



# ALASKA BIRD NEWS

## July 2011

Lin Westgard, Editor

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Available on-line at [www.alaskabirdclub.org](http://www.alaskabirdclub.org)  
Dedicated to all the current and future parrot owners of Alaska

## *The Adopt-A-Bird program.... Spreading the Love*

The Alaska Bird club has always had a committee dedicated to helping people re-home parrots. The Adopt-A-Bird program is now over ten years in the making and is still doing it's best to hook up people with parrots. With the state of sanctuaries right now, it's becoming even more of a needed program. Sanctuaries around the nation are reporting they are filled to capacities and wait lists are growing longer and longer. What do we do with all these parrots that need new homes? Where can they go? What are our options?!

Volunteers of this program report that parrots are being relinquished faster than people are adopting. If you know of someone that wants a bird, this is the program for them. We appreciate people that will consider giving a parrot a second, third and sometimes a fourth chance. Sure, it's easy to go to the pet store, buy what they call a



"baby bird" and set up house. But it's magical when you've taken a bird that needs a home and have given it a second chance.

In some cases, you can see and feel the gratefulness in their eyes and the way they interact. It only takes awhile and the parrots personality starts to shine through. And then there are those birds with special needs that requires a special parrot person to help them transition and regain their trust in people. If you think you are one of these people, then we need you.

We cannot stop the things that make it necessary for people to give up their beloved animals, but we can try to help as many as possible. That effort helps a human, a bird, and ultimately ourselves when we provide the opportunity for a parrot to find a new home. Please consider adopting a slightly-used parrot instead of a brand new baby. You will have an experience just as rich in discovery, and you CAN teach an old.....parrot....new tricks!

The Alaska Bird Club is not alone. Check out sites that offer adoption such as The Gabriel Foundation in Colorado ([www.thegabrielfoundation.org](http://www.thegabrielfoundation.org)) or Parrot Education and Adoption Center ([www.akpeac.org](http://www.akpeac.org)) or our own website at [www.alaskabirdclub.org](http://www.alaskabirdclub.org). We are all separate non-profit organizations trying to find homes for parrots and there are probably hundreds more like us.

"Many have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You remain responsible, forever, for what you have tamed." - Antoine de Saint-Exupery

*When you reach out and help re-home a bird you "step-up" to a new level, whether you adopt or volunteer.*

# CLUB INFORMATION

The Alaska Bird Club is a 501(c)(3) non-profit incorporated in the State of Alaska. It meets the first Tuesday of every month at Serendipity Adult Day Services in Anchorage at 7:00pm. Location: 3550 East 20th Ave (off of Northern Lights Blvd & Nichols St).

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Or visit our website:  
**[www.alaskabirdclub.org](http://www.alaskabirdclub.org)**

We welcome any comments, articles or any ideas for the club or the newsletter. Current issues and extra copies of previous editions of The Alaska Bird News are available at the monthly meetings.

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The following locations have copies of our newsletter if you need extra. We have also noted the clinics that have avian vets by the 🌟

## ANCHORAGE:

Alaska Mill & Feed  
1501 E. 1<sup>st</sup> Ave.  
276-6016

Alaska Pet-ography  
9130 Elim St.  
868-1680

Chester Valley Veterinary  
1571 Muldoon Rd.  
333-6591

🌟 College Village  
Animal Clinic  
Dr's Basler & Nicholson  
2036 E. Northern Lights  
274-5623

🌟 Dimond Animal Hosp  
Dr. Doty  
562-8384 (24 hour)

🌟 Hillside Pet Clinic  
Dr. Bluestone  
2101 Abbott Rd. #1  
344-7913

Petco  
8621 Old Seward Hwy

Pet Emergency  
2320 E. Dowling Rd.  
274-5636

🌟 The Pet Stop  
Dr. Riley Wilson  
1921 W. Dimond Blvd.  
522-1006

The Pet Zoo  
901 E. Dimond Blvd.

🌟 VCA Alaska Pet Care  
Dr. Frederickson  
3900 Lake Otis Pkwy  
562-PETS (7387)

VCA Alpine Animal Hospital  
12531 Old Seward Hwy  
345-1515

VCA E. Anch Animal Clinic  
2639 Boniface Pkwy  
337-1561

## EAGLE RIVER:

🌟 Ravenwood Veterinary  
Clinic  
Dr. Cuthbert  
11525 Old Glenn Hwy  
694-9665

The Pet Zoo  
12046 Business Blvd.  
622-2966

## WASILLA:

All Creatures Veterinary Clinic  
Mi 7.4 Palmer- Wasilla Hwy  
(907) 376-6016

The Pet Zoo  
1481 E. Parks Hwy  
357-7335

## PALMER

Far Country Animal Hospital  
2701 N. Liahona Dr.  
Palmer  
(907) 746-7297

North Star Animal Hospital  
840 S. Cobb St.  
(907) 746-7387

Palmer Veterinary Clinic  
Mi 39 Glenn Why  
(907) 745-3219

The Pet Zoo  
10201 E. Palmer-Wasilla Hwy  
746-0056

## FAIRBANKS:

Mt. McKinley Animal Hospital  
800 College Rd.  
Fairbanks, AK 99701



# Bird of the Month

# Meet Jordie!

Jordie is a Jardine's Parrot. Brightly colored with reds, greens and black he's stunning.

Jordie is a fun loving cuddly bird. He's filled with excitement for life and plays a lot. He's a wonderful vocalist and comes with a myriad of sounds he has mastered in his years. He hosts a wonderful telephone that even experienced bird owners will try and answer and on other days you'd think you had a master whistler in your living room, whistling a complex song. He's really good! And just when you think you have a leak in your roof, you can pin point the very technical "drip" coming from his cage. He'll even laugh at you when you realizes you are on to him. He looks at you with those big brown eyes and you'd swear they twinkle.

Jordie does not like to bathe and he does another set of sounds such as a growls and grunts when it's bath time. And when he surrenders to the water, he sits with his 'shoulders' slumped as if he's given up. It's hard not to laugh at him.

Like many *Poicephalus* he can tend to be nippy. He likes his "stuff" and doesn't want you to touch it at times. But luckily for his caretakers, he is great with body language and if you pay attention you won't get bit. When he wants something he's very 'cute'. And when he's angry, he fluffs out his feathers, turns sideways and almost scowls at you while he marches towards you. There is no mistaking his frustration with



you. It's almost funny, but it's very important to him and so pay attention to him!

And now some of the technical aspects of a Jardine's Parrot: He comes from West Central Africa. His "Real" name is *Poicephalus gulielmi*...and then there's some debate over subspecies...there are there three or four? Because we don't know where Jordie originated from, we don't know his subspecies for certain. Even though his wings are very dark, he's smaller than a Blackwing would be, and blackwings are VERY rare in the US, so my guess is he's just a very dark Lesser Jardine (the most common subspecies in the US). So that would make him *Poicephalus gulielme fantiensis*. And his weight clearly puts him in the Lesser category (averages 220 - 230 grams). Although, in the early years, there was a LOT of accidental hybridization going on because people didn't realize there were subspecies (same with the Meyer's parrot). So....it's possible he's a Blackwing/Lesser hybrid.

His lifespan is considered 30-50 years... providing excellent husbandry. Right now they are on CITES II list. In the wild they face problems with PBF, as does the Cape Parrot—a critically endangered *Poicephalus*.

For more information on his species see <http://www.wingscc.com/aps/jardine.htm>

Editors note: Jordie is a program bird with PEAC (Parrot Education and Adoption Center). They are not affiliated in any way with the Alaska Bird Club. For questions regarding his adoption, please contact Karen Webster at [akpeac@gmail.com](mailto:akpeac@gmail.com). Visit their website at [www.akpeac.org](http://www.akpeac.org).



## Check out the Alaska Bird Club's Website!

Find out about our latest Lost and Found Birds, our birds that are available in our Adopt-A-Bird program and other various articles and videos. Advertise your un-wanted cages via newsletter and website! See what's up and coming and stay in touch!

[www.alaskabirdclub.org](http://www.alaskabirdclub.org)

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## Website of the Month

[www,the-oasis.org](http://www.the-oasis.org)

The Oasis Sanctuary

Get involved. Get a reality check on how many parrots are being surrendered.

## Parrot Behavior Consultations

Need help with any of the following?

Aggression  
Excessive screaming  
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Contact Karen Webster  
to schedule your consultation today:  
929-BIRD (2473) or [akpeac@gmail.com](mailto:akpeac@gmail.com).

## Comfy Clawth Blankets for Birds

See [www.comfyclawth.com](http://www.comfyclawth.com) for Alaskan made bird blankets that can be used to train your parrot to be toweled in a safe and comfy environment.

[birdieblankets@comfyclawth.com](mailto:birdieblankets@comfyclawth.com)

**P E A C**  
**(Parrot Education & Adoption Center)**  
[www.akpeac.org](http://www.akpeac.org)  
929-BIRD

TBD - watch their website for updates!

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### Parrot "No-No's"

**Alcohol  
Avocado  
Caffeine  
Chocolate  
Non Stick coatings  
Rhubarb  
Fabreeze  
Air Fresheners**

Do your research and find out what else not to feed your parrots. There are some great lists on what is safe and what is not.

You can also find toxic and non-toxic house plants on the web!

Dieffenbachia and Ivy's are the most common houseplant that is toxic to your parrot.

# The Association of Avian Veterinarians

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## Best Practices for Behavior Change: P-A-R-R-O-T

S. G. Friedman, PhD

Abstract: Hidden in the word PARROT are 6 core principles of effective, humane behavior management: Power, Approximations, Reinforcement, Repetition, Observable Behavior, and Teaching Opportunities. These principles are relevant to all species of animals. Understanding each principle and arranging the companion environment to reflect them affords animals the best possible chance of achieving behavioral health and sustaining lifelong relationships with their caregivers.

### Introduction

Hidden in the word PARROT are 6 core principles of effective, humane behavior management: Power, Approximations, Reinforcement, Repetition, Observable Behavior, and Teaching Opportunities. These principles are relevant to all species of animals. Understanding each principle and arranging the companion environment to reflect them affords animals the best possible chance of achieving behavioral health and sustaining lifelong relationships with their caregivers.

### Power

The power to control one's own outcomes is essential to behavioral health.

Behavior is a tool, an evolved mechanism that enables animals to change their environment in some way that has personal value. Research suggests that controlling outcomes is also associated with emotional well-being, even with human babies as young as 3 months old. Animals from dozens of species have demonstrated the contrafreeloading phenomenon: they choose working (response-contingent reinforcement) over freeload (non-contingent reinforcement) to get valued outcomes. Therefore, one way to empower animals is by designing more complex environments rich with choices, problems to solve, and purposeful activities that run the gamut from species-typical behaviors (foraging) to novel behaviors (dunking basketballs).

It is the power to say no that may be most overlooked in the lives of companion animals—the freedom to use behavior to escape events perceived as aversive to the individual. Blocking an animal's escape responses works against its nature to behave for an effect. If response blocking persists, animals can learn that their behavior is ineffective. This leads to learned helplessness, depression, learning disabilities, emotional problems, and even suppressed immune activity.

We can empower companion animals to say no by ensuring that they have an escape route, a runway, to move away from imposing hands, and unfamiliar people and items, whenever possible. For instance, a 6-in T-perch used for training restricts a parrot's escape but a 36-in perch (with the caregiver at one end of the perch) allows the animal to express its choice to move away. This strategy may seem counterproductive to caregivers who hope to have close relationships with their pets; however, the apparent relationship that results from forced interaction is only an illusion. True relationships are the result of choice and mutually reinforcing interactions, not force. The goal is for animals to choose to approach their caregivers, which can be achieved by following these teaching principles.

### Approximations

The key to teaching new behaviors is reinforcing approximations toward the end goal.

People often expect animals to instantaneously perform complete behaviors. For example, many caregivers expect a parrot to perform the complete "step up" behavior just because they (or anyone else for that matter) offer a hand. When animals don't meet this expectation, caregivers too often resort to coercion, such as cornering the bird to make it step up. Coercion can result in big withdrawals from the trust account, which may not be easily recouped.

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Animals learn most behaviors better when they are reinforced for smaller, approximate responses that ultimately lead to the end goal. This procedure is called differential reinforcement of successive approximations, also known as shaping. It is the sharpest tool in any teacher's toolkit. To illustrate, the complete step-up behavior for a parrot can be broken into the following graduated sequence of approximations: 1) looking at the hand, 2) leaning toward the hand, 3) moving a foot in the direction of the hand, 4) taking a step toward the hand, 5) taking several steps toward the hand, 6) walking next to the hand, 7) touching the hand with one foot, 8) resting the foot on the hand, 9) transferring weight onto one foot, and 10) bringing the other foot on to the hand.

After describing the complete target behavior in observable, measurable terms, shaping starts by reinforcing the closest approximation the animal already does (eg, looking at the hand). It is well-timed reinforcement that accounts for the animal offering the behavior again. Once the first approximation is performed without hesitation, the next approximation in the sequence is reinforced (eg, leaning toward the hand). The natural variation in responses produces the next, closer approximation (eg, looking with a slight lean). As training progresses from one approximation to the next, the reinforced responses become progressively more like the final behavior.

Shaping requires good mechanical skills to observe and reinforce the small variations in responding that lead to the final behavior. If a learner experiences difficulty at any step along the way, go back to the last successful approximation rather than withhold reinforcement to the point of eliciting frustration. The best ways to create the momentum needed to steadily advance through the approximations is to reinforce smaller approximations, avoid staying on one approximation too long, use stronger reinforcers, and communicate a clearer criterion with more precisely timed reinforcement.

### **Reinforcement**

Reinforcing consequences are essential feedback about how to behave in the future.

Positive reinforcement is not manipulation, and reinforcers are not bribes. Positive reinforcement is the natural process by which behavior is maintained or increased by consequences. Learning is the process of changing behavior based on experience. This flexibility is surely one of the animal kingdom's most astounding survival mechanisms.

The schedule with which reinforcement is delivered matters. To be used effectively, reinforcement should be delivered contingently (only if behavior *x* occurs) and contiguously (closely following the behavior). Continuous reinforcement (a 1:1 ratio of behavior to reinforcer) is best for teaching new behaviors because it clearly communicates the contingency, if behavior *x*, then reinforcer *y*. Intermittent reinforcement (a ratio between 1:1 and 1:0) results in persistence, that is, behavior that, in the absence of reinforcement, continues longer before decreasing (ie, extinguishing). It is quite likely that behind every problem behavior is a lean intermittent reinforcement schedule that accounts for its persistence.

We can reduce problem behaviors without using punishment by applying the matching law that describes the way relative rates of particular behaviors tend to match the relative rate of reinforcement the behaviors produce. This means that we can increase desirable behaviors and decrease problem behaviors just by offering relatively more reinforcement for desirable alternative behaviors. When the environment is arranged so that desirable behaviors are both easier to perform and more reinforcing than undesirable behaviors, animals naturally perform the desirable behaviors more. A related strategy is to withhold the maintaining reinforcer for a problem behavior (extinction) and deliver super-sized reinforcers for an alternative behavior. This strategy is called differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors (DRA). A DRA schedule is often more effective and less intrusive than extinction alone or punishment.

When using a secondary (conditioned) reinforcer to contiguously mark the right behavior (eg, a praise word, click, or whistle), closely follow it with a back-up reinforcer every time (eg, a food treat or tactile reinforcer). This "twofer" (click-treat) approach will maintain the secondary reinforcer at full strength. Delivering a secondary reinforcer without consistently pairing it with another reinforcer will eventually drain the strength of the secondary reinforcer, resulting in a weak marker.

Once a behavior is mastered, it is often possible and beneficial to slowly shift from so-called contrived reinforcers (rewards arranged for training sessions) to naturally occurring reinforcers (the spontaneous outcome of behaving). For example, teaching a parrot to step up may initially involve reinforcing approximations with a contrived reinforcer such as sunflower seeds. With each repetition, naturally occurring reinforcers are also available, such as interacting with the caregiver and moving to a new location away from the cage. These naturally occurring consequences can maintain the step-up behavior in the long run. When teaching a new behavior, contrived reinforcers should be considered for the short run, and naturally occurring reinforcers should be considered for the long run.

### **Repetition**

A high rate of repetition across different conditions builds fluent, generalized behavior.

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The term behavioral fluency describes quick, accurate performance of a behavior. Fluent behaviors are emitted without hesitation in the presence of appropriate cues or conditions. Generalization is the extent to which a behavior occurs in different settings or situations (ie, stimulus generalization). When it comes to good citizenship behaviors—the kind that keep animals in their homes—the goal is fluent, generalized behaviors. Positive practice is the means to achieve this goal. Positive practice refers to high rate of repetition that results in a high rate of reinforcement.

It's easy to underestimate how much positive practice is needed to build a fluent behavior in one setting and to generalize that behavior across different settings and situations. When an animal doesn't respond to a cue or request, people often feel frustrated and insist, "He knows this behavior. I've seen him do it a dozen times!" Effective teachers define what an animal knows by observing what it does, and they interpret failure to respond to a request as an indication more positive practice is needed.

It may take hundreds of reinforced repetitions, in several different settings, for an animal to reliably respond to a cue. Research indicates that learning proceeds more successfully when practice is distributed over many short sessions rather than less frequent, long sessions. Therefore, positive practice doesn't need to be very time-consuming. A few quick repetitions a day can build and maintain behavioral fluency. One positive side effect of this approach is the strong bond that develops between teacher and learner due to the highly reinforcing environment associated with positive practice.

### **Observable behavior**

For an objective understanding of behavior, focus on describing observable behavior and observable conditions.

Most caregivers never consider how their descriptions of behavior are really just value labels of what they think an animal is rather than what it does. They wish for a companion animal that is friendly, is docile, or is sweet. However, we can't really teach animals what to be; rather we teach them what do, given certain conditions. For example, we can train an animal to approach people, relax when touched, and take food from human hands. If an animal is observed to do these behaviors, then we label it friendly.

Among professionals, there is a tendency to describe behavior in terms of diagnostic labels based on hypothetical, psychological constructs. Ostensibly, these constructs tell us what an animal has or lacks, such as anxiety, dominance, or motivation. A construct is a concept that is inferred from commonalities among observed phenomena and used to explain those phenomena. However, constructs are abstractions by definition, and abstractions cannot cause behavior. Although constructs can have a place in theory building, and conveniently summarize behaviors with a single word, they lack the specific information we need for an objective understanding of behavior.

Behavioral descriptions are critical to solving behavior problems. Describing what an animal actually does in context (not in the animal) is central to the behavioral level of analysis, the level at which observable behavior and observable conditions act upon one another. The behavioral level of analysis is one piece of the behavior puzzle without which no accounting of behavior is complete.

### **Teaching opportunities**

See teaching opportunities instead of punishment opportunities—misbehavior is a lack of information, motivation or practice.

An important goal (if not the most important goal) is for animals to respond to our requests because they possess the skills and the motivation to do so, not because they have to. Animals learn something with each and every interaction they have with humans, and what they learn influences how they behave in the future. There is no off switch where learning is concerned. Therefore, every interaction with an animal is best understood as a teaching opportunity. Instead of punishing problem behaviors, identify what the animal should be doing instead and teach that behavior.

There is a saying among behavior analysts that the rat is never wrong. This expression is meant to remind us that the responsibility for a learner's behavior rests largely with the learner's teachers. As Kay Laurence eloquently wrote, "[It] is not about teaching impressive behaviors; it is about impressive teaching of behaviors."

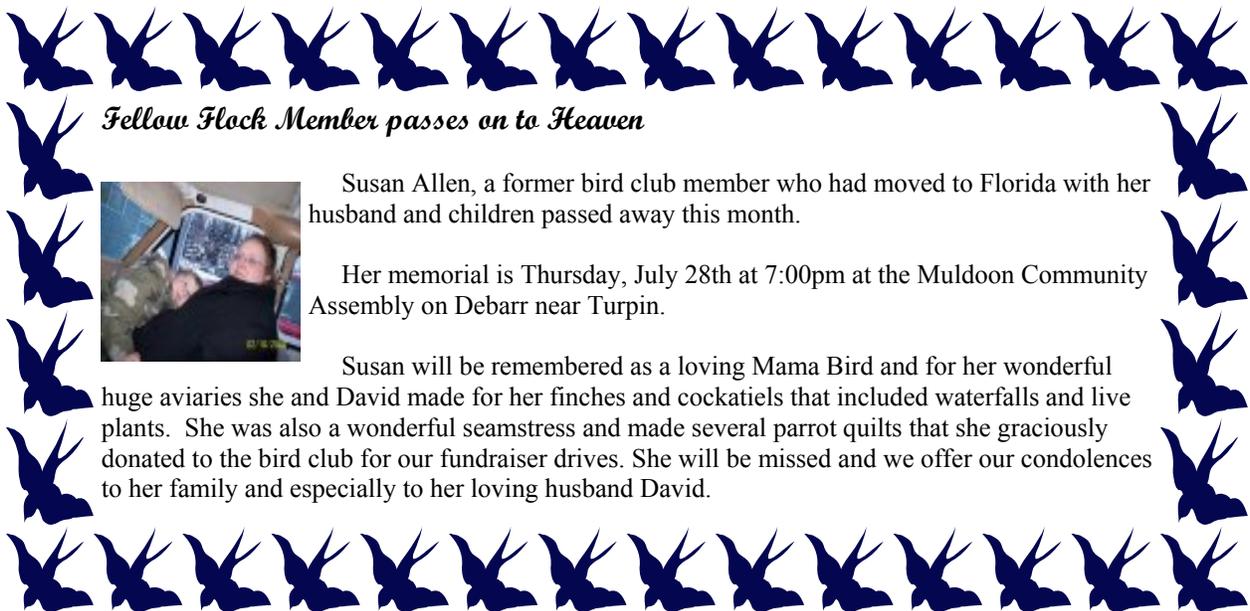
### **Conclusion**

It is the nature of all animals to use behavior to achieve valued outcomes. Given the power to choose, animals can be

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taught to behave successfully by shaping small approximations that lead to the end goal. Reinforcement is the crown jewel of teaching. To use it most effectively, positive reinforcers should be certain, swift and strong. A high rate of repetition and planned generalization builds fluent behaviors and a strong human-animal bond. To understand behavior, our main focus should be on observable behavior, not vague labels or intangible constructs. We need to be aware that information is exchanged in every interaction we have with animals; thus, every interaction is a teaching opportunity. These principles represented by the letters P-A-R-R-O-T are fundamental to facilitating behavioral health and building trusting, long-term relationships with the animals in our care.



### *Fellow Flock Member passes on to Heaven*



Susan Allen, a former bird club member who had moved to Florida with her husband and children passed away this month.

Her memorial is Thursday, July 28th at 7:00pm at the Muldoon Community Assembly on Debarr near Turpin.

Susan will be remembered as a loving Mama Bird and for her wonderful huge aviaries she and David made for her finches and cockatiels that included waterfalls and live plants. She was also a wonderful seamstress and made several parrot quilts that she graciously donated to the bird club for our fundraiser drives. She will be missed and we offer our condolences to her family and especially to her loving husband David.

## COMMON MYTHS AND FACTS

**All Parrots talk. NOT TRUE!** Parrots will mimic and talk if they choose to, it's as simple and as complex as that. **Parrots like to be petted like a dog. NOT TRUE!** Parrots are still wild animals, with all their natural instincts. They are not domesticated like dogs and cats. For that matter, not all dogs like to be petted by strangers... parrots even less so!

**Parrots are easy to care for— you just throw them in a cage with some seed and water. NOT TRUE!** Parrots are sentient beings, and need a variety of physical and intellectual stimulation on a daily bases. An all seed diet is a death sentence for most parrots... they need a variety of enriching greens, vegetables, and other healthy foods as part of their daily diet.

**Parrots need all kinds of perches and play areas. TRUE!** To exercise parrots feet and minds, they need perches of all diameters and textures and separate play areas from their cages. It's not about single perches anymore inside small and boring cages.

**A mirror is not a good companion for a parrot. TRUE!** Mirror images may look like another bird, but if mating behavior begins, the "other bird" refuses to do the things expected of it and then frustration and mayhem can ensue.

**Parrot's are fragile. A cold draft will kill them. FALSE!** If a draft would kill a parrot, then there would be none after the first breeze hit the rainforest. A healthy parrot can adapt to many stressful environmental conditions as long as they are not long term (a constant draft, a constant cold, etc).

**African Grey parrots are the smartest parrots: FALSE!** While the late Alex was a prodigy, some of the other "Pepperberg" Greys were not nearly as amazing. Parrots are as variable as people.

## More *Alaska Style* from David Jensen Photography

Visit David's website at: [www.alaskaportraits.com](http://www.alaskaportraits.com)

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David Jensen has been our volunteer judge for our  
Photography contest every year at the Alaska Bird Club  
for six years now.



Photo by David Jensen



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