

Charities Put Donation Money to Work to Help Birds

Bird enthusiasts have a variety of resources to help them choose a charity to support and the means in which to provide the funding

By Marissa Heflin

Americans gave about \$295.02 billion to charities in 2006, \$6.6 billion of it going toward environmental organizations and groups working for animal welfare, reported Giving USA, a publication of Giving USA Foundation, researched and written by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. In turn, these charities distribute money toward animal-related causes.

The nonprofit organization The World Parrot Trust (WPT) USA, which was founded in 1989 and has regional branches in North America, Asia, Australia and Europe, has raised more than \$2 million to fund conservation work for 37 species of parrots in 22 countries.

The parrot conservation projects that the World Parrot Trust supports are funded solely by membership fees, donations and merchandise sales, therefore, outside help from bird enthusiasts is vital.

"It makes the difference between [us being] an information hub and being a highly functional organization that is out there getting things done," says James Gilardi, Ph.D., director of the World Parrot Trust.

One of the World Parrot Trust's current projects is helping the St. Vincent Amazon in the West Indies. This bird has been historically threatened by hunting, capture for the wild-bird trade and habitat loss. Money for this project goes toward providing veterinary care, supporting population and habitat surveys, supporting local education programs and aviary construction for captive breeding populations.

Ensuring the survival of the golden conure, which has suffered from loss of habitat and heavy trapping for the international bird trade, is another project the World Parrot Trust is working diligently on.

Bird Charities At A Glance

Here are some of those organizations and information on how to contact them [More>>](#)

The Golden Conure Survival Fund, which was begun by World Parrot Trust Administrator Glenn Reynolds, has raised about \$54,000 to help the Brazilian species. This includes purchasing land for conserving breeding areas and supporting ongoing research. In 2006, the World Parrot Trust awarded Thiago Orsi Laranjeiras, a master student at the National Institute of Amazonian Research in Brazil, \$3,000 for a research fellowship to continue this research.

Donations to the World Parrot Trust, Dr. Gilardi are broken down into contribution type, such as a one-time donation, monthly donations, planned gift (a bequest in a will, a gift of life insurance or charitable annuity), in memorium to recognize a friend or relative who has passed away and corporate workplace giving. Donations are also dedicated to a specific project, in which 100 percent of the money is used for that designation. "People should bear in mind that a little money can go a long way," Gilardi said.

Many organizations benefit from donated goods and services. The World Parrot Trust has a wish list consisting of items such as airline tickets or mileage, laptop computers, stamps, digital cameras and climbing equipment. They are also looking for translators for the World Parrot Trust publications and Web page designers. Bird lovers who are interested in helping on a continual basis can become members of the organization and/or volunteers.

"I think the good thing for people to do is find one species that they really like and find a project that they feel they would like to be a part of and stick with that," Gilardi said. "That way they can get to know the details really well and understand how things change. It is important that they understand how things really work in the field."

One nonprofit organization is directing its energy — and money — to supporting avian research into specific diseases such as Proventricular Dilatation Disease, a deadly wasting syndrome that afflicts wild and domesticated birds and parrots worldwide. Avian Health Network Inc., which was founded in 2002, began its StopPDD campaign to promote public awareness of this deadly disease and to raise funds to help support PDD research being conducted by the Emerging Diseases Research Group at the University of Georgia's College of Veterinary Medicine. Branson Ritchie, DVM, Ph.D., is heading the research.

Valerie Schuster, president of Avian Health Network, says that they could not survive without the avian community. Almost all of the donation money goes to the University of Georgia, and much of the organization's expenses comes out of their own pocketbooks.

"It's for the birds, it's not about us," Schuster says. "Nobody receives an income, and there are very few, if any, reimbursed expenses."

The symptoms of PDD are varied, its routes are unknown and its outcome is fatal, according to Avian Health Network. Currently, there isn't a blood test or a non-invasive way to screen for PDD. And, because PDD is not well understood, Schuster says many bird owners blame themselves if their bird becomes infected with PDD.

"PDD can show up anywhere," she says. "It doesn't matter how clean you are, if you quarantine. It can hit anybody, any place. It doesn't mean that you are a bad bird keeper or that you have done anything wrong. I think that the hardest part about this disease is that there are so many unanswered questions. People feel so guilty when it takes out their one special parrot or their whole flock. You didn't do anything wrong."

Research funding may help answer these questions.

There are various ways to help the campaign, such as a one-time donation, pledging a certain amount of money over a period of time, planned gifts, memorial and tribute gifts, as well as donating time to volunteer. But perhaps the most unique way Avian Health Network brings in funds is through its "Birds of a Feather" Quilt Challenge to StopPDD. "It's a great way to donate without giving financially, said Becky McKirahan, quilt project coordinator. Bird lovers can use their sewing skills to stitch quilt blocks, which they then donate to Avian Health Network so a large quilt can be made for its fundraising event.

Avian Health Network will be unveiling the 2008 "Birds of a Feather" Quilt in October and will hold the drawing in mid-summer of 2008. Blocks for this quilt can be submitted up until August 1, 2007. Their website has more details.

Last year's quilt and fundraising event brought in almost \$10,000 for PDD research.

"[Donations are] so important," McKirahan says. "We need the funds for [Dr. Ritchie] to do the research. He doesn't have any big sponsorships; he doesn't have any big federal funding. He is totally existent on donations. As pet bird owners we have to pull together."

The Gabriel Foundation, a Denver-based nonprofit organization that was founded in 1996 and promotes educational outreach, conservation, rescue, rehabilitation, adoption and sanctuary needs of parrots, is investing in the future with their new Aviary and Adoption Center. The foundation's capital campaign has set a fundraising goal of \$2.5 million for the multi-year project, a feat that can only be accomplished with donor support.

"Without support, grants and fundraising revenues, bequests and endowments, we cannot continue to fulfill and improve our mission and purpose," says Julie Murad, the president and founder of The Gabriel Foundation.

The foundation needs to plan, design and construct an additional two-level building that will house a small conference or training room, more education outreach areas, another on-site employee living quarter and additional species rooms and flights especially designed for cockatoos. The list of needs is long, Murad says.

People may not realize what goes into establishing a nonprofit organization, Murad says. In addition to passion, compassion and dedication, one needs short and long term planning, a mission statement, a business plan and budgets and business costs such as insurance, utilities, payroll, taxes and program costs. Also, the Internal Revenue Service has very strong rules of compliance for 501(c)(3) organizations such as The Gabriel Foundation, she adds.

"The total well being of our flock is of paramount importance to each one of us," she says. "If The Gabriel Foundation were to fail in any way, shape or form, the future of our programs, parrots and longevity could be jeopardized. It is simply not enough to love parrots. We do indeed love them, but our love alone will not ensure a secure future for their lifetimes."

Murad says there is sometimes a misconception that if a nonprofit organization shows a healthy IRS Form 990, that there isn't much need for donor support. This is far from the truth.

"Our fundraising, program and grant revenues are critical resources for program expenses," she says. "At least 70 percent of revenue must come from the public sector so that the 501(c)(3) status remains in place. No public charity can be 100 percent dependent upon any one entity."

Murad says that \$0.85 of every dollar that is donated goes directly to The Gabriel Foundation's programs.

There are many avenues in which bird enthusiasts can donate to the foundation, one is through its e-commerce site The BirdBrain.com. Others coincide with upcoming events.

In the past, private donations have helped offset the foundation's travel expenses to the Association of Avian Veterinarian's Annual Conference. The Gabriel Foundation's mission and purpose includes strong liaison with the veterinary community, Murad says.

This year the conference will be held in Providence, R.I., on August 4 to 9, 2007. Murad and The Gabriel Foundation's team co-teaches the Handling, Restraint and Basic Behavioral Evaluation Practical Lab with Brian Speer, DVM. Murad is also chairperson of the association's Welfare Forum.

On September 2, 2007, The Gabriel Foundation will be hosting a memorial garden dedication. The first-time annual event is to honor those who have passed on and whose wishes were to provide support to The Gabriel Foundation, its parrots or programs through donations. A restricted donation can be given for a tree or trees, perennials, outdoor sculpture and flight cages. A plaque in memory of the honoree will be made and a listing of those who have donated on their behalf will be inscribed. For more information, call 303-629-5900 ext. 216.

The landscaping project, which includes almost 36 acres of high prairie grassland, vegetation and Ponderosa pine, is no small undertaking. This, as well as The Gabriel Foundation's many other programs, requires donor support. "Support is the backbone of our life," Murad says.

For those interested in organizations with a broader species interest, there is Wildlife Trust, which was founded in 1971 by British naturalist and author Gerald Durrell. Wildlife Trust has spent more than 35 years focusing its efforts on conservation.

In addition to birds, Wildlife Trust has projects involved with marine wildlife, emerging wildlife diseases, invasive species and human-wildlife conflict. It conducts its work throughout the United States and more than 20 countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa.

One of its projects, headed by Susan Elbin, Ph.D., a senior research scientist and director of Wildlife Trust's New York Bioscape Initiative, is monitoring migratory songbirds. The project is called "Passage Through New York: A Network of Listening Centers Tracking Songbird Migration from Boreal to Austral Forests."

Up to 3 billion birds fly through the United States during the spring migration north to their breeding grounds in Canada's boreal forest. In autumn, after breeding season, about 5 billion birds migrate south. Forty percent of the birds continue on to the Southern Hemisphere, while 60 percent spend the winter in the United States, according to the project. The nocturnal migration through the Hudson Valley includes Yellow-rumped Warblers, White-crowned Sparrows, Swainson's Thrush and Gray-cheeked Thrush.

The project plans to establish a 'listening network' in participating local high schools, connecting rural schools of the Upper Hudson Valley with inner city schools of Manhattan. A highly sensitive pressure-zone microphone will be placed on a roof and aimed at the night skies so that observers can hear the species-specific flight calls of migrating songbirds and record them for further study and analysis of migration patterns.

Wildlife Trust says that the study can provide migration data that may be signaling effects of global warming and deforestation.

"Private donations are vital to our continued growth as an organization," says Anthony Ramos, Wildlife Trust director of marketing and communications, adding that donors can call directly to make a credit card donation over the phone or write a check. Donors can also visit their website and click on the "Just Give" icon for online donations.

Gerald Durrell (1925–1995) once said, "Each mammal, bird or reptile with which we are concerned has taken millions of years to evolve. Suddenly it is in peril of its life and, if we do not act quickly, will be lost from the face of the earth forever."