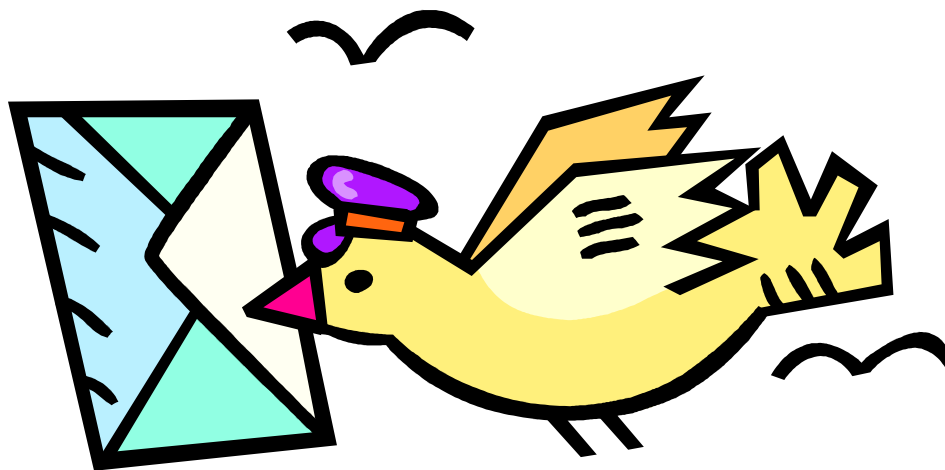


JUNE OAS NEWSLETTER



BRING YOUR BIRDS

**OUR TOPIC WILL BE
NEW WORLD PARROTS**

NEXT MEETING: JUNE 28, 2009 The OAS meeting begins with a social time and set up time at **1:30 pm, the fourth Sunday of each month.** The **business portion of the meeting begins at 2p.m..** Our meetings are held in the Hardesty South Regional Library which is located off memorial behind the car dealership at 8316 East 93rd Street

The Oklahoma Avicultural Society is a proud member of the American Federation of Aviculture

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Club Objectives

- A. To promote quality of birds along sound avicultural lines.
- B. To monitor legislative activity that might threaten, endanger, or otherwise affect the Avicultural community.
- C. To obtain and distribute information by educational speakers, exhibits, and general fellowship necessary to complement the keeping, raising and breeding of caged birds.
- D. To support and assist other organizations with similar goals or interests, whether state, national or international.

Submissions

All members of OAS may submit materials or ideas for this newsletter. Volunteers, writers, reporters and people with editorial ideas are encouraged to participate. Original material or reprinted articles will be accepted, but must have copyrighted release or permission to reprint, including author or contact person, with submission. All submissions must be received by the editor by the 10th of the month of publication.

Submit Newsletter Information To:

Alena Jo Gleason, Editor – djglee@totalcsi.com Phone: 918-275-4605

Mail to: Oklahoma Avicultural Society

P.O. Box 580155, Tulsa, OK 74158-0155

All ad rates are per issue and payable in advance. Ads must be copy ready on white stock, and turned in to the editor by the 10th of the month.

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Individual - \$20.00/year * Student - \$15.00 * Couple - \$30.00/year * Lifetime - \$250

Meetings begin at 1:30 p.m. on the **FOURTH** Sunday of every month (**except December and May**) at the Hardesty South Regional Library, 8316 East 93rd Street, Tulsa. Any meeting changes will be published in the newsletter and online on the Forum pages.

OAS OFFICERS – 2007

President	Carol Spilman	(918) 299-9578	MsBrattyBritches@aol.com
1 st V. P.	Alena Jo Gleason	(918) 275-4605	djglee@totalcsi.com
2 nd V.P.	Mattie Sue Athan	(918) 344-4492	msathan@yahoo.com
Treasurer	Robert Morgan	(918) 473-6955	selling_for_you@wilnet1.com
Secretary	Debbie Davis	(918) 252-1781	sirian@cox.net
Board. Members at Large			
	Lori Naiman	(918) 298-0839	LJNaiman@cox.net
	Tina Cook	(918) 828-3402	Cook4thebirds@aol.com
Public Relations. Comm.	Mary Hill	(918) 437-3343	keeper@DeShaneKennels.com
Library	Donna Dozier	(918) 245-6226	dozier-munn@sbcglobal.com
Membership	Robert Morgan	(918) 473-6955	selling_for_you@wilnet1.com
Bird Fair	Mary Hill	(918) 437-3343	keeper@DeShaneKennels.com

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Mary Hill, OAS Member

Please contact her at:
DeShane Kennels, Inc.
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Tulsa, Ok. 74108
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DON'T MISS THE MONTH'S OAS MEETING.

Bring your favorite new world parrot to share with the club

This meeting should be well attended by Macaws, Amazons, Pyhurras, and other New World species as described below:

New World Parrots:

Perhaps because of human's "recent" arrival to the "New" world, more parrot species populate the Western Hemisphere than either the "Old" World or Pacific Islands. Likewise, lesser predation as well as greater nutritional and nesting opportunities have resulted in species that are, for the most part, bolder, louder, and more colorful than their African "cousins." Even one Western species – *Myiopsittia monachus* (the monk parakeet) – repeatedly adapts to new habitat – while so many others falter – flourishing world-wide in human cities.



Minutes from the Secretary Bird

MAY 2009 OAS MEETING MINUTES

President Carol Spilman called the meeting to order at 2:00 P.M. on May 31, 2009 at the Hardesty Library. Officers present were President/Carol Spilman, Secretary/AFA Rep Debbie Davis; Robert Morgan/Treasurer; 1st VP/Jo Gleason; AFA Rep/Joy Jahn; and Mary Hill/Public Relations Rep.

NEW BUSINESS: Carol welcomed the attendees and identified new guests. Mary provided the attendees with an updated bird fair report. Mary suggested the need for a caterer during the Bird Fair, and the Green Country Event Center has a chef available to help provide food during the fair. Also, new vendors are interested in coming to the Fall 2009 OAS Bird Fair.

OLD BUSINESS: Robert gave the Treasurer's Report, and provided the attendees with a copy of the Treasurer's Report. Karen O'Brien made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report. Motion was seconded and approved – none opposed.

Carol made a motion to adjourn the business part of the meeting. Motion was seconded and approved – none opposed.

Carol introduced Susan Ferguson as the guest speaker. Susan brought her beautiful Great Bill Parrots and showed them to the attendees. Susan became interested in Great Bill Parrots in 1999, and since then, she has become dedicated to the species survival in Indonesia and as captive companion parrots in the United States. In 2006 she went to Indonesia to see these beautiful Great Bill Parrots in the wild. Susan provided the attendees an outstanding description of the Great Bills from hatchlings to adulthood. Although the Great Bills are beautiful parrots, they are not good pets because so many people do not educate themselves on how to properly care for them.

Thank you Susan for an outstanding presentation!

Respectfully submitted by Debbie Davis, Secretary

JUNE 2009 OAS BOARD MEETING MINUTES

On June 2, 2009 at 7:00 P.M., President Carol Spilman called the meeting to order at the Hardesty Library. Officers present were President/Carol Spilman, Secretary/AFA Rep Debbie Davis; 1st VP/Jo Gleason; 2nd VP/Mattie Sue Athan, Board Member/Lori Naiman; Publicity Rep/Mary Hill.

OLD BUSINESS: Carol asked Mary to provide the Board an update on the upcoming Fall Bird Fair. Mary stated she has mailed approximately 78-80 vendor information packets which included a list of hotels and restaurants, welcome letter and contract. Mary suggested the OAS contact the Green Country Event Center and request their assistance in hiring help to set up and break down the tables; having somebody to break down the tables will cost \$15.00.

The Board discussed the need to advertise Dr. Darrel Styles, DVM, Ph.D as the October 2009 speaker. Mary requested Dr. Styles biography be provided to her no later than 30 days prior to his arrival so she can advertise in the local papers.

The Board discussed the upcoming Caged Bird Society National Show November 19-21, 2009. Since this event is the first time in Tulsa, the OAS needs to advertise with the Caged Bird Society. Mattie Sue made a motion to buy a full page Parrot Division ad (\$40) with the Caged Bird Show Society. Motion was seconded and passed – none opposed. The Board also discussed the need to buy or rent a booth or table to advertise the OAS at the National Show. Lori stated she will check on the specifics and let us know.

NEW BUSINESS: Mattie Sue brought to the Board Meeting a beautiful Senegal parrot named Baby. Mattie stated this bird is the best bird in the world, and she wants the OAS to have an essay contest for children. The children will write an essay and compete for Baby. Mattie will determine the most qualified person due to their writing and research based on the essay paper. After a lot of discussion, the Board decided to "Table the Request." Although children are our future, it is best to further discuss Mattie's proposal when more Board Members are present at the next OAS Board Meeting.

Mattie Sue made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 P.M Motion was seconded and approved – none opposed.

Respectfully submitted by Debbie Davis, Secretary



We need to hear from all the OAS members on what programs they would like to have presented each month. Some of the plans are listed in the board minutes in this newsletter. We would like you to tell us what you are interested in.

We also want to support groups that are working to better the lives of our birds. Please let us know of groups that you would want supported.

SUGGESTION OF PROGRAM TOPIC

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

SUGGESTION OF WORK YOU WOULD LIKE OUR CLUB TO FUND

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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P.O. BOX 580155
TULSA, OK. 74158-0155
OR BRING IT TO THE MONTHLY MEETING

June Program: NEW WORLD PARROT PARTY:

Introduction to Pyhurras and NEW WORLD PARROT:

Lecture, video, and show and tell introduction to those exciting Pyhurras -- the colorful, quiet Conures.

Bring your favorite new world parrot to share with the club. This meeting should be well attended by Macaws, Amazons, Pyhurras, and other New World species as described below:

New World Parrots

Perhaps because of human's "recent" arrival to the "New" world, more parrot species populate the Western Hemisphere than either the "Old" World or Pacific Islands. Likewise, lesser predation as well as greater nutritional and nesting opportunities have resulted in species that are, for the most part, bolder, louder, and more colorful than their African "cousins." Even one Western species – *Myiopsittia monachus* (the monk parakeet) – repeatedly adapts to new habitat – while so many others falter – flourishing world-wide in human cities.

The Magnificent Macaws

With elegantly elongated wing and tail feathers, macaws may be accurately called both majestic and goofy, as few creatures come close either to their beauty or comical natures. Part of that description relates to their distinctive facial markings not unlike the exaggerated tracery of grease paint on the face of an opera star. Like human finger prints, the patterns of tiny remnant facial feathers along lines of circulation are unique to each macaw. Bare facial areas, usually white, leather-like patches, probably evolved to keep oil from damaging feathers resulting from the birds' opportunistic, sometimes carnivorous, eating habits. This unique feature also allows a glimpse into the birds' emotions as the skin can be seen to blush red with physical stimulation, excitement, or possibly even "embarrassment."

Infamously adaptable, macaws are well known for learning or improvising new behaviors and teaching them to successive generations. This serves them well both outdoors and in the living room.

Macaws reproduce in greater numbers in captivity than in the wild where nest sites are increasingly unavailable. Some species such as hyacinth and Buffon's macaws exist in greater numbers indoors than in the wild. Because of availability, prices have never been (relative to the economy) lower. Although some macaws discussed here are relatively uncommon as companions at this time, they have been included because appear exceptionally prolific in captivity. If present trends continue, red-bellies, red-fronted, and hyacinth macaws will become increasingly available.

Beyond Ara

Although all macaws were once labeled Ara, they are now divided into six genera:

Ara, including the Blue-and-gold, Scarlet, and Greenwing, *Prophyrrhura*, the yellow-collar; *Diopsittaca*, the red-shoulder or noble; *Anodorhynchus*, the hyacinth and nearly-extinct lears; *Orthopsittaca*, the Red-belly; and *Cyanopsitta*, the extremely rare spix macaw.

While wild flocks are usually limited to relatively small family groups, these birds are extremely social, and, as companions, macaws will seek out humans in the home if possible. Wing-trimmed birds simply go to the floor and walk around looking for people or other pets. This can be dangerous if other pets are larger and predatory.

Many macaws love cuddling and snuggling, and because they are such adorable babies, it's easy for a young macaw to develop attention-demanding behaviors if it misses the window-of-opportunity for the development of independence. Step-ups, fetch, and active play involving wing flapping rather than constant snuggling will help the bird to develop confidence rather than obnoxious attention-demanding behaviors.

Macaws are nothing if not dramatic, as many love to lunge at new acquaintances, rarely biting, but rather bluffing to observe human responses and finding great enjoyment in flamboyant reactions. If a macaw that doesn't bite is rewarded with drama: an "ouch," an "eek," and a jump, when it lounges or pretends to bite, it will continue not biting. Likewise, a bird biting for a drama reward can be trained not to bite by disallowing opportunities to bite and providing drama rewards for behaviors other than biting.

Chewing is both an exercise and a natural expression of sexual behavior to the macaw, a cavity breeder. This is not optional. If a macaw is denied access to destructible appropriate chewable, it will chew anything it can reach: perches, cage bars, picture frames, woodwork, computer keyboards, cables, or even its own feathers. Interesting appropriate objects to chew should be within ready reach. Objects that should not be chewed must be well out of reach.

Use special care when introducing branches with bark to macaws, as these birds may be extremely sensitive, especially to both the fruit (acorns) and bark of oak trees. Additionally, Kashmir Csaky oak sensitivity in hyacinth macaws and Dave Flom has reported it in blue and golds. Allergic reactions by macaws to dust (including cockatoo feather dust,) pollen, and potent fragrances have also been documented.

Large macaws (and cockatoos) have the longest potential life span of all companion parrots. It's a mixed blessing. A bird that lives almost a hundred years will certainly require multiple homes during that lifetime. Fortunately, also like cockatoos, macaws easily adjust to appropriate new environments and can often be effectively resocialized at well advanced ages. I have seen very old macaws that had not interacted with humans in decades settle in to become treasured household companions. The macaw is the epitome of that oft-repeated adage: "You can teach an old bird new tricks."

Except for longevity, loudness is the quality most often associated with home changes. The larger birds, the hyacinth and the green wing, have booming voices that have been described as able to "wake the dead." However, some of the larger macaws are less-frequent and less annoying screamers than many smaller parrots – especially aratinga and nanday conures.

Flapping is extremely important to healthy companion macaws. This is surely a replacement behavior for their wild activity of flying many, many miles to forage far away from nest sites. In companion settings where household dangers lurk at every turn, wing feathers are best kept trimmed and absolutely up to date.

Facial "Baldness"

Exercise is especially beneficial in maintaining skin health. I have seen facial feathers regrow on older macaws placed on conditioning programs that included daily flapping exercises. The birds were encouraged to hold on to human hands and flap until they were just slightly winded a condition which in macaws is accompanied by blushing. As endurance improved with practice, tiny new feathers began to re-line the once almost-bare face patches. Facial feathers on scarlet macaws are usually white or very pale red and not as noticeable as those of other macaws. Illger's, nobles, and yellow collar macaws have bare face patches.

The Hyacinth macaw, (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*), is the largest of the companion macaws. At this time, I would not call the hyacinth a "common" companion parrot, however, as they are still extremely expensive, both to purchase and to maintain. Hyacinth as well as the rarer members of the genus *Anodorhynchus*, the almost extinct Lear's and glaucous macaws, are the only macaws that have neither a bare face patch nor a uropygial gland.

Hyacinths are natural acrobats, with a reported love of running, hopping, and even somersaults. Kashmir Csaky even reports seeing one of her baby hyacinths chase her own tail. Like greys, hyacinths are sometimes seen to dig in corners. Because of their extreme size and strength, hyacinths need specially fabricated caging (be sure a particular cage is guaranteed for a Hyacinth, not just for a macaw) and a veterinarian with hyacinth experience.

The Greenwing macaw, (*Ara chloroptera*) is the largest macaw that can reasonably be called “common.” The green wing has a reputation for easy disposition, good talking ability, great beauty, and for being mechanically inclined (they can completely dismantle some cages). Especially appealing are the delicately traced lines in tiny red feathers on the white face patch. So appealing are these lines that in art, especially commercial and product art, when we can often see from the facial feathers that what is supposed to be a Scarlet macaw, it’s often a Greenwing macaw with the green patch on the wing depicted in yellow. This giant bird needs lots of exercise, lots of chewing materials, lots of handling, and lots of chewing materials to maintain good disposition. The Greenwing macaw can be a surprisingly active bird as well as a willing talker. It has an extremely loud voice, and will use it when necessary. Disposition may be maintained with little difficulty in young birds and during the breeding years, but these birds have a reputation for being really, really nice when they are much older.

While Dianalee Deter jokingly calls the Scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*) “the only bird worth having,” it is also one of the most maligned and misunderstood parrots. Whether the bird’s highly debated disposition is a matter of nature or nurture, it is infamously sensitive, and sensitivity evokes response. Liz Wilson reports that many people so fear scarlets that they “react differently” in their presence. Understimulation, especially an understimulating environment, combined with a love of drama and of watching humans scream and jump easily produces a bird that nips or even bites for the fun of it. My own scarlet macaw is sweet, dependable, and 100% predictable.

The blue-and-gold macaw (*Ara ararauna*) is the most common and, perhaps, the most evenly disposed of all macaws. With a reputation for clear speech, more than one blue and gold has been said to learn and use a word, sound, or phrase with association after hearing it on only one occasion. They adapt easily to their surroundings and easily become comfortable enough to breed. The blue and gold macaw has a reputation for being easy to socialize or resocialize at almost any age.

My personal favorite, the military macaw (*Ara militaris*) is surely the most underappreciated of the readily available macaws. While their colors may appear unexciting from the front, one glimpse from the other direction reveals a breathtaking brilliant turquoise rump and burgundy wing and tail feathers accentuating the bright green body. Amazingly inexpensive and easily available, both as babies and second-hand adults – an especially favorable situation for a first-time would-be macaw owner, militaries can be physically interactive, even when not actually touching. Look for a characteristic goofy craning head maneuver ending with one eye prominently and expressively advanced. Like the scarlet macaw, militaries love drama, and can go through (apparent) nippy phases if boredom is allowed to persist or if minimal needs for interactions are unmet.

The great green or Buffon’s macaw (*Ara ambigua*) is extremely rare and frequently mistaken for the (smaller) military macaw which it resembles. Both greens and blues are notably lighter than the military, with tail tending to predominant red-orange rather than burgundy.

The red-fronted macaw (*Ara rubrogenys*) remains uncommon, but breeds well in captivity. While other neonatal macaws usually just slump over and sleep wherever they are, whether near a sibling or not, gregarious nestling red fronts reportedly wrap their little bodies around each other like yin and yang.

Only slightly smaller, the red-bellied macaw (*Orthopsittaca manilata*) is known generally for its pleasing disposition. Although still unusual in companion settings, this macaw remains well populated in the wild. The natural calls of the red-bellied macaw sound a little like a small child. They have sweet voices and are great talkers. Cuddly, and not so rowdy as some other macaws, survivability was poor in early captive populations because of misunderstandings about nutritional needs. With a natural diet exclusively of palm fruit, red-bellies have a greater need for Vitamin A (Beta Carotene) and a lesser need for oil than other macaws.

The severe or chestnut-fronted macaw (*Ara Severa*) is a most easily accommodated size, maybe 350-450 grams, but retains the glamour, fun, and excitement of its larger “cousins.” With a reputation resembling a Scarlet, this intelligent little bird needs lots of exercise (including showers), environmental stimulation, and consistent handling to remain a good companion. In spite of its small size, this bird has a shrill voice that may be more perceived by some as annoying than a larger macaw, and because it may express extreme bonding preferences, may not be the best choice for families with children.

The popular yellow-collar macaw (*Prophyrrhura auricollis*), is a fine choice for anyone craving the qualities of a full-sized macaw without the huge space and maintenance demands.

They can be good talkers, acquiring a ready variety of understandable words. Although they tend to develop strong bonds with favorite people, places, and things, they can easily be taught to talk for attention rather than scream for it. Also often highly under rated macaws, for these birds, are famously adaptable and able to learn new things, including words used with association at almost any age. In spite of its small size, the Hahn's or Noble macaw (*Diopsittaca nobilis*) enjoys a reputation for extremely good, possibly the best, talking of the group. Except for its definitive bare face patch, this bird physically resembles the blue-crowned conure (*Aratinga acuticaudata*.) In fact, when imports were allowed into the US, unsuspecting tourists have been, sold blue crowned conures with plucked facial patches as Hahn's macaws. Quite a con, considering that a typical Hahns usually costs at least twice as much as a blue crowned conure.

The Amazing Amazons

These short-tailed heavy bodied birds are what most people think of when they hear the word "parrot." Intelligent, beautiful, mischevious, they are well suited to those who like a little "vinegar" in their greens. They are behaviorally predictable (sometimes predictably unpredictable,) with expressive mannerisms enabling reasonably observant human to know exactly what to expect.

These primarily green birds are talkative, adaptable and rarely shy. Few birds relish "rainfall" (provided indoors by caring humans) more than Amazons, as an Amazon enjoying a shower gets sillier as it gets wetter. Indeed, Amazons denied access to rainfall frequently become truculent, as disposition and feather quality decline.

Amazons are recreational eaters, being plagued by problems related to obesity probably more than any other health issues. Overweight older Amazon risk cardiovascular, foot, and feather disorders as they become increasingly sedentary. Amazons, more than any other companion parrot should not be free fed, rather they must be fed limited amounts on a schedule and learn other activities for daily entertainment.

The "African" Amazon

When asked to provide a parrot for the opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, I ran into an unexpected casting complication. Although I had provided a choice of African parrots, the director insisted on his notion of a parrot – a stocky green bird. I was unable to convince him that an Amazon parrot – from Central or South America – could not have participated in an event that took place more than a century before Europeans knew of the existence of the New World. My yellow naped Amazon, *Portia* played the part of a parrot attending the birth of Jesus.

Amazons are famous mimics, with an attraction to high-pitched "feminine" voices, including singing voices, and words said with great enthusiasm. President Andrew Jackson's yellow-headed Amazon, *Poll*, was removed from his funeral for cussing.

An Amazon will usually let humans know, in no uncertain terms when something is wrong, either with their voices or with their disposition. A bored Amazon might scream for attention and then bite when it is picked up. This may not be aggression, but rather simply little "punishments" for "neglect." While hand-fed baby Amazon's usually arrive in their first homes tame, their developmental period may be more noticeable than that of any other parrot, as even well-patterned juveniles may transition through a nippy phase somewhere around 9-12 nine months of age. With careful socialization including pre-patterning to step-ups, hand-held perches, and towel games, this "terrible-two's" like behavior may be virtually unnoticeable or might pass quickly.

The orange-wing (*Amazona amazonica*)—most common of all Amazons in the wild – was once called "the poor man's Amazon", being the least expensive and most easily accessible of the Amazons imported into the United States. They are charming characters with unique, adorable mannerisms, especially "shadow boxing" in which the feathers of the neck and cheeks are held erect in a "hawk-head-like" position while the bird stabs at a shadow on the wall or other imaginary enemy. During the times that these birds were imported, they were not known as great talkers, and since the 1992 ban in avian imports, the availability has plummeted as aviculturists preferred to facilitate breeding of more expensive parrots. Domestic birds should be both good talkers and evenly disposed; although they are parrots, and all parrots pursue their own agenda from time to time.

The orange winged Amazon has a reputation for being especially good with children. The smallest of the common companion Amazons, the white-front (*Amazona albifrons*) is sometimes erroneously called the “spectacled” Amazon in the United States. This unusual Amazon is sexually dimorphic, with a small patch of wing feathers known as the alula being red in mature males and green in mature females and most juvenile birds.

NEED PHOTO OF ALULA OF MALE AND FEMALE WHITE-FRONT

White fronts share a reputation with yellow napes for mischief, noise, and a willingness to nip. Like the Blue-fronts, the White-fronts have a reputation for being a little more reactionary than larger Amazons. They are active and benefit from the exercise provided by a larger than usual cage or flight. Males may be nippier from time to time, mostly during breeding season. Females seem generally less extroverted and quieter than males. Except for the occasional development of loud calls, behavioral complaints are unusual.

The brilliantly colored blue-fronted (*Amazona aestiva xanthopteryx* and *A.a. aestiva*) Amazon’s reputation probably resembles that of the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead, for when they’re good, they’re very, very good, and when they’re bad, they’re horrid. I have seen docile mature adults and aggressive neonates in this species. Most, however, seem to resemble their African relatives, *Poicephalus* and *Psittacus*, with an observable degree of cautiousness sometimes contributing to aggression in some birds’ personalities. Hens are probably slightly less likely to develop extreme territorialism than cocks, but extremely territorial hens are sometimes observed.

Yellow-headed Amazons (*Amazona ochrocephala oratrix*) are known for their great beauty and talking ability. Though highly prized, prices should remain relatively low, for these Amazons reproduce most readily of all Amazons in captivity, adjust easily to new homes, and can remain problem free for years. I have seen birds that were confined to the same small cage for decades blossom under the efforts of new owners who began to include the birds more extensively in daily activities. Famous for their vocal abilities, these birds love operatic voices, especially soprano and tenor. They easily learn arias, though both words and melody may be improvised and much poetic license taken.

Most common behavioral issues are screaming and biting, usually seasonal. Good behavior can be best maintained by patterning to hand-held perches so that the birds can be handled during seasonal phases. Yellow-heads can become extremely over-bonded and territorial, sometimes attacking all but the most favored human. Females can be as excitable and protective of their mate/human as males. This tendency is much more easily controlled than the same tendency in yellow napes, but the birds should be considered dangerous on the shoulder.

The intelligent, feisty yellow-naped Amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala auropalliata*) is sometimes called the “creme de la creme” of this very desirable family. This bird is the epitome of the feathered “dragon,” as most yellow-napes need to “breathe a little fire” every now and again. Both males and females can be extremely territorial. Like yellow-heads, napes love to sing opera.

The large mealy Amazons (*Amazona farinosa*) are sometimes called “Gentle Giants,” although their giant beaks can deliver giant bites. Like cockatoos and African grays, a healthy Mealy will have powder on its feathers. They are both the loudest and the mellowest of this behaviorally varied family. The five subspecies are mostly green with some plain, some with red, yellow, blue, or a wash of lavender on the head. These birds can be louder than cockatoos. Calls are occasionally punctuated with a mule-like bray.

The stocky red-lored or yellow-cheeked Amazon (*Amazona autumnalis*) is known for loyalty very loyal to humans in their “flock” although the number of humans accepted by the bird may be limited.

Curious and energetic, these birds can be good talkers, but they can be very loud and territorial. As with mealy's, the Red-lored's disposition is often so good, that volume is readily tolerated by doting owners. Deter suggests that domestically raised Red-loreds are not as noisy as their imported predecessors. Both male and female birds may be cuddly, almost never refusing a head rub. Males are more territorial in the spring. Red-loreds sometimes require more beak maintenance as this is the only common companion Amazon with a tendency to malocclusion of the upper and lower beak called "scissor beak." This may be a genetic predisposition or may be a cyclical issue occurring primarily during breeding season. The small, slender-bodied green-cheeked Amazon (*Amazona virigenalis*) is sometimes called the "Mexican Red-head," a name indicating source. More active than the similarly-colored lilac crowns, these birds can be extremely affectionate and interactive but have a reputation for over-bonding and for dominating younger or shorter family members. However, in my experience, a green-cheeked Amazon is just as likely to favor the youngest, smallest kid and treat everybody else like a rival. Dispositions and personalities can be extremely variable. The achingly-beautiful lilac-crowned Amazon (*Amazona finschi*) is generally considered quieter, gentler, and less exuberant than the green-cheek it so very much resembles. Their voices are described as "softer" all around, including both calls and occasional language.

The Comical Conures

From an agricultural pest that generated little interest to a star of the pet trade, these long-tailed parrots are the epitome of the slogan, "You've come a long way, baby." Since the banning of imports into the United States in 1992, few other parrots have so demonstrated such improved adjustment to living room life as the conure. From the large, loud Patagonian to the tin, quiet pyhurras, there is, quite obviously, great variety in this group. Sometimes underestimated, these birds are surely at greater danger of becoming bored than over stimulated.

The Carolina Conure: Born in the USA

Once upon a time, a small parrot enjoyed a huge habitat exclusively in the United States. The Carolina Conure resembled the Jenday Conure in coloring and the Mitred Conure in shape. Like many parrots, the bird was not sexually dimorphic. Like most parrots, it probably reproduced selectively and infrequently in comparison to song birds and mammals. Although they preferred cockleburs, if there were no cockleburs, Carolina conures would also eat corn.

The birds suffered from the expansion of agriculture, the introduction of European honey bees, habitat loss to large hydro-electric projects, collection for fashion, and, of course, shooting contests. The Carolina conure was the first bird that biologists knew in advance would become extinct. Even efforts by naturalists to collect skins for museums and research contributed to the bird's demise. Last minute attempts by primitive aviculturists to save our only parrot were unsuccessful. Both the smaller southern subspecies and the larger one which ranged as far north and west as Colorado were extinct by 1917.

Denver's Museum of Natural History has a large collection of skins of this beautiful little parrot. On a "back stacks" tour, I once held one in my carefully gloved hand. It was an extremely powerful experience. As one who lives with a similar type of small domestic parrot, I couldn't help but weep for the friend I never knew.

If farmers could exterminate them, these birds would surely be wiped out as quickly as possible. Developing Central and South American nations could easily follow our model in eliminating these parrots. Captive conure populations might join captive populations of some macaws, Amazons, cockatoos, and lorises as species more numerous in captivity than in the wild.

Blue Crowned conures (*Aritinga acuticaudata*) have a reputation for being extremely affectionate and loving when properly nurtured and socialized as babies. They are extremely intelligent and learn to talk easily. A personable little bird that suffered in the past from a reputation for being extremely loud. Hand-fed domestic babies don't have nearly the loud learned language of their wild-caught ancestors, but they can still get the message across when their needs aren't being met.

Like all conures, blue-crowns relish bath time. They will bathe in their own water dish if humans don't provide showers or other water for bathing. Newman reports that, "In my experience, most blue-crowned conures seem reluctant to bite hard and will, instead, either push your hand away with their beak or take it gently in their beak and move it away. But seldom will they bite hard. This anomaly has been confirmed with other breeders and owners. Even parent-raised Blue-crowned conures will usually tame quite easily."

The cherry-headed conure (*Aritinga acuticaudata*) has a reputation as the best talker in this group. Even imported birds often developed large vocabularies. Unfortunately, the Cherry-headed conures also have a reputation as frequently tending to bonding and territorial-related aggression.

Beautiful little sun conures (*Aritinga auricapillus solstitialis*) have more than once gotten themselves into situations where an appreciation for visual beauty far overrides humans abilities to tolerate their voices. This is the domestic conure most likely to wind up homeless, for even though the wild caught Nandays had a worse reputation for noxious sounds, the domestic sun conures carry a heavy reputation for making for more noise than anyone would imagine from such a small bird. Years ago, lovely imported mitred conures (*Aritinga mitrata*) were very inexpensive, but they didn't seem to be especially interactive, especially vocally. New parrot owners often seemed to have expectations that the Mitred would be "Amazon-like" or "Macaw-like" and they were often disappointed. Things have changed. Today's handfed domestic mitreds are talkative, interactive, bright-eyed, and beautiful. Handfed Mitreds need lots of hand-on interaction to maintain their sweetness.

Nanday conures (*Nandayus nenday*) have a reputation for being very beautiful and very sociable, and if sociable means "communicative," then Nandays are certainly that. Few birds this size can make anywhere near this much noise. They are unsuited to apartments or condos or for persons with sensitive hearing. However, if noise is not an issue, these are beautiful and amusing birds for a tiny price. Because of their natural sociability, Nandays make a good choice for multi-bird households. Few birds have such a well-deserved reputation for screaming as the Patagonian conure (*Cyanoliseus patagonus*). This bird's voice can even make other birds uncomfortable. This is a bird for a person with an estate. But if you have a good deal of insulation between you and your neighbors and if you crave an amazingly beautiful, unbelievably intelligent, loyal companion bird for a relatively low price, this just might be the bird for you. Not unlike macaws in their intelligence, the Patagonian conure even has a shaped eyering slightly reminiscent of the macaw's bare face patch.

Cliff dwellers, the Patagonian is known to dive down rather than up when frightened indoors. Companion birds learn tricks and are famous for being tricksters, playing "jokes" on humans and pets in the home. Newman suggests that their cliff-dwelling habits also influences their living room play which tends to games like hide-and-seek and peek-a-boo. Beautifully marked maroon-belly (*Phyrrhura frontalis*) and green-cheeked (*Phyrrhura molinae*) conures might be called an "ideal" conure, since their size and quiet natures makes them well suited even for small living spaces.

These birds are almost identical in almost every way, except that the green-cheeked conure's tail is mostly red and the Maroon-belly's is mostly green.

Often called, the quiet conures, this *Phyrrhura* family is highly treasured among conure lovers. Don't forget that "quiet" is relative and that even a quiet conure makes noise. This bird is reported to have a lower volume call than a cockatiel.

The Quintessential Quaker: Nature's Most Adaptable Parrot

When naming the best talking parrots, African greys and yellow naped Amazons often head the lists. But these are pricey, long-lived species involving a large initial investment and a couple of generations of planning and commitment. For a sturdy bird with a more reasonable price and life expectancy, many who fancy a talking bird are now turning to the quaker parrot.

At first glance, the quaker or monk parrot (*Myiopsitta monachus*) does not appear to be particularly compelling, but it's plain colors and unimpressive size mask a truly exciting personality. Among other things, it's not unusual for this intelligent little bundle of energy to use human words with understanding before it's six months old. In my study of talking Quaker parrots, published in BIRD TALK, October, 1998, I found that it is not unusual for baby Quakers to learn human speech at 6 weeks of age. While talk by ten months, it's not unusual for a quaker parrot to learn to say its first human word after it is one year old.

No baby parrot, including the quaker parrot, can be guaranteed to talk merely because it is of a particular species. One of the most exciting aspects of the talking capabilities of the quaker parrot is the sheer number of words these birds can acquire. In my studies, quaker parrots over one year old averaged between 50 and 60 words. On the other hand, quaker parrots are not known for being especially easy to understand.

Many of these birds had learned both to use words with understanding and to sing word songs. The latter use of language probably more accurately resembles bird song, and for the purpose of my work, the number of words in songs was not included in the total number of spoken words.

Many quaker parrot owners reported that their birds used an average of 15-16 words in ways consistent with their meanings, and some owners of talking quaker parrots report that their birds speak ONLY with apparent understanding. That is, these birds do not merely repeat any old word at any old time, they use all words only with the apparent intent of conveying appropriate meaning at the appropriate moment. Most of the birds in this group spoke an average of about 8 words.

Quaker parrots are especially prone to accidents in the home, including flying away. Wing feathers must be trimmed at least a couple of times yearly to prevent drowning in the toilet, burning up in the skillet, or crashing into the ceiling fan. Tame quakers that fly away in urban areas are usually easily recovered.

Because they are famously territorial, quakers have special behavioral needs. Like humans, if quakers do not learn cooperative habits and limits of acceptable behavior by the time they reach sexual maturity, they may be completely out of control. It's best for quaker parrots to learn cooperative behavior just after weaning in order to prevent the development of early aggressive behaviors during the developmental period called the "Terrible Twos" (which usually appears sometime between 9 and 18 months in quakers).

Most behavior is comprised of a series of habits that are routinely reenacted. A bird that learns to habitually cooperate will be less likely to try to dominate humans in the environment. In order to create good habits and to establish a pattern of cooperation in the bird's behavior, we practice a couple of interactive exercises -- step-ups and the towel game -- most days in neutral territory.

Because of the quaker parrots' instinct for territorial aggression, it's important not to service the cage with the bird in it. Just open the door, let the bird come out to the top of the door, then step the well-practiced bird up to a hand or hand-held perch and put it on a play pen. Then food, water, toys, or perches can be safely changed, and the bird will not learn how much fun it is to chase hands and other human parts.

A well-adjusted quaker parrot is too busy to be noisy. If the bird is making lots of unpleasant sounds, it may be unhappy. Try to find out why. Much chronic noise making is a habit, like any other. First assess and improve the environment, then guide the bird to replace habitual noise-making behaviors with more-appropriate behaviors.

These little green "feathered dragons" are never spayed or neutered for behavioral reasons, and therefore, they may be expected to demonstrate several diverse forms of sexually-related behaviors. In this group, approximately half of the birds over one year old masturbated. While a little more than half of those birds seemed to prefer the pleasure of a toy, a little less than half seemed to prefer their favorite person's hand. One of the birds in this study was reported to pleasure itself frequently "with anything handy ... while saying 'peek-a-boo' the whole time".

In the past it was feared that escaped quaker parrots could represent a threat as potential agricultural pests. Several states reacted by banning or otherwise regulating the ownership of quaker parrots. Because so many modern quaker parrots are hand fed that could probably not survive outdoors, it would not be surprising to see a little easing of these regulations.

Actually quaker parrots might be the first birds we see with permanent ID requirements such as microchips. And, because a quaker that could not reproduce would not threaten the local environment, quaker parrots might be the first parrots spayed. While this may seem hard on the bird and not at all ideal, if safe, humane spaying techniques could be developed, they could help a quaker parrot remain with its long-time family. It just might be worthwhile.

Clownish Caiques

Described by some as a single species, black capped caiques (*Pionites melanocephala*) and white-bellied caiques (*Pionites leucogaster*) are so close in appearance and range that they have been known to interbreed even in the wild. Playful and exuberant, they are animated little clowns, sometimes called “the New World lorries,” for like Lorries, caiques develop extremely strong feet and legs. Even healthy caiques with full wings might appear to prefer to hop and climb around rather than to fly.

Also like lorries, the caique’s love of bathing is well reported; and like lorries, they will sometimes play their water away. Because they love to play in it, caiques benefit from having water changed more than once daily and benefit from a tube as well as a bowl if they are left for long periods.

Whether they’re hopping in enthusiastic display, making a bee-line across a table to examine an unfamiliar object, screaming in anger and disbelief as you put them back into the cage, or leaf bathing in a visiting politician’s hair, the clownish caiques are more than strutting little Napoleons. Caiques love hugging and towel games and are at special danger of suffocation as they often seek out the folds of quilts and afghans just for the “fun” of it.

The caique’s personality can be extremely complex, with the same bird sometimes exhibiting both aggression and fearfulness of the same individual. A caique might suddenly exhibit fear of an inanimate object, especially a new one. Like the Scarlet macaw, a caique might be sweet as pie when picked up only to bite fiercely when being put down. A caique can react intensely to a new hat, hair color, or garment.

Like the Scarlet macaw, caiques are known for extreme intelligence. It’s always a challenge to stay one step ahead of these smart little birds. Each day will differ, as these birds will always be looking for new ways to have fun by frequently improvising new behaviors.

Caiques are not known for exceptional talking ability, nor are they known for great volume. Most probably prefer mimicking sounds to mimicking words. With this lesser volume, a caique will seldom get you kicked out of your neighborhood, but its voice can be very annoying inside the home. Then again, some owners report that they have never heard that shrill alarm call with which some caiques are said to “abuse.”

They can be stubborn and difficult to distract from whatever quest they’re currently pursuing. Caiques can bond strongly to one person and have been seen to stalk family members disfavored by their favorite person. Frequent outings and handling by multiple individuals is especially beneficial to the gregarious caique personality. Especially, if one family member is often attacked by the bird, then that family member will probably benefit the most from being the means by which the bird goes to the veterinarian or groomer. Even if the less favored human never actually handles the bird, sometimes being hoisted about in a carrier in strange places by the less favored person will restore at least some harmony to a disharmonious caique/human relationship.

As with Quakers, cockatoos, and other parrots with a tendency to develop chasing, it’s important not to allow poorly socialized humans to intentionally or unintentionally provoke a caique. It’s a good idea, both for immediate practical reasons and for long-term behavioral benefit, to remove the bird before servicing the cage so that it doesn’t develop hand-chasing behaviors.

Puckish Pionus

The Pionus parrot family is another wonderful bird, like *Poicephalus*, that is often overlooked in favor of larger, showier birds. Pionus babies are not as flashy as some other birds in the medium parrot family, the adults develop colors ranging from the muted white front, to delicate pastel shades of the Bronze-wing, to the dazzling cornflower blue and pink of the mature Blue-headed pionus. Companion pionus have a reputation as cautiously calm, graciously interactive, and normally subdued volume.

Pionus usually tolerate the presence of humans, pets, and other types of birds in the home well. Indeed, Pionus are known more for ignoring disliked humans than for attacking them. If a Pionus doesn't like someone or something it will often sit with its back to the offending party.

Pionus love baths, are vigorous bathers. Because they are not as high-energy as the *Poicephalus* family members, many older humans enjoy Pionus for the non-invasive companionship they can usually provide. Pionus learn to play with toys easily, may even tolerate servicing the cage without being removed, and love interaction just as much as any other parrot.

Pionus are known more for their stolid dispositions, undemanding personalities and subtle beauty than for their talking ability, although they can pick up a few words in a little robot, computer-like voice. Pionus parrots are not typically loud birds and often do well in apartments where noise can be a factor. These little birds, especially, the hens, have shrill calls and can use them, although there is usually something wrong in the environment when this kind of behavior appears. The Pionus' fear response sounds a little like it might be "Asthma", but this must not be confused with a health problem, look for something that the bird is afraid of.

"Cautious" is the word that best describes young Pionus babies, who would rather snuggle than explore. After three months, however, these inquisitive youngsters begin exploring and can be in danger of household accidents like being stepped on if they are not properly contained.

At around two years old, a pionus will begin testing the limits of the behavioral environment. This typical behavior and an expected developmental phase that passes with consistent handling and continue interactions. Strong flyers and strong willed individuals benefit from well-maintained wing trims. A flighted Pionus can develop extreme territorial tendencies and might decide not to let people into the house at all. To prevent the development of adverse reactions to grooming, these sensitive little birds should be groomed early and frequently throughout their lifetimes, as they can come to fear towels excessively if they are a part of the birds' ongoing experience. The blue-headed pionus (*Pionus menstruus*) is very dependable of disposition. Although it may bond exclusively to a favorite person, to the exclusion of all others, it will seldom abuse others because of the strength of that bond.

The white-capped pionus (*Pionus senilis*) is not so brightly colored as some other members of the family, but this bird's personality is far from colorless. They are beautiful, and this may be the most active of this generally placid family. Hen white crowns are especially treasured companion, but that doesn't mean that the males can't be really really sweet also. White-crowns have a reputation for being both the most aggressive and most territorial of the Pionus species.

Stunning and subtly colored, the bronze-winged pionus (*Pionus chalcopterus*) is usually a non-invasive addition to even the smallest living room. I seldom see unwanted behavioral issues in these birds, although they can be sensitive to grooming and exhibit a great deal of towel stress. Young birds should be well acclimated to the towel and towel games continued throughout the birds' lifetimes.

The scaly-headed or Maximillian's pionus (*Pionus maximiliani*) is, perhaps, the most docile of this generally docile group and is even more subtly colored than the others. With proper socialization on both sides, these birds often adjust easily to children.

The Pocket Parrots: *Brotogeris* and *Forpus*

Two families of New World parrots are often referred to as the "pocket parrots." *Brotogeris* – a sturdy little bird with a reputation for being "born tame" – and *Forpus* (parrotlets.)

During the 1980's when grey-cheeked parakeets (*Brotogeris pyrrhopterus*) were frequently imported, they had an almost universal reputation for gentleness.

Exceptionally popular as imports, their prices first doubled, then trebled. Sold by the thousands through chain stores, canary and white-winged bee-bees (*Brotogeris versicoloris versicoloris* and *B. v. chiriri*) had a loyal and very vocal following through the 1970's and 80's. Even wild-caught birds were known for very easy, very successful long-term human/parrot relationships – especially with children.

These birds were, for centuries, harvested in the manner of a renewable resource by indigenous peoples like those seen in the *Spirits of the Rain Forest*, a Discovery Channel video. Machiguenga girls of Yomuibato, Manu are shown feeding neonates by spitting chewed banana into the beaks of baby golden winged parakeets (*Brotogeris crysopterus*). Although the grey-cheeked parakeet had the best reputation of the group, even the commonest bee-bees seemed to come tame, and while practically every bird came tame, they weren't always easy to keep that way. Because of their small size and relatively modest chewing habits, it was easy to allow a grey cheeked parakeet to live at liberty in the home. However, these little guys easily develop extremely territorial behavior. Especially, grey cheeks and beebees may form excessively strong bonds with chrome appliances. Quite few of these little characters who became so territorial, they wouldn't let anyone – sometimes even the favorite person – into the kitchen or bathroom. I have worked with several cases of overbonding to a toaster or hair dryer in this family.

These birds require just as much careful patterning and maintenance of behavioral limits as a larger bird like a caique. They might even be called caique-like or lory-like in their ability to focus, chase, and stalk. They are pugnacious and known to attack other companion animals, for one of the leading causes of *Brotogeris* death in the home is the bird harassing a dog until the dog turns on it.

The second most common behavioral complaint, behind inappropriate territorialism, is noise. In spite of their small size, the *Brotogeris* voice can be both loud and shrill. Prevent the development of screaming behaviors carefully providing for the development of independence during the window-of-opportunity between weaning and sexual maturity.

If you have an older *Brotogeris* parrot and want to switch it to pellets, proceed cautiously. See the veterinarian first. If the bird has a weak liver or kidneys, a diet change might be too hard on the bird. Also, be careful supplementing vitamins for *Brotogeris*, especially if pelleted diet is fed, as they little birds can be sensitive to Vitamin D-3. Feed whole fresh foods instead of supplementing vitamins for *Brotogeris*.

Forpus, these very tiny parrotlets are sometimes called the “South American Lovebird” or “blue-winged lovebird”. Sandee Molenda likes to say, “Although they are the smallest parrot, they don't know it”. They are everything one would expect of a “real” parrot. There are seven species in the Forpus family, the spectacled parrotlet (*F. conspicillatus*), the Mexican parrotlet (*F. cyanopygius*), the Blue-winged parrotlet, (*F. xanthopterygius*), the Pacific parrotlet (*F. coelestis*), the Yellow-faced Parrotlet (*F. xanthops*), the Green-rumped parrotlet (*F. passerinus*), and the Dusky-billed parrotlet, (*F. sclateri*). The most common companion parrotlets in the United States at this writing are the Green rumped, Pacific (celestial) and Spectacled parrotlets. These birds cannot quite be called common are not yet produced in numbers enabling them to be found in a “normal” pet store. The best places to find parrotlets are parrotlet breeders, specialty bird stores, and bird shows.

Parrotlets don't require daily handling in order to remain tame. Matthew Vriends reports that they seem naturally tame, are quiet, and not messy. The “quiet” part is extremely charming, for the parrotlet's voice is chattery and seldom invasive in the slightest. Even the scream of an angry parrotlet usually falls way short of obnoxious.

Molenda also reports that they may be temporarily angry after you've gone away for a while. They have obvious memory and are loyal to favorites from the past. Parrotlets bond strongly to their favorite person, sometimes abusing spouses. They can be extremely cage territorial and, like a Quaker, benefit from being removed from the cage to change toys, food and water so that they do not develop chasing behaviors. It's important to keep the parrotlets well socialized to towels and to held perches for handling when they're in a cranky mood. Molenda also suggests that the companion parrotlet's wing feathers be kept consistently trimmed. In the parrotlet personality, feelings of power stimulated by flight can create playfully and territorial aggression. Well-maintained wing trims help to ensure safety, for these little birds are so curious and exploratory that they much more frequently die in accidents than of illness.

The Pacific or Celestial parrotlet (*Forpus coelestis*) had a head start in the pet trade over the other species of Forpus, but they can be more aggressive. They might take any opportunity to dominate anybody. If someone backs off, the bird may become convinced it can chase them and will try harder the next time. This might actually be playful behavior, as these birds, like other parrots, love to improvise interactive games. Pacific parrotlets breed readily in captivity. Several color mutations are now available.