

# EPPA GAZETTE

*Newsletter of the Edmonton Pet Parrot Association*

**Summer 2007**

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## Website Address:

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## Meetings:

Held the last Thursday of each month, except December, June and July at the City Arts Center, 10943 84<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**Above Photo:** A wild Kaka parrot photographed in New Zealand (North Island)  
Left: Orange-winged Amazon

## Club News & Past Meetings

Please note that all of our meetings will now be held at the City Arts Center, which is at 10943 84<sup>th</sup> Avenue. They will be on the last Thursdays of the month.

**April's Meeting:** We had a round table discussion about parrot-related issues this month. The parrot of the month was Tucker the Maroon-bellied Conure, who lives with Sandy V.

**May's Meeting:** Jessie gave a presentation on supplementing your parrot's pelleted or seed-based diet and the parrot of the month was Chicken, an African Grey who belongs to Jody.

For **June**, instead of having a meeting, we had a picnic at Petra's place.



**Above:** Snowy, the Citron-crested Cockatoo, who belongs to Pete S. This photo was taken by Ed at the June picnic.

**Thank you** to Sandy and Jody for bringing your parrots to meetings, and to Petra for hosting the picnic. Thanks also to the Hagen company for donating a large cage, food, a large perch and a large toy for a raffle at the picnic, and thanks to Pete for donating Tupperware and bulletin boards for our raffle.

## Upcoming Meetings



The next meetings will be on August 30<sup>th</sup> and September 27<sup>th</sup>. Activities and parrots of the month will be announced on the website soon.

**Have ideas for meeting activities?** Please anyone on the executive know! These could be ideas for a toy-making session, a speaker, or a good video to watch. If there is a certain topic related to parrots you are knowledgeable about and could give a presentation on, that would be much appreciated!



**Above:** Two Sulfur-crested Cockatoos photographed at the botanic gardens in Sydney, Australia.



Membership fees are due at the August or September meetings. If you cannot make them, contact a member of the executive to make other arrangements. Fees are \$22 for single memberships and \$27 for family ones.

## Augmenting Your Parrot's Pelleted Diet

By: Jessie Zgurski

**(These are my notes for the presentation I gave in May).**

After having a look through parrot magazines, websites, and books, one could be forgiven for being a bit confused over what is the best diet for a parrot. Some insist that only pellets should be fed and that adding anything else to the diet will throw off the perfect nutritional balance provided by the pellets. Others insist that feeding pellets alone is boring for the parrot and that a mix of pellets and fresh foods is best. Still, a few parrot keepers insist that one should not feed pellets at all and that a seed diet with fresh foods added is best. Who is right? Is there only one acceptable way to provide a parrot with a nutritional, enriching diet?

Those who insist that only pellets should be fed to parrots tend to claim that the pellets contains a perfect balance of all the fats, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals that a parrot needs. Adding extra foods to the diet, the argument goes, will result in a nutritionally-deprived parrot.

Is this claim necessarily true? Well, a great deal of research has gone into the formulation of pelleted diets, and a parrot fed on one over the long term will be very unlikely to develop any nutritional deficiencies. This is why I generally recommend that pellets, rather than seeds, be used as a base diet. However, whether they are "perfect" for all species is questionable, particularly given that the formulations are generally based on research done on poultry, or one parrot species, the cockatiel. In reality, there are over 300 parrot species that range over a wide variety of habitat and that have a huge

range of diets. For example, Hyacinth Macaws eat high-fat palm nuts almost exclusively, while other species, such as the Puerto Rican Amazon, will include parts of over 58 plants in their diets. One diet is unlikely to encompass the needs of all parrot species.

Additionally, the claim that adding additional food offsets the perfect balance in the pellets assumes that the parrot owner knows nothing about nutrition and is offering the parrot mostly junk food. However, adding whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and quality sources of protein will enrich a parrot's life greatly. Many excellent and conscientious parrot breeders and world-class zoos that have healthy, active parrots supplement their birds' diets with healthy, fresh foods. Parrot owners should not be afraid to do the same thing if desired. After all, part of the fun of owning parrots is seeing them enjoy life, and many parrots prefer fresh foods to pellets. All of my parrots eat pellets as a base diet, but they clearly enjoy the treats they get eat morning and the bowls of nutritious food they get in the evenings.

The fruits and vegetables I offer my parrots not only enrich their lives, but they provide extra nutrition in the form of phytonutrients (also called phytochemicals). "Phyto" refers to plant, so these are simply chemicals that occur naturally in plants. They are different from vitamins or minerals in that they are not 100% necessary for proper functioning, but they often do have health benefits. For example, a search done by me for academic journal articles on the subject revealed hundreds of studies have shown that many of the chemicals that occur in plants help reduce cancer rates in common lab animals exposed to carcinogens (cancer-causing agents). They

also selectively destroy cancerous cells in a cell culture containing healthy cells.

Examples of phytochemicals include anthocyanins (which are the red, purple or blue pigments in plants), lycopenes (the red pigment in tomatoes and grapefruit), carotenes (red, yellow, or orange pigments) or phenolic acids (found in many berries, nuts and chili peppers). Abundant evidence indicates that phytochemicals have numerous health benefits. Pellets lack them, so adding fruits and vegetables to a parrot's diet will improve its health, especially in the case of older parrots, which are more prone to cancers and other health problems.

### **Healthy Table Foods for Parrots**

If a parrot owner wishes to supplement a pelleted diet, then a mix of whole grains, vegetables, seeds, nuts, and fruits should be offered. For birds on a seed diet, extra foods must be added to prevent the parrot from developing severe nutritional deficiencies, because seeds lack many vitamins and minerals.

### **Grains**

Grains and grain-based foods can make up about 30% of a parrot's diet. Whole grains, or products made from whole grains, are nutritionally superior to refined grains or products made from them. Refined grains are those that have had the bran and the germ - which contain most of the vitamins and minerals - removed. White bread, white pasta, and white rice are examples of products made of refined grains. Some products made from white grains have been enriched with some vitamins, though they still contain less fiber than whole-grain products. Even so,

enriched refined-grain products are superior to unenriched ones.

Examples of whole grains that can be offered to parrots include brown rice, oatmeal, and brown millet. Pasta, bread, and non-sweet cereals made with whole grains can be offered as well. Other exotic grains, including bulgur (which is cracked wheat), brown cous-cous, or quinoa or amaranth (not true grains, but you can cook them like one), are great to feed to parrots. These ones have a somewhat nutty flavour, so most parrots relish them. They are a good first choice to offer "seed junkies" or birds that won't eat fresh foods or pellets. A Quaker Parrot I fostered wouldn't accept many fresh foods at first, but he chomped down on the first bowl of quinoa I offered him. He loved bulgur and cous cous as well.

Most whole grains are excellent sources of B vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, and proteins. Most whole grains, such as quinoa, also contain all of the essential amino acids your parrot will need. The majority of whole grains contain approximately 10-12% protein, which is about how much protein a non-breeding, adult parrot needs for maintenance. During a molt, this can be increased to 15-19%. Lean, cooked meats, cooked eggs, beans and lentils are also good sources of protein.

### **Fruits**

Fresh fruits are an excellent item to supplement your parrot's diet with. All can be offered to your parrot, except avocado. However, not all fruits are created equal and some do contain more vitamins than others.

The best way to gauge a fruit's vitamin content is to consider the colour of the flesh (not the skin) of the fruit. Most red,



yellow, and orange fruits are excellent sources of vitamin A precursors. These are the compounds (such as carotenoids) that can be converted to vitamin A in the body by parrots. The best fruit sources of carotenoids are cantaloupe, sweet red, yellow, or orange peppers, apricots, red or pink grapefruit, papayas, mangos, pumpkins and tomatoes. Orange peaches, plums, and green peppers also contain some carotenoids. Generally, the darker the flesh of the fruit, the more carotenoids it contains.

On the other hand, some fruits contain few vitamins, or minerals. These include fruits with pale flesh, such as apples, pears, or grapes. However, since these tend to be many parrots' favourite fruits, and do contain antioxidants and other phytochemicals, they can be fed to parrots as treats. However, the fruit part of a parrot's diet should lean towards the ones with more carotenoids. Bananas can also be fed to parrots who like them, as they are a good source of B vitamins.

Berries should be offered to parrots as well, because many parrots enjoy extracting the seeds from them. My Maroon-bellied Conure, Lucy, enjoys picking the seeds out from strawberries, Saskatoon berries, raspberries, and blackberries.



Blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries are all sources of vitamin K, and all berries contain high levels of antioxidants. In particular, they contain high levels of chemicals found to kill certain types of cancer cells, and black raspberries contain the highest concentration of them.

Most fruits contain some vitamin C, with citrus fruits and berries containing the most. However, most parrots do not need an external source of vitamin C, because they can synthesize it in their own bodies. Vitamin C aids in the absorption of iron, but some bird species are prone to iron storage disease, where an abnormally high amount of iron winds up stored in the body. Softbills such as mynahs and toucans are very prone to this problem, so their intake of citrus fruits, and iron-containing foods should be kept very limited. Certain lory species may be prone to the problem as well, although very little is known about this problem in birds in general. Lories or other parrots diagnosed with iron storage disease should not be fed citrus fruits or foods that contain significant levels of iron (e.g. meat, beans, iron-fortified cereals, spinach and lentils). Commercial low-iron diets are available for toucans, mynahs and parrots with iron storage disease.

The *Merck Veterinary Manual* has this to say about iron storage disease in birds:

*Hemochromatosis is the current popular scientific designation of this disease, but the specific histopathologic and physiologic changes that define hemochromatosis may not be the same as those seen in birds. Therefore, it is recommended that this condition be referred to simply as iron storage disease. It is common in pet mynahs and toucans, as well as in certain zoo birds such as the bird of paradise. It has also been occasionally reported in pet psittacine species, particularly lories. Iron storage disease is reported to be associated with excessive intake of dietary iron.*

*However, not all birds become affected when kept on similar diets. Stress or genetic factors may also play a role. Certain foods rich in vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, increase dietary iron uptake. Current recommendations are that the diet for toucans and mynahs contain <50-100 ppm of iron. Once clinical signs appear, low-iron, low-vitamin C diets and periodic phlebotomy have been helpful in control. Recommending low-iron diets routinely for pet mynahs and toucans is prudent (commercial formulas are available).*

## **Vegetables**

Frequently offer any vegetables to you parrot, as they are excellent sources of all sorts of vitamins and minerals. Over the long term, a parrot should eat more vegetables than fruits.

Many vegetables are excellent sources of calcium, and if you offer your parrot a lot of grains, you will need to add a source of calcium to your parrot's diet. This is because most parrots need a phosphorus:calcium ratio of 1.5:2 to 1:2 in their diet, and most grains contain a lot of phosphorus and very little calcium. Cuttlebones are composed almost primarily of calcium carbonate, so scraping a bit of cuttlebone over grains offered to a parrot will also correct its phosphorus:calcium ratio.

Most dark green, leafy vegetables are great sources of calcium for your parrot. Broccoli – particularly the leaves, but also the little flowers on top – also contains plenty of calcium. The problem is that, unless they were fed these as juveniles, not all parrots will eat them! Some persistence

may be needed to get a parrot to eat his greens (as is the case with some children!). Some seeds and nuts also contain calcium, with sesame seeds being a good source. Almonds, flaxseeds, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, and pistachios also contain some calcium. Yogurt is also okay to add to your parrot's food – it contains plenty of calcium and does not contain lactose (which parrots cannot digest) like milk does. This is because the bacteria in the yogurt digest the lactose first.

In addition to being high in calcium, most dark green vegetables also contain plenty of carotenoids – more than most fruit. Carrots, orange squashes and sweet potatoes are also great sources of carotenoids. Green peas and green beans contain some carotenoids, lots of vitamin K, B vitamins, and some protein.



**Above:** A wild Sulfur-crested Cockatoo forages on sycamore fruits.

Other tips regarding vegetables: It is best to avoid onions, as they can cause anemia in some other animal species. Also try to limit the amount of spinach in a parrot's diet. Spinach contains oxalic acid, which interferes with calcium utilization.

## Nuts and Seeds

For a long time, it was common for parrot owners to feed their birds a diet made of exclusively seeds and possibly nuts. Such a diet contains too much fat for most parrots, and an insufficient amount of most vitamins. Vitamin A and calcium deficiencies, along with fatty liver disease, are very common in parrots that eat only seed and nuts.

However, while an all-seed diet is not a nutritionally complete one, seeds and nuts can be offered as treats. Most parrots love shelling and eating them, which makes them terrific training aids. They are also good sources of nutrients and protein.

However, be careful in how you offer the seeds. Many parrots, if offered seed along side other foods, will ignore the other foods and eat the seeds. If your parrot does this, then do not offer seeds alongside his fruits, pellets, and vegetables. I've noticed that my Amazon, Ripley, does this with corn as well. If I add corn to her grain and veggie mix, she eats the corn and throws out the rest of the food. If I leave the corn out, she'll eat most of the carrots, peas, and grain. The peas get eaten first. Offering your parrot a varied diet doesn't always mean that she's eating a varied diet, so monitor what your parrot eats at first to be sure she's actually eating a variety of foods.

The amount of seeds and nuts offered will depend on the parrot's activity level, weight, and species. Some species, like Amazons, *Pionus*, or Rose-breasted Cockatoos, are more prone than others to obesity. Such parrots should be offered a limited amount of high-fat foods, such as a small spoonful of seeds a day, or a nut per day.

Other parrot species, such as macaws or conures, rarely, if ever, become obese. Macaws and Golden Conures in particular require more fat than other parrots and should be fed a few to several nuts daily. Parrots living in outdoor aviaries also require twice the calories that parrots that live indoor in cages need, so such parrots can be offered more seeds and nuts.

Be careful if you like to offer your parrot peanuts, and do not feed him anything but clean, roasted, human-grade peanuts. This is because a toxic fungus, *Aspergillus*, sometimes grows in peanut shells. This type of fungus produces aflatoxins, which can damage a parrot's liver. Look for black specks inside the shells.

## Species-Specific Dietary Concerns

### *African Grey Parrots*

While all parrots need calcium, African Grey Parrots seem to suffer from hypocalcemia more often than other birds. Symptoms include weakness and seizures. Some recent research suggests that African Greys need to be exposed to UVB rays to properly metabolize calcium. The following is the abstract of the article that reported these results:

*Abstract: The effects of providing ultraviolet (UV) radiation (285 to 315 nm, ultraviolet B) on calcium metabolism in two groups of 20 healthy grey parrots (Psittacus e. erithacus) fed either a seed or pellet-based diet were investigated. There was a significant increase in the concentration of ionised calcium in the plasma of both groups, independent of the calcium and vitamin D-3 content of the diets*

*fed, and a significant increase in the plasma concentration of 25-hydroxycholecalciferol in only the seed-fed group. In a separate study there were no significant increases in plasma ionised calcium or 25-hydroxycholecalciferol between March and August in a group of 28 South American parrots (Pionus species) exposed to unfiltered natural sunlight.*

In other words, African Grey Parrots exposed to UVB light had more calcium in their blood than they did prior to having access to the UVB. Lights designed for reptiles give off the required UVB rays that African Greys need. However, carefully read the box to be sure that this is the case. The lights only need to be on the birds for an hour or so a day to be effective and they should be kept a few feet away from the parrot. Natural sunlight also contains UVB rays; however, glass filters them out. Leaving a bird outside in a cage (with supervision) will benefit his health by giving him access to UVB rays.

Vitamin D is also needed for a bird to metabolize calcium properly. Exposure to sunlight allows birds and reptiles to synthesize vitamin D3 from plant-based lipids. However, vitamin D3 is also available in pellets. Do not add extra vitamin D to a parrot's diet unless a veterinarian recommends you do so. Excess vitamin D can cause kidney problems and gout. In general, it's not necessary to add vitamins to your parrot's diet if he's eating pellets and healthy, fresh foods.

### *Lories*

Wild lories feed primarily on flower nectar and have dietary needs that are quite

different from those of other parrots. Commercial nectar mixes are available and these should be fed to lories instead of pellets. Additionally, they have much lower protein requirements than other parrot species. If a high-quality source of protein is offered, then only 3% of the maintenance diet needs to be protein (Matson and Koutsos, 2006). Thus, the "fresh food" portion of the diet for lories should be composed primarily of fruit.

### *Eclectus*

An unusual syndrome, often called "toe-tapping," is sometimes seen in *Eclectus* parrots. A bird with this problem will involuntarily contract his toe and leg muscles. Little is known about this problem, but Dr. Brian L. Speer, DVM. Dip, AVBP, ECAMS, reports that owners of birds with this problem should

*Remove from the diet ALL pellets, vitamin powders, vitaminized seed mixes, vitaminized treats, spirulina and other herbal mixtures, processed human foods such as commercial bread mixes, pasta, processed cheese, pizza, TV dinners, and any food item which contains man-made vitamins, preservatives or chemicals of any kind. Read the ingredients on packages carefully to make sure that these items are effectively and completely being removed from the diet.*

The parrot should, of course, also be taken to a veterinarian. A deficiency of calcium can cause muscle tremors in this and other species, so the vet may test the parrot's blood calcium levels. A great deal of anecdotal evidence suggests that a diet of all pellets, or the feeding of pellets with



artificial colours can predispose an *Eclectus* parrot to either toe-tapping syndrome or feather destructive behaviors.



**Left:**

**A Red Lory.**

### **Food as Enrichment**

Aside from health benefits, food can be used to enrich your parrot's life. Wild parrots spend 4-6 hours per day foraging and there are ways to allow a pet bird to "forage" as well.

Here are some examples:

~ Scatter some seed on a clean surface for your bird to find. Or, make a foraging tray by putting seeds and other safe items (twigs, hay, etc.) in a tray. The parrot will have to pick around the other items to find the seeds.

~ Don't chop or process the food *i.e.* give your bird peas in the pod, or whole fruits for them to pull the seeds out of.

~ Hide food in a box or bag for the parrot to find.

### **Quick and Easy ways to add fresh foods to your parrot's diet.**

You do not need to spend a great deal of time preparing meals for your parrot. If your diet is reasonably healthy, then you can likely just share food with your bird. Here are some other quick and easy ways to add extra nutrition to your bird's diet:

~Once a week, cook some whole grains and add veggies to them. Freeze in baggies in the freezer and thaw as needed.

~ Do remember that thawed out frozen vegetables are fine to offer parrots. Some books say that freezing destroys the nutrients but that is not totally true. Of all the ways to process food (cooking, drying, etc), freezing results in the lowest amount of nutrient loss.

~Many companies make mixes of pasta, and dried vegetables and fruits than can be rehydrated and heated up. I find these a bit too expensive to use as the main part of the diet, but they are good to have as they are nutritious, provide some variety and are easy to prepare. Birds that won't convert to a seed diet will often eat these.

### **Conclusion**

Pellets have taken the guesswork out of feeding a parrot, as they provide a bird with the carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals he will need. However, other foods can be added to a parrot's diet if a variety of grains, vegetables, fruits and nuts are chosen. These will enrich the parrot's life and add other beneficial phytonutrients not found in pellets to his diet.

### **References**

- Matson, K. D., and Koutsos, E. A. 2006. Captive parrot nutrition: Interactions with Anatomy, Physiology and Behavior. In: *Manual of Parrot Behavior* pp. 49-58. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Oxford, UK.
- Speer, B. L. and Desborough, L. 2002. Toe-tapping from the combined

perspectives of an Eclectus owner and an avian veterinarian.  
<http://www.avesint.com/toetap.html>

Stanford, M. 2—6. Effects of UVB radiation on calcium metabolism in psittacine birds. *Veterinary Record* 159: 236-241.

Teresa L. Lightfoot, D.V.M., Dipl. A.B.V.P. (Avian). 2—6/ *Caged Birds*. In: *The Merck Veterinary Manual*. Kahn, C. M. (ed.) Merck and Co. Whitehouse Station, N.J. (Note: this useful resource is also available online at [www.merckvetmanual.com](http://www.merckvetmanual.com) )

## Other Resources

### Websites

<http://www.nutritiondata.com/>

-This is an interesting website to play with. You can enter nearly any type of food, and it'll give you nutritional data on it.

<http://www.parrothouse.com/pamelaclark/feedingcompanion.html>

-A very thorough article on parrot nutrition by Pam Clark.

<http://www.exoticpetvet.net/20facts.html>  
-“20 Things You Must Know About Nutrition” by Margaret A Wissman, DVM, DABVP.

### Books

Burgmann, P. M., and Earl-Bridges, M. 1993. *Feeding Your Pet Bird*. Barron's Educational Series, Hauppauge, New York.

Deutsch, R. 2005. *The Healthy Bird Cookbook: A Life-saving Nutritional Guide and Recipe Collection*. TFH Publications, Neptune City, New Jersey.

## Parrot Websites

<http://parrots.org>

-This is the World Parrot Trust's Website. It's been completely redone and is excellent! Clicking on the “All About Parrots” tab on the left will take you to a library of articles on captive and wild parrots.

<http://www.parrotchronicles.com/>

-Parrot Chronicles, an E-Zine for parrot owners,

<http://www.parrottalk.com/mlist1.html>

-Some Email discussion lists for parrot owners.

<http://www.naturalencounters.com/>

-An animal training centre in Florida. I list it here because there are some interesting articles on parrot behavior and training on the site.



**Above:** A White-tailed Black Cockatoo at the Taronga Zoo.

## Parrots in the News

### Man Tries to Smuggle Ten Parrots from Mexico

UNION-TRIBUNE  
7:02 a.m. June 29, 2007

SAN YSIDRO: Border officers found 10 Amazon parrots in a duffel bag when a Bonita man tried to smuggle them in from Mexico on Tuesday, a federal official said.

The 50-year-old man drove a pickup across the border at the port of entry about 7:30 p.m. He did not declare the birds to Customs and Border Protection officers, spokesman Vince Bond said.

Bond did not say what prompted the officers to search the duffel bag. The birds were turned over to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's veterinary staff. One bird later died. The driver was detained for investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Agents at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa have seized 152 birds in 18 incidents since last October, the start of the federal fiscal year, Bond said.

-P.R.

(editor's note: From a photo of the birds, I'd say that they were Yellow-crowned Amazons).

From:  
<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/metro/20070629-0702-parrots.html>

### Very Rare Parrot Photographed for the First Time

Adriana Tovar y Luis Eduardo Urueña, researchers of the Colombia-based nonprofit Fundación ProAves, found and photographed the extremely rare Perija

parakeet (*Pyrrhura caeruleiceps*), of which only 30 to 50 individuals likely survive. These photographs are the first ever taken of the species.



<http://www.cityparrots.org/2007/06/27/rare-parrot-photographed-for-the-first-time/>

<http://www.proaves.org>

### China finds new species of big, bird-like dinosaur

By Tan Ee Lyn and Ben Blanchard

Wed Jun 13, 6:52 AM ET

HONG KONG/BEIJING (Reuters) - China has uncovered the skeletal remains of a gigantic, surprisingly bird-like dinosaur, which has been classed as a new species.

Eight meters (26 ft) long and standing at twice the height of a man at the shoulder, the fossil of the feathered but flightless *Gigantoraptor erlianensis* was found in the Erlian basin in Inner Mongolia, researchers wrote in the latest issue of Nature.

The researchers said the dinosaur, discovered in April 2005, weighed about 1.4 tonnes and lived some 85 million years ago.

According to lines of arrested growth detected on its bones, it died as a young

adult in its 11th year of life.

What was particularly surprising was its sheer size and weight because most theories point to carnivorous dinosaurs getting smaller as they got more bird-like.

"It had no teeth and had a beak. Its forelimbs were very long and we believe it had feathers," Xu Xing at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology & Paleoanthropology said in a telephone interview.

Through analyzing its skeleton, the researchers believe the Gigantoraptor shared the same ancestor and belonged to the same family as the Oviraptor.

With a beak and feathers, the Oviraptor is also bird-like and flightless, but weighed a mere 1 to 2 kg, Xu said.

Other similar feathered dinosaurs rarely weighed over 40 kg, which means the Gigantoraptor was about 35 times heavier.

The largest known feathered animal before the Chinese discovery was the half-tonne Stirton's Thunder Bird, which lived in Australia more than six million years ago.

"It's a giant dinosaur that looked very much like a bird ... whereas from what we have known before, bird-like dinosaurs were very, very small. Large dinosaurs are usually not bird-like. So this Gigantoraptor was an exception," Xu said.

If the Gigantoraptor had lived to a full-sized adult, it would have been a lot larger, but Xu could not estimate what that would have been.

However, the researchers believe it had an accelerated growth rate that was faster than

the large North American tyrannosaurs.

## SURPRISING DISCOVERY

The scientists had originally thought they had found tyrannosaur bones, as they were so large.

"It was a very surprising discovery, not at all what we expected," Xu said later at a news conference in Beijing. "So we spent a lot of time investigating the fossils which is why it took us so long to announce the results."

The scientists showed off two huge fossilized bones from the animal, and a model of its beaked head.

Its feathers were likely for show and for keeping its eggs warm, Xu added.

"We think it's the largest feathered animal ever to have been discovered," he said.

It had both herbivorous features -- a small head and long neck -- but also carnivorous ones -- sharp claws for tearing meat -- and could likely run fast on its long, powerful legs, the professor said.

"Of course, there's no way of knowing for sure," he added.

Its site of discovery, near Erenhot on the Chinese-Mongolian border, is known for fossils and calls itself "dinosaur town."

The city of just 100,000 is hoping to leverage this fame to attract tourists, said its Communist Party chief Zhang Guohua, and will spend more than 100 million yuan (\$13.11 million) on a new dinosaur fossil museum this year.

[http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/china\\_dinosaur\\_s\\_dc](http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/china_dinosaur_s_dc)



## **Birdie Body Language**

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant  
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

Most parrot people are aware of some of the basic body language our companions use to communicate with us. But it's usually the more negative ones! However, our buddies use a multitude of moves to express lots of emotions, both positive and negative. So, let's look at a few:

### **EXCITEMENT/AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS**

Although most of these activities are associated with aggressive/defensive attitudes in our birds, they can also simply signify any excitement, good or bad - so you have to know your bird, and observe closely to differentiate between aggressive postures that mean "Stay away!" and those that simply mean "I'm over-excited!" even in a good way. (Of course, even with those you need to be careful, as an over-stimulated bird can still act out by biting.)

*Eye pinning:* The pupils dilate and constrict rapidly, back and forth, indicating excitement and interest. Definitely means you need to pay attention and look out.

*Feather Puffing:* The bird fluffs his feathers out all over, but especially the head and neck, and with cockatoos, the crest is erect. In the wild, birds use this to appear larger, and thus be more intimidating to foes.

*Tail Fanning:* Especially in Amazons, the bird fans his whole tail out (like a mini-horizontal peacock), again, to appear large and "scary."

*Blushing:* Bare-faced birds like macaws allow you to visually observe the facial redness that accompanies excitement. (Actually, all parrots so this - we just can't see it through the feathers! Some birds

blush a light pink, others (Like my Amber), go a deep red. I find babies blush more than adults, as they experience new things in the world.

*Head Bowing:* The bird, while puffed up, eye-pinning, tail fanning, and blushing, also lowers his head, stretching out his neck. Often accompanied by a "growling" sort of sound, or with African Greys and Cockatiels, it's more of a "hissing" sound.

*Stretching/Wing Spreading:* The bird rises up on his tip toes, feathers and crest erect, neck stretched, wings eagle - spread - again, he's trying to look large and threatening. Often, a highly agitated bird will sway back and forth. "Flash" colors (Bright color accents under wings, crest or tail) are highly visible during this type of posturing - it's hard to miss, as this type of display is quite obvious!



**Above:** A juvenile kea showing the red under his wings.

Although aggressive behaviors and excitement behaviors are similar, the good observer with a trained eye can readily tell the difference. Work on developing your observation skills, so you'll know how to best proceed. Of course, a bird coming at you, head-lowered, with an open beak, is hard for anyone to misinterpret!



## **SOLICITOUS BEHAVIORS**

These include all the more passive ways a parrot asks for attention. If we ignore these, they can lead to more outright demands, such as screaming, or neurotic behaviors that become obsessive, almost ritualistic, habits such as constant flipping or circling in the cage, or toe-tapping, beak wiping, and odd looking head movements. The basic solicitous behaviors include the following:

*Food Begging:* Recently weaned babies often cry and "baby bob" repeatedly. They sit low on the perch, heads turned up, slightly quivering their wings, with heads bobbing rapidly. This needs to be addressed! Often, newly weaned babies revert after moving to their new home. It's a good idea to continue regular body weight checks, as anything over a 10% loss is cause for concern. I don't believe in time-table weaning, and do not feel it is inappropriate to continue, or re-start, hand feeding of young birds. Ask for guidance on how to best handle it.

*Wing Quivering:* The bird sits low with wings gently quivering, head out, and stretched and softly chirps to you. Some may "bob," even as adults. This is more common in females. It simply means "Pick me up! Love me!" I find it quite endearing and nothing to be alarmed about.

*Leaning Forward/Looking up at you with Big Eyes:* This is also a very sweet way birdies ask for some loving. They simply lean toward you and give you big, soft, goo-goo eyes! Pretty fool-proof for most birds!

*Feather Puffing:* Nothing like the feather puffing of aggression/over-excitement, which is stiff and rigid, this is a "soft" raising of the feathers, again, especially on the head and neck and means "Please scratch me and preen my pin feathers!" They need

out help to reach those difficult spots, and it's a glorious way to strengthen your bond by preening his "pins" for him!

## **HAPPINESS BEHAVIORS**

These are my favorites! They are also the most subtle and most often missed signals that our parrots give us. Learn to recognize them and you'll enjoy a whole new level of richness in your communications.

*Tail Wagging:* Often in one on one interactions, you'll see your bird give his tail a quick "fan" and a vigorous side-to-side shake. This means "I'm content, I'm enjoying myself and feeling quite relaxed!" It's always a happy sight!

*Happy-Wing Tai Chi:* You walk in the room, or up to your parrot, he spreads out one wing, in a big stretch, often accompanied by a full extension to the back of the leg on the same side (very graceful, martial-arts-looking). I love this one! Often, they do it at the most inopportune time, like when you're in a big hurry to put him up and get out for the day. But, this is the parrot equivalent of a big hug! It means "I'm so happy to see you! How 'ya doing?!" Don't ever rush him when he's being sooo courteous and pleasant!

*"Happy Beak":* It's late, he's eaten, he's played, he's cuddled, he's almost ready for bed - and you hear a funny grinding rasping sound coming from your bird. This is a total contentment, relaxed, happy behavior. I actually met someone once who professed to "hate" that sound! To me, it's music to my ears - it means my kids have had a great day and are ready to go night-night for sweet dreams!

*Regurgitation:* You're loving on your buddy when all of a sudden, he starts to bob, then deposits a warm gob of partially digested

food onto you! Well, you've just been paid the highest compliment your parrot can pay you!! This is how parrots say "I love you madly, for ever and ever - you're mine!!" Please, don't act grossed out, or make faces, or laugh, or run away. Simply say "I love you, too!" and give him a rub!

There's lots more behaviors and postures our companion birds use to express their moods, needs, and feelings to us. When you start to pay attention to your friend's many ways in which he communicates with you, you'll surely discover some special and unique ones that will go a long way in enabling the two of you to get along better, strengthen your bond, and provide insight into his own unique personality!

From:

<http://www.yourparrotplace.com/pages.php?pageid=33>

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**Above:**Two kakariki species. Top: a Yellow-fronted Kakariki. Below: An Antipodes Island Kakariki. They were photographed at a wildlife breeding and rehabilitation center in Te Anau, New Zealand



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