

## Stereotypes Affect Parrot Adoptions

**Adoptable birds are often overlooked due to stereotypes.**

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Courtesy of Jessica Hagedorn, Wisconsin

Many parrots face unfair stereotypes, like macaws being loud and uncontrollable. Many assuming adopters will take in a cockatoo instead, only to find they match the macaw in size and sound level.

Space is tight at parrot rescues nationwide. With more parrots being surrendered as the economic climate becomes more dismal, the need for bird lovers to step in and adopt becomes even greater every week.

But while these rescued parrots are all potential pets in need of permanent homes, some people mistakenly believe that not all the feathered friends are created equal. Unfair prejudices and judgments can result in some parrots becoming even more difficult to adopt out. Bird rescue centers strive to clear up misconceptions to ensure that all birds can be placed in the right home.

One common issue is the habit of potential adopters to analyze the physical appearance of a bird and pick a parrot based on its beauty, rather than its character. A flashy parrot can overshadow a less colorful bird, regardless of either's personalities, a problem that bird rescues constantly battle.

At The Association for Parrot CARE (Conservation, Adoption, Rescue and Education), founder and resident Dr. Lorin Lindner, PhD, MPH, said that many adopters seek out pretty birds that talk. They fail to look beyond these physical traits to try to find the bird that's right for them.

Often, parrots with plucking problems and with spots missing in their feathers are overlooked because of their unkept appearance, but Lindner stresses that this can be an unfair judgment.

"Parrots who have plucked and are bald or patchy are often the sweetest, most grateful ones when they get adopted, but most people don't want them," Lindner said.

Bonnie Kenk, founder and executive director at the Parrot Education and Adoption Center (PEAC), said she's witnessed the same prejudices against birds with disheveled feathers. Though she does note that if a bird is a constant feather mutilator, potential adopters should look into whether there is cause for medical concern.

Species bias is another common problem that results in new bird owners becoming unexpectedly overwhelmed by their new parrot. After hearing that macaws have a reputation for being loud and uncontrollable, many assuming adopters will take in a cockatoo - only to find that these birds' personalities are just as strong, Lindner said.

Lindner also warned while many bird lovers covet a talkative African grey parrot, they might not realize that these birds can be extremely demanding.

"Many people can't deal with it after a while," Lindner said.

Kenk said that at PEAC, she has the most trouble adopting out the cockatiels, budgerigars and large macaws because of predetermined species bias. "Because of our education requirement for adoption, most people do not want to sit in a seminar to learn proper care if they are only interested in a cockatiel or budgie. This would most likely be unique to Parrot Education & Adoption Center or any other organization that has educational requirements for adoption. Often, the people seeking out large birds are only interested in cockatoos," she said.

However, ageism in parrots isn't as common a problem as in other species like dogs, cats and small mammals, which often become less adoptable with age. Because parrots typically have a long lifespan, many adopters become concerned that their parrot may outlive them. Kenk said with older birds it's "what you see is what you get." Many potential adopters like that the birds have already developed their personalities and habits.

Still, young birds are also often available for adoption. Though Lindner said that many people mistakenly assume that if they raise their bird themselves, it won't develop habits like plucking and self-mutilating.

To help ensure that all adoptable parrots find permanent homes, bird rescue groups focus on educating the public to combat the stereotypes that might prevent some people from adopting less popular parrots.

"In our seminars, we talk about the rewards of working and living with birds that have some type of problem. So if people are willing to educate themselves, they will learn that most problems are or will become insignificant with time, patience, love and the correct information on proper care of parrots in captivity," Kenk said.