

No More Homeless Parrots

Let's work together toward lifetime solutions for displaced captive birds.

By Denise Kelly

Parrots: Wild at Heart

Parrots are found the world over, from the rainforests of South America and the islands of the Caribbean and South Pacific to the deserts and grasslands of Africa and Australia. Whether born in the wild or bred in captivity, parrots are not domesticated animals like cats and dogs. They are highly social and as intelligent as chimpanzees and dolphins. Parrots are emotional creatures with far more complex personalities than cats and dogs.



There are more than 350 species of parrots – from budgies, cockatiels, and lovebirds to macaws, amazons and cockatoos – each with their own unique characteristics and individual needs.

Like other wild, exotic animals, captive parrots display traits and social behaviors that are crucial for survival in their native habitats, but may not be considered “pet qualities” in most human homes. Just as with cats and dogs, however, many parrots find themselves displaced simply because their caretakers acquired them on impulse and were no longer willing or able to care for them.

Special Care Required

Keeping parrots is definitely not for the unprepared. It requires a great deal of time and knowledge. Providing a proper environment, housing, diet, and veterinary care is expensive. Depending on the species, parrots can live 60 years or more. Taking a parrot into your home can be a lifetime commitment. Only people who understand that parrots are wild by nature and who can provide a suitable environment to accommodate their special social and physical needs should consider having one.

True to Nature

Parrots are fascinating; they're smart, curious and playful. They are also messy, destructive and loud. In the wild, parrots live in flocks and can fly many miles each day. They spend hours foraging for a variety of natural foods, bathing, preening, climbing, and socializing with other birds. Parrots roost and eat high up in trees, dropping the remains of their food to the ground; they use loud calls to stay in contact with their flock. In a home setting, parrots behave in much the same way; the difference is your carpet becomes the forest floor, your furniture the forest trees, and you are the flock that they loudly call to.

Creating an environment that will fulfill some of their natural desires to fly, forage and socialize with birds of their own species is essential to keeping parrots happy in captivity. A healthful diet, exercise, adequate light, and plenty of toys and enrichment activities are needed to simulate the kinds of experiences parrots would have in their natural habitats. Parrots thrive on companionship with birds of their own species and/or humans, but they clearly choose with whom they wish to form strong bonds.

Unfortunately, when parrots aren't given the proper care, nutrition or stimulating environment they require, they can develop behavioral problems. They may become destructive, bite, act aggressively, scream, and even resort to pulling out their own feathers.

Why Parrots Become Homeless

Parrots become displaced for a variety of reasons. Many of the larger species can live 40–80 years and often outlive their caretakers. Lifestyle changes lead some people to the realization that they can no longer devote the time to care for them. Others are unprepared for the responsibilities that bird care demands or become disenchanted when they discover that living with an undomesticated animal doesn't live up to their expectations. Many parrots are also rescued from living in uncaring, neglectful and/or abusive situations.

How to Help Parrots in Need

Volunteer: Take care of birds at a local avian sanctuary or shelter organization. This is a great way to get hands-on experience with the personalities and care needs of different bird species.

Foster: Contact avian rescue organizations, bird clubs and/or local animal shelters to help provide temporary care for a parrot in need.

Adopt: Adoption is not just for cats and dogs anymore! You can give an unwanted bird a new lease on life. There are thousands of perfectly healthy, adoptable parrots now in need at shelters and avian welfare organizations around the country. Parrots are emotional and sensitive creatures. It takes more time and patience to gain the trust of a bird whose life is in need of repair, but it is a truly rewarding experience.

Before You Adopt

Before you adopt a parrot, educate yourself thoroughly about avian care and behavior. (See our other resources, including “Educating Yourself About Avian Care and Behavior.”) Here are some tips:

Make an informed decision. Find out all you can about the more than 350 species of parrots – from budgies, lovebirds and cockatiels to amazons, macaws and cockatoos. All have distinct characteristics and specific care and social needs.

Think ahead. Will a lifestyle change – marriage, divorce, a new job or a move to a new home – affect your ability to keep a parrot for 5, 10, 25 years and beyond?

Consider compatibility. Will your lifestyle allow you to meet the high care demands and behavioral challenges of caring for birds? All parrots are not created alike; their physical requirements, behavior, personalities and natural instincts vary by each species

and individual bird. It's crucial to carefully research the characteristics of various avian species, have realistic expectations and take an honest look at what kind of bird, if any, you can best accommodate.

Think about environment. Are you able to provide an environment that will fulfill the physical and social needs of the bird you wish to bring into your home? Remember that all birds require specialized diets, "out-of-cage" time, enrichment activities, companionship with other birds and/or humans, and lots of patience.

Two may be better than one! Already have a top-notch home for your bird but don't feel you are spending enough time with him/her? Consider whether or not adopting a bird of the same species as a companion may be the solution. Remember, birds were meant to live in flocks of their own kind. Adding another flock-mate to your home requires very careful consideration of your bird's temperament and your lifestyle, but may make for a happier situation for you and your best friend!

Rescue and Adoption Organizations

Avian rescue and adoption organizations nationwide are leading the way to end the cycle of parrot homelessness. These groups range from permanent sanctuaries that provide lifelong care for birds with special health or behavioral needs, to adoption services that work with a national network of bird organizations to facilitate the placement of birds into knowledgeable, well-prepared and loving homes, to organizations that promote avian education and conservation of parrots in the wild. Some groups may be affiliated with bird clubs or other humane organizations, while others are dedicated exclusively to the rescue, foster care, sanctuary and adoption of captive birds.

If you are up to the challenge, learn more about how you can give an unwanted bird a chance at a new life. Here are some rescue and adoption organizations that can help:

The Avian Rescue Network (www.avianrescuenetwork.org) is a national network of individuals and avian rescue organizations dedicated to saving the lives of avian friends in captivity.

The Avian Welfare Coalition (AWC) is a working alliance of representatives from bird adoption, rescue, and sanctuary groups; humane societies; animal advocacy organizations; published research biologists; shelter and research veterinarians; and attorneys and other animal law specialists dedicated to the ethical treatment and protection of birds living in captivity and in their natural habitats. P.O. Box 40212, St. Paul, MN 55104. Website: www.avianwelfare.org, e-mail: info@avianwelfare.org.

Foster Parrots, Ltd., the East Coast's largest parrot rescue, placement, and sanctuary organization, is dedicated to the protection and advocacy of parrots in the wild and in captivity. Foster Parrots is actively involved in public education and in efforts to preserve parrots in their natural habitats. It is accredited by the Association of Sanctuaries (TAOS). Address: P.O. Box 650, Rockland, MA 02370. Phone: (781) 878-3733. Website: www.fosterparrots.com.

Midwest Avian Adoption and Rescue Services (MAARS) is the nation's largest avian sanctuary, shelter, and placement organization and a leader in the avian welfare movement. Located in the Twin Cities, MAARS is home to a flock of 200–250 birds on any given day. They also work with a national network of bird organizations to place birds with suitable adopters. MAARS is accredited by TAOS. Address: P.O. Box 821, Stillwater, MN 55082. Phone: (651) 275-0568. Website: www.maars.org.

The Oasis Sanctuary is the nation's largest avian-only lifetime care facility. It provides refuge and rehabilitation to special-needs parrots who are better suited to life among other parrots. You can't adopt their parrots, but you can sponsor them. The sanctuary is accredited by the American Sanctuary Association and TAOS. Address: P.O. Box 3104, Scottsdale, AZ 85271. Phone: (520) 212-4737. Website: www.the-oasis.org.

Parrots First, Inc., is an avian rescue and adoption organization, and a member of the Best Friends Network. Address: P.O. Box 66223, Los Angeles, CA 90066. Phone: (866) 248-7670, ext. 5937. Website: www.parrrotsfirst.org.

Where to Adopt

Visit these avian rescue and adoption links:

The Avian Welfare Coalition (mentioned above) has an adoption and rescue resource page: www.avianwelfare.org/links/organizations.htm.

BirdAdoption.org lists bird rescue, adoption and sanctuary groups by state at www.birdadoption.org/groups.htm.

The Avian Protection Society provides a listing of avian shelter and adoption groups at www.avianprotectors.homestead.com/Rescue.html.

You can also try contacting local humane organizations, shelters and veterinary offices. They often list birds for adoption or can refer you to sources in their area. Local bird clubs or associations may sponsor adoption programs and also provide vital education and support services to adopters. Adoption requirements for these organizations vary. Please inquire about required membership and/or adoption fees.

Denise Kelly is a co-founder and board member of the Avian Welfare Coalition. She has been active in animal welfare and protection and exotic bird issues for 20 years.

See also: [Educating Yourself About Avian Care and Behavior](#)