



# Angel Wings

*A monthly journal for human angels who make a positive difference in companion birds' lives.*

July 2014  
Volume 9, Issue VII

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## Angel Toys For Angels

### July's Featured Toys



[Seagrass Roll](#)  
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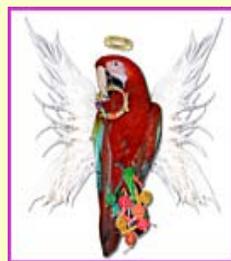
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Wheat Grass Tip & Caution



Quinoa Salad  
By Toni Fortin

- 1 cup quinoa
- 1-1/2 cups garbanzo beans (soaked and cooked)
- 1 whole small orange pepper
- 1 cup frozen peas (no salt)
- 4 fresh figs chopped
- 1 fresh roma tomato chopped

Cook quinoa just like you would rice. Let sit for 10 minutes and fluff. In a bowl, add quinoa

By Steve Letter

One point I'd like to make. When growing wheat grass, there is a danger. Moist soil is a perfect breeding ground for aspergillus, a fungus that causes aspergillosis. While not much of a problem for healthy birds usually, it can sometimes cause respiratory illness, even death.

The best defense is to not allow the soil anywhere around your birds. We just clip off the tops of the grass and feed it that way. Next best, use sterilized potting soil to grow your wheat grass in and only add water as absolutely necessary. Place a piece of needlework plastic mesh over the top of the planter, to keep the bird away from the soil. Only use the soil once.

Once again, it is usually not going to be a problem, however you grow the grass. These precautions just make it even less likely.



and other ingredients.

You can add other vegetables or fruit that you have on hand.



<>As always, my girls say "I like it, I like it, and it's good!"



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Touched By An Angel

Chris South, Executive Director - [A Place to Call Home Parrot Rescue and Adoption](#)



First off I would like to thank the Parrot Toy Angels for all that they do to help rescues like the one I run here in a very small town with not many parrot resources around. I have seen some pictures of what they do and read the great stories of how they have helped and knew they were wonderful angels. I never dreamed of what they actually send, I received a number of boxes in the mail from different parts of the country and with the opening of those boxes I was like a kid at Christmas I really was. It warmed my soul to know that people out there actually care and want to help out great rescues that are working so hard to make these parrots happy. The parrots here were also super excited to see the new toys that we were hanging and giving to them, and they deserve that happiness and it's all owed to these wonderful angels that take their time and money to help others. I have tried so many times to make toys and they just don't look good or they fall apart, I think that is why the birds here were so happy to see beautiful toys and not the ones I try and make for them, and they also love the angels that help them for what they did for them. I really can't write how much we love and thank them for what they did for us and what they do every day for the rescues and the birds. So please donate to this wonderful organization if you can because they make a HUGE difference in many lives human and non-human.



### Length Matters

By Kim Perez

It really does! What are we talking about? When you have a toy hanging in your bird's cage, how long is the uncovered portion of rope/chain/wire/leather? Is it long enough to encircle a bird's scrawny little neck? If it is, it is NOT safe!

When we hang a new toy in our bird's cage, it looks perfect. We are so happy that they love it enough to chew on it, swing from it, and play with it until there are colorful little shreds in their trays. But look at what's left. It is a huge safety concern.

Clyde, female B&G in our living room, LOVES any toy with yucca on it. Yes, it's too soft of a part to last any length of time

### Rikki Sez

Rikki will try and answer frequently asked questions here.



Rikki, We had a visitor over the weekend, my mom was watching another bird while his mom was on a trip. I was shocked when they brought his cage in, it was

with a big bird, but since she loves it so much, we spoil her and buy/make a lot of toys with yucca parts. It takes her no time at all to seek and destroy them all. When she does, she is left with sometimes more than a foot of exposed chain at the top of the toy. This could easily wrap around her neck and choke her.

Our solution to this is to attach both ends of the toys to her cage. We will attach one end at the top of the cage and the other toward the bottom. We check to make sure it cannot be easily pulled up and make a lot of slack. We prefer it stays taut so that it has no extra loose length to the chain.

It is perfectly fine to have a toy fastened at each side of the cage. Your bird can sit on the toy while he plays with it.

It doesn't really matter what the toy hanging medium is, either. Rope and chain are the two biggest threats when it comes to exposed lengths. Wire - it depends on if it is a soft aluminum wire or a thick, hard to bend steel wire. The softer wires pose more of a threat, but birds still can potentially bend the stiffer wires into shapes that can trap their feet, beaks or wings. Leather is one of the less threatening items, especially when thick, as it is really difficult to loop and pull. Anyone who has made leather toys knows that a thin leather lace is much easier to knot than the thicker leather, which can be next to impossible!

You should also note that it doesn't matter where the lengths of stringing media are. Sometimes you may find long lengths of rope hanging off a toy from another item on the toy. These are just as unsafe - as are strings hanging from a cloth item, such as a tent, or strings from a frayed rope perch. Even a couple of inches of frayed rope can wrap around a bird's toenail and sever it.

There are two ropes that I have found to be extremely safe with birds. One is Supreme or Superior brand natural cotton rope. The unbleached fibers are puffy and easily pull apart. And if your bird should happen to swallow some, it will digest. The other is Paulie/Polly rope. This is a polyethylene rope which is very safe in short lengths, but I would not use long

soooo tiny! He could barely move around in it. What gives? He needs a bigger cage like mine. Shouldn't all birdies have nice roomy cages?

Signed, Room to Boogie

Dear Boogie, I'm really hoping your friend was simply brought over in carry-cage because his home cage was too big to move, but I dunno! Some parronts don't seem to understand that their birds need SPACE, space to stretch out their wings, space to play, places to hide, room to climb and have fun in. You need room for toys, foraging, and perches of various sizes so your feet don't get cramped. I sometimes wish we could stuff THEM in small cages and see how THEY would feel. Hopefully, after seeing your nice roomy cage, your friend's mommy will get the idea.



Rikki, Mommy and daddy brought home a new baby, and I don't like it! It screams (I'd NEVER do that!) and smells and gets too much attention, they hardly ever play with me any more! Can I beak it?  
Signed, Frustrated Feathers

Dear Feathers, Beaking the human baby is most definitely NOT recommended! That will only make your parronts sad and they might send you to a shelter. Instead, you should try to be patient and understand that human babies are a lot of work and your parronts are probably stressed right now. Be sweet, play with your toys, eat your veggies, do all the good bird things that baby doesn't know how to do yet. They will love you all the more for being so good. Hopefully they will find more time to remember how much joy you have brought to them so far, and find more time to spend with you. If that doesn't work, then learn to make crying noises like the baby, and only make them in the middle of the night. Your parronts will think it's the baby, and when they get up to see what's wrong, pretend to be asleep like a good bird. That'll teach 'em!



Rikki, Since the weather got warmer, I feel all weird. Sometimes I wanna beak my mom for no reason. Sometimes I wanna beak my dad, and sometimes I wanna cuddle and rub on them. Other times I wanna scream, throw my food around, beat up my toys, and, and, and, I dunno!!!

exposed lengths of it either.

As always, with toy safety, remain vigilant in your power of observation! Maintain the mindset that just because it is for sale, doesn't mean that it's safe.

\*\*This article originally ran in the October 2010 issue of Angel Wings.



What's wrong with me, I've always been a good bird??

Signed, Stormy

Dear Stormy, There's probably nothing 'wrong' with you - but as always, if your parronts are worried, a vet check would help ease their minds. It's THAT time of year, something mom calls 'hormonal season' and it just makes some of us a bit cranky. It'll pass, and you'll be back to your usual self in no time. Meanwhile, try not to beak anyone you love, take out your frustrations on your toys. I always manage to get a half a dozen new toys this time of year, so I play it up for all it's worth! This also works for 'molting' season as well.

Do you have a question for Rikki?  
Please send it to The Editor at  
[editor@parrottoyangels.org](mailto:editor@parrottoyangels.org)



## Better Safe Than Sorry

By 'Sana Emberg

Now that warmer weather is here for most of us, I thought maybe I'd drop a few reminders about helping to keep our feathered friends safe. Most of us with pet birds of one sort or another give them out-of-cage time regularly, and thus we can get complacent, and forget the dangers our little friends can face. So, better safe than sorry!

In the warmer weather, doors and windows are open more often, and so many birds escape, get lost, and many of them are never reunited with their family. Here are a few of the things we do to help minimize these risks.

In our bird room, where the cockatiels fly free, we wanted the birds to have lots of fresh air and sunlight, but we were worried about the screens. Could a cat or other critter somehow pull them loose or chew through them (we have a lot of raccoons around, and those guys can get into anything!) Would the birds possibly chew the screen? Tons of bad things went through our heads. So, we took apart a few older cages we don't use any more and used the panels from them as an extra layer of protection, both on the inside and the outside, firmly attached to the window frames. Now the birds can climb up the panels, enjoy the breeze, and we feel better knowing there's more than a simple screen between our birds and the great outdoors, but it doesn't block the breeze or the sunlight.

We've also placed lace curtains in all our doorways in the house. Sounds silly, but it does help prevent 'accidental' fly outs into the rest of the house. I can leave the bird room door open and know they will have to get through at least two curtains to reach the kitchen or the bathroom if I'm not paying attention. And, the cockatiels have learned, if they want company, all they have to do is fly to the curtain and yell, and someone will come running :-)

ANY time we have any of the birds out (and that's most of the time around here, hardly ever a time when at least one of the birds isn't hanging out with us) and any of the

doors to the outside are open, the screen door is LOCKED from the inside - no chance of the wind blowing it open or someone coming in unexpectedly. We also have a sign on both our front door and back door, letting folks know that there MIGHT be birds loose in the house, and that they will have to knock and wait, or better yet, call first.

Another danger : Ceiling fans! We have two in the house, and the only time they run is at night when all the birds are safely tucked away for the night. We actually used a sharpie to make a reminder on the switches for the ceiling fans that says "are all the birds put away??" We had a friend over once who looked at the switch kind of funny, but then I told her the story of Zander, a cockatiel I rescued from a bad situation. When we went to pick him up, the folks who had him let him out of his cage as soon as we came in, and what did he do? Flew straight into the ceiling fan that was running! Crashed into it, fell to the floor and twitched. I thought for sure he was dead, and I had tears running down my face as I picked him up. The guy said, 'Oh, he'll be okay, he does that all the time!' He did recover in a moment, but I could not wait to get him out of there. I will never forget the sound he made when he hit the floor.

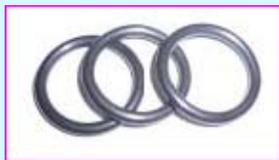
Another reminder, and this one learned from hard experience. When you are used to having birds around you forget they can get into trouble easily. Many years ago, my sweet little Trinity (spoiled rotten cockatiel and the sweetest bird) was napping on my shoulder. She had been there for so long I just forgot she was there, tucked up under my hair, sound asleep. There was a knock on the door, a friend who lived upstairs stopped by to ask if I'd seen the moon that night, it was really gorgeous. So I stepped outside to take a peek and we stood there talking for a couple of minutes. Just as I was about to go inside, Trinity woke up, screeched and took off...up up up in the sky she went, gone in a flash. Despite plastering flyers all over town, talking to every vet, pet lover, and any stranger who would listen, we never found her, and to this day I kick myself mentally every time I think of it.

Please don't let that happen to you. KNOW where your birds are at all times, and never become complacent. They can be stepped on, sat on, they are notorious for hiding in plain sight, or under covers, etc... Don't think it can't happen to you.



### Safety Today: O-rings

By The Safety Angel



To protect our savings and our children's college fund, many parronts have taken to making toys for our feathered little termites. It's a great money saver and something that can be fun to do together. Nickel plated and stainless steel "O" rings and chain are becoming ever popular in making "indestructible" toys, or toys that will last a little longer than wood and rope.

Used properly, the "O" rings are very safe, but can be an accident waiting to happen

### Beak-A-Boo News - Issue VII

Yup, it's Boo, messing up your screen again! Did ya miss me?

I had a blast today! Mom and Dad took me to something called a 'Relay for Life' and it was so much fun! I always love to meet new people, and there were lots there! Little people, big people, dogs, and even another bird! Some of the people were wearing funny colored feathers, made me laugh when I saw them. Do you believe it, I saw a dog that was smaller than ME? I'd never seen such a tiny, tiny, dog, and it was wearing a hat! I didn't know dogs wore hats! Mom tried to put a hat on me once, and I beaked it GOOD to make sure she'd never try that again! Dad let me beak his corn on the cob. Oh that was yummy, but mom was mean! She had something called 'cotton

when used improperly. It is important to choose an "O" ring that your parrot can't crush or open easily. Equally as important is opening and closing them correctly.

The easiest way I have found to open them is with two pair of needle nose pliers. First, cover the jaws with electrical tape to prevent scratching the finish and then grasp each side of the "O" ring with a pair of pliers. With a twisting motion, push the jaws of one pair of pliers away from you and pull the jaws of the other pair towards you, opening it just far enough to accomplish your goal (connecting to a piece of chain, attaching to a toy, etc.).

Closing them can be a bit trickier. Grasp the "O" ring with the pliers in the same manner as opening them and put a little pressure towards the middle when bringing the ends together. Please be sure the ends of the "O" ring join together snug and even. There should be no gap between the ends and no overlapping. An improperly closed "O" ring can catch a nail, beak or tongue possibly causing injury.

So play it safe and close those "O" rings tight!



candy' and it looks so fun, but she wouldn't lemme play with it. I yelled at her and tried to get it when she hid it behind her back and climbed all over trying to get it. She finally gave it to a little kid... I don't think she knows he gave me a little bit of it when she wasn't looking! Oh, it was awesome. You won't tell, will you?

I didn't really understand what we were doing, but we got to walk around with lots of people and everyone told me I was a bee-you-tee-ful bird, so I waved to them and barked at the dogs and did my super-chicken yell. I dunno why, but that always makes the humans laugh.

I'm completely exhausted and considering a nap, but before I go, here's your Beek-A-Boo tip of the month: Never, I repeat NEVER do 'tricks', or talk, or anything else mom wants you to do in front of 'company'. You gotta play hard-to-get, save the good stuff for when they've been around a few times. Otherwise they'll expect it every time. And oh, it's just so tedious having to do all that stuff just because they decide to come over once in a while.



## Aspergillosis - Part 1

By Constance Lee Menefee

Our Companion Parrots do an amazing job of adapting to our world. For the most part, they live in our homes without ill effect, while giving us pleasure and a connection to nature.

But one area we sometimes overlook is air quality. One of the most difficult (if not always obvious) challenges we have is to provide a safe and wholesome breathing environment for our birds. Human houses, closed and well insulated, are not designed for birds, whose intricate respiratory systems need fresh, moving air to stay in peak form. (See How Birds Breathe, below.) Fumes, especially those from cooking and cleansers, can sicken and even kill house birds. In general, if you can smell it, chances are your bird shouldn't be breathing it. But what about airborne dangers that have no tell-tale scent? Like humans, birds can inhale mold spores, those nasty little organisms that grow on surfaces. We can't see them, and usually don't smell them, but spores float through the air and into our lungs. If spore concentrations are small and we are healthy, molds usually do not bother people or animals. But if we're already ill, mold can be a troublemaker. When it comes to our birds, one type of mold seems to cause more problems than all others: [aspergillus](#).

Several types of aspergillus molds (most commonly *Aspergillus fumigatus*, *Aspergillus niger*, *Aspergillus terreus*, and *Aspergillus flavus*), all found worldwide, are capable of causing the disease of aspergillosis.

Aspergillosis can be a devastating respiratory illness that affects a bird's trachea, nasal passages, air sacs, or all three. It's tough to diagnose - and even harder to cure. In advanced stages, it blocks airways and spreads to other organs. Aspergillosis is the most common fungal infection found in wild birds. Among pet parrots, African greys and Amazons seem the most susceptible. However, any bird can develop aspergillosis. Recently, fatal cases have been reported among Jardine's parrots. My Meyer's parrot, Froggie, died from aspergillosis.

#### Weak birds in danger

Aspergillosis is an infectious disease – but not a contagious one. It's infectious because the mold spores can grow in living animal tissue. However, aspergillosis is not considered contagious because we acquire it from our environment, not from each other. Like all molds, aspergillus needs dampness, warmth, and a food source to grow. It spreads by ejecting spores, microscopic tough-skinned seed-like structures, into the air.

If we're not careful, the very environment in which our house birds live can become a breeding ground for aspergillus. The most common places for a pet bird to come into contact with spores include dusty pellets and seeds; spoiled food such as decaying fruits and vegetables; droppings; and cage bedding that becomes damp, such as wood shavings, mulch and corn cobs. Peanut shells and peanuts also can carry concentrations of spores.

Healthy birds seem to be able to withstand spores without becoming ill, but a weak bird is in danger. Spores favor setting up shop in an animal that is ill, malnourished or immune-suppressed, or that has damaged tissue. Once in the presence of a suitable spot, each spore is capable of growing tentacle-like filaments called hyphae, which spread and take nutrients from the host animal. The hyphae, together with the white and other blood cells secreted by the animal in an effort to rid itself of the invading organisms, form a mass called a granuloma. The longer the hyphae grow and the more the host continues to resist, the larger the granuloma becomes. Eventually, the mass becomes large enough to obstruct an airway, fill an air sac, or even interfere with other organs.

#### Is it aspergillosis - or something else?

Spotting aspergillosis before it becomes a serious problem is a challenge. The signs are subtle, range widely and can be symptoms of other diseases. By the time you notice anything wrong, your bird can be very ill.

One symptom is weight loss, which can occur even if your bird has a good appetite. Other signs: abnormal droppings, a change in voice, and depression or other behavioral changes, including difficulty moving. Chronic aspergillosis infections are thought to trigger some feather picking, especially in African greys.

Human houses, closed and insulated, are not designed for birds, whose intricate respiratory systems need fresh, moving air. An infected bird might recover his breath more slowly after exertion or have difficulty breathing, using an open beak with outstretched neck or bobbing tail. Masses in the nasal cavity can leave nostrils with dry, crusty lesions.

Even experienced veterinarians have trouble diagnosing aspergillus. Blood tests can suggest the presence of an active fungal infection, and aspergillus can be grown from fluid and tissue samples. However, aspergillus is such a common environmental contaminant, it's easy to get false positives. Many diagnoses, unfortunately, are made post-mortem.

### No instant cure

There is no instant cure for aspergillosis. Treatment can take months, and even then recovery is not guaranteed. If a lesion can be removed surgically, that is the best first step, followed by medication. Your veterinarian will probably opt for one of these traditional anti-fungal medications: 5-fluorocytosine (5FC), itraconazole, fluconazole, clotrimazole or amphotericin B. Your bird might receive medicine via shots, orally, or, to maximize penetration into the lungs, a nebulizer (a medical device that delivers liquid medication in the form of a mist to the airways).

For infections of the nasal cavity, frequent anti-fungal rinses seem to help. One or more nasal rinses a week is a daunting prospect if your parrot is difficult to handle, but it might be the only way to maintain a healthy bird.

My friend's African grey parrot, Seth, gets recurrent aspergillus infections if he does not get weekly medicated nasal rinses. Seth, a somewhat cranky bird, doesn't like the procedure, but Betty and her husband have worked out a routine. While one person towels and holds Seth, the other does the rinsing. I helped Betty after her husband had wrist surgery. I was not sure what to expect. But Betty held Seth and I rinsed each nostril a couple of times using a syringe. To my surprise, afterward Seth stood on my arm (a rare occurrence indeed), shook out his feathers, and just looked at me. We all sat for a few minutes until Seth indicated he was ready for Betty to put him back on top of his cage.

The key, I think, to Seth's successful weekly rinses is routine. Betty tells him it is time to rinse, wraps him, and does the job. Then Seth sits with the person who rinsed him for a few minutes and life goes back to normal.

If lesions are located in the air sacs, the infection is serious. Air sacs don't have a good blood supply, so not only do birds have a harder time getting their own germ-fighting cells to the site of the infection, medication has to be given in higher doses, which can cause kidney damage, among other problems. If treatment is working, your bird should begin to look and act healthier. Feather picking may stop. Birds with nasal infections may no longer have a discharge. Your veterinarian will be able to determine when to stop medication by using blood tests and observation.

### Youngsters at special risk

Young parrots are at greater risk for a number of ailments, including aspergillosis. This is due in part to an under-developed immune system. Some baby birds, for instance, can develop aspergillosis before hatching when aspergillus mold spores penetrate the eggs. The hatchlings can come out of the shell with well-developed lesions.

However, hasty or inept hand feeding also can invite disease. Birds can aspirate formula into their air sacs. Overly hot formula also can damage tissue and create an ideal spot for aspergillus mold to grow. That's how one chick from a clutch can become infected while the rest remain healthy. A hand-feeding accident might be why my seven-month-old Meyer's parrot, Froggie, developed aspergillosis. Froggie was fine for many months. He showed no obvious symptoms until three days before he died, when he began wheezing after exertion.

Even then, I didn't realize anything was wrong. I was an inexperienced parrot owner and didn't know that the change in his voice could be a sign of illness. I thought it was normal for him to pant for a minute after he was startled and fluttered to the ground. (I've since learned wheezing episodes of any length, except in excited or nervous pious parrots, are never normal.)

Even experienced veterinarians sometimes have trouble diagnosing aspergillosis. The necropsy revealed a large mass at the end of the trachea that had blocked one bronchial

tube for weeks, according to Froggie's vet. When the granuloma grew larger and blocked the other bronchial tube, Froggie died.

Had I weighed Froggie regularly, I might have seen the slight drop in body weight, even though he was still eating well. But by the time he began wheezing, it was far too late. Surgery on such a large lesion positioned where it was in his respiratory tract would have killed him, and medication would not have helped with such a mass still there.

When I first got Froggie, his veterinarian put him on a course of antibiotics after a fecal stain revealed large numbers of potentially harmful bacteria. Antibiotics disrupt the natural balance of bacterial flora, sometimes inviting secondary infections, including aspergillosis.

However, I don't think antibiotics made Froggie ill. I believe he was either overcome by spores in my home, or was injured from handfeeding at the breeder's or the shop where I got him. Any damaged tissue would have provided prime real estate for a few spores to get established, and one small growth could have simply taken a few months to enlarge to a life-threatening point. All of my other parrots – two cockatiels, two Quakers, three parakeets, a black-headed caique and a bronze-wing pionus – are healthy.

*Aspergillosis* will be continued in the August issue of Angels Wings. The article will cover ways to keep aspergillosis at bay and why some birds are spared.



Parrot Toy Angels gives thanks to the author, Connie Menefee for allowing us to reprint this article.

Connie Menefee has worked as a researcher in the field, laboratory or library since 1974. She has won several awards for poetry and wrote a weekly small-business column for two years. She currently writes on a variety of topics and does medical and business research. She is owned by nine parrots.



### Angels Wanted!!

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While PTA at all times tries to ensure any information provided in this newsletter is accurate, all articles are submitted by volunteers, and we are not avian professionals and make no claim as to the suitability of featured products, food, or toys for your particular bird. PTA strongly recommends that you ensure that all toys are safe, that you make sure your bird is fed a well balanced diet, and that you always provide continuing medical care through your avian vet.

Do you have a question or comment? Perhaps you have an idea for our newsletter, or simply want to share a story on how an Angel has touched your life. Drop us a line at: [editor@parrottoyangels.org](mailto:editor@parrottoyangels.org)



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