

Bird-Free Bird Fairs ??

Beth Trogdon and Jennifer Trogdon
Racine, Wisconsin

There is a carnival atmosphere, with wares spread out on tables, hung from display stands, and large items arrayed on the floor. Vendors from many states discuss quality and price with customers of all ages. Food, toys, cages, play-stands and other bird accessories fill the hall.

But there are NO birds. Why?

They are home in their aviaries and cages. They are safe from the stresses of travel, the extremes of temperature, the disruption in their schedules that can lead to illness. They are safe from unruly children and well-meaning but inexperienced adults who would test their patience. They are safe from other birds' illnesses, those which cannot be immunized against, nor tested for. They are also safe from overeager bureaucrats! Many states are enforcing health certificates for those crossing their borders. The cost would be prohibitive for many breeders.

Ah, but their images are present. Laptops, TVs, photo albums, posters, all of these extol the virtues of the birds and of the care their breeders show for them. The buyers are able to see a proper cage setup, good play-stands and toys, and how well the birds enjoy them.

Instead of a motionless Eclectus on a T stand, they watch a gorgeous red headed girl talking and playing in her large cage at her breeder's home. Instead of a suspicious African Grey, they see a lovely baby playing heartily with his toys. That screaming Umbrella Cockatoo is replaced by a loving ball of white feathers cuddled in the arms of a confident child.

A good video can show a 'day in the life' of a typical bird in a breeders

establishment. The varied fresh foods are highlighted, as is the routine of good bird care. The buyer can then discuss details of the bird's care while seeing that "he throws out his bananas" first hand!

The vendors really appreciate this arrangement. No longer do they

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have to worry that their wares might bring PBFDD or PDD home to their birds-or to other fairs. I know of one breeder who sells only bird supplies at fairs-none of the items that go to fairs ever enter her home or shop for just this reason! They also can point to a breeder and say, "Watch the tape, that's MY cage they are using for your baby!" Likewise, breeders can help buyers find exactly the toys and accessories the bird is used to.

They will bring in a better educated customer. I know many people who will not attend bird fairs, or buy from any vendor who attends them out

of fear of disease. Now, bird fairs will attract the knowledgeable consumer, those with multiple birds who want to add a baby to their home, as well as the first time buyer.

The birds will benefit the most. Not only will they be safer, but their experience with people will be consistently pleasant. No chance of them getting hurt because they flew off the cage top and wound up underfoot. There will be no chance of cockatiels or finches flying out the door.

They won't find themselves in homes unprepared for them. How easy it is to go to a fair intending to buy an African Grey, only to come home with the Moluccan Cockatoo that just wouldn't let you go? Never mind the neighbor who works nights. Soon, the Cockatoo is for sale and the Grey, who would have been perfect for you is in some home better suited to a Cockatoo! A sad story all around and one likely to stop people from continuing to be bird owners.

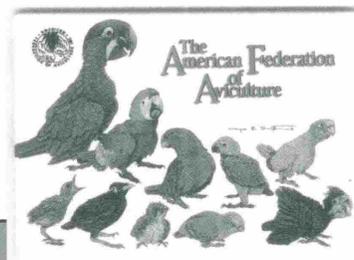
The breeders will benefit greatly. The fair day will be much easier, with no travel cages to haul, food to bring, or birds to worry about in case of a breakdown. They will be, able to discuss the intricacies of bird keeping without having to police the other people, their children and the birds themselves! Parrots are marvelous companions, but they don't encourage good conversations among humans! Nor will they have to worry about injuries to bird or human.

I have been working at and attending bird fairs for over six years. I have several to choose from every month in my area. I have yet to attend a fair where some of these problems didn't surface. I recall many times having to rush to shut the doors to catch an

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errant finch, or helping to retrieve a conure from the floor. At one fair, there was great concern that birds recently stolen from a local pet shop would show up there. They'd been diagnosed with Psittacosis and left in the parking lot so they didn't have to close the store! At another, an Umbrella Cockatoo was stolen. They caught the thief just as she reached her car!

One can argue that their birds are vet checked. We all know that there are illnesses not detectable by tests (PDD for one) and most have no immunizations available. Just because one breeder has healthy birds doesn't mean the sick birds at the next table cannot send something home with them! I have seen sick birds, birds in filthy cages, birds with no water or food at fairs. These are not the good vendors, but they are the vendors who will spread the very diseases we fear.

A club or fair organizer has some control, of course. The trouble is, once the problem birds are in the building, forcing them to leave only gives a modicum of protection to those already exposed.

The fair's organizers would undoubtedly benefit from this. Not only would clean up be much easier (or cheaper if the hall does it) but they are more likely to be able to find halls in the first place. I would think any liability insurance would be less, also.

Are there disadvantages to this? Of course. Folks with no bird experience won't have a chance to hold one for the first time. You can't evaluate a person's manner with birds if none are present. However, do you really want a young, impressionable baby to be the first bird someone holds? If they come to your home, you can use a 'tried and true' older bird to break the ice.

There is also the fact that people often see birds at a fair they'd never find anywhere else. Had there not been birds at fairs, I'd never have seen a Hawkhead, or Vasa, or Major Mitchells. However, do any of these birds really belong at a fair? I recall a man hesitating to buy a very cheap

wood toy for his new bird. He looked at me and asked, "Will an Umbrella Cockatoo REALLY need something this big???" I wonder what that bird is chewing now.

It is very convenient to take birds to a fair and sell them all within a few hours. It is much more time consuming to invite the buyers to your place. However, the birds, the buyers and, yes, even the breeder benefits from this. I know the person who bred my Grey. I've kept in touch with her for over 6 years. I've helped her rehome several birds, including a plucked Eclectus who now lives with me. This relationship would have been very unlikely had I purchased Katera from a vendor at a fair.

It's easy to do what's always been done, but sometimes there is much to be gained from looking at new ideas. ❖

[Editor's Note: There may be varying opinions on the subject of bird-free bird fairs. Neither the *AFA Watchbird* nor the American Federation of Aviculture have endorsed any position on this subject and the article reflects the opinion of the authors only. But an interesting aside is that while the Exotic Newcastle Disease current in southern California and some other states, has restricted the movement of birds, bird fairs have indeed been bird free and seem to have been successful. SLD]



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