

## Seeing Eye-To-Eye With Your Vet

**The vet didn't have an understanding of what each side expected or wanted.**

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I performed an informal survey of 10 bird breeders and found that eight of them are dissatisfied with their veterinarian. Interestingly, the two satisfied bird breeders are extremely happy and considered their vet a close friend. The remaining eight had moved through a variety of vets. The most common complaint is that a critically sick bird gets taken in, an extremely large medical bill is run up and the bird dies anyway. Sometimes these bills run more than \$1,000. Most aviculturists in this unpleasant situation feel they were not made aware of the bill as it grew. Other issues mentioned: failure to return phone calls, not responding quickly to emergencies, improper handling of birds in examinations and lack of knowledge about birds. There are other concerns, but these are the most common complaints.

Communication is the key. For example, a local bird breeder had a medical emergency for an egg bound hen. This hen raised close to six babies a year, making the couple more than \$3,000 per year. The medical procedure to save the hen cost more than \$500. Which, for most bird breeders, is a huge amount of money — usually coming at exactly the wrong time! However, the procedure worked, and the hen was on eggs within three months. Thus, a \$500 investment in vet fees resulted in continued earnings of \$3,000 per year. An alternative example concerns an expensive breeding parrot that had a seizure. The client spent more than \$2,000 for diagnostic exams and even a MRI. The bird was found to have a brain tumor and possible blood clot. Although there was some satisfaction in finding a definitive answer to the medical problem, spending more than \$2,000 did nothing to help the bird get well or become productive. I have never personally known of a bird that suffered a seizure to ever breed again.

### Vet Point Of View

Many vets believe they are ethically bound to perform every procedure that could possibly save an animal's life. This is an admirable quality. Unfortunately for most bird breeders, this isn't practical (or even possible). In the instances that bird breeders have been upset that the vet ran up large bills, the vet felt he or she was acting in good faith. However, the patient and vet didn't have an understanding of what each side expected or wanted. A bird breeder normally wants to spend money on veterinary procedures if there is a realistic chance that the bird can be saved and begin breeding again. The vet needs to understand that the aviculturist cannot afford to spend unlimited amounts of money to save every animal. Bird breeding is a hard world and hard pragmatic decisions have to be made.

### Set Guidelines For Care

Most misunderstandings regarding money between vets and patients could be eliminated through communication. I think each bird breeder should write out his or her goals for veterinary care. Under what conditions would different amounts of money be spent? This memo of understanding should be given to the vet so he or she can keep it on file. That way it can easily be referred to for adjusting diagnostic procedures. Some vets will not accept limitations on saving an animal's life. In such cases, the aviculturist needs to understand this and either financially be able to afford a financial worst-case scenario or find a vet closer to their philosophy regarding veterinary care.