

## **Lost and Found Parrots**

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It's become the annual sign that spring is here – "The Phone Call," that is. The sad, desperate calls from those who've had a parrot escape and the excited, but dazed, calls from the other side – those who've found a bird. Here in the Portland, Oregon area we had an unseasonably warm and sunny February and early March, so "The Calls" started early this year. So far, there's been more found parrots than lost – some were happily reunited with their families. This "Lost and Found" dilemma keeps growing as more and more folks are buying companion birds, and sadly, receiving too little info on their needs and care.

### **The Facts**

Okay, number one huge fact – parrots are designed to fly! Secondly, wing trims grow back in as birds molt. So, there really is no such thing as a bird who can't fly! Proper wing trimming is designed to limit flight – over trimming is never a good idea as the resultant hard crashes to the floor not only can damage beaks, legs and keels, but self-esteem as well. Even in these worst case scenarios birds soon regain some flight as new primary feathers grow in. I've seen birds who only fly down INSIDE the house soar pretty far OUTSIDE – at least far enough to land in the path of an oncoming car or under the neighbor dog's nose. So, bottom line is ALL parrots, clipped or not, should be considered capable of flight.

**The sad fact is MOST lost birds are NOT successfully found**, captured and returned home. Our pampered companion birds lack the skills to find food and water and often suffer quickly from dehydration and hunger. Predators, such as dogs, cats, hawks, raccoons, etc. are everywhere and parrots make easy prey. Birds that are found often end up in the wrong hands and are viewed as either a "free" pet or a commodity to sell for a few quick bucks. There also seems to be a prevailing attitude that a lost bird's owner doesn't "deserve" him back. I don't know why people tend to make so little effort in finding the family – these same folks often work diligently to find owners of lost dogs and cats, yet I hear this time and time again when it comes to birds. So, what can you do?

First and foremost, be an educated and responsible parrot owner! Keep wings trimmed regularly, including touch-ups as needed. Check often by gently tossing your bird over a bed or soft carpet. Long-tailed, slim-bodied birds regain flight more quickly than short-tailed, stocky ones. Cockatiels, in particular, are extremely aero-dynamic, with a wide wing span and light body weight. Most 'tiels can fly pretty well once one or two new primaries grow in. In my opinion, 'tiels should never be taken outside without a harness or a carrier.

Be mindful of doors and windows at all times. Make sure screen doors latch securely and that window screens are solidly in place. In homes with kids or multiple adults, set up a check system before birds are allowed out of the cage.

If you take your bird outside or in the car, put him in a cage or carrier until you arrive at your destination and are safely inside. If you have a larger bird that enjoys time with you in the yard or elsewhere outdoors, avoid breezy days and acclimate him to wearing a harness for the safest choice.

Microchipping parrots larger than 150 grams can help a found bird to be identified and the owner located. Microchips are tiny, rice grain sized implants injected into the breast muscle by your vet for a cost of about \$40 - \$50. A form is filled out with the chip number, your name, and other pertinent info. This data is then kept by a national registry. Be sure to record chips numbers yourself and notify the registry of any changes in address or ownership. Most vets, humane societies and some pet shops have scanners to check for microchips. Unfortunately new chip types can only be read by new type scanners and old chips only by old type scanners at this time. Although leg bands don't help in locating a bird's home, they can help you identify your bird when found. **Record the numbers and file them in a safe place.**

Don't delude yourself that your bird won't or can't fly away! I hear it all the time – "He never flies," "He never leaves my shoulder," "He loves me so he'll come back," etc, etc, etc. Reality check – even the tamest, calmest, smartest bird can be suddenly startled, catch a breeze and be gone. Cars back-firing and crows flying by are notorious parrot-startlers. Our pets are still governed by wild, intrinsic, "fight or flight" instincts. This means they are programmed to FLY AWAY when scared. Once airborne, parrots fly up and out, not down and towards you!

## Lost Birds

Okay, he's gone, you feel guilty and filled with self-blame, you know the odds of finding him are slim, so do you give up? NO!! Stop the self-loathing, think rationally, and act quickly. Much like missing children, the first 24 hours are crucial in recovering your bird. If you see him, move slowly and calmly and talk to him. Get your hands around him, ignore any biting, and get him safely indoors!

If you saw the direction he flew, head the same way, calling his name. Try to keep him in sight of someone while you recruit family or neighbors to help out. Gather a blanket, net, treat and anything else to aid capture. Walk the neighborhood, knock on doors, carry your other bird (in a small cage or harness!), and place his (the escapee's) cage outside topped with food and the door open.

Create a flyer, preferably with his pictures and a reward offer and include his name and words he knows. Make 100 copies and post them on street corners, at grocery stores, local vets and pet shops. Place a classified ad under "lost and found". Call the humane society, animal shelters, local bird clubs, avian vets, and any bird shops. Get on the internet and look for pet lost and found.

Although birds can travel far fast, most remain, initially, within a five mile radius. Contact any local bird rescue or adoption groups for aid. If you are contacted that he's been sighted, go with a few friends, an extension ladder, your "catching" gear and a carrier. Take him to his avian vet for an immediate check-up. He could have exposure, frostbite, sunstroke, dehydration, or have picked up a wound or infection. Don't forget - **clip his wings!**

## Found Birds

If you are the local "Bird Lady" or "Bird Man" people will call you when a parrot is found. I keep a list of all the local contact mentioned above and tell folks to contact all the same groups and places suggested for lost birds. Check the internet. Post flyers, but **DO NOT** include a photo or specific details as to markings, speech, or band numbers. Some less scrupulous folks will use too much info to lay claim to birds that are not theirs. If someone claims that it is their bird, require a specific description, bill of sale, vet records, or other proof of ownership. Most newspapers run ads for FREE for found pets. Place an ad ASAP. Take the bird (in a carrier) to a vet or humane society to scan for a microchip if he's bigger than a cockatiel. Don't forget to scan for both types of chips.

As far as caring for the found bird while you wait, place him in a cage for safety – if you don't have one, see if a rescue group can loan you one. If you have birds, isolate him to prevent disease spread. Get some quality seed mix – feeding what's around the house or for your other pets can further compromise his immunity. If you can afford it, get his wings clipped promptly and get a vet check-up to address any injuries or illness. If you find his bereaved owners, they should be happy to reimburse you. If his family is never found and you can't commit to giving him a permanent home with you, place the bird with an adoption program that will screen folks and place him properly – don't just give him to anyone who asks.

I'd love it if I didn't get "The Call" so often this spring. Everyone of these lost or found birds breaks my heart, as it's easily prevented. I think of the poor little bird out there alone and of his family, so sad, waiting. If you've done everything possible to find your lost bird, or to reunite a found one, at least you may find some comfort in knowing you tried. If you lost him, hopefully you learned a valuable lesson. If you find him, I hope you did the right thing – think how you'd feel if it was your little guy.

The bottom line is be **SAFE**, be **SMART** and **PROTECT** your parrots and yourself from **EVER** having to go through this unfortunate and unnecessary ordeal. I hope when I hear from you, it's not "The Call," but something more positive and fun!

### **\*\*From Taylor at Your Parrot Place\*\***

If your bird has a microchip, is your information up to date? If not, here are the major microchip services that you should contact depending on which type of chip your bird has.

#### **Home Again<sup>®</sup> Microchip**

AKC Companion Animal Recovery (Tracking Service)

<http://www.akccar.org/index.cfm>

1-800-252-7894

[found@akc.org](mailto:found@akc.org)

#### **AVID FriendChip<sup>®</sup> Microchip**

[PETrac \(Tracking Service\)](#)

[1.800.336.2843](tel:1.800.336.2843)

<http://avidid.com/>

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