

# Traveling is for the Birds

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(Owned by a pair of Solomon Island Eclectus Parrots and a Lilac-crowned Amazon)

## Accommodations

We enjoy showing dogs and often travel around the country doing this. We always knew we wanted to take our birds with us when we traveled so we chose our RV with this in mind so only slight adaptations needed to be made to accommodate our feathered and furred companions.

We purchased a 40-foot Class A motor home with two sofas. These sofas pull out into beds for our two children to sleep in at night. Across from the galley kitchen, we have a bench seating dinette set. To accommodate the critters, we removed this set and replaced in that area animal crates. I have three crates on the floor (22" wide X 36" long) with identical crates stacked on top of them (total of six crates). These crates, which are used for the dogs, are lined with matching area rugs that have the non-skid backing. These rugs provide additional comfort and stability for the dogs by not having the pads sliding out from under them.

On top of these crates, I installed three more dog crates slightly smaller in size. The fancy chandelier type light was replaced with a flush mounted light, which we rarely use. All of the crates are connected to each other with the bottom crates and the backs of the crates actually tied into the frame of the RV. This provides stability for the crates and keeps them from shifting or sliding during travel. The crates are black epoxy-coated; not zinc, which is the same material many folding bird cages are made of. We chose using dog crates for the birds because they give additional horizontal space rather than the vertical space the "real" bird cages do, which my birds rarely use. A variety of perches, feeding bowls, and toys are attached including water bottles that don't spill during travel. Pre-cut cage liners make daily clean up very easy. On the counter next to the bird cages, we use a HEPA air cleaner. It uses electricity from the generator during travel or the inverter, which uses the house batteries if we aren't connected to electrical hook-ups at our destination.

## Preparations

During any trip, I always make sure I bring the same food they would normally eat at "home." Prepared bird food in zip-loc containers contain their base food that is easily stored in the fridge and reheated slightly in the microwave. Additional containers of pellets, seed mixes, and treats are also brought along. Fresh fruit and vegetables are chopped daily for them, which is something we would normally eat also (salads, carrot sticks, pepper slices, etc.). Water bottles are refilled daily and either filtered water is used from the RV tanks that have been filled with my

"home" water or else bottle water is used. I am very careful not to give water from the RV if we have refilled our water tanks from an unknown source.

Since accidents cannot be predicted, I travel with an extensive first aid kit that includes staples for people, dogs, and the birds. I always make sure I have the most recent issue of *Birds USA* which lists avian vets across the country. If I know where we are going, I will sometimes call ahead to find an avian vet in the area "just in case." Recommendations from my regular avian vet have also been procured prior to taking a major trip. Depending on where we are going, I will obtain health certificates for my birds too. This is just for peace of mind in case there are any questions regarding the birds in out-of-state destinations. Traveling with the Eclectus Parrots is less controversial than some other parrot species. Quaker Parrots are one of those controversial species, which are illegal in many of the states we might visit.

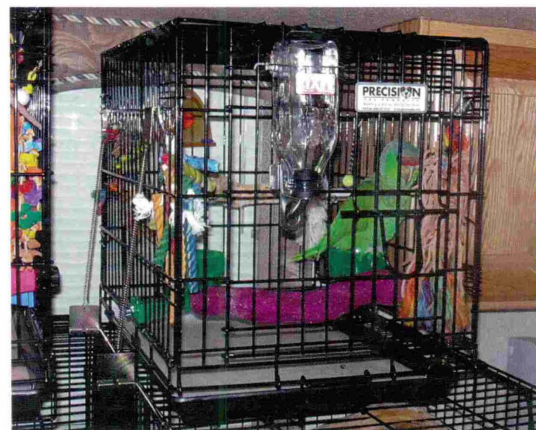
## Arriving at our Destination

Once we have arrived at our final destination, we set up camp. I carry a small Kings Cage that just fits between the bed and wall during travel. Since this cage is stored beyond our sight, we don't have the birds travel in this cage but rather pull it out after we put the duel slide-outs out in the RV. This cage provides additional space and functions as a play gym for the birds. More toys and perches are in this cage and with the Napoleon style top, the birds are able to perch up high for "out of cage" time. Someone is always inside the RV with the birds when they are out of their cage. The dogs are either crated when the birds are out or else outside in the exercise pens set up for them there. My personal dogs do not bother my birds but since I will often travel with other people's dogs, I don't take any chances they might be overly interested in their feathered travel companions.

In case you are wondering what we do now that we don't have our dinette set, we generally eat outside on our folding tables and chairs we bring with us. If the weather does not permit this, folding TV trays are stored under the sofa for table space now that we don't have the dinette set.

## Bathing

I try to stick to the same schedule and amount of showers the birds are used to at home. A suction cup type of shower perch is used in the shower. It is almost easier to just allow the birds to perch on top of the shower stall and after the person is finished showering, the bird is picked up



Photos by Jennifer Grossnickle

*These photos show the way cages are set up and stacked for travel in the RV.*

to be sprayed too. Yes, there are “accidents” below but they are easily cleaned up after the shower is done.

### Travel Concerns

No matter how expensive or well built an RV may be, I still find that there are drafts – especially when traveling. To prevent this from becoming a problem, I will wrap a blanket around three sides of the bird crates to avoid them becoming chilled. In cooler weather, the propane heating system may be turned on. Our RV has a sensor (that I make sure is always in good working order) that warns of any propane leaks. This benefits EVERYONE traveling in the RV. I always leave a window cracked open to provide ventilation too.

I am cognizant of exactly where the ducts are to avoid hot or cold air being blown directly on any of the animals. In hot weather, the air conditioning is generally used. If the temperature is comfortable for people and dogs,

I figure it is comfortable for the birds too. I like to provide high water content fruits during hot weather and in very hot weather, I mist the birds often to prevent over-heating.

We never leave the animals in the RV for very long. One of our greatest fears is the chance a circuit is “blown” thus leaving the RV without electricity. For this reason, we will often use our generator to power the RV in our absence. Since the main reason we take these trips *is* because of the animals, we enjoy “hanging out” with them and talking to the many other animal-lovers we meet at the show grounds.

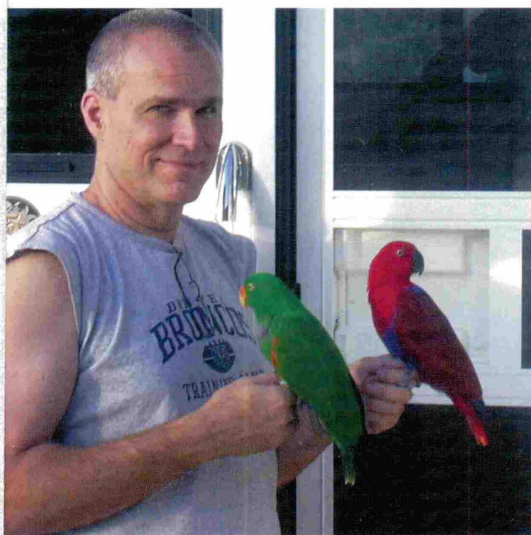
### Conclusion

All in all, the birds enjoy traveling with their “flock” as opposed to staying home with a “stranger.” All three of my birds have clipped wings, which lessens the dangers of losing a bird. In the past, I have had the birds outside with just my thumb holding them there. Now that they are mature, I don’t think I would do this. We also used to allow the birds out in their crates placed on the table in the shade of the awning. With the dangers of West Nile Virus, we are less inclined to take that chance either.

During travel, it isn’t uncommon to have one or all of the birds out. Care is always taken that this doesn’t stress them. The view from the windshield is

just too close/too much for the birds so they do better sitting behind the driver and/or passenger seat usually with one of the kids. This is also a safety factor for the driver so that a frightened bird doesn’t fly off while he is concentrating on driving. When in their cages/crates, the blinds are drawn to keep the sun from beating in on them, prevents being stressed by passing motorists, and when set up, deters people from staring in at these unusual travelers. Hopefully, this will prevent the threat of theft too.

I hope this gives you some ideas for traveling with your birds. Remember to always acclimate your bird by taking short trips initially to see how well they react to traveling. As with many aspects of owning a parrot, be patient and reassuring as you embark on this new adventure with you feathered companion. ♦



*Mr. Grossnickle holding our traveling Eclectus Parrots.*



*A large cage secured in our RV.*