Paradise Lost:

The Hidden Crisis of Captive Birds

Parrots and other exotic birds thrive in the wild. They are extremely intelligent and sociable, but unfortunately suffer great distress when kept in cages away from their natural habitats and family members. "Pet" bird populations have skyrocketed in recent years, yet few people can provide for the special needs of exotic birds or understand the seriousness of a commitment for the life span of the birds, which depending on the species can be 20 to 70 years or more. This results in much suffering for these beautiful creatures. Read on to learn how you can help.

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Whether captive bred or wild caught, exotic birds are not domesticated animals. Those who acquire birds as companion animals soon discover that parrots, including lovebirds, parakeets, and cockatiels, are noisy (vocalizing is an important part of their social communication), messy, and can be destructive (chewing wood furniture, electrical cords, paper, and curtains). Most buyers do not have accurate expectations about living with a bird. Many birds spend their days isolated and confined to their cages. Others bounce from home to home as "owners" tire of them, are abandoned at local shelters, or set free to fend for themselves. A 1998 article in the Journal of the American Veterinarian Medical Association, estimated the U.S. pet bird population at 35-40 million yet most humane societies do not accept birds. Although unwanted exotic birds are a growing problem, it remains a hidden crisis.

One of the most common assertions made by breeders is that captive breeding is necessary to keep parrots from becoming endangered. Captive breeding fails to address the leading causes of wild bird population decline -- habitat loss, pollution, and the pet trade. Instead, the vast majority are bred for purely commercial purposes in breeding facilities that often resemble nothing more than warehouses of birds for production purposes.

What You Can Do

- Never buy a bird from a pet store or breeder. If you feel you are prepared to provide lifetime care for a bird, contact a local bird club or humane society to find a bird in need of adoption.
- Don't patronize any store that sells birds or displays them. Let them know why you are taking your business elsewhere.
- If you know of someone who has lost interest in their bird and/or is no longer providing good care, give them this fact sheet and help them find a suitable home for their bird.
- If you know someone who is thinking of purchasing a bird, give them this fact sheet and encourage them to adopt.

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