



Heartfelt Thoughts from a Reformed Parrot Breeder

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I'm Tina Usher, and all of my life I have been captivated by all types of birds. First, I would like to give you some of my history. I own and operate The Parrot's Perch, a small home-based aviary just outside of Chicago, IL. I have been breeding and raising Moluccan, Umbrella and Medium Sulphur Crested (Elenora) Cockatoos, Green Wing Macaws and African Greys.



My breeding pairs inhabit the upstairs of my house, with the cockatoos and macaws in one room and the greys in the other. Upstairs they have the advantage of fresh air and natural sunshine. They get to see the dawn and dusk, the tree tops filled with birds and can appreciate the sound of rainfall. They also have their own stereo on which I play nature CD's, classical music and occasionally some soft jazz. I love my feathered children and continually pursue giving them the best life they can have in captivity.

I have never shipped my babies or sold to pet shops because I always screened the potential new parents. Included with each baby was a lengthy consultation on proper care, understanding behavior and hands on training to learn proper handling techniques. Even if they were experienced bird people, we still covered everything to make sure we were "on the same page".

Also, I am always available to my clients to answer questions or help guide them through a difficulty. I feel that I brought these babies into this world and it is my responsibility to make sure they are going to be properly cared for and have a much loved, healthy, happy life.

As a responsible and devoted breeder for 27 years it is because of this great love that I have for my birds that I have had a gradual change of heart about breeding. I cannot pinpoint exactly how or when it started, there was no big epiphany, just an awareness and a feeling that grew and grew. How can I justify bringing more birds into a world where...

. . . THERE ARE COUNTLESS UNWANTED PET BIRDS IN NEED OF LOVING HOMES.

Almost every day I receive emails and telephone calls from people who have decided to give up their bird, hoping I'll want it. I talk to them hoping I can help them to change their minds, but so far I have had little luck. Many even call our two local zoos thinking they would be thrilled to take their birds, and are shocked when they are turned down. I explain to them that the zoos receive calls like theirs everyday; they operate a zoo, not a rescue for all the unwanted pets. The zoos don't even have the room to take in all these unwanted birds. I try to help these people find a good home for their birds, by contacting friends, clients and acquaintances to see if they have room to take in one more. Unfortunately now, I have exhausted all my resources and have to refer them to the local rescues and clubs. Sadly, our local rescues and clubs are bursting at the seams. They are filled to capacity and are unable to accept anymore. I feel sad and helpless. What is the fate of all these unwanted companion birds?

Having become truly aware and concerned about the overpopulation of countless homeless birds, I feel the time is now that I begin a new journey. So, for starters, The Parrot's Perch has decided to no longer breed the cockatoos and macaws. They have a permanent home with me, I have just retired them. For now, during my transition I have to raise a few African Greys while I pursue my dream of opening a desperately needed avian rescue/sanctuary here in the Chicagoland area.

A few years back I began to realize my birds may out live me and I need to have a plan for their future. Where will they go? Who will take them and love and care for them like I do? I don't want to see them in the hands of an unethical breeder, stuck in someone's dark, damp basement. I want them retired and living out their lives well taken care of and happy. In the past, I had fleeting thoughts of this and did some research. I had contacted Parrot Jungle and a couple of out-of-state sanctuaries, but no one was interested in taking my pairs when the time came. So the procrastinator that I am, I easily pushed it off to the side to worry about later. This is another reason I am pursuing opening a rescue/sanctuary: to insure the destiny of my pairs.



Not only is there a crisis of the overpopulation of homeless companion birds, but since I am a breeder, I thought about the thousands of breeding pairs out there. I've noticed that all the breeders I know of, myself included, are all "getting up in age". Thankfully, I am not seeing the younger generation getting into breeding birds, but...

. . . WHAT IS THE FATE OF ALL OF THESE THOUSANDS OF BREEDING PAIRS?

Where are they going to have to go? Who will or can take care of all of them? The rescues that we currently have are filled to capacity with companion birds. These breeders are mostly wild caught, up in age, not socialized to be companions, nor do they want to be at this stage of their lives. Many have been maintained as mere money makers in large production mills. They need somewhere to go to live out their lives when their owners get too old or sick. We have brought them here. We are responsible for their well being. They deserve to live out their lives well taken care of and happy!

Unfortunately, I can see in the very near future that we will have to euthanize the unwanted birds like we do with our cats and dogs. There is public awareness about the cat and dog overpopulation. WE NEED TO MAKE THE PUBLIC AWARE OF THIS CRISIS. We all have to do our part to get the word out on this and **now**. Just as I have been predicting, I received an email from a local bird club of a flyer notifying anyone interested, that a large factory breeder in North Carolina has cancer and can no longer care for his parrots. He has arranged to transport his birds to Florida to be auctioned off - not just a few birds, but over 500 large parrots! It also says that he has arranged with one of the national humane societies in Florida to take the birds that are not sold. Well, what does that mean? Are they equipped to take in a multitude of parrots? Especially breeder pairs that are not adoptable? I doubt it, because who is? Does this mean that the humane society will "humanely dispose" of them?

Everyone, in every aspect of this industry, needs to be made aware of this crisis of birds whose people no longer want them or can care for them and that includes breeders too. Bird enthusiasts need to get proactive in these areas; we need to inform the public so that they are made aware of this situation. People need to know that there are rescues filled with wonderful birds that need loving homes. They need to be aware of the option they have to adopt a bird in need from a rescue, so they don't unknowingly just run out to the

pet shops and breeders to buy a bird. Most people are uninformed and don't even realize adoption is an option.

. . . WE NEED A PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN.

Most of us breeders love our birds and breeding and raising babies. I know I do, but at what cost? With every baby we bring into this world, are we depriving a bird in a rescue of a home? Are we, perhaps unknowingly, the major contributors to the overpopulation crisis?

Breeders...what will happen to your breeder pairs when you can no longer provide for them? Have you made provisions for their future? Do they have a place to go? Someone willing to take care of them for the rest of their lives? Or will your breeder pairs end up at a local humane society to be "humanely disposed" of? I wonder if this is not already a hidden dirty secret.

. . . BREEDERS NEED TO BE MORE BENEVOLENT.



The avian publications have regular monthly columns written by experts on various subjects. ***There is a definite need for a regular monthly column featuring our rescue and sanctuary profession.*** It could be written by a staff columnist featuring various rescues and sanctuaries or by an owner of a shelter. Articles could be written on topics such as: how they started their rescue, how to start your own rescue, how they run their operation, deal with the influx of birds, maintain their birds, raise funds etc. The subject matter would be endless. Occasionally I see a small

article here or there, but our rescues and sanctuaries provide an invaluable service to our industry and it's time they were highlighted. This will help to inform and educate the public, as well as hopefully inspire others to get involved in the field of parrot welfare. We need our industry's publications to support our shelters by contributing their share.

. . . WE NEED MONTHLY COLUMNS HIGHLIGHTING OUR SHELTERS.

I have a friend who has a local nonprofit parrot refuge. I asked him why he doesn't go to the bird clubs and conventions and lecture on this topic. He said he has tried, but since there are members of the clubs who are breeders, they don't want to hear from him. I find that shocking! The truth hurts so let's just ignore it? Ignorance may be bliss for you...

. . . BUT NOT FOR ALL THE UNWANTED BIRDS THAT END UP AT SHELTERS!!