

Avian Welfare Corner

by Genny Wall, AFA Avian Welfare Committee Chair

Introduction

I used to breed small parrots, but I no longer breed. I support breeders who provide humane care for their birds. For about eight years I have operated a small sanctuary for parrots. I am a member of AFA, and serve as the chair of the AFA Avian Welfare Committee. I am an advocate of Animal Welfare, but not of Animal Rights. There are vast differences between those two positions which I will discuss in this article. In future articles I hope to explore some of the difficult issues that we now face as bird owners and bird keepers, and to explore how concepts of Animal Welfare can be of benefit to us and to our birds. The views stated in this column are my personal views, not the views of the Board of Directors, or the members as a group, of AFA. If you have questions or comments please feel free to email me directly at:

Avian Welfare@aol.com.

This column will not be a forum to attack breeders, rescuers, sanctuaries, welfare workers, pet owners, or anyone else who keeps birds in captivity. It will be a forum where the problems of keeping parrots and other exotic birds in captivity can be identified and discussed, and by doing so, where we can find workable, practical solutions so that we can continue to live with the birds that we love.

I know that at times this column may offend some readers, but I will not refrain from speaking simply because what I have to say may offend some people. I will not be politically correct at the expense of our birds. If we who believe in Animal Welfare are silent while the animal rights extremists are shouting their positions, then the animal rights agenda will be the only view

which is heard and eventually accepted by our legislators and by the public. If we hope to preserve our rights to own or breed birds then each of us must become active and vocal advocates for, and practitioners of, Animal Welfare. The days of sitting silently in our aviaries hoping that no one comes knocking on the door are over. It is time for us to openly and confidently advocate for our rights to continue to keep birds and other animals. If we don't speak for ourselves, no one else will speak for us or for our animals. The ultimate outcome of our continued silence and apathy will be that we will no longer be able to keep the animals that we love. That outcome is unacceptable to me. I hope that it is unacceptable to you also.

"At first they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me."

Pastor Martin Niemöller

Animal Welfare vs Animal Rights

Two vastly different viewpoints with opposite and incompatible goals.

ANIMAL WELFARE is an attitude held by many people, perhaps the majority of people in this country, and is based on the traditional relationships that have existed between man and animals. Many Animal Welfare adherents don't even realize that they are members of this group – it never occurred to them to give their attitude a name. Animal Welfare emphasizes respect for and concern for animals, and the concept that animals deserve to be

treated humanely, provided a quality life and a humane death. Animal Welfare supports responsible animal ownership, breeding and use of animals in agriculture, research, and other activities.

ANIMAL RIGHTS is a political agenda that is in direct opposition to the concept of Animal Welfare. Animal rights advocates seek to end all breeding and keeping of animals. Their stated ultimate goal is NO USE OF ANIMALS BY MAN -- not for food, fiber, medical research, nor EVEN AS PETS. Animal rights extremists are not motivated by a concern for animals or their welfare – they are only interested in imposing their political agenda upon those who don't agree with them. Animal rights extremists intentionally deceive unsuspecting Animal Welfare proponents into supporting and advocating the animal rights agenda by appealing to that very emotional attachment that many Animal Welfare people have to animals. Most of the fund raising done by animal rights extremist organizations is based on this deceptive practice.

"We are not especially 'interested in' animals. Neither of us had ever been inordinately fond of dogs, cats, or horses in the way that many people are. We didn't 'love' animals."
– Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethic for Our Treatment of Animals*, 2nd ed. (New York Review of Books, 1990), Preface, p. ii.

Peter Singer is the acknowledged founding father of the animal rights movement. Singer's disciple is Ingrid Newkirk, who co-founded People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, also known as PETA.

Animal rights extremists are a large, vocal group, skilled at manipulating public opinion by using exaggerated, distorted, and even falsified "data" to promote their political agenda. Some animal rights goals are subtle and aimed at gradually achieving their ends – for example, substituting the words "companion animal" for "pet" or substituting "guardian" for "owner" in our laws and vocabulary, with the goal that

the concept of pet ownership and our ability to own pets will eventually be destroyed.

"We don't want cleaner cages, we want empty cages." – Tom Regan, animal rights leader.

"It is time we demand an end to the misguided and abusive concept of animal ownership. The first step on this long, but just, road would be ending the concept of pet ownership."

– Elliot Katz, President, In Defense of Animals, Spring 1997

Animal rights activists believe that if they cannot convince us with

their words to support their political agenda, then they have the right to force us to comply with their agenda by enacting legislation that advances their goals. On the surface, it appears that some animal rights initiatives seem to solve problems with animal use or care. But by looking only at the appealing packaging, and not at the contents, people fail to see that the advocates of animal rights consistently ignore other workable alternative solutions to what are perceived to be problems with the owning and keeping of animals – because those

other alternatives do not support the animal rights advocate's ultimate aim of abolishing the use of animals by man.

On a positive note, Animal Welfare people are an even larger group made up of those who believe that animals should be treated humanely and who understand and believe in the benefits of the human/animal relationship, but who do not believe that it is wrong to keep or use animals if it is done in a humane way. This group includes not only pet owners, but breeders and others who own or deal with animals in their day-to-day lives. Because of the lack of action by the majority of Animal Welfare people, the activities of animal rights extremists are gradually eroding the rights of animal owners. However, as these same animal rights extremists have become more successful, they have become more vocal, offensive, and even violent, the public has begun to turn away from the animal rights agenda. Those of us who believe in Animal Welfare can, and must, speak up and be heard if we hope to keep our animals and our rights to own animals. We can, and must, give the public an alternative to animal rights that is reasonable and that promotes not only the welfare of animals, but that protects our rights as well.

Animal rights extremists vocally and adamantly oppose all breeding of birds, even for conservation purposes. They use the existence of some substandard facilities as a propaganda tool to indict all who produce birds as pets no matter how responsible or humane those people are. We need to document and present our well thought out opposition to this propaganda. AFA is an organization that educates the public regarding appropriate avian husbandry practices, and, as such, is an Animal Welfare organization. AFA's educational activities help responsible bird breeders contribute to the welfare of birds and to society. AFA deserves our support as the premier organization in this country which advocates humane birdkeeping

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practices and which advocates for those who keep birds.

In future columns, I plan to explore Avian Welfare issues that face bird owners today, such as:

- Should there be minimum or ideal standards of care that all bird owners should adhere to?

- If there are minimum or ideal standards, who should define them? Should they be voluntary or mandatory? If they should be mandatory, who should mandate them? Who should enforce them? How would they be enforced? Who would pay for such regulation and enforcement?

- What are bird rescue, adoption, and sanctuary?

- Is there really a need for bird rescue, adoption, and sanctuary? How extensive is this need? Are there statistics to document this need? What are the statistics?

- Should there be minimum or ideal standards for bird rescue, adoption, and sanctuary? Should they be voluntary or mandatory? If they should be mandatory, who should mandate them? Who should enforce them? How would they be enforced? Who would pay for such regulation and enforcement?

- Is there, as the animal rights people claim, an overpopulation of parrots and a shortage of homes for them?

- Do breeders and pet owners have any responsibility for the rise of the rescue, adoption, and sanctuary movements?

- If we do have some responsibility, how can breeders and pet owners contribute to avian welfare?

- Should breeders stop breeding because the rescuers claim there is an excess population of parrots already?

- What can or should AFA as an organization do to promote avian welfare? ➤