

Pet Bird Rescue

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The summer of 2001 was a wonderful time in the Tidewater area where I live. There were two local bird clubs flourishing on both sides of the river. Both held monthly meetings attended by regular members as well as new recruits. Memberships were growing, nationally recognized speakers were taken for granted, and fund raising was a success. Education was the goal and with the finances to reach out to the public, that goal was well on its way to being met.

Speakers introduced at both clubs were the owners of a new rescue facility in the local area. A young couple, well educated and motivated to contribute to the well being of the lives of birds were now in the area. They presented a short introduction relating to their education, background, and desire to work with the local clubs and breeders alike. They stated that PIJAC was already consulting with them regarding the requirements of such a facility and they were working towards meeting the requirements set forth by this nationally recognized organization.

Soon the rescue facility was setting up booths at the local marts. Educational materials filled the booth explaining the facilities purpose, contacts, and goals. Adoption applications, business cards, and beautiful pictures quickly drew attendees to the booth. Their booth was located right up front at the mart's entrance for everyone to notice.

Board members of the local bird clubs, breeders, and pet owners also were excited to finally have a facility willing to work with the clubs. Donations to the facility from both clubs were approved unanimously by the board members. All contributions to such a good cause were important

because both would have an interest in education. The club could provide an endless list of volunteers to the facility and donations would help the rescue get off to a good start.

At a following meeting, another donation was discussed with the board. It appeared that a cockatoo at the facility had a broken leg and had presented quite a hefty bill for the rescue facility. One of the owners had apparently flung the bird to the floor in his surprise when the bird had latched firmly onto his hand. Advice was given to the general membership about this incident and everyone laughed with an uneasy feeling about what had happened. None the less, a donation went forward to aid in payment of the medical expenses incurred.

After a year or so, it was announced the facility was moving to the country. Here the family and the birds could both enjoy the space. Everyone was excited to hear the good news. Obviously, the number of birds in the facility was growing and the ability to house them ever increasing. A country setting, more room, and experience could now set the facility on the path to growth.

Several months after the facility moved I received a phone call from a friend living in the county where the rescue had relocated. They wanted to know who these new bird people were that had moved into the community. The neighbors were upset because the grass was growing up over the property. There were birdcages everywhere in the yard. I explained they were the new rescue facility. They were just getting moved in and I was sure things would improve.

At the next club meeting, I felt I should mention the phone call to the

board. Several members appeared to be offended. One member stated that she had been to the facility. She could assure the board that on every occasion things were up to standard. A recommendation was made to have several members visit the facility prior to making another donation. A recommendation was also made to assist the facility in other ways. We could keep an eye on the situation, still provide support through free space at the marts, volunteers from the club, and watch the progression of the facility. Finally, it was decided any request for several board members to visit the facility prior to donation would be an intrusion. The donation went forward.

Sadly, after approximately two or so years of operation, it was announced in the club newsletter that the facility had been closed. No further information was provided. The fate of the birds in the facility was not disclosed. What would be the disposition of these birds? Without the clubs financial support how would they receive proper care, food, and vet work? Were they still there? Even though at this writing it has been several months since the closing, no further information about their fate has been published.

As a bird breeder or bird club board member, it is likely you will receive calls from your veterinarian, referrals from previous clients, and general questions about re-homing of relinquished birds. It is my hope that through reading this article, all will become more aware of the word rescue and its implications. Pet bird rescue facilities have sprung up all over the nation. Trying to understand these facilities and their operation can be difficult. They range from the well-meaning bird lover to rather large profes-

sional organizations. Research into these facilities can be invaluable. This research will enable you to have factual information available to aid in "re-homing."

Professional organizations, while being called a "rescue facility," actually provide a wide range of services. Education is a key component. They provide education for entrants into their adoption programs as well as to the general public. Other components such as rehabilitation programs, sanctuary programs, adoption programs along with rescue, are provided under the title "rescue." They employ a full-time staff as well as having stable funding. They are a nonprofit organization with additional volunteer staff. They have strict quarantine and veterinary practices for all birds in the facility following proper protocol of good avian husbandry.

A moderate version of this can also be seen. The majority of these facilities are pet bird owners who may work outside the home and care for "relinquished birds" in addition to their normal family requirements. These facilities usually limit the number of birds they can handle at a time. These birds may or may not be provided proper veterinary testing. "Rescue" of actual injured or neglected birds can be financially out of their reach. These facilities may have little more than an average understanding of the quarantine, servicing, and proper set-up of good avian husbandry. "Re-homing" is more difficult.

Another version of these facilities, can be described as "hoarders." These people are very dedicated to animals and will take in any animal that is given to them or they can financially afford. They may have no human-compatible living space left in their homes and garages, but the love for the animals just seems to outweigh their common sense. They get up at dawn and start their day feeding, watering, and cleaning. There are normally many species of birds crammed into cages

intended for single bird use. No quarantine or individual attention is provided to the birds as they are out on their next adventure to obtain more. "Re-homing" is never a consideration. They consider themselves collectors and saviors of the animal without the comprehension of proper avian husbandry.

Sadly, another version of these "rescue" facilities may be strictly income oriented. These facilities are interested only in well-behaved birds in perfect feather that may be resold into the public. These "relinquished birds" certainly do not fall under the category of rescue as they have no injuries, behavioral issues, or any other aid to the animal required – rescue is not the proper title.

Distinguishing the different services offered under the title rescue, rehabilitation, sanctuary, and adoption are necessary in order to find the proper facility. Actual rescue by definition is limited to an injured or neglected bird requiring immediate medical attention. Rehabilitation or behavior modification may be needed for some birds. This would include modification of destructive behaviors, along with promotion of trust and confidence with humans. This provides a well adjusted, interactive, and happy bird now ready for movement to adoption. Sanctuary birds consist of birds that are unable to meet the requirements of rehabilitation. These birds may prefer the companionship of other birds or due to disease should not be moved into an adoption program.

Adoption requires screening applicants, as well as educating applicants about the bird's housing, care, and needs. An inspection prior to approval and after placement in the home insures satisfaction of concerns regarding the bird's circumstances and aids the future welfare of the bird.

Professional facilities need to meet Model Aviary Program requirements and maintain proper avian husbandry. With regulation by the USDA looming in the forefront of everyone's

future, we must insure that birds are not going to facilities that are inadequate in meeting the new regulations. Support of the most professional facilities also insures these birds have a chance to be "re-homed" where they can continue active lives. Of course, proper evaluation is necessary to determine whether a bird's circumstances indicates whether or not it should be placed in a facility in the first place.

In closing, knowledge of the different types of facilities and their services sometimes offered under the title "rescue" is critical. Make sure you know which of the services are provided by the facility in your area. Knowing when to refer to one of these facilities and when another alternative may be the answer will contribute to the welfare of the birds that are being placed. It is important to properly investigate each and every facility prior to making a referral or club donation. Many of these facilities may never get their feet off the ground, so to speak, while others do well. Therefore, it is very important to do sufficient research on rescue facilities prior to placing a bird in a facility, referring others to a facility or making donations to a facility. ♦



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