

NONPROFIT

Bird rescue agency depends on local foster homes

By NATALIE SHELTON

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Kim Eckert is playing catch with a white and orange cockatoo named Skipper, who also enjoys a rousing game of peekaboo with a tea towel on his head.

She fosters Skipper in her Kearney home, which is filled with squawks and tweets and random mimics.

She also has JoJo, a Mexican redhead Amazon. She fostered the bird she calls hot-head-ed and then adopted him after he'd lived in a single room in another home for 14 years with only food, water and no attention, she said. An adopted quaker named Fanny and a cockatiel named Sunshine round out her feathered menagerie.

Eckert is a member of Beak n Wings, an educational bird club founded in the Shawnee Mission, Kan., area six years ago that's evolved into a rescue and adoption agency. Beak n Wings annually takes in about 50 birds, all fostered in club members' homes and rehabilitated if necessary.

The nonprofit club has about 190 members and is a licensed shelter in both Missouri and Kansas. It has photos and information of

rescued birds available for adoption at www.beaknWings.org.

Beak n Wings member Kathleen Siska of Liberty just rescued an Alexandrine parakeet that was found a few months ago and taken to an area PETCO store. Because the bird had an identifying chip placed in its neck, PETCO contacted its owners by registered mail but got no response. Now, thanks to Siska, the bird is in the hands of Beak n Wings after a night's stay at a local vet's office.

"We usually take all the birds we rescue immediately to the vet," Siska said, "though the smaller birds don't usually need to be vetted. The club takes care of the vet bills up to \$100, and then it's up to us."

Siska, whose family is rounded out by feathered members Scooter, Pistol, Bailey, Fanni Cici, Sam and Coco, buys about \$350 in bird toys every six months and about \$40 in food each month.

"We try to educate people on how important it is to understand the responsibility a bird brings, and to know if a certain bird will be a good fit for their family," Siska said.

"It's traumatic for them to be taken out of their surroundings. These guys bond with a flock for life."

Siska's adopted five of her birds and fosters

Bailey, a quaker, and Coco, a Catalina macaw. She bought Cici, a Solomon Island eclectus, from the club for \$500. She's worth \$2,200.

Siska also cared for a hyacinth macaw named Daryl. He didn't make it, despite her spending \$1,000 in vet bills and the club spending another \$300 trying to save him.

Siska cares for the five adopted and two foster birds of fellow club member Linda Engelmann of Liberty when she's out of town. Engelmann cares for the club mascot, Bob, a green severe macaw who has only one claw after being attacked by dogs before he was rescued.

A yellow nape Amazon in Engelmann's home, also named Bob, lived in a mechanic's shop for 14 years and squawks, "Get to work!" and "I'm comin' over!"

And Missy, a timneh African grey, spends about 30 minutes each evening with Engelmann. "She likes to sit and be talked to," Siska said.

Cradling her red-front macaw Scooter like a baby as he nuzzled her, Siska said the birds responded to good care with a gift of longevity.

"It depends on their diet, their care and the other members of their flock," she said. "They'll thrive with a happy, healthy flock."

Kim Eckert of Kearney is a member of Beak n Wings, an educational pet bird club that has evolved into a rescue and adoption agency. Eckert has three of her own birds and fosters Skipper, a white and orange cockatoo with a penchant for playing catch with a ball.



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