

August 2018

Squawk 'n Talk

Save the Date!



31st Annual Fair Birds, Reptiles, and Exotics

Saturday, August 25, 2018

10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Machinists' Hall

12365 St. Charles Rock Road

Bridgeton, MO 63044

Featuring 10,000 sq. ft. of vendor space offering:

Birds, Reptiles, and other Exotics.

Toys, cages, play stands, food, supplies & accessories, arts & crafts

Snack Bar, Raffle, Silent Auction

Special Exhibit: "Meet the Parrots"

Speakers:

- Dr. David Kersting, "Conservation of the Brown Throated Conure & Yellow Shouldered Amazon of Bonaire" & "Interesting Parrot Cases"

- Robin Shewokis, "All Animals Forage - Welcome to the Great Foraging Experiment"

Contact Information:

Dick Grommet, Fair Coordinator, 636-529-0026

Email: rwgrommet@att.net

Website: www.GatewayParrotClub.org



Admission Fees: Adult: \$5.00; Children under 12: Free
Note: This will be the last newsletter before the Aug. 25th Fair

We welcome items from you for our raffle table or silent auction. Bring them to the fair or email us and we can pick them up.

Volunteers are always needed so if you would like to volunteer, email us at rwgrommet@att.net. Specify whether you want morning or afternoon shift. Use this email if you have any questions about the fair and are not on Facebook.

Christopher, Adeline, and Abbie will again have a special exhibit called "Meet the Parrots." Last year lots of people "flocked" to their area and enjoyed seeing many different species of parrots and learning all about them.

This year we are adding reptiles and small mammals. We are very excited to have them join us. The following was written by Noelle Richter, who will be a vendor with Karen Caution and Crystal Rolfe: *"If anyone wants to learn more about reptiles, maybe hold their first snake, learn about how and why chameleons really change colors, even pet a giant cockroach, please stop by our table and say hello! We would be happy to answer any questions, and look forward to showing off our animals."*

We will also have great speakers (Robin Shewokis and Dr. Kersting), silent auction, raffle tables, etc. Also some new vendors have signed up. Dr. Kersting will be speaking at 12:00 and Robin at 2:00 on the second floor.

Chef Christine just can't get out of the kitchen when it comes to parrot club. She will have a variety of food available at the snack bar. Dave Kinkade and Jim Berk will be assisting her. Here's the list to choose from:

Hot Dog	\$2.00
Hot Dog Combo*	\$3.50
Chili Dog	\$3.00
Chili Dog Combo*	\$4.50
Brat	\$3.00
Brat Combo*	\$4.50
Nachos w/cheese	\$3.00
Nachos w/cheese & chili	\$4.00
Popcorn	\$1.00
Chips	\$1.00
Soda	\$1.00
Water	\$1.00

*Combo includes chips and drink

If you are on Facebook, we will have posts updating fair news in the Gateway Parrot Club group page and also the Gateway Parrot Club Event page.

See You At the Fair!



Many of you remember **Robin Shewokis** when she spoke at Varietees Bird Store in 2013 and have mentioned that you want her to come back. Good news! She will be speaking at the August Gateway Parrot Club Fair. We are very excited to have her.

The topic of her presentation will be "All Animals Forage - Welcome to the Great Foraging Experiment." We will explore the need to forage and ways to encourage your pets to participate in foraging activities. She will not limit her talk just to parrots, but all animals. Since we are adding reptiles and exotics to our fair, she will include them in her seminar.

Robin is the owner of The Leather Elves (a company that designs and manufactures enrichment devices for animals in captivity. Since 2000 Robin has consulted at zoos in the U.S., Canada and Holland and has distributed enrichment products worldwide.

Robin regularly speaks at parrot clubs, providing workshops teaching ways to create a stimulating environment. She also develops new products for parrots that will stimulate naturalistic behavior. Robin has published articles on enrichment in national and international publications. She has also produced a DVD titled "Enriching Your Parrot's Life."

Robin is a member of The American Association of Zookeepers where she advises the behavioral husbandry committee. She currently serves on the board of The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators and chairs their enrichment committee.

You don't want to miss Robin at the August 25th fair. Check out her Facebook page, "The Leather Elves."

Pictures from Our July Toy Making Party:

Thanks to Dawn Breer and Lisa Rose, we had another fun toy making party. Everyone had a great time. The 30 toys that were made will be in the table raffles and a few on the silent auction table. We made 10 each of small, medium, and large toys. The large ones are special because they were made with a reusable parrot toy skewer (see first picture top left below). When your parrot destroys it, reuse it by adding more toy parts or thread fresh fruits and vegetables on it for a fun foraging experience. All three are great toys that your



parrots will love.

Gateway Parrot Club



Meeting Dates 2018:

- August 25, All American Hookbill Fair (no meeting)
- September 16, Michelle Vrbka, Consider Your Bird's Future by Equipping Tomorrow's Caregivers
- October 21,
- November 18, Adrienne Mock, Protecting the Flock from Theft, Natural Disaster, Disease and Legislation
- December 9, Annual Holiday Party

*** Meeting will be on 2nd Sunday**

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 1:00 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, and helps us to provide special speakers. 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.

NOTE: We will not have a general meeting in August. Instead, come to the fair on August 25th and enjoy the day shopping, playing with parrots and small animals, learning about parrots, reptiles, and small mammals, eating a hot dog or bratwurst, getting ideas of how to enrich your pets' life, visiting and sharing stories with other animal lovers, etc.

Membership Report (Renee Davis):

GPC July Meeting Attendees:

Georgia Fletcher	Cindy Burquin
Dick Grommet	Jess Ellis
Cathy Timma	Tom Howk
Renee Davis	Nancy Marron
Heidi Hellmuth	Julie Morgan
Dixie Danzeisen	Sandy Newcomb
Carole Grommet	Barbara Peach
Christine Kinkade	Lisa Rose
David Kinkade	Andrea Stoppelmann
Beth Poll	Sandy Warren
Barbara Agathen	Sharon Wilkins
Paul Agathen	Rosemary Wilson
Jorg Augustin	Christine Scott
Megan Augustin	Mary Staab
Jim Berk	Ted West
Dawn Breer	

Biting, It's Not For The Birds

Written by Steve Martin President, Natural Encounters, Inc.

Published in PsittaScene Magazine Publication of the World Parrot Trust, April 2002

“Biting is just part of having a parrot as a pet.” Does that sound familiar? It should. It is a very common attitude associated with companion parrot ownership. However, I feel the opposite is true. A parrot owner should strive to never get bit. That is a pretty bold statement for such a common problem. The fact is that biting is something parrots learn to do in captivity and not something that is normally seen in the wild. That’s right, they don’t bite each other in the wild, at least not hard enough to make another parrot bleed.

In the past 15 years or so, I have interviewed many parrot field researchers (personal communications: Brice, February, 1994, Munn, July 1998, Gilardi, February, 1999, English, November, 2000, May, May 15, 2001) about biting and dominance. With a combined total of over 35 years of field research, only two of these researchers have ever seen or heard of a parrot biting another parrot hard enough to make it bleed. Both of these incidences were associated with nest holes. One incident involved two birds fighting over a nest cavity and the other involved a parrot attacking a young bird in the nest in an attempt to take over the nest.

Parrots very rarely bite each other in the wild. However, they often show aggression to protect resources like territory, mates, desirable perches, food items, etc. These interactions are generally limited to body language like the raising of the head feathers or a subtle look of the eye. Sometimes the aggression escalates to vocal displays such as growling or even more overt body language like thrusting the beak forward in a jousting fashion. In the wild, this body language is usually enough to deter an intruding bird and avoid negative physical contact with the resource holder.

So, why do parrots bite in captivity? First, if you put an animal in an unnatural environment you can expect some unnatural behavior. Second, all behavior is a product of instinct or experience. A bite from a parrot falls into one of these two categories. Some biting incidents are innate and some are learned. Many parrots have been forced to bite out of fear, or self-defense. Humans tend to be aggressive in the manner in which they approach and pick up their parrots. This bold, aggressive action may cause a bird to bite out of fear. Most parrots do not have the option to fly away like their wild counterparts

and are sometimes pushed to the point that biting is the only way they know to defend themselves or express their displeasure.

Before biting, most captive parrots display various body language and vocalizations to express their feelings, just like wild parrots. However, few people ever notice the slight glance of an eye or the almost imperceptible tightening of the feathers on the parrot's head that holds so much information about its thoughts and feelings. After all, human communication is generally very bold and obvious, and has evolved to put much more emphasis on verbal communication, than body language. Many, if not most, parrot owners are oblivious to their parrot's subtle attempts at communication. They fail to notice the slick feathers, or quick head movements, as the nervous bird instinctively looks for an escape path, a common avoidance behavior. Often, the first signs of nervousness most parrot owners notice are the obvious escape attempts or the growls and other vocal displays of discomfort and fear. By this time, they have already missed the myriad of signals that have preceded this most obvious show of discomfort and have pushed the bird to the brink of aggression.

Another important point to consider is most of the information available to parrot owners today does not encourage sensitivity. In fact, some of the most common teachings today encourage dominance and aggression when working with a parrot. It is common to hear and read things like "make sure he knows you're the boss," and "don't let him get away with that," etc. The popular trend is to dominate pet parrots rather than build partnerships.

This aggressive approach only encourages more biting incidents as birds are forced to bite to express themselves to their confident but insensitive owners.

Parrots bite for the following main reasons:

Play; It is a hard wired, or instinctive behavior for parrots to investigate a person's finger or other body part with their strong beak. This is the way nature provides information to the young bird about its environment. It is the responsibility of the owner to tell the bird just how hard it is allowed to "investigate" fingers and other objects. A loud and sharp "NO" is similar in effect to the vocalization that an adult parrot would use in the wild to communicate to a youngster that it has exceeded its bounds.

Territorial Aggression; Parrots instinctively protect territories both in the wild and in captivity. In the wild a parrot bonds with one individual and will protect their nesting territory from intruders. Captive parrots also bond with one individual, often a human.

When this happens, they can aggressively defend a territory from intruders. They can easily learn that biting is the only, or at least the best, way to drive human intruders away from their territory.

Fear Aggression; As mentioned earlier, many parrots have bitten out of fear of a human forcing himself or herself on the nervous bird. This is also an instinctive reaction that is closely associated with survival. If the bird were in the wild it would simply fly away. However, most captive birds are denied the ability to escape and are left with biting as their last resort.

Learned Aggression; Some parrots learn to bite for a desired response. This learned aggression is displayed in many ways. One bird could learn that a light bite to the arm of its owner when he or she is eating a donut may result in a piece of the tasty treat being offered to stop the annoying nibbling. Another bird may learn that a bite to the finger will cause a person to leave it alone on top of the cage or on a person's shoulder, even if it is for just long enough for the person to go get a dowel or perch to pick the bird up with. Once a parrot bites a person for the first time, it may be on its way to learning that this is a valid way to communicate with humans. Any behavior that is reinforced is likely to be repeated.

To avoid being bitten, start by developing a positive relationship with the bird. Try to avoid forcing the bird to do anything it doesn't want to do. This is a very difficult concept for many parrot owners to understand, especially when the information available to parrot owners suggests dominating the bird. Plus, many humans have a fairly good reinforcement history associated with dominating other animals, such as dogs, and even other humans. It is a communication strategy that seems, at least to them, to work fairly well. Going against this natural tendency and working to establish a relationship with the bird that is built on positive interactions is the first step toward a partner relationship with a parrot.

Next, the bird owner should develop sensitivities to the bird's communication. He or she should learn how to read its body language and listen to what it tells them. Then, they should care about what it says and allow the bird to be a partner in the relationship instead of an object. They should learn to ask the bird to do things and avoid telling it. After all, rarely does anything, except a predator, ever force a parrot in the wild to do something it doesn't want to do.

One more thing that will enhance a parrot owner's relationship with their parrot: taking responsibility for each time the bird bites them. Parrot owners should understand that biting is something that they have either forced a bird to do or taught it to do. When they accept this responsibility they will begin to see that their scars are signs of insensitivity and not badges of courage. They will also begin to lay the foundation for a more rewarding partnership with their companion bird.

