



News from the Birdlink Sanctuary, Inc.

Wings and Things

By Jackie Smith

What a blessing! I was granted the privilege of hand-raising a 10 day-old Lovebird. I now have a brand new perspective on wings!

This little baby seemed so tiny and fragile even though he was the largest of his clutch. When I first handled this little ball of fuzz with a beak, I was nervous about crushing him. As we were on our way home from his birthplace, and we walked down the front steps (well, I walked, he hitched a ride), he raised his featherless wings in response. It amazed me.

I had been told that he would feather quickly, but I could hardly believe just HOW quickly! I couldn't see his ear holes anymore after 4 days (I thought the fact that I could see them was endearing). On the 4th day I could also see his feathers taking shape and by the 5th day the tip of his feathers in back became black. Day 7 his feathers had grown out considerably and the ones under his neck became peach in color.

On Day 10, he began to beat his wings. The first time he beat them hard enough he lifted off the counter where he was standing, I laughed out loud. I don't know who was more surprised, him or me. He looked like a miniature helicopter.

At 2 and 1/2 weeks he was flying a hands length to his cage and before I knew it, he was fully fledged.

He is a bright green with light brown on his face, a peachy colored beak and chest. The feathers on his back glow with golden highlights and he is absolutely beautiful. Blue and black decorate his tail feathers.

Well, once again the 'clip or not to clip feathers' raised its controversial head. It seemed cruel to clip the feathers of a bird who just grew them all out. I was very careful with him, and never had overhead fans on, or glasses of liquid sitting around. He was never unsupervised, and after all, he was only JUST learning to fly. His cage had been placed in the living room, and when I went up there, he balked because he didn't want to go into it. Unfortunately (because he hadn't been in the room), the overhead fan was on, and before I could blink, he had flown out of my hand, into the fan blade, and was knocked about 3 feet onto the couch. My heart felt like it had been squeezed in a vice. I picked him up and cuddled and



whispered to him the rest of the day. This story ends well, as he is as good as new, but he was in pain for a week, favoring his left foot, and until he was completely better, I didn't know if he would end up with a permanent injury.

As always, it is up to the individual to decide whether to clip wings or not, but I have since been told by a couple of people that their bird did not survive this type of accident. Tiny Tim earned the nickname 'Tiny Trooper.'

Should I buy an unweaned parrot?

By Jean Gibson

That is a question I still get asked quite often. Many people are under the misconception that an unweaned baby parrot will bond to them more than a weaned baby will. And this is simply just not true. A properly weaned baby parrot has learned how to eat a multitude of different foods, how to play with lots of toys, and how to interact with people and other species of parrot (if possible). A weaned baby should also be familiar with bathing, having his toenails clipped, and possibly a wing trim. It really isn't just as simple as feeding formula for a few weeks or months.

Many of you have heard the horrors of feeding formula incorrectly, such as the baby getting a yeast infection or a burned crop. Sometimes a baby can aspirate. This is when the formula goes into lungs and air sacs instead of the crop. This results in an infection and sometimes instant death. Why not leave all these scary and potentially fatal issues to the breeder?

Getting a baby bird to eat real food is often a chore and if not done correctly you can end up with a prolonged weaning process and or incorrect weaning which can cause problems down the road for your baby. It can be as simple as putting a bowl of food in front of the baby or as difficult as having to make all new foods mushy and sit there and finger feed them to the baby a few times a day until it eats and is full which can be very time consuming. Many birds

Notes from Wookie Woo:

Hi Bird Lovers,

Supporters, Friends, and Volunteers, just wanted to let you know that August is hot. Especially for us birds. Therefore the only scheduled activity we participated in this month was the First Monday event on August 4th. Jean and a few feathered friends kept cool under the misters and greeted passers by.

If you wish to schedule a tour of the Sanctuary, however, to see all of our colorful friends, please give Jean Gibson a call for an appointment.

Folks, we are sadly in need of donations. My friends eat a lot and they like having a fan to keep them cool. Please send in what ever you can afford, it will be greatly appreciated.

just don't want to try and eat on their own.

Since parrots are flock animals they learn much from their parents, clutch mates and other birds. Things they cannot easily learn being the only bird.

There are other issues like when it is best to introduce a baby to a cage? When to reduce feedings, how to begin the bathing process, get the bird to play with toys? A lot of this is difficult especially if it is the only bird and you leave it to go to work all day. So much easier bringing in a newly weaned baby that knows how to handle everyday life with humans.

“Since parrots are flock animals they learn much from their parents, clutch mates and other birds. Things they cannot easily learn being the only bird.”

In the wild most parrot parents get their children prepared to leave the nest and the security of their immediate family. They learn everything they need to know from them such as how to preen, find food, what is and is not good to eat, how to eat it, how and where to bathe, etc. This sort of follows the weaning process which in captivity is the perfect time for a baby parrot to enter your home.

Why then do many breeders push you to purchase their unweaned babies? Why do they tell you it will bond better with you if you do? That hand feeding and weaning are not that hard? The bottom line is money! The sooner that breeder gets that baby out of their facility the more money they make, even if they offer a discount for an unweaned bird. It is expensive and time consuming to raise parrots. If done right you will never be rich raising parrots. Anyone pushing you to buy an unweaned baby does not have that birds best interests in mind only their own pocketbook. And while looking for that new family member, why not consider giving a home to a second hand bird? They can make great additions to the family too! With love and patience they too will bond with you.

The Precious Parakeet

By Melody Milam Potter, PhD

Long before I began working with the Sanctuary, I did what I now know is the unthinkable, I bought a parakeet at a retail store. The store was run by bird breeders and I chose a little white one with a pretty blue underbelly, who put his little beak up to the window I was looking through.

Stuffed in a tiny Chinese takeout box, he rode home with me in the car, scolding and chirping. "It's okay, birdie, we'll be home soon," I promised. Birdie, as a name, seemed a little too abbreviated though so I added a repeat, to give him some dignity, and called him Birdie, Birdie. And so the name stuck.

This little bird was charming. Still young, he had joy in his heart, and quickly imprinted on me. There was a problem, though. He couldn't fly straight. Instead he flew in a circle to the left, like he was on a chain. I called the breeder, who assumed I wanted to return him. He told me, "If you bring him back, we will just use him for breeding."

Although a life of love didn't sound all that bad, I had already developed an attachment to him and decided to teach him to fly.

It wasn't all that hard, he just needed practice. And practice we did, round and round the bedroom until he learned to fly to me wherever I stood. By the end of the lessons, we were best friends.

Birdie Birdie's cage was in my office next to my desk. Being in the middle of writing a book, I spent a lot of time there. To keep him off the keyboard while I was typing, my husband built him a perch that ensured the two of us were eye to eye while I worked. He loved watching my fingers type and, sometimes, it became just too much for him. He would fly down to the keyboard and chase my fingers while they danced across the keys. I would shoo him gently away, he'd squawk his displeasure, and then jump back on the board. We both loved the game.

I talked to him as I worked, often asking if he wanted food to which he would answer, "Peep," like he knew what I was saying. Then we'd go downstairs to the frig, break off a piece of broccoli, his favorite, from a plastic bag, wash it, and take it back upstairs to attach it to his perch for nibbling.

After following this routine for several weeks, Birdie took it upon himself to initiate the procedure. "Wanna go get

you some food, Birdie Birdie?" he would say in a tiny but clear voice. Then he'd answer himself and say "Peep," meaning "of course."

I'd pick him up to carry him downstairs and by the time I opened the frig, he was making the exact sound of plastic rustling, then the snap of the broccoli sprig, and last, just before I turned the faucet on, he made the sound of the water flowing.

Birdie loved to hang upside from my bangs and gently peck me on the eyelids. Even though it didn't hurt, it was annoying and I would warn him not to bite me. So of course within weeks he was hanging upside down in my face, looking me straight in the eyes threatening, "Don't you bite mama."

After several months he had absorbed nearly 30 different phrases that he heard from me frequently. Then one day, I heard a phrase I'd never said myself. Birdie had put words together meaningfully to make a new sentence. This was the first time I realized that he really knew what he was saying when he talked. And this convinced me that birds do have language skills beyond mimicry.



He was clever and he loved playing tricks. If my daughter, who was afraid of birds, came over, he saw his chance to terrorize and he took it. He loved to dive bomb her and hear her scream, then he'd land on his cage, bob his little head up and down and laugh, "ha, ha, ha." Of course, his laugh sounded just like mine, which didn't help the situation any.

Parakeets have a brain that is smaller than a pea, yet they have been known to use up to 300 phrases. Most people see them as throw-away pets and we get a lot of them at the Sanctuary just because of that. In truth, they are smart little guys and make wonderful companions. They are active and entertaining, always into something.

Parakeets, also known as budgerigars or budgies, can live to be 15 years old if well cared for. They love to fly around the house, so the windows need a covering so they won't break their necks. They love to sit on shoulders and let their owners walk them around the house while doing chores. The sound that comes from a group of parakeets is musical and sweet and fills the house with happiness.

They need the same food that other parrots eat, seeds, veggies, fruit, eggs, etc. And they need their cages and bowls cleaned daily. They are very tender with their mates and often gaze lovingly at each other while mating. They feed each other by choking up food from their crops as part of their mating behavior.

Of all the parrots I have known and interacted with, the tiny parakeet is my favorite. Colorful, pleasant temperament, talkative, and playful, they make a perfect pet for any bird lover.



Ducky the Starling!

by Jim Gibson

I don't know how many of the readers have heard about Ducky. He was named by one of our volunteers because he was all mouth when he arrived. He or she at this point (undetermined) was brought to us as a hatchling. I am calling Ducky "he" until positive identification can be affirmed as to gender.

We tube fed Ducky for about six weeks at the Sanctuary until he became a fledgling. Then we did a gentle release into the wild or should I say our back yard. A gentle release is when you open the cage door and leave food & water out just in case they need it.

Since the release, Ducky has followed me around the yard demanding lots of attention on a daily basis. It is my

duty to keep the cats off of him and to make the dogs protectors over this bird while under my jurisdiction.

He has no fear. Ducky follows me in and out of our aviaries on my shoulder at times and fleeing for his life in others. He is much smaller and much faster than the birds we keep in the large shelters.



*image of a
Starling
from Wikipedia*

We keep a large bowl of water on our back porch filled at all times because he takes a bath eight to ten times a day. He has learned to hunt in the wild chasing bugs under leaves, butterflies, flies, moths, grasshoppers and so forth. If I stand in one place too long he pecks under my shoes to find prey. His roost is on our back porch at nine feet above the floor out of the weather and in site of us while we watch TV at night.

As I walk around the yard he rides on my head or shoulder and when I stop to feed he flies to the ground, hunts bugs till I start to move to another location he then flies to my shoulder and rides to the next location.

When we finally head back to the house, he expects to be fed. We have a chow that contains all the supplements he needs for a healthy diet. I offer him about a teaspoon held tight with thumb and three fingers. He then pecks between my fingers, prying them apart just enough to get a bite the size of one pellet at a time. This goes on for two to three minutes, then he flies to his water bowl, takes a few drinks, and starts bathing. I have to step back a few feet or get drenched since he slings water six feet in all directions.

Ducky has been a delight to care for. He started out a drab brownish color but, in maturing, he is growing new feathers, white & black speckles on his chest with black, brown, and white variations on his wings and back. He is the cleanest bird I have ever encountered.

Read next month for an ongoing saga of Ducky my Wonder Bird!

Notes from our Sanctuary intern, Hayley.

by Hayley Bowles



Animal Control Rotation

With Jean as my supervisor at the sanctuary I am pretty much guaranteed to have a very diverse experience. She told me personally, "that she doesn't want me getting bored and that she wants me to have as diverse of an experience as possible." As part of my diverse experience I rode with Parker County Animal Control, because at one point, I had thought that animal control might be something I might pursue after college.

I arrived at the animal shelter at about nine in the morning and was greeted by Karen. She showed me around a bit and then took me with her to the local police department to run a few errands, after that I spent the rest of my day going back and forth to calls with Matt. Although I had a great time riding along with Matt, I have realized that being an animal control officer is not for me.

We went to a total of three calls the whole day and then spent the rest doing welfare checks and driving around. I'm all for the part of making sure people are taking care of their animals, but I'm not so fond of the driving around all day part of animal control. I would much rather be more hands on either doing rehabilitation, training, or putting on educational shows like you see at zoos.

The first call we went to was to pick up a puppy that a family had found in their front yard and had held onto for a few days hoping someone would come looking for her. They couldn't keep the puppy themselves because they already had an older dog that wasn't friendly towards other dogs.

The next call was to a dog that was supposedly wrapped around its dog house and couldn't reach its water. When we arrived at the house, the family was home so they showed

us to the dog. This dog was in their bag yard chained to a two by four without shade or water. Matt quickly told the family that they had to move the dog under shade and give it water and that he would be back to check on the dog and if changes weren't made then he would have to take action against them.

The final call came from out in the country where a herd of cattle were blocking the road. By the time we arrived, the cows had moved off the road and were lying under trees. We were able to reach the farmer responsible for the cows, and he quickly came and herded the cattle back to his property.

Small Changes can Make a Big Difference

At the sanctuary, we have two hanging aviaries, one with cockatiels the other with a variety of conures. The conures had to be split up after they had started ganging up and attacking one another. One of the worst of all of the conures that was doing the attacking also bit Jim as he was feeding the group. This particular conure was moved into a different aviary that has a variety of birds from Amazons to Cockatoos. This particular aviary is my favorite, so I spend the majority of my extra time at the sanctuary bonding with these birds.

It never fails that once I step foot into this aviary, two birds will always land on me almost instantly, Snuggles a Goffin Cockatoo and Munchie a Sun Conure. With these two always landing on me and always receiving a lot of attention, I have noticed that the other birds are also more willing to at least come and get a quick scratch on the head. I have made great strides in befriending almost all of the birds in this aviary, even the "nasty" conure that was moved from the other aviary. "Felix" as I have just now decided to call the little Sun Conure is now not only stepping up and letting me pet him, but he is also giving me kisses.

"...I have made great strides in befriending almost all of the birds in this aviary..."

A Special Program for Fred

by Jean Gibson

A few weeks ago we had a Lesser Sulfur Crested Cockatoo surrendered to the Sanctuary. HER name is Fred. We actually have very little history on Fred. She is 43 years old but all we have is the last three months she has been passed around to three different homes. Fred is a sweet, talkative bird doesn't bite or scream but she done one thing – she has ripped the skin off her belly making a hole 6 inches by 4 inches. That doesn't sound good but when you see that her whole belly is 6 inches by 6 inches – you realize what a dreadful gaping hole it is.

Fred was surrendered to us at Birdlink Sanctuary because the family that had her was shocked by her mutilation and had no idea how to stop it.

So this is where our story begins. Over the next months, I am going to journal every step we take to make Fred live. And yes this is life or death for Fred. Left to her own devices she will either die of an infection or bite into a blood vessel and bleed to death. We have to “think outside the box” and try to stop this behavior.

Chapter One – The day we met.

The family arrived at Birdlink Sanctuary to surrender the cockatoo. They had only had her for a little while and didn't have much history. Another family member had passed the cockatoo to them. That family member had only had Fred a few weeks. They knew her age. They said she had started to pull skin off her belly so they had put a collar on her to stop her. But Fred was able to remove the collar and would rip at her chest at night, ever enlarging the wound on her belly. They were frustrated and didn't know what to do, so they brought her here.

Before us stands a Lesser Sulfur Crested Cockatoo, reported to be 43 and female. Her entire abdomen, and legs have been plucked free of feathers. She is wearing a collar that has rubbed off the feathers and bruised her neck. There is a large bloody area on her abdomen where Fred has removed skin. Her feathers are beige, dull and rough, she smells strongly of cigarettes. With the help of intern, Haley, we begin bathing Fred in a constant flush of warm water and Dawn dish detergent.

It seems very likely that her feather plucked skin has been irritated, stung, by the toxins in the house of her previous owners, the chain smokers.

Next month – The things we tried.



Who are We?

Birdlink Sanctuary is a 501(C)(3) Non-Profit Texas Corporation, for rescue birds and animals, with 20+ years of experience in wildlife and companion animal rehabilitation. We are located in Weatherford, Texas. Our five acres of land has become a temporary and permanent sanctuary for all manner of feathered and furry friend in need. We benefit greatly from our volunteers and local community. Come out and see us at one of our many outreach events or visit us online!

www.birdlink.org

www.facebook.com/birdlink

Jean & Jim Gibson

