



*Many have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it.
You remain responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.*

— Antoine de Saint - Exupery

A 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation promoting education, rescue, rehabilitation, adoption and sanctuary for the needs of companion parrots.

Open Letter from Julie Murad
August 1, 2008

Dear Avian Advocate,

We at the Gabriel Foundation, (TGF), take our responsibility to parrot welfare seriously and our loyalty is 100% to parrots everywhere. We believe that responsibility for parrot welfare is inclusive, belonging to all of us in aviculture, veterinary medicine, animal sheltering, conservation, the retail pet trade, and pet companionship. The present companion parrot paradigm of surplus, retired, aged, neglected and/or unwanted birds is the result of many factors that go back many years. Each of us has every right to be angry when we find birds in neglectful, abusive or other cruel situations. We must insure that the birds we profoundly cherish do not languish under our human stewardship. This is an effort that deserves our attention, participation and collaboration of thousands of parrot lovers and caregivers around the world -- breeders, retailers, veterinarians, hobbyists, companion parrot owners, as well as those dedicated to animal sheltering, in welfare, sanctuary and rescue organizations.

Although there has been much discussion and efforts over the years, the time is NOW to answer a clarion call to action and collaboration. We must work together in rededicating and coordinating our efforts, to establish a national, enforceable standard of care for parrots in captivity, that's long overdue. What the laws from state to state define as legally acceptable does not mean that it is species-appropriate, acceptable, or humane according to present-day avian care data. Our responsibility to parrots and other birds kept in captivity is to inspire, teach and insist that those who make the rules must set the standards high and by doing so bring about greater accountability for us all. Birds pay the ultimate price when human stewardship fails to meet their needs.

The recent rescue of 31 Virginia macaws living in deplorable, substandard conditions has brought to light the need for standards of care for parrots and companion birds everywhere. We must rise to the occasion and act now, to stem the rising tide of more and more cases of neglect and/or abuse.

TGF has dealt with many animal cruelty seizures in its 13 year history, with only two that were successfully prosecuted. Most cases disappear into the background or the owners relinquish all rights to their animals. Few are prosecuted, as the seizure and litigation are costly and time consuming for budget-constrained local governments, overburdened shelters and under funded rescue organizations. Most cases are quickly plea bargained, filed away and kept out of the public eye.

We were saddened to hear about the 31 macaws and the economic hardship the owners had faced and not having the resources to provide care for their birds. We were honored that the Commonwealth of Virginia's General County Court bestowed the care and custody of these neglected parrots to us.

We take our responsibility to heart to provide the best of care for these neglected birds and will in the next eighteen months determine their ultimate fate. Most importantly we will highlight the urgent need to develop and utilize “best practices” in animal cruelty cases. We bear our custodial responsibilities with great regard to the macaws. TGF was chosen as court- appointed guardians for the welfare of these birds due to our high standards of care, protocols based on best avian practices, and our long-standing national reputation for the advocacy for avian companion care, conservation and protection in the wild.

We are very sorry that the news of the seizure of the birds has generated such negative news coverage and misinformation in their local community, as we came on the scene weeks later, upon request from representatives of the Court. We send our sincere appreciation for the time and efforts of the many volunteers in VA who assisted in the rescue and care of the birds before they were assigned to us. We certainly understand how emotions run deep in sad stories such as this one. We want everyone to be assured that we will provide the best of care for these macaws. Look to our website in the days and weeks ahead as we will post a timeline for the project with measurable outcomes reported on their health, well-being and rehabilitation. We will post updated news, videos, photos, and pod casts to report the work of our organization and our veterinarian, Dr. Vanessa Rolfe.

It is important to know that the birds didn't enter into our care until they were brought to our FL affiliate's location on July 26th, eight weeks after being rescued by local VA officials. We chose to house them on the East Coast, in a location with comparable temperatures, altitude and humidity, instead of bringing them to our headquarter facilities in Denver, CO. We knew the longer travel to Denver would be too stressful for the already physically compromised birds, too. We consulted avian advisors in our network and drafted an initial continuity of care program for the birds. Look to our website next week for a full version of this plan, as we are updating it now with the macaws' current health information. We will soon be completing our initial health assessment of each bird and will adjust our care program to meet their individual needs.

On the day of transport, minor problems were addressed in VA by the officials there. Upon loading the birds for travel, we learned the original carriers being secured in the transport vehicle did not fit properly. We were extremely concerned about the birds' welfare and safety and were in immediate contact with the animal control officer in charge of the case. The birds were transferred into new smaller, yet adequate, carriers. All 31 birds were transported in clean carriers with ample food of fresh fruit, seeds and pellets. The original owners drove the vehicle to FL and the birds arrived safely with no incidences of problems during transport. [\[more information\]](#)

Our TGF team was on hand to meet the flock upon arrival. Oral cultures were taken as the birds were moved from their carriers into the aviary. Determining the identity of the birds was a challenge at first, as the list of names provided by the original owner did not match with the VA caregivers' list. But thankfully, the owner was there with the birds and he was able to re-establish their proper identify with their familiar, given names and helped us set them up in their customary flocks and pairs. The VA veterinarian providing previous care, Hillary Cook, was most helpful in assisting in matching her medical records with ours.

Dr. Vanessa Rolfe is providing continuity of care for the macaws in FL and has begun a toy drive and support campaign for the flock on Craig's list @ <http://miami.craigslislist.org/>. Her basic treatment plan is to review the birds' records, compile files and schedule additional onsite observation time to evaluate the flock's social interaction and activity levels, microchip and determine additional testing requirements while supervising and monitoring their care for the next 18 months. Keeping the macaws on an excellent diet, minimizing stressors and continuing their recovery is paramount. Many of the birds in this flock are old or retired breeders with undocumented histories. Several are the offspring of a few pairs. With little knowledge of past nutrition, scanty veterinary care and sedentary lives, there is probably substantial underlying organ, respiratory and cardiovascular disease that is presently undiagnosed. Final touches on the new aviaries built just for these birds are nearly complete. Palms and ficus trees will soon

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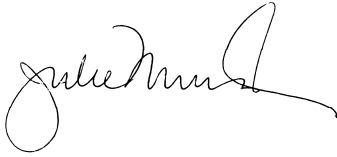
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surround the new building. Kudos and heartfelt thanks to the FL crew and to *Luv Them Birds* for generously donating their time, space and financial resources to TGF to get these aviaries built in just 2 weeks.

Whether or not the owners will have the birds returned to them is a decision that is a long time away - 18 months, minimum, and depends upon many factors to which they must legally comply. To set the record straight, TGF is legally responsible for providing care to these birds according to the terms of the Court's legal agreement, and all birds are to remain at the designated location without exception. According to statements provided by Orange County VA Animal Control and the DA, these birds were never available for adoption. The VA sanctuary providing their care was allowed only to place these birds into temporary foster care or sanctuary until the birds were transferred to TGF's care per the terms of the legally binding court agreement struck between the VA Court District Attorney, the birds' owners and their attorney.

Stay tuned in the weeks and months ahead, as we will keep you posted on the developing news. Thanks for your concern and letters of support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Murad', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Julie Murad
President and Founder
The Gabriel Foundation

P.S. There are many ways you can help, as these birds will need veterinary care, toys and the best in nutrition. We have received no funds to support their care. Your donations would be greatly appreciated.