

“Keeping a Pet Bird”

By Kay

A bird lover like me often calls a pet bird, “a companion bird”. Like dogs and cats or other animals, birds can also be really good friends, companions, and a member of your family. However, there are some aspects I would like you to consider before you bring a bird home from the pet shop.

Let me ask you three questions to begin with;

- 1) Do you know how long birds live?
- 2) Do you think all vets can “see” birds and provide them appropriate medical care?
- 3) Do you think birds are easier to take care of compared to dogs or cats?

Here are the answers;

- 1) It depends on the kind of bird, but some of them live up to more than 50 years.
- 2) There are VERY few vets who can “see” birds at a professional level in Japan. Most vets in Japan are educated and trained in caring for dogs and cats mainly, therefore, not many vets know how to examine birds.
- 3) Personally, I would say birds are much more difficult to take care of compared to dogs and cats.

Let me expand on the above answers.

Many people mistakenly believe birds are weak and easily die. It is a great misunderstanding. Life expectancy of birds is much longer than many people may think. Familiar birds like budgerigars, for example, live around 10 years. The African Gray Parrot is said to live at least 50 years. ‘Cookie, a Major Mitchell’s cockatoo, lives at Brookfield Zoo in Chicago and is the oldest parrot living in the world. It is 83 years old! This means many companion birds can live as long as their owners. At the same time, owners must consider whether they can provide the birds a stable environment to spend their life peacefully and steadily for a long period of time.

Because birds are very clever and sensitive, they take a long time to get used to a new environment and they do not like frequent changes. If we cannot provide proper living conditions and environment, pet birds may experience emotional and mental distress which may lead to “feather plucking” which is a disorder where birds try to relieve stress by plucking their feathers, and may end up removing most feathers from their bodies.

Once pet birds become sick like that, it is very difficult to find medical treatment in Japan, because there are not many specialized vets for birds. Therefore, bird owners must have at least an idea where they can take sick birds if it is necessary. It is better to find one BEFORE bringing a bird home, because birds have a tendency to hide their sickness and injuries since they know that they will be targeted by predators in the wild, and it is very natural for them to pretend they are healthy. As a result, it is often too late when owners notice something really wrong with their birds that are already in critical condition. That is why it is very important to find a vet who can treat birds appropriately BEFORE taking the feathery friend home.

Some of you have guessed already it is not as easy to take care of birds compared to dogs or cats. It is because birds are very clever animals with a heart of glass. Many of them are frightened easily. They become easily panicked. On the contrary, they require lots of love, attention, and affection from their caregivers. It is often said birds are forever like a 3-year-old child. Many birds LOVE their owners dearly and grow attached to them. They consider humans as their companions. If you cannot devote your time on taking care of them, birds are not for you.

Today, I would also like to introduce TSUBASA, a non-profit organization which is located in Saitama. This is the only organization specializing in birds in this country. They are specialized in rescuing and sheltering pet birds that have had various reasons to need help. Nowadays, there are an increasing number of cases where aged bird owners let their beloved pets go since they cannot take care of the birds anymore.

At the facility, medical treatment and rehabilitation is also provided when necessary. If birds are healthy, physically and mentally, they are put on a list for adoption. Unfortunately, some of the birds need to stay in the facility for the rest of their lives because of some difficulties. Currently, there are 140 birds housed at the facility. At the same time however, some of them find new owners and start new lives in better environments with lots of love and affection. To adopt a bird, it is necessary to clear a strict qualification process. The concept is “the birds choose their owners.” So, you cannot take any bird you like even though you wish to be an adoptive parent. The organization holds various educational classes and seminars in order to educate bird owners more about their birds so that their welfare can improve.