

**From:** Tom Priestly  
**To:** [Davenport, Alicia](#)  
**Subject:** Hamilton Aviary  
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Dear Public Works Committee,

I first started volunteering at the Hamilton Aviary in high school, almost 20 years ago. It taught me responsibility to show up on time for shifts, and the delayed gratification of handling the birds after chores were done. Birds have a lot to teach humans. They teach us about being good listeners. When we learn to understand what a bird is telling us through body language, we're learning how to interpret nonverbal communication. Body language accounts for 90% of the communication between people. As herd animals, birds know the importance of getting along. Like us, birds are social animals, with defined roles within their flock. Also like us, they have distinct personalities and a wide range of emotional reactions – happy, sad, stubborn, defiant, loving. In order for the flock to survive, birds have to respect the roles of others and cooperate despite differences. When we work with birds we become part of the flock, and that means learning how to approach others with respect and awareness. Elevated feathers on the nape of the neck, pupils pinned, open beak, and fanned tail feathers --a bird gives a clear warning that personal space has been invaded. By asserting their boundaries while giving the offender a chance to walk away, birds set a good example of how we can stand up for ourselves while avoiding escalating conflict. Macaws are known for their large, powerful beaks, it's understandable to find them intimidating or even frightening. Overcoming that initial fear and learning to handle a large parrot like Dwight has been a great confidence builder for me. Confronting a fear and working through it can leave us feeling empowered and ready to take on other intimidating situations in life. Birds are straightforward in their relationships. They don't judge, they don't blame and they won't tell your secrets (ok, some might). If you have a hard time opening up to others, birds can offer a non-judgemental relationship where you can practice building trust. Over time that experience can be applied to human relationships too. Hamilton is privileged to have a flock with wings and hearts open to the public.

Also, whether it's grooming, cleaning enclosures, feeding, or communicating cross-species, parrots require us to work hard. In an era of instant gratification, birds have a lot to teach us about the value of physical and mental effort. A useful lesson in all aspects of life. I remember Jerry, an African Grey who past away years ago. His outdoor flight was adjacent to a bench in the park. I used to visit him in the summer evenings, he would sit out there and whistle the Andy Griffith Show theme song and watch the neighborhood kids play. Jerry taught me to enjoy the little things. These neighborhood kids are now grown up and bringing their families to visit the flock they loved growing up.

A flock is a family and they mourn for each other as a whole. Hamilton's parrots are not pets. These birds are precious and vulnerable. They are in need of sanctuary. The flock has been a part of Hamilton since the 1920s and their existence as they know it is threatened. Most of them would not do well in a home as a pet. They require a group of knowledgeable guardians to be their voice. These individuals have complex social relationships in the flock and some would not do well separate from the others. They belong in Hamilton as feathered citizens and belong together as a flock. The Hamilton Aviary is part of our cultural heritage and is an institution.

Sincerely,

Tom Priestly  
Director  
Friends of the Aviary

Sent from my Samsung Galaxy smartphone.