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by Charlene Beane
Norco, California

The risk/benefit analysis involved in the decision of what to do with the parrot during vacation is excruciating. Making provisions for a pet bird, particularly a single pet bird, is an entirely different prospect than getting a reliable person to come in and take care of the aviaries.

Aviary birds are probably happiest when their owners are away. As long as there is plenty of food and water, they are perfectly happy without humans poking around.

The pet bird, on the other hand, often seems to value human companionship above food and water. This bond sometimes puts birds and their people in outrageous situations. Last winter friends of mine took their budgie in their VW van from the warmth of Southern California to the mountains of Colorado and back again. The kids could go back and play with Bud whenever they were bored, and apparently the parakeet took van travel in stride.

When I made vacation plans this year, I had to consider my Patagonian Conure who is very attached to me. He is a shy bird that does not like visitors. He also hates my eight cats. It did not seem likely that he could enjoy my vacation if I left him on his perch (he is never caged) for over a week.

I didn't even explore the possibilities of boarding him because I don't like the idea of exposing my bird to other birds; and not many people would consider boarding a Patagonian Conure.

In imagining either leaving him at home with a caretaker or boarding him, even with a friend, all I could envision was poor Damian starving himself from loneliness, and poor me, hundreds of

miles away, worrying about him.

The solution was simple: I had to take him with me. Even at the risk of exposing him to the temperature and air pressure stresses of airplane travel, a humid climate with different germs than he had encountered and different water, I still felt that taking him along would be easier on both of us.

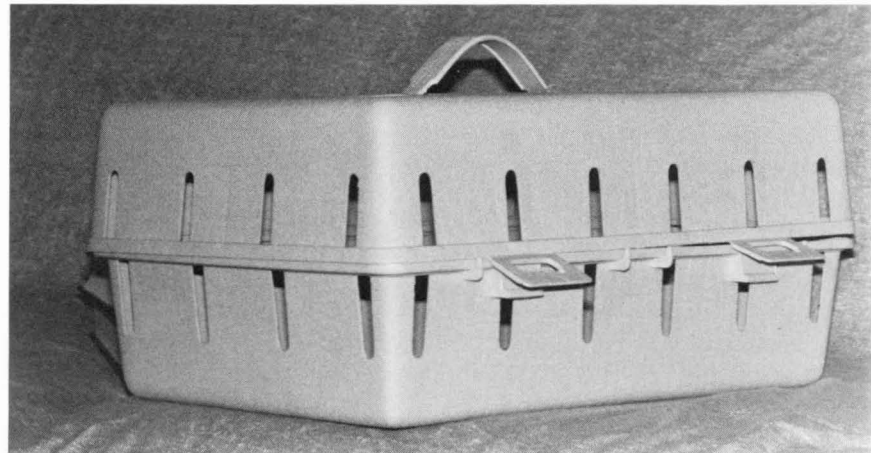
The airlines are wonderful about pet travel; trains and buses are not. Most airlines permit one pet in first class and one in coach per domestic flight. These in-cabin reservations are in great demand during certain seasons, so I made Damian's reservation along with my own. His ticket cost the same as for any pet: \$21.00 each way. He was not required to have a veterinary certificate or a leg band, and he was not inspected at any point in the trip.

His carrier is the standard, airline approved, slide-under-the-seat model by Dorskocil. It cost \$6.50, and is suitable for cats, small dogs, and most of the parrot family except the large macaws and cockatoos. The ventilation slits are narrow so it would easily contain rather small birds safely.

I put newspaper and sunflower seeds in the bottom of the carrier, closed the lid on Damian and we were off. I had a pillowcase in my purse that fit neatly over the carrier if I felt a draft or a chill.

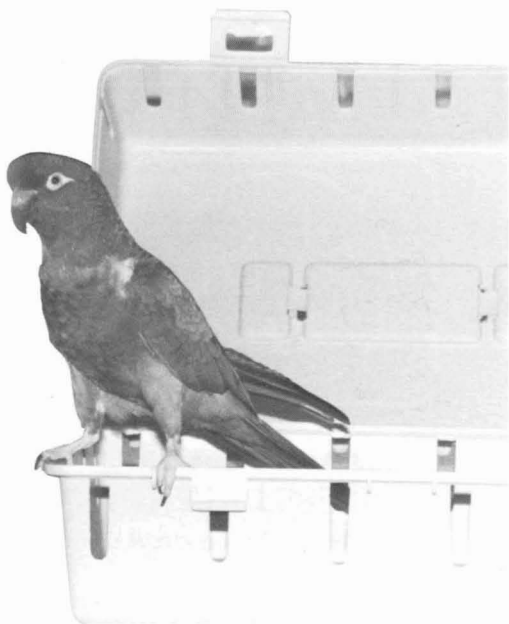
At the airport the carrier was handed over the metal detector by security personnel. I made it clear that I did not want my bird x-rayed.

What a champion traveller! During a layover in Phoenix I took Damian out of his carrier so he could stretch. He seemed calm, jumped up on my shoulder and off



This airline-approved carrying box is available for a modest price at most major pet stores.

Photos by Dennis Ferris



Damian on his travel case. No damage was suffered by the bird or the box.

we went for a tour of the airport. We attracted quite a few admirers, many of them children, who wanted to talk and touch. We talked, but Damian is not particularly touchable even on his own turf. In any case, I felt that this kind of close range observation was creating some interest and good will for birds in general. We were having such a good time we almost missed the next leg of our flight.

As we were landing in Des Moines we experienced some turbulence and variations in pressure. Passengers were complaining about pain in their ears, and it was during this brief period that Damian gave out a single squawk. I think his ears hurt, too.

On arrival at my parents' home, Damian's reception was mixed. Basically, these are people who cannot tolerate animals in the house. Their reactions ranged from indifference to hatred except for a niece and nephew who thought Damian was wonderful. Surprisingly, the feeling was mutual. Although he is not accustomed to children, Damian was soon going to them, riding on their shoulders and eating from their hands.

People tell me that Damian is unusual in that he is not destructive. I probably take his good manners too much for granted, but I was grateful that he is so trustworthy when he selected the baby bed as his perch during our visit. My mother keeps a baby crib for visiting small grandchildren, but I'm sure she never expected it to be occupied by a conure. I had brought an old sheet to spread under Damian, and I put newspapers on the floor, but he still threw seeds all over the room. Even so, I

had to remind myself that there are probably only a few other well-behaved pet parrots that could be trusted to spend long hours alone in a room as a guest and do nothing more than throw a few seeds around.

Through my niece, Damian was invited to make an appearance at the local Vacation Bible School. He visited four classes of various ages and amazed me with his sociability and his patience with children.

Throughout the trip, both his appetite and his attitude remained good. If he were a less hardy bird, I would have taken a bottle of water from home so as to not upset his digestion, but Damian drank the available water wherever we went and showed no reaction.

In one regard, travelling with a bird is rather like travelling with a baby; I carried a purse full of tissues. Also, my travel wardrobe was primarily green and white, for obvious reasons. These are small considerations for the pleasure of having my best bird buddy with me and knowing that he is all right.

On our return, Damian behaved as though he had never been away. He was glad to see his perch and his favorite chairback. He started terrorizing the cats

almost immediately, and resumed his other regular routines such as flying to my room at sun-up and crawling in bed with me for a snuggle.

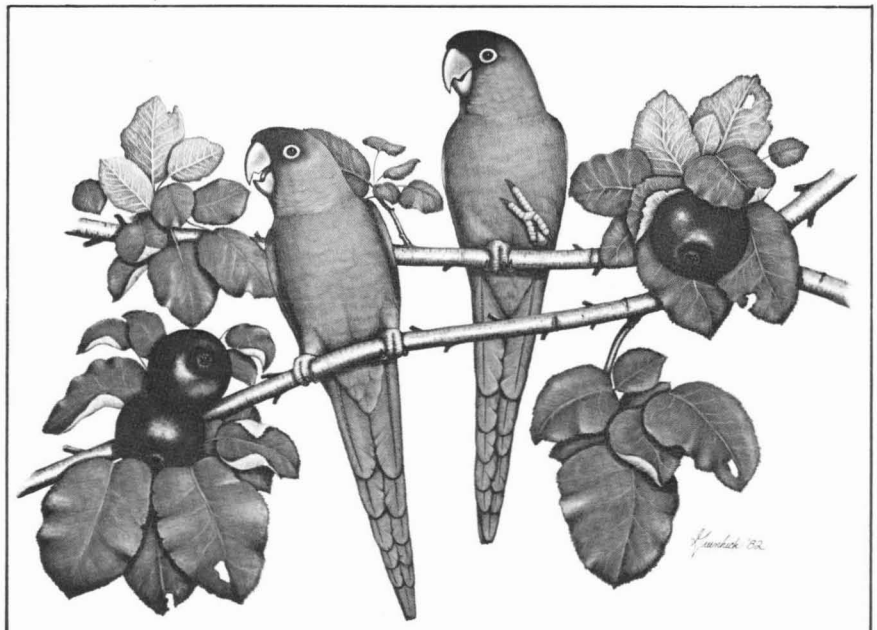
I watched him closely for any signs of respiratory or digestive disturbance, but he continued to seem absolutely happy and healthy.

I would recommend taking your parrot along on vacation to anyone who has a hardy, non-destructive bird. Of course, the trip would be more pleasurable if one were to visit people who like and understand pet birds. If Damian had not selected the baby bed for his perch, I would have suspended a tree branch for him. If a cage is necessary, a cheap one can be bought at your destination.

I took Damian's usual seed diet along with me. During our visit he missed out on his usual intake of people food, but he seems none the worse for it.

In transit, people could not resist asking, "Is this the first time he has flown?" Well, even though conures are powerful flyers, they are not accustomed to flying at 37,000 feet. Even so, except for the indignity of being stuffed under the airplane seat and the discomfort of popping ears, Damian's first flight in an airplane did not seem to hurt him at all.

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