



Ethical considerations on Parrots in presentations and current recommendations by the EAZA Parrot Taxon Advisory Group

Supplement to the Best Practise Guidelines on Birds in Demonstrations

By EAZA Parrot TAG, March 2019, 1st Edition

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Introduction: Our understanding of behaviour and training technology and its effect on parrots is currently “evolving”. There are obvious benefits in displaying birds which actively engage the visitors in natural avian behaviour. Training technology is also gaining in areas beyond the classical conservation education demonstrations. This includes training for cooperation in medical care, husbandry management, research and even breeding settings. Ethical implications and management pitfalls are easily overlooked or even not fully investigated, in particularly considering the longevity potential of some Parrots.

The ‘Guidelines on the use of animals in public demonstrations’ (September 2014) provides guidance on the use of exotic animals in public demonstrations at EAZA member institutions. The EAZA Parrot TAG supports the use and implementation of the ‘Guidelines on the use of animals in demonstrations’ document and EAZA Best Practise Guidelines for Birds in Demonstrations and recommend as the model in the absence of taxa specific guidelines. To best support our members on best practice guidance, the EAZA Parrot TAG has in addition to these Guidelines produced this ‘Ethical considerations on Parrots in presentations and current recommendations by the EAZA Parrot Taxon Advisory Group Supplement to the Best Practise Guidelines on Birds in Demonstrations’ document to provide species-specific guidance for institutions performing public demonstrations with Parrots.

This document should be considered in combination with the EAZA Best Practise Guidelines for Birds in Demonstrations (Habben&Parry Jones, 2016) and is a synopsis of current considerations where there might be ethical implications and will be a living document to be revised at regular intervals.

Approved by the EEP Committee as taxa specific addition to Husbandry and Management Guidelines for demonstration Birds (2016), Amsterdam, March 2019

1. Acquisition and sources of birds:

Description	Ethical implications	Current facts	Parrot TAG recommendation
<p>1.1. Ex pets: Birds showing a high level of comfort with people (i.e. “tame”) which are rescued or directly acquired from pet owners with personal relationships with the birds.</p>	<p>Frequently ex pet parrots are not socialized successfully with conspecifics. Many individuals end up living a socially deprived life because zoo’s generally cannot provide adequate social interaction required.</p>	<p>There are positive examples of ex pet parrots which have been successfully reintegrated. Some EEP’s recommend accepting individuals for recruitment. Much depends on the individual history of the bird</p>	<p>Evaluate on a case by case situation. In the case of accepting a ex pet parrots there should always be a contingency plan in case of social stress for extended periods Before accepting an ex-pet parrot, zoos should evaluate if they can ensure good welfare standards over the life span of the parrot. It should not be assumed if there is an EEP for this species, that the coordinator can readily rehome the bird.</p>
<p>1.2. Hand-reared purposely for a show: Removing clutches specifically to rear and imprint for presentations.</p>	<p>Concern is misuse for commercial purpose. There is also the concern that the birds end up maladjusted socially.</p>	<p>In some European countries it is not allowed to hand-rear except in emergencies due to Animal Welfare Legislation (the Netherlands). See also: EAZA Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria – 1.9 Hand-rearing</p>	<p>The EAZA standard must adhere to legislations. If hand-rearing is done EAZA institutions should always ensure adequate socialization is provided from just before fledging age. EEP species should only be hand-reared in communication with the coordinator.</p>
<p>1.3. EEP species: The usage of EEP species in demonstrations may have considerable implications on population management and planning. Claims about suitability of individuals are rarely scientifically founded.</p>	<p>Pressure to display a bird should not negatively affect the sustainability of the overall population. In conservation relevant species breeding purpose should have priority.</p>	<p>Each EEP should formulate a standpoint about including individuals in presentations or not. Decisions may be taken on an individual basis.</p>	<p>EEP species used in presentations are NOT exempted from EEP participation regardless of ownership situation.</p>
<p>1.4. Research and record keeping: Often presentation birds are not fully regarded as a part of the collection, sometimes they are owned by external companies.</p>	<p>A, Important research or population resources might be lost. B, Keeping a part of the population without records reduces the overall credibility of EAZA as a scientifically based organisation.</p>	<p>Per definition not keeping records or sharing data for a part of the collection is in violation with EAZA regulations.</p>	<p>EEP species used in presentations are NOT exempted from reports to the EEP or record keeping regardless of ownership situation. ZIMS entries should also apply for externally owned birds held and displayed.</p>
<p>1.5. Virus management: It has been estimated that a third of Parrots in captivity in Europe are carrying virus infections which could affect the overall population. The Parrot TAG aim to reduce this number.</p>	<p>Birds in presentations might be exempted from screening or results ignored due to the investment of training.</p>	<p>Birds in demonstrations can be just as infectious to other parrots as in regular exhibits.</p>	<p>Thorough screening of all new arrivals and regular screens in combination with weight monitoring. Contingency plan for isolation if needed.</p>
<p>1.6. Hybrids and Mutations: Sometimes such birds not suitable for breeding programmes are purposely used in presentations.</p>	<p>A, Colour variations are often produced at near industrial level with methods frequently including deliberate inbreeding and hybridization with little attention to welfare. Surplus birds not fulfilling the target are discarded. B, Zoos have a role model function and should not promote intended hybrids and mutations breeding.</p>	<p>The welfare issues in deliberate breeding of apparent forms is well documented and EAZA has a position statement on this subject which is not limited to white tigers. EAZA statement on Intentional Breeding for the Expression of Rare Recessive Alleles (May 2013)</p>	<p>Even if the bird kept is a unintentional hybrid or mutation this is difficult to communicate and should be avoided. The EAZA Parrot TAG RCP recommend a DNO/Phase out for all mutations and hybrids. Mutations and hybrids should be labelled as such in ZIMS records in the taxonomy field</p>

2. Social Management:

Description	Ethical implications	Current facts	Parrot TAG recommendation
<p>2.1. Human Imprinting: When strongly imprinted on humans the bird can learn to prefer to only voluntarily interact with humans perceived as mates or part of a family group. This intensifies as the bird matures. Training is required to address this challenge which can be labour intensive and not always successful.</p>	<p>Strongly human imprinted birds may experience poor welfare if unable to receive social interactions from preferred humans. Attempts to socialize such birds with conspecifics is frequently difficult. Strongly human imprinted birds may do well in educational presentations until sexual maturity. At this stage, undesired behaviours such as aggression and excessive vocalizations can emerge and be challenging to address. This may cause adult birds to be removed from presentations and receive limited desired social interactions.</p>	<p>In Cockatoos and Amazons imprinted birds frequently develop very aggressive behaviour. There is a clear link between social stress and feather destructive behaviour (FDB) in various species. Specific training to manage undesired behaviours demand extensive knowledge and good team cooperation.</p>	<p>Preferred and sustainable option is to raise birds to avoid human imprinting. Socialize birds with humans while young to facilitate creating good candidates and welfare for educational programming use. Allow birds to live in a healthy social environment and working with them using training technology based in positive reinforcement. For human imprinted birds there should always be a contingency plan ready.</p>
<p>2.2. Sexually oriented relationship: between trainer and bird: Mostly not intended. Trainers often develop relationships with their birds which is likely perceived explicitly sexual from the side of the bird.</p>	<p>It is hardly possible for a human partner to fulfil the needs of the parrot and it is likely to be subject of misconceptions of the public. It also sets the bird up to likely present many undesired behaviours that either need to be addressed or may cause the bird to unusable as a program animal and/or potentially in a reproductive program. See also 2.1.</p>	<p>This subject is poorly researched and understood. The parrot shows a mate like relationship with a human. Natural behaviours seen between parrots are associated with this type of relationship are presented with a human counterpart, such as regurgitating food, allopreening, contact calling, etc. Parrots will also drive away (attack, bite) those not perceived as the mate.</p>	<p>It is advisable to review and prevent sexually oriented relationships. This can be done via proper raising and socialization. It is also important to continue to monitor bird behaviour and adjust training strategies as needed to avoid reinforcing pair like bonds and instead encourage the presentation of desired behaviours not associated with reproduction when interacting with humans. See 2.1.</p>
<p>2.3. Keeping individuals isolated: Keeping social species in isolation for extended periods due to individual management or more effective space usage.</p>	<p>Keeping social species isolated or only in company of species which are socially incompatible can lead to avoidable stress and frustration.</p>	<p>There are European legislation against keeping Parrots isolated (Switzerland). There are also links between isolation and FDB issues.</p>	<p>Keeping parrots isolated for the purpose of any kind of demonstrations is not recommended and not advisable as other methods are clearly more functional. Attention to species specific social needs is important.</p>
<p>2.4. Bonded pairs: Not all Parrots are strictly monogamous but most bond with a specific partners for a certain time as a natural part of social behaviour.</p>	<p>Splitting bonded pairs for the purpose of presentation may lead to poor welfare. Preventing breeding may also cause frustration and may have implications leading to undesired behaviour.</p>	<p>Some EAZA Zoos have demonstrated that it is possible to keep parrots in a healthy social environment including active breeding while performing in presentations.</p>	<p>Preferred option is using birds living in a healthy social environment, either pairs or groups depending on species needs. Alternatively use immatures until reaching sexually maturity. It is essential to manage environmental stimuli and breeding triggers.</p>
<p>2.5. Life stages: Keeping the Parrots in presentations for certain parts of their life e.g. before sexual maturity or even before being allowed to breed or alternatively after retirement as breeder.</p>	<p>Issues include conflicting interests in regards to priorities for breeding or show.</p>	<p>If kept socialized, there are good examples of birds from flight demonstrations which later in life become breeders. Unfortunately no records available of this being practiced routinely.</p>	<p>For EEP species, regulations need to be specified or decisions made on a case by case basis involving the coordinator. It is advisable to establish life planning for individuals. Reports on member experience is wanted.</p>

3. Training Methods and Equipment:

Description	Ethical implications	Current facts	Parrot TAG recommendation
<p>3.1. Weight management: Weight management involves determining a weight range in which a bird may be more likely to respond to food as a reinforcer for training or maintaining behaviours. Once a weight range that corresponds to acceptable behavioural responses to food is established, a diet is prepared to maintain the bird in that weight range. This is not to be confused with weighing birds to monitor health or keeping birds at a healthy weight.</p>	<p>When the focus is on the number on the scale as opposed to the behaviour of the bird to measure performance this can result in poor welfare. Weight managed birds have exhibited the following problems: Frantic or anxious behaviour when anticipating food, Water gorging/ Ingestion of non-food items/Food related stereotypies, Stunted growth, Persistent juvenile behaviour, Malnutrition</p>	<p>Most Parrots have a lower metabolism and have a wasteful slower consumption rate than Birds of Prey. They have high need for fibres and hence ad. lib. access to certain food items. They will present greater flights when diets and access to food is not compromised. They respond to a wide range of potential reinforcers.</p>	<p>Parrots respond to a variety of potential food and non-food reinforcers for training. Motivation for food can be increased by using preferred food items for training, using small pieces of food when training, timing training for times when the animal is most receptive, using unpredictability for maintaining known behaviours (avoid patterned routines in shows, avoid always offering the same reinforcer, using different schedules of reinforcement, etc.) It is not necessary to use weight management to train parrots.</p>
<p>3.2 and 3.3 Non Food Reinforcers: Utilizing desired items and or experiences to reinforce desired behaviour that do not involve food.</p>	<p>Non-food reinforcers often include enrichment items (toys) social interactions such as scratching a parrot's head, and engaging in desired activities with the bird such as "play." These types of reinforcers can be effective for certain individuals depending on their history. Some may require a stronger social bond with the bird. Some may not send an appropriate message to an audience in regard to human parrot relationships. Some can trigger undesired responses such as sexual behaviour or high levels of arousal that can cascade into aggressive behaviour.</p>	<p>Anything the animal seeks to acquire, engage in, do, etc. and can be delivered at the moment the animal presents desired behaviour has the potential to reinforce that behaviour. Non-food reinforcers are an invaluable tool in animal training. They provide more variety in reinforcer options and at times can be more powerful than food as a reinforcer.</p>	<p>Positive reinforcement training is a force free approach to voluntary participation in everything from medical care to educational presentations. Behaviour is increased or maintained by the addition of a desired consequence. Without reinforcers (food or non -food) it would be impossible to maintain desired behaviours. it is advisable to do a reinforcer assessment to determine all the potential reinforcers available for each bird to be trained.</p>
<p>3.4. Flight impairment: Preventing escape during initial training.</p>	<p>Wing clipping or harness use may lead to permanent impairment of flight skills, injury and a false sense of security for the trainer.</p>	<p>Veterinary records report severe injuries in Parrots due to unexperienced usage of harness. Wing clipping can also trigger FDB. Clipping before or during fledging can lead to permanent impairment of flight skills for some species/individuals.</p>	<p>The Parrot TAG do not recommend clipping or use of harness. Rather invest time in reliable re-call training with a thorough individually based assessment process. This can be practiced and generalized in safe enclosed areas. Free flight should not be attempted without the guidance of experienced professionals.</p>
<p>3.5. Radio Telemetry and GPS Tracking Devices: Using tracking devices to detect birds which are missing.</p>	<p>Trackers which can withstand a Parrot beak are quite heavy and not suited to be carried permanently</p>	<p>Zoo based research for equipment to monitor wild parrots do suggest increased injuries and equipment loss. Affordable devices that work well for parrots are not readily available at this time. However in general, due to their social nature, parrots are often easy to locate compared to other bird presentation species.</p>	<p>Caution is advised using trackers in Parrots. Reports on experiences with suitable systems are wanted.</p>

4. Environmental conditions:

Description	Ethical implications	Current facts	Parrot TAG recommendation
<p>4.1. Climate in holding areas: The climatic conditions in the holding areas should fulfil species specific requirements.</p>	<p>It is observed that parrots are placed in enclosures designed for winter hard species with insufficient heating. Chronic cold is an avoidable stress factor. Many parrot species are prone to painful frostbite.</p>	<p>It is very difficult to establish climate requirements across such a diverse group.</p>	<p>Species specific requirements must be fulfilled and data are available in literature, published BPG and with EEP coordinators and TAG chairs.</p>
<p>4.2. Lighting: Quality and length of lighting in holding quarters</p>	<p>If birds are not kept under adequate lighting conditions it quickly become a poor welfare situation.</p>	<p>Parrots need a minimum of 12 hours daylight to retain a natural activity pattern. The long-term effect of very long days in northern hemispheres are unclarified. Artificial lighting must be flicker free and wide spectrum including UV light.</p>	<p>It is recommended to offer Parrots artificial lighting to the extend of 12 hours daily at 5000-6600 k. If there is no regular access to sunlight additional access to UV light is needed.</p>
<p>4.3. Space requirements in holding areas: The space provided for holding need to be as adequate as if the birds would spend all their time in them.</p>	<p>Due to a few minutes of daily free flight, it is often accepted to provide less than adequate space for the birds.</p>	<p>A few countries have issued minimum space requirements (CH). Insufficient movement can lead to “depressions”</p>	<p>Species specific requirements must be fulfilled and data are available in literature, published BPG and with EEP coordinators and TAG chairs.</p>
<p>4.4. Flight conditions and weather: Weather conditions are not always suitable for free flight.</p>	<p>Poor weather conditions may lead to poor welfare. This can include hypothermia or heat-stress. Flying on days with high winds can increase difficulty for birds to perform trained behaviours. Impending bad weather can also impact welfare if a bird has not yet returned prior to inclement weather arriving in the area.</p>	<p>There is no known research or reference to this subject. Feed-back on practical experience is wanted</p>	<p>Most Parrots are tropical and adapted to stable temperatures. Exposure to temperatures below zero and above 35 degrees should be limited or avoided. Mountainous or desert species may have a larger range tolerance than tropical forest species. It is recommended facilities create a show cancelation policy or modified show plan in the event of inclement weather. This should include parameters for heat, cold, rain, snow and wind. Approaching weather for the hours, night and day after the presentation should also be monitored and considered when making decisions. It is also important to consider the flight skills and training history of the birds to be flown.</p>
<p>4.5. Enrichment: Some Parrots in flight demonstrations receive less enrichment than birds in regular exhibits because of free flight.</p>	<p>There is the concern that if given too much enrichment the birds might be less motivated to perform. Our entertainment cannot be cause for less quality of life.</p>	<p>Food based enrichment in wrong timing could reduce interest in treats also anything that encourage reproductive behaviours such as mirrors, nest like cavities and sometimes shredding paper can cause problems. Bathing also obviously impairs flight so generally should limited to when the bird has time to dry.</p>	<p>The daily enrichment can be a great environmental reward if introduced after the daily performance. Teams can develop a list of enrichment items and experiences that does not impede performance. They can also schedule enrichment that may influence flight (such as bathing) for more appropriate times of the day. Enrichment can and should be provided via thoughtful selection and scheduling.</p>

5. Stationed Birds:

Description	Ethical implications	Current facts	Parrot TAG recommendation
<p>5.1. Clipping or pinioning: Birds are displayed on perches without an aviary. In the past frequently exposed to sun and fixated with a chain</p>	<p>Possible exposure to predators when kept outside. Lack of exercise and freedom of choice. Restricted from avoiding social conflicts.</p>	<p>Anecdotal evidence suggest that lack of flight in Parrots can lead to increased health issues e.g. aspergillus. Legislation in European countries prevent legal clipping and pinioning (Germany)</p>	<p>Although it is becoming more rare this practice still exist in EAZA zoos. The Parrot TAG does not endorse this form of exhibiting Parrots</p>
<p>5.2. Flighted bird that do not fly: Some individuals do not fly for different natural causes, behavioural or health related.</p>	<p>It is very difficult to communicate to the public why a healthy Parrot is not able to fly.</p>	<p>Parrots that are clipped prior to or during fledging or that are kept in an enclosure too small to practice flight typically do not regain flight skills. This is especially true of heavy bodied birds (such as macaws and amazons) less so of birds such as cockatiels, budgerigars and small cockatoos. This has to do with critical periods of development and not practicing those skills during that time of development. These birds typically only fly when startled and have no skills to fly back.</p>	<p>Some Zoos target such birds for exhibit purpose. This is also not endorsed by the Parrot TAG. They are at a disadvantage when housed with skilled flyers. They also often fly when startled in a panic without control and end up high in trees or exhausted on the ground. Both of these situations are potentially dangerous for the bird.</p>
<p>5.3. Birds for photo opportunities: A number of zoos keep parrots for photo opportunities with visitors.</p>	<p>There is very little free choice involved and the parrots are often kept for extended periods on standby with stressful peak hours.</p>	<p>The number of birds involved in this in EAZA zoos is unknown. Experience reports are wanted</p>	<p>The Parrot TAG do not endorse keeping stationed parrots for any purpose.</p>

6. Messages:

Description	Ethical implications	Stand of knowledge	Parrot TAG recommendation
<p>6.1. Conservation and environment: When parrots are used in demonstrations it is an optimal opportunity to convey conservation messages. Parrots are among the most threatened bird groups.</p>	<p>Some presentations, show parrots detached from nature. This is a missed opportunity to create awareness and appreciation.</p>	<p>Psittaciformes order are in trouble: 28% of surviving parrot species are classified as globally threatened and an Alarming 56% of all Parrot species are in decline</p>	<p>Educative presentations using threatened or conservation relevant EEP species should use the opportunity to raise funding and create awareness for species conservation or about relevant environmental issues</p>
<p>6.2. Unnatural behaviour: Like parrots trained to riding a bicycle or wear clothes.</p>	<p>Apart from unnatural motions which might cause discomfort, the message is degrading for the public perception of wild parrots</p>	<p>The public have mixed perceptions about anthropomorphic displays with animals but when explained a overwhelming percentage is strictly against it.</p>	<p>Presentations with parrots in flight demonstrations, outreach or aviaries should always aim to show only natural behaviours or abilities.</p>
<p>6.3. Parrots as pets: Presentations with attractive and clever parrots easily ignite the desire with members of the audience to keep a parrot as a pet.</p>	<p>Spontaneous decisions to acquire a parrot as a pet often lead to poor welfare situations.</p>	<p>Parrots are long-lived and extremely loud birds which need specialist care. This is often underestimated by new pet owners. Rescue centres are overfilled with unwanted pet parrots.</p>	<p>Presentations should use every opportunity to create awareness about the preparations and commitments needed as a parrot owner.</p>
<p>6.4. Introduced species: Species with potential for establishing in the wild. Certain species have a potential for establishing in different areas in Europe depending on species and climate.</p>	<p>There is a risk of contributing to establishment of non-native populations with potential invasive properties.</p>	<p>Legislation in EU is very clear in regards to introducing non-native species to the natural environment. See also: European Code of Conduct on Zoological Gardens and Aquaria and Invasive Alien Species (October 2012).</p>	<p>Zoos should take every step to prevent any negative on native wildlife or plants. Particular caution is needed when free flying with groups with reproductive potential. In all of Europe <i>Psittacula kramera</i>, <i>P. eupatria</i> and <i>Myiopsitta monachus</i> should not be used in free flight presentations. In the Mediterranean region there are further restrictions in particularly with South American Parakeets. The presence of current feral populations is not an acceptable excuse for zoos.</p>