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# When Your Parrot Flies Without You!

By Charlene Beane  
Norco, California

One week after my story, "Flying with Your Parrot" appeared in the August/September issue of *The Watchbird*, Damian, my Patagonian Conure and the subject of that story, flew away.

It was a Saturday morning and I was only half awake. I had gotten lazy about clipping his wings. He enjoyed flying around the house and I thought I was being careful, but that fateful Saturday morning I did not realize he was on my shoulder as I stepped out the back door. He became startled by a bag of cat food I was carrying, and off he went.

I was horrified. He flew to trees, landed on electric wires, and circled overhead, screaming all the while. I called to him, but he was having a wonderful time with his new-found freedom.

Who should appear to comfort me in my misery but our editor, Sheldon Dingle. He was a calming influence as he told me tales of birds he's lost—King Parrots that headed for Australia and never looked back—but he said that since Damian was a tame bird, I'd probably get him back. I didn't believe him.

Another birdman came by. He suggested I put Damian's parrot stand out in the yard so he could fly to his familiar perch. Sheldon suggested I call the fire department and see if they would come blast Damian with a high-powered stream of water. I called, but the fire department declined, and said they don't rescue treed cats either. The fire department in other areas may be more cooperative, so it is worth a call if you are caught in a similar predicament.

The day was getting hotter and Damian was flying in larger and larger circles. Jim Kling, noted bird trainer, says that the big birds such as macaws and cockatoos can usually be recaptured within 24 hours because when they escape, they fly to the top of a nearby tree and wait while they drop the necessary weight to be able to fly easily. Most pet birds are simply too well fed to be able to fly very far. Weight was not restraining Damian and his powerful wings.

As I followed his flight on foot, I felt as earthbound as a stone. In his manner and his cries, I could sense an approach/avoidance frustration. Damian is a shy bird. He likes me, but is afraid of

closeness with other people. As I ran along, calling his name and explaining my problem to onlookers, people gathered around me. If he wanted to come to me, he could not have because of his fear of other people.

Finally when the squawking dot in the sky disappeared, I stumbled home, wallowing in guilt for my carelessness and stupidity. Visions of hawks and crows and boys with BB-guns ran through my mind. I fixed myself a sandwich and set about calling all of the bird farms in the area to alert them that Damian was headed in their direction and might land where he heard other birds and thought he could find food.

My heart was breaking as I wandered out to attend to the aviaries that I had neglected while I was chasing Damian. Then I heard his voice. I could not see him, but the sound was only a couple of blocks away. I called his name and he answered. Closer. Closer. I could see him. From the treetops to the electric wires, and finally to the TV antenna on top of my house. He had been gone for 4½ hours so I knew he was thirsty.

Damian is fascinated by running water and enjoys taking baths, so I turned on the garden hose, splashed the water around and let it form a puddle on the ground. I started saying "Hello" to re-

mind him that he is a domesticated bird, and he answered with an articulate "Hello." He glided to a wire closer to the ground. I moved his parrot stand closer where he could get a straight shot at it, and we continued talking. In a matter of minutes that seemed like hours, he dropped from the wire to his parrot stand and I grabbed him. I felt I had been the recipient of a miracle.

Damian was glad to be home. He was exhausted, hungry, thirsty and frightened. His eyerings and legs were sunburned and his legs were swollen twice their normal size.

I started calling all my friends to tell them that the emergency was over. Denna Ferris said she would be right over to clip Damian's wings.

And that is the point of this story: Clip your pet birds' wings! Since that terrible day I have been inundated with lost bird stories. It has happened to nearly everyone who has had birds for any length of time.

Furthermore, if you take your bird outside, especially off your property, put it in a carrier or a cage. A cockatiel I had sold and had personally clipped the wings of was on its owner's shoulder when a big gust of wind lifted the cockatiel to the top of a tile roof. Each time the bird spread its wings to try to

glide down to its owner, the wind carried it higher. It took 45 minutes and a brave climbing lady and a broomstick to rescue that bird.

Another little girl was walking on the beach with her cockatiel when an unleashed black lab bounded up, knocked the girl down and killed the bird.

The stories go on and on. Some are miracles; most are tragedies.

To an extent, we are able to predict the behavior of cats and dogs that get lost because they are earthbound like we are and we have a fair understanding of their instincts. We know less about how birds think and their power of flight makes their return largely their own choice.

When Damian came back, I considered it a tremendous vote of loyalty.

I related this story to a friend who lives in the desert and has always wanted a homing flock of parakeets. (He did free-fly about 50 of them one time, but it wasn't intentional!) He said, "Well, if he came back once, I'll bet you could free-fly him."

"George," I said, "my heart couldn't stand it!"

Don't put it off another minute. Put this magazine down, get the scissors, and clip your bird's wings. ●

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