



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Bird Security

(Avicultural Society Meeting - August 2012)

Presented by Joe Habib

It's not uncommon to hear of pet shops such as Kellyville Pets, Crystal Pet and Wire Centre, and other pet shops getting broken into. The fact is that birds do get stolen and it is something that we hope never happens to anyone.

There are a few basic things that you can usually do, such as padlocks, high fences and dogs; and some people have things like cameras and alarms. In the yard in regard to the birds, things like micro chipping, rings and DNA testing depending on the birds, can also be helpful. One of the things that people don't do and should be doing, is to take profile photos of their birds, and in particular maybe little things like toes missing, a nail missing or something else - different things that may help to identify birds if they are stolen. If you have a case where you believe that a bird could be yours then you've got different things that can aid you in indentifying it. Especially when you consider the value of your birds and lengths that some people go to, to get the birds, it is a good idea to keep a record of anything that may assist you with recovering your birds.

There was a case of a young couple who were part of the Parrot Society - they went to their club Christmas party meeting and while they were out someone broke into their house. The thieves stole their car, a laptop, a pair of macaws, a whole lot of other birds including their Eclectus Parrots and all of the birds that they were hand raising (quite a lot of birds). I am not going to say it was or it was not the case in this instance, but I know these people are involved in a lot of the social media sites. If you are using this type of media it is wise to be very careful about what you are putting out there. I am talking about the social media sites such as Facebook. If you are going out and you post it on Facebook you are advertising that you're not going to be home and you've got a free backyard. By posting photos of your actual birds (that can be easily downloaded by others), or even other people's birds if you have their permission (you should never post photos without the owner's permission), you are giving people an insight into your own backyard even before they walk in. They may have never been in your backyard but they have a whole collection of photos of what you've got there and even how your aviaries are placed.

Unfortunately you have also got things like Google Earth (a multi-platform software application for viewing images of the earth) and if you have it on your computer (it is a free download offered by Google) then you can see the aviary layout. Big brother is watching. You can sit there and look in someone's backyard and even if it's an old photo they can still see how the aviaries are laid out. With large collections you can zoom in fairly easily and see the whole layout; the boundary fences, etc. So unfortunately you have got to be really careful of all the social media and technology that is available to the average person in today's day and age because it does have its downside. It is apparently possible to request that Google block your street address in both Google Earth and Google Maps if you have a valid reason for making such a request.

There is also a need to be very careful about the people that you let into your backyard when you are selling your birds. I may seem like the easiest option to take them out the back and show them your birds but it is far better to meet them somewhere else. Meet them up the road or at the service station, a car park in a shopping centre, or wherever you decide to meet them.

It cannot be stressed enough that you need to be extremely careful about everything regarding the safety and security of your birds, even how you set up your aviaries on your property. For instance if your rear boundary is adjoining a reserve or a park, or even a lane or a railway, or anything like that, it is something that you need to take into account when laying out where you want to set up your aviaries.

There was a case in the Hunter Valley about three weeks ago of someone having made a purchase of a pair of Blue 28 Parrots and a pair of Crimson-bellied Conures. He was quite excited about the birds and told a few people that he had them. He placed them in a couple of flights in his backyard which backed onto a railway. The thieves broke in through the back of his aviaries. They unscrewed the panels of his back fence, cut a hole in the back of his aviaries that backed onto the back fence and stole the two pairs of birds. So they knew what they're looking for. So be careful who you tell and who you bring into your backyard.

You might decide to advertise and sell a few birds on PetLink or other such sites on the internet but you don't really know who you are bringing through your backyard. It is far better to advertise your birds in the club magazine and even arrange to meet the person and bring your birds to a Society meeting. You can make use of your club and also introduce prospective members this way perhaps. Bird sales are good. Just take everything there and you won't have the need to have strangers walking through your backyard eyeing things up. It might not be that it will be the person that's walking through your backyard who is going to come back and break into your birds, but they could tell someone else and they could in turn tell someone else or they might just think that your birds would look better in their yard rather than in yours. You just can't tell.

Security can also be provided through the use of cameras including infrared cameras and alarm systems. There are a few people that have infrared cameras, sensor lights and alarms, and things like that to try and combat this type of crime. These are the extremes that you have to go to these days to keep your birds safe. There can be a lot of money outlaid in different people's backyards and unfortunately you have people who just think they can come in and help themselves.

Just another example of a case a couple of years ago when Mark Sultana from Crystal Pets and Wire sold a Blue and Gold Macaw to a guy and he decided that he didn't want to meet him at the shop. He met him in a service station. Mark was assaulted and they took the bird. In this instance the police recovered the bird and it was returned to Mark.

Another case up in the Hunter Valley which resulted in the recovery of stolen birds was when Russell McAllister from the Hunter Valley Avicultural Society had a pair of Blue and Gold Macaws and a pair of Scarlets Macaws stolen from his backyard about a year ago. They were young blokes and tried to sell the Blue and Golds to someone who knew Russell. The police were called and a meeting was set up resulting in the apprehension of the perpetrators. However, whilst the Macaws were in their hands they unfortunately decided to clip the wing on one of the Macaws and let it walk around their backyard. They didn't know exactly what they were doing when they clipped the bird's wing and instead of it walking around the backyard it took off and wasn't ever to be seen again. Also another sad outcome was that when they got to the meeting place, the guy with birds had them shoved in a sports bag. So you can imagine a couple of Blue and Gold Macaws shoved into sports bag. These guys were charged with animal cruelty as well as for theft. I haven't heard the final outcome but the penalty for animal cruelty was going to be a lot more than for the theft of the birds. It was possible that they could get anything up to 20 years in gaol for animal cruelty compared with one or two years for theft. So you have your good and bad stories – sometimes people get their birds back but in other instances, they don't. So be as careful as you can.

Open Discussion:

Question: Well you can be as careful as you like but Google Earth isn't on your side and maybe you can't stop birds being stolen. With the bird sales that are held, do they scan every bird for a microchip when it is brought into the sales?

Joe Habib: They are worried about how many birds you've got in a cage because they can be charged by the RSPCA for that. They don't do any screening. I think that in regard to the larger or rarer parrots, bird thieves are not going to bring them to a bird sale to sell them. It is possible to have stolen birds there but if someone comes in with birds without people knowing who they are then it could raise a few questions. I don't think someone in possession of stolen birds would want to draw attention to themselves by bringing them into a bird sale.

Comment: It's more likely they would try to sell them interstate.

- Question: Can you search for birds posted to social media sites on the internet?
- Joe Habib: I'm not an expert but I think it depends on your security settings. You can block anyone from seeing your profile and photos except for friends or someone that you choose to accept as a friend. You need to go through the security settings provided and set them so that you can only be seen by your friends. If someone hasn't done this then yes, you can go in and look at their profile, their photos and everything else they have put there.
- Comment: If you play games through a social media site or accept applications you are giving your permission in many instances for them to access your basic information and in nearly every instance, your photos. They can download your photos very easily.
- Comment: An image could be your security. Say if I take a photo of you, there can't be any problems because you are unique and birds are also unique. We don't notice the differences but with computer enhancements you can. When you come through the airport, even if you did a full figure change, it would still pick that you are who you say you are just from facial recognition. It maybe photo recognition is something that needs to be considered. It would then be nothing to go along to a bird sale with your camera and take as many photos as you like and if your bird is there a match will come up. It is the same when a teacher is checking essays; they can check if someone has plagiarised it by shoving it through a Google scanner. A search will come up with anything in the essay that has been published somewhere else. I'm getting the idea that having images of your birds is a good idea.
- Joe Habib: I take photos of all my birds.
- Question: Do you take a standard photo like a profile photo? You could have just the left side of the face and then as many other photos as you like.
- Graeme Phipps: Has anybody got any further thoughts, ideas or concerns relating to bird security?
- Comment: Intruders could cut off your power if they suspect that alarms have been installed.
- Joe Habib: Get a little Silky, some sort of little noisy dog. Big dogs will usually want to bite intruders but a little dog will just keep yapping and yapping and yapping and can make a lot of noise. People will generally run away if there is plenty of noise.

[How to Block Your Home Address on Google Earth](#)

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