

Pet Talk: Safe havens for needy birds

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By [Monique Balas, Special to The Oregonian](#)



[View full size](#) Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian Many people are unaware of the effort that goes into owning an exotic bird.

Unwanted, injured or abandoned exotic birds have few places to land for help in Oregon, but a bevy of bird enthusiasts do what they can.

One such group is [Exotic Bird Rescue of Oregon](#), whose mission is to help abandoned, injured or lost exotic birds and place them in new homes.

The nonprofit group receives about five requests from people who want to relinquish a pet bird each month, says Christine Pulsinelli, a volunteer, board member and foster care provider. Exotic Bird Rescue was established in 1994 and recently relocated from Eugene to Portland. It doesn't have a facility; instead, the volunteer-run group places birds within a small network of carefully screened foster and adoptive homes.

Many people give up their birds as a result of a change in their life, Pulsinelli says. An owner's new romantic partner, for instance, can trigger severe behavioral changes in a bird, such as screaming, biting or plucking out its feathers.

"We've also seen a large turnover of birds due to the economy because people lose their home," she says.

The organization also fields calls from people who made a spontaneous purchase and weren't prepared for the commitment of owning what's essentially a wild animal.

"They buy them at a pet store and say, 'That's a beautiful bird,'" Pulsinelli says. When she hears that, she says she nearly cringes. "There's a lot more to owning a bird than what you would expect if you didn't do your research."

An exotic bird's life span can range from 20 to 100 years, so adopting one is a long-term commitment.

That's why Exotic Bird Rescue of Oregon offers monthly classes providing training and skills necessary to care for such a bird -- as well as to educate potential owners on whether a bird is right for them. Anyone who wants to foster or adopt a companion bird from EBR must take the class.

At [the Avian Medical Center](#) in Lake Oswego, Dr. Marli Lintner has noticed another, all-too-familiar reason for relinquishment: Her clients are struggling to afford care, even those who have owned their avian companion for 30 or more years.

"They don't want to give up their birds," she says, "but they can't afford the treatment that needs to be done."

The clinic, which opened in 1986 and remains the only avian-exclusive veterinary clinic in Oregon, does its best to help. Aside from providing veterinary care, the clinic offers its clients bird boarding services, in-home behavioral consultation and a Parrot Placement Project, sort of like the classifieds for people who want to adopt a bird or find a new home for their bird.



[Dr. Marli Lintner of the Avian](#)

[Medical Center talks about why people bring birds to her facility.](#) Dr. Marli Lintner of the Avian Medical Center talks about why people bring birds to her facility. [Watch video](#)

[The Oregon Humane Society](#) is often faced with the challenge of caring for and placing the feathered charges that frequently arrive at the shelter. The birds are housed in a special area with heating units to keep them warm.

Currently, the organization is caring for 31 small birds (mostly canaries, finches and cockatiels) seized from a Newport pet store earlier this month. The birds remain in protective custody at the shelter.

Finding homes for the larger birds, such as cockatoos and macaws, can be

extremely challenging, says Humane Society investigations manager Linda Fielder.

"The big birds require an awful lot of time, socialization and interaction with their people," she says. "The reason we get birds at OHS is, more often than not, someone who got a large bird and didn't realize the time commitment and energy it would take to provide properly for it."

Fielder voices the sentiments of many bird lovers, who say people adopt birds without doing their research. Christopher Driggins of [Northwest Bird Rescue](#)-Birdman's Exotic Bird Sanctuary sees many birds who mutilate themselves because their owners aren't giving them the attention they need. He recalls a pet bird living with college students who often played video games, facing away from the bird. Thinking it had done something wrong, it began pulling its feathers out.

Driggins, 51, was 13 when he got his first parrot. In 2002, he and his father co-founded the nonprofit Northwest Bird Rescue in Vancouver, which provides care and homes for abandoned, ill or injured exotic birds. He's talked macaws out of trees, and broke his front teeth during a fall last December while rescuing an escaped white-bellied Caique parrot.

He likes to say that each species should come with an owner's manual, something that potential bird adopters would read so they understand all aspects of a bird's care.

"It's like placing you in a Ferrari and not telling you how to drive it," he says. "People need to do their research before jumping into that Ferrari. They're wonderful as long as you're literally ready to dedicate rest of your life to them."

Linda MacCoy helps run [the Avian Protection League](#), a small nonprofit that serves as a resource for injured or abandoned animals, mostly parrots. Shelters, veterinarians or community members will seek her help with an injured or abandoned animal, and the volunteer-run organization connects the animals with appropriate medical or foster care.

The biggest thing people can do to help these complex creatures, bird lovers say, is to do your research before you adopt. Sign up for one of EBR's monthly classes. Just make sure you're ready, because trying to find a new home for these animals isn't easy. The average bird changes homes five to seven times "if they're lucky," MacCoy says, which can be devastating.

A bird's trust must be earned, Pulsinelli says, but she believes winning their trust and love feels like an honor, and they make great additions to the family.

"They're a long-term commitment and definitely a long-term reward," she says.

-- [Monique Balas](#)

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