

First of all let me tell you how I got to The Tropics to begin with. In 1981, I purchased an Umbrella Cockatoo named Bernie. The name stuck even after SHE started laying eggs 5 years later! She was the joy of my life, and being single, my only child. Every time I was home, I did my best to have her with me. She loved to cuddle and sleep in my lap for hours at a time. After about 20 years of being alone 8-10 hour a day while I was at work, and putting up with my being away on vacation, she started to feather mutilate. It was devastating on both of us. I tried everything in the book. Full medical workups yielded that she was healthy, and we tried the drug approach. That was terrible for her and me. The drugs made her listless, and didn't stop the picking. I guess that it was the equivalent to a straight jacket and a padded room for us. Imagine coming home to your son or daughter bloody with hairs pulled out every day, and there was nothing you could do about it.

After a search on the Internet, I came across "The Tropics". I called Mary Bradford and we talked about the possibility of her helping Bernie. She said she would take her, and after days of agonizing about handing over my friend of 20 years, I decided I had to do it. My first visit was before ground was broken for the dome. I gave Bernie over to Mary and left balling my eyes out. It was 6 months before life was what I would consider normal again. Mary answered every email, and the reports of Bernie's progress were encouraging and answers to prayer. Mary has a gift from God, and EVERY BIRD matters to her. I am convinced that is why it takes 8 hours each day to feed all the birds. She is not just dumping food in a cage, but rather she is spending quality time to get to know each of these highly intelligent creatures. They all love her to death.

After 11/2 years of avoiding the place, I finally mustered enough courage to go and see Bernie again. The dome was built, and I heard she was in it. I could not have, in my wildest dreams, imagined what I would see. The dome habitat is truly remarkable. I walked in to find my best friend next to a male cockatoo. When I approached Bernie, the male defended her. Bernie has a boyfriend! She was doing great and while some feathers will never grow back, She had not feather-picked since she was dropped off, and has gained a lot of plumage back. Her male friend was quite proud of her and made sure I passed muster before getting too close.

I also saw multitudes of happy, loud birds flying, playing, and developing relationships of their own. The next thing blew my mind. There are those who have stated that domesticated birds will not go to humans once released and allowed to live in a wild state. At any time during the visit, I had 2-6 birds on me that wanted to be pet, and played with. Cockatoos, Cockatiels, Quakers, Conures, and many others took their turns. It IS possible for these birds to have bird and people time, and they seem to desire and need both. I believe removing the human component from these bird's lives would be devastating. Most of them are imprinted on humans, and I think they would be confused if they didn't have the best of both worlds. The other thing I noticed was the harmony in which the birds existed. There was no fighting, and many species were snuggled up with others from another continent. The funniest thing was the cockatiel that seemed to be in love with a greater sulfur crested cockatoo. I don't think that one will work out! What a wonderful place the dome is!

Now for the soapbox. So many organizations exist simply to raise funds for political action and to perpetuate their own existence. The Tropics is here to solve a problem. Instead of dumping all their money on conventions and political advertisements, with little or no money going to help suffering animals, they are allowing captive birds a chance to heal physically and emotionally. Seeing a pair of cockatoos in flight while they move from tree to tree, screaming to each other tells me that this was the right thing to support. Cockatoos are beautiful in a cage, but they are regal in their own element! I will personally never own a pet bird again.

I hope, through education, people will reconsider having a pet bird. You cannot imagine the suffering alleviated by removing the demand for these animals. In the meantime, if you love these intelligent and complex creatures, please realize that there are birds in need, and please consider supporting the Tropics and other organization that actually do something with the money other than make commercials and billboards. Your money will not be wasted. Mary is for real, and she really needs your help.

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