

PLIGHT OF RESCUERS AND THEIR BIRDS

by: Mary Bradford

I've been singing this song since 1991 and have readily been tarred and feathered (no pun intended), but they couldn't get rid of me. I'm in my 30th year as a bonafide 501(c)3 and still not breaking through. It starts with the breeders. If there were no captive breeding, the problem would gradually subside, but that's not going to stop. I'm sick and tired of hearing breeders say 'I don't make any money at this!' YES THEY DO or they wouldn't do it. It's the rescuers and sanctuaries that aren't bringing in enough through sales of unique gifts to support their rescue, or donor dollars. Breeders never have to re-fi their assets to feed their birds, their sales do that for them, and feed themselves as well. Also neither breeders or retailers are ever going to tell the prospective buyer all the pros and cons of bird ownership. They don't dare tell them how old certain species live, or that they may scream you out of house and home, or that they may pluck out their feathers, only to face huge vet bills for unnecessary tests when there's nothing wrong with their birds other than some birds just can't cope with captivity, while others do quite well. All a buyer is told is that they will have a wonderful companion that will live longer than a dog or cat and won't have to suffer loss of the bird after the normal life span of a dog or cat. And that their bird will talk, NOT necessarily. That bird food is cheap and they only need seed/pellets/water. That they don't have to prepare special foods to supplement an otherwise boring diet. That their bird will not be healthy without enough rays from the sun. That their bird needs 12-14 hrs/night of no TV, no sound, no conversation sleep, and on and on. Also, there is great competitiveness between rescues all about money. Some rescues are closing faster than new ones open all because of money. Many rescuers start by using their BREEDER birds, and also breed on the side to make the necessary money for their rescued birds. Some rescues can afford to have on staff people who are equipped to write hundreds of grants per year to bring in money. Some rescuers can afford to pay themselves a salary, most cannot. These and many more are the real inherent issues that plague unwanted birds and the real goodhearted people who genuinely want to do the right thing, but often find they're in way over their heads. Need I say anymore? We as rescuers are and always will be in an uphill battle to survive and our survival depends

upon the birds' survival.

Then there's the issue of disease; many rescues cannot let it be known that certain diseases have had a run through their flocks due to finger pointing by other rescues, YES OTHER RESCUES. Why, it all comes down to money. If a rescue can come off as so clean and disease free, it will get more money due to its spotless reputation. On the other hand, at some point in time if there are more than just 2 birds residing together, there WILL be disease, period.

Where does disease come from? THE WILD! Disease was brought out of the rainforests around the world into all of the other countries of the world which have accepted either legal, illegal or smuggled birds. It's not the rescue or the rescuer, if they keep a relatively clean environment with clean, fresh food and water, there will still be disease due to the contagious nature of the disease. Granted, there are rescues that should be shut down, but if/when that happens the confiscated birds wind up at auction, in unsuspecting homes, with breeders and in other rescuers. So, to blame the rescue for the disease problem isn't just unfair, it's incorrect. The problem is also exasperated by those who are not financially equipped to handle disease, the cost of it, the repercussions and the death rate.

In closing, I'd say we all need to be more tolerant of any of these issues that arise with exotic birds and any exotic animal for that matter. We need to be kind to each other, hold one another's hand through the hard times and be joyous together in the good times. There is NOTHING easy in coping with any animals. And, please don't humanize them, that's an insult even to the animal. Love them in the context of what they are.