

**THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
FOSTER PARROTS, LTD. &
The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary**



Scarlet Macaws in Flight, Costa Rica – Photo By Charlie Fayers

March Matching Fund Drive 2016!

Two Scarlet Macaws demonstrate the beauty of freedom as their feathers capture the fire of the setting sun in Costa Rica. Our latest conservation partnership with **Hatched To Fly Free: Avifauna Reintroduction Alliance** is just one of the many Foster Parrots projects that will benefit from your support of our annual **March Matching Fund Drive**. With a **matching fund of \$20,000**, the March Matching Fund Drive is our longest standing and most important fundraiser event, as it sets the stage for the success of our work through the year ahead. **All donations dated within the month of March will be matched up to \$20,000. Every donation, no matter how big or how small is critical at this time!** Your participation directly supports 400 parrots and other animals at The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary, advances our education and advocacy initiatives and puts strength under our growing adoption program. Because you support Foster Parrots, birds like those pictured above will continue to fly free.

Because of the overwhelming number of calls we receive on a daily basis from people seeking to surrender or re-home their birds, this issue of our newsletter is dedicated to stories, ideas and guidance in parrot care and human-avian relationships that will – hopefully – help people make the decision to re-commit to the relationship and keep their birds. Through behavior modification training, making changes in routine or in the home environment, or by nurturing a deeper understanding of our parrots' psychological, social and emotional needs, we may find that the best home for our parrots is *with us!* We hope you find the information useful.

Buster's Journey

Susan hesitated as she stepped through the door. She stopped and looked back at Buster who stood on the top of the cage in the "Special Needs" bird room looking curiously back at her. He would be sharing this room and his life now at this Rescue with several other parrots who were old or crippled or otherwise unable to fly. Buster had suffered a broken wing many years ago in the wild and he was a feather picker. He would certainly never fly again. Standing there, looking back at her, his naked little body was speckled with tiny new pins that he would never allow to bloom into real feathers. Only wanting what was best for Buster, Susan was sure he would find some level of happiness and belonging with this rescue organization. The place didn't look like much. Just someone's house, really. But it was immaculately clean inside and every room was full of birds. The woman in charge was friendly and seemed to be knowledgeable, which was what Buster would need. Someone who understood him. Someone who knew about parrots.

"Good-bye, buddy," Susan said. "Be a good bird. I love you." Then she turned and walked away.

Susan was twelve years old when, thirty-six years earlier, her father had returned from Africa with two wild-caught Congo African greys, Buster and Rosie. Susan was fascinated by the small, silvery alien beings who seemed so keenly aware. They spoke to her. They had analytical minds and moods and interests. To Susan they were like strange little people and she fell in love. For the next few years those two African Greys were central to her life and to the lives of her family. She would rush home from school to be with them. They ate together. They watched TV together. She read to them and played with them, and marveled always over the ways these living little dolls seemed so human in their intelligence and humor.



But like all little girls, Susan grew up, and as the world opened up before her, new friends and far away places lured her further from her family and from Buster and Rosie. Susan went to school and traveled overseas. She pursued a career and had a child of her own. Through the decades to follow Buster and Rosie lived occasionally with Susan, but mostly with her parents, with neither she nor her parents feeling entirely confident that the birds were receiving the best of care at the hands of the other. What did any of them really know about birds, after all? But Buster and Rosie were safe and well-loved, a part of the heart of the family and cherished companions to Susan's father during his retirement years.

In 2011 Rosie, who may have been considerably older than Buster, passed away. Four years later Susan's dad passed as well. And there sat Buster by himself. The home that for so many years had been alive with the voices and activities of a family was now still. The silence of the house and the long hours that stretched every day into an eternity felt heavy around him, despite the cheery music that drifted in from the radio in the kitchen that Susan's mom would turn on for Buster's benefit before going off to work. The music seemed hollow to Buster without real human voices to join in. And pointless.

The day Susan arrived and packed him into a carrier was a bright day for Buster. She had come to take him home. He would not have to sit any longer waiting for endless days to pass into endless nights. He would be back with his childhood friend. He could not understand why she cried and cried during the car ride. He could feel her sorrow in his own heart. The car ride was long, but car rides had always brought him to one or another of his people, so he did not mind the car. This time, though, it brought him to an unfamiliar place. The air was different. There were smells he did not recognize. He was confused when he heard the calls of many, many birds. The calls grew louder as they approached the door of a house he had never seen before, and they hit him like a wall and closed in all around him when they entered. What was this place? What was happening? His fear and his dread rolled up from a place in his belly and lodged in his throat, but Susan was there and if he kept his eyes on her he was sure he would be okay. Susan took him from his carrier and placed him on the top of a cage in a room with bright lights. There were other, strange looking birds in the room. They looked nothing like Rosie. Buster was not sure what they were. He kept his eyes on Susan, who continued to cry and cry, filling the room with her palpable sorrow as she spoke to another female human who sounded kind. Then Susan turned to him and said words he understood. "Good-Bye, Buddy. Be a good bird. I love you."

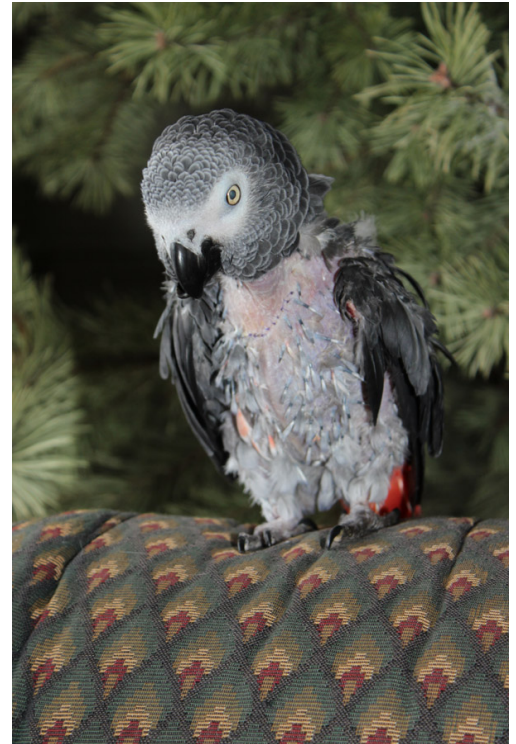
He knew those words. They were good words. He watched Susan turn and walk away. Why she would leave him in this strange place he could not know. But he had heard those words many times before and they meant that she would come back. Because she always came back. All he had to do was wait. He fastened his eyes on the doorway where Susan had just stood, and began to wait.

When I took the phone call, the woman on the other end fought through her emotion to assemble the story and to try to make me understand what she needed from me. "I left him there," she cried. "I'm trying to do the best thing for him, but I'm not sure if this was the best thing. I don't know if this was a good place. I think it was a good place. The woman was so nice and the place was clean. I thought it would be better for him to be around other birds and to be in a place where they knew about parrots. But I left him, and he was just standing there looking at me, and that was a week ago and I can't stop crying. I don't know if I did the right thing!"

I spent the next 30 minutes on the phone with Susan, asking her questions about the rescue organization where she had left Buster, hearing about the 36 year history of Buster in her family, listening to the reasons why she felt unqualified to care for an aging African Grey parrot.

It was not a bad Rescue organization. It was just a small, home-based rescue like thousands of others just like it, struggling to shoulder the weight of uncountable numbers of unwanted parrots, and doing the best they can on scant resources. And Susan's reasons for placing Buster with a rescue organization were the same reasons we hear over and over and over again, day after day after day: She felt that Buster would benefit from the company of other birds. She worked and did not have time for Buster. She did not have the physical space for Buster. Buster could be growly and her daughter was afraid of him. Buster was a plucker and she had no idea how to address this or make him happy. There was simply not enough room for Buster and his needs in her life. But the one variable in this situation was the fact that Susan was unable to live with the decision she had made. Buster had been a part of her family for 36 years. She felt that she had abandoned a family member.

"Susan," I said, "You need to go back and get your bird."



Rescue organizations everywhere struggle to deal with the fall-out from the innumerable changes in the lives of human guardians that precipitate a parrot losing its home. Some situations, like those involving acute health issues, the death or aging of guardians or other untenable circumstances, leave us no choice but to entrust our parrots to other hands. But very often there are choices. They may not be the most convenient options. They may require us to invest more time or creativity than we believe we have. But the fact is that there are no real safety nets or guarantees under our birds once we walk away from them. We can locate new adoptive homes for them – *sometimes*. But the same changes in our lives that forced us to relinquish our parrots are likely to happen again and again with each successive family. And as parrots pass from home to home, there are no guarantees of quality care. The long life spans and complex social, psychological and physical needs of parrots make them one of the most often re-homed and abandoned of all domestically kept animals. Very often what we forget is that we, the guardians, are not the only ones having the experience. The parrot's experience matters. Parrots feel fear, sorrow, confusion and loss. And they have to deal with the consequences of the choices we make around them, without ever being able to make a choice themselves.

When Susan left the rescue organization for the second time, once again she was in tears, but this time the tears came because little Buster was pressed tightly against her neck in a hug that conveyed his joy and his relief that she had returned for him – like he was so sure she would. Over the next several weeks Susan and I corresponded regularly, working through a health issue that was cause for a great deal of stress and some sleepless nights, but mostly exchanging ideas for enhancing Buster's life, creating a stimulating environment for him at home and improving his diet. "I have to be completely honest," Susan said. "I was worried that I was too busy to be of any use to him. I simply did not think I had the time for him in my life. I didn't think I had enough knowledge to care for him properly or understand his needs. But he's family. He lives at the center of my heart. We are having so much fun with him, getting to know him in a deeper way. The satisfaction of giving this bird a much more enriched life - on so many levels - is huge and rewarding. It's crazy how much he enriches us in return. He's simply part of our family."



Buster enjoying a story with Susan & Neve

Dear Foster Parrots...

An Avian Advice Column

Dear Foster Parrots,

I am an employee at a veterinary hospital that has a resident Goffins Cockatoo named Virgil. Virgil is a rescued bird who came from a situation of terrible neglect. He is very well cared for at the hospital but I feel he is anxious and unhappy and that the busy office environment does not adequately fulfill his needs. He can be aggressive and many people are unable to handle him. He becomes stressed and screams when it's closing time. I have been searching for solutions for him and I found someone in Ohio who is willing to take him, but I think what he really needs is to be around other birds. Would your sanctuary be able to take him? - PT -

Dear PT,

Goffins cockatoos are wacky, fun-loving, out-going clowns who are driven to play, entertain, act out and test limits. *They are really smart birds.* Generally speaking, they tend to thrive on a high level of activity and they require guardians who are confident and capable of connecting with them on a close interpersonal level. For all of these reasons Goffins cockatoos are glorious little beings. For all of these same reasons they can be extremely challenging as "pets" in the home environment and, like most cockatoos, they tend not to stick in homes for too long.

Cockatoos of any species can be problematic and there are fewer and fewer parrot rescue organizations willing or able to take them on. Most people believe that their birds will be much happier in sanctuary and that they need to be a part of a flock, but the truth is that many birds lack the skills to reintegrate back into avian society, and sanctuary is really not the answer for many birds, especially those requiring a high level of human support.

What we tell everyone who writes to us about problems with their cockatoos is that one of the most important management strategies, besides investing in basic behavior modification training, is a consistent daily routine that can help your bird know what to expect from you every single day, and help him know what is expected of him. It should be a routine that works for you and for all the people at the clinic, but it also has to take Virgil's needs into consideration - and meet those needs. There should be ample out-of-cage time, times when Virgil should be able to count on one-on-one attention and periods of time when Virgil understands he has to entertain himself.

We would advise against shipping him out to Ohio or any place where you are unable to conduct a proper pre-adoption home check and will also be unable to follow-up on Virgil's long-term success in the new home, because the fact is that Virgil's behavior and disposition are unlikely to change as a result of re-homing, and the overwhelming challenges involved in meeting the needs of a cockatoo and managing their behavior put them at high risk for being relegated to cages, being re-homed repeatedly and ultimately living poor quality lives in which few of their social, emotional and psychological needs are met. Understanding that no one will likely be able to provide for Virgil any better than his family there at the veterinary hospital, our advice is that you make a commitment to Virgil and take the necessary steps to make his life there work for everyone.

Scope out an area or two that can be transformed into stimulating environments for Virgil with toys, swings, branches, boxes. Suspend a hanging play frame from the ceiling over his cage in order to expand his real estate and enable him to climb and gain height. Or use that hanging play frame as a kind of "cage without bars" - a place where he can hang out but not be able to access the floor for "unauthorized wandering". Discover the activities that Virgil seems to really enjoy and accommodate those activities. For instance, provide a box inside a box inside a box so he can keep busy excavating a nest... Hide his favorite treat inside little boxes or lengths of paper towel rolls and provide foraging opportunities... A small investment in inexpensive wire and lumber could create a safe environment right there in the waiting room where Virgil might find the flow of clients and their animals fascinating. Most importantly, it can become an opportunity for the hospital to begin the educate people about the challenges parrots face in captivity, and the lengths people must go to to meet their needs.

In addition to enriched and stimulating environments and dependable daily routines, positive-reinforcement based training exercises can not only help guide Virgil's behavior but also become an enjoyable social activity that can help meet some of Virgil's needs for interaction and mental stimulation. Please do seek out information from professionals like Lara Joseph, Dr. Susan Friedman or Barbara Heidenreich, all of whom have written extensively and offer classes, webinars and tutorials that can help us better understand what motivates our parrots and ultimately enhance the human-avian relationship.





Behavior Serves A Purpose

by Lara Joseph

*This article was modified from the original for this publication.
Many thanks to Lara for her contribution to this edition.*

Behavior serves a purpose for the animal doing the behaving. If the behavior proves of no value, the animal will have no reason to perform or exhibit this behavior again. Often times I hear “The behavior happens for no reason.” The behavior does happen for a reason or this behavior would not continue to exist for this animal. Once we can find why the behavior happens, then we can work with that consequence or “reinforcer”, and begin working on changing that behavior. [For instance] If the bird is screaming for attention, give it the attention when it does something that is more desirable. I do this with all screaming parrots. Screaming is a tough behavior to live with.

Obviously there are several steps and different approaches that can be used, but for the purpose of this post, all behavior serves a purpose for the animal. If the behavior happens more than once, that behavior is being reinforced and exists because the consequence is of value for the animal. These behaviors can be changed or redirected.

Rocky, my 13-year-old Moluccan Cockatoo has a long history of reinforcement of his screaming and his abnormal repetitive behavior of doing back-flips in his cage. Both behaviors of screaming and flipping used to happen consecutively every 3-5 seconds for at least two hours at a time. These two behaviors are well-practiced by Rocky and from my best observation over time, have had a long history of reinforcement. I say this because these two behaviors still exist today and Rocky has been with me and under my care for over five years. Before you get discouraged, please keep reading because rarely do these two behaviors exist together [now]. Also, based on how often the screaming used to happen, I can now happily say rarely does his behavior of screaming exist anymore. If I do hear him scream, it is because it is serving a purpose for him. When I hear it, I pay close attention to his environment, observe potential reinforcers for this behavior, and immediately take control of his environment to change the delivery of the reinforcer. I do all of the above so I can change the behavior and reinforcer for that behavior. Now if either of these behaviors happen, which is few and far between, they are indicators to me that this behavior is likely to begin to rear its head again at some time in the future if intervention does not happen. The longer the history of reinforcement is for a behavior, the more that behavior may happen in the future if key cues or indicators are ignored. The cues or indicators of Rocky screaming or doing back-flips in his cage are very obvious to me because I've paid such close attention to changing them. I now know what environments or environmental events will likely bring out either of these behaviors with Rocky. This gives me the opportunity to rearrange the environment so the undesired behaviors will not happen by giving a particular toy or object he prefers, or incorporating positive reinforcers for alternate behaviors when the undesired is likely to happen. This is training. This is communication happening.

I often tell people “When working with an undesired behavior that has a long history of reinforcement, you can pretty much bet it took a lot longer to train that undesired behavior than it will for us to change it.” That has been my experience in changing behaviors with animals. Often times undesired behaviors have been unknowingly trained for a long time. If the steps needed to change the behavior are broken down into small approximations, one will see the behavior changing fairly quickly. Unfortunately, many times by the time a person seeks professional advice to change behavior, if the behavior change doesn't happen quickly, the animal is likely to lose its home, even though the undesired behavior probably took months or even years to get to this intensity. The importance in seeking professional behavior and training help is the key in helping keep animals in their homes and out of shelters.

We are always learning. Animals are always learning. Training is communication and we are always training. The key question is “What are we training?”



Lara is the owner of The Animal Behavior Center, LLC in Ohio. She presents workshops, travels, lectures, gives regular webinars, and consults focusing on positive reinforcement interactions and modifying behavior through applications in behavior analysis. She is also the Director of Training for a wildlife rehabilitation center where she focuses on taking stress out of animal environments. Lara is a professional member of The Animal Behavior Management Alliance and The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators. She is also a member of and writes for The American Federation of Aviculture, The Pet Professional Guild, Deaf Dogs Rock, and more. Lara has presented for a wide variety of animal care organizations such as The Philadelphia Zoo, The Ohio State Exotic Veterinary Club, The Association of Avian Veterinarians, and The Wheaton College division of Applied Behavior Analysis. For more information visit her website at TheAnimalBehaviorCenter.com.

Revisiting The Deadly Side of Teflon

“Good morning... I am writing because recently my mother lost 2 of her birds due to Teflon fumes from her self cleaning oven. She had these birds for over 15 years and not one person, including her vet, ever warned her this could happen. They are truly devastated. Their hope is to get the word out so that something like this doesn't happen to anyone else. Your site was the first I have come across that has any mention of non-stick cookware being an issue. If there is anything we can do to spread this knowledge out there, I am willing to help.” - Lisa -

Just when we think most people know about the acute risk that Teflon and other non-stick coatings pose to birds in the home, we receive an email like Lisa's, and our hearts break again over the preventable loss of a cherished family member.

In October of 2010 Sandra and her daughter joyfully signed the adoption papers and left the sanctuary with their new family member, a playful and gregarious white bellied caique whom they named Chupa. Their 3-way bond upon meeting one another had been instantaneous with Chupa snuggling and “hair surfing” through Sandra's curly locks. It was one of our happiest and most charming adoption matches. The women were both equally in love with Chupa. Their home check had gone without a hitch. As a biology teacher, Sandra was hyper-aware of environmental toxins; she and her daughter lived an organic lifestyle. Not only were there no Teflon products in their apartment, but they did not even own a microwave oven!

The day Chupa fell off his perch and died right before their eyes, barely a month after joining their family, was a traumatic event from which neither of the women would easily recover. While we waited for necropsy information to come back we went over and over events that might provide a clue as to why Chupa had died. We talked about his diet and what he may have eaten. We examined his behavior to determine if there had been any symptoms of illness. We looked at his cage and his toys. Going over events, Sandra suddenly realized that they had been baking cookies when Chupa passed away. She opened her oven and there it was. A silicone oven matt at the bottom of the oven. It had never occurred to either of the women that a product identified as silicone would offer the same chemical toxicity as Teflon.



Chupa

Walking through The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary, past the rows of large aviaries containing dozens upon dozens of parrots, one would never guess that a great deal of the construction came from a place of deep grieving. Some years earlier Craig and Irene lost their Amazon parrot, who had been a cherished family member for over 20 years, when the self-cleaning mechanism in their oven was accidentally activated. “Coming to the sanctuary, “ Craig explained, “and creating environments to help other parrots is my way of repaying my debt to Charlie.”



Charlie

These are just a few of the dozens of stories we've heard over the years.

Non-stick coatings are achieved chiefly through a chemical known as polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), which is highly effective at repelling other chemicals, giving us that non-stick property that is so convenient in so many applications. But when PTFE is heated above 350 degrees it releases tiny particles and gaseous compounds known to damage the lungs. Acute respiratory exposure creates relatively brief but intense flu-like symptoms in humans. A second chemical compound known as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), which is used in the production of PTFE is difficult to degrade, remains indefinitely in the body and has been found to be present in virtually all U.S. residents. PTFE may not be outright killing humans, but it's a pervasive toxin that is most certainly taking its toll in ways we still do not understand. And although the fumes are undetectable to people, they are 100% deadly to birds.

PTFE, whether it falls under the trade name of Teflon or is packaged simply as a generic non-stick product, *will kill your parrot*. Homes should be purged of these products. Stainless steel, cast iron or hard anodized cookware should be used instead of non-stick cookware. We recommend that people replace or refuse to purchase self-cleaning ovens if there are birds in the home. Irons and coffee makers very often also offer non-stick surfaces. Our birds depend on us. The tragedy of losing them is not worth taking the chance.

A Tribute To Our Founder



Marc Johnson was a potter in his early thirties when he purchased his first parrot, a Blue & Gold Macaw named Wally, from an ad in the newspaper. By 1988 his connection to this wild-caught macaw and the realities of the impact of captivity on parrots everywhere catapulted his journey, and his life's work on behalf of parrots had begun. Foster Parrots started as a modest, home-based rescue organization, but the passion and heart of its founder propelled the organization into a major national force in avian welfare and advocacy, and an international presence in conservation.

Understanding the enormous void in animal welfare in regards to avian issues, in 2007 Marc Johnson and the Foster Parrots Board of Directors took a chance on an abandoned property in Rhode Island, carrying forward a dream to establish a major center for avian rescue, sanctuary and education in the northeast. Now encompassing 23 acres, The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary continues to develop as an outstanding regional resource for humane education and avian care services.

While remaining active in the organization, Marc Johnson will be stepping down as Foster Parrots' CEO and entering into his "semi-retirement" while continuing to manage our conservation programs and, as Marc is so fond of saying, will continue to contribute his services as the janitor and maintenance man at the sanctuary.

Intro to Understanding Parrot Behavior Free Seminar



Please join Certified Avian Behavior Consultant, Sheila Blanchette, for a 2 hour seminar providing invaluable information to us decode avian behavior and understand how basic, positive reinforcement based behavior modification strategies can help people and parrots achieve a higher degree of compatibility and improve the quality of human-avian relationships. The seminar is *free!*

- **Behavior serves a purpose for the bird – are we unintentionally reinforcing a behavior?*
- **Observing body language – Biting is a form of communication – what is your bird trying to say?*
- *Unlabel your bird – Understanding behavior*

Where: MSPCA-Nevins Farm Training Room
400 Broadway, Methuen, MA 01844
When: Saturday April 2nd
1:00pm – 3:00pm
Who: Provided by Certified Avian Consultant
Sheila Blanchette, Heart of Feathers Education



As Always, we would like to thank our photographer, Brian Jones, for his stunning contributions to this publication.

It's That Time Again! The 2016 March Matching Fund Drive

The annual **March Matching Fund Drive** is one of Foster Parrots' 3 annual fundraising initiatives, and is the most important of all our fundraiser events. With a **matching incentive of \$20,000**, the March fund drive sets the stage for all of our work in the year to come, putting a strong foundation under the birds and animals at The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary, and supporting our education, conservation and adoption programs. **All donations dated within the month of March will be matched up to \$20,000!**



Rescue



Sanctuary



Education



Adoption



Conservation

Please consider supporting the work of Foster Parrots and the birds and animals of The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary by making a donation this month! No size gift is too big or too small.

Donations can be made on-line through MoonClerk, PayPal or Network For Good by visiting

www.fosterparrots.com

or by check to:

**Foster Parrots, Ltd.
PO Box 650
Rockland, MA 02370**

*Deepest thanks from the staff, volunteers, birds and animals at Foster Parrots.
Without you, none of this would be possible!*