

YOU'RE NOT ALONE! MEET BIRD BRAINS JUST LIKE YOU!

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I participated in my first bird show in October, 1987. It was the Suncoast Avian Society's annual show in St. Petersburg, Florida and it was a riot of birds, merchandise and colorful characters. There was a solid program of lectures throughout the two day event, and attendance was enthusiastic. Since then, I've attended conferences, symposiums, conventions, bird shows, marts, expos and fests. There are differences between the types of events, but most are open to all. Sanctioned bird show generally take place in the fall, after breeding season is over. Breeders and pet owners bring their birds to compete in various classifications and they are judged by recognized experts. A bird 'mart' or vendor room is usually held in conjunction with a show. Conventions and symposiums are held all year and are usually educational in nature. There are seldom judged shows at these events, although some birds may be present. Vendors offer an array of goods at these events as well. A bird 'mart', 'expo', 'festival' or 'fair' may also be held at any time of year. Seminars, workshops and vendors are included in these all-purpose events, but there is usually no sanctioned bird 'show'.

Here are ten great reasons to participate!

Meet other birdbrains, just like you! Do your friends and relatives refer to you as the 'crazy' bird person? Has anyone ever said, "It's only a bird", to you? Are you the only one in your social circle with little holes in the shoulders of your tee shirts? Once you walk into that first bird show, symposium, expo, mart or whatever the organizers call it, you'll be among friends: people who understand about green streaks down the back of your shirt and share your joy at finally getting that stubborn parrot type to eat its carrots!

Get free stuff! You can often come away from avian events with some swag! Some bird shows and marts offer promotional items and samples to the first attendees through the door. More costly seminars and conventions sometimes provide goodie bags for registrants. Some exhibitors, particularly those offering bird food, give out samples to visitors. Be an early bird! Supplies are often limited!

Hobnob with famous people! Luminaries from the avian stratosphere, such as Mark Hagen, Dr. Irene Pepperberg, Robin Shewokis, Dr. Susan Friedman and Lara Joseph are just a few of the popular speakers seen at bird events over the past few years. This is your chance to meet them and ask questions!

Get inside your bird's head! When you arrive at a bird event, check the day's schedule for workshops and special presentations by behavior experts and avian enrichment specialists and make a point of attending them. You may glean that one important piece of information that will help solve your own bird's personality problem. At the very least, you'll come away with a better understanding of why your bird behaves the way it does.

Meet your new best friend! Birds are often offered for sale at shows and marts. Take time to speak with the vendor/breeder and interact with the bird you're falling in love with. Avoid making an impulse purchase. Ask about health guarantees, and never purchase an unweaned bird unless you are experienced at handfeeding. The Long Island Parrot Society does not permit the sale of non-weaned baby birds at Parrot EXPO. Rescue groups and clubs may also offer birds for adoption at events. Expect to go through a screening process before you are approved as an adoptive parrot parent. Some fees usually apply when adopting a pet bird.

Shop 'til you drop! Supplies for birds and accessories for their pet humans abound at avian events, and this is your chance to scope out some new and unusual items for you and your bird. Food, cages, toys, cleaning products, tee shirts, jewelry and decorative items are just a few of the things you'll find at most bird shows. Purveyors of avian services, such as veterinary care, grooming and bird-sitting may also be in attendance. It's like being at a World's Fair for exotic bird aficionados!

Win stuff! Raffles, silent auctions, Tricky Trays and teacup auctions are great opportunities to win big! Where permitted by law, most bird events feature some sort of prize winning opportunity. Items can range from small bird toys to large cages and electronics to vacations. Dinner with the event headliner can be a major raffle attraction. Prizes are usually solicited from vendors, local businesses, bird club members and manufacturers of avian products. Proceeds are often earmarked for education, conservation or avian medical research or rescue efforts.

Meet the vet! The best time to establish a relationship with an avian veterinarian is before you have an emergency. Some bird events have a 'Meet the Vet' section or feature veterinarians as speakers. This is a great way to meet and develop a rapport with your bird's future doctor. Take advantage of it!

Learn about birds! Education is the mission of many bird clubs and is also the purpose of the majority of symposiums and conventions. Use your time at an event to visit the information or education center where you can speak with experienced bird owners and pick up informative literature. Attend the workshops and lectures and take advantage of Q & A sessions afterwards.

Ensure Your bird's future! Avian events often have special activities designed for young people. Bring your children, nieces and nephews and introduce them to the wonderful world of birdkeeping! When you look at the big picture, your bird's future may indeed be in their hands!



The Parrot Society of New England SPBE Show. Wendy LaBlanc, Linda S. Rubin, Pat Tucker, Ray Schwartz



Susan Chamberlain of the 14Karat Parrot, showcases her bird themed bags and socks at a bird show



Michael Dutton, DVM & AFA New Hampshire State Coordinator George Messenger, DVM



A group gathers for a picture at one of the many bird club events throughout the year

Know Before You Go:

- Not all vendors at bird shows accept credit cards. Bring cash and checks and scope out the location of the nearest ATM.
- In addition to admission cost, there may be an additional charge for certain programs or workshops.
- Don't assume you can bring your bird or other pets to the event. Many organizations restrict avian attendance to members' birds only.
- Arrive early for best selection of merchandise and to take advantage of hourly raffles. Allow time to attend lectures and browse educational exhibits.



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