

Is a Perpetual Care Program the Right Lifetime Care Solution for Your Bird?

Many pet birds can live very long lives — 20 to 80 years! Have you considered what might happen to your bird if he or she outlives you?

If you die, your bird may sense your death, grieve the loss, and feel the loneliness that comes from your absence. This is especially true of birds in the parrot family, which can form strong attachments to their human caregivers and can take months or even years to adapt to a new home.

Many pet birds basically are wild flying creatures who live in domesticated surroundings under our care. They require long-term caregivers and veterinarians with specialized skills. Moreover, they can be difficult to manage and expensive to maintain. Sadly, many birds who outlive their pet guardians often are euthanized in local shelters, or they end up in understaffed sanctuaries and in homes that cannot care for them properly.

What is an Avian Perpetual Care Program?

Responsible, loving guardians try to ensure that, in the event of their death or disability, their birds will not be neglected, abused, or abandoned. Although some owners manage to find a qualified friend or family member to care for their birds over a long lifetime, many must seek other alternatives.

Recognizing the need to provide long-term care for birds who have lost their guardians, several veterinary schools offer “perpetual pet care” programs, which promise lifelong care for birds whose owners have passed away or become disabled. Using endowments set up by the original bird owners, the schools provide shelter, food, emotional support, and medical attention for the rest of the bird’s life.

Would a Perpetual Care Program Provide the Right Environment for Your Bird?

Parrots and other long-lived birds are sensitive, demanding creatures who require space to fly freely, varied diet including fresh foods, trees to perch on and plants that can safely accommodate their innate need to chew, and friends of the same species with whom they can form a close-knit flock.

When considering perpetual care for your bird, you should look for a program that has experience caring for exotic birds and can provide the type of environment they need to thrive. Consider your bird’s unique personality and any special medical needs, interview the staff, and tour the facilities before making a decision.

Two main types of perpetual care are offered through veterinary schools:

- Complete, on-campus care at the veterinary school or a nearby facility;
- Long-term foster care by carefully pre-screened caregivers or caregivers designated by the bird’s owner, with veterinary care provided at the veterinary school.

What are the Pros and Cons of Avian Perpetual Care Programs?

Avian perpetual care programs offer many benefits. A good program will guarantee your bird a lifetime of avian-appropriate housing, nutrition, companionship, emotional support, and veterinary care. Moreover, your bird's residing in the program can help fledgling vets hone their medical and nurturing skills, while any funds left over from your endowment will benefit the veterinary school.

One downside of such programs is their expense, which can range from \$10,000 to \$100,000, depending on the arrangements and the facilities provided.

Perpetual Care Programs that Accept Birds

Veterinary school perpetual care programs equipped to care for domestic birds exist in California, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Washington State University's program is in the planning stages. The programs are listed below in alphabetical order by state.

CALIFORNIA**University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine
Tender Loving Care for Pets Program (TLC)**

UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine
Center for Animals in Society
One Shields Ave
Davis, CA 95616

Web: <http://www.tlcforpets.org>

Contact:

TLC for Pets Coordinator

Phone: 530-752-7024

Email: tlcforpets@ucdavis.edu

Costs:

\$1,000 enrollment fee, plus \$30,000 for the lifetime care.

Description:

Birds are offered lifetime medical care at Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital (VMTH) at UC Davis. Birds are placed with the owner's pre-identified caregiver, or in homes with permanent, loving caregiver identified and screened by VMTH. Caregivers can bring enrolled birds to VMTH for annual examinations and vaccinations as well as for emergency or chronic illness care. Senior birds are eligible for more frequent examinations. All the VMTH veterinary care is free of charge to the TLC for Pets caregiver home. The enrollment fee includes having the veterinarian meet the bird, assess its health and behavior, and develop a new-home screening and health plan.

Exotic pets and pets with special needs are reviewed on a case-by-case basis when estate plans are prepared in consultation with the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

KANSAS

Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine Perpetual Trust Program

Perpetual Pet Care Program Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine
Perpetual Trust Program
KSU College of Veterinary Medicine
103 Trotter Hall
1700 Denison Avenue
Manhattan, KS 66506-5604

Web: www.vet.ksu.edu/depts/development/perpet/perppet.htm

Contact:

Sharon Green

Phone: 785-532-4013

Fax: 785-532-4002

Email: perpetualpetcare@vet.k-state.edu

Additional Contact: Chris Gruber, Director of Development

Phone: 785-532-4465

Email: cgruber@vet.k-state.edu

Costs:

\$25,000 per bird. The donor must establish an endowed account for each bird, and the earnings from the account are used to provide medical care for the birds as long as they live. After the birds have passed, remaining money is used for student scholarships, faculty support, etc., according to the donor's wishes.

Description:

This program finds a permanent home matching your wishes for your pet and provides complete medical care for the rest of the bird's life. Until an adoptive home is found, veterinary students care for each enrolled bird daily, with clinical specialists in the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at Kansas State University providing veterinary services as needed. Once placed in an adoptive home, the program monitors the home, care, and lifestyle of your bird. Housing and previously arranged care are available upon your bird's acceptance in the program.

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine Cohn Family Shelter for Small Animals

Oklahoma State University
Center for Veterinary Health Sciences
308 McElroy Hall
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-2011

Web: www.cvm.okstate.edu/development/CohnFamilyShelter.htm

Contact:

Cathy Shuffield, Associate Vice President for Development
Phone: 405-744-6728
Fax: 405-744-5233
E-mail: cshuffield@oshuf.org

Costs:

Funds to operate the program come from the earnings of invested gifts. Minimum gift amounts for this new avian program are \$10,000 for each bird. Most people choose to provide funding through a bequest in their wills. A 5% non-refundable reservation fee assures your bird a place in the center.

Description:

Birds will live in a homelike setting at the center, under the care and supervision of veterinary staff and students. A live-in veterinary student provides 24-hour observation and care.

TEXAS

Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine The Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center

Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center
College of Veterinary Medicine
TAMU 4461
College Station, Texas 77843-4461

Web: <http://www.cvm.tamu.edu/petcare/>

Contact:

Dr. Henry L. Presnal or Mrs. Ellie Greenbaum
Phone: (979) 845-1188

Fax: (979) 845-1425

Email: spresnal@cvm.tamu.edu

Cost:

Costs per bird depend upon the youngest owner's age at the time of enrollment as shown below. The endowment can be established by bequest through a will or trust, or can be fully paid up at the time of enrollment with a considerable discount.

| Youngest Owner's Age | Minimum Endowment by Bequest | Minimum Amount for Paid-up Endowment |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 30 - 39 | \$100,000 | \$10,000 |
| 40 - 49 | \$85,000 | \$20,000 |
| 50 - 59 | \$70,000 | \$30,000 |
| 60 - 69 | \$60,000 | \$40,000 |
| 70+ | \$50,000 | \$50,000 |
| Enrollment Fee | \$1,000 | \$0 |

Description:

This program offers a homelike atmosphere in the center, including an aviary. All care is given on-site. Staff members are available 24/7, and veterinary students visit regularly. The center also includes a student apartment. Eight large domestic birds currently are enrolled to come into this program, and one bird has completed its lifespan in the program. (See the website for more details, including a video tour and a full description of the center.)

WASHINGTON

**Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine
Perpetual Pet Care Program**

Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine

Perpetual Pet Care Program

P.O. Box 647010

Pullman, WA 99164-7010

Web: www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-prd/pc.asp

Contact:

Lynne T. Haley, Director of Development

Phone: (509) 335-5021

Fax: (509) 335-2132

E-mail: lhaley@vetmed.wsu.edu or fuentes@vetmed.wsu.edu

Costs:

Included as a bequest in your will, the basic funding for one bird is \$25,000. A bequest of \$50,000 will provide scholarship support for a veterinary student. A non-refundable fee of \$500 is due at enrollment.

Description:

The avian program currently is in the planning stages. The University will arrange to place the orphaned bird in a caring and safe environment in a foster caregiver's home while providing for the bird's medical care and nutrition.