The Parrot Post – Newsletter of the EPPA

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About The Club

The EPPA focuses on aspects of keeping healthy, happy parrots.

At our meetings, you can get helpful information on topics such as nutrition, health, and behaviour. We have guest speakers, research reports presented by members, toy-making sessions, and round table discussions on topics of mutual interest. Members are able to bring healthy pet parrots to meetings.

If you have a parrot or are thinking of getting one, join the club.

Members are entitled to attend meetings, participate in parrot shows, and attend the June BBQ and the annual Christmas party.

Members also receive a newsletter, and a membership card that gets them discounts at some local pet stores.

Meeting Time and Locations:

Meetings are held the last Wednesday every month at the Allendale Community Hall (6330 105 A St) from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm, except for December, June and July.

Membership fees are $25 (single) or $30 (family) per year (Sept to Aug 31). Fees are ½ this for those who join half way through the year.

Upcoming Events

Parrot Show!

We are planning to hold a parrot show sometime next year, where members can bring their parrots and answer questions from the public about them. We are also hoping to have bird-related vendors there.

Right now, this show is in the early planning stages. We will need people to help with planning (for example, to call potential venues and vendors) so if you would like to help, please contact one of the members of the executive. We will also need people to help prepare educational materials, and there will be examples at the next meeting.

October Meeting

The October meeting will be on the 29th. It will start at 7:00 pm and will be at the Allendale Community Center at 6330 105 A Street.

We will be discussing the parrot show, and the “Bird of the Month” presentation will be on the Umbrella Cockatoo. Since it will almost be Halloween, I am also going to bring some treats for the birds (Harrison’s bird bread and pumpkin seeds for your parrots to try).

November’s meeting will be on the 26th and the same time and place.

If you would like your parrot to be “Parrot of the Month” for November, please let me know (izgurski@ualberta.ca). This involves giving a short talk about your bird to the membership. We are having these short presentations to help members get to know each other and learn about what living with different parrot species is like.
Mini Species Profile: Eastern Rosella

Rosellas are a group of very beautiful, colourful parakeets from Australia and some of the surrounding islands. There are six species and they can be found in a variety of habitats, except for the very dry outback. They often live in urban parks and will visit bird feeders. They have also been introduced to New Zealand.

Eastern Rosellas are native to southeastern Australia and Tasmania. They prefer to live in woodlands, parks, gardens, and bush lands.

Males and females look very similar, although females are a bit duller in colour. Females and juveniles also have a white stripe on the undersides of the wings.

Wild birds eat a variety of fruit and seeds, and they often live around farms, where they eat spilled grain, and grain left over on the ground after harvest.

Rosellas breed in tree cavities and prefer very deep cavities (1 m deep). They usually lay 5-6 eggs, and the female incubates the eggs and the male feeds the female.

Rosellas are kept as both pets and aviary birds and can often be taught to whistle.

News and Notes from the Editor

First off, I would like to apologize for the lag time between the last newsletter and this one. I do hope to send out newsletters more frequently from now on.

Club News

We recently had elections for club executive positions, and our executive is now as follows:

**President:** Ian Sprague  
**Vice President:** Roger Pelletier  
**Treasurer:** Sandy Vieville  
**Secretary:** Jessie Zgurski

I also want to offer a big thank you to everyone who has contributed to running and promoting the club, including everyone who came out to Pet Expo, and has helped with meetings (including giving presentations, bringing snacks and helping set up). I would like to name everyone but do not want to forget anyone.

It is unlikely that we will be doing Pet Expo again this year and this is primarily due to the high cost of having a table. However, we are planning on having a show of our own next year instead.

It’s time for membership renewal, and memberships are $25 for singles and $30 for families. You can renew at the upcoming meeting.

If you have a Facebook account, you can also join our club’s page there. Just do a search for “Edmonton Pet Parrot Association.” You can post pictures there, interesting links, or you can ask questions.

We also had some new members join this year. Welcome to Lise B (and her Pearly Conure) and Megan D (and her Senegal).

I also want to thank everyone who sent in photos for the newsletter!

Above: Pictured above are Zephyr, an Eastern Rosella, and Mannu, a Budgie. They belong to club member Samrah Burney.
Meet the Birds of the Kern Family!

Chelsea, Sunkyst, and Polly

Left: Chelsea, a Green-wing Macaw.

Chelsea was born on April 15, 1992, which makes her 22 years old this year. She is a gentle loving bird who loves to cuddle and loves "scritches". She is an amazing talker - she knows about 75 words, some of those being "coca-cola, where's your wings? kisses, I love you, you're bad, pretty girl, where's daddy?, watcha ya doing? peek-a-boo", etc.

We try to include as much adventure in her life as possible including trips to the park, for walks up to Whyte Ave, picnics, school presentations, soccer games and of course to the lake every weekend in the summer. She is one spoiled bird with her own room in the house; my oldest daughter still complains how the birds took precedent over her and got the nice "sunny" bedroom.

Sunkyst, is our Senegal Parrot. He was born on October 1, 2010. He is simply amazing at mimicking all the different birds that he hears, even the wild ones. He is a very inquisitive little bird; one of those that is always up to something. He used to absolutely love his "mama" but has decided that he likes "daddy" better : ( He gives wonderful kisses!

He too comes camping every weekend with us. He loves to climb in the saskatoon trees and eat to his heart's content. He's a tireless tree pruner; unfortunately his idea of pruning differs from ours! He shares the other half of Chelsea's bedroom.
Polly, Natalya’s Peach Faced Lovebird, is the love of her life. They are inseparable! He is a sweet little bird who proudly rides on her shoulder around the house. Polly is about three years old and competes with Sunkyst to see who can create the most “chatter” in the house. Natalya had to prove that she was able to adequately take care of a bird; she has done an amazing job and takes her responsibility quite seriously!

I (KimBerley) have had a bird as a companion for just about my entire life. When I was young, I had to beg my parents to have a bird; they finally gave in and let me have a canary....that was the beginning and it was long before birds become my passion. They are truly amazing creatures and they still fascinate me by how intelligent, interesting, social and of course, beautiful they are. I can't imagine my home without one of these beautiful feathered friends and feel that I have been truly blessed to share my life with them. When I think of my feathered family, the first thing that comes to mind: macaws = “majestic”, senegal parrots = “inquisitive” and lovebirds = “cute”

Group Profile: Berkeley’s Place

Berkeley’s Place is a forum to honour all aspects of our pet's lives and our relationship with them. Many people are unaware of the many rescue organizations that are helping animals or have misconceptions about rescue animals. Berkeley’s Place is a page to come to find support, encouragement, holistic healing options using crystal and oil therapy, to network with like-minded animal lovers/guardians, to share positive stories, find recipes for your furry and feathered friends and to learn more about healing trauma and abuse in animals.

Each month we host a Pet Honouring Ceremony for animals that have crossed the Rainbow Bridge. As well, we offer monthly draws for rescue prizes and raffle off Bark Boxes to foster families.

What will you see here? Stories of hope, encouragement, support for fosters and rescue volunteers, pet honoring ceremonies and animal related events. Our partner vendors, Pet Planet Riverbend, Darcy Evan's Photography, D.E.W.S, Katherine Fisher of Heavenly Animal Healing and Mornings Rise are all dedicated to helping animals in need.

What won't you see here? Lost pet advertisements, stories of abuse or neglect or anything showcasing humanity’s “inhumanity” towards animals.

This is an open page where you can post upcoming events, wish list requests, rescue success stories, recipes and fundraising events geared toward helping rescue animals.

Berkeley’s Place works closely with the SW community of Terwillager Towne and its entrepreneurs to collect badly needed items such as food, kennels, blankets, cages, etc. to re-home to rescues in need. Funds that are saved by not having to replace these items allow rescues to allocate badly needed resources into medical care and saving more lives.

https://www.facebook.com/BerkeleysPlace

Editor’s Note: Berkeley’s Place does support parrot rescues as well!
The above two birds belong to Janine Couture-Sprague. The parrot in the basket is Asia, an Alexandrine Parakeet and the other is Mara, a Lord Derbyan Parakeet. To the left is her daughter Zoe’s bird, who won first place in the pet bird category at the Northern Alberta Cage Bird Society bird show. Congratulations Zoe!
Living with a Blue and Gold Macaw

By: Jessie Zgurski

Of all the large macaw species that are available as pets in North America, the Blue and Gold Macaw is the most common. This is likely because they breed well in captivity (if set up and cared for properly), they can often talk quite well, and they are beautiful. They are not globally endangered and many were imported into North America until the early 90s.

Wild Macaws

The Blue and Gold Macaw is the quintessential parrot – big, bold, colourful, and talkative. In the wild, they can be found in the northern half of South America and southern Panama in a variety of lowland habitats, including city parks. They feed on fruits, nuts, and seeds and their powerful beaks can crack open very tough shells.

Wild blue and golds are often seen in small flocks, and outside of the breeding season, they will often sleep in groups. However, even within a group, it can be very evident which birds constitute breeding pairs, as pairs will typically fly and feed close together, even outside of the breeding season. When I was in Brazil, I noticed most of the macaws I saw seemed to be paired off. Even within flocks, it wasn’t hard to tell who the couples were.

Macaws as Pets

As far as their suitability as pets goes, Blue and Gold Macaws can be either phenomenal companions or a pet owner’s worst nightmare. It all depends on the owner’s expectations. Due to their size, loud voices, and powerful beaks, macaws are generally considered to be high maintenance pets.

First, because of their strong beaks and curiosity, macaws cannot typically be allowed to freely roam in a house without supervision. Thus, a cage is needed and a suitable macaw cage will often cost $1000 or more. However, a macaw should never be confined to a cage for its whole life, and thus macaw keepers often must invest in a large parrot stand (or two) for the bird to perch on when outside of the cage. Even with access to interesting bird stands, many macaws will roam around a house. An outdoor cage or aviary is also a nice thing for a macaw to have.

About two years ago, I got a twenty-three year old Blue and Gold Macaw named Pteri. She is the bird in all of the pictures accompanying this article. Her cage is in the living room of the house, but she is generally out of her cage if someone is home to watch her. She has a big parrot stand downstairs to perch on and a few places to perch upstairs. Her parrot stand also has chew toys hanging on it. However, she still likes to walk around the house and climb on the bannisters. She sometimes climbs up the bannisters and slides down them. She’s quite good about not destroying things she shouldn’t but will sometimes try to chew furniture and walls. If she does that, she is given something more suitable to chew on. If she’s really bored, she’ll climb on the curtains.

Speaking of chewing, macaws do need things to chew on. Pteri does like to chew on wood, baskets, pine cones and other similar items and her cage is generally stocked with safe chew toys. She has some store bought toys, but macaw toys are generally quite expensive (especially considering their purpose is to be destroyed). A lot of her chew toys are natural items from outside. Note that it is important to be sure that natural plants given to parrots are nontoxic and have not been sprayed with pesticides.

One question that nearly all parrot owners are asked is “does s/he talk?” Blue and Gold Macaws are often very good talkers. Pteri can say hi, good morning, water, what, apple, popcorn, corn, pasta, cat, vegetable, hot, and parrot, and she can laugh and bark like a dog. She also uses a few words appropriately. For example, she
greets people who come in the house with an enthusiastic “Hi!” and she says “water” whenever I change her water or give her a spray bath. She also says “Good morning!” in the morning. She uses other words at random and doesn’t appear to know what they mean.

Although many macaws I know can talk, not all macaws speak well and even macaws that can talk will often make a lot of loud screeches and squawks. Pteri often talks to herself when no one is around and she will also screech periodically. Her screeches are high pitched and extremely loud. Such vocalizations can often be minimized using behavioural modification techniques, but it takes patience and it’s unreasonable to expect a macaw to be a quiet animal. I also tend to tell people who want a parrot primarily because a talking animal appeals to them to rethink their decision. Not all parrots talk, and some who can talk only learn a few phrases. And as I always say, the novelty of having a talking bird will wear off!

The Mess Factor

Macaws (along with cockatoos) are among the messiest birds one can keep. They of course poop a lot, but they can also make a mess with their food and toys. Pteri loves nuts so her diet does include some walnuts, pecans, hazel nuts, and almonds in the shell. She sometimes receives Brazil nuts as well. She always somehow manages to get the shells outside of her cage, so I have to clean that up. The woody debris from her chew toys also ends up outside of her cage as well. Still, she isn’t as bad as Mitri, my Lesser Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, who actually kicks food bits, wood, and paper outside of his cage.

That Huge Beak…

A lot of people find macaws to be very intimidating. That’s not completely unreasonable, as macaws do have large, strong beaks. A large macaw can slice through a walnut or hazelnut shell like it’s butter. Macaw bites are painful.

However, there are steps one can take to minimize the likelihood of being bitten. Macaws are not subtle in their body language and will often give warnings before they bite. An agitated macaw will likely lower her head, pin her pupils and erect her head feathers. Don’t ever try to touch or pick up a macaw who is giving such warning signals. Some macaws will also lunge and shriek before biting. Pteri does that, but she only rarely actually bites.

Training a macaw from a young age to step up on an arm or a hand-held perch can also make her easier to handle. Parrots trained with positive techniques are less likely to become biters than parrots trained with force. A macaw is also less likely to become a “one-person bird” if handled by multiple people. I’ve met many macaws — primarily blue and golds and greenwings — who have remained quite friendly to even strangers into adulthood.

Diet

Most macaws will do well on a good pelleted diet supplemented with nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and other healthful ‘people’ foods.

Useful Resources

I noted a few times above that macaws respond well to training using positive reinforcement. A few books about parrot training are available and include The Parrot Problem Solver by Barbara Heidenreich and Clicker Training for Birds by Melinda Johnson.

The best book written about macaws is, alas, out of print. It’s called The Large Macaws: Their Care, Breeding, and Conservation and it’s by Joanne Abramson (author), Brain L. Speer (author),

It’s quite important that a potential macaw owner not be intimidated by the bird. Macaws often become very difficult when their owners become afraid of them. What can happen is that the bird will lunge or bite once, and the owner then becomes afraid of the bird. As the bird is handled less frequently, she will become more unsure of people and will become more likely to nip. That results in less handling, and the frustrated macaw may become more bitey and noisy. Macaw owners must be comfortable around large birds so that doesn’t happen.

Macaws are very social birds and they can be quite demanding of attention. A macaw is not the type of bird that can be left in a cage all day. Most will want to be with their people. Pteri seems happy as long as she’s perched near me or my husband. She talks back to people who talk to her (although her responses don’t always make sense) and she will yell to be let out of her cage if she feels she’s been in there too long. Macaws are also quite capable of learning tricks. In short, they are very interactive, high energy and demanding pets.

Become a member or renew your membership today!
There are a couple of basic macaw care guides available from Avian Publications (http://www.avianpublications.com/) as well.

Stuff your Parrot Doesn’t (or Probably Doesn’t) need.

By: Jessie Zgurski

All sorts of products produced for pet parrots are useful and make caring for them a bit easier. These include toys, pellets, and perches. However, there are several products on the market that most parrots really don’t need and that may, in fact, be harmful. Others may be useful for birds like quail or pigeons, but not for parrots. Here are a few examples:

1. Sandpaper Perches

These are usually dowel perches coated in sandpaper and are supposed to help keep a parrot’s nails short. In theory, when the parrot walks or lands on the perch, its nails may touch the sandpaper and be gradually filed short. However, these perches are actually quite rough on a bird’s foot and are best avoided.

2. Vitamin Supplements

Vitamin supplements do have their use, but a parrot that eats a diet of pellets and healthy fresh foods (like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables) will not need a vitamin supplement. There are a few vitamins and minerals that can actually be harmful if overdosed.

A vitamin supplement can be useful for a bird that is eating a primarily seed-based diet. Ideally, parrots on a seed diet should be encouraged to eat other foods but this can take time. A vitamin supplement may be needed until the bird learns to eat a better diet. Some vitamins, like “Prime” (Hagen) are designed for birds on a primarily seed-based diet.

3. Grit

Parrots generally don’t “need” grit (i.e. pieces of hard substances like oyster shell), but birds like pigeons and quail can benefit from receiving small pinches of it. Pigeons and quail do not hull shells off of their food and the grit will help grind the shells off in the bird’s crop. However, parrots and finches will typically hull seeds before eating them and they don’t require grit for digestion. Parrot pellets and most of the fresh foods people feed to parrots are soft enough that a parrot’s digestive system can grind them without grit.

Some breeders offer pinches of calcium-rich grit (like ground oyster shells) to their parrots as a mineral supplement. Offering grit is also quite common among Australian bird keepers. Wild parrots often do consume some clay or dirt, but this is typically to gain minerals lacking in the rest of their diet. A pet (non-breeding) parrot on a pellet-based diet should receive sufficient minerals. However, small pinches of grit (a few grains) will not hurt a healthy bird. Even so, I do not offer it to my parrots or finches. My egg-laying finches receive extra calcium in the form of ground-up egg shells. The egg and shell are cooked, ground up in a food processor with vegetables and given to the finches. I also add “Prime” to their egg mix.

My quail do receive pinches of oyster shell. Avoid offering a bird on a seed-based diet a large amount of grit at once. The bird may eat too much of it and can end up with an impacted crop or badly irritated digestive system.

Above: Grit. Pet parrots can generally do fine without it.

4. Cedar, Walnut- or Corn-based Bedding

Plain newspaper is perfectly fine to use as a liner for parrot cages. Some places sell other types of liner for animal cages, and some are actually harmful to small animals. Cedar-based bedding, for example, can cause respiratory problems in parrots and small mammals. Other types (such as corn-based bedding) may grow mold if it becomes damp. Walnut litter may actually be ingested by birds, so I do not recommend using it in bird cages.

My quail do require some type of soft substrate since they are ground-based birds. I use a paper-
based one such as care fresh or ecobedding. I use the unscented or coloured types. Aspen shavings are also fine as bedding for quail and other birds.

The types of mites that sometimes infect pet budgies or finches should not be treated with the mite strips sold in pet shops. Such mites include air-sac mites, which are sometimes seen in finches (particularly canaries and Gouldians). These are mites that infest the bird’s air sacs, and birds that have them may breathe with their mouths open, and they often produce a ‘clicking’ sound when breathing. Products such as SCATT (Vetafarm) or S76 can be used to treat this problem.

“Scaly-face mites” sometimes infect birds (primarily budgies) on the featherless parts of their bodies (cere, beak, legs). The mites will burrow in the bird’s skin, which will irritate it and cause it to thicken and develop a scaly appearance. Severe deformities can result, so a bird with a suspected mite infestation needs to go to a veterinarian as soon as is possible. A vet can diagnose the problem by examining a skin scraping under a microscope. The mites can be treated with oral or topically-applied insecticides.

6. Bird bath spray

Many pet birds like to be bathed or showered. However, birds don’t need any special bath solutions, so save your money and offer your birds plain water to bathe in or shower with.

Birds suspected of having a skin irritation should be taken to a veterinarian.

Items to be cautious with:

7. Toys or perches with rope.

Many bird toys and perches sold at pet stores have rope in them. These can be fine for birds who do not unravel the rope. For birds that do chew ropes, they can present a hazard. A mass of threads from a chewed-up rope can become wrapped around a bird’s neck, leg or foot. This can cut off circulation to the leg or even strangle the bird. My Jenday Conure, Peggy, actually lost a foot she got wrapped up in thread, and she’s not the only bird I know of who lost an appendage that way.

My finches and small parakeets have a few rope perches since they do not chew them. I placed all rope toys of my stronger chewers on the outside of their cages, so I can keep an eye on how they use them. My birds are typically out of their cages only when I am home.
Blue-throated Macaw News


According to the World Parrot Trust, for every blue-throated macaw in the wild, there are 3,750 African elephants, 200 rhinos, 12 giant pandas, and six mountain gorillas.

That's about to change, however slightly, with the release of 17 birds raised in Shawnigan Lake.

Those birds are among 27 who are leaving April Sanderson's Shawnigan Lake aviary this week. Five breeding pairs will remain in Toronto, where African Lion Safari will take over Sanderson's breeding program, while the majority will eventually head to Bolivia to be gradually released into their natural habitat.

It is the result of a lifetime with parrots.

"I've had parrots since I was a child," said Sanderson, who will still have three blue-throated macaws – her pets – when all is said and done. "I got my first one when I was nine, and I've worked with them all my life."

Sanderson started breeding parrots for the pet trade, but soon discovered that wasn't a business she wanted to be part of, particularly since many pet parrots end up in unfortunate circumstances.

"A lot of people don't know how to care for parrots," she noted.

Not wanting to give up working with the birds altogether, Sanderson decided to breed them for the World Parrot Trust's conservation program.

That has involved an extreme amount of permits and contracts, and the birds have all been quarantined at her aviary for the last five years, with no contact with other parrots or even other parrot owners.

It has also required at least three hours of labour a day, seven days a week, limiting family holidays, and cost hundreds of dollars a month to keep them fed and sheltered.

"It has been hard for my family to understand," Sanderson admitted.

Sanderson's five breeding pairs represent nine different bloodlines, probably one of the most diverse breeding groups in North America, which will help prevent inbreeding in the wild.

Parrot release programs are controversial, which Sanderson readily acknowledges.

"There are two teams," she explained.

"One wants to protect the existing population, and the other wants to release more birds."

The wild population of blue-throated macaws is estimated at around 125, within an area roughly the size of Vancouver Island. Breeding pairs usually have just one chick per year. The survival rates of those few chicks are low, and Sanderson believes releases are necessary.

"With numbers so low, I don't believe they can recover without human intervention," she said.

The efforts in Bolivia are modeled after the successful Ara Project, which has helped reintroduce two species of macaw in Costa Rica.

The birds are closely watched, and will begin their time in South America in huge aviaries, where they will be able to build their flight wings, transition to the wild diet, and get accustomed to the climate.

Despite all her hard work, and that of everyone involved in Toronto and Bolivia, Sanderson has accepted that there won't be a 100 per cent survival rate once the birds are released, but still feels it's worth it.

"They're not all going to make it," she said.

"I'm not being naive about it. I know some of them are going to die, but what are the species' chances? Our generation could be the last one to see them."

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Related Link:
World Parrot Trust, www.parrots.org
Science News: Complex social lives gave parrots big brains


Living in a complex social world—one with shifting alliances and competitors—is often cited as the key reason humans, dolphins, and spotted hyenas evolved large brains. Now, researchers say that social complexity also underlies the braininess of parrots, which have big brains relative to their body size. To understand the social lives of these birds, the scientists observed wild populations of monk parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*), a small parrot, in Argentina and captive ones in Florida. They recorded how often the birds were seen with other individuals and how they interacted—and then analyzed the parakeets’ social networks.

The birds, the researchers report online today in *The Auk: Ornithological Advances*, prefer to spend time with one specific individual, usually their mate. In the captive populations, the birds also had strong associations with one or two other individuals, numerous more moderate relationships, and only a few that were weak. The scientists also recorded aggressive interactions among the captive birds, revealing that monk parakeets have a dominance hierarchy based on which birds won or lost confrontations. Thus, the parakeets’ society has layers of relationships, similar to those documented in other big-brained animals. Living in such a society requires that the birds recognize and remember others, and whether they are friend or foe—mental tasks that are thought to be linked to the evolution of significant cognitive skills.