

Polly wants her freedom

Marc Johnson, founder of Foster Parrots near Boston, says he wishes the Fish & Wildlife Service would pay a visit to his facility before allowing imports of wild blue-fronted Amazon parrots.

He estimates that the USA already has 20 million to 60 million parrots of all kinds, and thousands have been abandoned by their owners after they learned how difficult it can be to keep the birds in captivity.

Foster Parrots, one of many parrot rescue organizations, now has 260 unwanted birds and has placed more than 600.

The public has been misled or is at least uninformed about the nature of wild parrots, Johnson says. They are not cuddly pets.

The blue-fronted Amazon is an aggressive and intelligent species. It can live to 80 years old and typically bonds with one mate for life. Males can be extremely territorial. In captivity, the bird typically will bond with only one person in a household and consider everyone else a threat.

"This species is by far the most common type that we get requests for retrieval," Johnson says.

In the wild, parrots are highly social and form large groups. Pairs communicate when out of visual contact by making specific calls. Pet owners often do not understand why their birds make so much noise and are constantly calling, Johnson says.

Nor do they understand why they will attack family members and visitors. The birds are doing what comes naturally in the wrong context. Also, many of the birds Foster Parrots has rescued use expletives as calls. They learned them from owners who constantly cursed at them.

Because of the natural sociability and intelligence of parrots, Johnson believes that none should be kept in captivity. "To us, it is like keeping a dolphin in a backyard pool. The birds represent intelligent life that is being restricted for your own pleasure."