

## **BIRD OWNERSHIP – NOT FOR EVERYONE!**

By Patti Christie, CVT

As the rise in availability of pet exotic birds has occurred, so has the need for adoption/rescue and rehabilitation organizations dealing specifically with companion birds. The reason for this is because MOST people do not understand the incredible time and money commitment necessary to keep a pet bird. Special diets are required for ALL pet birds – even canaries and parakeets – to ensure health and quality longevity. Regular veterinary exams are a must. An informed bird owner recognizes that the patterns of emotional development in these wonderful companions are very similar to human emotional development. Birds are flock animals, therefore in great need of much social interaction. That becomes the responsibility of their “human flock”. Lack of social interaction and proper guidance leads to biting, screaming, self mutilation and other “inappropriate” behaviors. These problems (which interestingly are not typically observed in wild bird flock behavior) often lead the owner to seek a new home for the bird.

I believe that there are no bad birds but rather birds that were bought or acquired by people ill-equipped with proper education to handle the demands of bird ownership. A bird is a long term commitment – living 15 – 75+ years. A bird that goes from one home to another, for whatever reason, becomes less trusting with each successive placement until eventually they have lost their pet potential and either are euthanized or, if they are lucky, are put into a sanctuary situation. There are more and more valuable sources of information today. If you are a bird owner, I would encourage you to seek out a qualified avian veterinarian as your starting point to get reliable, up-to-date references. The Association of Avian Veterinarians has a website at [www.aav.org](http://www.aav.org). Those of us who have dedicated ourselves to our companion birds can expound on the many, many rewards we enjoy. We can also tell you about the sacrifices we have all made to keep these pets happy and healthy. Companion birds bring more joy to our lives than one can imagine – but not without a cost!