

Can I Rescue A Bird

By Joanie Doss

I feel an owner has a responsibility to their own birds not to introduce a fatal disease into their flock. I seldom go to all the pet stores any more as most of them are there to make a profit at any cost. I will not condemn pet stores as a whole as I also know some very nice ones. As Liz states, these are the ones we need to support by buying products and birds from them.

Many times people think that if they buy from a breeder instead of a pet store that they will get a healthy bird. WRONG! You have to judge the breeder and pet store as an individual and not lump all breeders as good and all pet stores as bad. I have seen birds at some breeders that literally turned my stomach.

Most cities and states have neither the laws nor the man power to oversee these businesses. We can have a lot to say by where we buy our bird products and birds. These bad places stay in business because they often sell birds at a bargain or products at lower prices. Most people don't realize that the birds are at bargain prices because they are antisocial or ill. The products are generally very old and out dated.

Many stores will not allow a person to enter their store with a camera. You would have to hide it to take any photos and you can bet if they saw a flash go off, they would escort you out in nothing flat. We do have a lot of power by giving our hard earned dollars only to places that keep their birds clean and healthy. If these places do not make a profit (that is their main goal), they will not be in business.

Even good places can have birds that become ill. The difference is how they react and deal with the customers when a vet says there is something wrong with the bird. A good place will help the new owner get the bird back to being healthy; a bad place will place the blame on the buyer and wash their hands of any dealings with the customer. (You cannot expect any breeder or store to guarantee the health of the bird after several weeks. They cannot control the places you visit, the diet you give the bird, or the lack of cleanliness on your part.) It is up to you to allow money for that vet visit when you buy the bird and not put it off for months and then expect the store or breeder to assume responsibility for the health of the bird.

Everytime you buy a bird or a product from these bad stores or breeders, you are making it possible for them to stay in business that much longer. They are motivated by one thing only and that is money....take away the money and they will fold. We do have a lot of power by choosing where we buy our products and birds.

It is not easy to turn your back on a suffering bird, but in most cases it is the best thing to do. Yes, the money you spend in buying a bird in need will go to buying two more birds to replace it so they can again get more people to do a pity buy.

Last spring I had to turn my back on a wonderful Amazon that I knew personally because he had fallen into the hands of a bad pet store. They had picked him up for a few dollars because his former owner could not pay the boarding bill somewhere else. She had just been divorced and sole support of a couple of young children. The shop

picked the bird up cheaply but put a \$2,500 price tag on him. The shop has had birds diagnosed with PBFD, Avian TB, Psittacosis, etc. There was no way that I could risk allowing the bird in my home.

I admire people who rescue birds but it takes money, facilities, and a certain mind set to do it properly. Here are some things you must consider before you allow your heart to rule your head.

1. Can I properly isolate the bird from my present birds? That means you need a separate room, are willing to change shoes, wash and take nothing from that bird's room into an area where your present birds stay.

I do not allow other birds present when my birds perform. I can remember how angry a person became when my birds performed at The Alaska Bird Club and the club president would not allow her to bring her baby cockatiels into the room. She felt since they were babies and small birds that they could not transmit any disease to my guys. Babies and small hook bills are very capable of carrying disease. If you go to a store and feel you do not have to be careful just because they only have finches and parakeets, you are in for a rude awakening.

No matter how clean a store is, you should wash off anything such as the plastic bags, perches and toys before they enter your own bird's room....better yet before they even go into the house. You do not know what person has handled that product before you bought it. Unwrapped seed sold in bulk can also be very dangerous. What did the person have on their hands that scooped up seed just before you? Did they have sick birds at home?

You need a room to isolate a newly purchased bird. Even birds from good aviaries can be exposed to disease. Your first duty is to the birds you already own. A responsible pet owner does not risk the health of his other birds to rescue a bird in need if he cannot isolate that bird.

2. Do you have enough money to buy the bird and then immediately take it to a vet? A feather plucker could be just a bird under stress or it could be a bird with PBFD. A thin bird could be a bird that was not getting enough food or was dying from Avian TB. A fat bird could be fat from too much seed or it could have been on too high a fat diet for so long that its liver is no longer functioning properly.

There are many miracle stories of people rescuing birds and then bringing them back to health. You do not hear of the many more stories of the birds that died and infected the owners flock before dying.

You should not buy the bird and think that home remedies or over the counter drugs will bring the bird back to health. They need a thorough examination including physical exams, blood work, and fecal exams. This will not be cheap....even if the bird is small like a parakeet or cockatiel. A rescue bird is in more need of good expert care and an exam by a doctor than others as a poor diet and stress leave it wide open to catch any disease. The longer the bird has been under these conditions the higher the risk that it could be carrying a disease that could spread throughout your flock.

3. Can you honestly improve this bird's life? I have seen many well-intended buyers rescue a bird and then not give it a much better life than it had. When you get too

many birds, you do not have the time to keep every one clean. This last bird might be the bird that "breaks the camel's back" so to speak. It might be that extra cage that no longer allows you time to play and talk with your own birds. It may make it so that you cannot take the time to really clean your other bird cages and keep them sparkling clean. You did not buy your first bird so that you could only clean cages and feed it. You bought it for its beauty and for the companionship that it could offer.

4. Can you really afford this bird? A rescue bird will end up costing you money and if you are doing it correctly, will probably cost you more than buying a healthy, young baby.

Not only must you allow for the cost of the bird and the vet check, but the cost of continuing medical care if need be. Anyone that has had a seriously ill bird knows how expensive it can become. In about a year's time I stopped looking at the amount on the vet bill's for Kodiak's father after they reached \$1,000. You cannot give up well-bird checks on your present birds because you are spending too much money on the rescue bird.

Can you give the bird a large enough cage? This is the least the bird deserves. It also deserves to have the cage cleaned daily as well as having the food and water dishes cleaned daily.

Birds do not eat as much as a horse or cow, but they still require food. Proper diet does cost money. Do you have enough to insure that all the birds can continue to receive a proper diet?

Do you have the time to devote to the new bird and your other birds. A rescue bird may need more time to give proper medication and will need to be watched closely.

5. Can you deal with this bird emotionally? We all like to think that we can buy a poor, needy bird and then through proper diet and care it will become beautiful and healthy again. You have to be able to deal with the fact that the bird may not live. Some people can handle this better than others. It can be very upsetting to spend sleepless night after sleepless night and spend hundreds of dollars and then have the bird die. No matter how badly you want the bird to live, it may not no matter how much time and money you spend. After spending a lot of time and money on Kodiak's father, he died and no matter how much I wanted him to live, he didn't. He was not a rescue bird and I would have spent that time and money on him any way, but I use it as an illustration to show that it takes more than desperately wanting the bird to live. I would not be a good rescue bird person as I get too involved with the individual bird and would be a basket case whenever one would die. I still have an ache in my heart for Kenai and he died 6 years ago!

A good rescue person is involved with the bird, but is able to deal with the death and get on with the next rescue bird. I also have seen places that claim to be rescuing birds but in reality are breeders looking for free and cheap birds. No money is spent on medical exams and the birds are home treated. The rescue birds always are turned into breeders. A good rescue place is concerned with all birds (not only the expensive ones) and will turn them into breeders only if that is best for the bird.

There is a real need for people that can rescue neglected and abused birds. This is not for everyone and those involved should be set up to do so. As long as people buy

birds at bargain prices and supplies as cheaply as possible, we will have problems with neglect and abuse. Most bargain birds are not bargains. They generally have health or behavioral problems when they are sold at a very low price. When buying bargain products, make certain that they are not old or out-dated especially when buying vitamins and hand-feeding formulas. Always check your expiration date on food and supplemental products. You may get an old bucket of pellets because the store did not rotate its merchandise. The old food will not have the food value that you expect.

By far the most dangerous part of buying a rescue bird is the emotional part. To fall in love and care for a bird and then have it die can leave a big scar on your heart, but imagine the pain you would carry if that bird also killed your best bird buddy as well.

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