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You remain responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.*

— Antoine de Saint - Exupery

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The Gabriel Foundation is a 501(c)(3) avicultural and veterinary affiliated parrot welfare organization licensed by the State of Colorado, promoting educational outreach, conservation, rescue, rehabilitation, adoption, long-term foster care, and sanctuary pertaining to the needs of parrots everywhere. — Tax Identification #84.1396085

From the Founder, "Building Bridges, Not Walls"  
Julie Weiss Murad  
The Gabriel Foundation  
July, 2008

Sometimes an action rooted in the best of intentions takes on unintended consequences in challenging situations. TGF was asked to intervene regarding the care and placement of a large flock of birds located out of state. What was requested was a safe harbor for all birds, to provide them appropriate care and supervision, at a location that would operate under the guidelines of TGF's standards of care and protocols of practice. Through the generosity of a long-time aviculturist and yes, a breeder, a new aviary located in a separate area of the property is under construction and will be used to quarantine and house these birds for the court specified period of time. This arrangement by the court and all parties concerned was agreed upon for these birds' best interests. No one from TGF was present during this hearing. In accordance with TGF's policy and in the best interests of these birds, they are not to be used for breeding, even though the history provided by the owner states that the birds were former breeders when he got them. TGF's policy does not allow any of its birds to be used for breeding, and has strictly enforced this rule throughout our 13 year history.

The birds' owners found themselves faced with charges of animal cruelty in a situation that echoes fallout from the recent economic and mortgage crisis. These people lost their home to foreclosure, lost their financial security and faced with devastating circumstances had to relocate themselves and the birds. With those changes came some rough times, and the care of the birds deteriorated for a variety of reasons. The owners' legal counsel, animal control and the Orange County, VA court agreed upon the decision to place the birds under TGF's care. Transfer of the birds to Florida is the result of legal action and is not a frivolous intervention by TGF. We were asked to help; we stepped up to the task for the birds' benefit and responded appropriately as requested. We were asked if we could house the birds here in CO. With about 70 other birds recently entering TGF quarantine, many from relinquishers facing similar dire economic life changes, TGF did not have quarantine space to house a group of 31 macaws immediately. Additionally, it would have been terribly stressful for the birds to transport them to CO, not to mention the costs involved. According to the information that we have received, these birds have been kept outside for most of their lives and have been housed as a flock for a many years. This situation is not about good or bad people or intentions; the court determined that the birds should be placed in a safe and appropriate location for a designated period of time for the birds' health and well being. That is the action that is being taken on behalf of the birds.

If concerned people want to help, they can begin by collecting toys, foraging and other enrichment items for the 31 macaws. Those toys will be inventoried and provided directly to those birds. Until TGF has additional history on each of the birds, the cost of medical care is unknown for these birds. The owners have agreed to provide TGF's basic monthly cost for foster care of \$50/month per bird for each of the 31 macaws. That amounts to \$1.66/day per bird - hardly a revenue generating proposition for anyone. That money will be used to help defray expenses for these birds, including food, enrichment, new flights, husbandry, veterinary and medical care and whatever else is required for their health and well-being.

Many other parrot welfare, sanctuary, rescue and foster groups were established to provide for the care of parrots in need and to educate the public about the need to provide appropriately for parrots in captivity. Many of these same organizations continue to raise the bar for parrot welfare with their programs. TGF has maintained the belief that one organization acting alone is simply not enough - and we respect the efforts of each of the others involved in parrot welfare for the work that they do. TGF's purpose is inherent in our mission statement: "The Gabriel Foundation is a 501(C)(3) avicultural and veterinary affiliated non-profit parrot welfare organization providing for the needs of parrots everywhere through each of its seven programs: Education outreach, adoption, rehabilitation, long term foster care, sanctuary, rescue and conservation." TGF's entire history has been to serve as an ambassador to model what can be done, should be done and is being done the raise awareness of the plight of parrots in our world.

As with all other incoming birds, the birds in this particular situation will be placed in a location where a high standard of care will commence immediately in accordance with the protocols and practices of TGF. Their physical, psychological and environmental needs will be met and they will have reprieve from the poor conditions that they once knew. This is in the obvious best interests of the birds. Whether they are returned to the owner or not will be under stipulations of care created by the court to the best of TGF's knowledge. At this time it seems to me that parrots desperately need help from communication built through bridges, not walls... which I know is easier said than done... especially since there is a mixed history among parrot welfare, rescue, sanctuary, avicultural groups and retailers. Vilifying breeders, retailers or other parrot welfare organizations will not be what changes the state of parrot welfare in this world. It will work only to polarize issues, and create a defensive barrier that no language will be able to pass. As to the homeless parrot issue, what got us here will likely not be the same thing that gets us out. There are many pieces to the puzzle that need to be in place. Some people or groups serve by providing sanctuary, others serve by remaining ambassadors. All pieces are vital to a resolution. Each has a role to play, and we can only work towards ensuring that our roles do not grossly interfere with the work of the other.

Pet owners, retailers, zoo keepers, breeders, animal shelters, even sanctuaries and rescues... examples can be given for each group that show substandard care. Poor care and the homeless parrot issue do not rest on the shoulders of any one group alone. To focus on creating an enemy of one group pulls resources away from solving the problem as a whole.

Anyone that takes on the responsibility of caring for an exotic bird also takes on the responsibility for the complete physical, psychological and environmental well being of the parrot in their care. The responsibility of a high standard of care knows no boundaries and is applicable to pet owners, retailers, zoos, breeders, sanctuaries, rescues and to everyone that cares about the welfare of parrots everywhere.

Let us focus on what we can do together, what action can be taken that will build the momentum to reach our common interests by improving standards of care, and working to see that all birds are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of where they may be at any moment in time... from the pet cage to the sanctuary flight to the wilds of the forest and savanna. We are all reaching towards the same hopes and ideals, though our methods may differ.



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