



## Parrots-R-4Ever Avian Rescue & Sanctuary, Inc.

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### An Open Letter In Support of Central Virginia Parrot Sanctuary

Like thousands of concerned members of the avian welfare community, I followed the story of the 31 Macaws confiscated from abusive conditions by Virginia Animal Control officials. I read that the birds had been placed in the care of the Central Virginia Parrot Sanctuary (CVPS) in Louisa, VA. I was aware of this organization but had never met the founder, Matt Smith, or visited their facility. At the time, there was speculation regarding the state of the bird's care and the qualification of CVPS to render that care. Rumors and propaganda made it impossible to separate fact from fiction.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> 2008, I drove 9 hours to Louisa, Va. My goal was to see the truth for myself. What I found was an immaculate, well engineered and well maintained facility. The vast majority of the birds lived cage-free in large, well-designed, dedicated rooms or in equally impressive aviaries outdoors. Both accommodations provided ample room for flight. Every conceivable type of toy, perch, ladder, boing, rope, net, natural branch and other enrichment items were abundant. I interacted with a number of the macaws and saw no sign of fear or stress in their new environment. A look at the contents of the food bowls and the small amount of debris below indicated that the birds were eating a rich and varied diet. I found Matt Smith to be a highly knowledgeable and caring individual supported by a large, motivated and equally knowledgeable volunteer staff. I left knowing that the 31 Macaws could not possibly be in better hands. Frankly, I believed the macaws remaining there was just a matter of formalities. I was WRONG! I am shocked and disappointed at the outcome.

I am disappointed in a "plea deal" that I believe is so void of justice that it is not even a slap on the hands of the defendants despite what appears to be overwhelming evidence of guilt. It is unconscionable that the animal welfare laws are so weak that the victims of abuse would be returned to their abusers.

I am disappointed that the American Federation of Aviculture and breeder communities would come to the defense of the abusers instead of policing themselves, and finding a real solution to such a serious problem.

I am even more disappointed in the lack of cohesion within the avian welfare community. I am outraged that the Gabriel Foundation would publish a list of unfounded misinformation about a fellow avian welfare organization on their website yet then write about "building bridges instead of walls". If what they wrote is not libel, it is certainly hypocrisy. Most of the inflammatory statements have now been discreetly removed. Unfortunately, the damage has already been done.

I am also aghast that this same organization sees no conflict of interest in voluntarily becoming involved with the removal of the macaws from a competent and accredited avian welfare organization to place them hundreds of miles away in the hands of a for-profit breeder. Perhaps there are no legal improprieties there, but I see ample room for opportunity. This leaves them and their motives open to question. As charitable organizations, we must avoid even the appearance of impropriety to maintain the public's trust. I fail to see that in the Gabriel Foundation's decisions.

If Julie Murad and the Gabriel Foundation are truly interested in "building bridges", I suggest that they put aside their arrogance and issue a public apology to Matt Smith and the staff of CVPS who worked so diligently to care for these macaws and help them recover after the confiscation. Perhaps they might salvage some shred of credibility as an avian welfare organization in the process.

In closing, to Matt Smith and the volunteer staff of Central Virginia, I express my utmost gratitude. You extended a magnificent effort on behalf of the welfare of these macaws and I rejoice in the progress they made while in your care. Please know that you have my full personal support as well as that of the entire staff of Parrots-R-4Ever Avian Rescue and Sanctuary.

Dave Spurlin, Executive Director

For the Board and Staff of Parrots-R-4ever Avian Rescue and Sanctuary, Inc.