

Bird Safety Corner

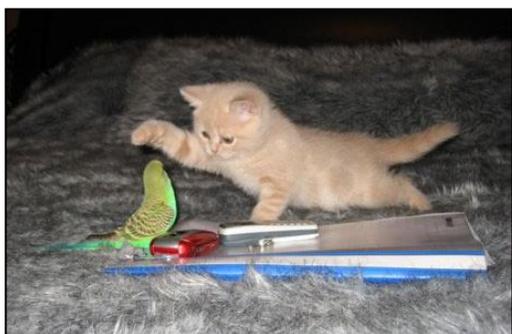
Birds and Other Animals

Word went out recently from another club about a tragic case of dog vs. bird. A 30 year-old double yellow-headed Amazon had played regularly with the family dog, without incident. The bird was allowed to roam the floors freely and walked up to the dog's food dish. The bird, being a bird, nipped the dog on the nose. The dog, being a dog, instinctively responded by grabbing the bird by the wing and ripping it off in front of the owner. The bird was rushed to the vet, but had to be euthanized. Now the owner will have to live with the horror of watching her beloved bird being mutilated and killed by her dog. She said they had always played together fine without incident before.



Dr. Clare Fahy of South Wilton Veterinary Group reported a similar incident with a cockatiel that was rushed to them after having its wing torn off by a dog. Amazingly that bird survived, albeit wingless, with the chest cavity sewn shut.

A letter recently posted to George Sommer's column, "[From the parrot's beak](#)" tells of how they lost their "dear sweet" white-capped pionus. A friend was watching their birds while they were away. The friend has dogs and was asked not to have the birds out of their cages when the dogs were in the house. The friend thought she could just run through the kitchen to upstairs with her shepherd mix. The pionus was startled and took flight. The dog snatched the bird out of the air and killed her instantly.



Dr. Stephanie Lamb, also of SWVG, tells the story of a yellow-naped Amazon which lived in a home with 4 other birds and 3 rescue dogs of various breeds. The dogs normally did not have contact with the birds, but one night the owner let the birds out to play on their cages. The phone rang, and she left the birds "for just a second". One dog snuck into the room and grabbed the Amazon right off of the cage. The owner rushed him to the vet, but he had died by the time they got there. There was a huge hole punctured in his stomach. Dr. Lamb reports another case of an African grey parrot that lived with a chow chow. The chow was always trying to get to

the bird, and one year earlier had grabbed the bird through the cage and punctured the bird's eye, blinding it in that eye. This time, the bird was walking around the floor and got grabbed by the dog again (yes, the owner STILL let the dog be around the bird!). The bird suffered multiple puncture wounds on the face and into the sinus cavities. The beak had a severe lengthwise fracture down the center. The bird had to have a prosthesis placed on the beak and stayed in the hospital in intensive care for five days on numerous medications and oxygen support. The bird did survive and went home, but the recovery time was greater than two months. No word on whether the owner is still allowing the dog to be around the bird. She described a third case of an eclectus which had had numerous encounters with a medium-sized dog. They "played" together, but it had escalated numerous times, causing puncture wounds, beak fractures, internal

bleeding, and nerve damage. Dr. Lamb has advised the owners time and time again not to let them "play", but they won't listen. She said that she fears that one day the bird is going to get killed.

Maybe you're sitting there reading this and horrified. Maybe you're telling yourself that those cases are exceptions, and that your dog/cat would never harm your bird. They've "grown up" together. Your dog/cat is very docile and wouldn't hurt a flea. Your bird has a beak - it can defend itself. Your bird is fully flighted - it can always fly away. Your dog/cat is afraid of your bird. The list of why it's ok for your dog/cat (or other animal) to play with your bird goes on and on. Except it's not ok. It's never ok.



The Internet abounds with cutesie videos of birds playing with dogs and cats. We've all seen them. We've probably thought how adorable they looked together, all the while telling ourselves that it was dangerous. But how dangerous is it? The stories above are not exceptions to a rule. They ARE the rule. Dogs and cats (and some other family pets, especially ferrets) are predators. They may be domesticated, but their predatory



instinct is always there, either overtly or lurking just below the surface. If an otherwise friendly dog or cat is annoyed by a bird, such as by a nip on the nose (and what bird doesn't occasionally nip?), it will lash out. It's not going to stop and think that oh yeah, this is my buddy. I'd better not hurt him. In dog/cat vs. bird, the bird usually loses. Yes, the bird has a beak, but it's not like they've set out to have a fight with their "weapons" at the ready. Once the dog or cat has struck, it can be game over for the bird. Even friendly dogs and cats can injure birds by overexuberant play or even stepping on a bird, so injury doesn't just result from hostile behavior.

Also keep in mind that something as simple as a scratch from a dog or especially a cat can be fatal to a bird. Dog and cat bites, licks, and scratches can transmit a deadly organism called *Pasteurella multocida*. Not just to birds, but to you too! When outdoor cats "play" with a bird (or other animal) outside and the animal escapes, it frequently dies of this infection. So even if your docile cat just licks your bird, it can have serious consequences.



But, you're thinking, my dog/cat has never harmed my bird in all the years they've been together. That's what the owner of the Amazon in the other club was saying too. Just because something has never happened before is no guarantee that it will never happen in the future. You've cooked with Teflon all these years and your bird is still alive (until Aunt Mabel calls you and you lose all track of time as the pan slowly burns on the stove, killing your birds). That stock has risen every year since you've owned it (until the CFO gets caught embezzling funds and the stock crashes). You don't need to put ID tags on your dog because she's never run out of the house before (until you open the door for the mailman and a squirrel runs by outside).



It's called an accident. It's unpredictable. You never meant for it to happen. Supervising your animals while they're out isn't good enough. The woman whose Amazon got its wing ripped off was in the room when it happened. Unless you can move faster than the speed of light, you won't be able to stop it from happening. The only way to keep your bird from being injured or worse by your other family pets is to make sure they're never out together and that the other animals can't access the cages. A friend of mine with an outdoor aviary lost his cockatiel when a neighbor's wandering cat pulled the bird's leg through the bars and ripped it off. The bird had to be euthanized as it slowly

bled out. Some people advocate "training" the dog/cat to be with the bird. It's fine to let the dog/cat know that there are birds in the house and that they shouldn't touch them. But that's not the same thing as letting them play together. That is never acceptable. And size doesn't matter. Ferrets are small, but deadly to birds.

With proper precautions, extended families of humans, dogs, cats, birds and other animals can all live happily together. Remember that the lives of these precious little creatures are in your hands. As they used to say on Hill Street Blues, let's be safe out there!

Amy Hopkins