

Senior Bird Stories

Bird owners share their experiences living with senior birds

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Miki, a festive Amazon
By Barbara and Jeff Wasserman, North Carolina

Miki and I got acquainted at the pet store where I was working. He had worked his way through the entire staff and a few customers. He took blood samples from everyone he came in contact with. He was to put it mildly – “unsaleable,” and had gained the nickname “Razorbeak.” We had lots of birds at the store but this guy was a real challenge.

The original owner had the same problem with him as everyone else. Miki was there when I started working at the store, and I never met the original owner, so I don’t know where he came from or how old he is.

Six months later, I graduated from the police academy, went on split shifts and had to give my job at the pet store up. I decided to make the owner an offer on Miki, which I found out, was a festive Amazon. He was so happy to get rid of him He said, “Just take him.” And take him I did.

Miki and I were living together in a small one room rental in Queens, New York. It became very apparent that I would have to learn Amazon before he would learn English. Forty five years ago, things were very different in the Avian world. I wasn’t much of a cook so he ate a lot of “Take out”. He liked french fries and pickles. I know those foods are not good for birds. At the time, books on birds were as scarce, and any two books on birds were diametrically apposed to each other.

He was a great talker and an even better singer. Incidentally, Miki didn’t bite me any more, but unfortunately, he didn’t bite me any less. Some times he would come out of his cage and sit on my shoulder for hours and be a perfect gentleman. Other times without any warning, I would get bitten. I started learning little things. Watching him, he was talking to me, and I slowly started to understand that he was more like a little person who had good moods, bad moods, likes and dislikes. I learned that at certain times of the year, he was untouchable and moody. I gave him his space and we were both better for it.

Forty five years have passed, I am married, have four children and three grandchildren. To this day, he still calls all the children by name, asks O’Brien (our first dog,) if he is ready to go out. O’Brien died 30 years ago.

About 20 years ago, my wife, Barbara, bought an African grey for my birthday. The first time Miki saw the African grey, he was so happy. His personality changed, he was easier to read and much happier. The more birds we got, the happier he got.

It’s funny how things go full circle. It all started with taking a bird that no one wanted and ended up with a house full of birds and, a toy business that is truly a “Labor of Love.” I’ll thank Miki later when I dish out the fruits and vegetables – No more pickles and french fries.

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Travey Rae Esta, a double yellow-headed Amazon
By Julie Corwin, Washington

Travey, a double yellow-headed Amazon, is 50 years old. She has lived with me since she was 18 years old. Her previous owner was a Spanish opera singer, and Travey had learned to sing with her, plus had approximately a 1,000-word vocabulary. Travey stopped talking and singing when her owner died, until she met me. She immediately started talking and singing again.

Her diet has been changed to more pellets and less seed, and lots of fruit, veggies and cooked food. Almonds are one of her favorite treats, and she will eat any kind of people food and wants me to share. She also has many different types of perches including a rubber-type perch, a sisal rope perch, a sandblasted wood perch, and a grape vine perch – all in different sizes.

She does not play as much as she used to, but still talks and sings and loves to cuddle. She especially enjoys being around children and will talk more readily around them.

Travey loves to go places with me – schools, nursing homes, bird club meetings and more. She will allow almost anyone to hold her, but no one can take her from me. I belong to her.

The only real difference I have noticed as she has aged, is the fact that she does not grip as tight when she is sitting on my arm. She also seems to like a smaller cage. Her favorite toy is still anything with a bell.

She has continued to have more yellow in her feathers as she gets older. She will occasionally get broody during the spring and beginning of summer, but she has never laid an egg. She has been sexed by the vet and we know that she is a female. She has never had a mate or partner bird, she chose people instead, and does not play well with other birds.

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Joey, a yellow-naped Amazon
By Judith Woods, Connecticut

We own a 26-year-old yellow-naped Amazon. Joey is a wild-caught female wearing a 1981 import band. She was given to us by owners who no longer wanted her. When we first got her, she was very ill from a liver problem, but after a week in the hospital and weeks of medications, Joey is now healthy and happy. She doesn't talk much and she is extremely inactive, which we attribute somewhat to her age. She never touches a toy. She does, however, eat well; consuming pellets, seed and table food. As the months go by, Joey becomes more and more attached to my husband. She seems to care for no one except him, but she will do anything in her power to get to him or to stay with him. We find this bird completely out of character for an Amazon but, since she was imported in 1981, no one knows Joey's real age.

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Fred and Ethel, sun conures
By Judith Woods, Connecticut

I live with a pair of sun conures, Fred and Ethel, who are 21 years old. They were hand-raised babies purchased in Florida in 1986. Both birds were healthy and active and produced four to six healthy babies each year. In 1992 they hatched a clutch of four babies, two of which were hydrocephalic (had water on the brain). One of these babies lived about 4 years, and the other is still alive at 15 years old, although she is totally blind and has been since birth.

Believing that these youngsters were a freak of nature, and not a problem connected to the parents, we allowed Fred and Ethel to breed again. This time they hatched four babies, two of which were hydrocephalic. After extensive medical tests on both birds, which showed absolutely nothing, we stopped using Fred and Ethel as breeders, and decided to let them live out their lives in peaceful retirement.

Freddy has a misaligned beak, which he has had since birth. We do not know if he was born that way or if the misalignment was caused by hand-feeding, but Fred needs his beak dremmeled every three or four months by our avian vet.

Both Fred and Ethel have seizures when they are stressed. This has been happening for the last eight years. Whenever they are frightened, they go into a seizure. The eyes tend to roll in their heads and their bodies go limp, with the wings spread out, and they do some mild shaking. The vet tells us they will probably not die during one of these seizures, but they are frightening to watch. The cure seems to be to put the bird on the floor of the cage and just leave it alone. It will come out of the spell in about 30 seconds.

This is the only concern we have with these two older birds. They seem healthy and they eat well. However, as they get older, their feather condition is not as pristine as it once was, even though their diet has not changed at all. We have not

yet had to make any accommodation changes for them, nor have we had to do anything special besides being careful not to stress them.

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Chocko, a blue-fronted Amazon
By Jo Ann Lowery, Georgia

Chocko is a 16-year-old blue-front Amazon. I have had him for 13 years. When my husband and I married almost six years ago, I had been a widow for 8 years.

At first he didn't want to accept anyone else being in the house, but it didn't take long for him to get attached to my husband. Now he will come to him before he does me. We call him our spoiled brat. He has his own bedroom and a 5-foot by 3-foot by 2-foot stainless steel cage. He has his own TV and watches Disney channel all day. If something comes on that is not one of his favorites, he starts calling "Jo Ann" (my name) to come change channels. When the sun goes down, he starts yelling "Nite nite," which means he wants the blinds closed and TV turned off. He never says a word in the morning until we get up. Then he gets up and eats breakfast with us. His favorite breakfast is orange juice and cereal (Clusters).

He has a travel cage and likes to go to Callaway Gardens with us for a picnic lunch (which is only six miles from our home). Chocko is a perfect companion and we consider and treat him like a member of the family. We are seniors ourselves (66 and 72 years old), and can't imagine life without our little buddy.

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