

Parrotkeeping—How Do I Raise My Birds?

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Part 4 of 5 — Selling Birds

Beginning breeders and pet owners ask me, *“Don’t you get attached to the youngsters? How can you sell them?”* The answers are, *“Yes, and it’s often not easy.”*

Over time, I have learned to detach somewhat, and I try to ensure that the birds I raise are going to a good home. Even then, there are individual birds that particularly tug at my heartstrings as they go out the door. And sometimes, while driving to the airport to ship one across the country, I have to remind myself that I cannot keep them all. However, I have learned how to relinquish control and trust that others will love the birds as I do—I remind myself that I am sending little feathered ambassadors so that others can enjoy their company.

Business Practices

Ethics and reputation—Even if I have a small aviary and I sell birds for money, I am engaging in a seller-buyer activity, regardless of whether it’s a hobby or a true IRS-recognized “business.” To maintain the reputation of an aviary, interactions with customers must be conducted with candor and honesty, including discussing the pros and cons of birdkeeping in general and the species of interest, in particular. I try to determine why a buyer wants a bird, why they are interested in a particular species, what their expectations and hopes are for the bird insofar as their relationship with it, and that they realize and accept that this is a long-term commitment.

Making money raising birds—There is nothing wrong with “making money” raising animals! Animal enterprise activities are as old as our civilization. Hobby breeding is often not financially rewarding, although it can be (except that usually counting the hours I spend and dividing into the “profit,” I often find that I am making below minimum wage per hour). For me, I consider the welfare of the birds first and profit second, and that perspective assures that I will do what I can for the welfare of my birds. I am doing what I love to do, and more than “breaking even” is a bonus for me.

Screening buyers—I have talked people out of buying one of my birds because it either wasn’t the species for them or I felt the environment wasn’t optimal. I have also refused to sell to someone who had an obviously dangerous situation for birds about which they seemed unconcerned (e.g., pet ferrets that had the run of the house). However, absent a good reason, I don’t feel I can judge someone unfit who is passionate about wanting one of my birds. For example, I do not say that a child or teenager shouldn’t have a bird (as some say). It depends on the child and, more importantly, whether there is adult support and approval for the new pet bird. I ask the parents if they are willing to be responsible for the bird if the child cannot be. In the case of a teenager who will eventually leave home, I ask if the parent also wants the bird and is willing to assume the total responsibility for the bird if the young adult cannot or will not. I also try to determine if there is anyone in the family situation who is

Sun Conures



really against getting a bird, because an unfriendly human “flock member” can make a bird’s life miserable in many small ways.

Purchase contract—I use a purchase contract developed from others I’ve read, including one from an aviculturist who is also an attorney. This contract protects both buyer and seller and attempts to be fair to both. I also have a clause in it that the buyer is to notify me if they are giving up the bird and give me right of first refusal for re-homing of the bird. For example, although I am not contractually obligated to “buy back” a bird, I have done so, for the good of the bird. No contract is better than the parties to it, however, and if disputes arise, one must be reasonable in resolution of issues. In addition, the good of the bird must be kept in mind at all times.

After-the-sale service—I am available to my buyers (and to others) for questions and concerns. I help whenever I can in regards to behavioral issues, breeding, aviary management, etc. When I don’t know the answers, I refer to other breeders, behaviorists, or avian veterinarians. I have occasionally bought a bird back a few months after the sale, because either it wasn’t working out or the person’s circumstances had changed dramatically. I have also helped people place a bird (my bird or another’s) in a new home when they couldn’t keep it, although I try to counsel the person to keep the bird, if possible. My objective is the best home for the bird, and I attempt to make that happen.

Networking and Communications

The main reasons I write articles are to share with others what I have experienced with the species I raise and to help others understand their birds, which benefits both. Everyone has some different experiences, but if I can help a few people and their birds to have better relationships and improve the chances for birds to have healthy, well-balanced lives, I will consider myself successful!

I belong to more than 30 bird email lists, including specialty lists for my species, as well as those concerned with general birdkeeping, service organizations, etc.

Other resources for hobby breeders and pet owners include the following:

- Local bird clubs, which are often good ways to network, but regarding which you should be mindful of the varying quality and consistency of educational information.
- National organizations, both general and specialty, which can offer excellent resources, including very experienced aviculturists and mentoring opportunities.
- National animal interest organizations, which can help keep you up-to-date on the latest animal-related legislation being considered, as can state-wide “pet-law” lists.

Pacific Parrotlets



Pyrrhura Conures

Roseifrons Adult

(compliments of Richard Cusick)



Crimson Bellied Adults



- Local avian placement/rescue groups, which are good ways to support “giving back” to the community by helping re-home birds that have been displaced.

This type of networking—whether it’s in consultation with other breeders or answering questions from new breeders or pet owners—is a daily, time-consuming effort, but I believe it is important, not only from a marketing standpoint, but also from the standpoint of learning from fellow breeders and helping to educate new bird owners.

Web site—In order to “grow” even a hobby, a user-friendly web site with information and pictures is important, in my opinion. I have found that paying a professional to set up the initial site, and then being able to maintain it myself, is the most time- and cost-effective method. This also allows potential customers within driving distance, as well as out-of-state, to be a few computer key clicks away from a view of your birds and aviary.

Email communications—It is important to be clear and nonconfrontational or judgmental in dealing with others in emails. Even if you are just joking or feel passionate about a topic, the way you come across can be misunderstood, as facial expressions and voice inflections don’t come with an email! If you feel emotionally upset, it’s a good idea to save a draft response, walk away for an hour or more, come back and re-read, and usually tone down before sending the response. That will often prevent “burning bridges” that you might regret later! Communicating clearly with prospective buyers, including answering their questions as completely as possible, is critical to growing your business and getting referrals. This is particularly important if you sell, as I do, to buyers in other states.

Referrals—Over time, a good breeder will develop a reputation which will lead to referrals for future babies. This is much better, in my opinion, than having to constantly advertise birds in various classifieds, whether locally or on-line. In a “good” year, such advertising may also be necessary, but I personally do NOT advertise in local newspapers.

A Few Q&A’s about FCA Avicultural Practices

Do you provide a health certificate with chicks? Unless a buyer requests and is willing to pay for a veterinary health certificate on the chick, I do not provide one, as it is at best only a superficial exam. To determine the true status of the health, it would be necessary to run blood panels and cultures, which can run from \$200 up, a cost that most buyers are not willing to add to the cost of their bird at the seller’s end. If they want those tests, they would most likely have them done by their own avian veterinarian.



Do you ship birds? Is it safe? I have shipped birds via airlines from coast to coast. Other than an occasional delay, I have not had a serious problem shipping (using major airlines set up to carry pets). Airlines that are experienced in carrying birds have procedures in place if there are mistakes in plane changes or unexpected layovers.

There are federal regulations regarding shipping animals via airlines, and airlines must follow these. The major airlines have programs for shipping, e.g., Continental’s Pet Safe Program and Delta’s Pets First Program. You

Indian Ringnecks



should be able to ask about regulations via the “800” number main desks, but my experience has been that particularly in local cargo offices that ship animals, the clerks may not be 100% up on what is and is not required for *birds*. For example, while dogs and cats require health certificates to ship, typically, birds do not.

It is YOUR responsibility (as the shipper) to know what is required, so that you don't get to the airport and be turned away on a technicality that you could have prevented or that is incorrect information. In addition, various airlines may have specific requirements for their airline. For example, Delta will typically not ship birds in the summertime when the temperature at any airport on that flight's route is 85 degrees or above; however, Continental will ship just about any time because they have climate-control on all flights and cargo facilities that take animals.

[Note: It is against U.S. Postal Service regulations to ship hookbills, and one risks confiscation by USFWS if that is attempted!]

Three national organizations to consider joining:

American Federation of Aviculture (AFA): <http://www.afabirds.org>

Avicultural Society of America (ASA): <http://www.asabirds.org/>

National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA): <http://www.naiaonline.org/> and
<http://www.naiatrust.org>

Upcoming discussion topic

Part 5 – Legislation and References