

# Not Guilty as Charged



*By Madeleine Franco*

**B**ECAUSE I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN rehoming parrots for a number of years, many people ask if I am “anti-breeder,” and yet others assume that I am. I am not anti-breeder, and in my opinion, such a position in many ways seems untenable. My own personal position on breeding is that responsible breeding that recognizes the limitation of markets and the economy, the availability of suitable bird owners, education to produce more of same, and the conservation status of species is what most would support. More importantly, responsible care, education and a life plan for parrots cradle to grave, so to speak, is what I believe we all want.

The world and its problems are not black and white, but many wondrous shades of gray. While those against breeding would like to see all pet breeding stopped, psittacines present a unique problem because of their intelligence and longevity. Ironically, these are at least two characteristics that those who are anti-breeding probably wouldn't know much about were it not for aviculture. Were such a dichotomy not puzzling enough, the concerns I have about rescue/rehoming organizations becoming anti-breeder are myriad and much more complex, touching even upon the human need to nurture, human mental and physical health, and crime statistics.

While many demand an end to breeding, this seems shortsighted. One of the major failures of ZERO POPULATION GROWTH plans is that they just don't

reach the people they most assuredly should reach because they have the effect of alienating them, as well as alienating most moderates. Once people have flipped their DO NOT DISTURB switches, meaningful communication is lost.

Notwithstanding the efforts of animal rights activists to move the middle in the debate, I believe the two groups (breeders and rescue/rehoming) must work together, so that more can be learned about birds as pets. One must admit that, barring any ugly interventions, the current parrot population will be around a long time; my conclusion is so also will parrot breeders. It is important, therefore, that we support a dialogue that helps those breeders and all parrot owners become as responsible and responsive to parrots' needs as possible.

We have already learned that when parrots—kept by man for centuries—were not available to the pet trade in sufficient numbers domestically bred, many species became dangerously depleted in their natural habitats. I seriously doubt that we want to inflict those wrongs on the world's parrot population ever again. People tend to protect what they have come to know and you can “blame” aviculture for helping millions of people know parrots and other species of birds.

Education, and an appreciation of what it takes to be a responsible parrot breeder or owner, is a major part of the answer. In alienating even the most responsible breeders, if we reduce the populations of the most desirable pets, with a “no-breeding” philosophy, then aviculture as we know it—the mechanism by which we learn and teach—is lost. In

such an environment, the standards can only become lower, and the prophecy of parrots—or any species, for that matter—becoming unsuitable as pets will self-fulfill. In a strident anti-breeder environment, parrots as desirable pets will all but disappear, but parrots as problems will likely proliferate. And, too, government, with its propensity to cater to the lowest common denominator and pressured by those who protest the loudest, may step in yet again and reduce important choices and freedoms that should be available to responsible people.

While I am not convinced that anything I say will completely alter the thinking of those who proselytize an anti-breeding agenda, I do wish they might adopt a more moderate stance. I myself will continue to be supportive of RESPONSIBLE breeding and stewardship, as I consider that the most reasonable, workable and contributory choice in the long-term best interest of all birds, and most assuredly of parrots. In fact, as humanity continues to exert pressure on the specialized environments so necessary for the survival of these beautiful creatures in the wild, aviculture is called upon to play a key role in ensuring the future of numerous species mankind has come to know and love. Aviculture must remain not only viable but also healthy, energetic and enthusiastic enough to mount an effective campaign.

*Madeleine Franco is president of the Southern Nevada Parrot Education, Rescue & Rehoming Society. She is an award-winning business writer and a work-from-home bird mom to a highly interactive and platonic flock of pet parrots.*