

Houston Parrot Festival 2009

By Patricia Sund

The tenth annual Houston Parrot Festival took off like a rocket on Friday, January 23. A high energy and intensely fun event for bird enthusiasts everywhere, it appeared to be the most successful Festival in the National Parrot Rescue and Preservation Foundation's (NPRPF) history.

Cheryl Rose, Festival Director, had this to say about the turnout: "This was one of the best years we have had. We strive to improve Parrot Festival every year. We had many positive comments from the attendees about the wonderful line up of speakers this year and how smoothly the Parrot Festival was run."

Experts in their respective fields, and incredible presenters, respected individuals such as Dr. Lorenzo Crosta, Official Veterinarian of the recovery programs of the Lear's and Spix's Macaw, informed and inspired all of us. Give us a lineup like Doctors Patricia Macwhirter, Brian Speer, Robin Bjork and Natalie Antinoff, trainers and educators Sid Price and Steve Martin, and Mark Hagen of the Hagen Avicultural Research Institute (HARI) and we get very excited about all of this new information. There were other educational presentations: Valentina Barcarolo spoke on Free-Flight and Parrot Communication, Rick Jordan on Conservation and Aviculture and Bob Johnson from the Shyne Foundation gave us tips on building a free-flight habitat.

The emphasis this year swung toward the subject of positive reinforcement training. It seemed that almost every speaker touched on this subject in one way or another. Positive reinforcement training seems to be the "New Black" in the world of aviculture. It was gratifying to hear that the word is out about this incredible method of training and that positive reinforcement is building a head of steam and spreading throughout the world of aviculture including Avian Veterinarians.

Positive reinforcement training for birds has been made accessible to aviculturists by Dr. Susan Friedman and the momentum has been building from her on line class "Living and Learning with Parrots" as well as her lectures, articles and classes.

As well as an incredible lineup of speakers, there were vendors aplenty for those interested in snapping up the latest in bird toys, cages, clothing, art and other items of interest to those of us who have deemed ourselves "parrot worthy." You can talk about birds until you are blue in the face and nobody notices because they are all doing the same thing. Try doing this with your non-bird friends. By the time you get home, this "birds on the brain" condition has gotten out of your system and for a time, you are almost normal.

There were raffles and drawings for a myriad of bird related gear and prizes including play stands, cages, toys and a shopping spree.




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Then there are the parties: NPRPF's "Party in Parrot-Dise" kicked off on Friday evening with snacks, cocktails and dancing.

Many prizes and events frame up this party including the ever-popular Hula dance contest. Those gentlemen daring enough to put their dignity aside for the moment are welcome to don grass skirts and coconut bras and shimmy their way through the dance floor. The one who ends up with the most donations wins a prize from NPRPF. This year's winner was Brian Keith of Louisiana.

Saturday Evening's event was the "Blue Jeans to Black Tie" Banquet. This party has a three-course sit down dinner, award presentations and the ever-popular live auction of items donated to NPRPF for fund-raising. The bidding was energetic and feisty with auction paddles waving like palm fronds in a hurricane and bidding was breaking out everywhere.

More lectures and a last minute rush to the vendors on Sunday cap off a weekend of camaraderie, education and just plain fun. The Houston Parrot Festival is a must-go for anyone with even the slightest interest in parrots. It is a classic and classy event and I can't even begin to describe how much fun it is.

As NPRPF President Jill Bell mentioned to me, "As happy as I am that Parrot Festival is over, I am unhappy it is over! It was great to see the old friends and meet new ones. The speakers were wonderful, and we are grateful as always for the help from all of our volunteers, vendors and sponsors. I had a flappin' good time!"

The friends you make, the people you meet and what is more important, what you learn, are worth the trip.



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