

# PsittaScene



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Confiscated Greys released  
Palm Cockatoos & Kea



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# Psitta Scene

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# W

What do you think when you hear the term “welfare” in relation to parrots? You might think of your own bird(s) and think of nutrition, training, enrichment and a generous space to call home. And what is rescue? Rehabilitation? These terms mean different things depending on the context. Is your definition relative to companion birds in the developed world or wild birds in developing nations? Either way, you can think of rehabilitation as the process of restoring something, like a parrot, to a normal life; to a place of thriving and ideally prospering.

For companion birds, rehabilitation may be needed in cases of injury, sickness, abandonment, or abuse. In wild parrots however, rehabilitation is often necessary when birds are “rescued” from trade and are fortunate enough to be candidates for a return to the wild.

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of a growing legion of front-line partners in the World Parrot Trust’s FlyFree programme, wild parrot rehabilitation is happening with greater frequency. Because of this unprecedented international cooperation, thousands of wild-caught birds have now been spared an uncertain fate. In developing nations where access to resources is scant and concern for wildlife is, often by necessity, secondary to human needs, this is a remarkable achievement.

To those who believed that such an approach was unworkable or unrealistic, I encourage you to read about the latest release efforts in Uganda (page 3) and to review the FlyFree insert in this issue. Extraordinary changes are underway. And to those hundreds of caring individuals, volunteers, organisations, foundations, staff and sponsors who shared our vision and supported FlyFree, we offer heartfelt thanks for your part in making this movement a reality.

Best wishes,

Steve Milpacher  
Director of Operations

## onourcovers

**FRONT** Two African Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) appear slightly astonished in their first moments of freedom after a six month ordeal. They are among some 270 birds confiscated at the Uganda – Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) border in January 2011. After months of care and rehabilitation most were released in July, bringing their species back to a part of Uganda where they once lived. © Musiime Muramura

**BACK** A Kea (*Nestor notabilis*) dances on an early morning updraft in Mount Cook National Park on New Zealand’s South Island. Kea are mostly active at dawn and dusk and are highly inquisitive, often interacting with alpine visitors. Researchers are increasing our knowledge about and awareness of this often maligned mountain parrot. See Kea Fascination page 10. © Andrius Pašukonis



Photos by Musiime Muramura

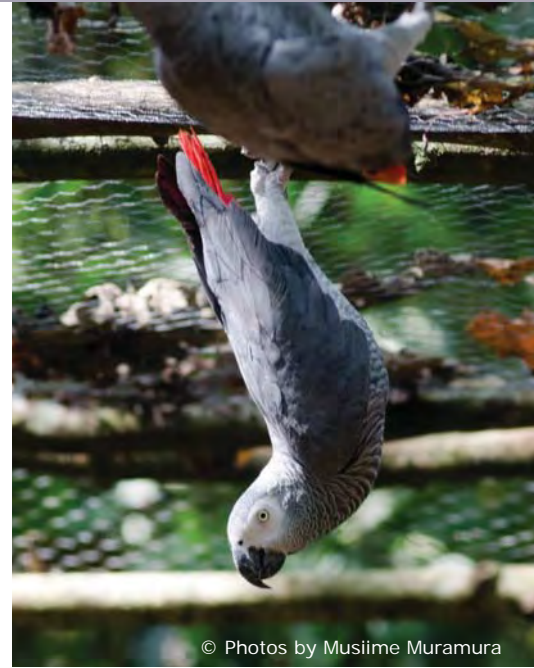
# Karibu kasuku kijivu! (swahili) Welcome back parrots!

African Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) were gone from most of Uganda, an east African country on the edge of their former range. Were gone, that is, until 204 Greys, confiscated from traders, were released in Uganda's Kibale National Park on July 28th 2011.

YOU FIRST MET THESE BIRDS in "Greys make News" (*PsittaScene*, February 2011). They were the survivors among 272 birds confiscated in two shipments in January 2011 by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA). All were taken to Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) for assessment and rehabilitation for release. The World Parrot Trust, through our FlyFree campaign, provided guidance, technical assistance and funding to prepare the birds for freedom once more.

It sounds simple: just release the birds right...? But in reality, there are so many variables involved. Where did they come from? What condition are they in? How many are there anyway? Just picture almost 300 parrots descending upon you in one place at one time. Who might claim to own them? Who has the training and resources to assess and handle the birds? Feed and house them? Negotiate their release? Find a site and monitor their progress?





© Photos by Musiime Muramura

A crowd gathers to witness a small miracle – over 200 African Grey Parrots on release day. The positive outcome of this story garnered national and international media attention helping to increase awareness and further educational efforts to end parrot smuggling within the country.

THESE BIRDS ARRIVED AT UWEC in terrible shape. As is so common, they were badly crated in overcrowded wooden boxes, were heavily soiled and in a state of stress, dehydration and with various traumatic injuries. They had not had food or water for an unknown period of time. As hard as it is to picture them, it's even harder to imagine how to take them from this horrific condition to the prospect of release. This reality is one of the key reasons the World Parrot Trust started the FlyFree campaign two years ago. Our goal is to end this trade altogether so birds are no longer

subjected to this treatment. While it still occurs our goal is to return parrots like these to the wild wherever possible. To do this we need partners on the ground, ready for action, when and where the need arises.

Thankfully, things came together just right in Uganda. The birds were confiscated by the right people – the Uganda Wildlife Authority, a government agency – and were taken to the right place – the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre, a private zoo exhibiting the country's vast biodiversity.

UWA didn't put the birds in legal limbo in substandard housing whilst awaiting a court case. Nor did they dump them on an unprepared centre ill fit for birds. UWEC, while challenged, were ready for the birds. One of their veterinarians, Dr. Noel Arinteireho, had worked with a WPT team in the Congo that triaged the large shipment of African Greys we referred to as the Congo 500 (*PsittaScene*, November 2010).

IMMEDIATELY UPON ARRIVAL, the birds were separated into groups depending on their condition. Their immediate

## Reason for optimism...

In the last four years, the World Parrot Trust has been called upon to provide emergency assistance for thousands of African Grey Parrots confiscated from illegal shipments. While horrific, visions of frightened, injured, mistreated birds often obscure the bigger picture. In reality there are many reasons for optimism – namely policy (export quotas), enforcement (confiscations) and action (releases).

In 2001, seven countries allowed export of 30,450 Greys (including 7,740 *P. timneh*). In 2011, only 2 countries maintain export quotas totalling 9,000 Greys (all *P. erithacus*). In addition to this 70% decrease in export quotas there has been a dramatic increase in law enforcement (confiscations) against trade. Lastly, with the help of our FlyFree campaign, nearly 4,000 Greys have been saved from trade and are being returned to the wild.

[www.parrots.org/flyfree](http://www.parrots.org/flyfree)





A dramatic increase in confiscations in countries like Cameroon and Uganda is a result of both increased enforcement and the fact that facilities now exist to manage the birds. Through FlyFree, the World Parrot Trust is working with partners to improve procedures to get confiscated parrots back into the wild.

medical needs were attended to and the healthiest were soon transferred into a holding aviary. There was a strong motivation to limit the amount of time the birds spent in a captive situation. While the UWEC staff resolved the complex legal and political issues required for release, two potential sites were identified where the birds could survive, feed, nest and multiply. Security was carefully considered to guard against recapture and finally the UWEC maintenance and veterinary team visited the forest to assess the final proposed site for construction

of temporary holding. It took a week to clear a small area and construct a pre-release aviary using locally available materials. Meanwhile, transport cases were designed and built to ensure a safe transfer.

On July 20th the parrots left the centre for their new home in Kibale National Park. They were allowed to acclimatise to the local environment for a week before doors at the top of the release aviary were opened and the excited shrieks and squeaks began. The media

was present and hopes ran high. Soon about 50 of the bravest birds ventured out. Some came rushing back to the safety and security of the cage and their companions. Others flew around and returned, as if to tell the wary what they had discovered. More birds joined in and this continued, with each group returning in the same fashion to take along the converted. Slowly and surely, these resilient birds made an important step towards returning their species to the forests of western Uganda. This is a success story for all involved.



## Kwaheri na nakutakiya la heri (swahili)



Goodbye and good luck!



# PALM COCKATOO NEWS

BY CHRISTINA ZDENEK

Text © Christina Zdenek & The World Parrot Trust



© Damon Brundage

I POINTED MY SHOTGUN MICROPHONE toward the rowdy calling and made my way through the shoulder-height tropical grass before I finally caught sight of the activity. An epic battle was about to unfold. A rival male made a direct flight toward the resident male sitting near a tree hollow. They met in mid-air, growling and wrestling until they hit the ground. The growling continued for a long five seconds, probably leaving one, if not both of them, in pain. This battle, to me, vividly represents the value of rare, high-quality nesting hollows in the ever-challenging world of Palm Cockatoos.

**D**uring my recent research I spent up to six months each year living in a 2-walled shelter-shed, called a “humpy,” adjacent to the remote rainforest in northern Australia. The purpose: to figure out how to better study Palm Cockatoos. I evaluated the efficacy of two noninvasive techniques to identify and track individual Palm Cockatoos over time, without capturing them.

**VOCAL INDIVIDUALITY** involves digitally recording their calls to use for sound analysis, much like a fingerprint.

**PHOTO IDENTIFICATION** involves taking high-resolution profile photographs of the birds’ faces to identify them, much like they do with dolphin and whale fins. The technique has also been used with other parrots such as the Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*) and Hyacinth Macaw (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*). See *PsittaScene* 19.2 (May 2007) and 18.4 (November 2006).

This research is particularly important because there are currently no other

working alternatives to identify individual Palm Cockatoos within the population. It is not feasible to apply coloured rings/bands to the adult birds. It is extremely time-consuming and difficult to capture them and they can easily over-stress. Plus, these birds have good memories and are very intelligent, so they may very well avoid capture areas, thereby effectively reducing the area of quality habitat. I hope my efforts not only provide an important research tool but also some well-needed insight into the Palm Cockatoo’s conservation status and unique behaviour.

So what do we gain by identifying individuals in a population? The answer has to do with the population’s age structure and the Palm Cockatoo’s life history. Because these birds are so long-lived (estimated 40-60 years; captive birds may reach 90 years), problems with recruitment can be masked within a persistent, but aging, population. For example, large, hot fires late in the dry-season burn down more trees than early dry-season cold

burns. As a result, the birds are likely losing breeding hollows because dead (but still standing) nesting trees are vulnerable to hot burns. In this grim scenario of inappropriate fire regime, feeding trees may still be available to keep the population alive for decades, while a lack of nesting trees takes a substantial toll on recruitment.

The Palm Cockatoo’s life history can exacerbate this problem. They are very slow breeders, with pairs attempting to breed once every 2.2 years on average and invariably laying just one egg per clutch. They also have low reproductive success, with one successful fledgling every 10 years on average. So if we simply monitor the number of individuals, without knowing their age or how many are breeding successfully, we only get a small part of the story. Furthermore, in determining the long-term viability of the population as a whole (i.e. their conservation status), data from individual birds is particularly important when each bird lives for so long.

# PALM COCKATOO

(*Probosciger aterrimus*)



© George Gornacz



© Dean Portelli

PALM COCKATOOS ARE LARGE, BLACK parrots that can grow up to 60 cm (24 in) tall, weigh over 1 kg (2.2 lb), and are world-famous for their unique “drumming” behaviour (above). Males occasionally fashion drumsticks from live tree branches and use them to “drum” on the edge of tree hollows. This remarkable display, unique in the animal kingdom, is a fascinating example of tool-creation and use by an animal in a non-foraging context.

Palm Cockatoos are native to New Guinea, some offshore islands and Australia, where they only occur on the north eastern tip, in and around the rainforests of Cape York Peninsula. Although numbers in Cape York are thought to remain reasonably high, loss of habitat from aluminium strip-mining and degradation of habitat from inappropriate fire management are current threats to these iconic birds.

After 2 ½ years of formidable research on this elusive and remotely-located species, I have indeed been able to contribute a better understanding of applied behavioural ecology for Palm Cockatoos. I found them to be individually distinctive in vocal features of their calls, which was a good start to identifying individuals. However, in order to identify them over time using their calls, I first had to make sure that the way individual birds call does not change over time (like when they change territories, or simply grow older). While I was not able to test this question extensively, preliminary tests of vocal stability suggest that vocalisations are not stable over time. That’s the bad news. The good news is that Photo-ID of the beak and face show promise for individual identification and warrant further exploration.

In this daunting, confusing, and often frustrating process of becoming a Palm Cockatoo linguist, I discovered their scope to be more complex and extensive than most Psittacine species. There are several interesting theories as to why. It appears that their calls have a territorial and mate-attraction function – similar to songbirds – whereas, most parrots use vocalisations to coordinate their flocking, fission-fusion societies.

I also discovered that Palm Cockatoos duet! In rare, specific situations, mated pairs actually coordinate a call so precisely that only the super-refined sound analysis skills that I developed during this study could discern that it was two birds in a duet. I don’t know how they do it, but I imagine the pairs that do it well have been mated and perfecting the technique for years, maybe decades.

Although my research focused on understanding Palm Cockatoos so that we can better apply management strategies, the wider project aim is to utilise Palm Cockatoos as an umbrella species for the whole Cape York Peninsula – a truly unique place where the species of Australia mix with those of New Guinea. And while my “humpy” was not overly-luxurious, seeing epic battles, drumming males, and living 50 m (160 ft) from a rainforest was truly an experience of a lifetime.



Christina Zdenek studied Palm Cockatoos under the supervision of Professor Rob Heinsohn and Naomi Langmore from February 2009 to July 2011, as part of a Fulbright Postgraduate Fellow from the U.S. government. Her thesis was accepted for a Masters degree of research at The Australian National University.







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This pair is in the middle of a nest exchange. The female (left) has arrived to relieve the male who has been incubating all day. She'll take the night shift and the male will relieve her again in the morning.



© Martin Willis



# Kea fascination

If I asked you to imagine a wild, rugged mountain landscape, what would be the first creature that comes to mind? Would it be an eagle? A mountain goat? How about a **mountain parrot**? A concept I could barely wrap my head around less than a year ago, the thought of a mountain parrot now comes as perfectly natural.

Article & Photos  
By  
Andrius  
Pašukonis

There is only one place where you learn to make this connection – the South Island of New Zealand, home to the world’s only alpine parrot: the Kea (*Nestor notabilis*). Endemic to New Zealand, Kea roam one of the most spectacular mountain ranges in the world, the Southern Alps. A unique place calls for a unique inhabitant, and the Kea fulfils this requirement in a myriad of ways. Looking back on my adventure with these amazing birds, I realize that the very first encounter I had with a Kea defined the rest of my experience in New Zealand.

I travelled from France to New Zealand as part of a Master’s degree program in animal behaviour, joining a team of young researchers at the University of Canterbury to participate in a field project on Kea acoustic communication. The day after my arrival, sitting atop an exposed mountain ridge, I looked down to a valley below expectantly scanning the area. Suddenly the unmistakable “keeee-ah” call made me jump to my feet. I looked around eagerly, but nothing showed up. As I sat back down,

I heard something like a distant metallic jingle, which I first attributed to my jet lagged perception. Some minutes later the jingle occurred again, this time closer. I turned my head and met eye-to-eye with a hawkish face, curiously staring back at me from less than two meters (6.5 ft.) away. A long curved beak and two dark eyes turned sideways, as if trying to get a different perspective of me. As the bird leisurely scratched itself, two coloured, metal rings jingled on its leg. The bands are used by researchers to mark the Kea for individual recognition. Still staring, the bird, named Hamish, purposefully picked up a little stick in front of me. He then retreated slightly, as if showing that this twig was the sole reason for his appearance. Just then, the sun came out. What had at first looked like drab olive plumage suddenly reflected in all shades of green and blue. The bird jumped up, surfing a wind gust and sending a splash of bright red from his underwing feathers. He tossed the twig in the air and landed gracefully on the ground. Another stroll around me, and he disappeared behind the trees, not to be seen again that evening.





**Playtime!** The cheeky Kea is famous for its curiosity. Two fledglings tussle in play (above). Another favourite past-time is interacting with tourists, photographers and their vehicles. Kea take particular delight in rubber gaskets, antennas and the like.





**Kea Country:** The stunning mountain vistas on New Zealand's South Island are frequently the backdrop for this unique high elevation parrot.

This brief interaction revealed at least two essential Kea attributes. First, Kea are extraordinarily curious. Curiosity is their ultimate weapon against the harsh alpine conditions, where no food source is reliable and no native predators are present. Every novel object in their territory, from one of hundreds of species of alpine plants, a finding of carrion, a tourist car on the side of a mountain road or a hiker on a high ridge, is a potential source of food or entertainment. Second, Kea are highly unpredictable. One moment they are loud and flashy, earning the nickname of “the clown of the mountains.” A second later, they can be silent as a rock, blended into the native vegetation and practically impossible to find.

Kea voluntarily interact with people, which makes them very attractive for behavioural studies, except that their appearances are as predictable as the mountain weather. Once you're in Kea territory, they decide when to grant you an audience and for how long. One day a flock of Kea would descend on us at 5 a.m., but leave before we even managed to get out of our sleeping bags, while the next day a bird would stay around all night poking its head into our tents and nibbling on our sleeping bags. Despite some difficulties in matching our working schedules with the volatile nature of the Kea, the time that we did spend in their presence was always thrilling and fully absorbing. Moreover, the Kea often seemed as entertained by

our presence as we were by theirs. It's precisely this mutual captivation that makes the human-Kea relationship so special, but also extremely delicate.

Unfortunately, whenever people are fascinated by something, the object of their affection is often at risk. Some people cherish Kea, while others persecute them. From 1860 to 1971 a government-funded massacre killed some 150,000 Kea due to the allegation of Kea killing and feeding on the high country sheep. This claim, although true, was wildly exaggerated. Since 1986, Kea have been fully protected, but attacks continue. Sadly, Hamish, the Kea I first encountered, and his mate Penelope, were among eight recent victims.

**Research:** Radio transmitters allow individual Keas to be tracked. Catching them requires precision with a net gun.





**Green on Green:** The dual nature of the Kea is reflected in their plumage: striking and conspicuous in motion yet subtle and camouflaging while feeding or at rest.

Even some well-intentioned visitors end up harming the Kea by encouraging their natural cheekiness with nutritionally deficient food and attracting them to human-occupied areas where risks are numerous.

I believe that a balanced and respectful Kea-human relationship is of great importance to both sides. However, respect is something that education without personal experience hardly ever brings. It is not enough to study the Kea's population dynamics; we also need to study the Kea's perspective.

Each individual Kea matters - not because of its contribution to genetic variability, but because of the collective

experience that it shares with other Kea as well as with some of us. I am convinced that conservation plans should use human sensibility to make the connection between people and animals more personal and thus more engaging.

If you ever find yourself in the Southern Alps, take the opportunity, and step beyond the mountain resorts and road viewpoints and out into Kea country. Be respectful and patient, and you might be granted a visit, which will define your own relationship with these fascinating birds. Then the next time you think of a rugged mountain landscape, it might not be the mountain goat that first comes to mind.

**Acknowledgment:** I want to thank my professors at the University Paris XIII and Dr. Ximena Nelson from the University of Canterbury for allowing this project to happen. Most of all, I want to thank PhD candidates Raoul Schwing and Amanda Greer for welcoming and guiding me through this unique experience.



Andrius Pašukonis developed an interest in nature growing up in Lithuania. His photography grew from his passion for observation. Both led to an interest in animal behaviour and research opportunities in the USA and New Zealand. Andrius is now starting his PhD on acoustic communication in frogs and birds at the University of Vienna.

**In the hand:** A brief physical exam allows fitting of a transmitter. A curious Kea volunteers to be weighed.



# Feather Destructive Behavior

## Finding Solutions (Part One)



© Leah Matejka

This issue's contributor, **Pamela Clark**, is a well-known author, speaker, and parrot behaviour consultant whose experience with parrots dates back 40 years to the purchase of her first pair of lovebirds. Her special interests include feather destructive behaviour, training, flight and nutrition.

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CLEO WAS JUST 13 MONTHS OLD when I first met her – a perfect feminine African Grey head perched atop a scruffy body – most feathers removed including her tail and primary flight feathers. Her caregiver came to me distressed and feeling guilty, unsure of what was wrong and desperate to help his beloved grey.

**F**eather destructive behavior (FDB) has become quite common among companion parrots. It has also become a widely accepted behavior – just “something that captive parrots do.” Caregivers, frustrated by their unsuccessful attempts to stop the behavior, instead capitulate into acceptance, reassuring themselves that at least the parrot seems happy and healthy otherwise. This is a case of the “bad becoming normal,” to borrow a phrase from author and respected behavior expert Temple Grandin. When any parrot destroys his own feathers, it is a sign that something is wrong and intervention is needed. While not every case of FDB can be resolved, many can by performing an holistic, comprehensive examination of every aspect of the parrot's life and making improvements where indicated.

The definition of FDB, a.k.a. feather picking, is any self-inflicted destruction of feathers. This may include pulling

feathers out completely with the beak or feet, chewing them off at the body, barbering (snipping away small pieces), or shredding the barbules off of the central shaft. It does not include self-mutilation (chewing into the skin itself to create a wound). While feather destruction and self-mutilation can occur in the same individual, FDB does not necessarily lead to self-mutilation.

Frequently, solutions elude caregivers because there is not a full recognition of the complexity of the problem. In most cases, several factors work together to push the bird over the edge into this extreme behavior. There is usually also a trigger, a particular event that initiates the behavior. For example, as it turned out Cleo had been weaned too early onto a seed-based diet, was given a too-short wing trim, and did not receive the enrichment that would have led to the development of behavioral independence. At age six months, the owner left for an extended period, leaving her with an unfamiliar caregiver,

Feather Destructive Behavior, commonly termed “feather picking,” is any self-inflicted destruction of feathers. Whilst it has come to be accepted by many caregivers, it is a sign that something is wrong and intervention is needed.



© Joanna Eckles

at which time she began chewing off feathers. The owner’s absence was blamed, when in fact it was the other conditions and experiences that predisposed Cleo to developing the problem.

Risk factors for FDB can be divided into medical vs. non-medical causes. I often hear the term “behavioral” used to describe an individual’s feather destruction. However, this term is useless and should be avoided. We know that feather destruction is a behavior. Therefore, this label tells us nothing and does in fact bring us to a dead end, in terms of identifying possible solutions.

Medical causes can include (1) infection (bacterial, viral, fungal or parasitic), (2) metabolic disorders (liver disease), (3) endocrine conditions (thyroid dysfunction), (4) tumors, or (5) metal toxicity. Non-medical causes include (1) inappropriate diet, (2) chronic stress or anxiety, (3) increased production of reproductive hormones, (4) lack of independent play skills that leads to boredom or overdependence upon the owner, (5) inadequate bathing opportunities, (6) lack of adequate rest, (7) insufficient exercise, (8) insufficient opportunity for learning and making choices, (9) lack of foraging and other

“discovery” opportunities, (10) lack of access to fresh air and sunshine, and (11) foreign substances on feathers or exposure to toxic materials, such as cigarette smoke. Even if your parrot is not currently damaging his feathers, any of these factors, if present, should be corrected now, in order to prevent the problem from occurring in the future.

Certain clues as to cause can be derived by observing where on the body the behavior begins and when it occurs during the day. A parrot who starts chewing off wing and tail feathers, or who barbers feathers, is likely doing so for non-medical reasons. A parrot who destroys feathers over the torso could be doing so for either non-medical or medical reasons. A parrot who destroys feathers only at night when supposed to be asleep may, in fact, be suffering from a physical ailment that causes discomfort when the distractions of the day are no longer present.

Regardless of any such clues, the first step to resolving a FDB problem must be to have a thorough work-up done by an avian veterinarian experienced with this problem. If you take your parrot to a vet and no diagnostic testing is recommended, seek a second opinion. It is not possible to rule out medical

causes by simply doing a physical exam. While there is no recognized protocol for working up a feather picking parrot, typical testing might include a complete blood count, chemistry panel, Gram stain or culture and sensitivity, fecal analysis and possibly radiographs.

After ruling out medical causes, the best chance at resolution is to then examine each of the areas listed below and to make improvements where necessary.

**Diet and Nutrition:** Parrots eating a seed mix as a staple in the diet, or who regularly consume relatively high amounts of fat and carbohydrates, are at risk for FDB. Seed mixes contain insufficient amounts of vitamin A to support the immune system, and are so high in fat as to predispose a parrot to conditions like fatty liver disease. You must transition the parrot from the seed mix onto a high-quality formulated diet and then supplement with a moderate amount of live, raw, fresh foods, with the focus on vegetables, greens, and grains. Teaching a parrot to eat a better diet is just that – a training issue. If not able to make this transition successfully on your own, then seek the assistance of a professional who knows how to do so effectively without causing the parrot undue stress in the process.



Feather destruction may include pulling feathers out completely with the beak or feet, chewing them off at the body, snipping away small pieces (barbering), or shredding the barbules off of the central shaft.

The overall amount of fats and carbohydrates in the diet must be limited. Parrots are instinctively “programmed” to load up on these foods. This serves them well in the wild, where energy expenditures are significant. However, in captivity these same parrots easily become carbohydrate “junkies” demanding daily their ration of white rice, mashed potatoes, fruit and pasta. The best rule of thumb is to avoid feeding any food that contains white flour, that has any form of sugar listed in the first five ingredients, or that contains any trans fat. Very sweet fruits, such as bananas and grapes, should be avoided in favor of those that offer better nutrition, such as berries.

**Chronic Stress and Anxiety:** All companion parrots experience some stress because they are captive, living in a state of chronic restraint. This stress can be increased dangerously by many conditions present in our homes. These range from remodeling projects, threats from other parrots, cages placed in front of windows, the presence of rodents at night, to an inability to fly away from perceived threats if the wings are trimmed. A thorough and objective analysis of the environment must be undertaken to identify causes of stress. Then, practical changes should be made where possible, without becoming

overprotective of the parrot. If a friend visits wearing a hat and the parrot is afraid of the hat, you would have the friend remove it. Hats are not necessary to quality of life for a parrot. On the other hand, if a new toy creates a fear reaction, you will need to implement a desensitization plan allowing him to get used to looking at it first, then finally learn that it has entertainment value.

A significant source of stress for most companion parrots is their inability to fly. A parrot who cannot move about at will is not able to make the steady stream of behavioral choices that is his birthright, and knows instinctively that, should danger manifest, he is unable to get away.

It is my hope, as we move into a more modern and benevolent manner of caring for companion parrots, that each parrot will be evaluated as a candidate for flight and that having flighted parrots indoors will one day be the norm, as it is in other countries. Certainly, there is risk in the home for a flighted parrot, but there is also risk for parrots whose wings are clipped. Maintaining a flighted bird can be done safely through wise arrangement of the environment and effective training within the home. Transitioning a clipped parrot to a flighted status

should be done with the help of a professional who lives successfully with flighted birds.

**Production of Reproductive Hormones:**

This is perhaps the most common factor contributing to FDB in adult parrots. Wild parrots naturally live in a hormonally inactive state for most of the year. They are triggered into a reproductive status when environmental conditions converge that support breeding and rearing young. Unfortunately, these same triggers are often present continually in our homes. The primary triggers caregivers provide that increase production of reproductive hormones are: (1) the presence of a pair bond (usually between the parrot and a human in the home), (2) the ability to engage in interactions of an affectionate nature with that bonded one (cuddling, stroking down the back and under the wings, shoulder time), (3) the presence of a perceived nesting area (access to closets, drawers, cupboards, sleeping huts, cardboard boxes, etc.), (4) a nutrient-dense diet that contains too many carbohydrates and fats, or too much food overall, and (5) a degree of sameness to the environment (no challenges to accept new experiences). An additional trigger can be the presence nearby of other parrots also in a reproductively active state.





Recovery is possible! This is the same bird pictured on page 14 with feather destruction completely resolved. Resolution first requires a thorough analysis of every aspect of the parrot's life.

**I**ncreased hormone production is a fundamental and primary problem that leads to several problem behaviors, in addition to FDB. Therefore, making changes in this area is critical. If you think your parrot has developed a pair bond with you, try to evolve that bond through reducing time on the shoulder, reducing and then eliminating cuddling. Instead engage in trick training or other activities that will cause your bird to relate to you in a different manner. Also discourage any sexual behaviors, such as regurgitation or rubbing of the vent against clothing or hands, by relocating the parrot to another perch and redirecting him to more appropriate behavior.

Many caregivers provide cardboard boxes, empty out drawers, or allow their parrots to play in closets out of the perception that this makes the parrot very happy. It does. Parrots get very excited at the opportunity to even sit in perceived nesting areas. However, this must be consistently discouraged. A parrot allowed access to such areas will not only suffer the attendant surge in hormone production that such exciting activities trigger, but will soon begin to display a form of territoriality

about these areas that often becomes quite inconvenient for the owner who wants to get another pair of shoes out of the closet.

**Bathing, Fresh Air & Sunshine:** I will discuss these together because all contribute greatly to feather quality. Many cases of feather damaging behavior can be improved simply by increasing bathing opportunities. Parrots should be bathed in the morning so that they have plenty of time to dry before going to bed at night. A daily bath can be provided to those parrots who enjoy this. At minimum, a weekly bath should be encouraged. Access to an outdoor aviary where the parrot will experience wind, rain and sun will also help to encourage normal preening.

**Rest:** Requirements for rest vary among individuals and species. Young parrots, or those originally from the New World, are likely to need at least ten hours of sleep a night. Adult African Greys and some cockatoos often do well with only eight to nine hours of rest. Caregivers must use common sense in this area and realize that, while we can extend day length artificially, our parrots would naturally be sleeping during the hours of darkness.

**Exercise:** A parrot allowed flight will exercise himself naturally. Encouraging exercise for parrots with clipped wings can be challenging. However, certain hanging perches can help. Examples are the *Spring Swing* (encourages flapping) from [www.motherpluckinbirdtoys.com](http://www.motherpluckinbirdtoys.com) and the *Get A Grip* (encourages climbing) from [www.estarbird.com](http://www.estarbird.com). Some parrots will enjoy playing fetch or hide and seek on the floor.

**Foreign or Toxic Substances:** Caregivers must maintain an awareness that substances transferred onto feathers by hands can be unpleasant for parrots. Avoid snacking while petting your parrot. Wash hands thoroughly every time after smoking. If you shower with your parrot, make sure that all soap and shampoo is rinsed thoroughly from his feathers before leaving the shower.

**Next Steps:** Once you have evaluated the areas detailed above and made changes where needed, it is time to tackle the single most important area for a successful resolution of the problem – behavior modification and training. This includes providing appropriate enrichment and then teaching the parrot to stay busy which will be discussed in **PART TWO** of this article, which will appear in the next issue of *PsittaScene*.





# Psitta News



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## parrotevents

### Phoenix Landing Foundation

December 3, 2011 (4:30-7:30 pm)  
Fairlington Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, Virginia, USA

The Phoenix Landing Foundation presents "Life on the Wild Side in Africa," an evening event to support the World Parrot Trust. **Steve Milpacher** will discuss the work of WPT to help African parrots in the wild. WPT encourages effective solutions that protect parrots, including conducting and supporting field conservation projects; working to eliminate the international trade in wild-caught parrots; and increasing awareness of parrot's plight in the wild and in captivity. Auction and raffle support WPT projects. Hor d'oeuvres to share.

www.phoenixlanding.org  
phoenixlanding@earthlink.net

### Training with Art and Science

January 14-19, 2012  
NEI training Facility  
Winter Haven, Florida, USA

This five-day workshop by **Steve Martin, Susan Friedman** and **Natural Encounters Inc** (NEI) staff will exceed your expectations in every way. By focusing on the practical application of the science of learning and behavior you will develop skills to shape and modify even the most challenging behaviors.

This workshop offers a balance of insightful lectures and hands-on experience in small groups with birds from NEI's extensive collection. It is the ideal setting to accommodate various training skill levels.

www.naturalencounters.com  
info@naturalencounters.com  
+1 407-938-0847

### IAATE Annual Conference

February 15-18, 2012  
Crowne Plaza Hotel & Suites  
Bloomington, Minnesota, USA

The theme is Full Circle. The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE) was founded in Minnesota back in 1993. This 20th annual conference represents 20 years of collaboration, sharing ideas, experiences and knowledge.

Hosted by Minnesota Zoo, the 2012 conference will feature the World Parrot Trust's **James Gilardi** as the Keynote speaker. Jamie will talk about the Trust's role in developing, supporting and implementing parrot conservation and education projects around the world.

www.iaate.org  
cfo@iaate.org  
+1 407-808-9254

## yourletters



### From Alan Lurie Connecticut, USA

The August issue article on the Great Greens had me absolutely in tears, especially the incredible photograph on page 3. I have that photo as my computer desktop at work. Every time

I look at it, I try to imagine what this bird must be thinking or feeling as he/she looks out at the place where he/she is supposed to be living. It must be absolutely incredible. Look at that eye - it tells you everything you need to know. When my wife and I had the honor of seeing 2 Great Greens in Cana, Panama in 2005. They were extraordinarily majestic as they flew across the valley. I love them.

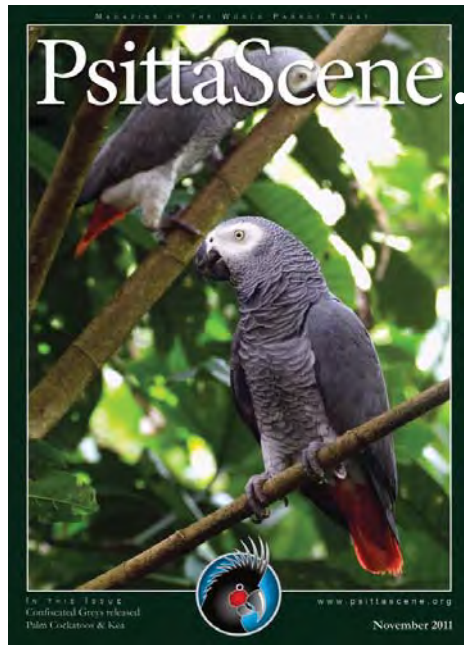


© Anne Greenhow

## ourmistake

In our article announcing the Indian Parrots Photo Contest winners (*PsittaScene* 23.3 August 2011) we mis-credited the species winner of the Ring-neck Parakeet. Our apologies go to Anne Greenhow who took the beautiful photo above.

## moreonline



## PsittaScene.org

Exclusively for readers of *PsittaScene*, find all the great information, photos, and resources that we couldn't fit into this issue.

- Grey release photos and videos
- More Palm Cockatoo photos and print purchase information
- More amazing Kea photos
- News and Events links

[www.psittascene.org](http://www.psittascene.org)



## From Joe Forshaw Mitchell, Australia

I suspect that like me, some *PsittaScene* subscribers are coin collectors, so I'd like to mention two new one dollar coins produced by the Royal Australian Mint. In their "Air Series", which is part of the wider conservation series that includes marine and land animals, are four very attractive one dollar coins depicting Australian birds. Two of these are parrots – the Crimson Rosella (*Platycercus elegans*) and Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (*Lophocroa (Cacatua) leadbeateri*). The coins are legal tender, but are uncirculated, so can be purchased only from the Mint.

 [www.ramint.gov.au](http://www.ramint.gov.au)

## Online

Main: [parrots.org](http://parrots.org)

Change your Address: [parrots.org/addressupdate](http://parrots.org/addressupdate)

Languages: Dutch, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish & Swedish

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# Parrots in the Wild

