



PARTNERS IN PARADISE

Newsletter for The Tropics Exotic Bird

Summer/Fall, 2002

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VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT: tropics.parrotrefuge.com

Look for us on "**Ripley's Believe It Or Not**" soon. It will appear on the TBS network on Tuesdays at 8:30pm. We will post an air date ASAP.

*If you've ever flown on US Airways you know of a magazine that is found in the back pouch of each seat... "**Attaché**". After working all this year, a writer has finally landed the contract to write about The Tropics in this publication. His article will be finished next week, and within 2 weeks photographers from the magazine will be here to shoot photos. Do you realize how many MILLIONS of people we will reach? Issue date: Jan 03.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Unfortunately, not all announcements are good. In addition to Ricki Lake, we've had other losses recently; Sweet Pea our little Quaker that had no eyes, for one.

Sweet Pea was 9 years old and in perfect health until struck down by a fungal infection; aspergillosis. This fungus can be found in our environment everywhere; home, car, outdoors, etc., and there is no prevention for it.

He fought the good fight and finally lost after rounds of anti-fungal medications and oxygen therapy, all performed here after our vet diagnosed the problem and instructed us on how to care for him.

Sweet Pea was proudly sponsored by the **Parrot Breeders' Club of Virginia** for many years. We deeply appreciate their care for Sweet Pea and hope they will decide to sponsor another handicapped bird in the future.

Another bit of sad news is about Ricky, one of our Mitred Conures. He has

A TRIBUTE TO RICKI LAKE, THE HALF MOON CONURE

By: **Mary Bradford**

A little bundle of 86 grams graced our home for the last two years. Ricki Lake was his name. He, himself took the last name of Lake after hearing the name "Ricki Lake" on TV one day while at work with Peter Mennen, his owner. Here, he also added Ricki Rick, and we were trying to teach him Ricki Roni because he loved macaroni.

In April, one of our long distance volunteers visited for 10 days of work. This was her vacation. We worked very hard putting birds out into the dome and cleaning aviaries. During her time here, she and Ricki spent lots of time together. We caught the two of them on video, kissing. Ricki loved to kiss, saying, "Kissing Ricki Lake", over and over again as he kissed and kissed.

One day, he flew to Michelle and said, "Wanna a Fish". She was completely confused as to why this little bird would be asking for, of all things, fish. I explained that fish were Gold Fish crackers. His favorite was the parmesan. Of course, with Ricki being one of our 7 flying flock in our house, he got all the others "hooked" on fish. When the bag came out, it was like a swarm of bees flying around a hive.

One of Ricki's favorite things to do was to lay on his back in the palm of your hand with his eyes closed, with one foot holding your pinkie finger and the other holding his neck. The level of his intelligence was sheer proof of the understanding these birds have of the world around them.

Ricki's companion was Lucy, another Half Moon Conure, but she soon became smitten with Petey our handicapped Nanday Conure with severe hip dysphasia in both hips. Lucy spent much of her time between Ricki and Petey, feeding and preening each of them. One of their favorite things to do was to each land on a ceiling fan blade and wait for us to slowly spin the fan. Over time, they learned that by jumping from blade to blade, they could make the fan spin on their own.

Once, when Lucy first discovered our new ceiling fan, she was determined to eat the grapes off of it. They were carved onto the base of the fan and she recognized them as potential food. Soon Ricki joined in. Needless to say, their efforts were futile.

But, I think the most unique thing about Ricki was his love of life. He loved people, all people, and all the other birds he flew around with. His behavior was always good, even if he got into the macaroni pot and ate so much that his whole beak was

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was determined that Ricky is at least 30 years old, which is a long lived life for his species. For the past 12 years, Ricky's cage mate is Lorenzo, a huge Mealy Amazon. Yes, they are certainly the odd couple. They continue to remain together, as Ricky will need all the company he can get now that he lives in a world of darkness. They both will remain in the big cage they've occupied for many years because Ricky has it memorized. At this point, the only thing Ricky can see are faint shadows. It is very sad to see his sight go, but as long as he and Lorenzo are bonded, and Ricky stays in otherwise good health, he will remain a part of our flock till the end.

Yet another sad, but happy ending concerns one of our Blue & Gold Macaws, Cha Cha. He was transferred to the dome months ago and was living a very happy life, finally flying, when, suddenly one day a fearful cockatoo attacked him as he approached. His wing was severely bitten at the lowest joint and had to be amputated from that point down. The cockatoo is not a fierce bird, but was new in the dome. Cha Cha is totally non-aggressive and didn't even bite back at the cockatoo during the attack. I was finally able to get them separated and Cha Cha was rushed to the vet. Cha Cha is such a strong, brave little guy that even through the pain, medication, surgeries, etc., he continued to pin his eyes, say "THANK YOU!" and bob his head every time you gave him anything, toys or food. He also never stopped his dancing when you sing "Cha Cha Cha Cha Cha Cha". He absolutely loves

UPDATES:

Since the loss of Ricki Lake, the Half Moon Conure, his former owners have pulled their financial support from us completely. Although his death couldn't have been prevented, The Mennen's trauma due to his loss was so severe that they felt they could no longer support our ongoing efforts. Our monthly operating budget is \$3,000 and they were generously providing HALF of that. Now, with this loss, we continue to be blessed by receiving additional and unexpected donations from old as well as new donors. We wish there were some way we could lessen the Mennen's grief, not because of the money, but because we still love and appreciate them so as friends, that we just want them to be happy. Unfortunately, we are not able to provide this miracle for them, so we ask that you sympathize with them and pray for them in their time of loss. Lucy, Ricki's companion still remains with us.

NOTE: We will continually have to work towards replacing that \$1,500/month we lost, so please be aware of this when making your donations. Thank you.

The dome is functional and inhabited by approximately 90 birds, but continues to give us problems. Because we fired the contractor, we have no warranty, nor will Monolithic Constructors warranty it. So, it is up to us to use the remaining \$5,000 in the construction fund to fix and complete the job. We hired a Monolithic dome builder from Houston, TX, who has built over 30 of these domes, to come here to do this work. His schedule so far has prohibited him from coming here. His plane ticket is already paid for and his labor will only be \$15.00/hour. The work is expected to take 2-3 days.

In late October, John and I are going on a week's vacation. We have spent the last year saving every personal dollar we could in order to have this get away. As usual, our long distance, and one local volunteers will take over for us. Beverly & Teresa are coming from New Jersey and June is coming from Delaware. They will live on the premises, but Jane will have to travel one hour each way, daily, to help out.

Special Thoughts
by: Mary Bradford

As we continue year after year, in this work of saving and caring for hundreds of birds, we find that more and more parrot owners are calling, emailing, and writing us to tell us that they no longer believe these birds should be pets, but rather free flying animals as created. It is our experience that, in many cases, the longer a bird stays captive, the more frustrated it becomes and vents its frustrations out on us and themselves. The problem of unwanted birds is probably the fastest growing pet problem in this country, if not the world. Please keep these creatures, that deserve better, in your thoughts and prayers daily. Thank you.

The Meaning of Refuge

Weeks ago you came to us,
Fearful, shivering, and withdrawn.
Unsure of what would happen,
Resigned to a fate you could not control.
Feathers drab, eyes sorrowful, posture defeated.

Our hearts reached out, but you bit our hands.
And we knew then how desperate you truly were.
We did not know, and you could not tell us—
Had you been abused—could we regain your trust?
Could you learn to forgive the past and try once again?

Day after day we gave you fresh food and water,
And the chance to be yourself.
We heard mumbles, grumbles, little peeps and squeaks.
We pondered this avian monologue—
Were you arguing with yourself whether to trust one last time?

We spoke to your fearful back for hours,
Softly reassuring you: No tricks, no harm, no demands.
Here you can be yourself. Here is the end of the road of pain,
You had traveled for so many years.
Oh dear one, here—here, fly once again if you wish.

And so, patiently, we waited for you to come to us.
And one day—did we hear something? Did we imagine?
".....hello....."

We looked—and there you were...so tentative,
Peeking over your shoulder through the bars of your cage.

We talked for a while, although soon you turned away,
As though amazed at your own temerity.
But we knew the corner had at last been turned.
Yes, we knew you had decided, one last weary hopeful time,
To trust a human once more.

Now that one word speaks volumes, as we enter into the dome.
Many a joyful "HELLO!!" echoes, feathers puff with pleasure.
And that one word speaks volumes:
"HELLO!" oh, the freedom of flight!
"HELLO!" Look, I no longer need my cage!
"HELLO!" I'm loved although I can't speak!
"HELLO!" See how beautiful I am!

We laugh to see you spread those beautiful wings,
Dancing so boisterously on the limbs of the tree.
And as you gently climb to and fro on our arms,
Your cheeks ruffled, eyes and feathers gleaming,
We are taught the Meaning of Refuge in one small unassuming word:".....hello!....."

Dedicated to all the frightened birds who come to The Tropics, but most especially dedicated to my buddy, Otis (Mr. "hellooooooooo!"), and to Cha Cha, the most beautiful, sweet and loving macaw who ever lived. "Thank you!" Cha Cha. And, of course, this is gratefully dedicated to all the supporters of The Tropics who never get to hear, "hello!" but care enough to help anyway.
by: MICHELLE QUINN

covered with it.

Because he and 6 other birds flew free in our home, they didn't want their cages. So, each night all 7 birds would roost on the curtain rods in the sunroom, with Ricki reciting "Go Night, Go Night". Ricki had no enemies here. He knew which birds to hang out with and which birds to avoid. He had established a flock and was truly the alpha of it.

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On June 12, we noticed a slight change in Ricki's behavior. When I woke up one morning he was waiting in the bathroom on the curtain rod. I picked him up and he quickly flew back to the other birds. The next morning, there he was again on the curtain rod, this time he was showing signs of weight loss and not feeling well. One call to our vet brought her to the clinic (on her day off) to look at Ricki. Blood was drawn, and a gram stain taken so every conceivable test could be run on him to try to determine his problem. Also, X-Rays were taken which revealed a large mass in his abdomen.

Within a few days, all the blood work came back normal, but Ricki died in spite of our efforts to find the problem. A cosmetic necropsy was done which revealed a huge blockage in his intestine. Within this short time of 1-1/2 days Ricki succumbed to its affects on him. He was beyond saving via surgery or any other means, but strangely on the morning he died, he was sitting on his feed cup eating cereal, blueberries, and grapes.

Peter Mennen, Ricki & Lucy's owner came to claim his body. It was a most sad and emotional time for us all. He was taken to a special place the Mennen's picked out for him to be laid to rest. Meanwhile, Lucy was left here because of her attachment to Petey the Conure.

The Mennens are overcome with grief, as we are, but are having an impossible time of recovering from this disaster. You see Ricki was like a child to them. They had just purchased land and a cabin in Virginia so they could spend 6 months a year on the east coast to be near and visit Ricki. These big hearted, and most generous people now suffer from the never ending grief they experience daily.

Due to Ricki's death, the Mennen's grief, other personal situations, and losses in the stock market, The Tropics has lost their most generous financial help, 1/2 of it's monthly operating budget, but we are hanging in there and are doing well thanks to our continual pleas for financial aid. Ricki will be sorely missed, especially that little voice that said "Go Night, Go Night", and "Kissing Ricki Lake."

The date of Ricki's death was June 14, at 10 AM. He was 5 years old.

Note: An intestinal blockage like Ricki's can occur in birds, other animals, and even humans. This is why there are warnings on bird toys about chewing rope, wood and leather. The only way to completely protect Ricki from his demise was to have kept him in a bubble, with no toys and nothing to do. So, take heed to this testament of a little creature's life and love your birds every day. Ricki is now free to fly the heavens and to touch the hand of God.

There is also the loss of Josie, a Yellow Nape Amazon. She was brought here years ago because of her horrible fear of people. Almost anyone approaching her cage caused her to throw herself all over the cage, sometimes causing minor injury. This happened even when we fed/watered her. After much thought, we decided to put her in the dome with the other Amazons, hoping that freedom would lessen her fear. She was found one day, deceased. It was so sad to see her go through each day in such fear, so our consolation is that she, too, is now free to fly.

On the up side, we have many birds that have improved: Pharaoh, Sam, Pepper, Kira, Scottie all African Grays have all grown back in their feathers since arriving here. Also, Merlin the male Eclectus, Cha Chi, and Bo, Moluccan cockatoos; Rio, Bentley, Sinbad Greenwing Macaws have improved feathering also, along with countless other birds.

You may recognize some of the birds named as being in the dome: Polly, Mackenzie, Fred, Jake, Diddid, Caesar, Montgomery, Kazz, Rosco, Mac, Simba, Patrick, Oscar, Winnie, Rufus, Alex, Chloe, Gizmo, Flo, Buddy, Buster, and other species; Scarlet, Blue & Gold, Shamrock, Ruby Macaws; Moluccan, Umbrella, Goffin's, Sulfur and Citron Crested Cockatoos; Blue Front, Yellow Nape, Orange Wing, Red Lordes Amazons; Gold Cap, Jenday, Sun, Blue Crowned, Mitred, Cherry Head, Nanday Conures; Quakers, Ring-necks, Alexandrine Parakeets, Cockatiels, and others. To date, the total is 90 birds in the dome. We don't know yet how many will fit comfortably in the dome.
