

# PsittaScene



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Feather Destructive Behaviour



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# Psitta Scene

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## from the director

In the days and weeks since my mentor, colleague and friend Cathy Toft passed away, (see tribute by Tim Wright on page 16) I've been struck by her loss, not just to me personally, but to the parrot world as a whole. In so many ways Cathy left a real legacy.

About a week after I had heard the news about Cathy I was visiting a waterfowl refuge in California with one of her students. We marveled at what was later estimated to be 250,000 geese, swans and ducks in that one refuge. It occurred to me that you'd have to multiply those waterfowl not by ten but by one hundred times (!) to get to the number of parrots, toucans, flamingos, hummingbirds, and so many other birds that are flying free today because of the ban on wild bird imports to the EU. It was Cathy's poaching study (along with Tim and >20 others) which provided the science to support that ban.

When I first became Cathy Toft's graduate student in 1991, her interest in and love of parrots was just hitting its stride. Although our meetings focused on scientific questions, they often touched on a more pressing issue - that is, exactly when the hand-feeding formula she mixed as we spoke would be the right temperature for the Cockatiel chicks she was feeding on her lap!

Over the next two decades, Cathy's passion for parrots led to a multi-year conservation project on Amazons in Guatemala, a ground-breaking study of parrot poaching, and a comprehensive book on the biology of the entire parrot family.

In the end, Cathy left us all with many lasting legacies to science, to students, to millions of birds, and in the form of a forthcoming book which will deepen our understanding and passion for parrots for decades to come.

Jamie Gilardi  
Director

## on our covers

**FRONT** Playing dead is the natural reaction of one Lear's Macaw (*Anodorhynchus leari*) chick to researchers, no matter how gentle. Its sibling is quietly stoic as they await weighing and measuring and in this case, several simple tests for first of its kind disease sampling. This is a project full of firsts as to work in the nests of these highly endangered birds has only recently been allowed. © André Becker Saldenberg

**BACK** This dynamic trio of Major Mitchell's Cockatoos (*Lophocroa leadbeateri* - formerly *Cacatua leadbeateri*) were photographed in a remote part of the southern Tanami Desert in Australia. They were gorging on the seeds of a bloodwood tree (*Eucalyptus opaca*) which were producing vast amounts of flowers and seeds after a very wet summer. © Steve Murphy

“ I have to say, this field work was by far the hardest I have experienced...”

DISEASE SAMPLING IN THE LAND OF LEAR's, page 4



# DISEASE SAMPLING *in the land of lear's*



© André Becker Saldenberg

OBSERVING PARROTS IN THE WILD is a life changing experience for any parrot lover. Having the opportunity to see an endangered species is even more profound. And for someone committed to helping parrots, the ability to study a species like this, and gather information that could help it and other parrots, is the ultimate privilege.

I GOT THE CHANCE to visit the Lear's Macaw (*Anodorhynchus leari*) project at the Ecological Station of Canudos (Brazil) in March 2011. There I joined Erica Pacifico's study on the species and I have to say, this field work (see *PsittaScene* 22.4, November 2010) was by far the hardest I have experienced. Part of the challenge was that I was just recovering from an illness, but in addition, the extremes of nature make life in the dry caatinga (semi-arid region) a constant fight to survive. No wonder troubled species in this type of climate are thrown to the brink of extinction so easily if they also rely on human "help". It's not easy to work here!

I joined Erica's team for one week to do disease sampling on the wild birds while she was carrying on her research on the species' biology. I was there to collect feces, cloacal and oral swabs to survey for parasites, bacteria, fungi and viruses from the newly hatched chicks that were being banded and microchipped. This work has never been done before as Erica is the first researcher that has ever been allowed access to Lear's nests.

It is important to gather information on what possible pathogens wild parrots, which are theoretically completely healthy, harbour in their bodies. We can compare our findings with similar tests on captive parrots. We can also use this information to improve and demand better husbandry protocols and guide treatments as well as to determine what is normal for disease screening to rehabilitate and release birds.

The excitement of seeing a Lear's Macaw for the first time was unforgettable. Preceded by loud calls that echo around the canyons, the dark silhouette, seen at a distance against the bright blue sky was surprisingly far more rewarding than being right next to a captive bird. But lucky for me, that first flying bird was just the beginning. I was going to have a truly hands-on experience with the growing chicks.

LEAR'S MACAW CHICKS are not only adorable but they smell great! A perfume of coconut oil. But as cute as they are, we had little time for pictures. These chicks play dead in the face of a

possible predator (researchers) but their increased breathing rate and fearful eyes clearly show that they stress very easily by too much handling and time outside of the cool nest cave. Samples and measurements were collected quickly so the chicks could be returned to the nest as soon as possible.

Working conditions in the area are extreme. You have to ration your water, walk many kilometers on sandy dry riverbeds and still climb the cliffs carrying heavy backpacks while the average temperature is 40°C (104°F).

Once I just had to get away from the relentless sun while trying to reach a collection of rocks at the top of a cliff that several adults used as a perching site. I wanted to try to collect the adult's feces too. I hid inside one of the many small shallow caves created naturally by the action of the heat, sand and wind. As I hid inside, the Lear's flew around the canyon. It was noon and they were gliding with such grace, flying nonstop for 30 minutes or more, unphased by the heat of the sun.

by André Becker Saidenberg

A delicate procedure, the cloacal swab, is one of several tests conducted in the field during nest checks which are part of a broader study on the Lear's biology. The wild chicks were found to be in excellent health with no signs of intestinal parasites. Among other things, this work helps to set normal values for parrot release programs.



© Museu de Zoologia Universidade de São Paulo

Not surprisingly, a pair (probably the parents of the chicks being returned to the nest at that moment) came to check out what I was doing. They flew over my hiding place several times. If only I had the video camera! That day I had chosen to add an extra water bottle to my available pocket instead. Later when returning to the field station I wasn't sorry about the camera as I drained the last drops from the extra water bottle.

THE INITIAL RESULTS of my research show that Lear's chicks are completely free of intestinal parasites as shown in other wild parrot populations. It's been proven that problems and deaths related to internal parasites in captive birds are not necessarily a normal and inevitable fact, as so many people think. In fact, such issues should prompt changes to improve husbandry. While being parasite free, these totally asymptomatic wild chicks do carry some microorganisms that cause severe problems in pet birds. But, no cause for alarm. Wild birds live a very different life than their captive counterparts and tend not to develop disease. Captive birds are frequently maintained in nutritionally deficient diets (yes table foods and seed junkies!) and may be kept with inadequate hygiene, lack of mental and physical stimulus. These are all factors that lead to diseases in the medium/long term.

In some ways wild parrots are great models for nutrition of captive birds. But be careful to consider the circumstances. One may argue that wild parrots eat oily seeds at will and for many species that's their staple food. Why not do the same with captive parrots? The answer is pretty straightforward: Wild birds fly! And they don't simply fly from one perch to another or to your hand from their cage. They fly for kilometers each day in search for food, roosting sites, escaping from dangers, etc. Lear's Macaws may fly 40 km (25 mi) or more nonstop to their feeding sites! All the extra calories these birds eat aren't extra at all – they will burn everything and need even more to keep them alive.

Despite the birds and the scenery, not everything is beautiful. This region was always extremely poor. It is infamous for an uprising called the War of Canudos in the late 1800's (*The War of the End of the World* in a notorious book on the subject). And things are not going to get better with a growing human population in a place that has no jobs or capacity to feed them. In other areas parrots, including Lear's adults and chicks, are heavily poached. The arrival of drugs like crack cocaine to the city isn't going to help at all. The future of the Lear's is far from safe. Hats off to Erica and Park Rangers for their dedicated work in extreme conditions to protect this species. These birds can thrive as long as humans decide to HELP.



## LEAR'S MACAW *Anodorhynchus leari*

The Lear's is one of only two remaining blue macaws in the wild. The Glaucous (*A. glaucus*) is extinct and Spix (*Cyanopsitta spixii*) survives only in captivity.

Very similar to the Hyacinth, (*A. hyacinthinus*) the Lear's is smaller and has larger, more prominent yellow lappets bordering the lower mandible. Designated as Critically Endangered, the Lear's range is limited to a dry rugged thorny scrub habitat known as the caatinga in northeastern Brazil.

The World Parrot Trust provided funding for André Saidenberg's disease sampling work as well as Erica Pacifico's (University of São Paulo) study on the species' biology.







## A Grande Sight

In the late 1990's Miguel Facussé, a businessman and macaw enthusiast in Honduras, received two separate small groups of Scarlet Macaws (*Ara macao*) that had been confiscated by the government. The birds became part of a reintroduction programme on **Isla Zacate Grande**, where Facussé owns a 2100 hectare (8 mi<sup>2</sup>) private reserve and biological station. Estación Biológica Dinant (EBD) is named for his Corporación Dinant, a large palm-oil and food company.

The birds were released on the island which rests off the south coast of Honduras in the Gulf of Fonseca where El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua come together. Their story is yet another example of confiscated birds that have been successfully released.

Here we talk to **Olvin Andino**, the biologist at EBD, to better understand the details of their story.

### How did Miguel Facussé first get involved with caring for parrots?

Scarlet Macaws are his favorite birds. He is an aeronautical engineer who studied at Notre Dame Catholic University (U.S.A.) and is now one of the most successful entrepreneurs in agricultural industry of Honduras. He had kept macaws as pets, but this is the first time he has been formally involved in their holding, breeding and release under a systematic programme.

### Tell us about the first Scarlet Macaws you received at the EBD.

The first chicks arrived in 1992 after being confiscated from illegal traders by RENARE (Renewable Natural Resources), an agency of the Honduras government. They were sent to the project by agency biologists Giovanni Rodriguez, Bessy Aspra and Eloísa Espinoza. Because of the lack of housing facilities and staff to look after

the chicks, their young age, delicate health, dehydration, malnourishment and severe gastric infections, all the chicks died. In 1994 the Honduran government sent another shipment of about 20 chicks; 12 survived and formed four pairs. In 1996 the project hired me to design and lead a small programme for the bird's management and breeding.

### Tell us the history of the releases and also about the birds' behaviour.

The last wild macaw was seen in the area in 1954. Then the birds disappeared until September 1996 when DINANT released 8 birds. These birds had previous training and exercise in a flight cage to develop their flight muscles and skills. At first they flew around all together but later they formed 2 pairs and one group of 4 birds. Later, four more birds were released. They now fly free around the entire Fonseca Gulf region.

◀ Released on the beautiful island called Zacate Grande off the south coast of Honduras in Central America, these Scarlet Macaws are the pet passion of a resourceful businessman and entrepreneur named Miguel Facussé (above).



© Photos by Jamie Gilardi



Using nest boxes at first, the birds have now switched to natural cavities, especially in the Guanacaste species of tree (above).

### Did you base your release plan and methods on prior work?

We studied a variety of macaw breeding projects in the Amazonia. Some of these were known to us through a National Geographic Magazine issue. We also relied on the practical adaptation of local knowledge through my experience as a biologist.

### Did you make changes in the released birds' diet over time?

We made changes in the diet to increase proteins, seeds, fruits, vitamins and minerals; then we added more concentrated calcium (the type used for laying hens) because we had problems with fragile egg shells. We wanted also to increase the quantity of eggs laid with a stronger shell and prevent them from continued breakage.

In addition to improving the birds' diet, we also hung nest boxes. The birds used them but some years later left them for natural cavities in trees, especially the Guanacaste species (*Enterolobium spp.*).

### Describe the nesting success of the released birds.

We've had clutches of up to 5 eggs, depending on the quality of the season. A good rainy season with food availability tends to produce more eggs,

while a bad season of drought produces less. Usually, they hatch 1-3 chicks with 1-2 surviving to fledging. One-year old chicks still fly around with their parents and are fed by them even though they are able to fly and feed themselves. This can delay the adults from nesting again.

### How far have the birds dispersed from Zacate Grande?

The birds have been seen flying around all the islands of the Gulf of Fonseca. Over the last four years we have had reports of sightings on La Unión and Jiquilisco, El Salvador (from Salvatur staff) and in Cosiguina, Nicaragua from a researcher who was doing a crocodile survey in the area.

### Have people made attempts to catch or shoot the birds?

The local people have caught or killed the birds when they went into the crops. To help increase understanding we are giving talks at the local school. To help keep the birds in the reserve we have increased the morning food ration and we also gave them an additional optional evening feeding. There are plenty of seeds and wild fruit trees in the area and we don't have this problem as frequently at the moment.

### Have you encountered other challenges with the released birds?

We were suspicious about some employees in the past who may have poached the eggs to sell them. Another problem we have had is the loss of adults, chicks and eggs to wild predators like hawks, owls, jays, racoons, coatis, boas and bees infesting nests. We have also seen conflicts for cavities between the macaws or with wild ducks. At times this competition has resulted in the loss of eggs and newly hatched chicks.

### Would EBD be interested in additional releases?

We would be delighted to do more releases if birds were available from confiscations or breeders. We also want to take a step forward with the birds we already have, using rings and wing tags, if possible, with the chicks hatched this year. We are also interested in using camera-traps and we have identified four nests that are already active.

### What about rehabilitation and release of other parrots?

We have released *Aratinga*, *Brotogeris*, and *Amazona* species but, in these cases we were only hosting, rehabilitating and releasing, without any monitoring. Still, we have seen many of them that stayed as residents in the station.







© Courtesy of EBDinant



Zacate Grande is in the Gulf of Fonseca, where Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua meet. Scarlet Macaws, extinct there since 1954, were first released in 1994. They have now been spotted in all 3 countries. Reforestation efforts aim to ensure future feeding and nesting opportunities.



Special thanks to Bradley Mills and Rosa Elena Zegarra for their help with translation.

# Conservation Hero >> Steve Martin

One of the best-known animal trainers in the world, Steve Martin has pioneered the art of training birds and animals through positive reinforcement. He has been a master falconer for over 40 years and a parrot trainer for more than 45.

Steve's training experience includes hundreds of species of birds and mammals. He is a Trustee with the World Parrot Trust, and served as a core team member of the California Condor Recovery Team and as a behaviour consultant for the Hawaiian Crow and Hawaiian Hawk conservation projects. He is also a founding member of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators and has served as its President four different times. Steve spends about 3/4 of each year traveling around the world serving as a behaviour consultant. He has now worked at over 80 zoological facilities in over 15 countries.



Steve is known for his commitment to conservation and education. He has raised over \$1 million for conservation programmes through his company Natural Encounters, Inc. (NEI) and non-profit Natural Encounters Conservation Fund. Earth Day is an official holiday at NEI.

## What first drew you to birds?

My father was the most important influence on my bird interest. He had pigeons when I was young, and I even have a photo of me holding one of my dad's pigeons when I was only 18 months old. I had a pet parakeet when I was 4 and by the time I was 10 I was raising parakeets and finches to sell to the local pet shop. By that time I was also an avid bird watcher spending hours each week in the fields in my backyard.

I marveled at the behaviour of birds and can vividly remember watching intently as so many local birds went through their forage behaviour and courtship displays. The pair of Kestrels that nested a block from my house completely captivated me. Then, when I was 16, I got a Kestrel from a falconer I met. After that, I was hooked on falconry. But, my passion for all types of birds continued to grow as my falconry activities allowed me to explore new areas and experience new birds.

## When did you begin working with parrots?

I had companion parrots all my life, but in 1974 I met a trainer who did a show at Universal Studios in Los Angeles and got a job as a professional bird trainer. It was beyond a dream to be able to get paid to do what I loved. Two years later he sent me to the San Diego Wild Animal Park to set up a free-flight show with birds of prey and parrots. In 1980 I went off on my own to set up shows at other zoos.

**Was conservation always a part of your educational programmes?** When we opened the show in 1976 I knew I wanted people to know more about birds so that they would protect them.

But, I didn't know much about conservation or how to include it in our programme. I gradually learned more about how to structure our programme to create engaging experiences that carried subtle conservation/education messages. Rather than bombarding people with doom and gloom, I learned the value of positive and hopeful messages that inspire caring and conservation action.

Now, conservation is a part of all of our programmes. We use the entertainment of animals doing species-appropriate behaviour combined with close encounters for the guests as vehicles for our conservation/education messages. We try to help people understand how they make little changes in their lives that will help countless species in the wild.

## When did your interest in conservation go to the next level?

In 1988 I talked to Ron Tilson, Director of Conservation at the Minnesota Zoo, about his work to protect Javan Rhinos at Ujung Kulong in Indonesia. I was impressed with the commitment to protect rhinos in their native habitat instead of trapping them in the wild and bringing them to zoos to try and breed them for future release. Protecting them in the wild helped the rhinos, but also helped the rest of the rare and endangered wildlife in the park.

I was so inspired that we raised money for the rhinos at our show at the State Fair of Texas that year. We made \$22,000 in 24 days and all of that money went to the Javan Rhino project. They used the money to buy a boat for the wardens to patrol the rivers and protect the rhinos from poachers. They also bought the wardens radios so they could communicate during their patrols. We still



support the Javan Rhino project through the International Rhino Foundation.

**What made you decide to work with WPT?** I met Mike Reynolds at a conference many years ago. I heard him talk about his passion for parrots. Through my conversations with Mike I saw hope for wild parrots through his commitment to save them from the poaching and other devastating pressures they faced. I became a member and began supporting the WPT with our donations to help their conservation efforts.

When the opportunity to acquire two groups of Blue-throated macaws came up, I was happy to build facilities and manage the birds. We set up four breeding pairs and have increased our number of B-t macaws to over 30 birds. Some of the birds we use in our shows to help tell the story of the Blue-throated Macaws, but most of the birds are kept in large flights to prepare for an eventual release back in their homeland of Bolivia.

**What is the most challenging problem for companion parrots?**

I believe parrots are one of the most challenging species a person can share their home with. They are incredibly beautiful and intelligent, but also very difficult to understand. The most significant challenge to companion parrots is in the misguided and poor understanding of their behaviour. Most

companion parrot owners have a very poor understanding of how to handle, manage and train their parrots. They often treat them like a dog or a cat expecting the bird should just like being a pet and should “comply with their commands.” Unfortunately, there are many behaviour pseudo-experts who promote dominance-based methods with parrots that may sound good to novice parrot owners, but usually lead to compromised relationships with their bird. When someone writes an article that says things like “You should be the flock leader,” or “Don’t let him get away with that,” so many companion parrot owners are quick to jump on the coercion bandwagon and do things with or to their parrots that hurt their relationship with them. The best way to create desirable behaviour with a parrot is through positive reinforcement, and there should be no compromise on this point.

**What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

I rarely think of it as a job. It’s too much fun! I have seen wild parrots in over 20 countries and trained some of the rarest, most interesting and majestic of all birds, like the Harpy Eagle, Palm Cockatoos and three species of Black Cockatoos, Keas, Pesquet’s Parrots, Blue-headed Macaws and more. It is also rewarding to be able to share my training knowledge with thousands of professional animal trainers and companion animal owners. But, best of all I get to give back to the creatures that have inspired and motivated me throughout my career.



© Joanna Eckles

# Feather Destructive Behavior Finding Solutions (Part Two)



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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For more advice from parrot experts visit [www.parrots.org](http://www.parrots.org) > Forums, Experts & Bloggers

PART ONE OF THIS ARTICLE (*PsittaScene* 23.4 November 2011) examined the most common causes of feather destructive behavior (FDB) and ways to make improvements to diet, environment and social relationships as steps to resolving the problem. PART TWO focuses on the provision of enrichment, behavior modification and training to further address FDB.

**I**t is often stated that FDB becomes a habit. It is more helpful to realize that, over time, the behavior begins to have value to the parrot. If it did not, it would not continue. This recognition helps us to understand that a parrot will be more likely to give up this behavior if he learns that alternate behaviors bring greater reinforcement or enjoyment. For this, we can implement both short-term and long-term behavior modification strategies.

**ENRICHMENT:** First, the environment must offer adequate opportunities for interaction. Many people tell me that their parrots won't play with toys. My reaction? This can and must be changed. Lack of independent play behavior is one of the greatest risk factors for the development of FDB.

The first step is to provide enrichment items that elicit curiosity in the parrot

and that offer a reward for interaction. Parrots especially like items that are easily destroyed or that offer 'discovery' (foraging) opportunities. If your parrot is one who prefers feathers to toys, you will likely need to experiment to find items that he is moved to investigate. Larger parrots sometimes prefer toys made for smaller birds. For others, projects created at home from paper and cardboard are of more interest. Luckily, many on-line stores now offer a wide variety of foraging toys.

Provide a variety of different 'destroy and discover' items to determine what piques your parrot's interest. This might be something very simple in the beginning, such as a whole roll of white unscented toilet paper hung in the cage. This common item offers the same opportunity for 'snipping' as feathers do. A wonderful resource is Kris Porter's Parrot Enrichment Activity Books,



Presenting a variety of treats and surprises in “puzzle feeders” (like this homemade one using ► plastic caps) or in rolls of paper, ◀ boxes and egg cartons can provide wonderful opportunities for foraging and discovery. Birds quickly learn to view these new offerings with eager anticipation.

© Kris Porter

available for download free of charge at [www.parrotenrichment.com](http://www.parrotenrichment.com). Try to provide something new each day to trigger curiosity. You will also need a variety of foot toys for the distraction technique described below.

**DESENSITIZATION:** If your parrot is afraid of new toys, you will need to first desensitize him to anything that you want to provide. To do so, place the new toy at enough of a distance from the cage that you observe no fear reaction from your bird. Each day or week, depending on your bird’s reaction, move it a short distance closer. When you can put the toy near the cage without worrying your parrot, attach it to the outside of the cage down low. Once he has had a chance to get used to looking at it there, move it up higher. If you have moved at your bird’s pace, you will be able to then put it into the cage without his becoming concerned. Once he has become accustomed to your providing new things regularly, you may find that you can introduce new things more quickly.

**DISTRACTION AND REDIRECTION:** Any behavior that gets a reward will occur more often in the future. Therefore, if

you are giving your parrot attention for chewing or pulling feathers, you are actually reinforcing this behavior. It is important to overtly and completely ignore the behavior. The following distraction technique often helps to break down the behavior over time if implemented consistently:

- When you notice that your parrot is engaged in feather destruction, ostensibly ignore him, but create some sort of auditory or visual distraction, such as tapping a spoon against a pan. He should have no idea that this distraction is in any way related to his activities. Do not scare him; the goal is to get him to stop chewing feathers and look up to identify the cause of the interruption.

- As soon as he looks up, reinforce him with a verbal marker, such as “Good, Cleo!”

- Immediately approach him and offer him a small foot toy or other item of interest.

- If he takes the item and begins to play with it, praise him and walk away.

- If he takes it and drops it immediately, or will not take it at all, step him up and transfer him to another perch.

- Begin again...this method requires a consistent approach. If you are able to do this for long enough, you will effectively help to break his pattern.

**BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION AND TRAINING:** The parrot who entertains himself with his feathers is often a parrot who sits in one place all day and will not interact with enrichment items. By using positive reinforcement to teach new behaviors, you can increase ten-fold your chances of resolving the FDB.

Before beginning any training with your parrot, you must first identify reinforcers (rewards) that he highly values. Generally speaking, the best reinforcers are often food rewards, such as small pieces of nuts or seeds. If you don’t know what your parrot likes, you can perform a ‘treat interview.’ Identify 5 to 7 different treats that you think he might value and that would be convenient to keep handy in your pocket. Place a small piece of each into a dish and offer this at a time when he’s hungry. Watch to see



what he chooses first, second and third. These then become your training treats. Do not offer them at any other time.

**TEACHING YOUR PARROT TO PLAY WITH TOYS:** Once you have provided plenty of new things in and on the cage and in any other areas where your parrot spends time, you will need to watch for opportunities to reward any interest he shows in them. Don't watch him like a hawk, but remain aware of his activities. To do so, his cage will need to be located in your living area. If your parrot lives in a bird room, you will not have enough opportunities to reward the desirable behaviors he displays. When he shows any interest at all in one of the enrichment items, respond immediately with a "Good!" and walk over to offer one of your food treats. He will soon learn that interacting with the toys you have provided earns him a highly valued reward. In the beginning you may have to reward just sitting next to a toy, but you can gradually increase the criteria for earning a treat to including some form of interaction. If you have done a good job of providing interesting items, he will soon learn that interacting with them brings its own rewards.

**REWARDING CUED BEHAVIORS:** We often expect our parrots to step up or return

to their cages just because we ask them to. In truth, these are behaviors that we should be rewarding. When we don't, compliance often diminishes over time. When working with a parrot who damages his feathers, we shouldn't overlook opportunities just to reward these cued behaviors. When you ask him to step up and he does, tell him "Good!" and offer a small treat or head scratch, if that's what he prefers. Do the same when asking him to step back off of you, especially if he's stepping off of your shoulder onto your hand – a behavior that many parrots resist. When you return him to his cage, offer a treat. If this is something that he doesn't want to do, make sure that the value of your treat is a little higher. This simple practice will cause him to look to you for guidance and reinforcement and will set the stage for teaching new behaviors.

**TEACHING NEW BEHAVIORS:** Our intelligent parrots need learning opportunities for greatest psychological health. By teaching new behaviors, you accomplish three important things. First, if your parrot is one who has developed a pair bond with you, this practice will help to evolve your bond into

a more appropriate one. Parrots offer the behaviors that make the most sense within the context of the bond they have with you. If your parrot has a pair bond with you, he will offer the behaviors that make sense within that context, such as regurgitation. If you interact with him as a teacher, he will begin slowly to offer more behaviors that make sense within that context. Second, he will become more alert, oriented outwardly to the environment, as he learns that he has increased opportunities for earning the things he likes. Third, the new behaviors you teach will help to gradually replace the feather damaging behaviors.

As you decide what to teach first, you can consider both trick training and husbandry training. As the number of parrots doing tricks on YouTube can attest, many caregivers have discovered just how much fun trick training can be. This type of training need only take five to ten minutes a day of your time. Best results will be obtained by teaching a simple behavior, like targeting, first (targeting is simply the act of touching the beak to an object). By focusing first on a simple behavior, you allow the parrot to become familiar with the process of learning in this manner. It will also allow you to better perfect your timing and technique before you

◀ Foot toys are small and intriguing for parrots to hold in their foot and investigate. A myriad of styles are available for purchase (example far left) or make your own like this one (left) made from drinking straws.

Offering your parrot the opportunity to learn new behaviors has significant benefits for both of you. From tricks like a wave to husbandry behaviors like entering a carrier, training is another tool that can significantly reduce problem behaviors like destroying feathers. ▶



go on to teach something more complex. Many excellent resources are now available to help you get started. Jenny Drummey offers helpful training videos free of charge at [www.projectparrot.com](http://www.projectparrot.com). Barbara Heidenreich's excellent training DVDs and book can be purchased at [www.parrots.org](http://www.parrots.org). Once you have taught targeting, you can use this skill to teach other behaviors, such as turning around or going into a carrier on cue.

**TEACHING HUSBANDRY BEHAVIORS** is another way to expand your parrot's horizons and make his care easier at the same time. Ideas include teaching him to take a shower, wear a harness, allow his nails to be filed, or go into a carrier when asked. Begin by assessing your parrot's skills. What do you wish you could do with him that you can't do now?

Often, this type of training must begin with desensitization – first allowing him to get used to the sight of whatever it is you are introducing. If you want to teach him to take a shower in the bathroom, you might first have to get him used just to being in there, or to teach him to step down onto the shower perch. Carrier training might begin first just with

bringing it into the room and letting him get used to looking at it. Teaching him to accept a nail file or harness might begin with pairing treats with each of these items. Decide what you want to teach and then break this down into small steps. If you need personal help, identify a professional who has hands-on experience with training who can consult with you by telephone.

Feather destructive behavior is a problem that can be resolved. Even if a full resolution of the problem eludes you, by taking the steps outlined in parts one and two of this article, you will improve your parrot's quality of life. Begin by ruling out medical causes by scheduling a visit with an avian vet who has experience with the problem. Next evaluate diet, sources of stress, and triggers for reproductive hormones, making changes where indicated. Increase opportunities for bathing, exercise, and access to a safe outdoor enclosure. Make sure your parrot is getting adequate rest. Discover the types of things that interest him and provide daily enrichment. Lastly, discover the power of positive reinforcement to change existing behaviors. Reward your parrot for

interacting with toys or performing the behaviors you request. Enrich his life by teaching him something new. If the changes you need to make seem too difficult, contact a professional experienced with this problem who can help you to work through these steps.

Do you remember Cleo, the African Grey I mentioned in Part One? Her caregiver, beset with personal difficulties, struggled with making the necessary changes to her care and she continued to damage her feathers until she went to her second home. Her new owner improved her diet, eliminating all the snack food she had previously enjoyed and taught her to eat a high-quality pellet supplemented with fresh vegetables. She also taught her to bathe and to interact with enrichment items. After three years, her new owner wrote the following: "Even though you had told me that it was possible that Cleo might stop mutilating her feathers in a new environment, I never expected such a stunning turnaround. It's been a gradual process; at times it seemed like she was taking two steps forward and one step backward, but the overall progress is there to see in the photo log we've kept." I include this example as proof that this problem can resolve through steady and consistent effort. What are you waiting for?





## Catherine Toft

October 11, 1950 -  
December 2, 2011

Tribute by **Tim Wright**

In addition to her deep interest in parrots, Cathy was active in Collie rescue and agility training.

**T**he parrot world lost a true friend when Catherine Toft succumbed to an aggressive form of non-smokers lung cancer. As a professor at University of California Davis, Cathy had for many years combined a keen scientific interest in parrot biology and conservation with a deeply personal attachment to the large colony of cockatiels and other parrots that shared her home.

I first met Cathy fifteen years ago, when I was a vagabond graduate student that she took under her wing. She provided not just space in her lab, but also friendship and guidance at a time when I needed both. Although Cathy was unpretentious and often self-effacing, her low-key style masked a fiercely independent intelligence and a wealth of strongly held opinions. During my time in her lab we had many wide-ranging discussions about such topics as the biology of parrots, becoming a scientist, and how best to conserve the natural world we both held so dear. I invariably left these conversations with my thoughts provoked and my views altered.

Our discussions led to the initiation in 1997 of a study of the scope and effects of poaching of parrots for the pet trade. At the time there was considerable debate among biologists,

conservationists and aviculturalists as to whether the international pet trade was having a substantial impact on wild parrot populations, and whether the Wild Bird Conservation Act, which had outlawed most imports of wild parrots into the US, was a necessary measure. Over the next several years, Cathy and I collected data sets on parrot nesting and poaching rates from biologists working across the Neotropics. The result was a paper published in *Conservation Biology* in 2001 that showed, for the first time, that illegal poaching was a widespread phenomenon and that in many species levels were quite severe. This paper proved a catalyst for subsequent efforts by the World Parrot Trust and others to enact a ban on wild bird trade in the European Union, efforts that were ultimately successful. Cathy and I took tremendous pride in the way our scientific findings supported the conservation actions of others in this critical effort. For me it was also a formative lesson in how to do good science that makes a difference in the world.

This past fall I was fortunate to spend my sabbatical leave term at UC Davis. By the time I arrived Cathy's cancer had been diagnosed and she was in the

midst of her chemotherapy. Although the treatments were clearly difficult to endure, she was incredibly upbeat and enthusiastic as we discussed old projects and new. Over the last decade, Cathy had been working on her magnum opus, a book summarizing what we know about the biology of parrots written for a popular audience. Sadly, her health declined rapidly through the fall to the point where she was unable to complete the final revisions. In our last meeting she asked me to oversee the completion of her book. It will be a bittersweet honor to do so, as the resulting work will be a reminder both of Cathy's deep knowledge of parrots and of her unstintingly generous spirit.

*Tim Wright is an Associate Professor at New Mexico State University. Research in the Wright Lab focuses on the function and evolution of vocal communication in parrots.*



Cathy with WPT Director Jamie Gilardi in 1992.





# Psitta News



## parrotnews

### Tribute to Rolf C. Hagen

Rolf C. Hagen passed away on Saturday, October 22, 2011. He was the Founder and Chairman of Rolf C. Hagen Inc., one of the world's largest privately-owned pet products manufacturer and distributors.

In his lifetime, Mr. Hagen was honoured with many awards in the pet products industry. In June 1999, he was inducted into the American Pet Products Association Hall of Fame, the highest honour that can be bestowed upon an individual in the pet industry. In March 2004, he was given the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pet Industry Distributors Association in recognition for innovative design of pet products and for his generous support of organisations and individuals dedicated to improving the lives of pets and people. He is the only person in the pet products industry who is a recipient of both awards.

The Hagen Company, and in particular Rolf's son Mark, has been a steadfast supporter of the World Parrot Trust, and other parrot conservation and welfare projects.

~ From: [www.bari.ca/](http://www.bari.ca/) and Steve Milpacher

## Congratulations Belize Bird Rescue

Heska 2011 Inspiration in Action Grand Prize Winner: The Belize Wildlife and Referral Clinic (BWRC) is the only wildlife medical facility providing critical services to many rare and endangered wildlife species. By providing key equipment and services BWRC will serve not only as the national wildlife clinic, but a referral clinic for veterinarians whose clinics are markedly under-equipped.

## parrotevents

### Think Parrots 2012!

May 20, 2012

Woking Leisure Centre, Surrey, UK

**JOIN US** AT AN AMAZING PARROT EXPERIENCE! Parrots Magazine is very proud to be presenting the first Parrot Show of its kind in the UK. Parrot enthusiasts will have the chance to see birds and chat with the breeders about their care and health, many of whom are experts in their field.

There will be FREE Workshops by experts Neil Forbes MRCVS, **Rosemary Low, David Woolcock** and John Hayward; trade exhibitors with foods, treats, and a variety of products; and even a talking parrot contest! **WPT will have a stand and look forward to meeting you there.** Download a form from [www.parrotmag.com](http://www.parrotmag.com) to guarantee a place at your chosen Workshop. Advance tickets are £6. Admission on the day is £7. First come, first served for Workshops if you haven't booked your interest.

🌐 [www.parrotmag.com](http://www.parrotmag.com)

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### Parrot Lover's Cruise

October 28 - November 4, 2012

Departing from New Orleans, LA USA

**JOIN US** ONBOARD the 4th Annual Parrot Lover's Cruise. Discover some of the bluest waters and best sightseeing in the world. Educate yourself with onboard parrot seminars and visit exotic ports of call. Get a chance to see wild parrots. A spectacular cruise for all parrot enthusiasts! There is nothing else like it for the parrot lover!

Support parrot conservation while you cruise. Raffles, donations, and a portion of conference fees will directly aid the World Parrot Trust and their efforts to protect parrots.

**Ports of Call:** New Orleans, LA, Montego Bay, Jamaica, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, Cozumel, Mexico.

**On board speakers include:** Dr. Scott Echols ([AvianStudios.com](http://AvianStudios.com)), Phoebe Linden Green (Santa Barbara Bird Farm) and David Woolcock (Paradise Park).

🌐 [www.parrotloverscruise.com](http://www.parrotloverscruise.com)

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Prize money (\$25,000) will help fund key equipment for rescuing and treating injured, diseased, orphaned or confiscated wildlife. BWRC will also provide veterinary training for students and professionals through continuing education opportunities, educating the public about wildlife, and supporting wildlife research.

<http://www.heska.com/>

“I still can't quite believe it: x-ray, gas anesthesia, 24/7 hospital care for injured birds. Amazing. Hopefully it will be up and running by March. Thank you to each and every WPT follower who voted for Belize.”

~Nikki Buxton, Belize Bird Rescue (funded in part by WPT)

<http://www.wildlifebelize.com>

ありがとう

Thank You

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FlyFree



www.parrots.org/flyfree

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Thanks

THANKS TO THE OUTSTANDING GENEROSITY of WPT supporters, this year's FlyFree fund-raising campaign was another phenomenal success. In a little over 60 days more than 335 parrot enthusiasts from around the globe came together to raise an extraordinary US \$71,655 (£ 47,770).

THIS EXCEPTIONAL LEVEL OF GIVING will significantly further our efforts in the coming year to end the wild-caught bird trade, and return parrots to the wild. It will directly support projects already underway in over a dozen countries in Asia, Africa, Central and South America as well as the Caribbean.

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- More Lear's macaw photos
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# Parrots in the Wild

