

FOR PARROT'S SAKE, LET'S CHANGE OUR LANGUAGE

Most parrots will need a succession of good homes. Most birds will be adopted at some point in their lives, perhaps several times, in fact. We are often reluctant to admit this because it makes us feel guilty about our ability to care for them “forever.” However, if we start by acknowledging this truth, then birds will surely have a better opportunity for long and healthy lives.

For parrot's sake, let's change the way we view the rehoming of birds so they will have an improved chance of going from one good home to another. Birds of all ages and circumstances should be considered adoptable, adaptable and companionable. For YOUR bird's sake, let's think about adoption as a commendable approach, because it's very likely your bird will need a new home some day too. You'd like it to be a good one, right?

Unfortunately, the word “rescue” conjures up notions of parrots with severe emotional baggage and psychological dysfunction, making it more difficult to promote the concept of adoption in a positive way. Dictionary.com defines the word rescue as “to free or deliver from confinement, violence, danger, or evil.”⁽¹⁾ Although some parrots can be found in such dire situations, I hope we can agree that most parrots do not come from horrid circumstances like this. We need to overcome this hurdle or thousands of birds will continue to lose their homes with little prospect of finding a sequence of good ones.

Here are some important facts and myths to consider about the rehoming of parrots.

- 1) **FACT: Parrots are long-lived.** If a parrot receives the kind of care that leads to a long and healthy life, then very few will have only one home. People's lives change in unexpected ways or they no longer have the time, health, interest or money to care for their birds as planned. Unfortunately, most birds do not reach a natural lifespan in captivity because of inadequate diets and care. However, parrots can and should live for decades, especially the larger species. In one recent study ⁽²⁾, the oldest bird was a salmon-crested cockatoo (Moluccan) documented at 92 years old. Several other cockatoos and macaws were in their 50's, 60's and 70's. Even a Pacific Parrotlet lived to over 30 years. Dr. Susan Orosz, DVM, Dipl ABVP (Avian) has treated several 100+ year old Amazon parrots. Do we really think only one person can care for every long-lived bird? Of course not! If we take proper care of our birds, they are going to need a few good homes. This makes an undisputable case for why we must consider adoption a priority when it comes to parrots.

- 2) **MYTH: Birds should have “forever homes.”** Rarely does a bird have a “forever home.” This is such an unsuitable term for birds; it actually does them a great disservice. If instead we assume that our bird will need another family someday, we might actually plan for it; and we might do a better job of promoting behaviors to make the next home easier to find. At a minimum, I hope we will consider parrot adoption not only as compassionate, but also practical and necessary!
- 3) **FACT: Parrots are resilient and adaptable.** A bird is a remarkable creature of nature. As prey animals, they must be very quick and intelligent to avoid predators. To survive, they must learn to forage, remember where foods and nests are more abundant, and use their unique hookbill to open difficult nuts and foods. If they lose their mate, they must quickly find another because being alone can be fatal. All this genetic genius contributes to a bird’s capacity to move to its next new home, assuming that the new environment is safe and the people are respectful. Some of us would like to think that our birds love only us, because that’s what we want them to feel. Well - it’s just not true. Parrots are smart, resilient and seem to live in the moment. These attributes mean they adapt well when they need their next family.
- 4) **MYTH: Rehomed birds come with lots of problem baggage.** Birds, like all living beings, strive to gain something they want and to avoid those things that cause harm or pain. No matter how old a bird is – days or decades – you will need to earn their trust by offering a parrot what is desirable to that bird at that moment. As prey animals, they are genetically engineered to avoid danger. Unfortunately, many people have inappropriate expectations of their parrot. We often break trust with our grabby fingers or speedy movements, and then the bird is unfairly blamed for defending itself. After rehoming thousands of birds, Phoenix Landing has consistently found that every bird can learn to behave in positive ways if we give them a sense of safety, have appropriate expectations about how to touch (or not touch) them, and provide the quality nutrition, space, enrichment and medical support needed for a healthy life and positive behaviors. Frankly, what’s important is where the bird goes, not where it came from. We need to take responsibility for the behaviors we create in birds, and understand that a bird’s behavior CAN change if we relate to him or her with respect for a parrot’s true nature.

Here’s my main point – if we want to give more parrots a fighting chance for a good and full life, we can’t label rehoming as “rescue.” Wonderful parrots lose their homes through no fault of their own and don’t deserve to be labeled with a charged term like “rescue” which may make it harder for them to have a positive future. Let’s work together to make it a well-known fact that parrots are supposed to live a pretty long time; and for some, a very long time. Adoption is the only way to make sure they have good home after good home. Adoption needs to be one of the first things we

consider when we want a parrot. And let's give resilient parrots that come from terrible situations a fighting chance too, because they won't be labeling themselves as "rescues" either. Adaptable birds from all backgrounds just want to know if there is good food for breakfast, something fun to play with, space to exercise or even fly, and a family or flock to call their own. Let's do more to make sure every parrot has this kind of opportunity!

(1) <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rescue?s=t>

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word rescue as "to free from confinement, danger, or evil; or to take (as a prisoner) forcibly from custody; or to recover (as a prize) by force." ⁽¹⁾ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rescue?show=0&t=1367782203>

(2) Survival on the ark: life-history trends in captive parrots

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ARGO is a 17 year-old Timneh African grey. She was bought by a Navy Seal at a market in Bahrain, and moved with him for many years to different parts of the world. However, when he was deployed to Afghanistan, about the same time he and his wife had their first child, he decided it was not in the best interests of Argo to remain with his family. He was extremely sad to lose his friend, Argo!

Argo is super duper smart. We hope her next home will provide her with much mental enrichment and preferably trick training. She knows how to drop things in a bowl, pick things up from one bowl and take them to another, is learning to put discs into a slot, and learning colors. Argo loves to give kisses, but don't try to pick her up! Hands are not for her, although she will gladly step onto a basket handle. Argo is a great fresh food eater, and Harrison's is her pellet of choice.

GIZMO is a 22 year-old blue and gold macaw. He was well loved in his first home for 15 years. He was then adopted through Phoenix Landing by a nice family and was with them for 6 good years, however, they ran into financial and marital problems. He is now looking for his next great home, and Phoenix Landing will always be here for him.

Gizmo likes to say “uh oh!” and “I’m gonna get you” with a southern twang. Blue and golds have a great sense of humor, in captivity and in the wild. Gizmo LOVES to eat! Macaws need a high fat diet - and this does not mean french fries and pizza. It means walnuts and Brazil nuts, complemented by lots of fruit, veggies, grains and legumes, and Harrison’s is his pellet of choice.

TORI and GABRIELLE are Nanday conures, ages and background unknown. From a companionship perspective, their past doesn’t matter much, they must learn to trust people just like any other bird. Nandays can live 20-30 years, so most will need more than one home.

After giving Tori and Gabrielle a few months to feel secure and make their own choices about interaction, Tori now flies to a shoulder and is especially interested in what food is being prepared. They share a spacious cage with many activities. At night, they sleep together under a triangle hut with their tails going in opposite directions. Tori likes good-night kisses and a skritch on the head. Gabrielle appreciates your presence, but would prefer to build a bit more trust before he gets any closer. They are truly an adorable pair.