

Squawk 'n Talk

October 2017



**~ October Gateway Parrot Club Meeting ~
Sunday, October 15, 2017
Varietees Bird Store
Valley Park, MO**

**Guest Speaker, Joanna Berger, M.Sc., Animal Behaviorist
www.AnimalBehaviorConsultancy.com**

Joanna is going to share with us her study of 47 African Grey parrots in a naturalistic aviary. We will learn about their behavior, territories, and social organization.

This will be an amazing opportunity to see a great deal of fascinating natural behavior of the African Greys and to learn things that can help us all give the best lives to the birds in our care.

~ Business meeting begins at 2:00

~ Food served at 2:30

Program starts at 3:00 p.m.

~Raffle drawings after the presentation (raffle tickets \$1.00 ea, 6 for \$5.00)

Chirps from the President's Perch

The Butterfly House joined us last month with a wonderful and very educational program about their facility. I've been there many times with grandchildren and with parrots but I learned so many things that I had never heard before. Many thanks to the Butterfly House for sharing their beautiful facility with us.

I'm excited about our speaker this month. This will be a rare opportunity for us to get first hand details and data about a study of a large group of African Greys in a naturalistic setting. Joanna Berger M.Sc., Animal Behaviorist will share her experiences and information with us.

I mentioned in my last month's message that we would be holding a special raffle for a Free Registration for Parrot Festival. Unfortunately, Hurricane Harvey intervened and flooded a huge amount of Houston and the surrounding communities. Daniel Sigmond, President of NPRPF and Chairperson of Parrot Festival was not personally flooded but he was flooded into his neighborhood. No mail or direct outside contact was possible for him for over a week. I hope to have the Certificate from Danny in time for our October 15th meeting.

Parrot Festival is a three-day educational seminar with speakers from across the nation, a very worthwhile event to attend. The dates are January 26, 27, and 28, 2018. It's truly a very worthwhile event that you might consider attending. The Raffle will be for a Free Registration to Parrot Festival, a \$150 value. Don't miss your opportunity to win this fabulous prize. The list of speakers is outstanding, some but not all are as follows: Robin Shewokis, Barbara Heidenreich, Concetta Ferragamo, Joan April Blazich, Jason Crean, and Kathy LaFollet (creator of all the Facebook "Felix" the African Grey posts). The Hilton Doubletree Hotel rooms are \$98 a night and reservations are now open for booking. Several of the St. Louis members will be attending this year. For more information go to: <http://www.pparrotfestival.org/when-where-is-it>

AFA has been very instrumental in providing bird food and supplies to those in need due to Harvey, Irma and Maria. Texas and Florida are slowly recovering and rebuilding, now the AFA Disaster Fund is trying to establish multiple locations in Puerto Rico to become Distribution Centers for Wild Bird Food, Parrot, Finch and Canary seed, pellets, medical supplies and wire to build holding cages for the birds whose homes and cages have been destroyed. The only distributor on the Island has all of its buildings totally destroyed along with

all of their inventory. Communication is still almost nonexistent so this project is going to be very long term. AFA has located one person who still has a building standing and has a large truck and is willing to act as a distribution point for AFA food and supplies. He is employed by American Airlines and travels back to Dallas weekly. He also has over 100 birds in PR, many who have suffered broken legs and other injuries. AFA is trying to locate an Avian Veterinarian who will be able to treat his birds as well as any other birds in need of medical care. The Veterinarian that the man has traditionally used cannot be reached. The situation on the Caribbean Islands is dire. People, Parrots, and Wildlife are all suffering.

Georgia

General Meeting Information:

Come and enjoy the fun and bring a bird (as long as it is clipped). It's so enjoyable seeing all the different species of parrots and talking to other parrot owners.

You don't have to be a member to attend, but we would love to have you join. Meeting starts at 2:00 and it will be a full afternoon of meeting, socializing, eating, program, and raffle. For members who have not renewed their membership or who would like to join, please see Renee Davis, our membership chair person. She will be at the meeting to sign you up. An annual membership fee of \$20.00 includes your family (two voting members) and brings you our monthly newsletter by email. Thank you for joining and helping support the parrot community in St. Louis.

We meet at Varietees Bird Store, 60 Meramec Valley Plaza, Valley Park, MO. Varietees will be open in the afternoon so you can purchase bird food, supplies, toys, cages, play stands, etc.

We do have a raffle most months so if you would like to donate item(s), they are always welcome. They do not have to be bird related. We sell raffle tickets for \$1.00 each or 6 for \$5.00.

Chef Christine will be preparing meatballs with sauce, little smokies sausage in BBQ sauce, chicken pinwheel sandwiches, bean salad, fresh pepper salsa with chips, fruit salad, fresh apple cake, and pineapple upside down cake. In addition there will be a pasta salad, veggie tortilla rollups, and pumpkin crisp dessert. Feel free to bring something to add to the buffet (snacks, salad, dessert, etc.).

Membership Report (Renee Davis):

Welcome new members who joined at the August GPC fair:

Marion Muir
Loretta Walk
George Feller
Rhonda Wilson
Timothy and Tara Nahm
Curtis Smith
Amanda Barnard
Bernadette Geringer
Michael Cross
Andrea Barnes

GPC September Meeting Attendees:

Georgia Fletcher	Aubrey Kiener
Dick Grommet	Linda Kraft
David Kincade	Nancy Marron
Cathy Timma	Julie Morgan
Renee Davis	Tara Nahm
Carole Grommet	Timothy Nahm
Christine Kincade	Sharon Wilkins
Tracy Schwarztrauber	Amanda Barnard
Pamela Alsop	John Barnard
Jim Berk	Michael Cross
Cindy Burquin	Miriam Hannibal
Ginny Feikert	Leslie Zheng
Tom Howk	Andrew Zheng
Steve Johnson	Beth Poll



Association of Avian Veterinarians

Advancing & Promoting Avian Medicine and Stewardship

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Importance of Environmental Complexity for Captive Macaws

(Part 1 of a Series on Enrichment)

By: Kenneth R. Welle, DVM, Dipl ABVP (Avian), University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine Adapted from: "Extreme Enrichment for the Modern Macaw," Session #137, ExoticsCon 2016

The problem with captivity is, simply put, captivity. Restricting the movements of a bird will limit the extent of exposure to the environment. How restrictive this is depends highly on the environmental complexity available to the bird. A good analogy would be incarceration of prisoners. Placing a prisoner in solitary confinement is far more restrictive than housing one in the general prison population, which is in turn, far more restrictive than someone confined on "house arrest" with a monitoring anklet. None of us like to think of our birds as prisoners, but many pets are given environments far smaller and less complex than an average prisoner is afforded.

Size is one of the factors involved in environmental complexity. Generally, larger spaces will allow a greater diversity of activity than smaller spaces. This can be affected somewhat by other factors, but extremely small spaces will necessarily restrict the available choices for activity. While it is true that some birds seem to become bewildered by an extremely large cage, this is likely to be due to early experiences or lack thereof. No parrot has a small cage in the wild,

and their aversion to open space is a pathological response, born from developmental stunting. It is relatively easy to find information about the minimum cage size for birds. This may not be the best way to look at the equation. A better way would be to determine the maximum space that can be provided. Once that is determined, then the bird can be chosen to match the available space. Guidelines stating that a cage should be large enough to allow for the wings to extend without touching is grossly inadequate to allow normal behavior. The majority of birds spend 12-22 hours in the cage; it is impossible to allow normal behaviors to occur in a space barely large enough to turn around in. Whether or not a bird is flighted, a flight cage, open bird- room, or aviary is highly recommended in order to provide ample opportunity for activity. In addition to the raw space, the shape and orientation of the cage is also important. Two cages of equivalent volume may have very different amounts of “effective” space. The older cages for small birds with a vertical, narrow, cylindrical shape had no more usable space for the bird than a cage of half the height. Generally rectangular cages oriented horizontally provide the most usable space for birds.

Exploratory opportunities are another feature of avian enclosures that can influence the complexity. Parrots have the unique capability among birds to climb using their feet and beaks. For birds with clipped wings, and those with wing conditions preventing flight, this is the primary mode of locomotion. Provision of furnishings to the cage that encourage this activity will enhance the ability to explore. Wire cages provide this opportunity inherently. However, climbing excessively on the wire of the cage can have deleterious effects on the remiges and rectrices. The feathers often push between bars bending the barbs back and ultimately breaking them. Natural branches are a good addition to most cages. In addition to providing climbing opportunities, they allow for beak activity. These branches can be oriented horizontally or vertically, depending on the bird’s abilities and the configuration of the branches. They can also be hung rigidly between the cage sides or can swing more freely.

Very few perches in nature are rigid. If natural branches are limited, wooden dowels, cholla branches, rope perches, commercial swings, and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe can be used. PVC can be roughened to improve grip or can be wrapped in self-adherent bandages or natural twine or rope. Ropes can be used alone as well. The diameter should be appropriate for the size of the bird.

The ways the ropes are hung are dependent on the climbing abilities of the bird. Ropes should generally be natural fibers in case the bird chews off fragments and swallows them, and to prevent strands from constricting toes. Ladders offer a simple climbing opportunity as well and can be rigid or constructed of rope. Large manila cargo nets are excellent climbing furniture for large birds.

One type of item that should be avoided in most situations is any nesting structure. Most species of parrot are quite territorial about their nests, and will display aggressive responses to people or even other birds that they would normally tolerate. This is because most species will separate from the flock for breeding. This is when the nest structure is usually utilized. For most parrot species, the nest is a hollow tree cavity. Any hollow item large enough to climb into could be perceived as a nesting structure. One possible exception to this rule may be Quaker parrots. These birds are communal nesters, and nest building is not isolated to breeding activity. They also build nests, which is unique among psittacids. Providing these birds with small twigs will allow natural nest-building activity to occur.

Visual and auditory stimuli will also affect the environmental complexity. The activity and scenery surrounding a bird's cage should be interesting but not stressful to the bird. A cage usually should be located in an area with a great deal of household activity. This allows non-contact interaction with people in the household. Verbal interaction should be relatively constant when people are present. In households where no one is home through most of the day, alternative stimuli should be provided. Television, radio, other pet birds, a view of a bird feeder outside, or other interesting stimuli may be useful. Care must be taken that the stimuli do not evoke fear responses, at least on a constant basis. One may think that watching an outdoor bird feeder would be a great stimulus but seeing birds snatched up by Cooper's hawks may be more like a horror movie to some birds. This is not to say that brief exposure to threatening stimuli are harmful to a psychologically stable bird, but this will depend on prior experience and the individual personality of the bird. The olfactory sense of birds has long been considered weak, largely due to the small olfactory lobe of the brain in most species. There is, however, some evidence that olfactory cues are sometimes used by birds. This can be encouraged simply by feeding fragrant vegetables (e.g., sweet peppers) or using a small amount spices (e.g., cinnamon, nutmeg) on chew toys.

Toys can provide a great deal of activity for parrots. There are numerous types of toys that are appropriate for parrots. These will provide different types of activities. They should be selected specifically for the species involved. Foot toys simply allow the bird to manipulate the item with the foot. This is usually combined with beak activity or foraging. Birds that would feed in trees in the wild are more likely to use foot toys than ground feeding species like cockatiels or grass parakeets. Chew toys are critical for all parrots. These should be constructed of natural, non-toxic materials and should be easy enough to destroy that the bird does not give up on the project. Branches with the bark still on it, cardboard, and thin, soft woods are good for birds with low to moderate destructive potential. Harder woods are appropriate for very beaky birds. Puzzles allow the bird to work out a problem to achieve some goal, whether that is a food item, another toy, or just a sound. Puzzles should be simple at first, gradually increasing the complexity as the bird learns and gains confidence. Like humans, birds will become bored with continued exposure to the same toys. How many of us have home gyms that are collecting dust or serving as a clothing rack? Rotation of the toys will help keep the interest up.

Care must be taken to avoid frightening timid birds with new toys also. Some birds will react adversely to new items being placed in the cage. In these cases, toys should be introduced outside of the cage in a non-threatening way (i.e., allow the bird to approach the toy on its own time schedule).

No matter how interesting a home is, it is always desirable to get away from it once in a while. Even if it seems stressful at first, having exposure to varying environments is critical for pet parrots. The truth is that very few pet parrots will live their entire lives in one home. With the long life expectancy of parrots, having the owner move, die, or lose interest in the bird will necessitate adapting to a new environment. Birds that are more accustomed to various locations will be better adapted to this change. For well-adjusted parrots, the variable environment will be pleasant stimulation. Play stands are a good alternative site for parrots to spend time. There are numerous arrangements that can be useful. Branches, PVC pipe structures, and many other stands are commercially available or can be readily built to provide a play area for psittacids of varying sizes and activity levels. Multiple cages can be helpful in some cases. A sleep cage will allow the primary cage to be in an area of high activity, but still have a dark quiet place to sleep at night. The sleep cage can be smaller and minimally furnished. Otherwise, having another cage in another room may just provide a

change of scenery. An outdoor aviary allows for exposure to natural sunlight and fresh air. Commuter birds that go to the workplace with the owner have the advantage of staying with their human flock most of the time. The non-contact interaction with various people through the day is ideal for well-socialized birds. Travel can be either highly stressful or highly rewarding depending on the individual bird and the methods used. Generally, travel will involve more close confinement and sometimes motion sickness, dehydration, and other issues. These factors need to be taken into account for travel to be a positive experience.