



Staying Connected

PERSON TO PERSON

By Jamie Whittaker

Many years ago, scattered throughout the United States there were pockets of people with a strong interest in birds. These individuals sharing a common passion formed bird clubs so that they could share their love of birds. Most clubs had an educational component, although, there was so much to be learned about birds at that time and so little information available. Many of these clubs had exhibitions, some had bird marts, and numerous ones had both.

Internet groups and connections...

The early Internet discussion groups such as rec.petbird were places to ask questions and sometimes get adequate answers. In those early days you were just as likely to be beaten up verbally as you were to get an answer you could use. Those groups

evolved into discussion groups like Yahoo groups. If you are searching for a Yahoo group and type in the keywords "bird" and "parrot", there are 378 listed groups available. There are at least that many private groups, like the American Federation of Aviculture, Inc. (AFA) members' discussion group.

Facebook has been a game changer in bringing together individuals with common interests. There are over a thousand Facebook groups using the keywords "bird" or "parrot"; so it is apparent that people are still interested in connecting with other bird owners.

Starting a group with Facebook or Yahoo is relatively easy for people who are connected to the Internet. Most groups do not have a formal structure with officers, dues and regular meeting times. Some of them offer education with a guest chat. You can also invite someone to be on the Facebook page at a particular time to discuss a specific topic or answer questions.

Some groups have resident experts who can answer questions regularly. Some groups have fund raisers; and other groups just share pictures and talk about their birds. These groups are welcome to join AFA as national affiliates for as little as \$65 a year. This affiliation allows them an opportunity to meet at the AFA convention each year. They may have their own designated meeting room for an hour either in private, or open to other attendees.

Supporting AFA with an affiliation means that they agree with AFA's Mission Statement and that birds have a place in our lives. Wanting to work with AFA and other members, to improve the lives of birds in our care and to ensure that birds can have a place in our lives and homes in the future, is a goal that we all share.

Face-to-face connections...

What are the advantages of face-to-face clubs and organizations? There are some things you cannot do on Facebook.

Some things that local clubs can do:

1. Help each other with bird sitting when needed.
2. Grooming can be done in groups. Some clubs have people who will groom birds at meetings.
3. Clubs can form small buying groups if they are not in an area with good access to bird supplies.
4. Birdie play dates can be scheduled. This can keep birds well socialized and is very enriching to them.

How do you get a local group started?

You only need two or three people with a common interest and a common goal to start a local group. First, decide where you are going to have an initial meeting and choose

a day and time for that meeting. There are probably other people in your community whom you have never seen who also have birds. Does the local grocery store, feed store or discount store sell bird food? If it does, then you can bet that you are not the only person in town with birds. Talk with people in the store, see whether they have a place to hang flyers. Bird people will usually stop and read something with a bird picture on it. Post your flyer on community boards online and in public places. Ask your veterinarians to let you post your flyers in their offices. If there is a pet store or bird store within 50 miles of you, the staff may also know other

people in your area. There may be employees of the store who are interested in becoming a part of a club also.

Affiliate your club with AFA. The birds in your care will benefit from us working together for their future. You and your birds will benefit by meeting other bird people; and everyone's birds will benefit as we work together through AFA.

You are not alone! It only takes one person with an interest to start a club; and if you have read this article to the end, then you are that person.

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