

Pirate Parrots - WHEN WHAT WE BOUGHT IS NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED

By Christian E. Olarte, Veterinary Zootechnician

What kind of parrot is mine?

The wish of many people to have the best pet, the biggest, the most colorful, the rarest, the most beautiful of all take them to do things that are against common sense because of lack of information. In many cases, they end up receiving misleading or just false information.

This is the case of the “dyed parrots”, birds that are subjected to harmful procedures to make them look like what they are not, or at least, not the species we were told they were. They are fake. This is a very common problem that happens to owners when they decide to get a parrot as a pet. In the daily consultation, we have found a broad list of names given to certain species of parrots that actually neither belong to them nor even exist. Sometimes they just seem not to “fit” with the characteristics of the presumed species.

The incorrect names are just the beginning of a long list of problems that our feathered friends have faced. The names range from such as “Papagayo Parrot”, “Dwarf macaw of Brazil”, “Cherry-headed Parrot”, “Royal Parrot”, “Arlequin Parrot” or other names of species that actually exist such as “Yellow-headed Parrot” (*Amazona oratrix*), “Yellow-cheeked Amazon” (*Amazona autumnalis*), and they just try to disguise them and cheat potential buyers. The buyer, with the idea of getting a parrot that probably no one has, falls on the trap.

It is important to highlight that it is not the intention of this article to “demonize” the people who dye, harm and sometimes, mutilate these birds. We all have the right to find a *modus*



vivendi. What is absolutely incorrect is to do this by lying and cheating a potential buyer with good will and even worse, to risk the health of species that are possibly endangered.

These are the so called “birdmen” of the informal market. These people wander in the streets of Mexico allegedly lying to anyone who might seem interested in buying a parrot. But this practice is not exclusive to countries like Mexico. These people succeed in lying to their victims, offering rare species that either do not exist or are not what they say. Furthermore, these people who are not happy with just changing the names, they also dare to color the parrots’ feathers in many ways that are distant of being harmless.



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The process seems more like a hairdo tutorial than anything else. These birds, after having gone through the trauma of captivity and transportation in harsh conditions, have their wings cut off as a “brush cut hairstyle” so they are no longer able to fly. Then, with abundant bleach for human hair (whose name might seem familiar to many women and men) these little birds are given a bath so they lose any trace of their original color, and they can now be “painted” with different chemicals to give them vivid colors and make them look like certain birds or, to our astonishment, becoming new species and...*voilà!* There we have new names such as “Yellow-headed Baby Parrot”, “Papagayo Parrot” and the others we mentioned above.

Besides having sold an injured bird, the seller usually gives advices that are far from being appropriate to preserve a parrot’s health. They recommend to feed them with sunflower seeds, corn, corn dough, bread soaked in milk, ideas that are more than proven to hurt any bird.

When these parrots get lucky, after some time and appropriate nutrition, they will recover until new original feathers grow in, little by little, and our parrot will look beautiful again.

However, most of them have not the same luck. We have treated parrots with severe harm, sometimes non reversible, that go from burns in one or both eyes, injuries in beak, nares (the little holes that they use to breath), in the *cere* (the waxy structure around the nares), skin burns and injured scalp that will not let new feathers grow back. Then our little parrots would have parts of their skin exposed, becoming targets for other skin diseases and opportunistic infections given their immune system will not be in condition to resist after such a traumatic process.

It is of great importance to continue recommending to our readers not to buy parrots, wild birds and macaws in the black

market. It is a deep-rooted feeling to have an exotic bird as a pet; and although there are many measures to fight the illegal trade of birds (and other wild animals), it will be impossible to eradicate because as long as there is a buyer, there will always be a seller. The only thing I can advise to the people who are thinking about getting a bird as a pet (by any possible means) is to get informed. There is plenty of useful information about exotic birds that include their correct diet, proper shelter, training, habits, etc., so when you learn all that, you have less chance to be cheated by these people.

And for you who own an altered parrot, do not get discouraged. I am sure you now have a friend that will thank you when you feed him in a healthy way, you play with him, you get him a nice and functional cage and who knows, one day he will surprise you and start saying some words. In any case, you must take him to the veterinarian. He must be examined to determine whether the harm has been light, severe or irreversible and given the adequate treatment so the parrot heals and recovers their original feathers if it’s the case.

The day when the sellers of “pirate parrots” realize that people are not easy to cheat will come; and they will stop mutilating and putting at risk the health of these birds; and if it’s the case of legal birds, hopefully they will be sold just as they were beautifully designed by nature.

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