

31 Abandoned Macaws Will Stay At Florida Facility

Virginia court orders parrots' owners to pay almost \$20,000 for veterinary expenses

By Katie Ingmire

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Photo Courtesy of Project Perry Inc.

Cookie before being brought to Project Perry Inc. Thirty-one abandoned macaws found living in filthy conditions on an Orange County, Va., farm in May will spend the next 18 months at a Florida bird-care facility.

Defendants Danny Ray and Sally A. Crosswhite, who face 27 charges of animal cruelty and four charges of inadequate care, will take possession of the macaws on July 25, 2008, solely to transport the birds to Luv Them Birds, a facility in Loxahatchee, Fla., according to a July 9 agreement from the Orange County General District Court. Efforts to reach the Crosswrites were unsuccessful. Luv Them Birds is run by a board member of The Gabriel Foundation, a nonprofit parrot welfare organization based in Colorado in whose care the macaws were placed by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Gabriel Foundation has made an official statement about the macaw case, and it can be read [here](#).

The July agreement came almost two months after Orange County Animal Control workers seized the birds from a property in Rhoadesville, Va. According to a July 18 article in the Charlottesville Daily Progress, animal control officers said the macaws were locked in "small, rusted-shut cages with mounds of droppings beneath them," and were vulnerable to weather conditions and kept under plastic tarps.

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Photo Courtesy of Project Perry Inc.

Cookie in the Macaw Room at Project Perry Inc. "All the birds I did blood work on, 95 percent of them tested for some sort of medical problem," said Hillary Cook, DVM, CVA, of Orange Veterinary Clinic, who examined all the birds and treated a percentage of them with medicine or surgery.

Since the May rescue, the macaws have stayed at Project Perry Inc., also known as the Central Virginia Parrot Sanctuary. Matt Smith, executive director of the sanctuary, said traveling to Florida could be "very stressful" for the birds, but right now they're doing "really well."

"They came into the place that day very scared and in poor condition feather-wise," Smith said. "They have great appetites. They're warming up to people a lot."

Cook said she has seen marked improvement in the birds as well.

"The ones that didn't visibly look as ill as the others really flourished with the good husbandry and the good diet and the shelter," Cook said.

On Friday morning, Orange County Animal Control will come to the sanctuary, load up the macaws and transfer them to the Orange County Animal Shelter. From there, said Diana Wheeler, Orange County's Commonwealth's Attorney, the Crosswhites will take possession of the birds to move them to Florida, most likely using a temperature-controlled truck.

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Photo Courtesy of Project Perry Inc.

These blue-and-gold macaws were a part of the 31 macaws rescued. The Crosswhites will not have possession of the birds for 18 months, during which time the Commonwealth shall be provided with information about the facility and have the right of physical access to the birds, according to the court agreement. The defendants will also have to pay almost

\$20,000 in veterinary bills to the county by Jan. 9, 2009. The macaws will not be bred during their time in Florida, Wheeler said.

“If [the Crosswhites are] in a position to pay for them and take care of them, then it's up to The Gabriel Foundation to decide whether they get the birds back,” said Wheeler, who describes the situation as “long-term foster care.”

Not everyone in the bird community is happy with the outcome, however. Wheeler said she has received “nasty” and “hateful” e-mails about the court's decision.

“Had the trial been won by the Commonwealth [of Virginia], the bird's futures would have been secure,” Smith said. “Their future, in my opinion, is unknown.”