

# Cockatoos and African Greys:

## Are they Really So Different?

By:  
**Sam Foster (cockatoos) & Jane Hallander (African greys)**

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How many times have you heard these words...

African greys are feather pickers; Cockatoos demand your constant attention and if they don't get it, they will scream all day, or start plucking; If you want a bird that talks, you have to get a grey, but watch out, they're one person birds; Don't buy a Major Mitchell's or a Rose-breasted...they're all neurotic; My grey used to like me, but now he's bonded to my husband and hates me; My Umbrella used to be a love sponge, that's why I bought it. But now he's become aggressive and bites me whenever I try to pick him up; Greys aren't as cuddly as cockatoos; Cockatoos aren't as smart as greys?

It sounds as if these are aliens from two different planets, rather than separate classes of the parrot family. However, what if many of the urban myths about cockatoos and greys are just those -- urban myths? Maybe these parrots who share 'shades of grey' as their primary coloration have much more in common than we think. Let's take a look at some common misconceptions about cockatoos and greys and the possible reasons behind these misconceptions.

### Feather Plucking:

Yes, there is no question that many greys and cockatoos chew or pluck their feathers. However, rather than considering them highly neurotic animals, who cannot stand any change in their lives, perhaps they are instead, highly social and intelligent birds.

We know that both African greys and Cockatoos appear to have a fairly long maturation and learning period, during which their parents provide continuing lessons in flock social rules and survival skills. What makes the statement that "greys and cockatoos are neurotic and that's why they pluck" highly suspect, is that you seldom see this in wild-caught birds. Of course, there are exceptions, however the average imported grey or cockatoo, who has no health problems, has already withstood incredible trauma from the capturing process alone. Now it's in a cage, with people who may or may not understand its social needs -- and yet, there are relatively few who pluck their feathers or become phobic. Why is this? And why do we see few cases of feather plucking among South American and some other Australasian parrot species?

One of the most common misconceptions is that all cockatoo personalities are the same. In reality, cockatoos inhabit a wide variety of territories differing not only in geographic location, but also in climate, from rainforest to coastal plains to semi-arid, almost desert conditions. Each of these natural environments presents its own daily challenges and struggles for survival, including food availability and water supply, predators, nesting sites, and safe havens for camouflage and roosting.

Also, even though it is certainly true that cockatoos are extremely social creatures and have a strong flock instinct, not all of them fly in massive flocks as is often witnessed with Greater Sulphur-crested's, Rose-breasted's and Corella's. There are some who are seldom seen, even out of breeding season, in groups of more than a dozen and others who stay primarily in pairs.

Could it not therefore be logical to theorize that the impact of hundreds of thousands of years spent by cockatoos in these assorted environments would have a profound impact on their instinctive behavior, even in a captive environment?

An example of this was our "flock" of pet cockatoos in Australia, which consisted of two Greater Sulphur-crested's, one Bare-eyed and one Eastern Slender-bill Corella, two

Rose-breasted's and one Major Mitchell's. The Rose-breasted male (Mateus) and the Major Mitchell's (Inca) were captive bred. Although these two birds were hand raised

to some degree, Mateus was not taken from the nest until 7-weeks old and Inca was removed at 12-weeks. The other five were wild-caught and, with the exception of Fred the Bare-eyed, who was over 60 years old, came to live with us when they were young, just after being trapped in the wild.

These birds lived in harmony in a large enclosed screened porch overlooking the cockatoo breeding aviaries. Although only two (the Greater Sulphurs-both females) interacted on a daily basis, these birds quickly established their own flock structure and protocol. All seven could be out at the same time in their "habitat", on various perches and playgym or "grazing" on the floor (usually the Galahs). As these birds often mingle in the wild, the Major Mitchell's perhaps less than the others, there were never any signs of discomfort, fear, or intimidation, even when a new flock member was introduced.

Alfie, the Slender-bill (female), immediately took the role of sentinel and would announce with great gusto any possible or perceived threat or danger.

The flock leader in this instance was a female Greater Sulphur, "Mooloolaba". She had a very relaxed personality and was totally non-aggressive toward us or the other birds.

However, the other cockatoos always looked to Loo-Bird, as she became known, for direction. Her cage was the closest to the door leading into the house, she was always fed first, was the first to be uncovered in the morning and the last to be covered at night. Her actions very often dictated how the others would behave when a new person came to visit, there was a disturbance in the outside aviaries, when fresh tree branches, pine cones, or other new items were placed in their cages, or even when there was a mild territorial squabble among one of the other six flock members.

Watching these birds interact daily, doing many of the same things and behaving in many of the ways they would naturally, gave me a valuable lesson in learning to accept and appreciate these birds for who they really are.

African greys do not appear to intermingling their flocks with flocks of other parrot species in their wild habitat, as do amazons, macaws and conures in South and Central America. There are far fewer African parrot species than South American, therefore less competition for food and nest holes. One theory is that survival competition from other species creates a need to become independent sooner than perhaps the grey, who does not compete with other species within its habitat. Therefore, the amazon who may receive intense socialization and survival training for a shorter period of time is better equipped to draw on its own instinctive social personality in a domestic situation. The grey, on the other hand, may need longer and more detailed instruction from its surrogate parents (we humans) before it is equipped to handle our man-made stresses. There are reports from those who have studied African greys in the wild that they appear to stay in closely bonded 'family' groups of five or six birds, within the confines of the larger flock. The theory is that greys stay with their parents for an extended time period -- maybe even over a year -- before moving on to juvenile groups and even more habitat evolution.

The social structure of most cockatoos is very similar to African greys and they also typically remain in family groups within a larger flock until the adolescents become completely independent. Even when forming bonds and associating primarily with others the same age, young cockatoos will often go on living within the same mini-group as their parents, continuing to learn by observing the behavior and interaction of adult birds.

There are several stages during the physical and emotional growth of cockatoos, indeed throughout their lives, when these complex animals are highly impressionable.

There are two periods that I feel are extremely critical, and potentially have the most impact on the long-term behavior and development of these birds...weaning and sexual maturation.

In the wild, not all parents raise their babies in the same manner. Nor for that matter do they rear each chick in the same clutch exactly the same way. Just as in human infants, there are those babies who are more aggressive, who are naturally bigger and stronger and who require more nurturing.

Cockatoos have varying clutch sizes of typically 1-4 chicks, although some will occasionally lay 5-6 eggs. When feeding and raising these babies, the parents are extremely busy from dawn to dusk feeding and protecting their young. While we may think that the babies in the nest are only concerned about their empty crops, during this entire process they are learning everything they will need to know in order to successfully care for their own young when the time comes.

Having the opportunity to witness the fledging and weaning process of wild cockatoos taught me a great deal about the love, tenderness and concern these parents show for their young. Even in the wild there are babies who, for whatever reason, just are not yet ready to wean, even though the majority of other juveniles in the flock are totally food independent.

So how do wild parents deal with this situation? They don't abandon the baby and leave it to its own devices, try to chase it away to get rid of it so they can go back to nest, or completely ignore it as if thinking "Hey, you're old enough to be on your own so leave us alone!"

Those devoted parents will continue to feed their persistently begging young until such time as it, not the parents, determines it is ready to break that parental connection.

Whether this lengthy weaning process is the result of a physical or emotional need we have no way to document. What we do know is that the end result is an independent bird who is then fully prepared to continue the learning process for becoming a well-adjusted and self-confident adult cockatoo.

In the wild, when these birds begin to reach sexual maturity, not all cockatoos automatically behave in the same manner.

Although the males seek out the female when looking for a mate, some are much more aggressive than others. During this time as well, there may also be some challenging by young, strong, dominant males for the position of flock "leader".

These are two of the times when natural instincts will be very strong in cockatoos, and when the actions we take or the reactions we exhibit can either help produce a happy, well adjusted, self-confident and independent companion parrot, or one who will be constantly demanding our attention, perhaps shredding or plucking its feathers or even in extreme cases, self-mutilation.

Other questions this brings to mind: What effect does the "lack" of this first-hand knowledge from parent birds have on hand-raised cockatoos who are eventually placed into breeding programs? Could this possibly be one of the influencing reasons for the difficulty some breeders experience in successfully matching pairs with hand-raised cockatoos? Is this one of the reasons many former hand-raised pets do not make good parents, sometimes killing their babies or refusing to feed them?

Remember that these are only theories. This article isn't meant to 'turn aviculture around', but instead to add food for thought about common misconceptions and problems. Are our domestically raised greys less able to handle what we consider everyday stresses because they cannot relate those human-created stresses, such as being left alone for periods of time, nearby construction sounds and sights, or the pain and trauma of someone pulling bloodfeathers, to their instinctive, genetically-driven fears of being devoured by a predator? Are the unfortunate phobias we see all too often in domestically bred parrots the result of an inability to differentiate between a human, who raised them and suddenly appears to the hand raised parrot to be a predator, and an actual predator?

### Aggression and Bonding Behaviors

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When most people think of African greys, they think of an aloof bird who may or may not stay bonded to its first primary human, while cockatoos are perceived as 'velcro-birds' that cannot stand to be anywhere but attached to their human's chest. Where problems occur are as the cute bappie grows up into a grey who does want more attention, albeit perhaps not the intense hands-on attention associated with many cockatoos.

In the wild, when these birds begin to reach sexual maturity, not all cockatoos automatically behave in the same manner. This is also a period when the strong natural instinct to find a mate and breed brings about another natural behavior, which is to leave the "family" unit and seek out a "new" partner, thus preventing interbreeding.

There are many instances with cockatoos where bond changes occur during or after sexual maturity, primarily in males and more commonly in some species. My feeling is that this is an instinctive behavior which pet cockatoo owners sometimes, unknowingly, encourage.

Also, when seeking a mate some male cockatoos are much more aggressive than others. Something else can be happening during this time...there may be a challenge by the young, strong, dominant males for the position of flock "leader".

My personal feeling, after comparing and documenting the behaviors of male cockatoos in captivity and in the wild, is that many of the birds we often refer to as "super" males (particularly Umbrella's, Moluccan's and some of the Sulphur-crested family) are those who would be genetically predisposed to take on the role of flock leader in the wild. In captivity, the males who show this tendency are often physically very large birds, who also project a great deal of intelligence and often present quite a challenge for their owners around the age of 3-5 years. It occurs to me that these qualities are what best suits that leadership role in the wild. Dealing with this type of bird in captivity can be "interesting", frustrating and at times, frightening.

In captivity these particular birds may become extremely territorial and in a multi-person household may feel they have to protect and defend their chosen mate against all intruders, even if that might be their formerly "chosen" one. In the wild, they would merely use body posturing and vocalizations to claim their territory, nesting site, or mate, with perhaps the occasional beak battle. However, the freedom to take flight along with the vastness of their natural habitat, prevents these squabbles from becoming major altercations.

African greys are extremely social birds in their natural habitats. They have constant flock interaction. A recent informal survey had some interesting results regarding long-time bonding patterns with African grey parrots. The birds in the survey were all three years or older, domestically bred, DNA sexed and lived in households of two or more people.

A common complaint about African greys is that they don't always choose to bond with the person they were originally intended for. For instance, a grey might be raised by the wife in a household, only to decide it wanted to be close to the husband a couple of years later. Or a grey may suddenly prefer a wife or child to the rest of the family, often rejecting the person who cared for it as a juvenile.

The survey showed that 63 percent of nominate (Congo) species African grey males changed their human bonds between the ages one and one half and two years of age, from one family member to another, aggressively rejecting the original bonded human. The original bonded human was the person who raised or gave primary care to the parrot when it was a fledgling and juvenile. However, percentages changed with female nominate greys, where only 16 percent changed their human bondmates as they neared maturity.

This was strictly an informal survey that did not follow the closely regulated conditions that would make it a truly scientific survey. Therefore, the results only 'suggest' potential information and should not be taken as 'hard fact'. That being said, here is a theory about African greys and human bonding, based partly on those survey results.

If greys are raised in close family groups in the wild, laws of 'natural selection' would require greys to seek a mate outside of their immediate family group -- to prevent inbreeding and insure a strong gene pool for the species' survival. If it is the male grey who selects a mate from available females, rather than a female selecting from courting males, that would explain why a far greater percentage of male nominate species change their bonds to another family member than do females. Although our domestically bred greys do not have the benefits of 'parrot parenting' to teach them how to select mates, they do have plenty of wild genes to give them the necessary instincts that protect the survival of a species. However, they may not view us humans as potential nesting mates, the instinctive urge to leave the family group (person who raises the parrot) and bond to someone else could be strong enough to make the parrot reject the first bond and show affection to another family member.

The interesting surprise of this survey was that from an equal number of Timneh African greys as nominate species greys, there was no Timneh, male or female, who changed its pair bond from one human to another. I have no theory on this, except that perhaps Timneh greys live in a different habitat, under different flock social conditions. We do know that Timnehs inhabit a more 'savannah' type of terrain than the wetter 'rainforest' habitat of the so-called Congo grey. It is possible that, like different cockatoo species that show vastly different behavior patterns, the Timneh grey may actually be a separate species of African grey. I have spoken to evolutionary biologists who believe the Timneh to be a separate species. However, since I lack the background and qualification in this field, I have no opinion either way.

It disturbs me greatly when I hear comments that a particular cockatoo (or any parrot) should be weaned by a certain age or should be at a certain weight, as if it's engraved in stone. Or when someone makes a statement such as, "Moluccans are all feather pluckers", or, "Once a 'super' male goes through sexual maturity you'll have to put him in a breeding program".

One of the first and worst mistakes parrot owners and, in some cases parrot educators, make is gross generalizations about their feathered charges that lumps them all into the same categories, without understanding the environmental motivations and instincts that have developed within each species. To say that African greys are aloof, neurotic and prone to feather plucking is a disservice to the species. If they don't behave like that in the wild and do in captivity, then it becomes 'our' problem to solve, rather than to lay the blame on the species. Have we created such an artificial growth environment that some greys cannot cope?

Perhaps we should look toward modifying our breeding and hand-raising practices, instead of modifying the birds.

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#### Part II-Phobic Behavior

by **Sam Foster (cockatoos) & Jane Hallander (African greys)**

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We frequently hear a cockatoo or African grey owner express concern that their bird is exhibiting phobic behavior. This can be anything from a bird that throws itself on its back in a fight or die position when the owner comes into the room, to a parrot who runs away when the human tries to take it out of the cage. In these instances, it is critical for both the owner and the behaviorist to make every effort to determine that a true phobia actually exists before offering advice or recommendations.

According to Webster's dictionary, a phobia is "an exaggerated, usually inexplicable and illogical fear of an object, class of objects, or situation". If we use this meaning as a standard, how do we then determine which behaviors in our companion parrots are truly "phobic". The bird who throws itself to the cage bottom, screaming or scurs away is probably phobic "if he repeats this behavior whenever one or more people try to handle him. The parrot who runs away from your hand or the "up" command may not be phobic, but instead just be trying to assert his own flock dominance.

A number of excellent articles have appeared over the years in *The Pet Bird Report* discussing various methods for successfully dealing with this particular problem. Our intention here is to analyze some of the possible causes of phobias and why they appear to be more prevalent in some species, such as cockatoos and African greys. Hopefully, through a greater cognizance and understanding of the instincts and thought processes of these highly intelligent creatures, we might learn to avoid potentially traumatic situations or events that can lead to phobic behavior.

There are many often repeated theories and phrases concerning the care and behavior of companion parrots...things such as "birds are prey animals", "never force a hand-raised baby to wean", "it is critical to teach young birds to be independent", and "parrots in captivity are still wild animals". Although we believe statements such as these to be true, and may use them as a basis for the daily interaction with our birds, do we fully comprehend the enormous impact that following these guidelines, and others like them, have on our birds future emotional health, adaptability, and long term happiness in a pet environment?

Let's begin by considering all the different cockatoo personalities. There are some cockatoos who show phobic tendencies more than others? If so, why is this and what factors may be involved...such as genetics, natural instincts, the physical environment or human "engineering".

Consider this scenario. Four Rose-breasted Cockatoo babies are taken from the nest as they reach 7-days of age and are brought into a clean, well-maintained, bright, and cheerful nursery to be hand raised. They are placed in a brooder made of clear acrylic with red low wattage bulbs for warmth, allowing the hand-feeder to easily monitor their actions and progress, day and night. All four babies eat well and are growing at a normal rate, although the breeder and hand-feeder both notice that these babies cry considerably more than the other cockatoos in the nursery who are close to the same age.

At around five weeks of age it becomes noticeable that when the top is taken off of the brooder and the hand-feeder reaches in, the Rose-breasteds appear extremely distressed, hissing and huddling close together for security. As soon as the babies are out of the brooder and being fed, they calm down and seem fine. This same pattern of behavior continues until they are moved into a small weaning cage, then the problem is no longer obvious.

This breeder has a small aviary and there are only a few other babies being raised at the same time, including two Umbrella Cockatoos and three Goffins. Although each baby is given individual attention every day, including lots of cuddles and scratches, by the time the Rose-breasteds are fledging, there is some concern that they are not going to be as affectionate as either the umbrella or goffin babies. In an effort to correct this situation and increase their desire for human interaction, the Rose-breasteds are separated and put into individual cages, and the hand-feeder spends more time with these babies on a daily basis throughout the weaning process, attempting to teach them to enjoy more physical contact.

When the youngest galah is 10-weeks old, all four are given their first wing clips. The umbrellas and goffin's are close to the same age and fully feathered, and are also clipped at this time. The youngest goffin's is a very small bird and can still fly extremely well, even with quite a few feathers cut from each wing. So it is decided that for her own safety, all the parrots on both wings should be clipped to prevent her from flying into a window or out the door, and indeed that works to totally eliminate any flight capabilities.

The following week, one of the umbrellas loses his balance while dozing on the playgym. Although he instinctively flaps his wings, he cannot slow the force of his fall and lands hard on the tile floor, breaking several tail feathers. Fearing there may be other injuries, the breeder takes the young umbrella to her avian veterinarian. After a thorough exam, it is confirmed that wrap are none. The vet and his assistant carefully wrap the young umbrella in a towel and pull the broken feathers. The bird is then returned to the nursery where both the breeder and hand-feeder are extremely cautious from that point on not to leave him unattended, even for a moment, while he is out of the cage.

Over the next few months all of these birds are successfully weaned onto a varied and nutritious diet, and sold to caring and responsible people who are given both verbal and written directions from the breeder for the continuing care of their pet cockatoos. Eventually, each young bird learns the facility to become a much treasured and adored addition to its new home, adjusting quickly to the new surroundings and appearing perfectly content.

The question is, are any of these cockatoos more likely to develop behavioral problems or phobias than others? It appears that all of these birds were thoughtfully and lovingly cared for by both the breeder and the hand-feeder, and the new owners were educated to some degree about proper diet and husbandry. With this seemingly ideal start in life, what could possibly go wrong?

Although African greys are limited to only two sub-species, we are familiar of basic differences between the personalities of the nominate sub-species (Congo, for lack of a better term) and the smaller, darker Timneh sub-species. Many individual owners, breeders and behavioral consultants say over and over that Timnehs have a quieter, less prone to neurotic behavior, personality than their larger cousins. I used to think this was due only to the fact that Congos were imported and bred in much larger numbers than the less colorful Timnehs. However, the past 10 years have seen a great interest in Timneh African greys, with a resulting large number of domestically bred, hand-fed birds released to the pet bird market. And, they are still notable for their adaptability to change and calmness in the stressful situations that might drive a Congo to pluck feathers or become truly phobic.

This made me rethink my theories. I do still believe that there are much larger numbers of neurotic, insecure Congo African greys than Timnehs, simply because there are more Congos to count. However, there hasn't been a great number of neurotic Timnehs produced in the past 10 years, as we breed and sell more of them. Here is my current theory and this is a theory that applies directly to cause of phobias in African greys, since we see many fewer phobic Timnehs than phobic Congos greys.

Briefly, Timneh greys start talking and vocalizing sooner than Congos -- some Timnehs as soon as five months, while Congos usually don't start vocalizing a lot until after they are a year old. If we assume that vocalization is an important part of an adult bird's communication within a flock -- danger calls, mating calls, foraging calls, etc. -- we might say that a parrot is genetically programmed to start imitating calls when he or she matures enough to become part of everyday flock 'business'. A juvenile, still under intensive parental guidance, probably has little need to imitate and learn flock calls. If this is true, it would appear that Timnehs might mature faster than Congos, making a long parental guidance period unnecessary.

Unless they endure severe abuse, we rarely see wild caught, imported greys of either sub-species that show true phobic symptoms. This is probably because they are raised and parented over a natural, for each sub-species, period of time. In a domestic breeding environment, weaning and fledging times might be the same, however if it is true that Timnehs are genetically programmed to interact sooner with the flock, they might not fall prey to the insecurities that we see so often with six to 18-month old Congo greys.

Looking at Yellow-nape, Blue-front and Double yellow-head amazons, species where there is early vocalization and possibly early independence, we see very few cases of feather plucking and phobias. This all indicates that how we handle certain species during their most formative times sets the stage for future behavior.

Phobias in African greys and other African parrots are related to their abilities to emotionally deal with what they perceive as 'prey/predator' situations. For example, many natural predators to African greys come from above -- raptors, such as hawks and eagles. I have had several clients with greys who became very phobic toward their primary handlers after overhead, track lighting was installed in the birds' room. Usually, the owners didn't think to remove the parrots from the room while work was in progress. In all instances, there were birds, genetically programmed to fear danger from above, in the middle of situations with people working on ladders above their cages, noisily pounding with hammers and drills, pieces of ceiling or lighting parts occasionally falling around them and eventually, bright lights that weren't there before turned on overhead. I'd be phobic too, if I were a prey animal that didn't understand the cause and effect reasoning behind what was going on in my territory.

Another common cause of phobia in African greys is 'feather pulling'. Because greys are heavy bodied birds, they can be very clumsy juveniles. This probably doesn't happen in the wild, because wild greys are fully fledged and so make up for any clumsiness by flying and gliding gracefully. In our artificial environments we must clip wings, for the birds' safety. This causes many young greys to crash to the floor if they lose their grip on perch or cage, sometimes breaking blood feathers. It's a common practice with some veterinarians to pull those broken feathers, and sometimes even surrounding feathers, out by the shaft. This can be very painful to the parrot, who perceives it as torture, rather than a veterinary procedure. The bird's owner is often present during this torturous event. The parrot associates the pain and fright with those who are in the room with him, and a long term phobia of veterinarian and this same starts.

Let's consider how some of this same information might apply to those three clutches of cockatoo babies. How about the goffin's with the severe wing clip? We have seen numerous accounts of phobic birds who are also severe feather pluckers or feather shredders. In trying to correlate one with the other, it appears that this is a tragic example of "pain" as it relates to phobias.

There are several ways in which such a clip can affect a bird, the most obvious being balance and the inability to adequately counter a fall. Repeated falls of any nature may cause blood feathers to break or bleed even though there may be no other serious physical injury, which there often is. We humans may analyze this situation concluding that it is the fall itself that causes the bird to suffer pain. However, in the mind of a pet bird, he may suddenly, or over a period of time, associate that repeated physical and emotional suffering with what "he" perceives to be the cause...us. In this situation, the highly emotional bird may begin to chew or shred these broken or damaged feathers out of pain or nervousness, or both. In some cases, when combined with a phobia, this activity becomes habitual and the pattern is extremely difficult to correct.

The umbrella who had his tail feathers pulled as the result of falling from the playgym could potentially develop a phobia at some stage if forced to undergo this same procedure again. He might also exhibit extreme fear or anxiety when taken to the vet even for a routine exam, or when a towel is used for restraint, as a result of that past experience. In these situations it is imperative for the owner and avian veterinarian to discuss this situation and how they can create an environment to hopefully minimize that possibility.

And what lies ahead for the Rose-breasted's? The complexities of this beautiful little cockatoo could certainly fill a book. Very briefly, the human "engineering" which can occur in some hand-raising situations, as described previously, battle strongly with genetics and instincts. Placing young chicks just removed from a dark nestbox into a clear or brightly lit brooder can have a negative impact on many birds, not just Rose-breasted's. Their natural instinct is to stay "hidden", with protection offered from a dark tree cavity and from the bodies of parent birds and siblings. Constant or unexpected movements and activities of people in the nursery, or even lifting the cover of the brooder and peeking in, may represent a continual danger to some young birds, causing repeated traumas during an extremely sensitive developmental phase.

Separating a clutch of cockatoos is not something that I would personally recommend, unless there was a health issue involved. The social structure of the galah is unique, even to other cockatoos, and the interaction of siblings (or other young cockatoos in the case of a single chick) plays an important role in their maturing process.

As for attempting to "force" a Rose-breasted into more social interaction, there may be some long-term emotional risks for the bird involved in this process. As with most baby birds, cuddling and close body contact are typically enjoyed, and even sought after, by galahs. Due to instinctive behavior, they will generally become more independent (although still very affectionate and social) as they reach fledging. When the human caretaker views this as a problem or unnatural cockatoo trait, they may overcompensate by showering the bird with even more attention trying to "ease" the birds dependence. Again, this is where a problem may begin.

\*Specific Rose-breasted Cockatoo characteristics and behavior will be discussed in future *Pet Bird Report* articles.

While no one can absolutely guarantee that a young cockatoo or African grey will grow into a happy, well-adjusted adult bird, or that they will never develop a phobia, there are certainly ways to minimize potential problems. The successful hand-raising, weaning and socializing of young birds must be a combined effort, to include the breeder, the hand-feeder or "teacher", and the new owner.

The breeder can help insure the physical health of babies by properly caring for the breeder birds. The hand-feeder (teacher) plays a tremendously important role, and the lasting influences of this impressionable stage can be seen throughout the birds life. This "teacher" not only furnishes a safe haven and abundant food supply, but provides necessary lessons in natural and "flock" behavior, play, eating habits, dominance and rule-setting. Young cockatoos and African greys (indeed all pet birds) who do not receive these early advantages are more likely to face either physical or emotional problems at some point in their lives.

It is also important for there to be an open and honest line of communication between the breeder and the new owner. A caring and conscientious breeder who is dedicated to providing a safe, nurturing, and healthy environment for their birds should not feel ashamed if an unavoidable accident or injury, or inexplicable illness, occurs despite determined efforts to prevent such incidents. One of the greatest disservices this breeder can do to the people involved, and to the young bird, is to keep that information from the new owner. No matter how insignificant something like having a few tail feathers pulled as the result of a fall may seem, or how irrelevant it might appear that a bird went through a short period of obvious distress during the hand-feeding process, these and other day to day events have the "potential" to negatively effect a bird's behavior at some stage in its life, under certain circumstances. Whether or not that actually happens depends on a number of variables, including the individual bird's personality, the extent and duration of the trauma, and the owners willingness and ability to prevent situations which might appear threatening to a sensitive companion parrot.

It is crucial for us to remember that natural instincts and genetic influences are always present in our pet birds. Our continuing efforts to better understand the impact of these factors on the actions and reactions of parrots in captivity, and to apply that knowledge in a positive and responsible manner during the early developmental stages of life, can possibly lead to a dramatic reduction in some of the severe, and much too prevalent, problems such as phobic behavior. Hopefully, as our knowledge and experience in aviculture continues to increase and expand, there will be ongoing positive changes in the philosophies and husbandry of both breeders and pet bird owners.