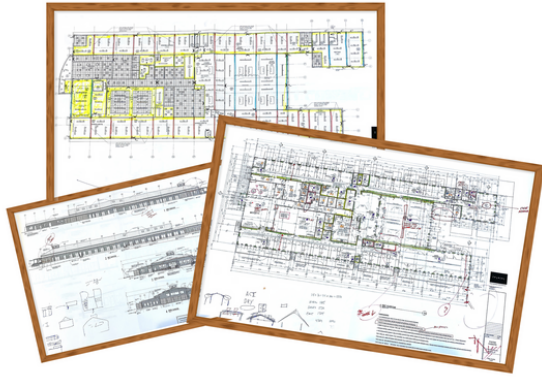




Year in Review Issue / Year-End Fund Drive!



Sanctuary Reconstruction Project Update

The Highs & Lows of Getting to the Starting Line

Wielding his pen like a little axe, our Construction Project Manager, Brian Kelleher, draws a tentative line across the middle of the page, and just like that, macaws lose 186 square feet of space. That may not seem like a big number, but it's equal to a room a little larger than 12'x15', which reduces our ability to rescue as many as 10 macaws. Ouch. We decide against it.



We are hovering over the multi-layered pages of the new architectural design, agonizing over what we can or cannot afford to sacrifice. The long-awaited cost estimate had come in way, way over budget. Not realistic, and frankly, not fair. Looking at comparable projects dating back only 3-4 years, the insane projection reflected more than a 100% cost increase in the construction industry in just a few short years. This is hard to accept. No doubt, construction costs have soared, and construction companies have more work than they can handle these days, which does nothing to help drive costs down. But we know we can do better, so we're strategizing, consulting with contractors, working on some tactics that can help create competitive bidding, and we're pouring over the design, making cost-cutting decisions and trying to shave down square footage in our new sanctuary. Nevertheless, we know we're looking at a budget in the \$8 million dollar range. Although we have now raised close to \$5 million dollars toward our reconstruction project, it's going to take another \$3+ million to get the new sanctuary built.



It had taken until June of 2022 to plan, rethink and re-imagine our way to the first official architectural design for the new sanctuary, and it felt perfect in every detail, closely following the footprint of our original building. We would phase construction so that birds could be moved as new sections were completed; stress to them would be as minimal as possible. It was a great plan. Then, in the spring of this year, Foster Parrots hired Bowerman Construction, Inc. to join our team. The guys from Bowerman looked over our perfect floor plan, and promptly urged us to redesign the building.



Above: Rendition Drawings

(Con't on page 2)

The 2-3 phases it would take to get this sanctuary built, they said, would add more than a million dollars in cost and an extra year of time to the project. It was a bad plan. So back to the drawing board we went. In the end, our second plan was even more perfect than the first. It expanded space for many of the birds and sacrificed nothing. It provided larger event spaces for concurrent educational programs, and larger adoption center and medical clinic space. It did, in fact, increase interior space by about 4,000 square feet, which felt like a positive and essential upgrade. Best of all, it was repositioned on the property so that construction could be completed in one single phase, and it was estimated that the project would be completed in 12 months once the first shovel full of dirt was turned. We were elated!

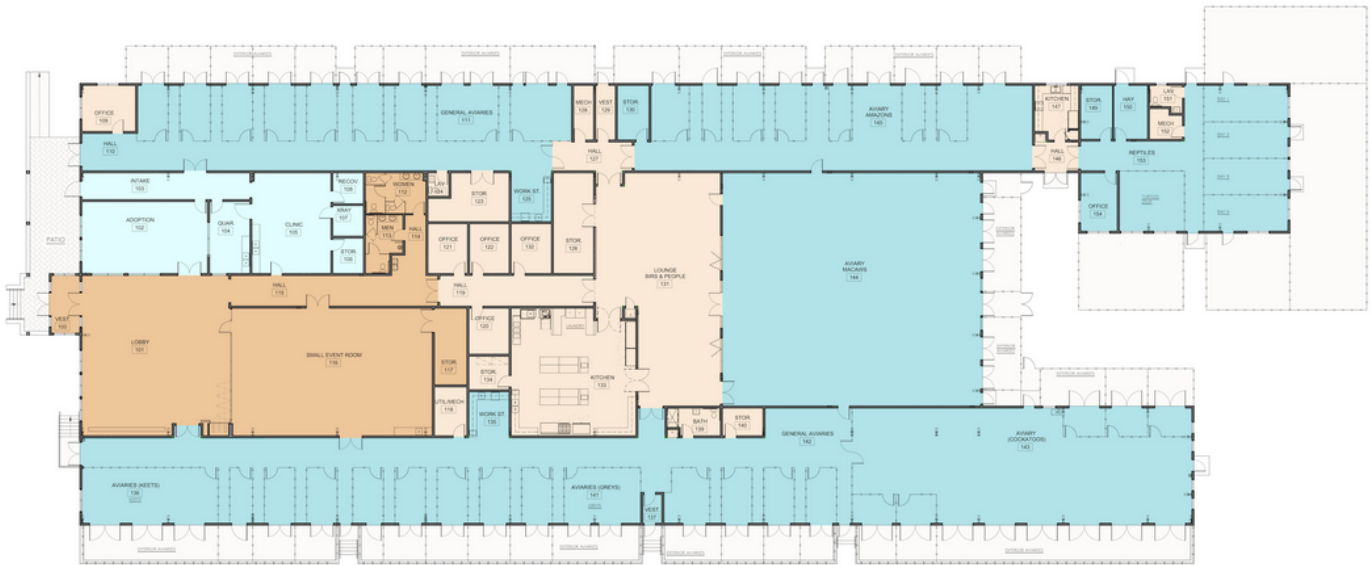
And then: the dreaded preliminary cost estimate. Modifications are needed. And it hurts.

At 33,000 square feet, this is not a small project, and at its center sits a resident population of more than 360 parrots which, in the eyes of our construction team, not only makes this arguably the most unique project they have ever worked on, but also the most impossible.

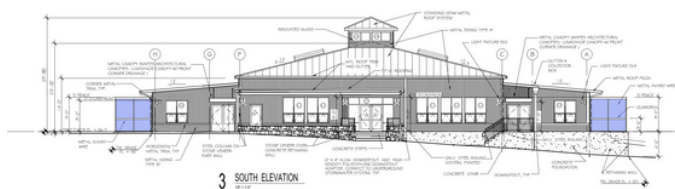
At every turn, the inclination of parrots to dismantle and destroy anything they can get their beaks around leaves the construction team scratching their heads as we work to identify materials and building elements that are indestructible, safe and affordable. And as we sit with our heads bent over the giant pages of plans with our inky little axes in hand, eliminating two feet here, three feet there, we are also trying to economize on finishes and structural features that were never extravagant to begin with. We are masters of frugality! But even the basics are killing our budget.

Our modified sanctuary plan will now go through its final architectural draft, the layers will be assembled and the project will go out for bidding by March. We will finally break ground somewhere within the first half of the new year. As anxious as we all are, this does not leave us with a lot of time to raise an additional \$3+ million dollars.

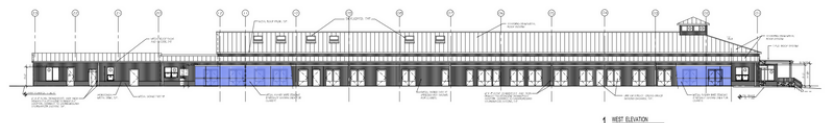
Do you have the ability to help? Let's close the gap! Please contact Karen Windsor to discuss major capital gifts or pledges. **Karen@fosterparrots.com**



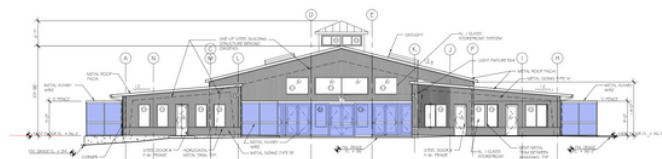
FLOOR PLAN
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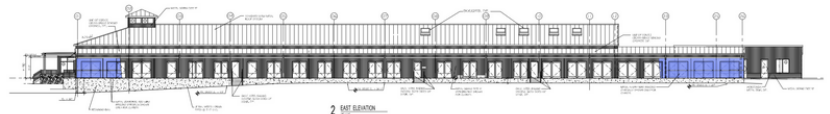
3 SOUTH ELEVATION



1 EAST ELEVATION



4 NORTH ELEVATION

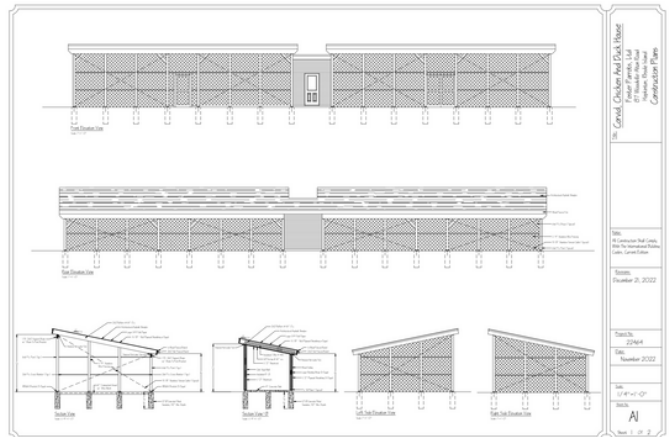


2 WEST ELEVATION

Breaking Ground on the Yard Bird House

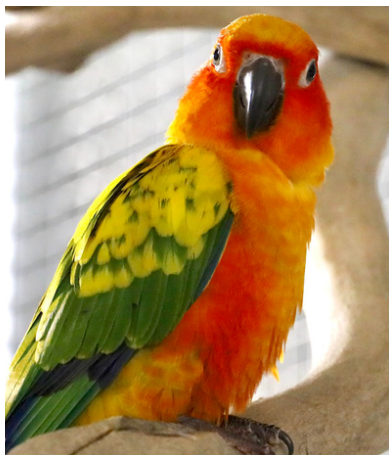
Sheltered Living for Foster Parrots' Yard Birds and Corvids

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) caught us by surprise in the spring of 2022, unleashing a viral threat unlike any we had experienced before. We sheltered our yard birds inside the Feral Arts building to minimize their risk of exposure, and our crows and parrots were kept inside through the entire summer. Knowing this would not be our first tango with HPAI, we began plans to build a large structure that could accommodate our yard birds safely and comfortably inside during times of high risk. We never anticipated that it would take nearly two years to navigate the regulations that swirl around building a “chicken coop” of this size (to be fair, it’s really big) and also to find a construction crew with the time and desire to build it! Contractor, Joe Babcock and his company, Babcock Construction, came to the rescue! Construction commenced at the start of November. Ducks, roosters, peacocks and corvids will be in their new home before the end of the year. This 1,880 square foot structure actually kicks off our capital reconstruction project as it will be a major feature of the new sanctuary.



Mayaguez Zoo Rescue Update

The Mayaguez Zoo rescue event in Puerto Rico was one of the largest and most complicated rescues Foster Parrots has ever been involved in. Traveling to the island in June of this year, our Foster Parrots team was joined by our associates from Best Friends Animal Society to pull 66 birds, 2 Patagonian caviés and 5 kittens out of this decrepit establishment where animals had been suffering and dying for many years. After their safe arrival to Foster Parrots, two road trips were organized to get birds and animals to their final destinations at Best Friends in Utah, Oasis Sanctuary in Arizona, MAARS in Minnesota and Project Perry in Virginia.

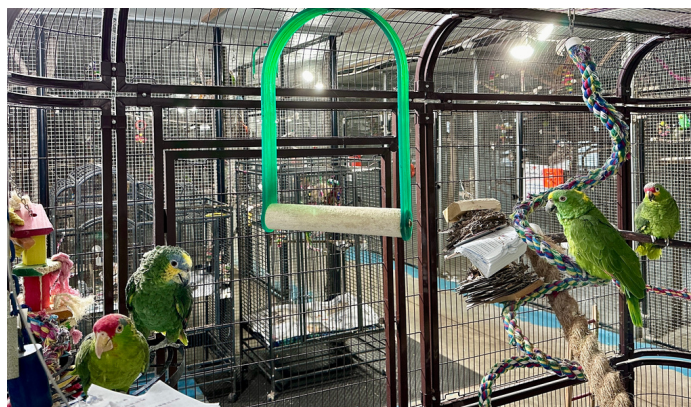


Conures, Rick & Morty (above), blended seamlessly with our other jenday and sun conures in one of our two large conure aviaries



Theodora (left), the one adult canary-winged parakeet we rescued, is spunky! She enjoys flying as a part of the flock in our large, mixed species little bird aviary.

Foster Parrots Birds!



Of the 26 rescued diamond doves, Foster Parrots kept 4 due to medical issues that required extra support. They enjoy space, flight and (relative) freedom in the little bird aviary, along with friends, Theodora and 5 Gouldian finches, also rescued from Mayaguez. Additionally, 2 lovebirds have been happily integrated into our lovebird aviary!

Amazons, Bonnie (OW) and Clyde (GC), have found themselves a new flock at Foster Parrots!



Ginger & Kiki



Lucy & Lucky



Bodhi & Canine Best Friend, Nemo

Don't forget the kittens! Five orphaned kittens were rescued and adopted by Amanda Coleman, Danika Oriol-Morway, Karen Windsor and Marc Johnson of Foster Parrots.

Our Mayaguez Rescue Partners: MAARS, Oasis, Best Friends & Project Perry



Seven Indian ring-necked parakeets (left) and six baby canary-winged parakeets (below) found their new home at MAARS in Minnesota and are blissfully happy in aviaries that are safe, beautifully enriched and ready to support their every need.



Fabulous and fun-loving, Dewey the lorikeet (above) is living it large at Oasis Sanctuary in Arizona. Oasis also took in 5 adult Quakers for integration into their large Quaker aviary.



Project Perry in Virginia brought 22 of the 26 rescued diamond doves into their care (above). These doves never knew life could be this good.



Best Friends Animal Society in Utah took in 2 lucky Patagonian maras, Moluccan cockatoo, Cody, umbrella cockatoo, Lolita, 5 very silly Quaker babies, and a bonded pair of beautiful green-cheeked conures.



**99
Rescued
Parakeets
Update!**

99 little parakeets called for help in March of this year, and we knew there was no way we could absorb that many birds. But when Foster Parrots' Intake & Adoption Director, Amanda Coleman, traveled to New Hampshire to check out the situation, she knew there was no way we could walk away.

The rest of the year was spent providing medical support to several birds suffering from congenital or diet related health problems, and searching for people willing to provide homes for small groups of the parakeets. At this writing, 17 parakeets are still looking for placement, but many of these little ones have found excellent homes with people who enjoy letting birds be birds in their own little flocks.



Left: With a beautiful outdoor aviary offering plenty of space, Project Perry in Virginia agreed to take in 10 of the parakeets, which Foster Parrots delivered along with the 22 diamond doves from Puerto Rico.

Far Left: Some of the parakeets were welcomed to Foster Parrots' aviary, particularly those who had health issues and were in need of prolonged support.



Left: Riley Farm Rescue in Connecticut was happy to take a flock of 20 of the parakeets, but needed an aviary! Arrangements were made and Foster Parrots' Facility Manager, Michael Teets set about constructing a beautiful and spacious indoor aviary for the birds. An outdoor component will be added next summer.

Managing Reproductive Behaviors and Egg Laying in Captive Parrots

By Kelly Duker, Avian & Animal Care Director

Foster Parrots sees increasing numbers of surrender requests each year, including more 'out of control' breeding cases. This was exemplified in the case of the 99 inbred budgies we took on earlier this year. We implore guardians to stop intentional and accidental breeding, which overwhelms the rescue community and negatively impacts the individual birds as well, with reproductive behaviors in unnatural, captive settings frequently leading to medical issues and severe degradation in quality of life.

Preventing Hormonal Behavior: Both environmental and behavioral modifications can be implemented to discourage hormonal behaviors. Enclosures should be free of dark or small spaces that imitate nesting sites, and any substrate that would mimic nesting material. Any objects that stimulate the birds in a hormonal way should be removed. In more extreme cases, changing up their entire cage layout, or "shaking up their world," may be needed. Avoid feeding a diet high in fat and sugars. Especially avoid warm or mushy foods which may be reminiscent of "courtship feeding" between mates. Guardians should never stroke their birds anywhere besides their head and feet, since other areas are erogenous zones for birds.



Cardboard boxes or other dark hiding places can be fun enrichment but can also stimulate hormones and act as nesting triggers. If nesting behavior becomes a problem, boxes should be removed.



Female Eclectus are notoriously driven to nest. NEEWS resident, Ava, is a chronic nester whose hormonal and reproductive behavior must be closely monitored, and managed with a regular schedule of Deslorelin implants.



Managing Chronic Egg Laying: If your bird persists in laying eggs despite preventative measures, the focus should shift to avoiding breeding. Obviously, this is only a concern if the eggs could be fertile. Enclosures should be thoroughly scanned daily for eggs. Eggs should be pulled, sterilized through boiling, and returned. Sterilized or dummy eggs should be clearly marked, with a sharpie or other method, to avoid confusion between newly laid eggs in the enclosure. If a bird's egg laying becomes abnormally frequent, or poor egg quality is observed, more extreme measures will need to be taken to stop the behavior. Chronic egg laying can lead to many illnesses in parrots including egg-yolk peritonitis, reproductive cancers, prolapses, infections, and depleted calcium in the bones. These are cases where you don't want to remove the eggs, as this can create a 'vacuum effect,' with birds continuing to lay to replace the stolen eggs. If a bird persists in laying, medical intervention may be necessary. Lupron injections or Deslorelin implants are often used as hormonal manipulations to stop egg laying and prevent inevitable reproductive diseases in birds. **We strongly advocate against separating bonded pairs, and instead promote all other options, including medical intervention, to preserve such a crucial quality of life component.**

Using these methods, Foster Parrots successfully manages a population of over 360 birds without experiencing intentional or accidental breeding. We encourage guardians to reach out to avian vets and behaviorists to create plans to prevent reproductive behaviors, and prevent contributing to the overwhelming unwanted parrot problem that rescues are struggling to keep up with more and more each year.

Love and Loss at the Sanctuary: When Parrots Grieve

By Karen Windsor, Executive Director



Brutus' body was found in the morning, laying on his favorite platform. He had passed peacefully in the night. An old, wild-caught Timneh grey, Brutus had been declining for quite some time. Evidence of heart disease had surfaced 3 years ago when he suffered a stroke that left him with mobility challenges. A regimen of medicinal and herbal heart support, and modifications in the aviary he shared with his friends, Phio, an orange winged Amazon, and Louise, a Timneh grey, were provided to help him navigate his space more easily. Although his passing was not unexpected, our hearts broke nevertheless, as Brutus was a deeply cherished, long-time sanctuary resident. But Brutus was cherished most intensely by Phio and Louise, who guarded the body of their fallen friend aggressively, and would not allow him to be taken away. So staff members, Danielle and Emily, hung a sheet outside of the aviary and instructed volunteers to leave the birds to mourn. "The two of them stayed with Brutus for 6 hours after I found him," recalled Danielle. "I checked on them regularly. The two only moved a few feet away from Brutus and rushed back to his side anytime I peaked in. Eventually I had to remove Brutus so that Dr. Bourke could perform a necropsy. This was a two-person job, as Phio was not ready to say goodbye. Poor Phio spent the rest of the afternoon calling out to Brutus."

Mourning in animals has been studied extensively, even documenting death rituals observed across a myriad of species. Elephants tend to and pay homage to deceased family and herd members. Crows have been observed gathering around the bodies of fallen flock mates, much like attending a wake.

Chimpanzees and whales have been observed clinging to the bodies of deceased offspring for weeks. We depend heavily on science to explain what we don't know or can't understand, and the act of grieving in animals does not seem to make sense from an evolutionary standpoint. Depression, self-isolation, loss of appetite, the inability to sleep or mentally focus are all behaviors demonstrated by humans in mourning, but these behaviors have also been documented in animals, despite the fact that grief-driven behaviors like those described do not support survival in the wild. The very fact that a wild animal would put themselves at risk by succumbing to such unusual behaviors demonstrates an emotional response that defies reason, self-control and choice. It demonstrates grief.

Because our birds can't verbalize their grief or loneliness in words or in tears, people can fail to register that the bird left behind may be having a prolonged emotional experience. A body is removed, human guardians carry on as usual, and the surviving partner now sits alone in a cage.



Jardines parrot, Sweet Pea, and her umbrella cockatoo mate, Snowbird, had shared their unusual love bond for over 17 years. When the highly spirited Sweet Pea began to show symptoms of illness, we were all alarmed. She was pulled from the aviary and put on intensive supportive care while we waited for test results, but it was important to recognize that Snowbird was also having a response to Sweet Pea's illness.

A hospital cage was set up inside the aviary so that Sweet Pea could be fed and medicated under the supervision of her companion. While we had hoped to see some level of recovery, this would not be the case. Well into her 30s, Sweet Pea tested positive for borna virus and also for the ganglioside antibodies, which trigger the seroconversion of borna virus into active PDD. Sweet Pea was dying. When it finally became clear that she had given up, the decision was made to help her pass on. Her body was returned to Snowbird, who spent quite a while sitting with her and preening her. Snowbird finally left Sweet Pea's side and allowed staff to take her away.

Informing the volunteers in a compassionate way to help manage their grief is also important when we lose a resident

parrot. Staff and volunteers alike have intense emotional responses to the loss of the birds they have known and cared for for many years. Why would we imagine that the birds left behind feel any less loss or heartbreak? Parrots and people alike need extra support and attention as, together, we face a world without the bird we all loved.

Love and loss are inevitable aspects of life in sanctuary. In 2023, Foster Parrots suffered the loss of several deeply cherished residents, almost all of whom were lost to age-related diseases. In light of our grief, and acknowledging the emotional responses of the birds left behind, we hope our readers will be mindful that bonds run deep between their parrots at home. Extra support during times of loss can help parrots and people alike through the process of healing.



Saying Good-bye in 2023



(Above and Below) Brutus: An elderly Timneh grey who had little affection for humans, Brutus enjoyed the companionship of two aviary mates, an orange-winged Amazon named Phio and a fellow Timneh named Louise. The mourning demonstrated by these birds upon the loss of their friend was heartbreaking.



(Above) Sweet Pea: This enchanting Jardines parrot was about 35 years old when we lost her in November. This is an advanced age for this species, and the decline in her immune system may have been a factor in the advancement of the borna virus that finally took her from us and from her long-time mate, Snowbird.



(Above) Daisy: An elderly, wild-caught orange-winged Amazon, Daisy was thought to be in the range of 60 years. Daisy developed peritonitis, a serious reproductive disease that required many months of close monitoring, medication and draining of the fluids that would build in her oviduct. Daisy finally succumbed to her illness in May.



(Left) Peek-a-Boo: A resident since 2008 and known to be in her mid-thirties, this extraordinary mitred conure was well loved by aviary mates and by staff and volunteers. Heart disease took her from us in August. Peek-a-Boo's mate, Larry (blue-crowned conure), was quickly claimed by his long-time admirer, green-cheeked conure, Loki.



Launching the

Home Sanctuary Program

By Amanda Coleman, Intake & Adoption Director



Wild-caught, unsocialized and having emerged from the extreme hoarding and mass death situation in Weston CT years ago, hawk headed parrot, Rio, was provided with Home Sanctuary by FP Executive Director, Karen Windsor



Larry, a Congo grey, arrived emaciated and plucked in May 2023. He is bornavirus and ganglioside positive, putting him at risk for developing clinical PDD. He will need life-long veterinary support. Larry was provided with Home Sanctuary by volunteer, Mia Nassivera.



With serious, chronic health issues needing ongoing medical support and preferring not to be handled, Issac and Hayes found Home Sanctuary with volunteer, Julian Trilling

Foster Parrots functions primarily as a sanctuary, providing care for over 360 resident parrots and reptiles, but with 700 – 1000 surrender requests flooding in annually, our adoption program becomes essential. We simply cannot address the sheer number of birds needing services, particularly those who do not fit the standard adoption mold: birds who are unhandleable, have chronic medical issues, prefer avian companionship over human companionship, or birds who arrive in large flocks. These are the parrots who tend to sit in our adoption center for months or even years, generating little interest in the standard adopter. To help these birds, Foster Parrots has developed – and is now officially launching - “Home Sanctuary,” a new program to help increase placement possibilities for birds who struggle in a traditional adoption program. It requires guardians who can embrace birds for their inherent value, and provide lifelong care on an unconditional basis, recognizing that parrots aren’t pets, they are wild animals, and that we aren’t ‘owners,’ but rather, caregivers to autonomous beings. It brings a sanctuary-mindset into the home environment and helps create a greater placement network for these traditionally unplaceable parrots.

An unconditional commitment to the guardianship of parrots in the Home Sanctuary program is important, as the care of these birds will be more challenging, and each Home Sanctuary placement is unique; placement for a human-bonded bird with very demanding medical needs looks very different than placement for an independent, bonded pair of aggressive/reactive Amazons. People who participate do so because they recognize the intrinsic value in each bird and are able to offer a different kind of support. They are people willing to take a hands-off approach if needed; they are people who truly rescue for what they feel they can offer a parrot, not for reasons that directly benefit themselves. We are clarifying and further developing the Home Sanctuary concept to inspire more people to take on these often-overlooked birds, to shed light on these parrots in a new way, and to promote these guardianship opportunities more as partnerships with our sanctuary.

Through the new Home Sanctuary Program, we are also hoping to offer new “language” to help break mental patterns in guardians so that we can begin to rethink the human-parrot relationship. By leaning away from terms like “owners” and leaning into alternative terms like “guardians,” we are trying to distance ourselves from ownership mindsets to, instead, being stewards of wildlife.

Home Sanctuary Bird Spotlight



Gabby & Macho: Wild-Caught, Yellow-Naped Amazon Pair
Gabby and Macho are a bonded pair of wild-caught Amazons who arrived at Foster Parrots in the spring of 2022 after their guardian passed away unexpectedly, leaving them behind, alone in the home. They have been placed in our Home Sanctuary program because they are birds who hover in the realm between sanctuary and “standard adoption.” When tried in our aviaries with other Amazons, they were fearful and clung to the mesh. In a home setting, they will enjoy interaction with people but are not comfortable with being handled. They currently share a large cage in the South Park section of our sanctuary and are only caged at bedtime. Here they can engage with humans and other birds on their own terms. Gabby and Macho would do well in a home with a guardian who will offer them autonomy in choosing how they wish to interact with their new family without pushing their boundaries.



Chewy: 50-Year Old Wild-Caught, Yellow-Naped Amazon
Currently residing in our Adoption Center. Chewy has some signs of aging with mild arthritis and cataracts in both eyes that limit his vision, but do not let these ailments fool you - he can still navigate his world without issue! He has lived with two previous families and is unable to fly due to his wing having been pinioned (portion of the wing cut away) during his capture from the wild. Chewy, prefers a male guardian. He is not comfortable with being handled, however, he does enjoy interactions with both humans and other birds. He would do well in a Home Sanctuary setting where other birds are present. Chewy enjoys spending his day sitting on top of his cage in the warm winter sun and shredding any toy he can get his beak on.



17 Parakeets

In March of this year, we responded to a hoarding case at a residential home in NH in which we removed 99 parakeets. We have successfully placed all but 17 of the parakeets! They will need toys, enrichments, a diet that includes fresh produce, and a large flight cage, aviary or dedicated room to accommodate flying activity. Budgies are joyful flocking birds who benefit from the companionship of their own species. Social support is essential for budgies. In the wild, their flock size can reach upwards of 100+ members! Our parakeets are part of our Home Sanctuary program as they will need to be placed in groups, and are not focused on human companionship.

Interested in our Home Sanctuary Program? Keep an eye on our website! The program outline will be posted after the first of the year! For more information, you may also contact our Intake & Adoption Program Director at Adoption@fosterparrots.com. Available Home Sanctuary birds are currently listed on our website under our adoption program.

Legal Standards for Birds Under the Animal Welfare Act Published This Year

By Jennifer Yordy, Sanctuary Director

Last winter, we reported on a set of proposed standards expanding coverage of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) to apply to birds. The final rule was published in February 2023. Although the standards are not perfect, and include some truly distressing omissions, they nevertheless represent a huge victory for avian welfare.



Wins

A Starting Point for Protection.



Until now, parrots and other exotic birds commonly victimized by the pet trade had no federal legal protections at all in the United States. The AWA now mandates a reasonable degree of physical and psychological well-being for many birds kept and bred in captivity. We will continue to advocate for improvements where they are needed, but the adoption of these standards was a hard-fought battle and a monumental step in the right direction.

A Requirement for Species-Appropriate Enrichment

Prior to the adoption of the new standards for birds, primates were the only species for which the AWA mandated environmental enrichment. The inclusion of this requirement for birds is an incredibly important acknowledgement of their social and intellectual complexity, and will mean a great improvement in quality of life for countless birds.

A Bill of Rights for Birds

Under the new standards, countless birds in the care of large-scale breeders and exhibitors (including sanctuaries that offer tours, like Foster Parrots) are legally guaranteed certain basic rights. The standards mandate housing environments that are sheltered from the weather, with appropriate ambient temperatures, humidity, and light. Enclosures must be clean, adequately sized, and support avian social needs. Diets must be nutritious and species-appropriate, and ample fresh, clean water must be provided. Perhaps most importantly, record-keeping is a mandate, as is oversight by a qualified veterinarian. While the commercial breeding community fought against these regulations, the rescue community advocated for them and now embraces them as we work to ensure that we are in compliance.



Losses

A Loophole for Pet Stores



In perhaps the most significant omission from the new standards, all retail pet stores and some breeders are exempt from AWA regulations. Presumably, this loophole is partly predicated on the idea that if sales are carried out in person, the consumer can see the living conditions of the birds and demand decent standards of care. But as we know from the calls we receive regularly from people encountering birds in tiny, dirty cages in pet shops, this is by no means a sure method for ensuring welfare.

Unequal Protection for Different Species.

In general, small-scale breeders are exempt from licensing requirements under the AWA. Regulations stop short based on number of individual birds sold—and differentiate between small and large birds. For birds weighing more than 250 g (e.g. Amazons, cockatoos, macaws), the limit to avoid regulation is 8 per year, but for birds weighing under 250 g (e.g. budgies, cockatiels, conures) the threshold is 200.



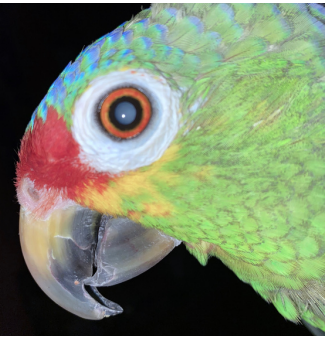
So, we applaud the progress that has been made, all the while remembering that we still have a long way to go. The rescue community will continue to push for stronger regulations—after all, in our view it would only be an even greater win if retail pet stores, which perpetuate so much suffering, were no longer able to sell birds.

Below: Photos from Beeches Breeding Ranch in NC, taken in 2009 prior to the facility's closing. Not only were these conditions accepted, but this establishment was used as a teaching facility for veterinary students. No birds should have to endure lives like this. This still happens. This is our fight.



Understanding Cataracts and Blindness in Parrots

By Dr. James Coady-Hahn,
Foster Parrots Board Member



Watching my old cockatiel, Dander, fly, was like watching a slow-motion bird ballet. She would fly vertically, inching very slowly forward, and if her beak touched an object, she would drop gently to the floor. Dander suffered from a congenital ocular defect. She was completely blind. I did not feel this was a reason to keep her caged, as many people would, and neither did she. Birds are meant to fly! She figured out how to safely navigate her space. The fact that I had adopted her from Foster Parrots was no mistake. I am an eye doctor for humans and practice full scope Medical Optometry at Atrius Health in the Boston area. In addition, I have a Ph.D. from Brown University where I studied visual psychophysics and color vision in humans. I hope to use my experience to help.

Birds have some striking dissimilarities in their eyes as compared to humans. The shape of their heads and position of their eyes provide birds with a much wider field of vision than we have. They also have an extra eyelid which protects the eyes from wind, dust and particles, while still allowing them to see. Their irises have striated muscles as opposed to our smooth muscle, and they can control the irises at will (e.g. pinning). But there are also many similarities. Like humans, parrot eyes have a cornea (outer clear dome), an iris, an internal lens, and a retina. Like humans, birds' eyes can also suffer from congenital abnormalities, viruses, and quite commonly, age related diseases like cataracts.

Having a cataract is like looking through frosted glass or a dirty windshield. Cataracts occur when the lattice structure of the clear crystalline lens in our eyes starts to break down and the internal lens becomes cloudy. Many birds can lead very happy lives with only one cataract, and in most cases, these can be left untreated.

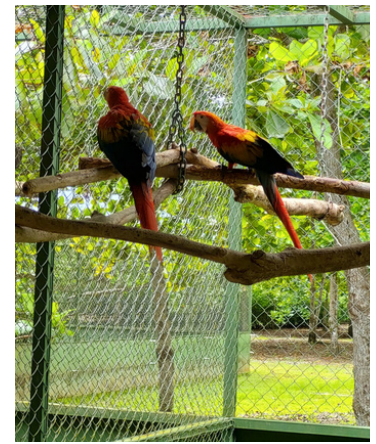


No topical nor dietary treatments can reverse cataracts. The only cure for cataracts is surgical removal, but the risks of this surgery, especially in older birds, must be carefully weighed against the quality or extent of the benefits. Without the simultaneous placement of an artificial lens inside of the eye, vision out of the eye will be significantly blurry at any distance. Due to the tiny size of a parrot's eyes, the instrumentation needed to implant the artificial lens is usually too difficult, so this surgery may have limited benefit.

It is difficult to know what a parrot perceives out of the eye with cataracts. In humans, some people can have cataracts that appear very dense to the doctor yet still manage to have good acuity. My red lored Amazon, who has a dense cataract in his left eye, was startled by something the other day. He flew from my back and landed perfectly on the bed frame. To do this would require good vision and, preferably binocular vision (both eyes). This makes me question how much vision this bird has out of his eye with the more significant cataract.

Vision impaired parrots can still have a wonderful quality of life in our homes if they are provided with the appropriate support and understanding. Here are some tips:

- 1) Keep food, water and perching in their cage/area in the same location.
- 2) Please do NOT keep a visually impaired parrot locked in a cage because you think he or she will hurt themselves. Parrots should be free! A cage should really be just a comfort zone and a place to sleep.
- 3) Provide a rich acoustic environment for your bird's listening pleasure. Also, use verbal cues and be consistent. Hearing becomes more important to blind birds.
- 4) Spend more one-on-one time with your bird to help them feel connected and less isolated.
- 5) Increase the illumination in your home to help your parrot visually. Avoid full spectrum lighting as this can make the cataracts worse.
- 6) Cataracts are worsened by oxidation inside the eye. Thus, increase antioxidant rich foods like blueberries, apples, beets, strawberries, kale, pecans, etc.
- 7) Do not clip your bird's wings. Flying is natural to birds. Try to help the bird acclimate and allow the bird to do what is natural. The bird already has a handicap, why make another?



Far Left: Pika, Chu and one destroyed crate!

Above: Rajitas (before), skinny upon arrival; (after) chubby and ready to leave the clinic 3 months later. Rajitas and Mango together in their aviary.

Left: Mango before and after

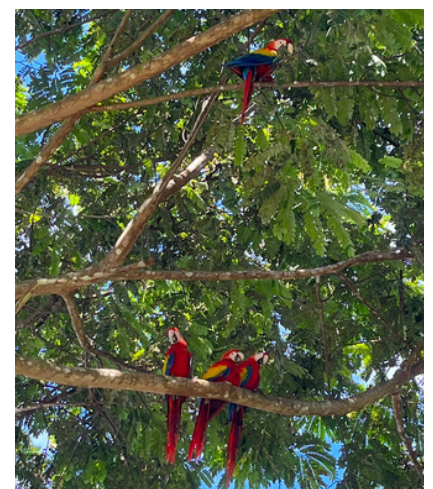
In May of this year, one juvenile and two adult scarlet macaws made the trip down to MCCR from the Alturas Wildlife Sanctuary in Dominical, and from the looks of this crate (above, left), they arrived not a moment too soon. The female, Pika, was missing her right eye. Both birds were unreleasable and were welcomed to MCCR as permanent residents.

in July, she was just what Mango had been hoping for: a girlfriend of roughly the same age who could grow strong with him through months of care and rehabilitation. But Rajitas, was facing a tough battle. She was severely malnourished and skinny, weighing only 560 grams, and the stress bars on her tail and discolored feathering were evidence of liver damage. The team at MCCR poured all their love and skill into her through the summer months. Today, Rajita and Mango are both healthy, happy and share an unbreakable bond.

The youngster, Mango, weighing in at under 600 grams, was in very poor condition and in need of intensive nutritional support. He also needed a friend. When little Rajitas arrived at the farm



In other happy MCCR news, Monster and Mila, our two hand-raised and previously released macaws, successfully raised and fledged two offspring this past spring. This was the pair's second successful nesting season. Known as our "Miracle Macaw," Mila had been found as a nestling on the forest floor by a nighttime tour group in 2019. She was barely 3 weeks old and not expected to survive. Having been hand raised by Chris Castles and the MCCR team, she shocked us all when, after being released, she paired up with Monster and successfully fledged her first offspring when she was only 3 years old. Mila and Monster are skilled parents now, promising to produce many wild babies who will fly free on the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica.



Above: Mila & Monster with their successful, second season offspring

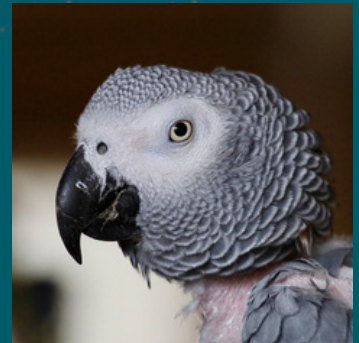
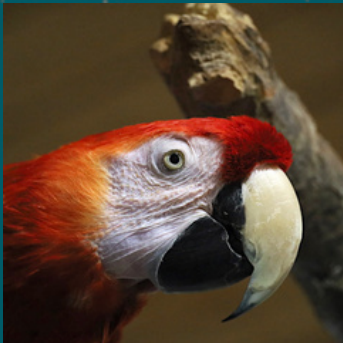
The Parrots Have Been Very, Very Good This Year!

They bit many fewer people than usual.

They Shared their toys.

They were kind to new volunteers.

They ate their vegetables.



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Endless gratitude to our Official Photographer, Brian Jones, and our Graphic Designer, Dorian DeSimone, for their contributions of time and talent throughout each and every year. There are no words...