivity and essential to reintroduction programs where suitable habitat with adequate resources exists in the wild.

It is difficult to predict with certainty the future status in the wild of some vulnerable species. Therefore, it may be prudent to undertake conservation breeding for these species as a precaution. Also, there are many species not currently threatened, but existing captive populations can be managed as insurance for the wild population. The interesting behaviour or appearance of some species not endangered can also be used in aviculture for conservation education.

If breeding programs are to be self-sustaining, multigenerational propagation is required. In addition to established avicultural techniques, science and technology has made breeding birds easier and more reliable while avoiding inbreeding without relying on wild bird populations for new genes. Breeding programs require a long-term commitment that may also be expensive. Although zoos and research centres often have the advantage of permanence and resources, private aviculturists have considerable expertise and are sometimes better able to dedicate facilities to propagation.

Despite the high level of care provided by aviculturists to birds and the success of avicultural breeding programs, numerous groups are actively campaigning to end the keeping of birds and other animals in captivity. The use of “positive” or “permitted” lists are being promoted to different levels of government by a number of animal rights and activists’ groups with the goal of limiting the number of species kept in captivity by private individuals. The term positive list is confusing since it starts with no species allowed and then a short list of species to be permitted is created. We can see an example of positive or permitted lists in the French speaking part of Belgium where the only pheasant species breeders will be allowed to keep to in captivity are the Golden pheasant and game pheasants. Most other species will be prohibited. Meanwhile in Canada, the Ontario government has enacted new animal welfare legislation. During a hearing for the Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act, several animal rights groups made a united call for a permitted list system restricting the species that may be kept in captivity by private individuals. Adoption of a permitted species system would prohibit most exotic species and make aviculture very difficult.

The Importance of and Challenges to Aviculture (Cont'd)

Keith Chalmers-Watson, Chairman of the World Pheasant Association has suggested that some breeders like zoos may be able to claim an exemption for keeping species not on a permitted list based on their conservation breeding work. However, it is likely that only conservation breeders, who band their birds, keep records and complete annual census forms would be considered for species exemptions if this type of legislation spreads to other jurisdictions like Canada. In Europe, some private breeders, organizations and zoos are trying to reduce criticism by referring to their activities as "Conservation Breeding" and not "Captive Breeding". They are also using the terminology of "Environmentally Protected Breeding Enclosures" instead of "Cages or Aviaries". A Canadian breeder of exotic species informed me that he usually refers to his animals' homes as "habitats" or "enclosures", never "cages". Canadian aviculturists need to consider how we can better present our activities and promote the contributions of aviculture to conservation breeding and education.

Zoos are also sometimes subject to criticism regarding the keeping of animals in captivity. On February 3, 2020 a Councillor on Belfast City Council in Northern Ireland made a motion to close the Belfast Zoo. The Councillor, Conor Maskey claims the caging of animals is unethical and wrong. Belfast Zoo is engaged in many education and conservation breeding programs for rare species. Hopefully the closure of the Zoo in favour of a more financially sustainable theme park can be averted. The motion to close Belfast Zoo comes at a time when the world's zoos are needed to play a greater role in conservation breeding, education and other programs to assist endangered wildlife species. In a recent conservation action statement made by

the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the IUCN, there was a call for everyone involved in species conservation to increase their efforts. The declaration states, "We call on zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums and conservation organizations to scale up their commitment to species conservation". Countries who are signatories to the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change have a commitment to support the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the guidance provided in documents within the framework of the CBD such as those from SSC.

With a greater commitment to conservation aviculture we can help establish sustainable populations in captivity and the wild. No single aviculturist or zoo can manage sufficient numbers of large birds to ensure a sustainable population. If private breeding is to play a significant role in avicultural conservation, programs that coordinate the genetic management for long-term bird breeding needs to include both private and public collections.

Establishing sound conservation breeding programs and education programs to promote other activities relating to bird keeping are ways to show the value of aviculture. The call of the SSC of the IUCN for conservation organizations to scale up their commitment to species conservation includes the Avicultural Advancement Council of Canada (AACC). We need to better educate the general public as well as our legislators about aviculture and also encourage appropriate legislation.

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“Caveat emptor? It means ‘buyer beware.’
Take this parakeet you bought online, for
example.”

Back from the Brink: Saving the Red Siskin

Guyana Chronicle, Nation's Paper

March 2020

Smithsonian scientists use novel genetic approaches to help bring an iconic bird back from the brink of extinction.

Text and photos: Smithsonian's Institute for Biodiversity Genomics



1 Red siskin in Guyana

In Venezuela, the red siskin (*Sporagra cucullata*) is known as el Cardenalito—or “little cardinal”—a tribute to its vibrant colors. This charismatic bird is part of the country’s national identity: It is the official bird of Lara state, the subject of well-known folk songs, and its image appears on the highest denomination currency, the hundred bolívar fuerte note. It is also one of the most endangered birds in the world.

The red siskins’ distinctive red-and-black plumage made it desirable. The feathers and even whole birds adorned elaborate women’s hats and other clothing items in the early 1900s, and it has been a popular caged bird in many countries. Great numbers were captured for the pet trade, and even now trapping continues illegally. But the main reason for its disastrous decline was the popular early 20th-century quest to produce a red canary, causing the red siskin to be trapped almost to extinction to meet the demand of aviculturists who were hybridizing it with domestic canaries.

The red siskin once graced the skies in large flocks across northern Venezuela into Colombia and the island of Trinidad. Now the bird has disappeared in many of these places, and the few isolated groups in Venezuela may number only several hundred individuals. In recent decades, sightings in the wild have been increasingly scarce. That is, until a Smithsonian/University of Kansas expedition traveled to the Rupununi savannas of southern Guyana in 2000 and discovered a previously undocumented population.

That expedition was co-led by Michael Braun, a research scientist in the Department of Vertebrate Zoology at the National Museum of Natural History, and Mark Robbins, collections manager for ornithology at University of Kansas, who first spotted the rare birds. “It was like seeing a ghost,” says Braun. “Ornithologists had pretty much given up on this bird in the wild, outside of a small, local population in far western Venezuela near the border with Colombia.”

Robbins, recollecting the moment of discovery in Guyana said, “Quite unexpectedly, I heard siskins calling as they flew overhead and out of sight. A few minutes later I found the birds, including a male, sitting in the top of trees. When I realized what they were, I thought I must be dreaming.”

Even in their excitement, the researchers realized how extremely valuable these birds would be on the international black market for the pet trade, so they kept the information about their find a close secret while they sought official protection for the red siskin in Guyana. After it was added to the country’s endangered species list and legal protections against trafficking were in place, the scientists were able to publish their findings—without specific location information—to announce the discovery of Guyana’s population of red siskins to the ornithological community. This important discovery attracted the interest of conservationists in Venezuela, who contacted

Back from the Brink: Saving the Red Siskin

Braun about protecting this bird. And from this, the Red Siskin Initiative was born.

The Red Siskin Initiative

Saving the red siskin has become a passion for Braun. He came to the Smithsonian 27 years ago to start a molecular genetics laboratory for the Institution, but also because he has always been interested in the biodiversity of the tropics. For his entire career, he has been involved with museum collecting and biodiversity documentation. Now, in addition to his work in genetics, he spearheads the Red Siskin Initiative, a multifaceted conservation effort to bring the bird back from the brink of extinction.

The Red Siskin Initiative is an international partnership of public and private institutions that aims to protect the population in Guyana and restore sustainable populations in Venezuela through reintroduction. The Smithsonian's participation is significant, hosting the project coordinator position and drawing on expertise from Smithsonian scientists at the National Zoo, Conservation Biology Institute, Migratory Bird Center, Tropical Research Institute and National Museum of Natural History.

Project coordinator Brian Coyle explains: "It's such a comprehensive effort—it includes habitat protection, captive breeding, sustainable agroforestry, education and community involvement, plus a cutting-edge genomics aspect that's really exciting. It can serve as a model project for modern conservation."

Guided by Genomics

In many ways, genomics will guide conservation efforts. Because extensive breeding efforts with other species like canaries have created numerous hybrid birds, it is important to be able to identify birds that look like red siskins, but have mixed ancestry, and exclude them from captive breeding programs for reintroduction. Critically small populations are also prone to inbreeding, with the associated health concerns. Genetic

methods can gauge relatedness among potential mates to prevent inbreeding and ensure success of breeding efforts.

The first step is to assemble a whole genome for the red siskin. By combining short-read and long-read DNA sequence data, a novel hybrid-assembly approach developed by scientists at the University of Maryland, they expect to produce one of the highest quality genome assemblies of any bird.

Armed with the red siskin's whole genome, plus low-coverage shotgun sequencing of nine other wild individuals from Venezuela and Guyana, researchers can develop molecular tools to identify hybrid birds, prevent inbreeding, find markers for genetic disorders or disease, and understand the genetic differences between the two populations. The latter has become immediately relevant; preliminary data indicates that the two populations are genetically diverged to an extent that they will probably need to be managed as separate populations, and not bred together, in order to maintain evolutionary distinctness of each population.

The project is also working with Jesus Maldonado at the Smithsonian's Conservation Biology Institute to extract DNA from museum specimens collected in the 19th and early 20th centuries across Venezuela and the Caribbean. These samples are critically important to understanding past genetic diversity and population structuring that will help inform future conservation management.

Jesus Maldonado says, "Our group at SCBI has played a big role in the development of 'ancient DNA' technologies to extract, capture and sequence DNA from old museum specimens. DNA from these ancient specimens gives us a more complete picture of how the red siskin has changed genetically over space and time."

Back from the Brink: Saving the Red Siskin

Protection in Guyana

Guyana's red siskins are found in a remote area of about 70 by 100 miles. Since there seem to have been no known threats to this population prior to its discovery in 2000, monitoring and protection may be sufficient to sustain this population without additional external breeding efforts. However, habitat protection remains a priority, especially with the recent introduction of industrial mechanized agriculture to the area and the increasing frequency of fires in the savanna.

The main partner in Guyana is the South Rupununi Conservation Society. Many of the founding members of SRCS were guides and assistants to the Smithsonian expedition that discovered the red siskin population in 2000. "We have raised awareness of the bird in local communities, stopped its capture by local caged-bird traders, and guided many visiting birdwatchers to their first sightings of this exceedingly rare bird," says Chung Liu of the SRCS. "Our experiences have been invaluable in understanding the feeding habits and behavioral patterns of this minute and rare bird."

Researchers from the Smithsonian, SRCS and collaborating organizations have been conducting field studies to define the population size, density and distribution. SRCS has been collecting blood samples so that the Smithsonian can assess genetic diversity and viability, and they are also banding birds for future studies. Recently, the project has been collaborating with the Environmental Protection Agency–Guyana and Bird Life International to develop strategies for red siskin habitat protection that include establishing an Important Biodiversity Area.

In Guyana, efforts are focused on nurturing a culture of community pride and support for protection of the red siskin through training in conservation research and administration for volunteers from communities in the Rupununi region, promoting sustainable economic opportunities like eco-tourism and shade coffee, and developing a variety of environmental education programs for Amerindian schools and villages.

A Teachable Moment

The red siskin is a high profile, charismatic, endangered species, and saving it will generate knowledge and awareness that can be translated to other threatened species.

"It's a teachable moment," says Braun. "This bird is endangered because too many of them were harvested without regard to what the natural population could sustain. And that lesson then translates to many, many other aspects of how humans use and interact with their environment, such as overfishing, clear-cutting of forests and overdependence on fossil fuels."

"We hope to have success at reintroducing the red siskin and recovering it to the point where it doesn't need intensive management," continues Braun. "It can be an example of wise use of the environment so that people understand that we need to pay attention to all aspects of how we're using the environment in order to sustain the biodiversity and ecosystem services that we take for granted."

Puerto Rican Parrots Successfully Released into El Yunque National Forest as Recovery Efforts Continue After Hurricane Maria



Rio Grande, PR —Feb 11, 2020 — Thirty Puerto Rican parrots (*Amazona vittata*) were recently released into El Yunque National Forest as part of a collaborative effort to help re-establish populations of this endangered species back into the wild. Hurricane Maria, which devastated the entire island in 2017, was particularly destructive in El Yunque resulting in significant loss of wild parrots in the Forest.

Following the hurricane, agency personnel from the US Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service have been working together on recovery efforts in El Yunque by conducting assessments of parrot populations, making improvements to aviary facilities and restoring habitat for the parrots in the forest. Parrots at the Iguaca Aviary in El Yunque have been breeding with record numbers of eggs and chicks produced post hurricane.

The recent release of parrots in the Forest will help re-establish a second wild parrot population on the island and has been designed to reduce the risk of impacts from future hurricanes or other threats. Habitat improvement projects in the Forest include installing artificial nests, observation platforms, and planting trees to improve nesting habitat and provide food. Agency employees have

worked alongside partners, contractors, volunteers and local and off-island youth conservation crews to support these recovery efforts and the release of captive reared parrots into the wild.

The US Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service along with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources have collaborated on long term parrot recovery efforts to re-establish populations of this endangered species in Puerto Rico for over 40 years. The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources also manages captive and wild populations of Puerto Rican parrots in the Rio Abajo State Forest in northwestern Puerto Rico.

Current populations island-wide are estimated at approximately 500 for both captive and wild parrots. The overall goal of the collaborative recovery program is to establish viable populations of wild and captive parrots, so the species is no longer listed as endangered.

Editor's Note:

Thank you to Heather Rosen for providing this update on our donation to this organization.

Should Zoos or other facilities Keep Animals Captive?

by *Chris Biro*

Keeping animals in captivity provides back up populations for struggling wild populations, allowing us to breed and release from these populations. But these captive populations do much more than this. They also provide opportunities to learn things about the animals that cannot be learned otherwise, thus further improving our ability to put them back into the wild. Currently many reintroduction projects have failed due to a lack of understanding about the animals themselves. Biologists have a fairly hands off mentality which is not always good for their understanding of the animals they are trying to help preserve. Usually their focus is more on studying the animal than on preserving them, and they maintain their usual scientific approach to these projects, meaning extremely slow and extremely cautious, which is not always good for the conservation of the species non the verge of extinction.

Private enthusiasts tend to be more agile, flexible and more dedicated to the preservation over study. And they tend to have an understanding of the animal the biologist rarely has. These people rarely understand the areas the biologist understands. So to me, these two groups have combined information and knowledge that is critical to helping species survive. Without dedication and participation of private falconers (the Peregrine Fund 501c3), the peregrine falcon would very likely be extinct today.

If biologist were to study cars, they would first visit some junk yards and dissect a few to study the internal parts of cars. Then they would perch themselves on an overpass and count the vehicles that pass below them. Within a few weeks they would have lots of data about how many white cars, red cars, pickups, semi's, tow trucks, etc. were passing under the overpass. They would be proud of their data and confident they had learned important information about cars from these studies. But would they open the door and sit behind the wheel and actually drive a car? No. So their understanding would be missing some very key information about cars. This is what they do with animals also.

Zoos are wonderful public education facilities. They help expose people to wild animals. Such exposure is critical to creating public support for preserving struggling species. People will only preserve what they care about. This is very well understood in conservation circles. Educational programs with animals are immensely important to this end, be they at a zoo or privately operated at a county fair. The roughly 200 USA zoos have very limited resources, meaning limited space to house animals, limited staff to care for them and limited funding to pay for all this. They also have a fairly poor track record of breeding success compared to private breeders and they are also fairly poor at conducting conservation release programs. Zoos are very bureaucratic so are very good at displaying animals, keeping records of them and their care. But this bureaucratic nature does not allow flexibility in ways usually needed for innovative processes involved in release projects. Is it in any way reasonable to think 200 zoos are capable of preserving all the endangered species that need preserving? Obviously not. Other private facilities are needed to help fulfill this very important role in conservation.

This only happens though if there is some way for private owners to generate money from their animals. Yet in today's climate of growing authoritarian socialistic control over private behavior and private resources, the potential and future of such facilities is steadily shrinking. More and more cities and states are adopting exotic animal bans or creating costly fee structures to force private ownership of these animals into extinction. This is often perceived as a "progressive social justice" movement but is in actual fact very short sighted degradation of our free society which will greatly contribute to the premature extinction of many endangered species.

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A dog tested positive for coronavirus. Should pets be quarantined?

UPDATE: On March 12, Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries & Conservation Department released a statement that said a blood test of a dog that was initially found to have a "low-level infection" of the coronavirus through other measures came back negative.

The result indicates that "there is not a strong immune response and that there are currently not measurable amounts of antibodies in the blood," according to the statement. But the possibility the dog is infected with the COVID-19 virus has not been ruled out. Another blood sample will be taken and analyzed.

The dog remains in quarantine. The statement also said there is currently no evidence that pets can infect people with the coronavirus.

News that a dog tested positive for the coronavirus in Hong Kong likely set off alarm bells this week among pet owners. While there's no indication the virus can spread to humans from dogs, some experts say there may be a need for quarantines among pets of owners who contract the virus.

Hong Kong officials collected samples on Feb. 26 from a dog of a patient who had COVID-19 and found "low levels" of the coronavirus in its nose and mouth the following day.

If you have a dog, cat or ferret, and you're isolating at home, those animals should be isolated at home with you. - Prof. J. Scott Weese, University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College

Followup tests determined the dog tested "weak positive" for the virus. Then, international experts at the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) concluded the dog has some degree of infection, likely caused by human-to-animal transmission.

"I think this dog has a low level of infection," Thomas Sit, assistant director of the Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), said Thursday.

"According to experts, it's likely the human infected the dog... Sometimes animals infect humans and sometimes [it's] the other way around."

The dog, which is reportedly a 17-year-old Pomeranian, has been in quarantine in Hong Kong under close surveillance, but has displayed no symptoms of the COVID-19 illness.

How did the dog get infected?

Prof. J. Scott Weese of the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College, who studies diseases that can pass between animals and humans, said it was initially thought the dog became infected due to contamination from living in close contact with its owner.

"The fact that it was positive two days later and they weren't calling it a 'weak positive' the second time would suggest that it was more of a true positive that's more consistent with the dog actually being infected," he said.

"The dog is clinically normal, which is good for the dog, but it also [shows] why we need to sort this out."

Dr. Mike Ryan, director of the World Health Organization's emergency program, said it's not unusual to find animals that can be "transient hosts" in infectious disease outbreaks, carrying the disease without spreading it.

He said similar issues have been seen in the SARS epidemic of 2003 and the ongoing MERS outbreaks in the Middle East.

"This dog is a victim..." he said. "We need to establish quite clearly what part animals might play in further transmission, but that is unknown."

Division 1B – Changes to Gloster Canary Class Numbers

Section 1100 – Gloster Consorts

COCK			HEN	
OPEN	YOUNG		OPEN	YOUNG
1101	1102	Buff Green-Clear,Ticked,Grizzle	1103	1104
1105	1106	Buff Green Lightly Variegated (<25% dark)	1107	1108
1109	1110	Buff Green Variegated (25% to 50% dark)	1111	1112
1113	1114	Buff Green Heavy Variegated (50% to 75% dark)	1115	1116
1117	1118	Buff Green 3/4 Dark (>75% dark)	1119	1120
1121	1122	Buff Green Self	1123	1124
1125	1126	Yellow - Any colour - Clear to Self	1127	1128
1129	1130	Buff Cinnamon - Clear to 1/2 Variegated	1131	1132
1133	1134	Buff Cinnamon - 3/4 Dark to Self	1135	1136
1137	1138	White - Clear to 1/2 Variegated	1139	1140
1141	1142	White - 3/4 Dark to Self	1143	1144
1145	1146	All Fawns - Any Variegated to Self	1147	1148

Section 1200 – Gloster Corona

COCK			HEN	
OPEN	YOUNG		OPEN	YOUNG
1201	1202	Buff Green-Clear,Ticked,Grizzle	1203	1204
1205	1206	Buff Green Lightly Variegated (<25% dark)	1207	1208
1209	1210	Buff Green Variegated (25% to 50% dark)	1211	1212
1213	1214	Buff Green Heavy Variegated (50% to 75% dark)	1215	1216
1217	1218	Buff Green 3/4 Dark (>75% dark)	1219	1220
1221	1222	Buff Green Self	1223	1224
1225	1226	Yellow - Any colour - Clear to Self	1227	1228
1229	1230	Buff Cinnamon - Clear to 1/2 Variegated	1231	1232
1233	1234	Buff Cinnamon - 3/4 Dark to Self	1235	1236
1237	1238	White - Clear to 1/2 Variegated	1239	1240
1241	1242	White - 3/4 Dark to Self	1243	1244
1245	1246	All Fawns - Any Variegated to Self	1247	1248

Please note the above changes to Division 1B Gloster Canaries have been approved. They are on the Canadian National Bird Show website.

Developmental Stages of a Parrot

By Liz Wilson

Just like a human child, a young parrot can go through a variety of stages as it grows to adulthood, so you should be aware of the various developmental stages you may encounter in the future. Allowing plenty of room for variation between species and even more between individuals within a species, it may help the parrot owner to be familiar with various life stages of the “generic parrot”.

Species Differences

Keep in mind that different species of parrots develop at totally different speeds, with small parrots generally maturing substantially faster than large parrots. For example, at around nine months of age, the cockatiel is physically capable of starting a family, whereas one of the large macaws has barely developed the physical coordination necessary to walk across the living room rug without tripping over its huge feet and falling on its beak.

Where applicable, I will include approximate ages for various sized species using the following categories: small (budgies, cockatiels, etc.), medium (amazons, African greys, etc.) and large (full-size macaws and cockatoos). The age ranges are estimates only. Parrots do not generally read what we write about them, so they do things whenever they please.

Because of the inevitability of change, owners of baby parrots should be cautious about the predictability of their parrot’s behavior, always adding the word “yet” to the end of most statements. For example, “He never leaves his cage” should be stated as, “He hasn’t left his cage YET”. The fateful “He would NEVER fly” should be restated as, “He hasn’t flown YET”. Personally, I learned the futility of predictions when my own blue and gold macaw didn’t choose to lay her first egg until she was at least thirty years old.

Babyhood

When you bring a very young parrot baby home from the breeder or pet store, that animal is in

what I fondly call “The Bassinet and Goo Stage”. Totally dependent, it is acquiescent to your every whim. All it wants to do is eat, cuddle, poop and sleep. It is at this totally charming stage that some less-than-scrupulous parrot retailers might tell you, “Oh, he will NEVER bite”. Incidentally, that statement is just as silly as you (or your wife’s) obstetrician saying your infant will NEVER talk back.

It is also at this state that many inexperienced baby parrot owners decide their baby doesn’t need to learn to step up on command. After all, their baby scrambles onto their hand whenever it is offered, right? Isn’t that all that matters?

A Failure to Communicate

Unfortunately, this owner has completely missed the point. The up command has to do with control, not just getting the bird to step onto a hand. Just because a very young parrot does not seem to need controls now certainly does not mean it won’t need controls later. After all, the discipline needed to control a year-old human is certainly different from what is needed to control a teenager. It is also a tad easier to teach controls to a baby than to an adolescent—not matter what the species.

The human “parent” of a parrot chick should enjoy the bassinet and Good State to the fullest, because it doesn’t last forever. However, young psittacines mature so slowly compared to puppies and kittens that their owners often forget that babies DO grow up and change. The single most important thing a person should understand about baby psittacines is that they don’t stay babies.

People are always so amazed when they complain to me about their parrots, saying “But he never did this before!” Well, of course, he never was this age before. Expecting baby parrots to stay babies is just as realistic as wishing kids never grew up, or that puppies never turned into dogs.

Time to Adjust, Then Learn

When a parrot chick is taken to a new home it may take a day or two for the bird to adjust to the new environment. If knowledgeable people have purchased the baby, this adjustment period will go

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smoothly and the baby will settle in nicely. After the baby parrot has settled in, it is now ready to learn. Now is the perfect time to establish rules for lifetime behaviors by establishing a relationship of nurturing guidance.

A gentle but strong framework of consistent controls is essential for the young parrot so it matures into a happy and successful member of its human flock. Indeed, the same is true for the successful raising of a human child.

Baby Parrots & Controls

It is a source of endless frustration to me and my colleagues that many people simply cannot believe that their baby parrot will ever need any controls. Since parrot chicks are often so docile and easy to handle, the humans conclude that controls will never be necessary. These well-meaning people apparently don't realize that change is part of life and that babies don't stay babies.

Tragedy

So instead of teaching a baby parrot the rules that will make its life with humans happy and comfortable, these well-meaning but misguided people choose not to teach any guidelines at all. This is incredibly sad. When, not if, a young parrot starts manifesting behavior problems later on, the owner feels betrayed and invariably perceives the problem as the bird's fault. This is despite the fact that the owner inadvertently laid the foundation for these problems earlier.

"He changed," the person says, "He used to be really cute, but he's mean now".

The Animal Always Pays

The worst part about all this is the parrot always pays the price. It is either offered for sale, through a pet store, or will spend most of its life locked in a cage, kept away from the rest of its flock by the very behaviors that the human flock didn't discourage when the parrot was a baby.

So if you are the owner of a baby parrot, please, your baby needs to learn controls now. Before problems develop. Trust me on this. It is so much easier to prevent problems, rather than try to fix them later. But if you already have an out-of-

control parrot, don't give up. Parrots are teachable and can learn to change, no matter how old, but only if you do.

The Fledging

Small parrots fledge around 4-6 weeks, medium-size ones at about 10-12 weeks and large ones around 20 weeks, give or take. The concept of fledging often confuses people. This is the stage at which a young bird learned how to fly, and it often gets muddled up with the weaning process because the two events can happen around the same time. Parrots fledge prior to weaning, which makes perfect sense when one considers that in the wild, they will need flight capability before they can learn where to go to find food.

The fledging stage is probably one of the most important developmental periods in a young parrot's life, yet it seems to be one of the least discussed. Simply put, a fledging is a baby bird that is learning how to fly, and proper fledging is crucial in terms of a parrot's self confidence later. Excellent breeders I know firmly believe that young parrots should be allowed to fledge normally, because they then develop into more confident, self-assured individuals. It is as if the chicks know that they have mastered a fundamental and crucial survival skill, and they feel safer because of it.

Flight lessons

Watching baby birds learn to fly can be hair raising, there is no question. After all, flying in a straight line is the easy part, steering and stopping are the skills that require real finesse. A reasonable parallel would be my parents watching a 6-year old me wobble away down the street as I was first learning to ride a bike. Many years later, I still have faint scars from a couple of my more spectacular crashes...but I am very glad my folks did not take my bike away must because I might break something. After all, nature expects youngsters to crash as they learn—that's why they are designed to heal so well.

Crashes in the Future

I have also found that parrots that never learned controlled flight can get into serious trouble later

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on if their wings accidentally grow out. Since they never learned how to steer and stop, they can only fly in a straight line. Indoors that takes them straight into a window or wall. But unlike young babies with undeveloped flight muscles, old birds are stronger and more likely to build up sufficient speed to actually get seriously hurt when they bang into something.

Worse yet, unfledged parrots that are outside and startled into flight also go in a straight line...away. No matter how badly they might want to come back, they don't know how to control their flight well enough to return.

The Weaning Stage

The next stage a young parrot encounters is weaning, which means "to take food otherwise than by nursing". In the wild, this is a gradual process that does not just accustom a young bird to eat on its own. The baby must be taught not only what things are foods, but when and where to look for them and once found, how to actually eat them.

Weaning ages vary widely, and can be an incredibly stressful time in a baby parrot's life. The following are extremely conservative estimates: small birds may wean around 6-11 weeks, medium-sized birds around 10-16 weeks and large species like macaws at a slow 9-12 months.

The practice of selling hand feeding parrot chicks to inexperienced people, whether they are pet store personnel or the general public) is considered to be unethical. The physical dangers of hand feeding – starvation, aspiration pneumonia, crop burns, bacterial and fungal infections are just some issues. Individual animals do things at their own speeds. For example, children learn to walk when they are ready, not when "the books" say they should. So when you follow the advice of some "experts" who say, "If a chick keeps begging when "the books" say it is old enough to be weaned, ignore it, when it gets hungry enough it will eat on its own". This is called force weaning. Please do not follow this kind of advice. And unless the chick has been thoroughly vetted by an avian vet you don't know if

it is healthy. Chicks with medical problems do not wean "normally" often needing hand feeding much longer than healthy ones. Babies that are force-weaned often display massive insecurities later on in their development. These insecurities generally really blossom in the age range of 8-18 months, as parrots begin to develop more independence.

Viable alternative

Birds grow into better eaters and more secure, stable companions if they are not starved into feeding themselves. Generally speaking babies should be hand fed until they start weaning themselves by walking away from the food syringe.

Many aviculturists have made the same comment and they do not quite understand why. It seems that the better-fed baby parrots are, the more interest they show in the bowls of food in their cages. The more interest they show in eating on their own, the sooner they will wean themselves naturally, without the terrors and insecurities of babies that thought they were going to starve to death.

A fully weaned young parrot is one that is essentially food independent, meaning that it is, capable of survival with little or no guidance or help in procuring adequate nutrition. Weaning must come after the fledging stage, because the wild parrot chick must be capable of flight before it can learn how and where to find food. The baby must develop the physical strength and dexterity to learn controlled flight. Only then, it will develop sufficiently to achieve the complex manual dexterity necessary to eat on its own.

Liz Wilson explains, for humans to fully appreciate the difficulties inherent in this task, I would suggest they try opening a package of cookies that are shrink-wrapped in heavy plastic while standing on one leg in a small boat that is bobbing merrily in moderate seas. I believe that might be somewhat analogous to a young psittacine perched high in a wind-tossed tree, trying to crack and eat a nut held in its foot. Suffice it to say, if I had to eat like that, I would no longer have a weight problem.

Parent birds assist in this process by holding food in

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their beak and feet for the baby to eat. The human caretaker should therefore assist their ungainly parrot chick by holding warm, wet foods in their fingers (wash your hands first, please) and finger-feeding their baby.

Foods that are perfect for this are chunks of banana, strips of carrot, pieces of slightly cooked yams, toast, etc. Variety is very important—get creative. All foods are warmed and moistened in hot water or hot fruit juice. The temperature range is critical for maximum palatability, and foods should be warmed to an initial temperature of 105-110°F. Temperature is constantly monitored with a thermometer, not a human's wrist. Candy thermometers work well for this and are available in any kitchen supply store. Foods must be reheated frequently during finger feeding to maintain this temperature because the baby must not be rushed.

Abundance Weaning™ by Pheobe Linden entails feeding a baby, not when the clock says it is time to feed, but when the baby is actually hungry. She bases her feeding technique on the common sense notion that the sound of baby parrots crying for food in the wild would attract predators. As a consequence the parents must feed much more frequently than we humans do in captivity. Common sense tells us that a human baby should not be allowed to cry continually when it is hungry, and neither should a parrot baby. Common sense also tells us that a human baby left to cry continually for food will probably develop psychological problems later on, and this also appears to be true of baby parrots. Yet owners of unweaned chicks are routinely told to “ignore the baby or you'll spoil it” when a parrot baby cries in hunger. A well-fed and nurtured parrot baby can grow into a calm, confident adult. A food-deprived baby parrot often grows into an anxious, high-strung, distrustful adult. Which bird would you rather have as a companion?

The Juvenile Stage or “The Terrible Twos”

After being totally agreeable to your every whim, your young parrot (6 to 18 months old for the

medium-sized and larger species) may abruptly refuse to cooperate. Instead of scrambling onto your hand the second it is offered, it chooses instead to run away. Always before, your sweet baby would hang on its cage door, begging to be let out so it can be with you. Now it climbs around upside down on the roof of the cage, obstinately refusing to come down no matter how much you cajole. This kind of behaviour is the hallmark of The Terrible Twos or the onset of the juvenile period.

With human children, this is when they start to recognize themselves as being separate from their parents, and the sudden discovery of the word No. No matter what the parent wants, the child resists and parrots in this stage often behave in a similar fashion. Indeed, the word No becomes the hallmark of the juvenile period, both with the owner constantly trying to stop the young bird from doing something unacceptable and with the parrot's flat-out refusal to cooperate.

This is often the time that many youngsters discover that nipping human fingers can be an extremely effective way to get what they want. This is the stage best characterized by obstinacy, or disagreement for the sake of disagreement. As a consequence the companion parrot may seriously challenge the authority of the other flock members at this time. If the young bird has been taught no discipline or clear, consistent controls, then this can be the beginning of the end for happy parrot ownership. So this is the age range of most of the parrots you see advertised in the newspaper “Pets for Sale” section as well as birds you see on consignment in the local pet stores.

However, the terrible twos stage is far from all bad. This is also a wonderful period of exploration and discovery and the youngster's development of its own special personality. For the parrot lover, this is an incredible process to observe and in which to participate.

True it is unnerving at first to have your sweet baby change so dramatically, but this is when your parrot really blossoms into a young adult. Like all stages, the juvenile period lasts a finite period of

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time—in other words, if the human maintains control and consistency, then this, too, shall pass.

Puberty -- The End of the Pet Relationship

Proper Upbringing

I often get calls from parrot people who have, as far as I can tell, done everything right. Their baby was raised with Nurturing Guidance, it has always been handled with the Up and Down commands, the rules have always been clear and unchanging, etc. However, when the parrot becomes an adolescent, the humans still might have power struggles with which to cope.

This really surprises some people. I guess they assumed since they had done everything correctly, that their own bird would never go through these different stages. Unfortunately that is not the case. As they grow, all parrots go through various developmental stages whether trained or not.

Stressful Period

There is no question that puberty is a stressful period in the life of any species of animal, human or otherwise. Hormones are raging and the animal in question (human or otherwise) is generally not fun to be around. The timing of puberty's onset varies tremendously, depending on species and the individual bird. Small species like budgies, cockatiels may reach sexual maturity at about 6-9 months. Medium- sized birds like amazons, African greys and the small cockatoos and macaws mature sexually around 2-4 years. The large species of macaws and cockatoos do not reach sexual maturity until they range in age from 3-6 years.

Hormonal Aggression

Aggression is associated with these higher hormone levels with most species, and the parrot is no exception. If the humans have established no clear controls or guidelines for the adolescent, then that parrot will most likely perceive itself to be the flock leader. In that situation, its aggressive tendencies will be directed towards controlling the human members and the humans are quite likely to get hurt. If the humans have established themselves as dominant over the parrot, then the parrot will wait for direction. Proper controls will

not eliminate the natural aggression but they will substantially decrease it.

Forever and Ever...

How long does puberty last? It seems like forever, but in reality it probably can last for several months. Even though it isn't a fun time for parrots or the humans in their flock, at least it doesn't last several years like it does with humans.

Not Always Negative

As an aside, most people automatically associate hormonal behaviors as being aggressive in nature and while this is often the case, it is not always true. I have known several parrots who become much more loving during hormonal periods, not less.

In the wild

Generally speaking, puberty is the time when a young parrot has become independent of its parents. In the wild, this bird would probably be spending all its time with its peers, working out dominance levels between individuals. Competition would be intense, with lots of excited vocalizing, posturing and challenging.

Challenging would be a good word to describe this period in captivity, also. The parrot is challenging the human's control and it can be a challenge to live with them. The young parrot starts testing all the rules, and biting behaviors often exacerbate. Noise levels can increase tremendously. Destruction of toys increases, as does the destruction of everything else if the bird is foolishly allowed unsupervised time out of the cage.

Overload

Adolescent parrots frequently start playing much rougher with their human, often getting overstimulated sometimes called overload. A parrot in overload is simply out of control, and their human could easily get bitten badly if he/she does not deal with this situation quickly and decisively. The play should end now and the bird should be immediately returned to its cage.

Reaching barehanded for overloaded birds would be a serious mistake, so an experienced owner will step the bird up onto a handheld stick, instead of

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their hand. If worst comes to worst, the caretaker can simply drop a towel over the excited bird, pick it up, and return it to its cage. Once safely enclosed, the parrot is given time to quiet down.

Incidentally overload can happen at any age. The human needs to learn to watch the bird's body language during playtimes for signs of increasing excitement, such as wildly flashing eyes, fanning tail feathers, increasingly shrill vocalizations, etc. Once experienced at recognizing the beginning signs of overload, the human can slow down the play to some softly whispering quiet time, and avoid the situation completely.

Lack of Control Escalates

If a parrot was not taught how to be a good pet before the advent of puberty will become totally out of control as hormone levels rise. Accustomed to being catered to and always getting its own way, the bird generally turns into a little monster. It is important to understand, that this is not the bird's return to "normalcy" whatever that is. However, the human should not expect the bird to be exactly the same creature he or she knew before sexual maturity was reached. Parrots are intelligent creatures that learn, grow and change, even as we people do.

In conclusion

The baby parrot that is raised with limits and controls will not be exempt from these different stages, but their human flock usually finds that the youngster still responds quickly to human laddering and seriously dirty looks. Testing is normal and expected, but consistently and lovingly controlled young parrots will settle down quickly, since consistency minimizes their confusion.

fault, it is the fault of the human who never established controls.

Salvageable Situations

If a parrot was not taught how to be a good pet before the beginning of adolescence, this does not mean that the situation is not salvageable. Caretakers dealing with adolescent parrots should return to having short daily training sessions, as a method of reminding the bird that the human, not the bird, is head of the flock. Reemphasizing the controls also appears to reassure the parrot and settle it down.

Patience and Time

With puberty, it is simply a matter of hanging on to your sense of humor and waiting it out, and most importantly, not taking it personally. Parrots at this age are not trying to irritate us, it just happens. With patience, the adolescent parrot will survive puberty and so will its caretaker. Once through this difficult period, the owner is rewarded with a

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Hookbills

** Hookbill Judges already listed under other species*

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Cockatiels, Mealie & Golden Mantled Rosellas, Pileated Parrot, Plumheaded Parakeet, Goldie Lorikeet

Size P - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (6.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 1FB

Cloncurry, Pennant, small Quakers, large Quail, Dusky, Peach Fronted, Pyrrhura, Nanday, Sun, Green Cheeked, & Maroon Belly Conures, African Ring Neck, Tippler/Tumbler Pigeons & Doves (including Ring Neck)

Size R - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (7.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 1FB

Port Lincoln, Twenty-Eight, Blue Headed Pionus, Larger Rosellas, Crimson, Jenday, & Blue-Winged Conures, larger Quakers (over 100 grams esp. *Myiopsitta monachus monachus*), Princess of Wales, Lesser Hill Mynah, Rainbow, Dusky, Blue-Streaked & Violet Necked Lory, Rock Pebbler, Barrabands, Grey Cheeked Parakeet

Size S - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (8.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 2FB

Derbyan, & Patagonian Conure, Homing Pigeon, Australian King Parrot, Moustache Parakeets, Red Lory, Meyer's Parrot, Hahn's Macaw, Blue Crowned Pionus, Indian Ringneck, Caiques, Senegals*

Size T - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (9.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 3FB

Alexandrine Parakeet, Mitred, White Eyed, Red Fronted, White Crowned & Scaly Headed Pionus, White Fronted, Yellow Billed and Tucuman Amazons, Dwarf Macaws, Red Bellied Parrots, Large Lories, Chattering Lories, Cherry Headed Conure, Jardine Parrot, Stella's Lory, Hawk Headed Parrots

Size U - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (10.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 4PB

Goffin, Citron Crested, Lesser Sulphur Crested and Rose Breasted Cockatoos, Timneh African Greys, Severe Macaw, White Crowned Turaco

Size V - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (11.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 5PB

Congo African Grey, Medium Sulphur Crested Cockatoos, Mexican Red Headed, Yellow Crowned & Red Lored Amazons, and other large Amazons, All Eclectus

Size W - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (13.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 6PB

Triton, Moluccan and Umbrella Cockatoos, Greater Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, Scarlet Macaw, Blue & Gold Macaw, Military Macaw*

Size X - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (15.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 7PB

Green Winged and other large Macaws, Leadbeater's, Palm and Sulphur Crested Cockatoos

Size Y - Aluminum CLOSED & SPLIT (16.0mm), Plastic SPLIT Size 8PB

Hyacinth Macaw



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