

# **Kaytee Avian Foundation - Parrot Relinquishment Survey of 2010**

## **Introduction**

The human fascination with parrots dates back to the time of Alexander the Great (4<sup>th</sup> century AD). For centuries parrots were rare in captivity and limited primarily to wealthy collectors. However large scale importation of parrots from the early 1970's until 1992 made parrots common and available to the masses in the United States as well as developed countries worldwide. The passage of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 halted the importation of most parrots into the United States and heralded an era of captive breeding in the United States. American aviculture geared up to fill the demand for companion parrots.

It was soon apparent that America's upwardly mobile society was often in conflict with the longevity of parrots resulting in the displacement of many parrots from their homes. Parrot welfare organizations, societies and rescue organizations were established to take in birds which were relinquished. The numbers of birds being relinquished became a subject for debate as are the reasons for relinquishment.

In 2008 the Kaytee Avian Foundation established as a goal – to become an industry leader in the development of programs to increase the satisfaction of pet bird ownership. In order to fulfill that goal we embarked on a project to determine why parrots were being relinquished and where they were going. Many birds lose their homes due to changes in the family structure such as deaths, divorces, financial difficulties, moving into places that do not accommodate pets, etc. However many also lose their homes because of unfulfilled expectations, becoming bored with the pet and behavioral problems. It is the goal of KAF to develop programs to address those issues which may be corrected, making each bird a valued and loved member of the family.

A model for this survey was the National Parrot Relinquishment Research Project conducted in 2004 by the Gabriel Foundation and PetsMart Charities, and prepared by Cheryl Meehan, Ph.D. This survey was undertaken because of “increased public attention directed toward issues surrounding parrot ownership and relinquishment”. Most of the questions in the KAF relinquishment survey were similar, or identical to questions in the NPRRP survey. This was intended so that trends in relinquishment could be established over the 6 year period.

The KAF Parrot Relinquishment survey was an online survey conducted between June 20 to Aug 30 of 2010 utilizing surveymonkey.com. Announcements were circulated utilizing many e-mail list serves targeting many stakeholders including avian welfare, sanctuary and rescue organizations, breeders, zoos, veterinarians and individuals who take part in accepting relinquished birds and ultimately rehoming or providing sanctuary for them.

Similar trends in parrot ownership were also happening in developed countries worldwide, although variations in wildlife laws resulted in variations in availability of birds, and hence relinquishment. While this study was designed as a survey on relinquishment in the US, many responses were from outside the US.

## **Materials and Methods**

The survey was conducted completely online utilizing the survey software of surveymonkey.com. Survey

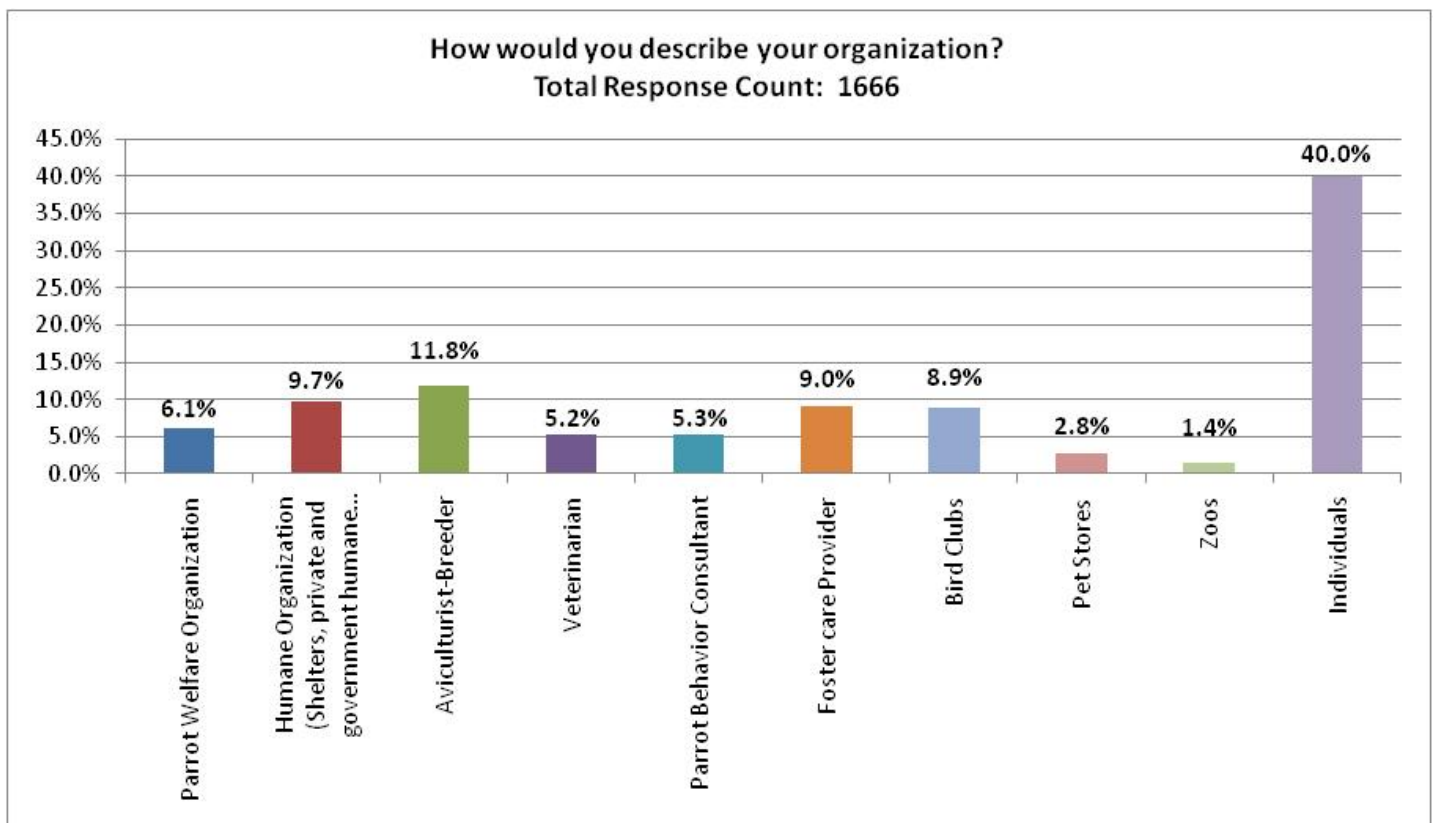
questions were presented to respondents as multiple choice questions – is presented in Appendix 1. Participants were notified by posting of announcements on various list serves which target hobbyists, rescue/sanctuary organizations, breeders, veterinarians, etc. Requests were made to widely cross post the announcements to any potentially interested audiences. Invitation letters are presented in Appendix 2. The first invitation letter was distributed on 6-14-10 and the second on 6-21-10. Data collection was enabled on 6-20-10. Letters informing participants that the survey was ending were distributed on 7-29-10 and 8-27-10, informing participants that the deadline for submission was 8-30-10.

Participation was incentivized by holding a sweepstakes in which the name of participant organizations were placed in a sweepstakes in which 20 participants were chosen to receive \$1500 worth of Kaytee products of their choice.

Results of the survey were reported from Survey Monkey in Excel format. These data were formatted into graphs and charts again utilizing Excel software.

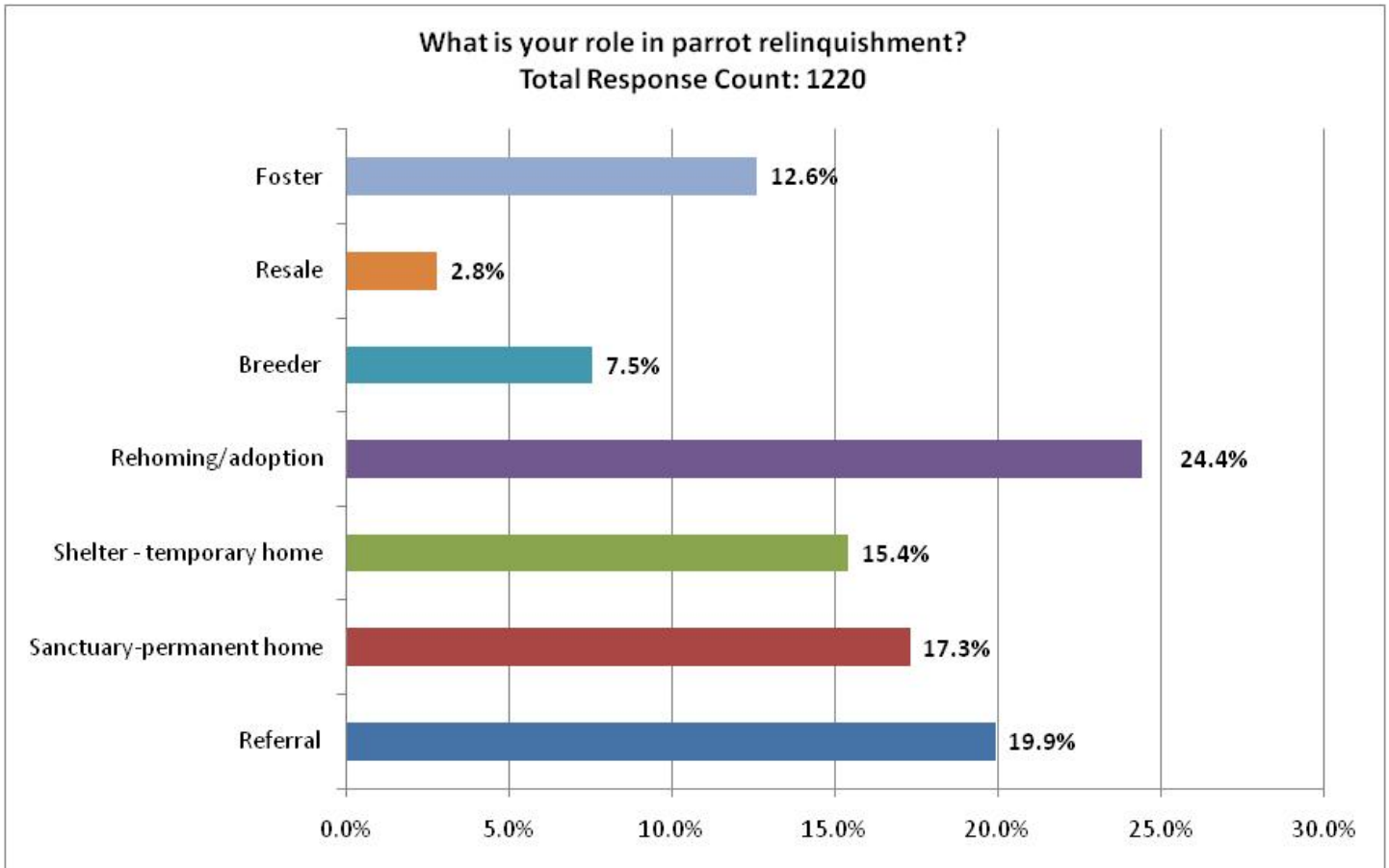
## RESULTS

### 1. How would you describe your organization?



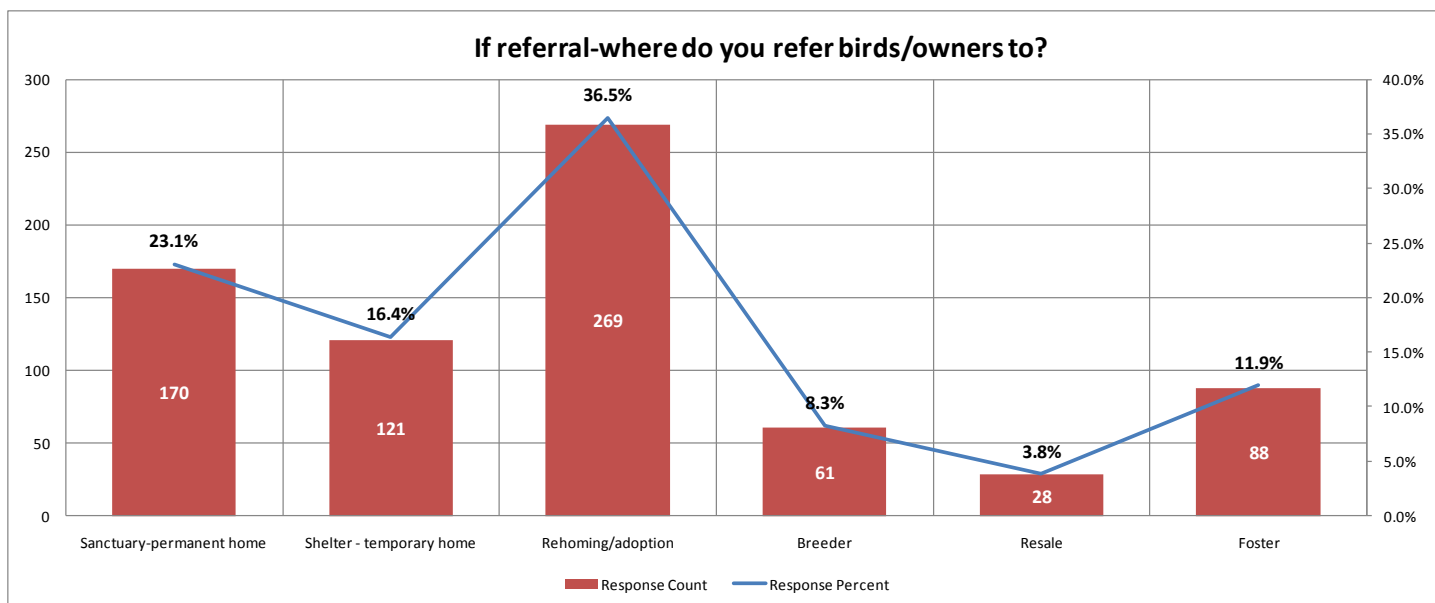
The KAFPRS had a total of 1666 respondents as opposed to a total of 779 respondents for the NPRRP. In both surveys the majority of respondents were individuals with 40% of the respondents in KPRS and 58% of respondents in the NPRRP being individuals. The second largest group of respondents in the NPRRP was parrot welfare organizations (10.9%) while in the KPRS the second largest group was aviculturists (11.8%).

2. What is your role in parrot relinquishment? (mark all that apply)



This question was not asked in the NPRRP. Interestingly the vast majority of efforts were aimed at rehoming or relocation, while a low percentage of respondents provided permanent sanctuary.

3. If referral-where do you refer birds/owners to?



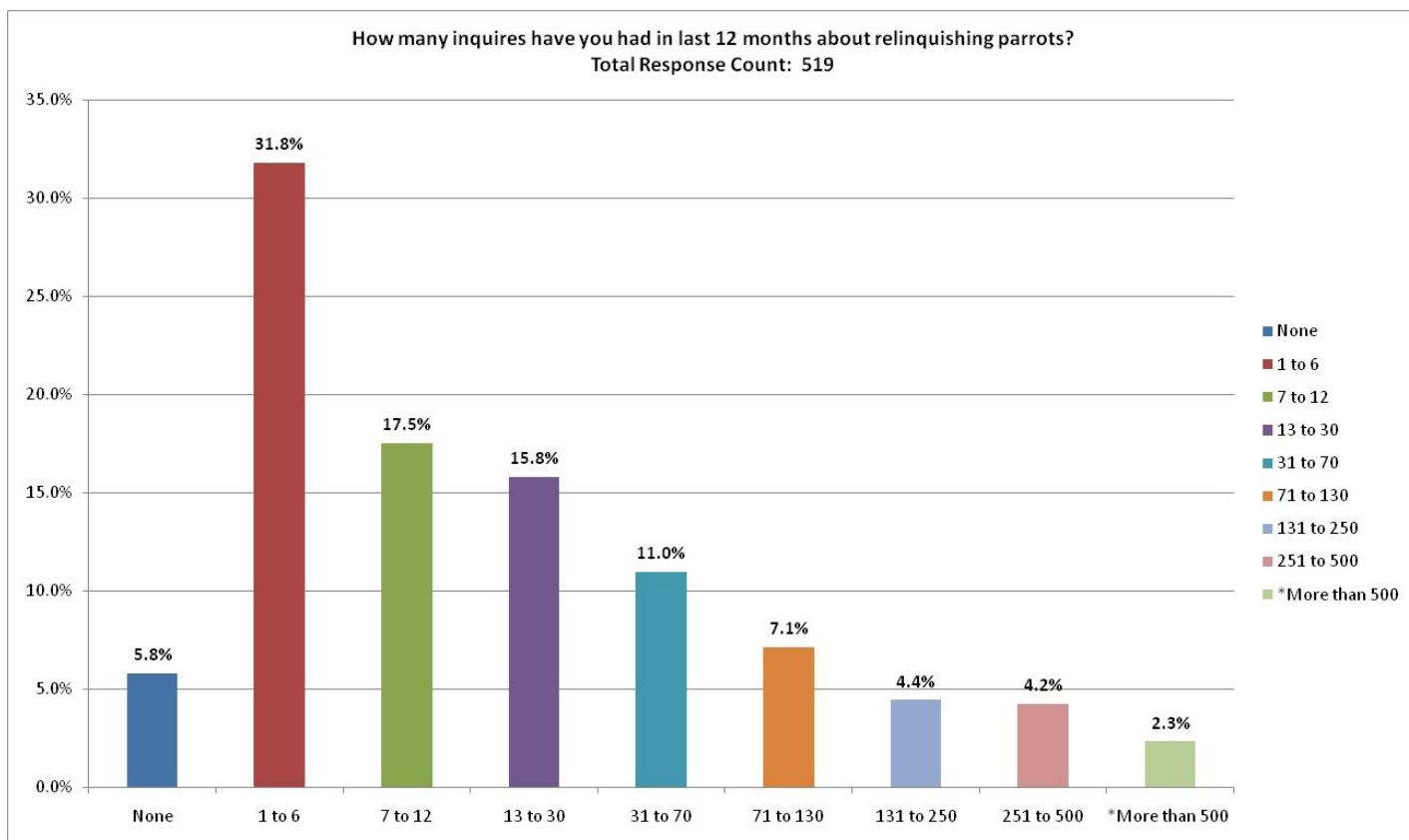
Again most of the respondents, who practiced referral of relinquished parrots, referred them to new homes, temporary shelters or in some cases breeders, with 23% being referred to permanent sanctuaries. This question was not asked in NPRRP.

#### 4. Please provide your state or location



The location of respondents was very similar to the NPRRP report with highest numbers of respondents in states where typically the largest concentrations of breeders and pet bird owners are found - California, Texas and Florida. However this was truly an international effort with responses also from 16 countries. Interestingly, Australia had the highest level of response outside of the US.

#### 5. How many inquires have you had in last 12 months about relinquishing parrots (phone calls, visits, letters, e-mails, etc)

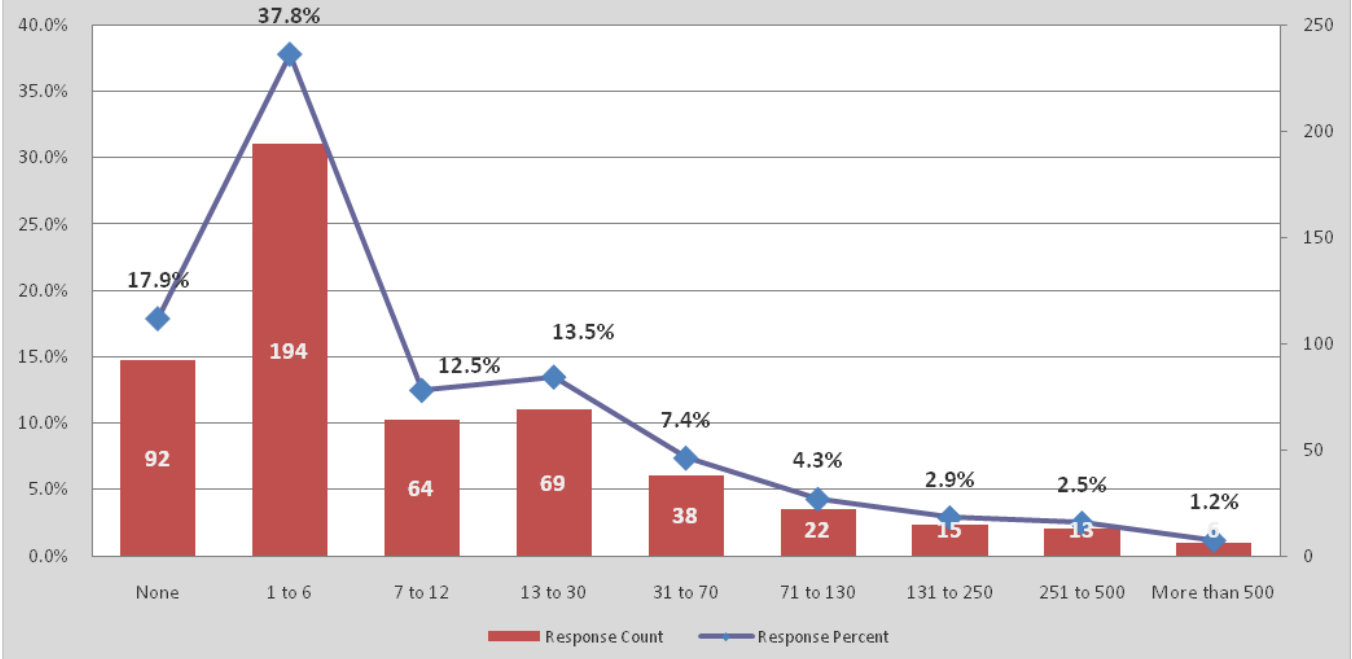


The responses to this question were very similar between the KAFPRS and the NPRRP with generally a low number of inquiries for most respondents and only a few organizations showing high numbers of contacts - 18% of respondents had more than 70 contacts per year, while the overwhelming number of respondents had relatively low numbers of contacts. This is probably due to the relatively high visibility of some of the larger parrot welfare and rescue groups as opposed to smaller local organizations or individually operated facilities.

In the NPRRP survey this question was divided into 2 separate charts- one on frequency of inquiries for Parrot Welfare Organizations which clearly showed a higher level of inquiries to these organizations.

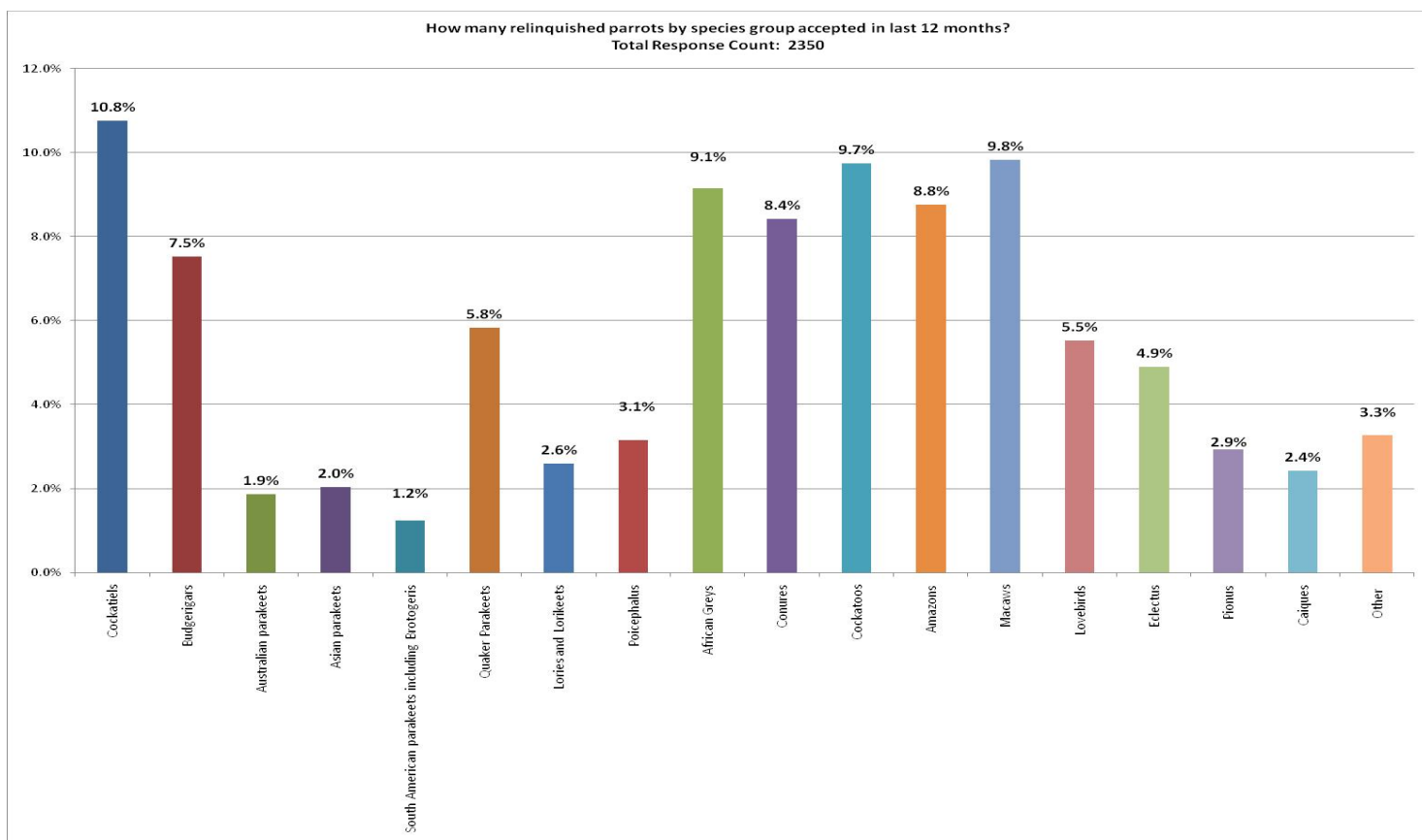
**6. How many parrots have you taken in within the last 12 month period?**

### How many parrots have you taken in within the last 12 month period?



This question was presented so that respondents chose a range of numbers of birds taken in. Again it shows that most respondents were small, taking in a relatively low number of birds annually. A low percentage (6.6%) took in over 130 parrots annually.

#### 7. Relinquished parrots by species group accepted in last 12 months.

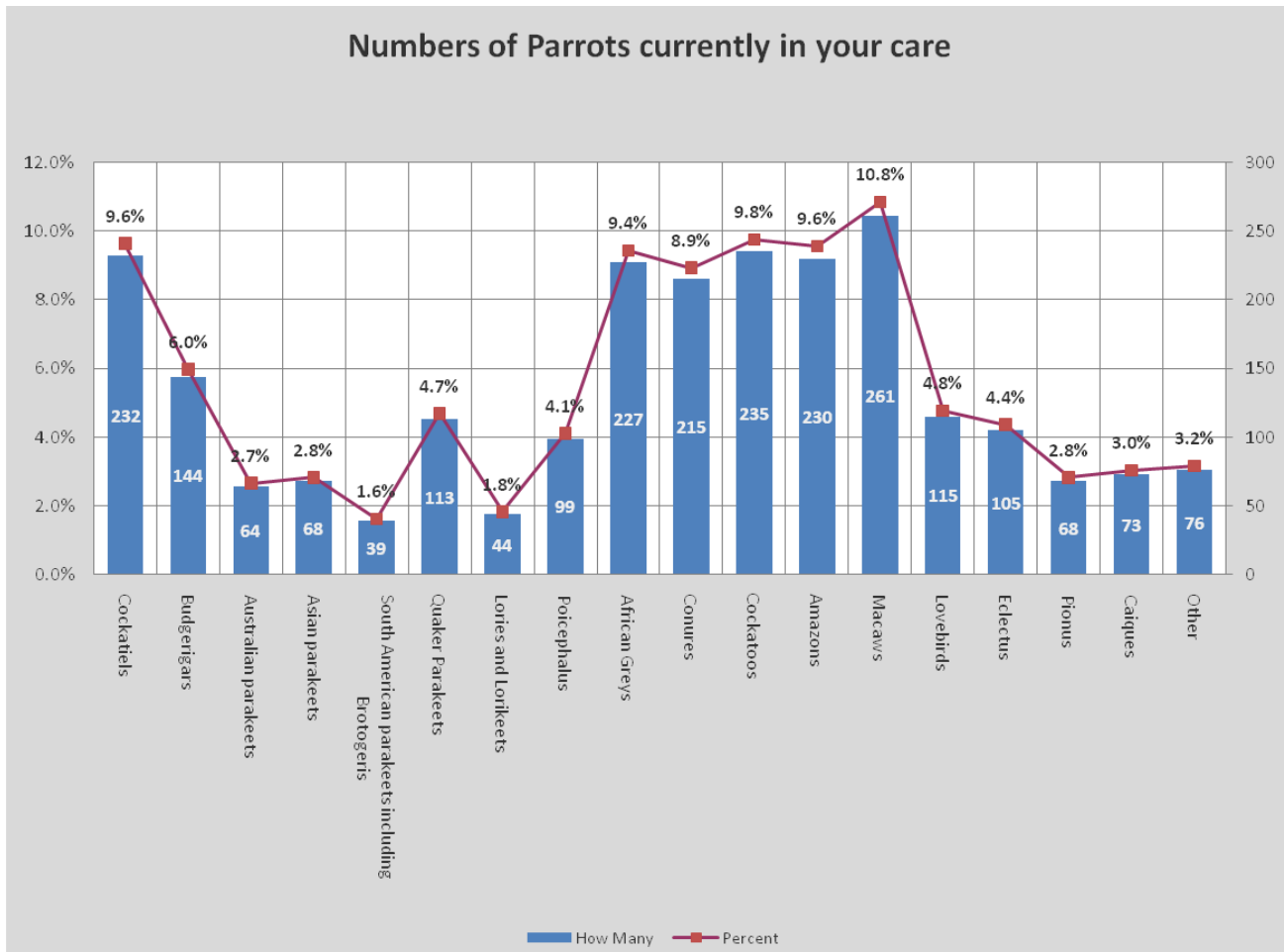


Relinquished birds by species/group listed as follows, Cockatiels, Budgerigars, Australian parakeets, Asian parakeets, South American parakeets including Brotogeris, Quaker Parakeets, Lories and Lorikeets, Poicephalus, African Greys, Conures, Cockatoos, Amazons, Macaws, Lovebirds, Eclectus, Pionus, Caiques and Other.

Comparison of Species relinquished in past 12 months (In percentage of relinquishments by species)

	NPRRP	KAFPRS
Cockatiels	25	10.8
Parakeets combined	18	
Budgerigars		7.5
Australian parakeets		1.9
Asian parakeets		2
South American parakeets		1.2
Quakers		5.8
Lories & Lorikeets		2.6
Poicephalus		3.1
African Greys	6	9.1
Conures	10	8.4
Cockatoos	9	9.7
Amazons	8	8.8
Macaws	7	9.8
Lovebirds	6	5.5
Eclectus		4.9
Pionus		2.9
Caiques		2.4
Other	11	3.3

## 8. Numbers of Parrots currently in your care



	KAFPRS	KAFPRS by %	NPRRP by %
Cockatiels	232	9.6	17
Budgerigars	144	6.0	11
Australian parakeets	64	2.7	
Asian parakeets	64	2.7	
South American parakeets (inc. brotogeris)	68	2.8	
Quaker	113	4.7	
Lories & Lorikeets	44	1.8	
Poicephalus	89	4.1	
African Greys	227	9.4	7
Conures	215	8.9	
Cockatoos	235	9.8	11
Amazons	230	9.6	11
Macaws	261	10.8	13
Lovebirds	115	4.8	5
Eclectus	105	4.4	

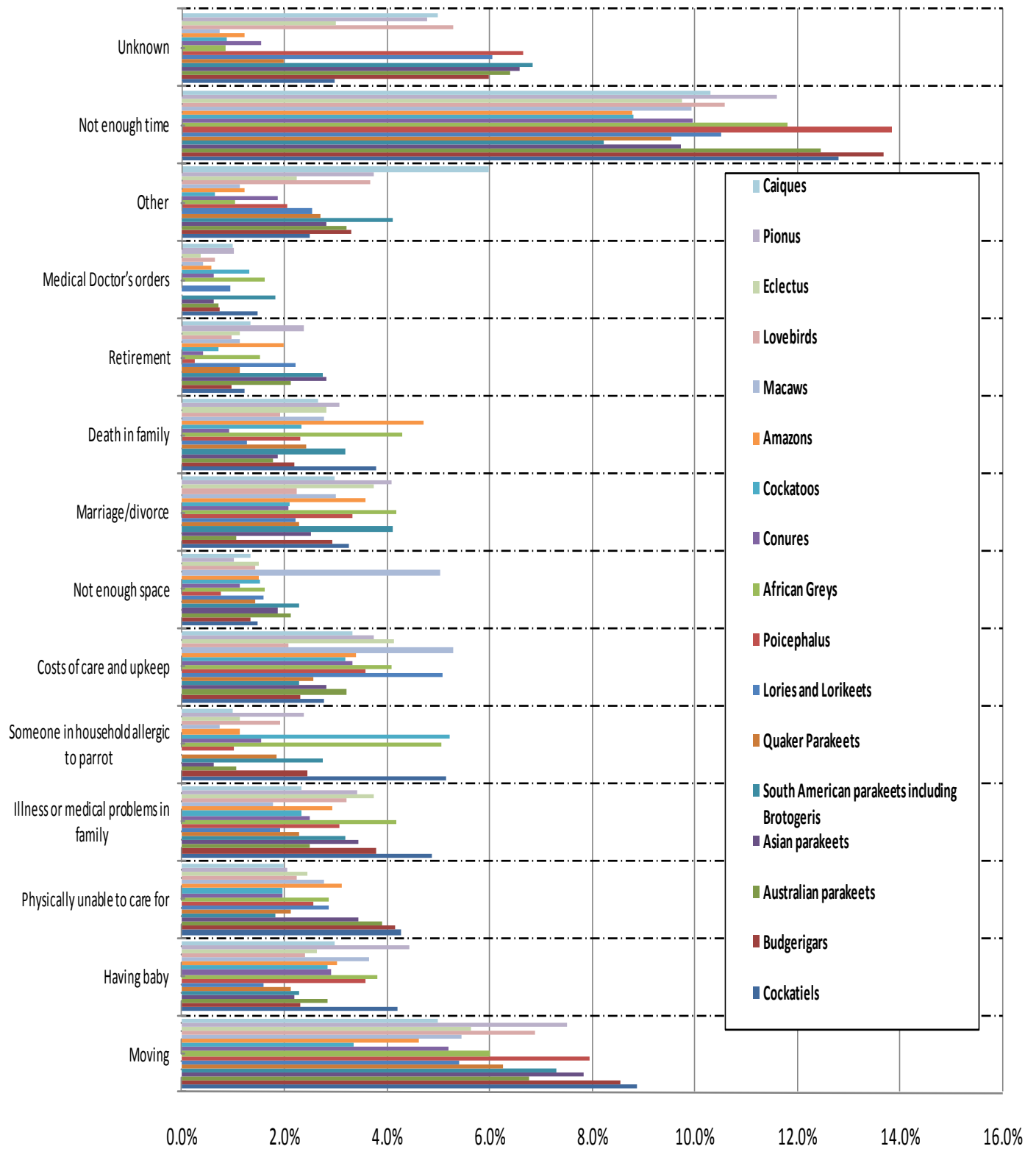


Pionus	68	2.8	
Caiques	73	3.0	
Other	76	3.2	14

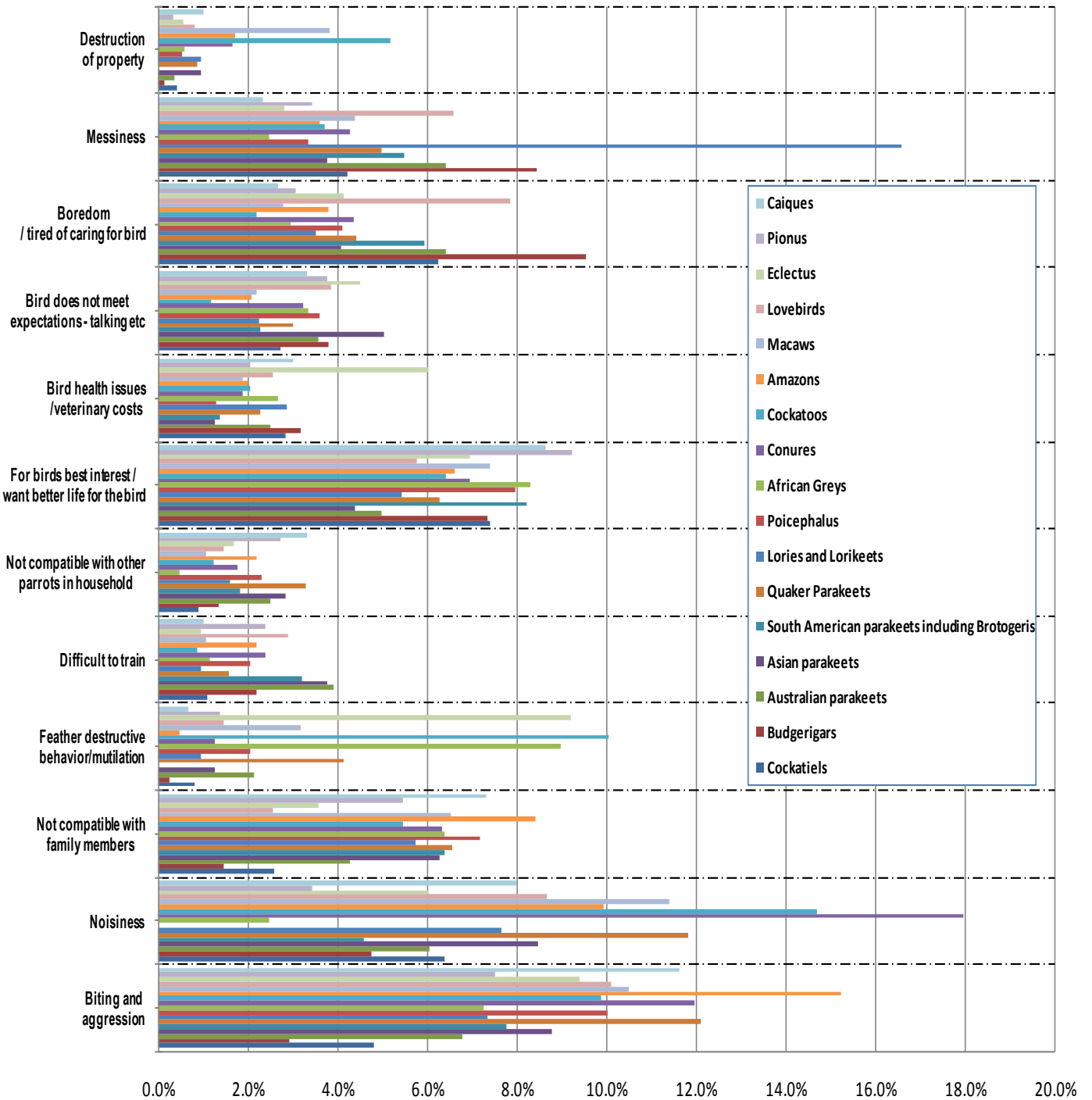
**9. Main reasons for relinquishment, list top 5 in order of frequency.**

This data set was so large that it was divided into 2 categories - Relinquishment due to changes in family structure not of situation and relinquishment due to failure of the human animal bond. This is important because although we cannot change the rate of relinquishment due to changes in family situation or structure, we hopefully can target the breakdown in human animal bond to keep more of those birds in their homes.

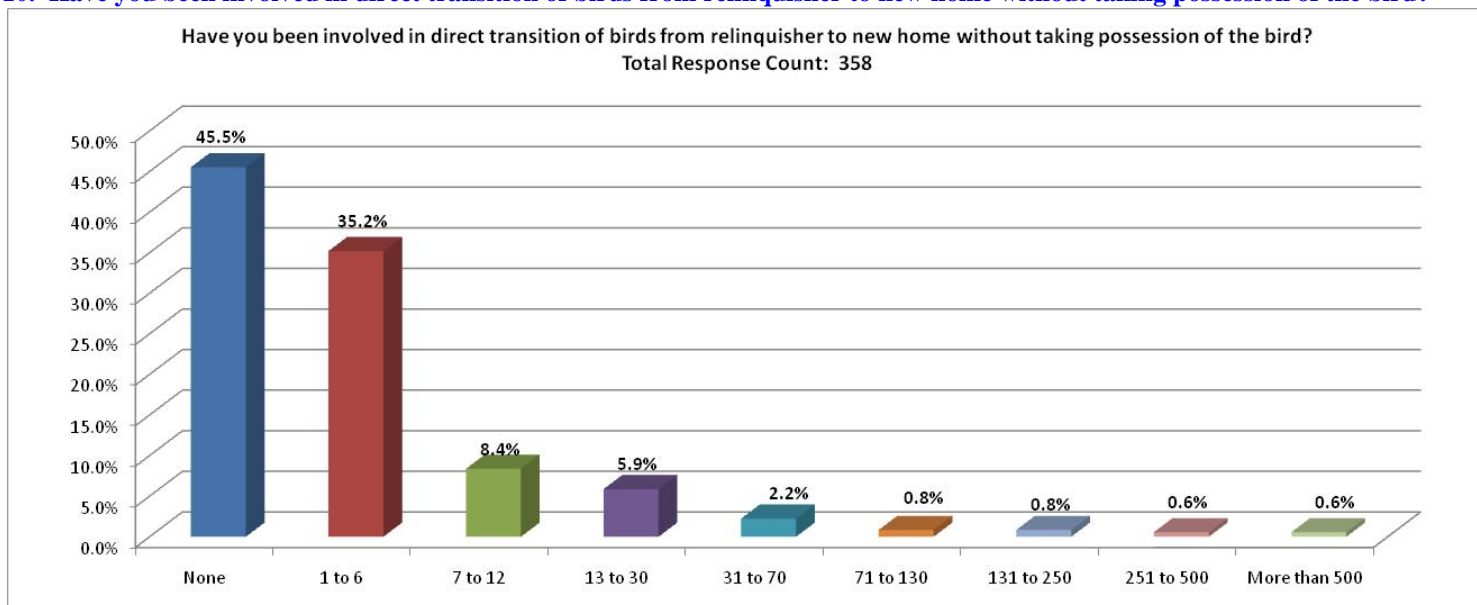
Relinquishment by Changes in Family Structure or Situation



### Relinquishment by Failure of Human Animal Bond



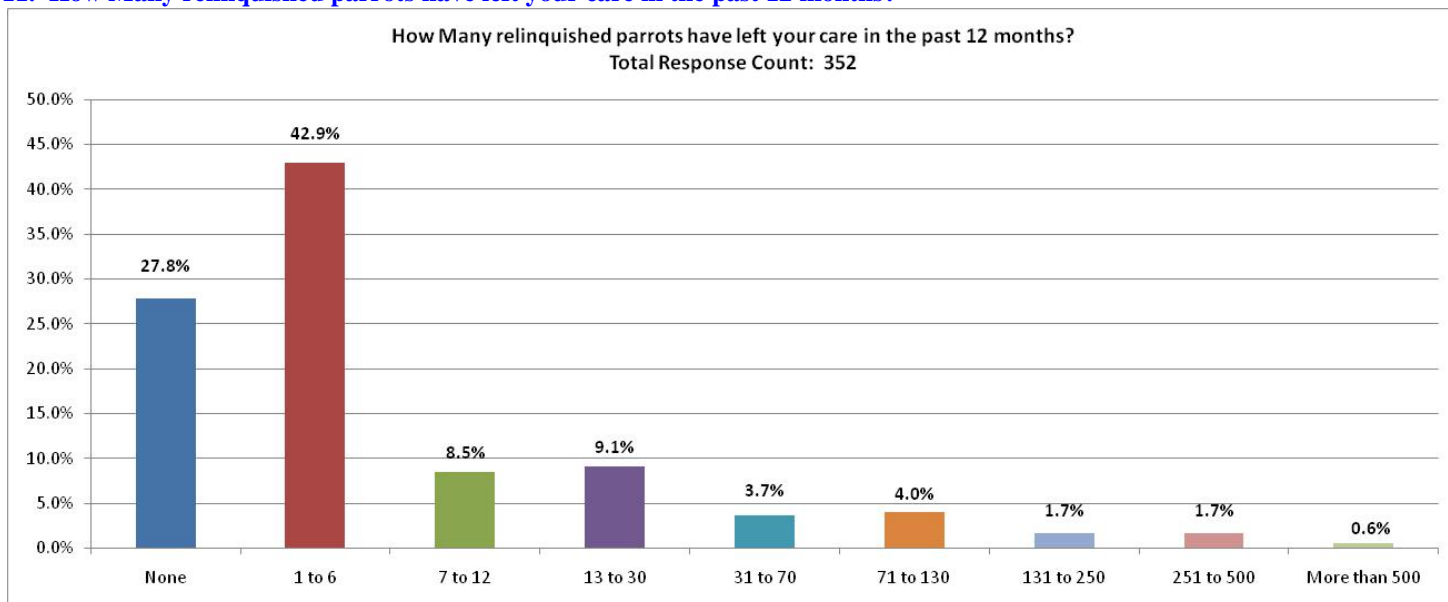
**10. Have you been involved in direct transition of birds from relinquisher to new home without taking possession of the bird?**



Again in this question, it appears that the vast majority of respondents assisted in the transition of relatively low numbers of birds from one owner to another. A very low percentage of respondents indicated being involved in transitions of large numbers of birds.

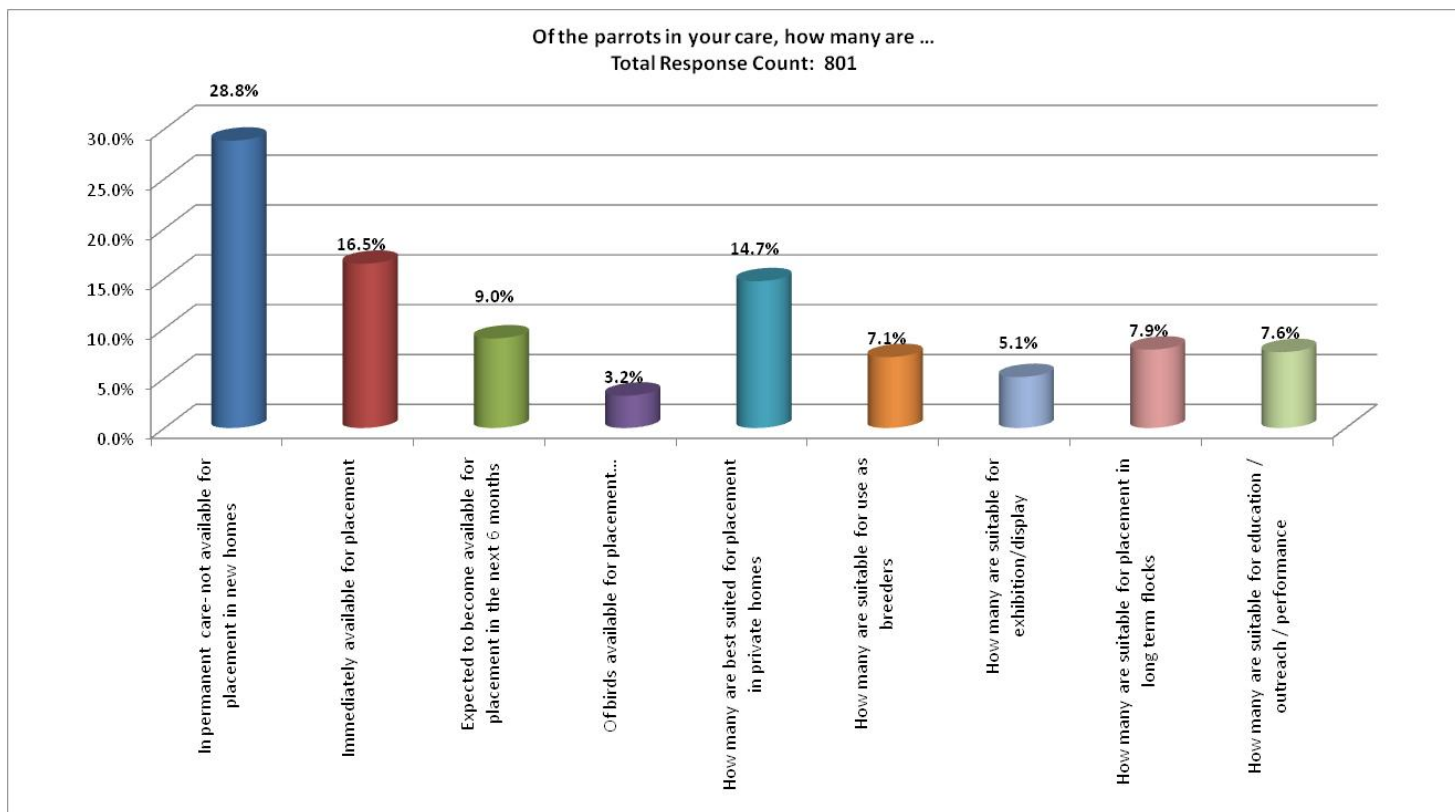
This question was not directly asked in the NPPRP; however 207 respondents indicated they had assisted in transfers of 2001 parrots in 2004.

**11. How Many relinquished parrots have left your care in the past 12 months?**



This question was asked in a slightly different way in the NPPRP and indicated a total number of parrots which were placed in 2004 being 3,321.

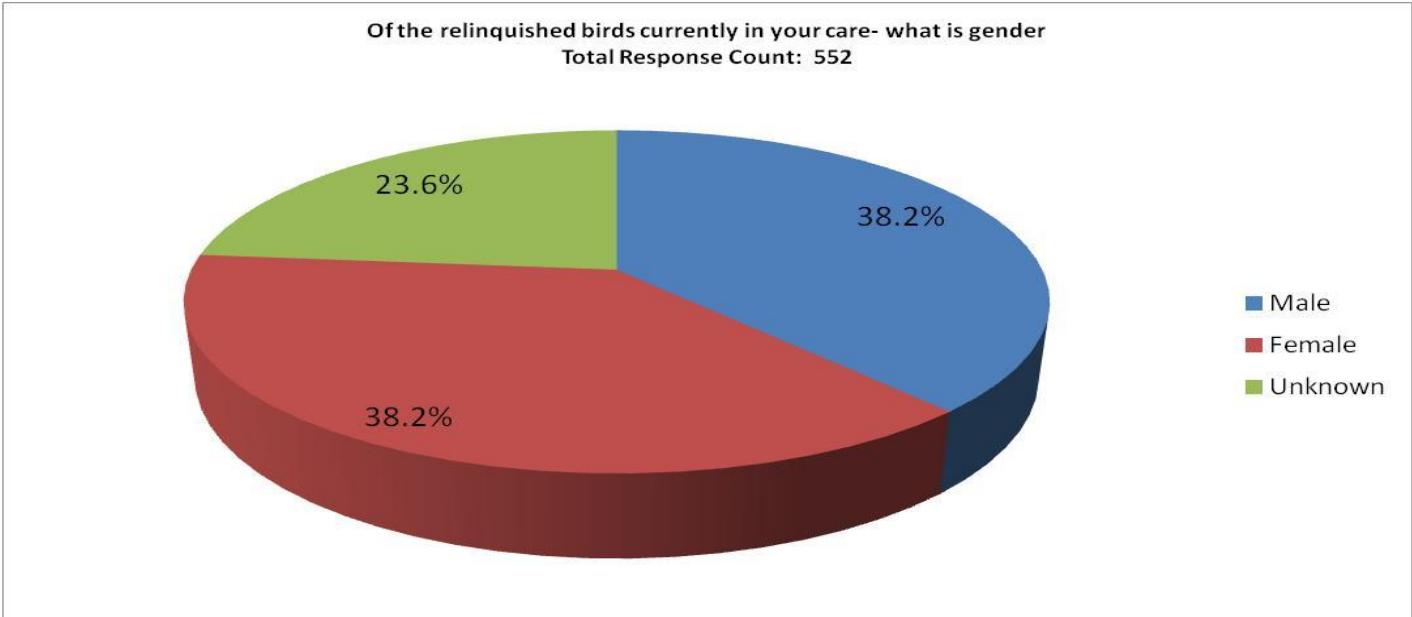
**12. Of those parrots which left your care-where did they go?**



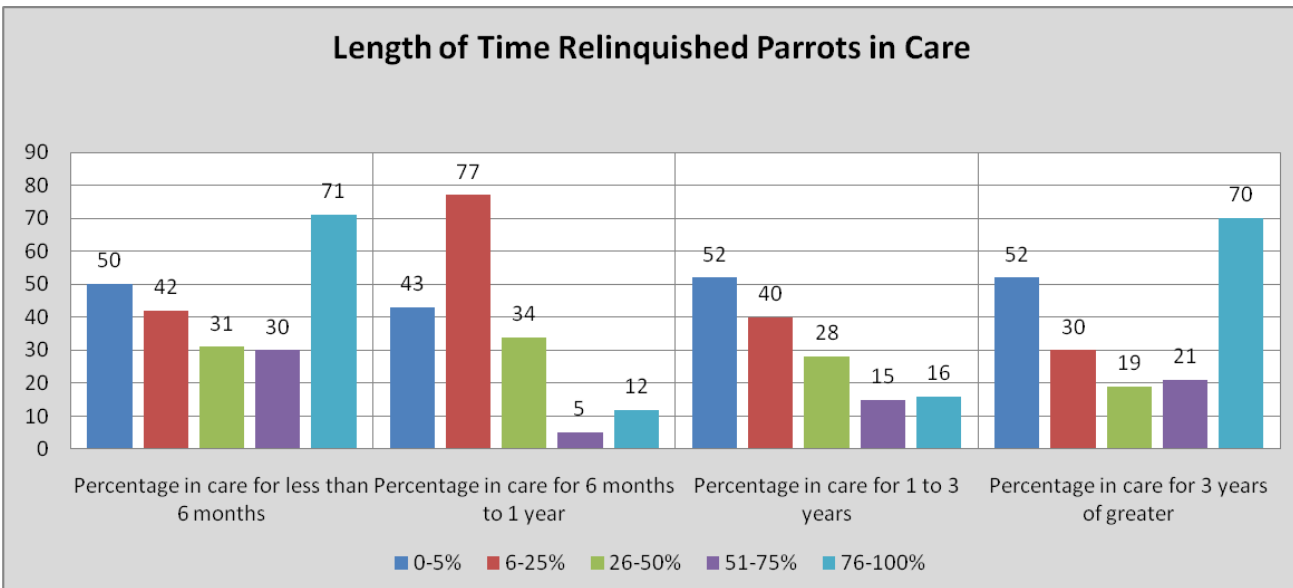
This question was also asked in a different way in the NPPRS and the results are presented as below

Placement	N	% of Total
Permanent private homes	3048	92%
Other permanent placement	180	5%
Placement with breeder	91	2.5%
Placement with zoo, public aviary or animal park	2	.5%

### 13. Of the relinquished birds currently in your care- what is gender

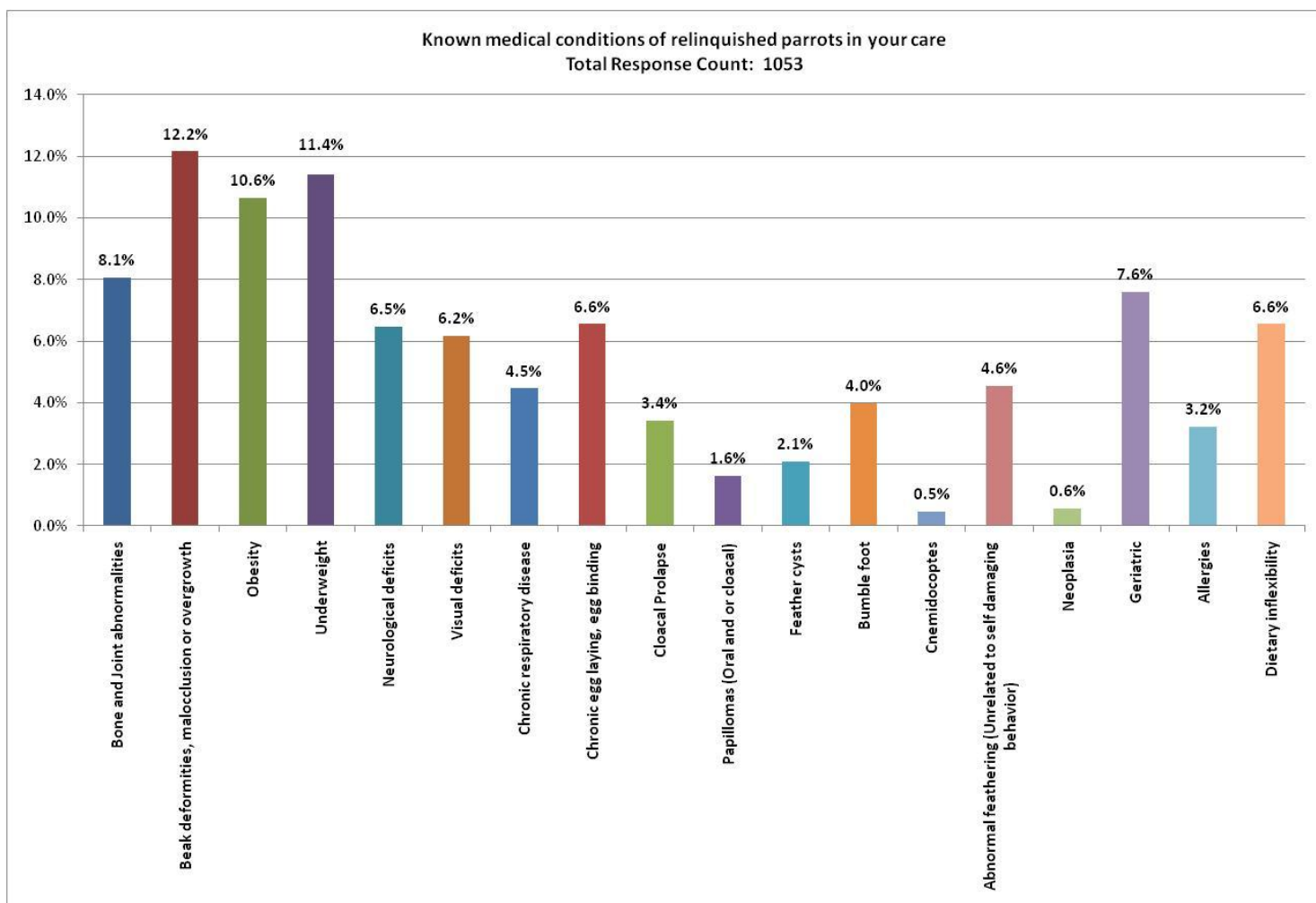


**14. Length of time relinquished parrots are in your care: This question had 5 choices (percentage range) for each time period.**



In the NPRRP survey 21% of parrots had been in the care of respondents for less than 6 months, 17% for 6 months to 1 year, 28% for 1 to 3 years and 33% for 3 years or greater.

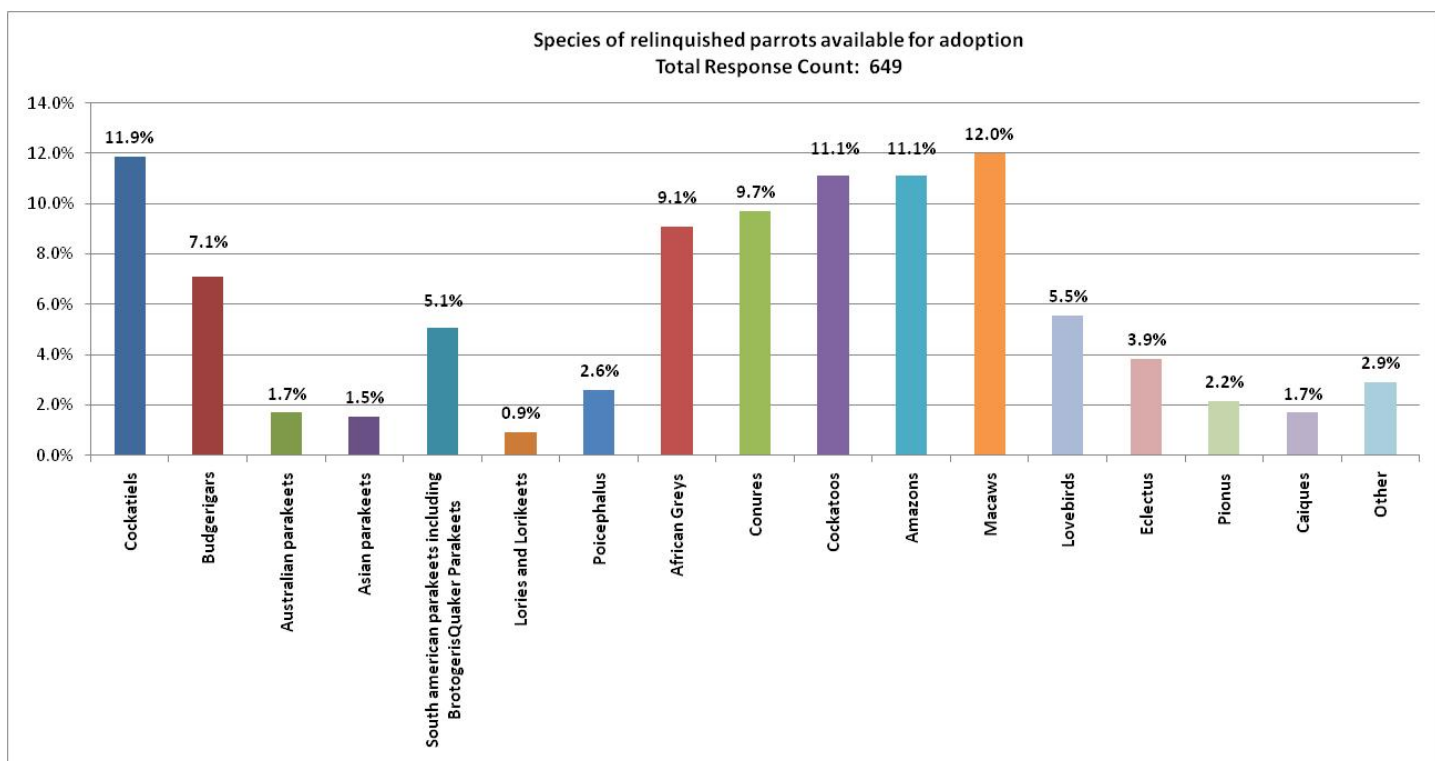
**15. Known medical conditions of relinquished parrots in your care, check all that apply.**



Conditions are listed in order from left to right - Bone and Joint abnormalities, Beak deformities (malocclusion or overgrowth), Obesity, Underweight, Neurological deficits, Visual deficits, Chronic respiratory disease, Chronic egg laying, egg binding, Cloacal Prolapse, Papillomas (Oral and or cloacal), Feather cysts, Bumble foot, Cnemidocoptes, Abnormal feathering (Unrelated to self damaging behavior), Neoplasia, Geriatric, Allergies, and Dietary inflexibility.

This question was not asked in NPRRP. Interesting to note that beak abnormalities are the most common medical condition reported.

**16. Species of relinquished parrots available for adoption.**



**Species listed in following order,** Cockatiels, Budgerigars, Australian Parakeets, Asian Parakeets, South american parakeets including Brotogeris, Quaker Parakeets, Lories and Lorikeets, Poicephalus, African Greys, Conures, Cockatoos, Amazons, Macaws, Lovebirds, Eclectus, Pionus, Caiques and Other.

Species which were currently available for adoption in NPRRP survey were as follows

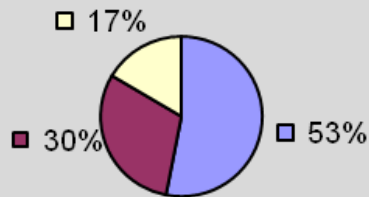
Conures-	26%
Amazons -	14%
Cockatiels -	14%
Parakeets including budgies -	10%
Macaws	10%
Cockatoos-	7%
African Greys	6%
Lovebirds	2%
Other	11%

### [Open format Questions](#)

**17. Of the Parrots in your care, how many are?**



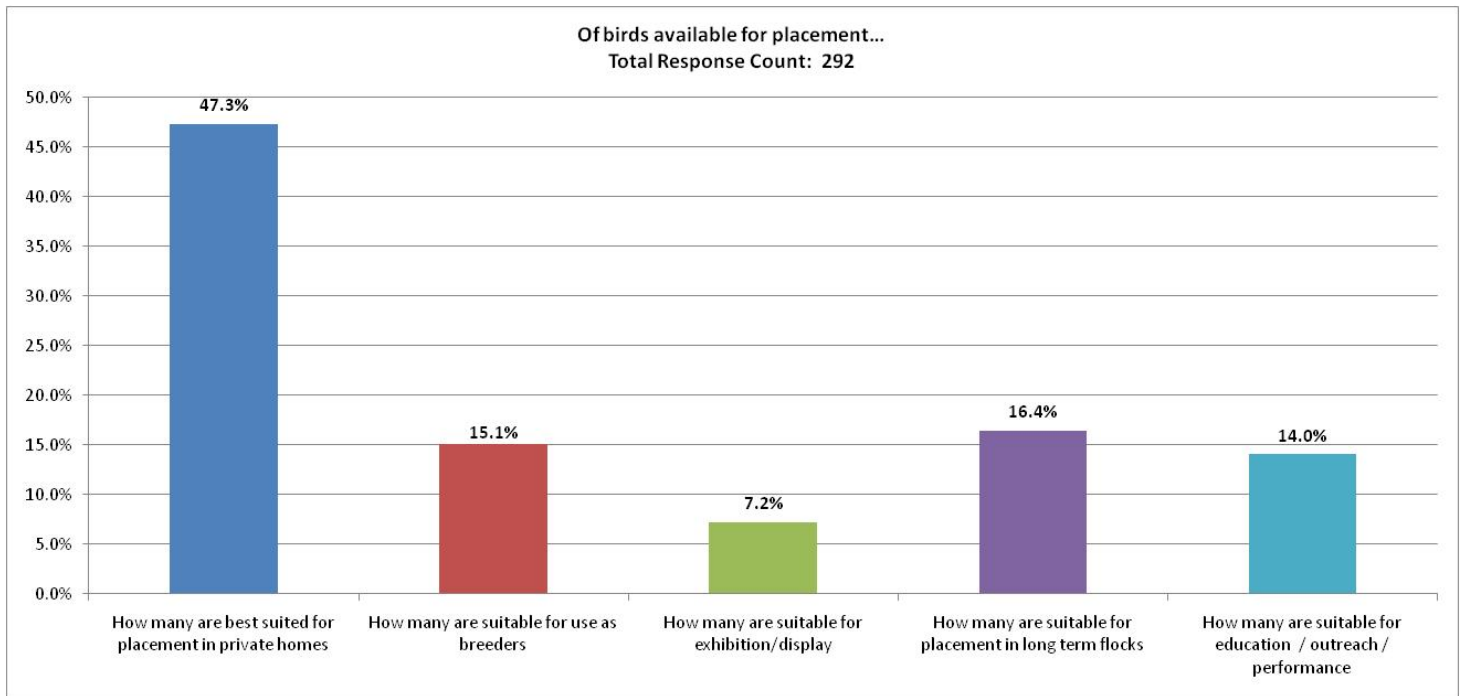
Of the parrots in your care, how many are- (n=435 - total response count 258)



- In Permanent care- Not available for placement
- Immediately available for placement
- Expected to become available for placement in the next 6 months

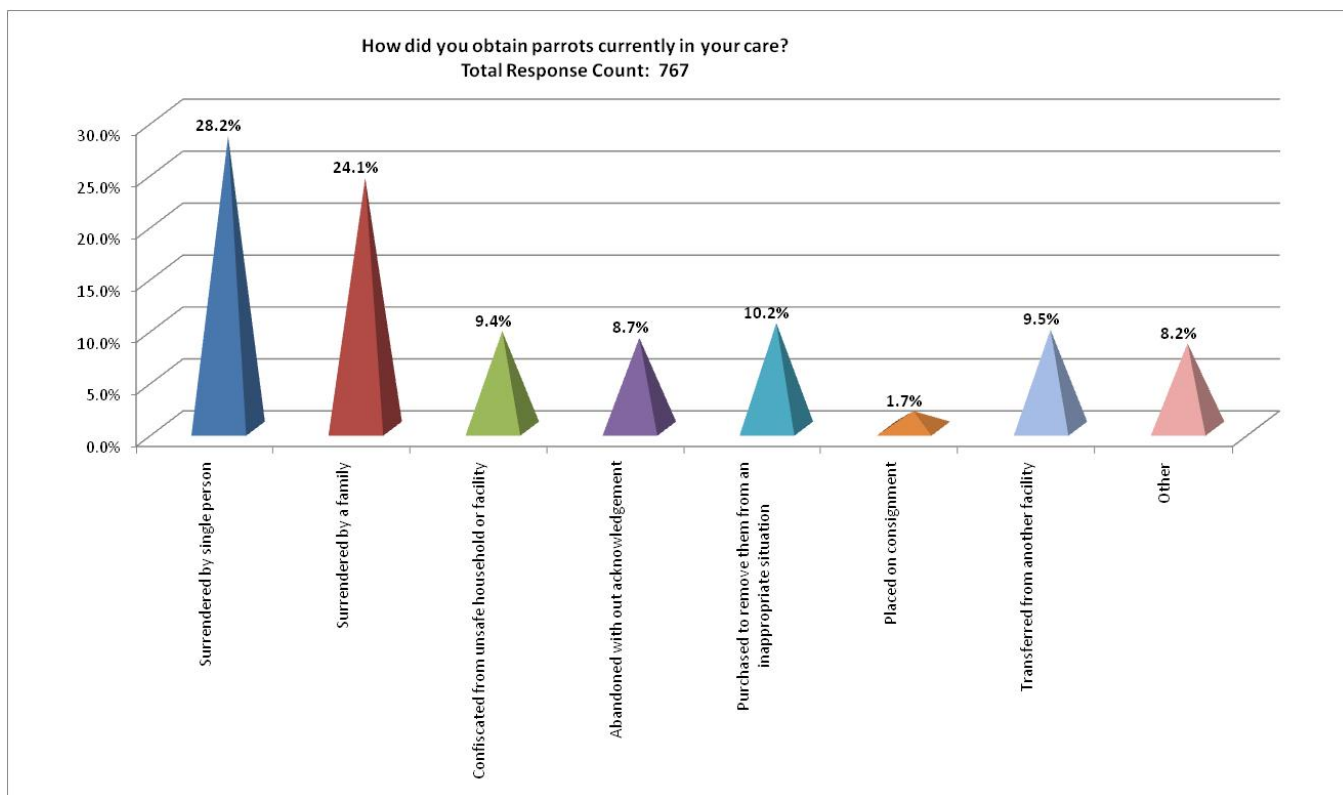
The NPRRP report showed much higher numbers with a total of 5382 relinquished parrots currently in care, 3080 in permanent care, 1959 being immediately available for placement and 343 expected to become available for placement in the next 6 months. This is certainly a significant difference in data between the 2 studies. It also does not correspond well with the total numbers of bird's relinquished (See summary). This suggests that many respondents may have actually skipped this question. Alternatively it may suggest that respondents in the KAFPRS are more effectively rehoming birds. Or possibly that more facilities providing permanent sanctuary responded to the NPRRP survey, than the KAFPRS survey.

**18. Of birds available for placement, how many are best suited for....**



**How many are best suited for placement in private homes, for use as breeders, for exhibition/display, for placement in long term flocks, for education/outreach/performance**

**19. How did you obtain parrots currently in your care?**



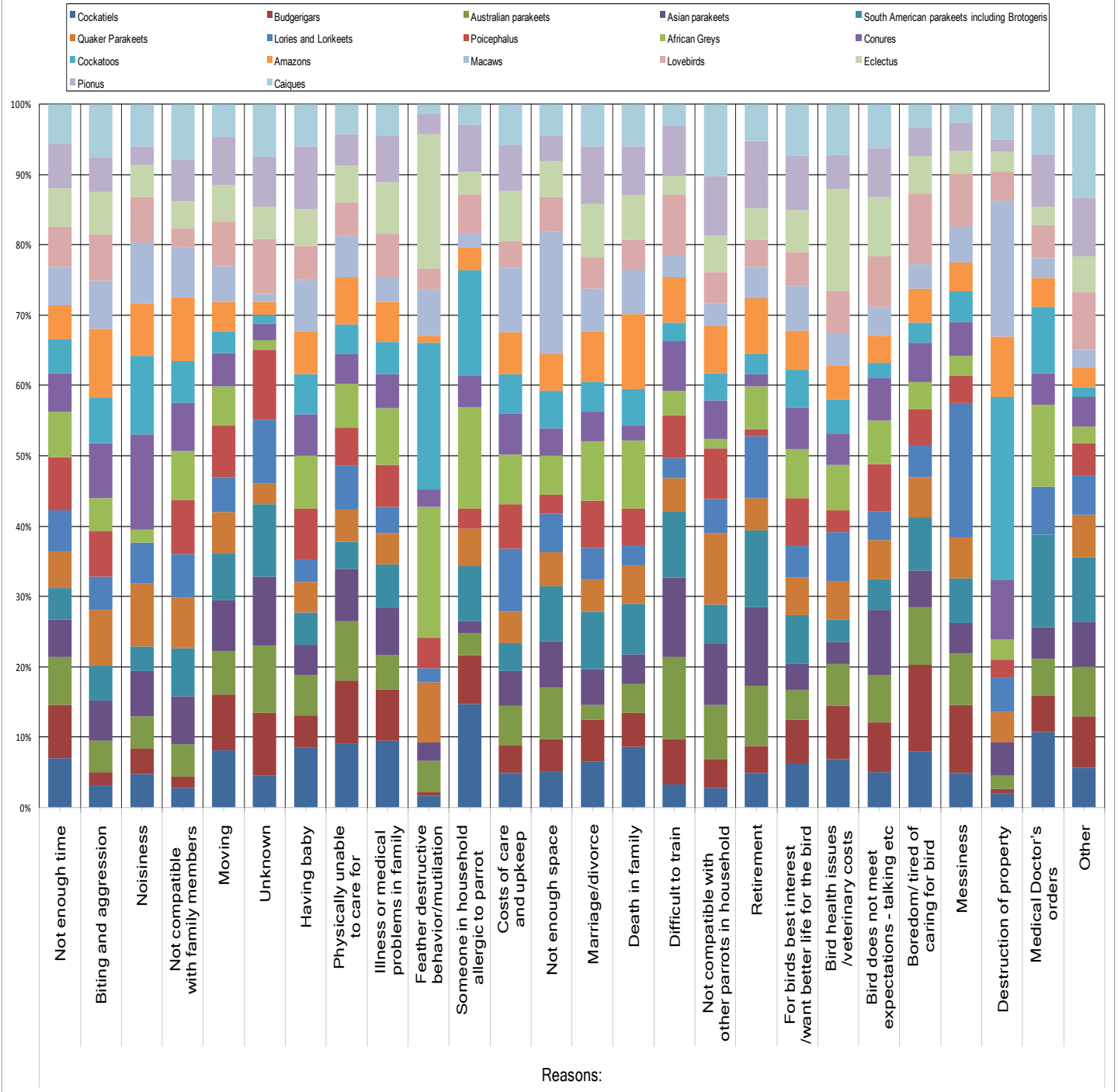
**Surrendered by single person, Surrendered by a family, Confiscated from unsafe household or facility, Abandoned without acknowledgement, Purchased to remove them from an inappropriate situation, Placed on consignment, Transferred from another facility, Other:**

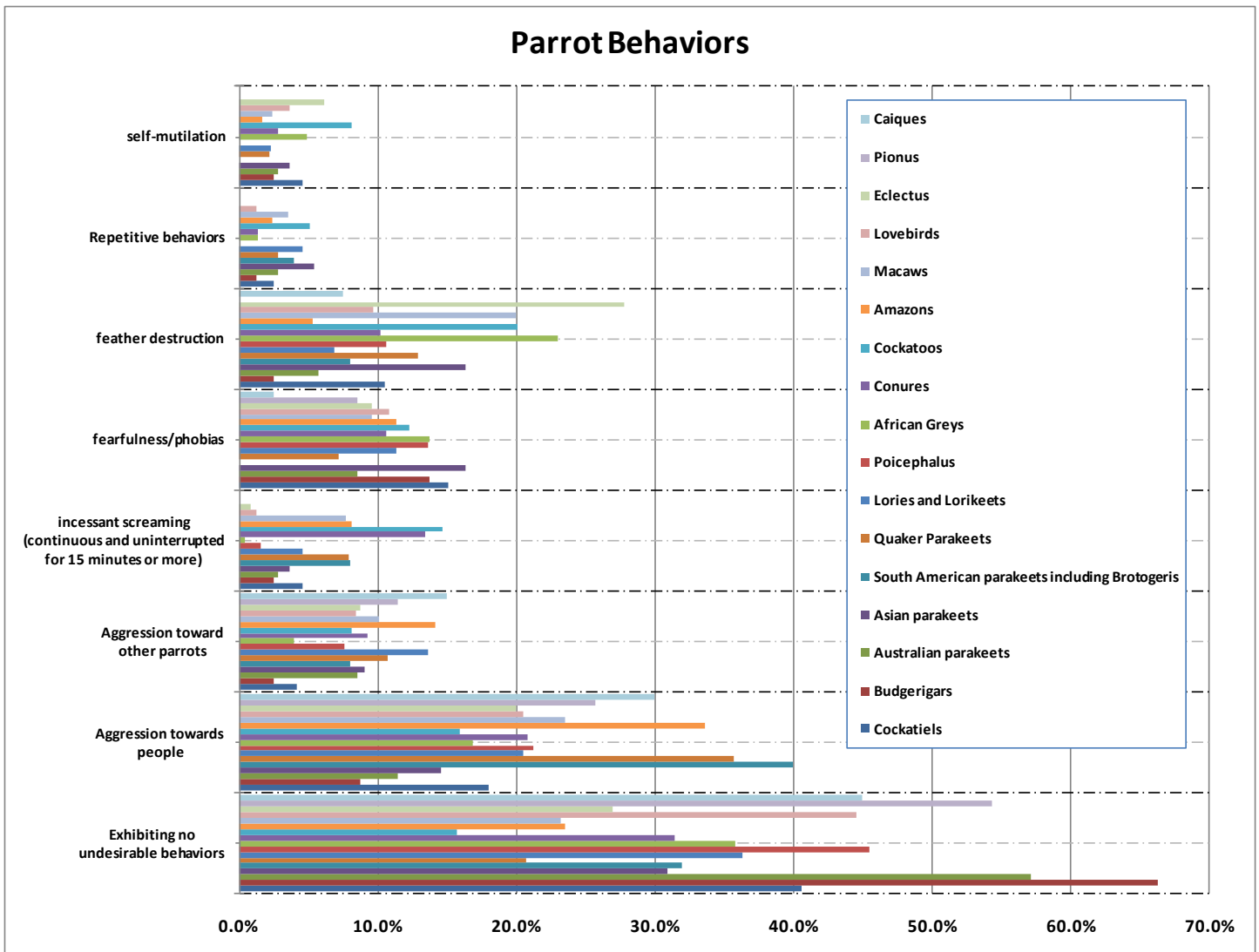
The NPRRP report showed that 69% were given to them (Does not indicate source), 16% were abandoned with them and 15% were purchased. For pet stores, 25% of relinquished parrots were brought to them for sale on consignment.

**20. What undesirable behaviors are performed by parrots currently in your care?** *Cockatiels, Budgerigars, Australian parakeets, Asian parakeets, South american parakeets including Brotogeris, Quaker Parakeets, Lories and Lorikeets, Poicephalus, African Greys, Conures, Cockatoos, Amazons, Macaws, Lovebirds, Eclectus, Pionus, Caiques, Other*

**Exhibiting no undesirable behavior, aggression towards people, aggression toward other parrots, incessant screaming (continuous and uninterrupted for 15 minutes of more), fearfulness/phobias, feather destruction, repetitive behaviors, self-mutilation**

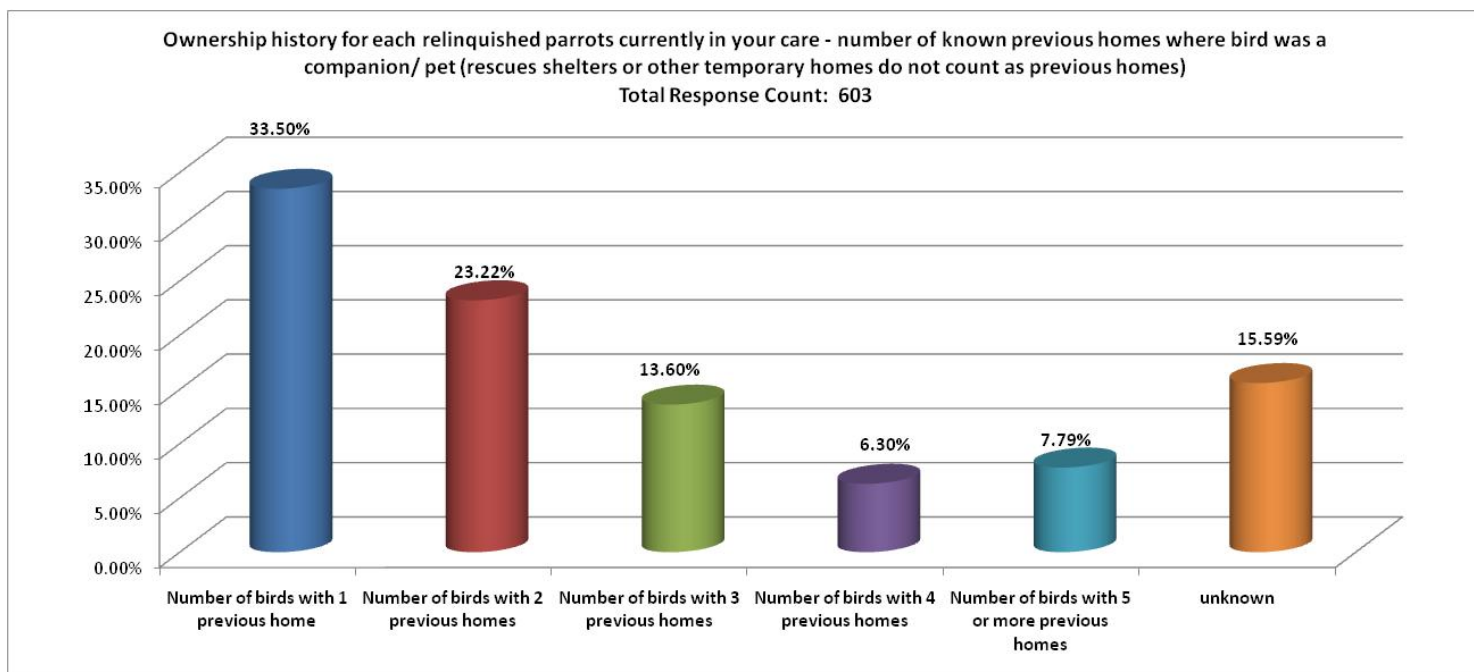
### Relinquished by Species





A large percentage, variable by species, showed no undesirable behaviors. These may be primarily birds which were relinquished due to changes in family situation or structure. The behavior which was most frequently associated with relinquishment was aggression towards people, a behavior which in many cases can be corrected by training or behavior modification. Other behaviors of significance were aggression towards other parrots, fearfulness or phobias, incessant screaming and feather destructive behaviors.

**21. Ownership history for each relinquished parrot currently in your care - number of known previous homes where the bird was a companion/ pet (rescues, shelters or other temporary homes do not count as previous homes)**



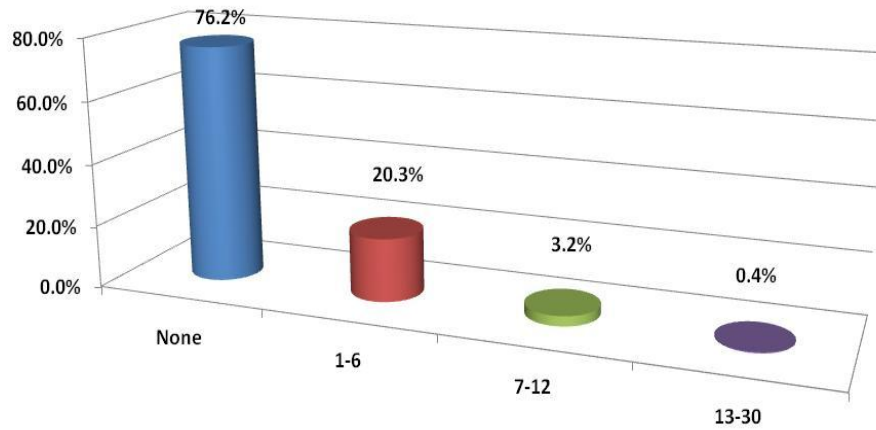
These data mirror closely the data from NPRRP. In that study 46% had 1 previous home, 17% had 2 previous homes, 6% had 3 previous homes, 3% had 4 and 2% had 5 or more and 26% were unknown.

## **Euthanasia**

The results of the questions involving euthanasia are very similar to those in the NPRRP and indicate that euthanasia is typically not considered a solution to the parrot relinquishment problem. While questions 22 and 23 were designed to be answered by veterinarians, from the response count it is logical that many respondents who are not veterinarians responded to these questions.

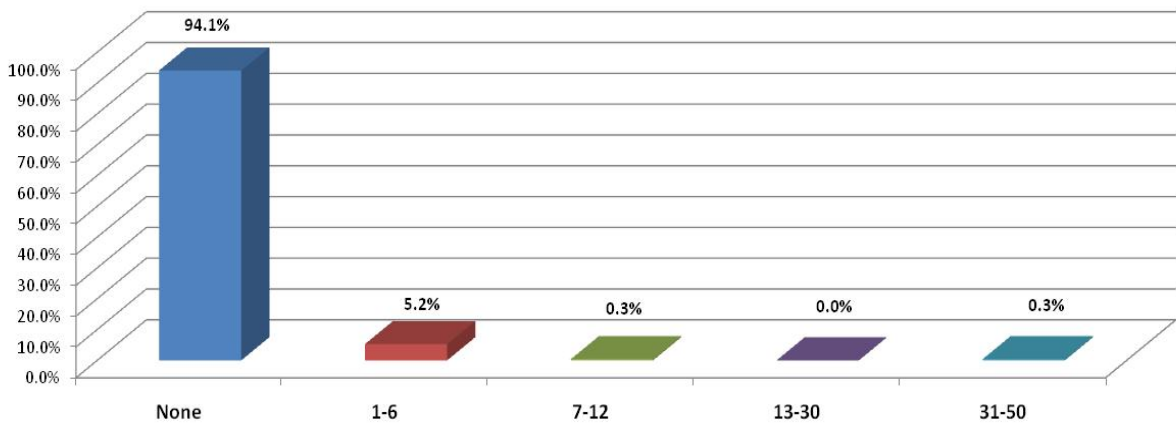
**22. How many requests have you had in last 12 months for euthanasia because owners could not care for them or didn't want them?**

How many requests have you had in last 12 months for euthanasia because owners could not care for them or didn't want them?  
Total Response Count: 281



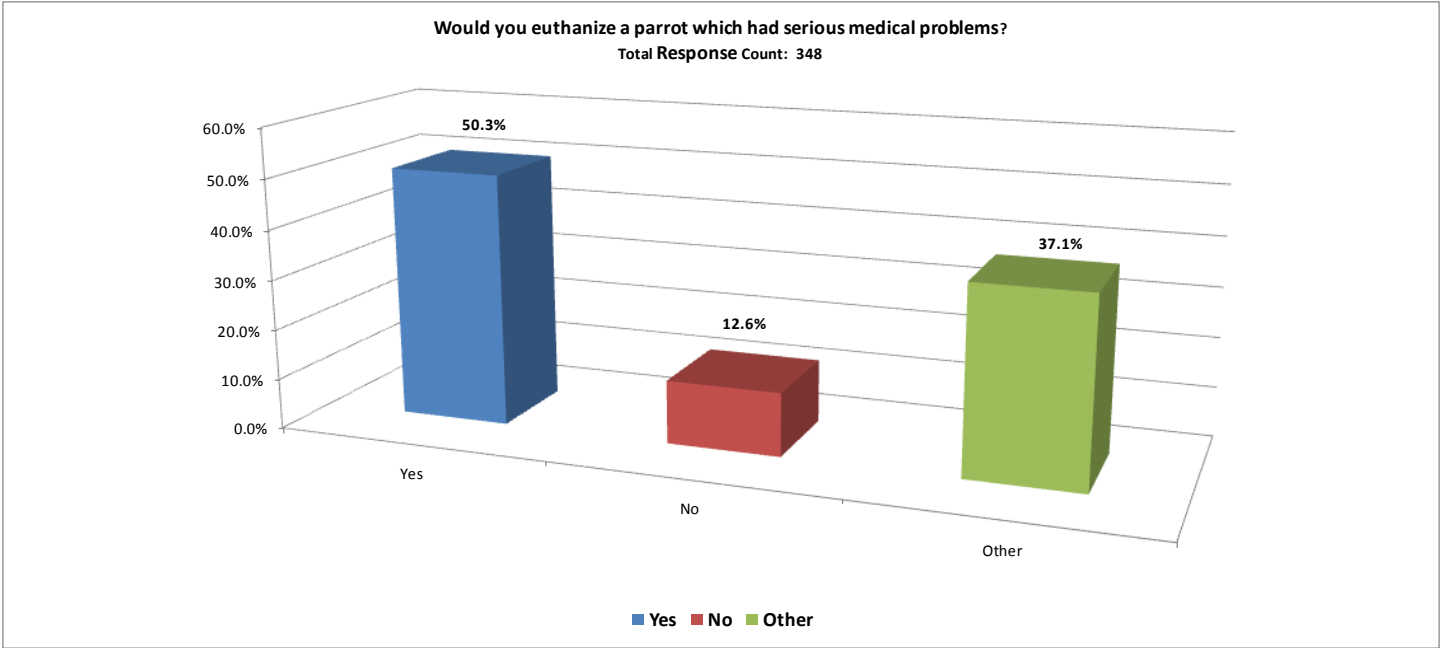
**23. How many birds have you euthanized in last 12 months because owners could not care for them or didn't want them?**

How many birds have you euthanized in last 12 months because owners could not care for them or didn't want them?  
Total Response Count: 286

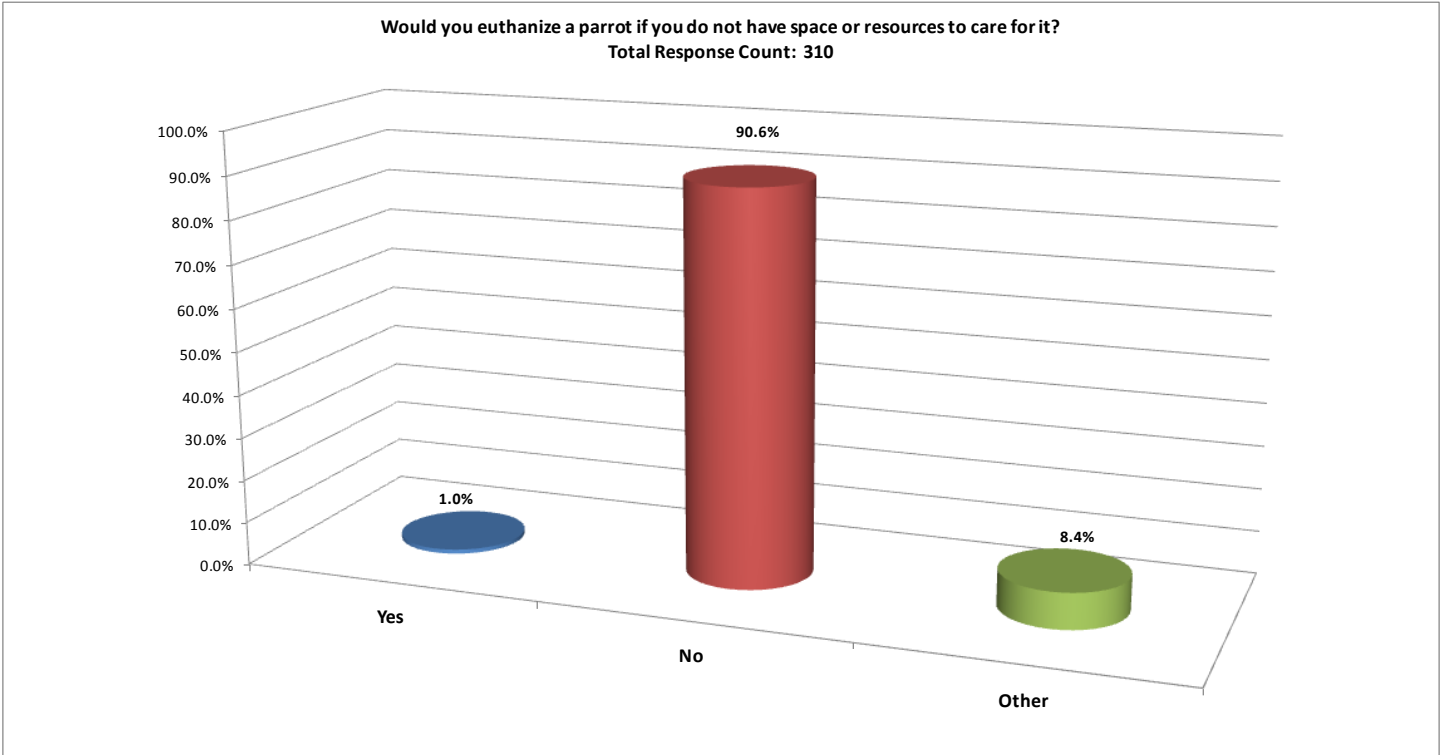


**Euthanasia questions specifically for Humane, rescue/sanctuary, and parrot Welfare Organizations**

**24. Would you euthanize a parrot which had serious medical problems?**

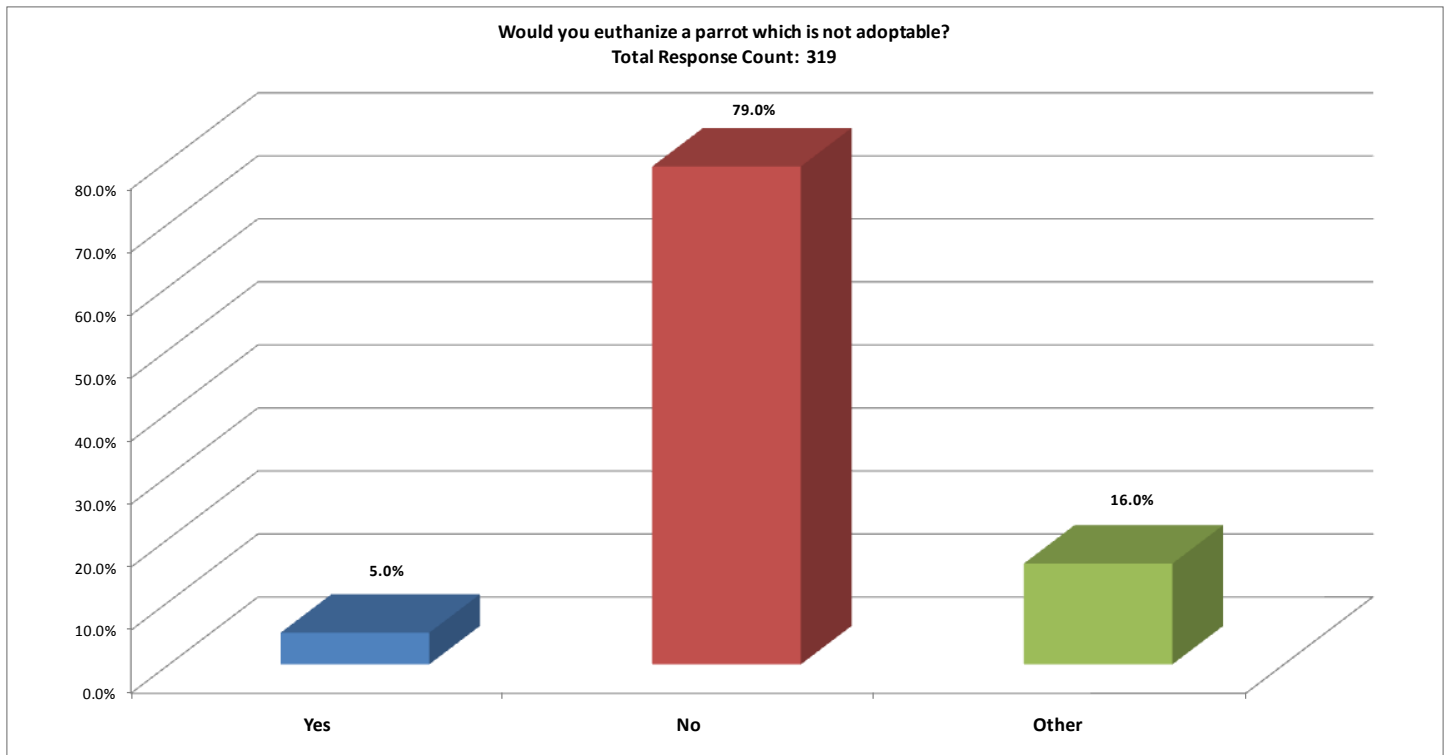


**25. Would you euthanize a parrot if you do not have space or resources to care for it?**



**26. Would you euthanize a parrot which is not adoptable?**

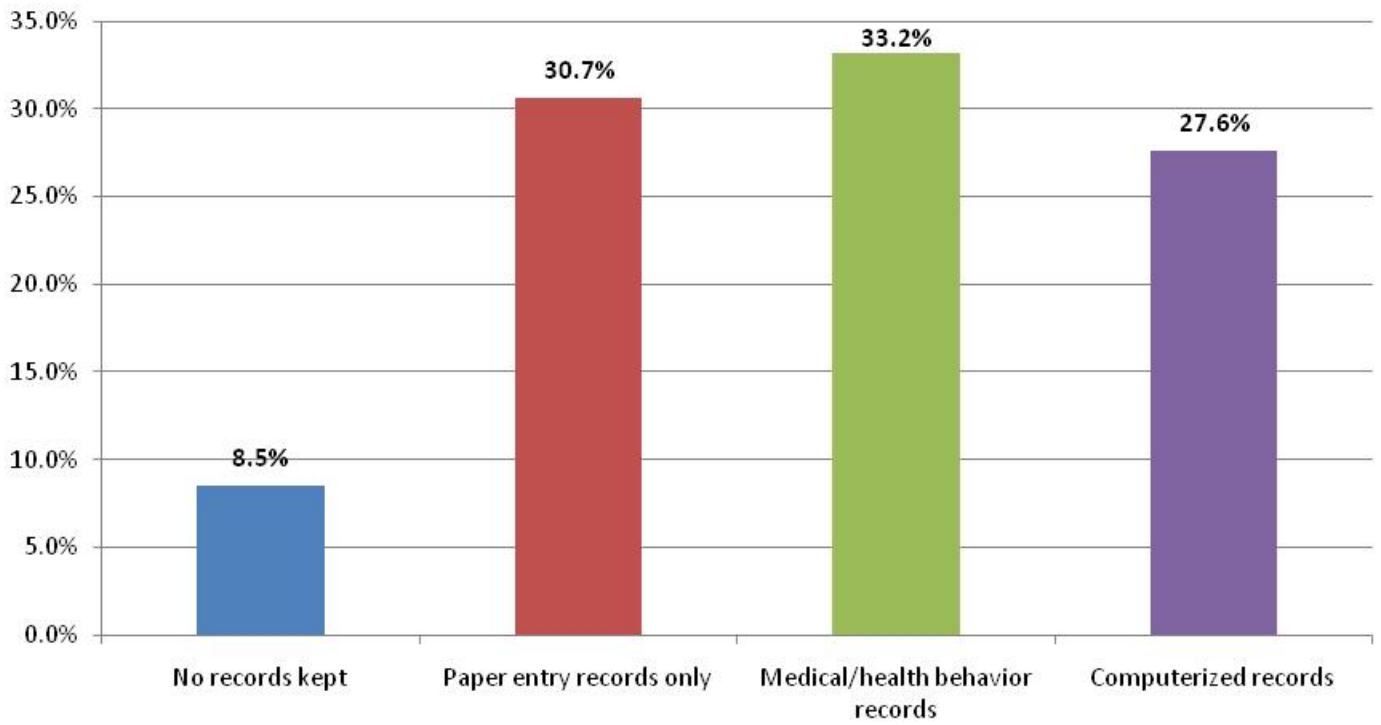




**Questions on Structure (record keeping etc. questions which follow were not included in the NPRRP study.)**

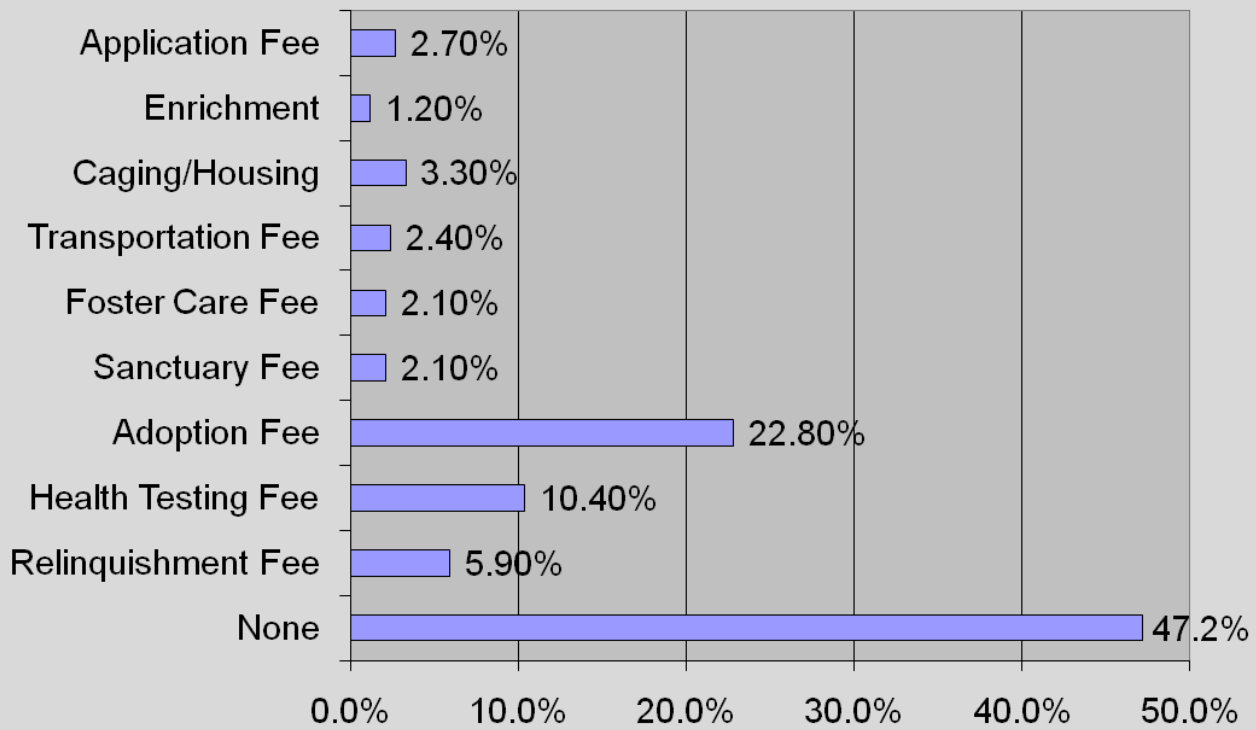
**27. How do you keep records of relinquished birds in your facility?**

How do you keep records of relinquished birds in your facility?  
Total Response Count: 398

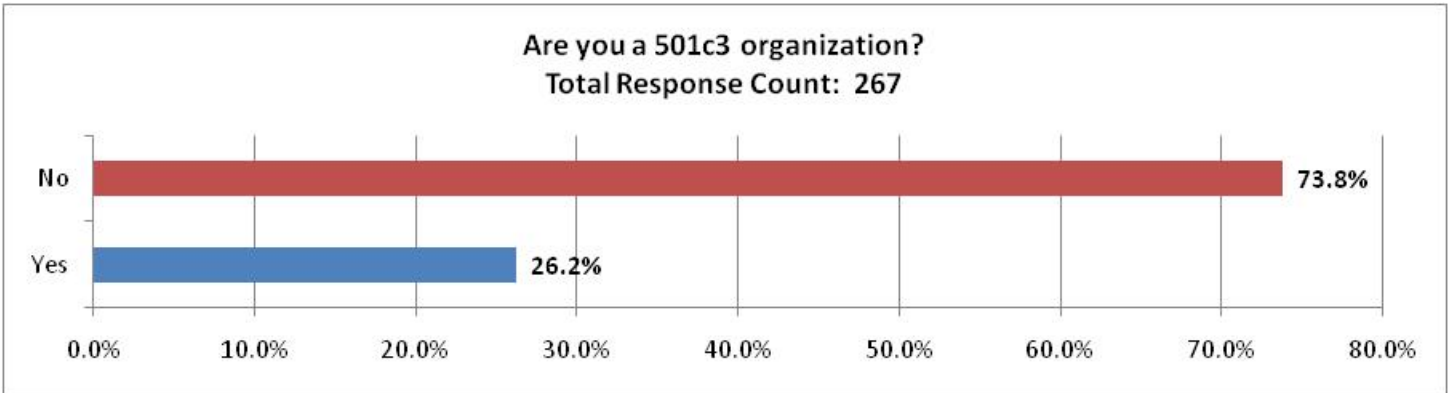
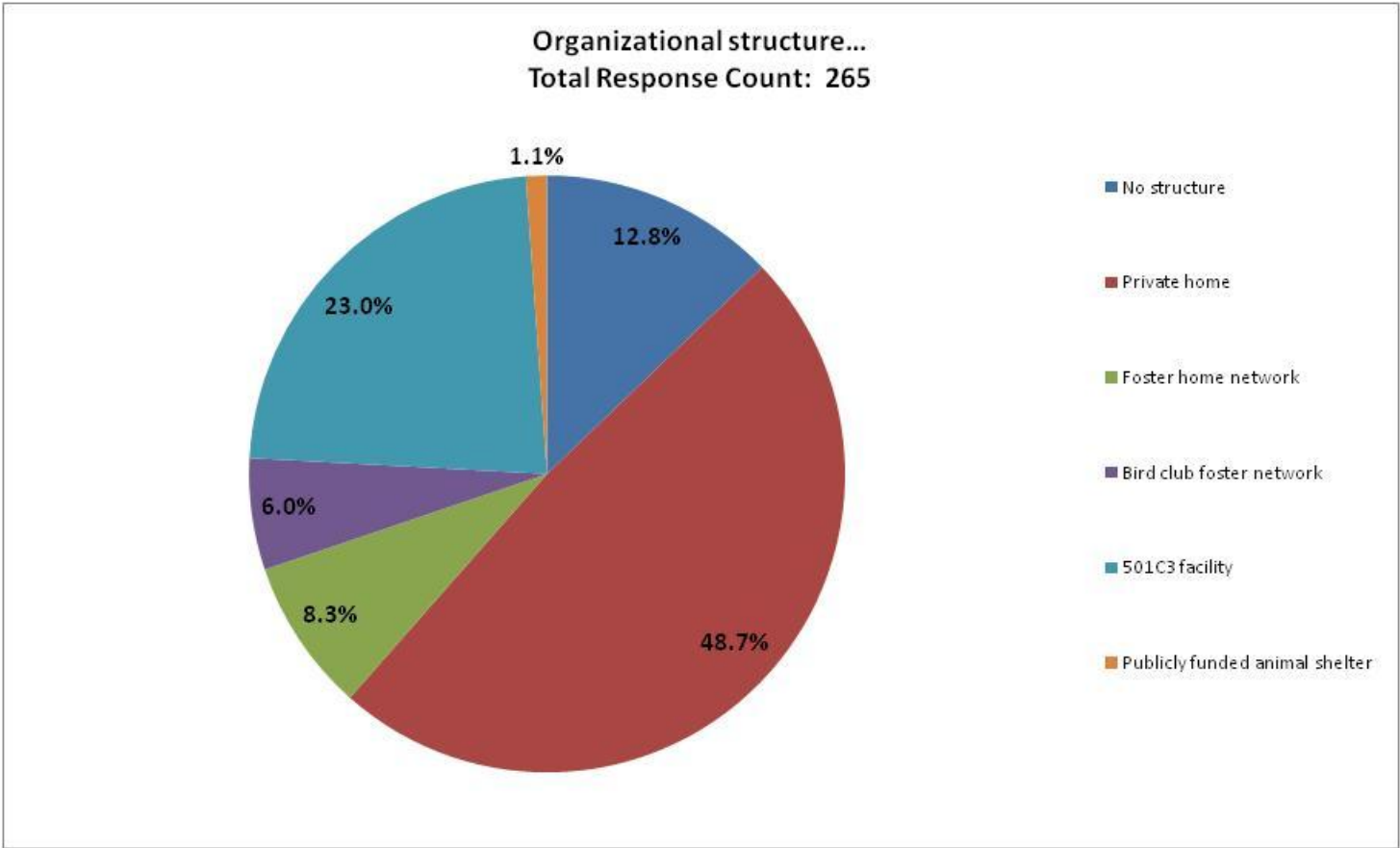


28. What fees do you require for relinquishment /adoption?

**What fees do you require for relinquishment/adoption?  
Response count-337.**

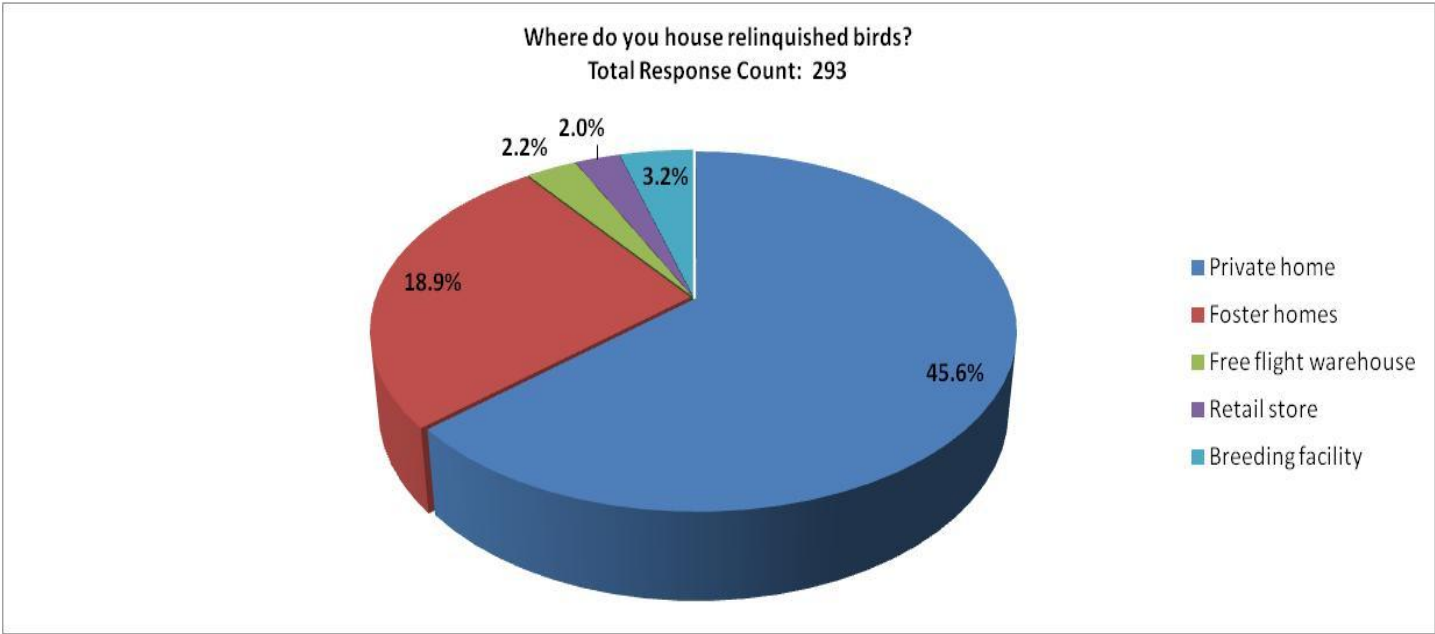


**29. Organizational structure....**

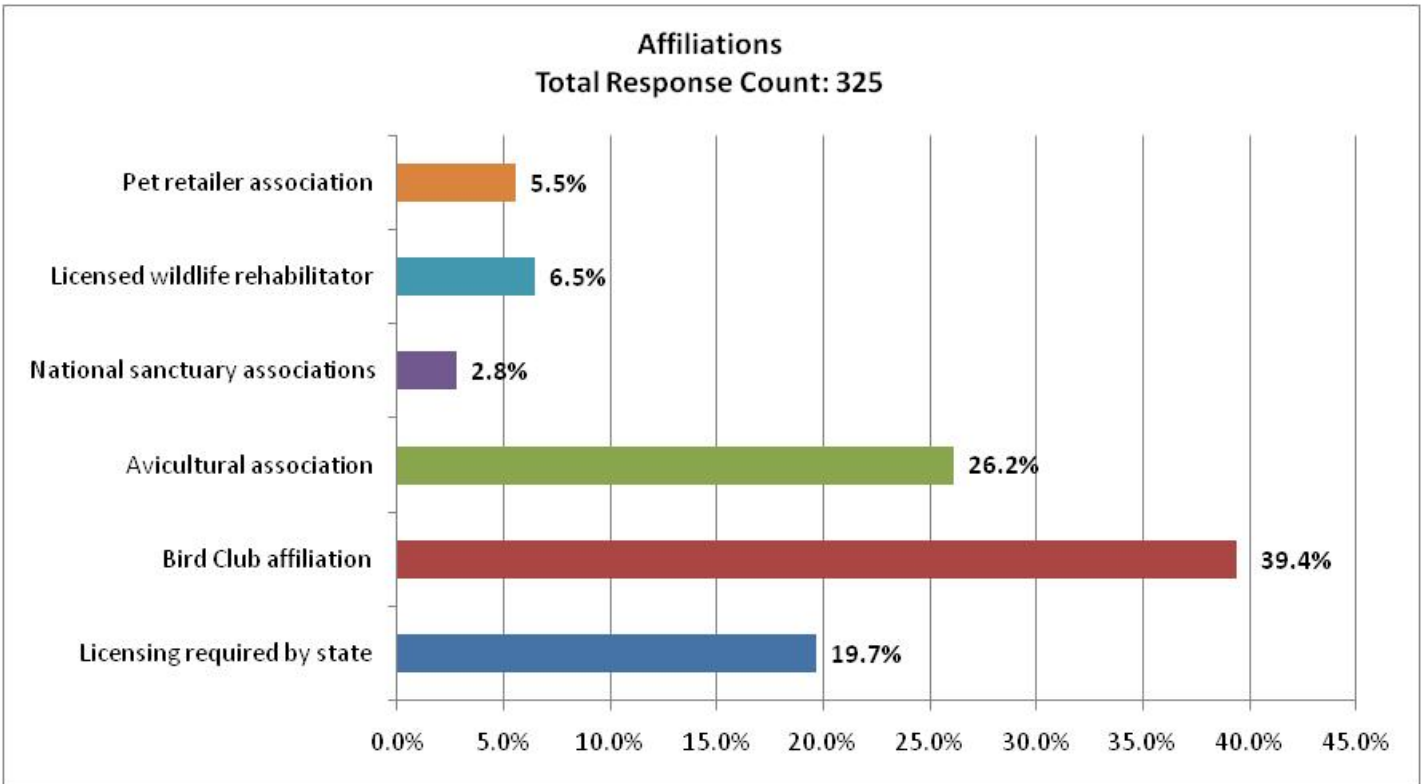


26% (61) of 267 respondents (3.6% of total) were 501C3 tax exempt organizations in the KPRS survey, this question was not asked in the NPRRP. (Indicating that this group was relatively small)

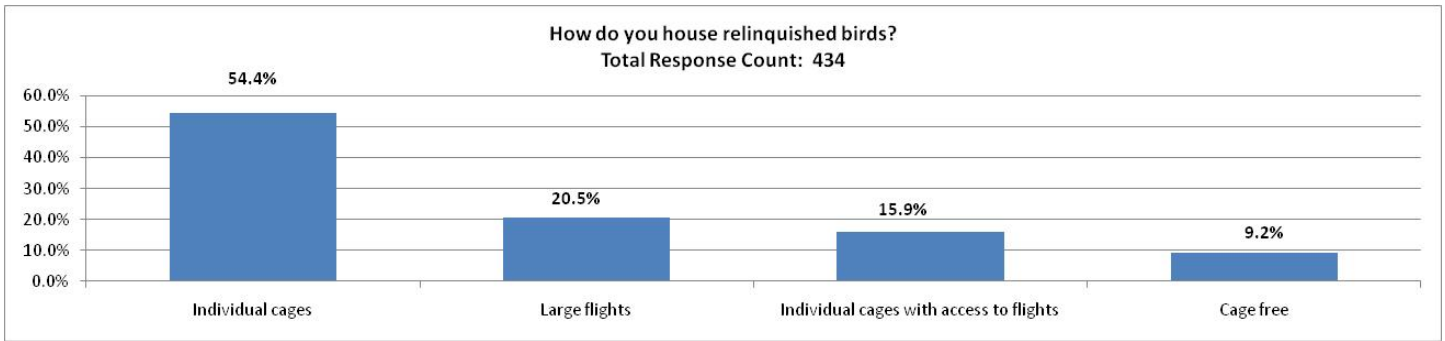
**30. Where do you house relinquished birds?**



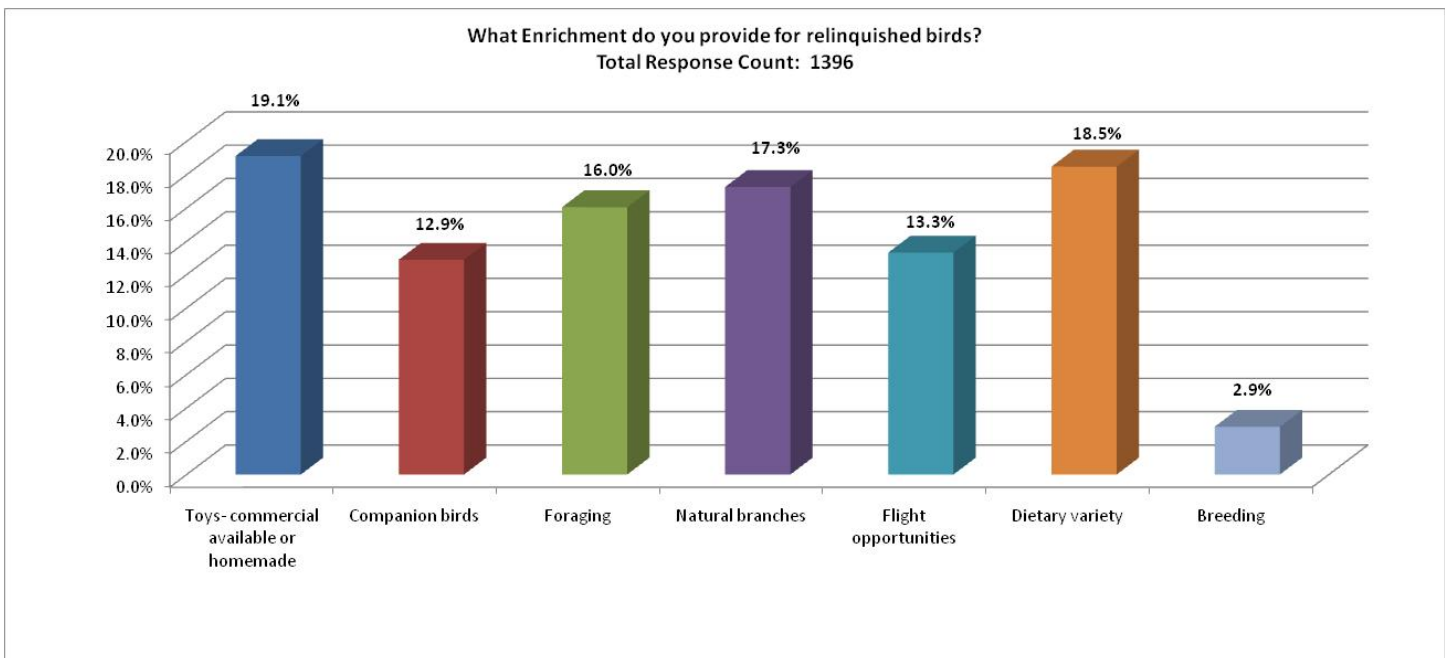
**31. Affiliations**



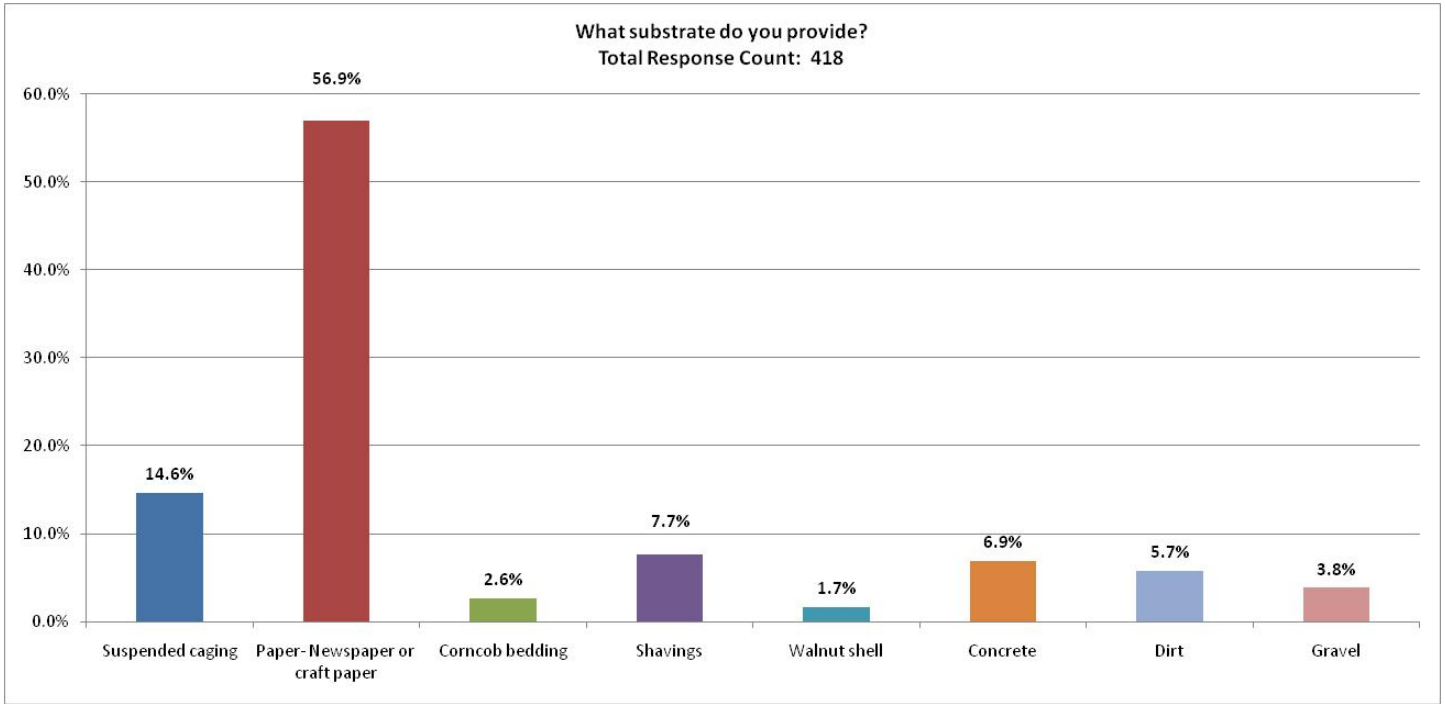
**32. How do you house relinquished birds? (Select all that apply)**



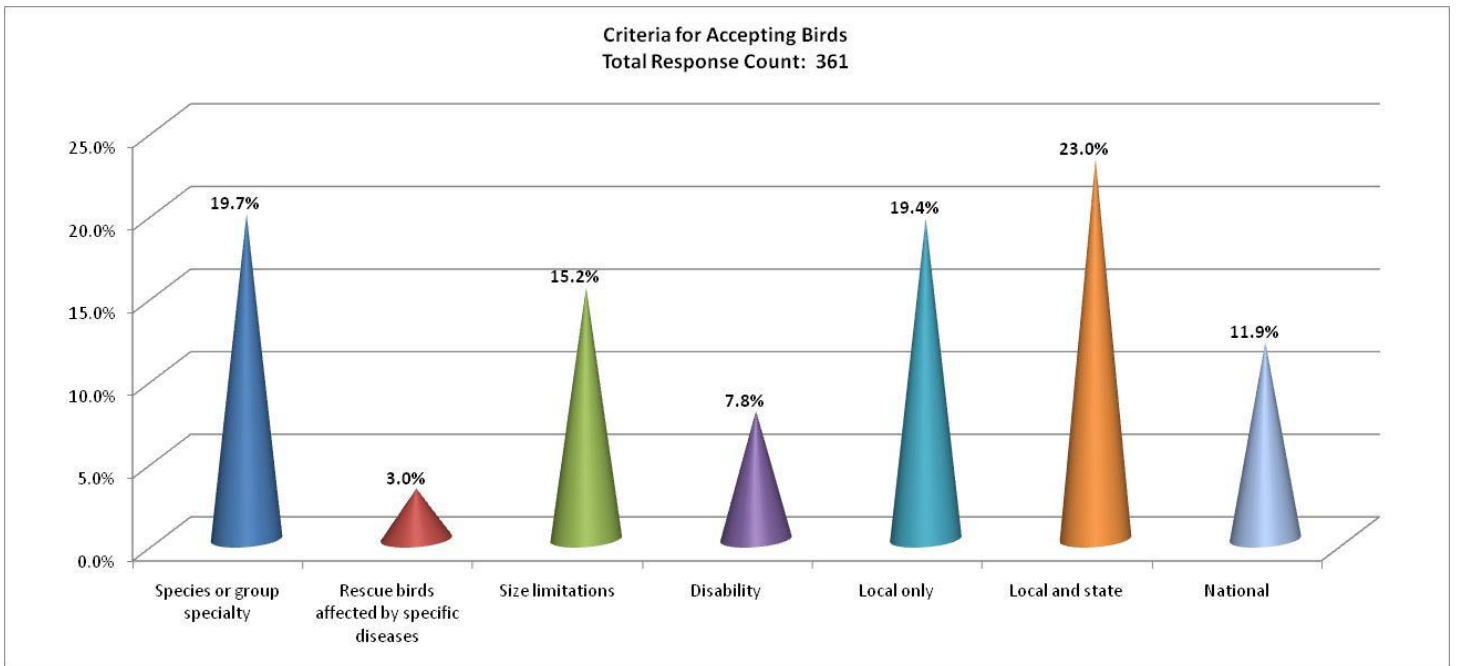
**33. What Enrichment do you provide for relinquished birds? (Select all that apply)**



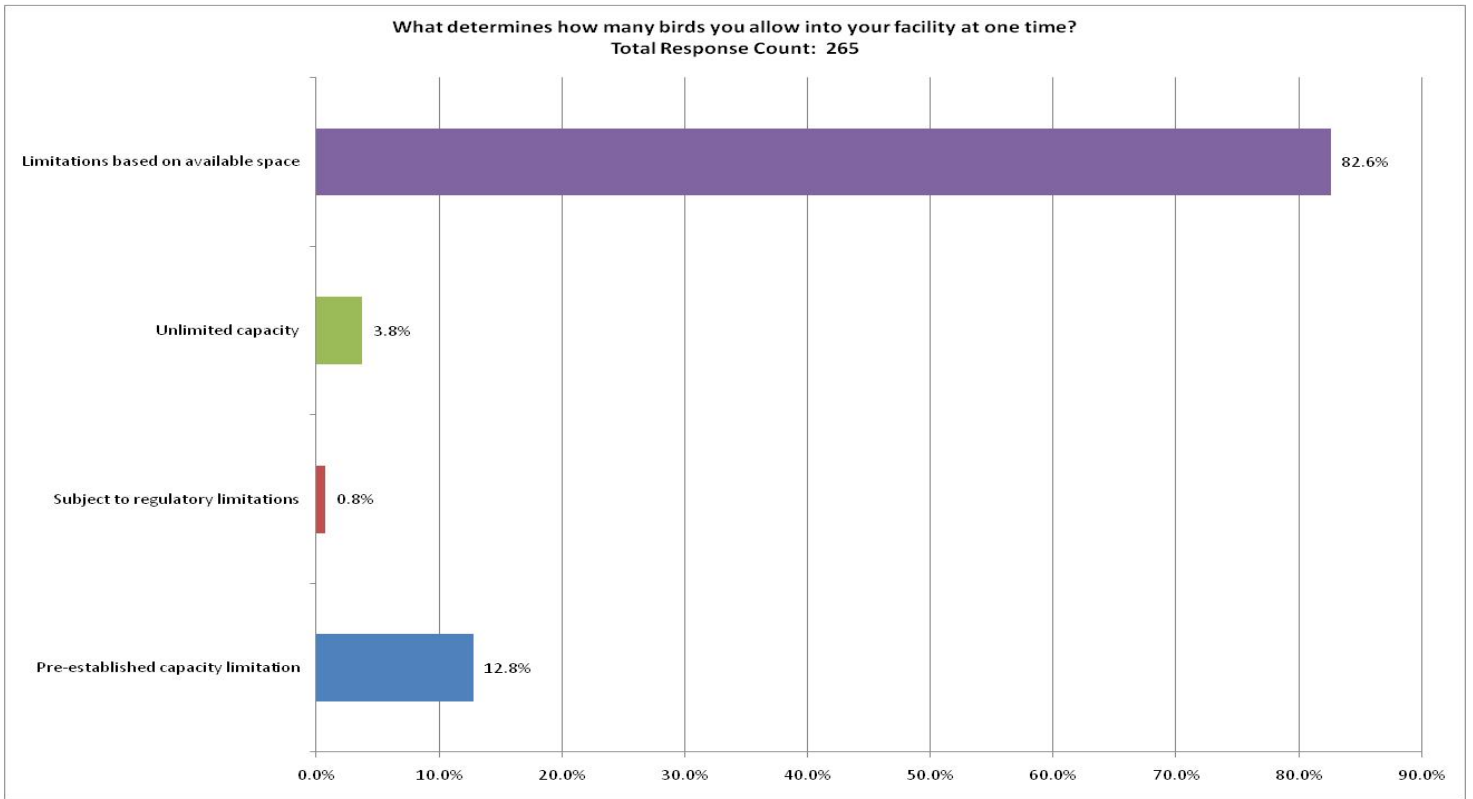
**34. What substrate do you provide (Select all that apply)**



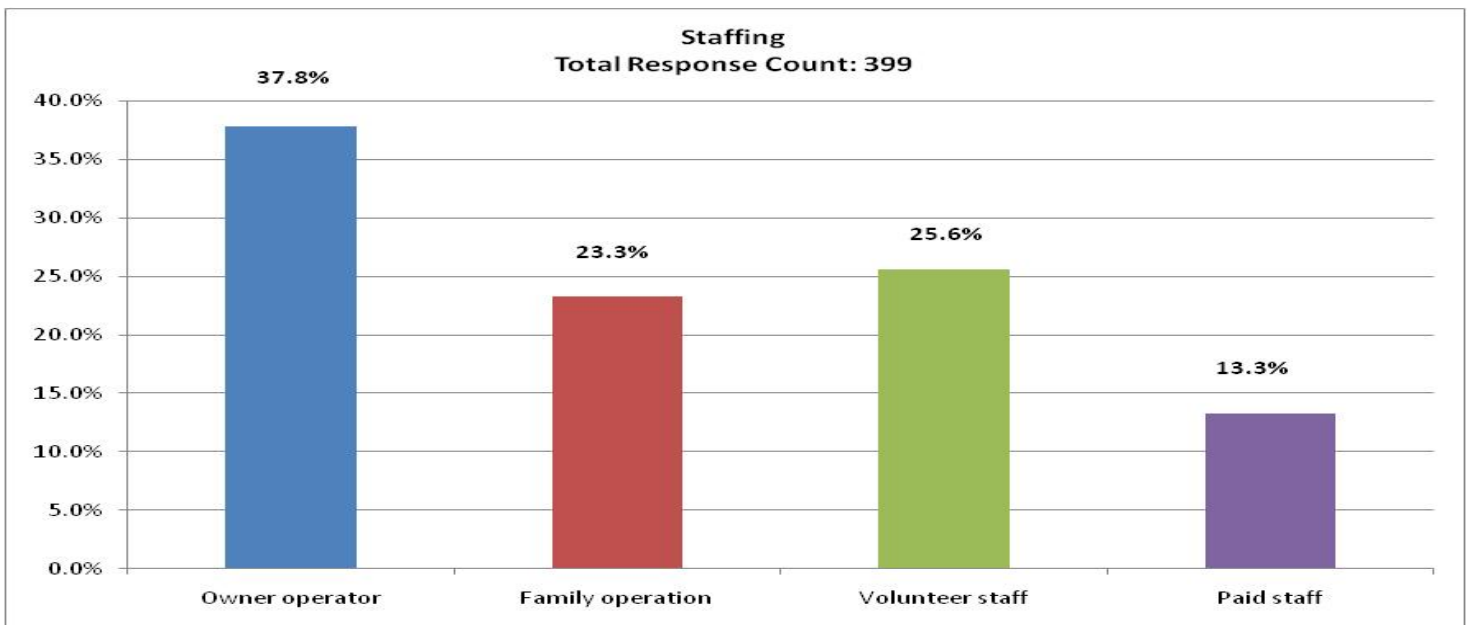
**35. Criteria for accepting birds**



**36. What determines how many birds you allow into your facility at one time?**

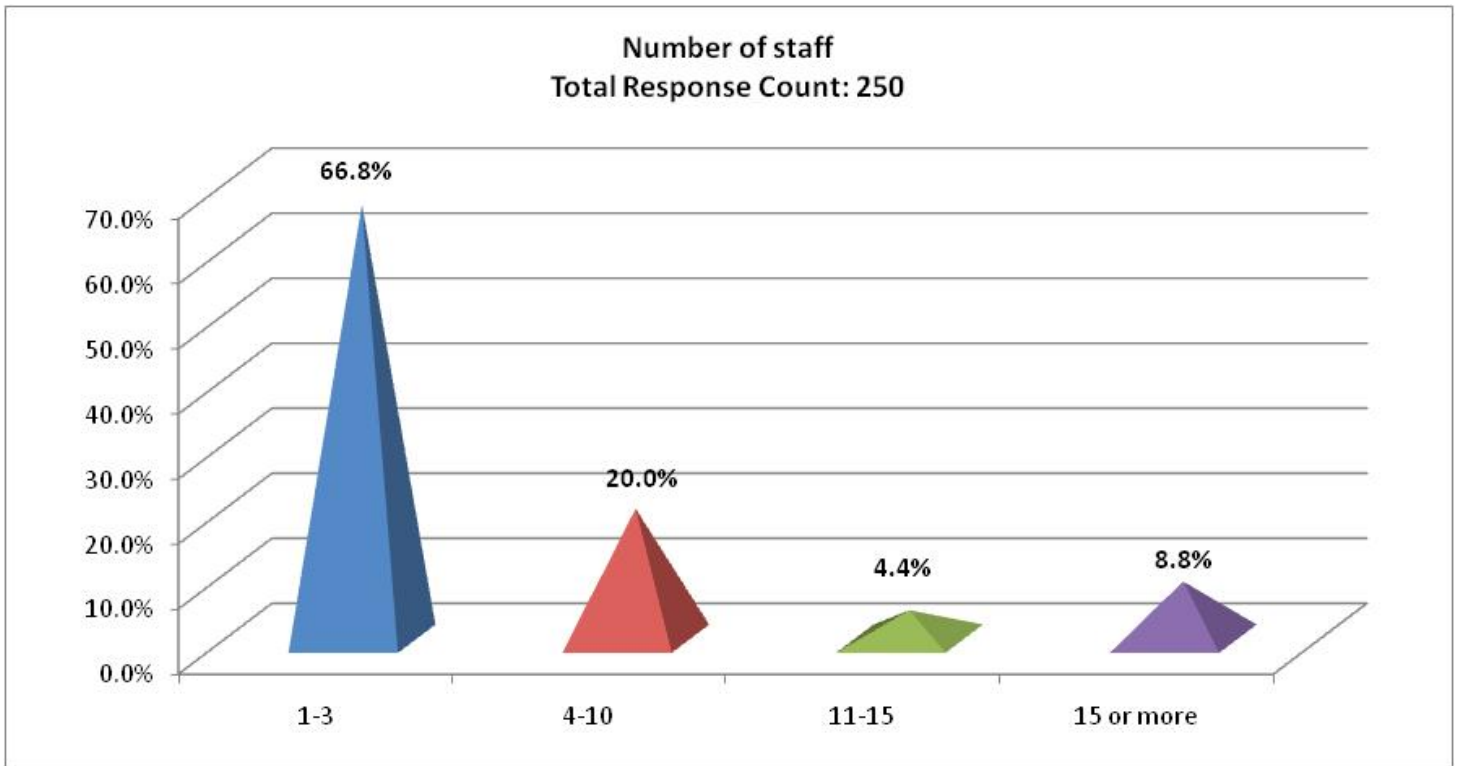


**37. Staffing - mark all that apply**

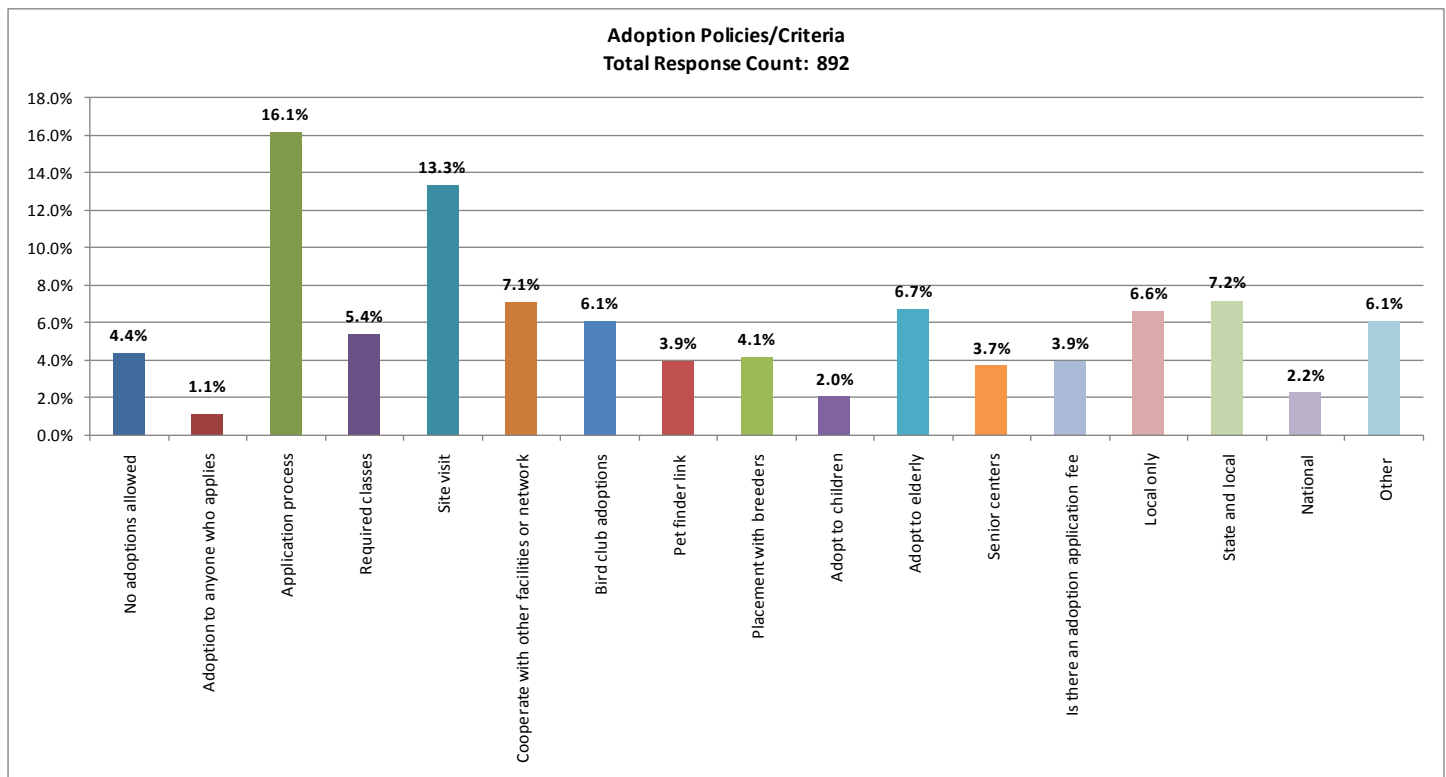


**38. Number of staff**





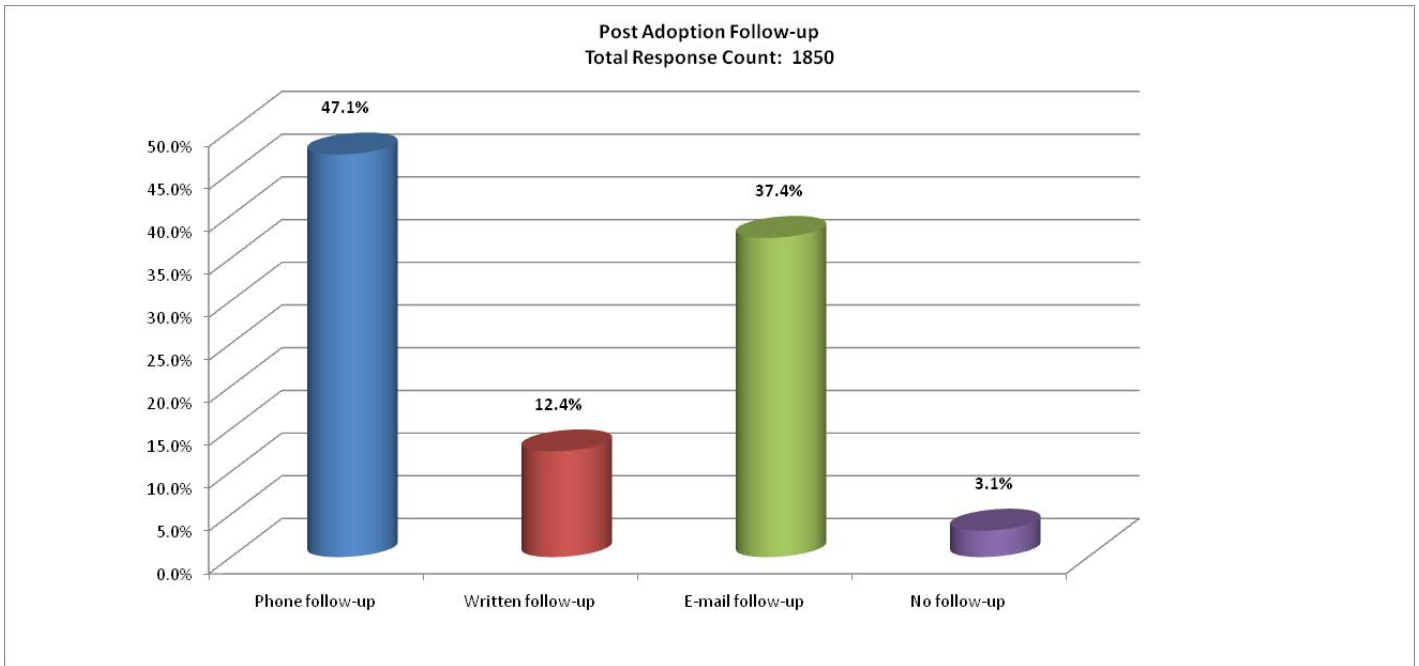
**39. Adoption policies/criteria - mark all that apply**



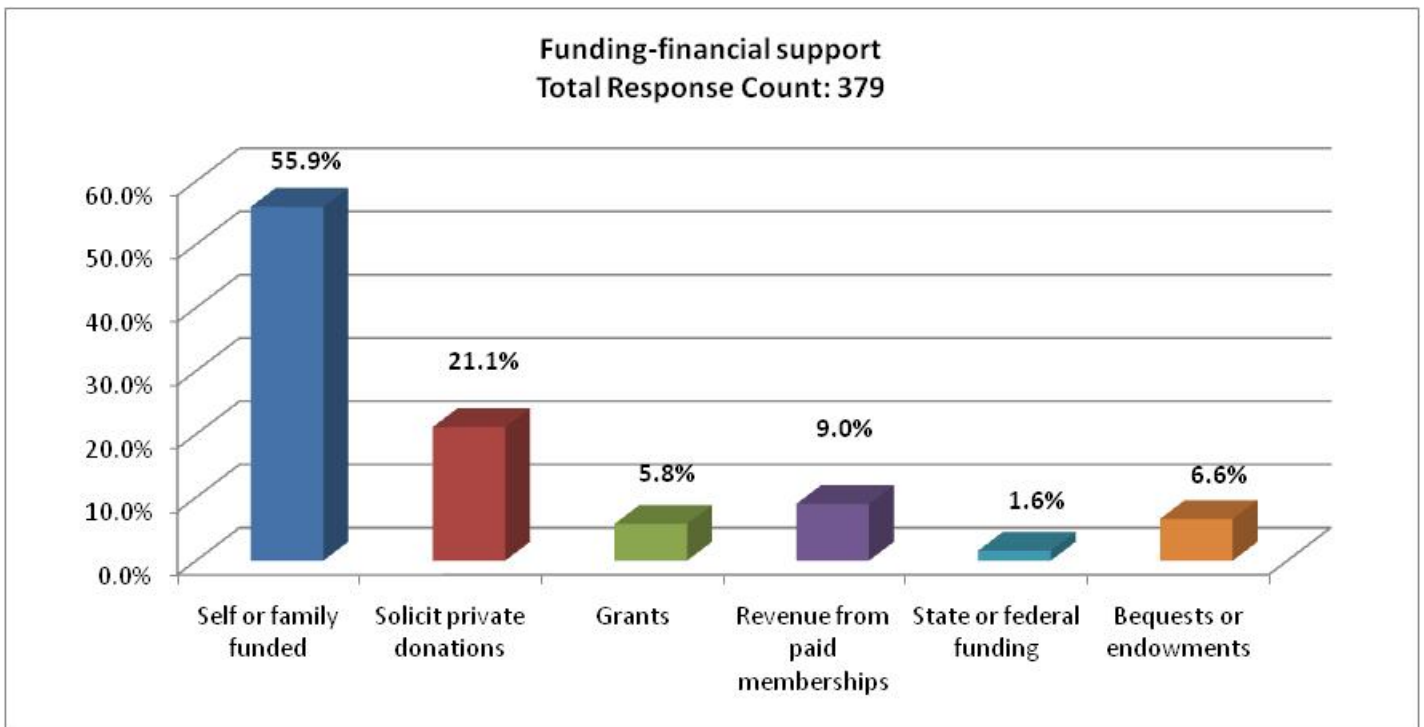
Adoption policies/criteria listed in following order - No adoptions allowed, Adoption to anyone who applies, Application process, Required classes, Site visit, Cooperate with other facilities or network, bird club adoptions, pet finder link, Placement with

breeders, Adopt to children, Adopt to elderly, Senior centers, Is there an adoption application fee, Local only, State and local, National, Other.

#### 40. Post adoption follow-up

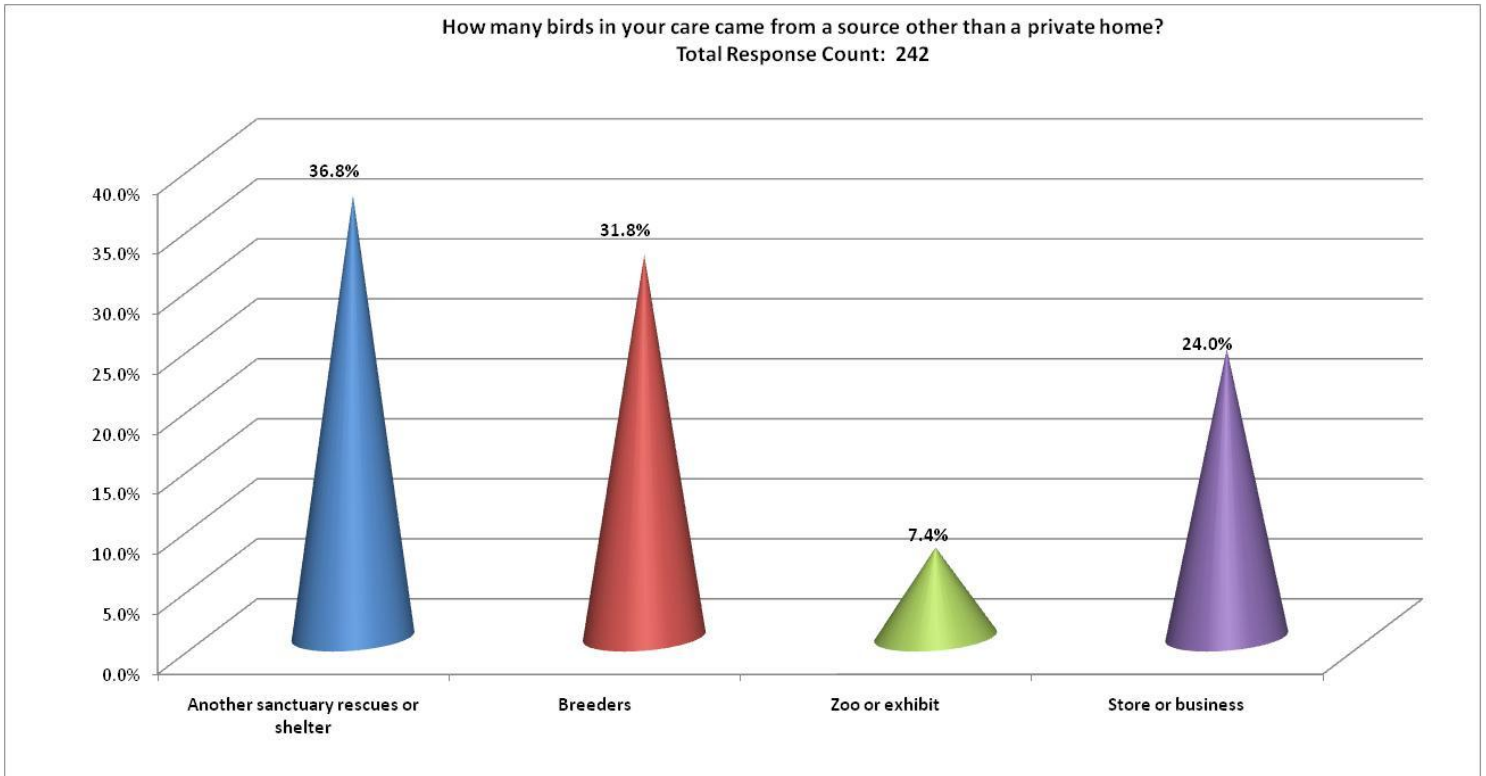


#### 41. Funding-financial support (Mark all that apply)

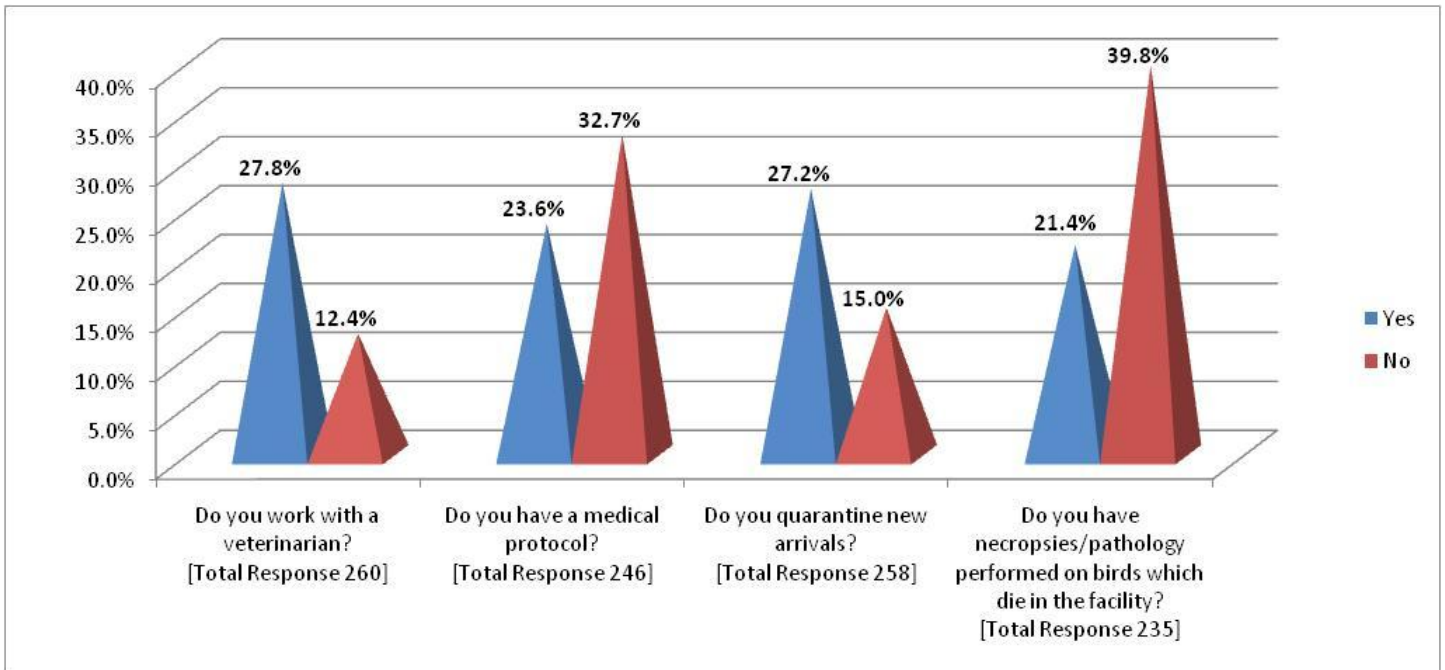


The majority of respondents were small owner operated or family operated facilities but only 23% of respondents answered this question. Only 13% of the 399 responses (3.1% of total) had paid staff. Most organizations with staff (167 of 250 respondents) had only 1-3 staff. 33 respondents (1.9%) had 10 or more staff.

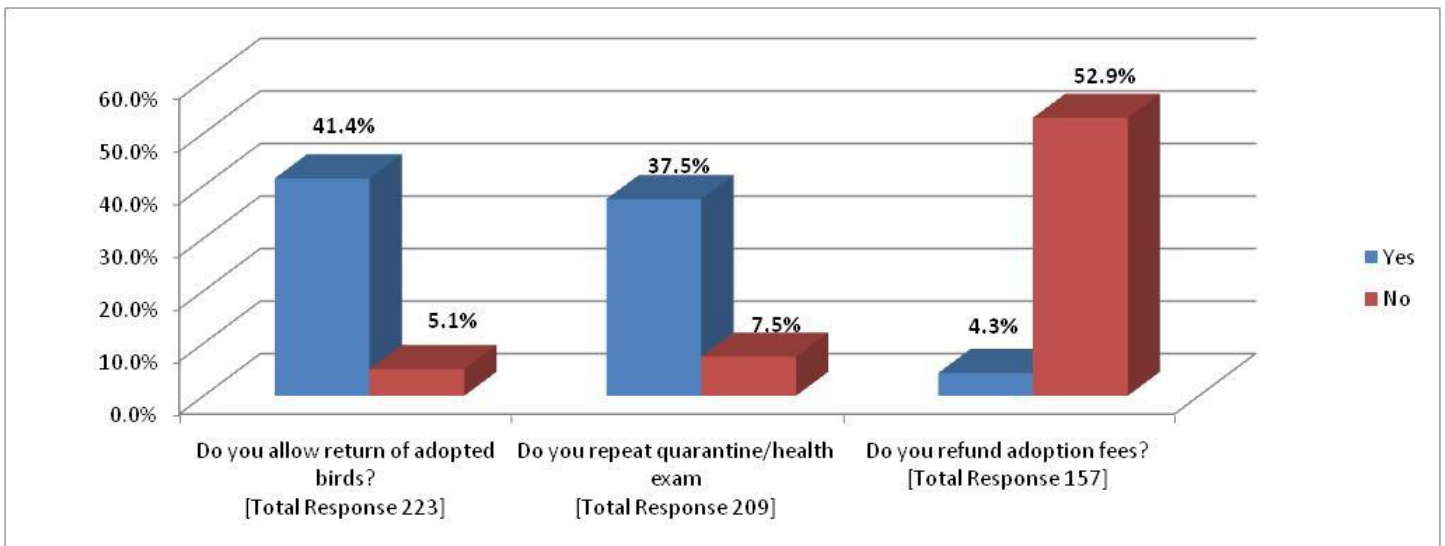
**42. How many birds in your care came from a source other than a private home?**



**43. Health care ... (Yes or no)**



#### 44. Return policies... (Yes or no)



## Conclusion

Survey-based research projects are a frequently used tool for collecting data on companion animal population dynamics. Such projects can shed light on issues of importance regarding issues relating to pet ownership and the human animal bond. Conservative interpretation of these data is essential as they are based only upon the respondents who are self selected via internet participation. Care should be taken to avoid extrapolation beyond the boundaries of this survey. Limitations of this survey were locating those organizations and individuals who are involved in care of relinquished parrots. A more expansive response could yield significantly different results.

As with the NPRRP the total population of parrots in the United States, much less total numbers of relinquished parrots cannot be precisely determined using an internet survey. We attempted in this study to cast a wide net and reach out to large numbers of people involved in all aspects of parrot relinquishment.

At a glance it would appear that the numbers of relinquished parrots has declined significantly since the NPRRP. This however may reflect a difference in sampling as their primary focus was parrot welfare and sanctuary organizations which may in fact hold larger numbers of parrots either in permanent sanctuary or in various stages of preparation for relinquishment. However it is apparent from both the KAFPRS and the NPRRP that the vast majority of relinquished parrots are moving through less organized and smaller facilities which handle relatively low numbers of parrots.

According to responses to the survey - Parrot relinquishment in the United States is predominantly done by individuals and families. Similarly, the recipients of a majority of relinquishments appear to be individuals or small organizations. And it is also very clear from conversations with the public independent of this study that many transfers take place between individuals, family members and friends without involvement of a third party, or relinquishment facility.

A low percentage of respondents answered questions regarding structure of their organizations. (Typically 250 to 270 – or approximately 16%). It might be assumed that these questions were answered predominately by the larger organizations with more formal structure. However these questions did shed light on the diversity of organizations involved in relinquishment.

A key issue in the debate over parrot ownership and relinquishment is the ongoing question of parrot overpopulation. Many welfare and sanctuary organizations call for an end to breeding parrots, concluding that the rate of production is outpacing the number of available homes. If the reduction in numbers of parrots available for adoption as reflected by the 2 surveys is in fact a true reflection of the current situation, it would certainly indicate that the numbers of birds being relinquished and rehomed are declining. We might assume therefore that current breeding is not excessive.

As in the NPRRP a brief summary of the causes for parrot relinquishment may shed light on ways to reduce the impact of this problem. For this exercise we will again divide the causes of relinquishment into 3 broad categories - Behavior factors, Health and personal factors and compatibility factors. These 17 reasons were discussed in the NPRRP as receiving at least 1% of responses.

**Behavioral factors**

Biting/Aggression  
Noisiness  
Feather destructive behavior  
Difficult to train

**Health and personal factors**

Moving  
Having a baby  
Physically unable to care for  
Medical issues, allergies  
Allergies  
Retirement  
Marriage/Divorce  
Death

**Compatibility factors**

Not enough time  
Incompatibility with family members  
Not enough space  
incompatible with other parrots  
Cost of care  
Best Interest of bird  
Messiness  
Boredom, tired of caring for pet

Reasons cited for relinquishment of parrots

	<b>NPRRP</b>	<b>KAFPRS</b>
Behavioral factors	43%	21.6 %
Health and personal factors	47%	33.4 %
Compatibility factors	51%	40 %

total more than 100% because of  
multiple answers

See below

Results in the KAFPRS survey were very similar reflecting combined behavioral and compatibility issues as outweighing personal/health issues for relinquishment. These are areas where intervention may result in resolution of the problem.

Reason Given for relinquishment of parrot	NPRRP		KAFPRS		Behavior	Personal	Compatibility
	N	%	N	%			
Not Enough Time	1267	31	1278	10.7			10.7
Biting/aggression	755	19	1093	9.1	9.1		
Noisiness	621	15	1078	9	9		
Best interest of the bird			836	7			7
Moving	469	12	738	6.2		6.2	
Not compatible with family members	572	14	633	5.3			5.3
Messiness**			556	4.7			4.7
Boredom-tired of caring for pet**			537	4.5			4.5
Feather destructive behavior	240	6	416	3.5	3.5		
Cost of care and upkeep	174	4	407	3.4	21.6	3.4	
Having a baby	335	8	370	3.1		3.1	
Illness or medical problems in family	255	6	372	3.1		3.1	
Unknown	338	8	342	2.9		*	
Marriage/Divorce	158	4	351	2.9		2.9	
Bird does not meet expectations/talking etc**			344	2.9			2.9
Physically unable to care for parrot	319	8	339	2.8		2.8	
Death in family	146	4	336	2.8		2.8	
Someone in home allergic to parrot	180	4	313	2.6		2.6	
Bird health issues, veterinary costs**			293	2.5		2.5	
Other reasons	413	10	255	2.1		*	
Not enough space	164	4	219	1.8		1.8	
Difficult to train	103	3	202	1.7			1.7
Not compatible with other parrots in home	61	2	192	1.6			1.6
Destruction of property**			192	1.6			1.6
Retirement	59	1	151	1.3		1.3	
Medical doctors orders**			103	0.9		0.9	
Totals	6629	163*	11946	100	21.60%	33.40%	40%

\* more than one reason stated

\*\* reason not included in NPRRP

\* Not included in totals

Our focus as we move on and try to apply what we have learned is to examine those issues where we might, through education and behavior modification, enhance the human-animal bond or correct behavioral issues which are causing dissolution of that bond. Most of these aspects might be resolved with education of the owner and/or positive reinforcement behavior modification for the bird, which also requires education of the owner.

The #1 reason for relinquishment, "Not enough time" may be valid in our society and these economic times, where people are over extended and distracted by many other possibilities. However it is probably more of a reflection of dissatisfaction with the relationship, unfulfilled expectations, or boredom with the parrot because of the inability of the owner to communicate to the parrot their wants and needs. Unfulfilled needs of the parrot as well result in misbehavior which further weakens the bond. Many incompatibility issues, as well as behavioral issues such as aggression, nosiness and to some extent feather destructive behavior, may be at least partially if not completely resolved by training and enrichment.

Probably the more difficult aspect of solving these problems is finding a way to reach the parrot owner before they have arrived at the decision to relinquish, so that intervention, education and training can occur.

Another important but difficult group to reach is the prospective parrot owner, shopping for their first bird. Education of this group so that they choose an appropriate bird for their family and go into the relationship with reasonable expectations might prevent many relinquishments. While educational material is available on the Kaytee website as well as many other internet resources, utilization of those resources may not be adequate. Many purchases are impulse buys and prospective owners may not take time to research the behavioral aspects and needs of a species prior to purchase.

Encouraging the sources of parrots: pet stores, breeders, etc to properly inform and educate prospective buyers is a critical component of creating a strong and durable bond. Such programs may be extremely beneficial in getting birds off to a good start in their new home with a family which is educated, and understands how to mold the behavior of their parrot so that they can not only peacefully co-exist, but also experience the joys of owning a well behaved, happy parrot.

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