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## Rescue is for the birds

### Bolingbrook woman saw a need, founding parrot rescue group

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**By DENISE M. BARAN-UNLAND For The Sun-Times News Group**

It's a typical morning at the Bolingbrook home of Kathy Forst, founder of HAPPE parrot rescue.

Two birds are sitting downstairs in their cages, watching "Sesame Street" while they eat because they are learning to count. Another bird is in the kitchen playing on top of her cage.

A fourth bird is upstairs sleeping, but little does it know Forst's wake-up call is 30 minutes away, a task Forst delays. "She's cranky if she doesn't get her 12 hours of sleep," Forst said.

She has 16 exotic birds in the rescue she founded two years ago when she became licensed by the Illinois Department of Agriculture. All but one of her birds are housed in foster homes. Forst eschews the practices of other rescue groups that may warehouse up to 60 birds in one large, central area.

"I have four birds, and I think that is too much to take care of," said Forst, a full-time bird keeper. "Three are mine and one is adoptable. This is a good, friendly system."

#### Attention required

No matter how well-meaning someone might be, Forst limits the number of birds placed in any single foster home.

"There are not too many cages for one person to clean and you can interact better with the birds. I don't care what anybody says, they require as much attention as 2-year-olds. People who have watched my birds for me say it is like running a kindergarten."

Although Forst consistently seeks volunteers to serve as foster parents, since many of them will adopt the bird they foster, no bird is placed in a home without first training its caretaker.

Foster parents learn proper cage cleaning (Forst uses only parrot and environmentally friendly cleaners), optimal nutrition for a particular species (which may include food pellets, black and adzuki beans, brown rice and sweet potato, along with vitamin and mineral supplements), parrot hygiene and bathing, how to medicate parrots and common behavioral issues (screaming, biting, feather picking).

And don't forget the toys.

"I have different stands and swings, as well as stuff hanging from my ceiling," Forst said.

#### Need for rescues

An exotic bird owner since 1978, Forst decided to put her knowledge and devotion to broader use when, seven years ago, she began volunteering for a Northbrook parrot rescue. There, Forst saw the overwhelming need for similar rescues and decided to begin her own.

"Many parrot rescues are full and won't take anymore birds," Forst said.

Her exotic birds come from a variety of sources, including people who give and sometimes will them to Forst. Sometimes parrot owners release their birds into the wild to fend for themselves, only to become members of Forst's rescue.

However, the majority of birds come from owners who become overwhelmed with the birds' care. Whether they're moving or they're having a baby doesn't matter. Forst has heard all of the excuses.

"People get parrots because they talk and they're beautiful, but they have no idea what they are getting themselves into," Forst said. "Birds are definitely not low maintenance and they do a lot

more than sit in the cage. They want to shower with you and eat breakfast with you. Then the owners come home from work eight hours later and start all over again. Sitters can run a lot of money. It's like having a 2-year-old child forever."

### High-cost care

Forst is not exaggerating. With proper care — and depending on the species — many birds live from 25 to 80 years. And caring for them, especially if the bird has a medical condition, is not cheap.

One bird in Forst's rescue takes thyroid medication; another one requires heart medication. A third bird has battled cancer for the last six years and appears to be winning the war with medication and a specialized diet.

"I have a female who is on an antibiotic for a horrible sinus infection," Forst said. "She's been going to the vet every two weeks for the last month and a half because they keep trying to flush out the sinuses. Sometimes when stuff has been festering a long time, the bird dies even though you do get it to a vet."

HAPPE (Helping with the Adoption and Placement of Parrots Everywhere) parrot rescue is always happy to receive donations of molted feathers (except migratory or native bird feathers, which are illegal to sell), which the rescue then sells to fishermen and crafters to help fund medical testing, toys, miscellaneous supplies and cages.

Forst can never have enough cages because it is mandatory for each bird to have its own.

"It's not because we think they will breed," Forst said. "It's because they might kill each other. Or they might pluck out another's bird's feathers or peck off its toes. When I worked in the Northbrook rescue, we had a pair of love birds board with us. The owner told us they were bonded and not to worry, but sure enough the female did kill its mate and we had to tell the owner."

HAPPE parrot rescue lists its homeless pets on Petfinder.com, the oldest and largest database of adoptable animals on the Internet. The site has more than 313,000 homeless animals listed and it is continuously updated.

For more information on HAPPE services, including education, rehabilitation and behavior-management consultation, call Forst at 630-759-7363, e-mail her at [wingnutz2@aol.com](mailto:wingnutz2@aol.com) or visit [www.happesrescue.com](http://www.happesrescue.com).

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