



The Official **NEEWS** Letter of Foster Parrots & **The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary**

## Cockatoo Breeder Challenge: Be Forever Responsible for What You Produce

By Karen Windsor

*"Peaches is not happy in our home anymore. We are not happy and cannot deal with her constant demands for attention. We are in our 60's and the last 3 years have put a strain on our home. We have tried everything...The vet even gave us something to calm her down, but that didn't work either... I hope you can help us or maybe point us in the right direction. She needs to be happy. We need to be happy..."*

*"I love my bare eyed cockatoo. I cannot provide a good enough life for her and it is killing me. I feel terrible that she is by herself for days on end. I hate having [her] in a cage, unhappy. She deserves a good life with people who can provide it for her. I am 23 years old and I work 60-70 hours a week. I am not home enough to properly care for this beautiful bird."*

The Surrender Requests appear in my in-box, and when I open them up and begin to read, my heart sinks over and over again. More cockatoos. Like sanctuaries and rescue organizations everywhere, we have hit our ceiling in regards to our ability to accept cockatoos at the NEEWS, and their prospects for finding adoptive homes capable of meeting their intense needs over the long-term (50 - 70 years) are virtually non-existent. Our



attempts to deal with an overwhelming unwanted cockatoo problem is akin to sticking our finger in the dike as we scramble to locate options for an ever-increasing population of unplaceable cockatoos.

Due to the size of large species cockatoos, their neediness, their energy level and their capacity for normal self-expression in decibels not well tolerated by human ears, finding long-term homes for even the most well-adjusted cockatoos is a daunting prospect. For animals who require strong and consistent social connections in order to thrive, it is difficult these days to find homes in which the humans are present for all or most of each day. Many re-homing requests we receive express the profound guilt of human guardians over how little time they have for their cockatoos, and request that we find homes for their birds with people capable of giving them the time and love they deserve. Where are those homes? The fact is, there are few homes available in which cockatoos can receive the level of social support they require in order to thrive and to avoid developing behavioral problems that systematically decrease possibilities for their success as "pets".

A cockatoo's attempts to assert its needs - or simply exercise natural behavior - are typically met by attempts of guardians to control or eliminate behaviors that may be completely natural for the bird, but are intolerable to human guardians in the home environment. Few people have the time, resources or patience to address problem behaviors constructively or creatively, and the resulting frustration begins to mount in birds and humans alike. This is not a criticism of the



*Keva - a resident Molluccan cockatoo*

countless people who have tried and failed to care for a cockatoo. It is simply an illustration of the fact that it is virtually impossible to adequately meet the needs of these animals in captivity.

*"I took Hannah from a humane society when she was 7 or 8 years old. They were going to euthanize her and I didn't want that so I took her. I've had her about 15 years... Everyone is afraid of her, I am the only one that handles her and now she is biting me too. I am 61 years old and I can't imagine trying to care for her another 20 years."*

*"Do I want to give them up? No. I love them. But I am now afraid to handle Lefty since the last bite. He got my thumb and went to the bone. My husband was ready to get rid of them then and there for my safety. I've done what I can to rehabilitate them, they don't pluck [any more] and I know they love me in their own way. I'm 63 and I want something better for them than a scared old lady and an upset old guy for companionship."*

Repeatedly losing the humans they are bonded to, lacking predictability and stability in their lives, imprisonment, social isolation and loneliness... all of these situations are precursors to accelerating behavioral issues that render these animals ever more unstable in the home environment. But behavioral problems in cockatoos don't always arise from situations of abuse or neglect. Changes in behavior that become problematic in pet cockatoos are very often simply rooted in

*(cont'd on p. 2)*

**Save the Date! 10<sup>th</sup> Annual FP Fundraiser Extravaganza, Saturday, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>!**

*See page 7 for details*

# Cockatoo Breeder Challenge *(cont'd from the cover)*



biology. It can be difficult to remember that this bird who cuddles and says, “I love you” is a wild animal, but that is the reality that impacts every aspect of psittacine behavior. Very often, despite our best efforts to meet the needs of pet cockatoos, it’s evolutionary destiny that destroys avian-human relationships. Territoriality and aggression are natural behaviors that aid survival for cockatoos in the wild; removed from the natural context of what their lives were supposed to be does not eliminate their need to follow the same biological drives of their wild cousins. Choosing a mate (usually a favorite human in the home), establishing nesting territory and using aggression to assert those choices are the “behavioral problems” that most often render cockatoos unkeepable. As we scramble to consult veterinarians or animal behaviorists to help mitigate the issues, what we’re really trying to do is to render our cockatoos more “dog or cat like”. A cockatoo’s inability to actually be a cockatoo creates the biological and psychological conflicts that have a profound negative impact on the birds and, subsequently, on their people.

Arguably the most psychologically vulnerable of all parrots kept as pets, cockatoos are also the most likely of all captive birds to self-mutilate. While feather plucking is common in many species of parrots kept as pets, crossing that line into self-mutilation is the most extreme



manifestation of psychological stress and/or trauma. It is very often not reversible once it begins.

*“Hedwig’s feather picking problem suddenly erupted when she was about two. Out of the blue, with no previous history, I found her one morning with her breast feathers plucked and a strip of skin peeled off, maybe 1 1/4” x 3/8”, dripping blood onto the bottom of the cage.”*

*“The home Bebe was in when I met him had a bunch of kids. One would apparently pull his tail feathers out for fun. The wall behind his cage was splattered with blood - his blood - because of the severe self-mutilation, which resulted in an open wound on his chest the size of a baseball. You could smell the blood. He had no strength in his feet and would fall off his perches at night.”*

Casey, a 25-year old Goffins cockatoo, exhibited psychological stress not through self-mutilation, but through extreme phobic behavior that began, inexplicably, after the age of five. “For the first five years, he was a joy,” explained Casey’s guardian, Karen. “He did tricks to the point of my being able to hold him on his back in my hand. He’s so intelligent and picked up everything I wanted to teach him.”

What could have caused such a transformation in Casey? He had had a stable, loving home with Karen since he was 3 months old. The change in him after the age of 5 was extreme and beyond the abilities of his human family, despite their attempts to help him through the years. “The screaming is causing much stress in the household. He will not let any of us pick him up, although he wants attention... Casey is fearful of so many things. He doesn’t trust anyone, especially me. He will fling himself off a perch if startled or approached too quickly. I can only hope that in a different situation, he could lose his fear and be happy again.”

When we honestly assess what’s happening to cockatoos, what we’re witnessing is an unmistakable, collective distress call. It couldn’t possibly be more clear that cockatoos are suffering in captivity. Several years ago the Association of Avian Veterinarians issued a statement expressing the belief that, due to the inability of the average pet owner to provide for the complex needs of large cockatoo species like Moluccans and Umbrellas, these parrots should not be kept as pets.



*Bebe’s chest showing severe self-mutilation*

Apparently, the breeding community didn’t get the memo.

Through the years we’ve listened to a litany of breeder claims about “loving their birds”, but from our standpoint it appears this love has a shelf-life that expires once the bill of sale is issued. Vast numbers of baby cockatoos sold to consumers begin to fail in their homes once they progress past babyhood and past the excitement their guardians once felt over the endearing prospect of owning an animal as cuddly, affectionate and needy as a cockatoo. Ultimately, what breeders are really selling is suffering and heartbreak. Over the years, hundreds of cockatoos have passed through our doors; hundreds more have been turned away and/or referred for services elsewhere. Where have all these cockatoos ended up? There’s just no way to know in most cases. But we have to wonder why the responsibility for the failure of these birds as pets should fall on the shoulders of the rescue community alone. And for this reason Foster Parrots is launching “The Cockatoo Breeder Challenge”.

You say you love your birds? Then love them forever. Be forever responsible for what you produce. We challenge cockatoo breeders to issue a ‘Guaranteed Return Certificate’ to buyers stating that, at any time during the life of the cockatoo, if the relationship fails or the guardian is unable to continue care for any reason, the breeder will accept the return of that cockatoo. This is not a money-back proposition. It is simply a guarantee that the birds you breed, will have somewhere to go.

You say you love your birds? You are responsible for sending generations of cockatoos out into a world they cannot possibly fit into. This is what is happening to the cockatoos you say you love. It’s time for you to clean up your own mess. 🌀

# Meet Our Newest Resident Birds...

## Izzy - Blue & Gold Macaw



Sanctuary isn't right for all parrots, but for some parrots it's the only chance they may have for a quality of life. Izzy, a four-year-old blue & gold macaw, is once such bird. Even at his very tender age, he had been through four homes prior to being surrendered to Bob and Jill Lewis at the Northeast Avian Rescue (NEAR) in New York. Bob affectionately described this high energy, high spirited macaw as a "hyperactive Houdini", quick and amazingly smart, and nearly impossible to contain. "He is an escape artist," explained Bob, "and when he gets out of his cage he starts opening other cages..." After

spending a year at NEAR, it had become clear that there were no adopters willing to take on a bird as intense as Izzy. We made arrangements for him to come to the NEEWS. Izzy was integrated into the open concept macaw community and immediately began to try to make friends. Within just a couple weeks he won the heart of Lightning, a single blue & gold macaw who's been a sanctuary resident since 2009.

## PJ - Double Yellow Headed Amazon

Every now and then we meet a precious old bird who seems to possess the wisdom of the ages. PJ, an elderly double yellow headed Amazon came to Foster Parrots to enter into our adoption program, but it quickly became evident that this old soul had significant health issues that would preclude him from adoption. A chronic sinusitis has defied remedy by a number of veterinarians over the years. A series of exams by NEEWS veterinarian, Hank Wietsma, indicates a

benign but inoperable tumor in the sinus cavity. PJ will require periodic nasal flushes for the rest of his life, and regimens of steroidal medication when symptoms flare. That's quite a lot for an old Amazon to endure, but PJ is the gentlest of Amazons. Though he may complain when it's medication time, he never bites. He now lives permanently in the Ed Hall where he can be heard trilling, talking happily throughout each day, and offering his head for scratches when he feels like a little love!



## Adoption Corner



### Cleo

Cleo is 28-year-old female blue fronted Amazon whose been waiting at the sanctuary since September 2016 for someone to take her home! She has an unwavering preference for men and will be charming, flirtatious and possessive of her chosen male human. Cleo likes to be the one in charge and can bite, so she can use a little bit of behavior training, but she is food motivated and eager to have a positive relationship with a man. Consequently, she is a great candidate for positive reinforcement training, and has responded well to training by our team at

the sanctuary. She is more than willing to be handled by a man, and will also step up on a stick. Cleo prefers not to be caged and is a wonderful "hang-around" bird. She is not destructive and is content to sit and observe the activities happening around her when she is not on her chosen person. She has always lived around other birds, but prefers people. Her perfect adopter would be a man with time and love to give, and a level of experience that can be helpful in managing Cleo's somewhat willful nature.



### Comet

Comet is an absolutely delightful, 12 year old sun conure. Gender is unknown, though we suspect she may be a female. She is an "equal opportunity" lover and has no gender preference, easily going to either men or women. She loves to be with people, craves attention and can easily be handled. Like all sun conures, Comet has a loud

voice and will use it to solicit attention, but ample out-of-cage time and being welcome as an active part of the family is all this little one wants! When she's feeling lonely or a little insecure, Comet does a little plucking on her tummy, but the support and stability of a loving family will help eradicate this small issue.

*(cont'd on p.6)*

# A New Home For A “Homer”

## Domestic Pigeons: The Hidden Avian Welfare Issue



*Kahuna, a homing pigeon*

Sometimes animals enter our lives quite unplanned, and most often after they have already endured their own inauspicious and circuitous path before coming under our care. If someone had told me I'd be spending three solid days and two hundred dollars renovating a shed to build a large aviary for a pigeon I'd have said they were crazy. But when Kahuna arrived at the New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary, he, as they say, had me at “Coo”. Apparently still quite young, he had been found on a street in Providence. Under the care of the NEEWS he was vetted and de-loused. Within just a few weeks he had increased impressively in size and was utterly handsome! But without other pigeons of his variety at the sanctuary he was without community. After months of making excuses why I should not take in the lone bird with no friends and a feisty attitude, I brought him home from the sanctuary.

Kahuna is a homing pigeon, or a ‘Homer’ in pigeon racing parlance. His band could be traced to a pigeon club in Massachusetts, but we have found that breeders generally do not

welcome the return of pigeons who fail to fly home. Not willing to invest resources or support the genetics of pigeons regarded as “damaged goods”, some pigeon breeders will euthanize these undesirable birds.

Homing pigeons bond strongly and mate for life. So strong is their reproductive drive and their desire to get back to their mates that they are, in fact, seen as a symbol of fidelity, love and home. This propensity for bonding has been exploited to the point of creating a sport that is global in scope and can be extremely lucrative for breeders of some of the world's most acclaimed racing birds. One very successful method for training homing pigeons for lives as racers is referred to as “widowhood”. Once a homing pigeon has been mated and produced offspring, these birds are allowed access to their mates and their babies only upon returning from their race. This creates the sense of urgency needed to cultivate a winner. Some racing pigeons are simply shown their mates in the presence of another bird within their nest box before being taken away to race and the lasting image of that drives them to fly faster

By Michele Nash

to deal with the interloper when they get back home. While methods like these create “money-makers” for hobbyists, it's yet another example of human use of animals for utilitarian purposes without consideration for the impact on the animal. Pigeons bond for life and sometimes do form lifelong bonds even with same-sex partners, suggesting that bonding is rooted in emotional attachment, not just reproduction. And of course, we cannot ignore the risks to the lives and safety of the birds. Predation is a constant threat, and factors like weather systems, accidents, hunger, dehydration and exhaustion result in the untold numbers of injured and lost pigeons that fill humane shelters from coast to coast every year.

Pigeons are not widely regarded as “companion animals”, but the fact is that these birds can make wonderful pets. They are intelligent, affectionate and interactive. Their soft coos are infinitely more pleasant to listen to than the calls of the average parrot! Most of all, the need for homes for these birds is enormous. Pigeons bred for racing or for dramatic releases at events like weddings do not have the ability to survive in the wild without assistance from people to provide food, shelter and protection from predators. They are not “wild animals”.

Kahuna happily came home with me and together (with maybe a teeny bit of help from my husband) we converted our shed into a very impressive pigeon coop. Kahuna was instantly at home, but he was still lonely. This led me to the MSPCA in Boston where “Pudge” had been waiting almost 3 months for adoption. Upon first seeing her in her cage at the shelter I was dumbstruck. The picture online did not properly



I arrived home with Pudge, and since it was approaching dusk, I thought I would allow just a brief introduction through the bars of her carrier and take her inside with me for the night.

convey her size at all. She was enormous, at least twice the size of Kahuna. And she was beautiful! Pure white and sleek as a sea otter with a cranium shaped like a beluga whale, she sat there placidly and royally, as if waiting for her prince to arrive.

Pudge is a King Pigeon, I soon learned, and according to veteran pigeon rescuer Elizabeth Young from Palomacy Pigeon & Dove Rescue in San Francisco, CA., these impressive birds are the “masters of the leisure arts”, a large docile breed known to produce the young squab seen on many restaurant menus. Like Kahuna, Pudge had no ability to survive in the wild. Had she not been found and brought to the MSPCA she would have perished.

This was not to be. From first sight, Kahuna stopped doing his perpetual figure 8’s and constant cooing and stared, and stared, with what looked like awe. I let Pudge out of her carrier and she lifted off, albeit like a Flying Fortress heavy bomber, whereby she alighted immediately on a roost in the outdoor aviary- Kahuna following fast like a nimble and quick F-18 in comparison. A few chortles later by Kahuna, and they were enjoying seed on the ground together. Within just a couple days they were inseparable, happily lazing about, engaging in friendly beak wrestling and canoodling in the basket that Kahuna had claimed as their nest. The rescue of one lucky pigeon had resulted in the rescue of two, and also the beginning of my advocacy for these remarkably intelligent and social birds. 🌀



## I Have Found A Lost Pigeon! Now What?

All fancy pigeon breeds are descendent from the wild rock pigeon - but these domesticated birds are not wild and do not have the ability to survive without human support. With some 15,000 breeders across the country and a hobby that has been around for centuries, by some estimates, less than 5 percent of birds do not return home, but this still represents a loss of thousands of birds in any given year. Here’s how you can help:

**Take that pigeon in off the street!** Lost homing pigeons may be hungry and dehydrated. Commercial seed mixes for parakeets and/or chicken crumbles can be offered in a pinch. Pigeons are “suction drinkers”, so offer water in a cup or small bowl.

• **Palomacy Pigeon & Dove Rescue** offers a wealth of pigeon care information and also references to pigeon rescue organizations across the country. Palomacy can be found at [www.pigeonrescue.org](http://www.pigeonrescue.org)

• **Adopt a pigeon!** These beautiful birds are intelligent, social, interactive and affectionate - and much easier on the ears than parrots!

• **Create a sanctuary!** Your local SPCA or humane shelter will be grateful for the help. Converting an existing shed or other structure to a pigeon coop with indoor/outdoor access can be done inexpensively. Due to their highly social nature, several pigeons can share a single aviary. Pigeon coops should be predator safe, offer sheltered roosting, and outdoor space for foraging, strutting and some level of flight.

# NEEWS Staff Announcements!



## Beverly Lewis - Cockatoo Manager

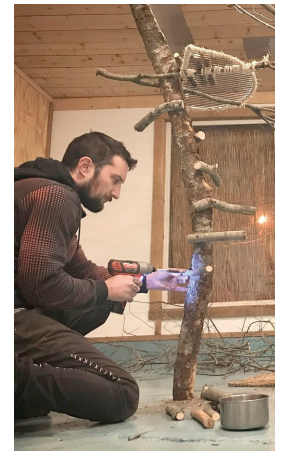
We would like to take the time to congratulate Foster Parrots volunteer, Beverly Lewis, on her official new title as Cockatoo Manager at the sanctuary. For so many years Beverly has taken the lead on the management of these incredible birds who are the most difficult and complex of all parrot species kept as “pets”. Her deep personal connection to the lives of each individual bird, her understanding of their behavior, their psychological profiles and the challenges they face every day in the sanctuary setting has resulted in a level of care and quality of life for these birds that would not have been possible without her. In order to ensure a

continuum of care, Beverly has been responsible for training all of the brave volunteers at the sanctuary who have expressed interest in working with the cockatoos. In-so-doing she has “spread the love”, creating a team of outstanding cockatoo care givers who provide the support these special birds need, and have created a little “cockatoo sub-culture” within the larger sanctuary environment. Special thanks to Beverly, Alyssa Christian, Michaela Kennedy, Jennifer Gagnon, Amy Abajian, Donna McAdams, Thalia Field, Rita Rooney, Lara Gordon and Monica Armstrong for their devotion to the lives of these beautiful birds.

## Pat Schofield - Facility & Enrichment Manager

When Pat joined the Foster Parrots team, we could not have anticipated the extent to which his skills and creativity would transform the aviary environments and the sanctuary itself. Pat has an eye for detail and an innovative spirit that he’s able to apply intuitively to the needs of the birds, creating unique, fun and stimulating aviary features. His problem-solving skills and dedication to the task-at-hand are also invaluable as he tackles endless facility maintenance and improvement projects that can range from plugging a hole to creating a really BIG hole as he powers

through the walls of the facility, opening up new windows that increase light and air circulation dramatically. Pat has been officially promoted to the position of Facility & Enrichment Manager. Although this is now his primary focus at the sanctuary, Pat will continue to work with the birds, who all seem to love him, and will continue to help grow the Feral Arts program as one of our Artists in Residence.



## Saying “So-Long” to Rick Van Tuyl

As impossible as it seems, we will soon be saying farewell to our long-time employee, Rick Van Tuyl! With 17 years of parrot care experience under his belt and having worked at several of the most major parrot rescue organizations in the country, Rick joined the Foster Parrots family 5 years ago and has had such an incredible impact on the sanctuary, on the birds, and on all the staff and volunteers at the sanctuary. His skills in construction, big machine operation, and repair and

maintenance are only outshone by his gentle nature and the special calm, patience and care with which he handles the birds at the NEEWS. Over the past 5 years Rick has gone to school to earn his degree in psychology and will be leaving to apply his skills at a mental health facility where his passion for helping people can be fully realized. Of course, this isn’t really a goodbye! Rick will always be a part of the Foster Parrots Family. It’s comforting to know he’ll never be too far away.

## Adoption Corner *(cont’d from page 3)*



### Boy

We just love this bird! Boy is a 15-year-old male double yellow headed Amazon. He prefers women, though his previous guardian and primary care-giver was a man. Boy is a little on the shy side and needs some time to build trust, but he is interactive, interested in connecting and would love someone to take the time to get to know him. He is sweet-natured,

can easily be handled by his chosen person and will bond strongly. He likes to just hang around, and would prefer only to be caged when it’s bedtime. Boy has charmed us all with his gentle disposition and his delightful vocalizations and would love to be a cherished part of a loving human family.

***Interested in adopting a parrot?***

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**Please consider supporting Foster Parrots Fall Fundraiser by becoming an event sponsor!**



**GREEN FEATHER LEVEL SPONSOR: \$500**

- ☉ Company or individual listing as a Green Feather Level sponsor in our event program!
- ☉ Your company logo displayed on event posters!
- ☉ Receive 2 complimentary event tickets!



**BLUE FEATHER LEVEL SPONSOR: \$1000**

- ☉ Company or individual listing as a Blue Feather Level Sponsor with a ½ page ad or dedication in our event program!
- ☉ Your company logo displayed on event posters throughout the sanctuary!
- ☉ Receive 4 complimentary event tickets and 5 raffle tickets!



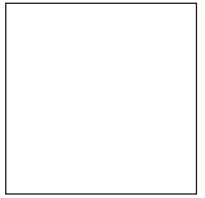
**RED FEATHER LEVEL SPONSOR: \$2000**

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- ☉ Reserve a 10-top table and receive 10 raffle tickets!



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 at The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary!**

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