

Avian Community Mourns Loss of Pioneering Parrot

Alex the African grey parrot passes away

By Rose Gordon

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Dr. Irene Pepperberg and Alex the African grey worked for 30 years together on parrot behavior research.

In his 30th year of work with Dr. Irene Pepperberg Alex the African grey, the bird that put a feathered face on parrot research, was found dead last Friday morning, Sept. 7, cause unknown. He was 31 years old.

"Irene put him to bed. He said, 'I love you; see you tomorrow,'" related Arlene Levin, lab manager for Pepperberg's research facility at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass.

A necropsy revealed no problems with the heart or lungs nor any head trauma, Levin said. Biopsy results are expected in a week.

Alex was purchased by Pepperberg from a Chicago pet store in June 1977 and became the principal bird in her groundbreaking cognition and communication research. Alex's name was an acronym for Pepperberg's research project, Avian Learning EXperiment.

Prior to his death, Alex had learned to label colors, to count, some of the alphabet and naming shapes, and had only recently grasped a zero-like concept. The research that Pepperberg worked on with Alex was also applied to therapies to help learning disabled children.

For many in the avian community – and elsewhere – Alex's accomplishments provided tangible proof that parrots could do more than mimic and spout coined phrases – "Polly want a cracker." [Click image to enlarge](#)

Avian photographer, Bonnie Jay, put together a memorial notice and photography collage to honor Alex's passing. Courtesy Bonnie Jay

Levin said the lab had received hundreds of sympathy notes over the weekend. Bonnie Jay, a noted avian photographer, put together a memorial notice and photography collage from her own photographs to honor the parrot's passing.

"It's just really, really sudden," Levin said. "I worked with him all that day. He seemed fine."

Pepperberg's work and the Alex Foundation, however, will continue with the lab's other two young African greys, Griffin and Wart. "They're just going to need to work a little harder with no Alex," she said.

Donations in Alex's name and condolences can be sent to: The Alex Foundation, c/o Dr. Irene Pepperberg, Department of Psychology/MS-062, 415 South Street, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 02454.

The Alex Foundation created a memorial pin to help remember Alex. For more details on the Alex Memorial Pin [Click Here>>](#)

For more information on The Alex Foundation, visit www.alexfoundation.org/index.htm.

Send a message in memory of Alex.

Visit our Alex the African Grey Memorial Page and post condolences, images and memories of Alex.

To visit the memorial page and leave a message [Click Here>>](#)