

## Hope for Large Birds: PETCO's New Policies (April 2005)

I was nine years old. It was a kinder, safer time when my mother allowed me to wander the pet department of a local retail store while she shopped other departments. His name was Chester. I ran to see him every time we shopped at that store. Chester was a beautiful cockatoo. He had luminous white feathers with peach undertones. Chester liked me, too. He always ran across his perch and pressed his head against the side of the cage. This in spite of the sign on his cage that said, "My name is Chester and I bite!" He spread his feathers so I could give him a good scratch above his eyes where he just couldn't reach. He was an expensive bird, and my mom wouldn't let me spend that much money on a pet. I did my best to tell people he was a good bird, he just picked favorites, and that he'd make someone a great friend. The last time I saw Chester was just before the store closed its pet department. Unless he met with an early death, Chester is still out there somewhere.

Large breed birds like Chester can live to around 80 years of age, and some parrot breeds can live up to 100 years. With such a long lifespan, large breed birds require a commitment beyond even that of marriage or having children. Unfortunately, many people who purchase large breed birds do not fully recognize the commitment their birds require. Many of these birds are orphaned or released into the wild when their owners pass away.

In April of this year, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) scored a major victory when a national pet store chain agreed to stop selling large birds like Chester. "This is a precedent setting action," said PETA spokesperson, Daphna Nachminovitch. PETA announced through its website in April that PETCO, the second largest pet store chain in the US with over 740 stores nationwide, agreed to stop selling Amazon and African grey parrots, cockatoos, and macaws. PETA says these birds are not suitable as family pets because of their long life spans, size, and special care needs. In turn, PETA ended its two-year boycott of PETCO, halted demonstrations outside PETCO stores, and removed its anti-PETCO website.

PETCO also agreed to include large breed birds in the PETCO Foundation's partner adoption programs with local shelters across the country. PETA's website announcing the agreement, quotes Bruce C. Hall, PETCO president and chief operating officer, and PETCO Foundation president, "We welcome the opportunity to work with PETA as we announce ending the sale of large birds as one of several progressive steps we are taking in our industry-leading efforts. We recognize that most of our bird customers are what we would call 'beginning hobbyists'. Large birds are not necessarily appropriate for these individuals due to their long lifespan, size, and care requirements." PETA hailed PETCO's decision. Ingrid Newkirk, PETA's president noted, "We hope other responsible retailers follow PETCO's lead in this regard."

The non-profit PETCO Foundation, founded in 1999, uses its resources to support programs in accordance with its stated "Four Rs: Reduce, Rescue, Rehabilitate, Rejoice." Currently the PETCO Foundation supports over 2,700 animal rescue organizations including 387 in California.