

News Release

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VA Macaws Update September 21, 2009

Recently more misinformation has begun circulating on the internet regarding the Virginia macaws that have been under the care of The Gabriel Foundation (TGF) by order of the Commonwealth of Virginia since July 26, 2008.

The Gabriel Foundation is often called upon to take in birds in a "rescue" situation that can be either temporary or permanent. Often, due to the number of birds, their location, or space availability at our locations in Elizabeth and Denver, CO, we do not have the ability to bring the birds to our facilities. In those cases, TGF has a small network of parrot caregivers located nationwide to assist us until such time as the birds are able to be relocated into our direct care. These caregivers agree to uphold the mission and purpose of The Gabriel Foundation, its avian medical requirements, its standard of care and protocols of practice. Each of these caregivers is under the supervision of The Gabriel Foundation and fully agrees to comply with our standards of care; TGF birds are never used for breeding purposes.

One of those temporary caregivers is Kathleen Szabo, an aviculturist for almost 30 years and owner of Luv Them Birds, a parrot and exotic cat breeding business located in Loxahatchee, FL. The Gabriel Foundation DOES NOT advocate breeding and no birds under the care of TGF are ever used for breeding purposes.

Most courts recognize that birds and other animals are the legal property of the owner. Though we may disagree with ways in which birds and animals are sold, we have no control over the choices other people make regarding the sale of their property or business. All of us who care for birds and other animals bemoan the sad reality that ANY birds or animals are sold at public auction with no consideration of their future well-being. Financial hardship has caused many aviculturists to break up their flocks; it has also forced many bird rescues and sanctuaries to close their doors adding to the numbers of birds in need of new homes and long term care.

When the 31 VA macaws were put in the protective custody of TGF more than a year ago by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Ms. Szabo agreed to provide housing for these birds on her property in Loxahatchee, FL. With her own resources, she constructed a new aviary physically separated from her own birds. By agreement with TGF, Luv Them Birds has provided all husbandry, nutrition and enrichment in compliance with TGF's standards of care since July 26, 2008. Vanessa Rolfe, DVM has been the birds' veterinary care provider since they arrived into TGF's care on that same date. Most of these birds' lives and physical condition have improved dramatically in the last 14 months. However, years of poor husbandry and nutrition and lack of appropriate veterinary care have taken a toll on the flock and has resulted in the deaths of 4 macaws. Complete necropsy and histopathology has been performed on each of the deceased birds to ascertain the birds' cause of death: One bird died as a result of severe cardiac disease, a second from a highly unusual form of cancer, and two died from chronic aspergillosis (fungal) infections.

To date, TGF has spent over \$25K on behalf of these birds without one cent of reimbursement - no one from Project Perry or any other parrot-related rescue, sanctuary or avicultural organization

has sent one dime, toys, or anything else for these birds since they have been in our care. In 2008, Project Perry billed the Orange County District Court and solicited funds on behalf of the VA macaws for when the birds were under their care. They will receive some compensation from the Court when the owners' restitution has been paid to the courts, based on copies of invoices and receipts provided by Project Perry to the Court. TGF has received no financial compensation whatsoever for the care it has provided for these VA macaws.

Financial hardship has forced Ms. Szabo to sell her Loxahatchee property and she has made the decision to auction her birds. This action in NO WAY affects the VA macaws, and TGF will make whatever provisions are necessary to ensure the well being of all birds under our care. The VA macaws have been entrusted to TGF. The birds' owners' will appear in court on animal cruelty charges in January 2010. If the Loxahatchee property is sold prior to that, the VA macaws will be relocated, again in keeping with TGF's standards and practices of care and news of their relocation will be made public at the appropriate time.

The VA macaws have a safe home with TGF for as long as needed. It is a sad day indeed that a few people have elected to misrepresent the future of the VA macaws despite the public record of the Court's decision to place these birds with TGF. These are the facts. Any accusations or innuendo to the contrary serves no purpose and only hinders the future of avian welfare. We are all working towards a common goal and parrot welfare will be better served when we are supportive of each other's parrot advocacy efforts rather than disparaging one another.

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