

Perseverance and Parrots

by Judy Leach, Marengo, Illinois

My history with parrots goes back about 16 years. Like most people involved with parrots, I started with one bird, a wild-caught male Moluccan Cockatoo that I bought from a quarantine station. I am an animal lover, so with perseverance and patience, I was able to tame him. Next I bought a female Moluccan Cockatoo and tamed her too. At the time, I was divorced, raising two children, supporting a household, holding a full time job, and breeding angelfish. I decided that I preferred the female Cockatoo and decided to sell the male. I sold him at a profit, and this started the ball rolling.

I found a home for the female Moluccan too, and used the money to buy more wild-caught birds. I realized that I could buy wild birds and tame them as pets to help support my family. Within a year, my collection of parrots had increased to over 30 birds, and I no longer had time for both fish and birds. I decided to sell all of my fish. The birds had become my fascination.

Through taming and training the wild birds, I learned about parrot psychology. It never ceased to amaze me that parrots who had been mistreated and roughly handled during capture and quarantine could learn to trust humans again. Because of my love for them and my lack of fear, wild African Greys would allow me to pet them within 15 minutes. I tamed, and gained the trust of totally wild macaws, cockatoos and African Greys that most people called "broncos" and would not have attempted to tame. I suppose my lack of fear helped to reassure them. I never used gloves because I felt that I had to give my trust to them in order

to gain theirs.

Within a couple of years, by using charge cards to buy birds and by selling some of the birds that I had tamed, I was able to increase my flock to over 100 parrots of various species. Then disaster struck.

In August, 1985, I had an electrical house fire. I lost all but 30 of my 119 birds. The experience was traumatic. I blamed myself for their deaths and almost decided to give up. I still owed money on most of the birds that were lost and I was not making enough money at my job to pay for them and support my family. After I got over the initial shock of the fire, I realized that I could not just quit. That would have meant defeat and I refused to be defeated.

Insurance did not pay for any of the lost birds, but it did pay for losses of belongings and contents of the house. Instead of replacing all of the household losses, I used some of the insurance payments to buy more birds, but this time most of my purchases were for breeding stock. I secured a five-year home equity loan to buy my first pair of Hyacinths.

In 1986, I bought a couple of baby Blue-fronted Amazons out of quarantine. The next day I found one of them dead in the cage. He was replaced, but less than two weeks later, my birds began to die. Every night after work I would come home to find that another of my birds had died. At the time, the vet I was going to could not diagnose the problem and told me there was nothing I could do.


Finally, through another bird lover, I heard about a new Avian veterinarian, Dr. Peter Sakas, and I took one of the sick birds to him. The bird lived.

Soon after this, the deaths stopped but I had lost over \$20,000 worth of birds, including the female Hyacinth of the pair that I was paying for. Still, I refused to be defeated. I stopped buying birds from quarantine stations, but I had to go further into debt to buy unwanted and abused birds that would become my breeders.

I allowed each of the birds to choose its own mate, and set them up to breed. I went through all of the same learning experiences that every new breeder does, sorting through opinions and theories, trying different cage sizes, lighting, and supplements. I very quickly figured out that most successful breeders were not going to reveal to me how they became successful. I had to go through the same growing pains that they did and figure it out on my own—but I did it.

In 1993, I married after 16 years of being on my own. My husband, Paul, has been supportive of my love of birds and has helped me with the maintenance of cages and with the feeding of our birds, even though they have taken over most of our time and our lives. In fact, he once told me that we had to "get a life." I responded, "This is a life."

In January, 1995, we bought a home on five acres of land in Marengo, Illinois. It took six months to prepare it for the birds, and we moved in during the month of June. It took almost six months for the breeders to settle in, but once they did, for the first time I had to close the nestboxes. I had so many babies that I could not find homes for all of them. Through much learning and suffering, and against all odds, I had become a successful parrot breeder.

Although, most of this might be of little interest to many, the point that I am attempting to make is that no one should ever give up on a dream. Although you may lose a couple of battles, the war cannot be lost unless you quit. 

Judy Leach, having been a trainer and breeder of parrots for 16 years, spends most of her time caring for her parrots, writing a book about parrot selection, care, and breeding, and writing and developing her web site, <<http://www.petparrot.com>>.



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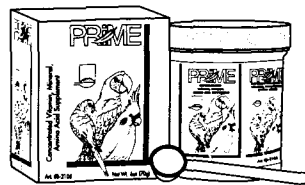
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