

Easy Reference Sheet

Rescuing Domestic Birds

Version 2: January 2021

Introduction

As a rescue/rehabilitation organisation, WILDCARE is permitted to rescue and rehabilitate wild animals, not domestic/pet ones. It is not uncommon for volunteer rescuers to take possession of a domestic bird through the usual course of attending wildlife rescues.

If a domestic bird comes into your possession, you should notify the RSPCA as soon as possible. The RSPCA have an extensive database of lost and found animals, and will also monitor local Facebook pages and Gumtree advertisements for lost and found posts. The priority should always be to get the animal back to its rightful owner.

Some species of domestic native birds, such as Major Mitchells, can only be held in Queensland under an appropriate Recreational Licence in which case, you must instead notify the Department of Environment and Science (DES) within 24 hours of it coming into your possession. It is illegal for any person to possess these animals without the appropriate DES permit.

If the animal is sick or unwell, it should be taken to your local vet or the RSPCA wildlife hospital for veterinary treatment in the same timeframe you would take any animal (i.e. critical injuries must be attended to immediately). You will be expected to relinquish the animal to the vet/hospital in the same manner as any unclaimed/stray pet.

Note: Wildlife hospitals (other than the RSPCA) are under no obligation to admit and/or treat domestic/pet birds and they may refuse to accept the animal.

How do you know if the animal is domestic?

Below are the most common signs that may indicate that an animal is an escaped or released domestic bird:-

Found outside of its normal geographical range

- Refer to a comprehensive field guide to determine the species natural geographical range. If it has been found in a region outside of that range, then it is most likely a pet.

Behaviour

- If the animal is extremely friendly and easy to handle without restraint, it could be a pet. It should also be noted that even a very tame pet bird can become fractious when stressed, therefore it is advised that you consult an experienced bird coordinator/keeper for more advice. Note also that birds suffering from Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) may appear friendly, when it can be put down to neurological issues associated with the disease.
- If the animal talks or makes noises unusual for the species, it is likely to be a pet. Be mindful that even a friendly bird may be shy for a few days before settling in and feeling comfortable enough to 'talk'.
- If the animal readily recognises and eats captive food (such as commercial seed mix, parrot pellets, fruit, vegetables or human food/treats).
- The bird is exhibiting commonly seen nutritional deficiencies that occur for an inadequate seed diet. This can be evident in poor feather condition, enlarged liver commonly seen on radiographs and poor bone density or deformities.

Common captive conditions/diseases

- Feather plucking is not unusual in domestic parrots. Parrots with missing feathers across their chest are possible feather pluckers, and therefore domestic. Also excessive over-preening can damage feathers too, and is common in captive birds.
- Displaying hormonal/ submissive sexual behavior in captivity.

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- Beak and feather disease DOES exist in domestic parrots, and this diagnosis alone cannot determine the animal is either wild or domestic.
- Obesity is common in captive birds, and rarely seen in wild birds (wild birds do not overeat or have the tendency to eat a high fatty diet).

Forms of Identification

- Clipped wings
- Excessively overgrown toenails (from inappropriate perches)
- Leg band
- Microchipped- it is becoming more common practice to microchip birds.

The most common examples of domestic birds that arrive into care through wildlife volunteers include:-

- Rainbow Lorikeet
- Sulphur Crested Cockatoo
- Galah
- Indian Ringneck
- Budgie
- Cockatiel

What happens to the animal next?

UNLICENSED SPECIES

The animal should be handed over to an animal welfare organisation, such as the RSPCA or Animal Welfare League.

The animal will be assessed by a veterinarian and will be given appropriate treatment. Experience shows that most domestic birds that have been in the wild for more than a day will likely require veterinary care for dehydration at the very least. After a 'stray hold' period if no owner comes forward, and the animal has finished its treatment, it may be made available for adoption.

LICENSED SPECIES

For licensed species, DES will advise on where to take the animal, which will be to either a DES Regional Office, or the RSPCA at Wacol.

A veterinarian appointed by DES will assess the animal. If no owner is found, and the DES deems the animal appropriate to be re-homed, they will organise a veterinary examination to be performed. If the health assessment is satisfactory, the animal may be made available for rehoming, either through the RSPCA's adoption program, or Queensland Species Management Plan (QSMP).

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Can I attempt to rehome the bird I have home?

UNLICENSED SPECIES

Wildcare discourages all members from keeping lost domestic birds. As mentioned earlier, domestic birds that have been exposed to the wild will often require veterinary attention, and you will be responsible for any costs associated with this, should you choose to keep the animal for rehoming. Wildlife Hospitals will not treat an injured or sick pet bird, unless it is relinquished to them and domestic vet practices are likely to charge full price for a pet bird in your care.

The RSPCA has a great success rate at re-homing domestic birds, and as the RSPCA has a huge reach through their shelters and Adopt-a-Pet website, this is the best place for the animal to find a new home, if they have been unable to find the owner.

LICENSED SPECIES

Legally, you cannot keep a licensed species you have found, even if you hold a current permit for that species. The DES will advise on where to take the animal.

Can I adopt the bird I have found?

You may be given an opportunity to adopt the animal, if becomes available through the RSPCA's adoption program. However, there are no guarantees that this will occur as the placement of the animal is made at the discretion of the RSPCA, or the DES for licensed species. When you relinquish the animal, you may be able to register your interest.

Quarantine

It is imperative that strict quarantine procedures are adopted to ensure the protection of the animal in question along with any other animals that you may have now or in the future.

The bird should be kept separated from all other wildlife and domestic pets. This includes equipment used to house, handle or feed the animal. We recommend the use of disposal equipment that can be discarded safely once the animal is relinquished (e.g. cardboard box etc.).

Contact

RSPCA Queensland 1300 264 625

Lost & Found / Pet D Tect 1300 363 736
<https://www.rspcaqld.org.au>

Department of Environment and Science (DES) 1300 130 372

<https://www.des.qld.gov.au>