

# Airlines & Birds in the Cabin

By Sandee L. Molenda, C.A.S.

**O**ne of the safest, most convenient and most economical mode of transportation is to fly on commercial airlines. Unfortunately, it can also be the most restrictive and therefore more frustrating experiences if one is flying with birds and unaware of the rules and regulations.

As someone that regularly flies 20,000 to 50,000 miles per year with birds, I hope to help alleviate the difficulties bird owners can encounter when flying with their birds. It has always been my experience that the best way to overcome obstacles is to evaluate and understand the situation from the opposite viewpoint. This often provides the best tactical advantage in order to achieve success. The issues raised from the prospective of both the airlines and the government, two separate entities but both of which need to be addressed by the bird-flying public, will allow everyone to have a stress-free experience when flying with birds.

When flying with birds, owners must realize that they are dealing with two separate but necessary components of the aviation industry that can either prevent or allow a successful flight. Those components are the Federal government, which regulates airline security under the Transportation Security Administration and the airlines themselves, which formulate the rules and restrictions for their individual planes. It is vital to understand the motives and goals of each in order to achieve a successful flying experience. I will present these issues and ideas as well as how to deal with them effectively.

One thing that aviculturists must remember is that flying is a privilege, NOT A RIGHT. There is nothing in the Constitution of the United States that guarantees anyone the right to fly on an airplane. Furthermore, flying with pets, including birds, is also a privilege and not something that other members of the public might appreciate. Airlines are businesses and as such, they need to make money to stay in business. Some airlines will not allow birds or any animals on their flights at all and as a business, that is their prerogative. Some of the major airlines that DO NOT ALLOW birds on their flights are:

- Frontier Airlines
- Jet Blue Airlines
- Southwest Airlines

All bird owners need to check with their airline PRIOR to booking a flight. Some airlines will accommodate members of the bird flying public under limited conditions. This is for the health and safety of other members of the public that are also their customers. It is the owner's responsibility to understand and comply with these rules and regulations. If not, the airlines do not have to allow people to fly with their birds. The following airlines allow restricted number of pets (birds) in cabin as follows:

*chart on next page...*



Photo by Wendy Edwards

Airline	# Birds First-Class	# Birds Main Cabin
Air Tran Airlines		2
Alaska Air	1	5
America West	1	
American Airlines	2	5
Continental Airlines	1	1
Delta Airlines	1	2
Northwest Airlines	2	4
United – Canaries, Finches & Parakeets ONLY. NO PARROTS	2	
US Airways	1	2

We are all aware of how litigious our society is and if someone has an allergic reaction or becomes ill because of birds, the airlines will be held liable. That is why most airlines have a limit of the number of pets in the cabin, birds included. For example, most airlines have a limit of two pets per flight. This includes all animals such as pet dogs and cats as well as birds. The only exceptions are service animals such as seeing-eye dogs, which are always allowed on every flight. It is very important to make sure to book the reservation for the bird as soon as possible in order to be sure there is space available on the flight. If other passengers have reservations for their dog or cat already, you may not be able to get your birds on the flight.

In the event an airline allows an exhibitor to get onboard with 10 birds and another passenger

has a problem, they would be 100% liable for any distress and injuries that person suffers. The agent that allowed the violation of the rules may be suspended or fired and the airline may have to answer to the Federal Aviation Administration as to why they violated their own rules and regulations. Repercussions could be fines or other penalties not to mention the airline will also have to answer to their insurance liability carrier, which could be higher rates or cessation of the policy. The answer is to know what the policy is with regard to the number of birds allowed and follow it. If the exhibitor announces to the agent they have eight birds instead of two, the agent will not let the birds on the plane. They are not being mean; they are just following the rules to protect themselves. While an argument could be made that taking two parrots on a plane is different than taking two canaries, the airlines do not care about square inches of birds. They only care about being in compliance with their own rules and regulations in order to protect their business interests. Another issue that many bird owners have a problem is the requirement for a health certificate. All 50 states, as well as Puerto Rico, and the Federal government under the Animal Welfare Act, require that all birds traveling across state lines have a veterinarian issued certificate of health. Not all airlines or even states enforce this law but it is a law none-the-less. Due to the near panic proffered by the media of late regarding avian influenza (H5N1 “bird flu”), it can be almost guaranteed that this rule will be enforced by every airline if and when the disease reaches the United States. Again, the reason will be to protect the airlines from lawsuits and liability by the public. Aviculturists that chose to ignore this



Photo by Wendy Edwards

requirement do so at the risk of not being able to board the plane with their birds.

While most airlines that allow birds on flights state "household" birds in their policies, some actually have listed what types of birds are allowed. America West and United airlines specifically list what types of birds are allowed i.e., 'canaries, finches and parakeets'. If a bird owner tries to get on the flight with a cockatiel, the most likely will not be allowed. This is because airline personnel are not trained to identify birds that are similar but only follow the policy with regard to the types of birds allowed. Bird owners need to know what types of birds are allowed and make sure they follow that policy.

All airlines require reservations for birds prior to the flight and are usually best made when the owner is booking their ticket. Airlines will also charge a pet-in-cabin fee on flights both going to your destination and returning as well. The birds must be in containers that fit under the seat and meet the airlines' specifications. Birds must stay under the seat and in their container during the flight. They must also be housed in 'humane' and 'sanitary' conditions so they do not disturb other passengers with excessive noise or offensive odors.

If you understand and follow these rules, your flying experience with birds will probably be a good one. We all know there are no guarantees to anything. In this day and age of terrorism and security issues, one may still have a problem with an individual airline or security agent. Be patient, comply with their requests as much as possible and always ask for a supervisor. Carrying copies of the airline's rules (available on their web-sites) or information for the TSA – "SOP 11", will go a long way to resolving any issues.

Remember, airlines do not have to accommodate those of us flying with birds and by following the rules and policies, you and your bird, as well as the airline and other passengers, will arrive at your destination safely and stress free. If we try to bend the rules or refuse to follow them, the airlines may decide not to allow birds on flights at all. So, be courteous, know and follow the rules and you and your birds can enjoy a comfortable, relaxing flight the next time you fly with your beloved bird. ■

# Join us at the VI International Parrot Convention!

**Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Canary Islands**  
**September 27 - 30, 2006**

*Sponsored by Loro Parque &  
Loro Parque Foundation*

## Speakers include:

- **Rosemary Low, Great Britain** - Aviculture and conservation: A symbiosis to benefit parrots
- **Dr. Lorenzo Crosta, Italy** - Neonatology in parrots
- **Rick Jordan, USA** - Techniques & observations from captive breeding that can be used to assist conservation
- **Dr. Paul Salaman, Colombia** - A bright future for parrots in Colombia
- **Dr. Cristina Miyaki, Brazil** - How DNA analysis in parrots assist conservation in the wild and in captivity
- **Dr. Jorgen Thomsen, USA** - The big picture - ecosystem protection and saving parrots
- **Dr. Willem Wijnstekers, Switzerland** - CITES and parrots
- **And many more!**

**Early registration until May 31, 2006 - 350.00 Euro**  
**Registration after June 1, 2006 - 400.00 Euro**

*Includes cocktail reception, evening beach party,  
surprise party, & gala dinner*

Workshops after the conference also available as well as a tour of the Loro Park breeding facilities.



**For more information  
and to register,**

**contact Brenda Piper, Organizer,**  
**[pipersparrots@comcast.net](mailto:pipersparrots@comcast.net), phone**  
**781-280-4675 or fax 781-275-3091.**

**For more information on  
Loro Park go to**  
**[www.loroparque-fundacion.org](http://www.loroparque-fundacion.org)**





***Investing in  
their health.***

***Committed to  
their future.***



**Umbrella Cockatoo**  
*Cacatua alba*

### **At the forefront of Avian Research.**

HARI (Hagen Avicultural Research Institute) is a world class Psittacine captive breeding, nutrition and disease research facility. HARI's continuous progress in animal husbandry have resulted in advancements that enhance the quality of captive breeding and maintenance of companion birds. Consulting with Avian veterinarians, and technicians, HARI works to develop new diets, healthy treats, bird supplements, and is responsible for innovations such as Tropicana and Tropimix formulas. These diets combine the highest quality ingredients with strict standards to ensure that your bird receives the highest quality nutrition.



Canada: **Rolf C. Hagen Inc.**, Montreal, QC H4R 1E8  
U.S.A.: **Rolf C. Hagen (U.S.A.) Corp.**, Mansfield, Ma. 02048  
U.K.: **Rolf C. Hagen (U.K.) Ltd.**, Castleford, W. Yorkshire WF10 5QH  
Australia: **Pet Pacific Pty. Ltd.**, Emu Plains, NSW 2750  
New Zealand: **Petware Distributors Ltd.**, Panmure, Auckland 3, New Zealand  
South Africa: **Rolf C. Hagen South Africa**, Durban North 4001



#### **TROPIMIX**

100% EDIBLE A perfect blend of Fruits,  
Nuts and Legumes with Tropicana.



#### **TROPICAN**

TOTAL NUTRITION Lifetime and High Performance  
formula for a healthy diet.



**Mazuri**<sup>®</sup>  
The Exotic Animal Feeding Resource

# EXOTICS RULE OUR ANIMAL KINGDOM



We know exotics rule. In the grand scheme of things, we produce more food for more exotic animals than any other company in the world.

**MAZURI® BIRD DIETS:**

- Natural Vitamin E and mixed tocopherols for preservation
- Complete and balanced nutrition with no artificial colors or flavors
- Color enhancers for brightly-colored plumage
- Each bag is date coded for guaranteed freshness and is produced in the United States

So for healthy birds and greater peace of mind, trust Mazuri® products.

Take a walk on the wild side and visit us at  
**[www.Mazuri.com](http://www.Mazuri.com)**



**MAZURI® BIRD DIETS:**

Small Bird Maintenance  
Small Bird Breeder  
Parrot Maintenance  
Parrot Breeder  
ZuLiFe™ Soft-Bill Diet  
ZuLiFe™ Bird Gel