

The Curious Companion



*A monthly publication celebrating
people and their pets*



batty about birds

Christopher Driggins, a self-professed "bird person," transforms his home and his life to care for exotic avians



Right: Christopher Driggins shares some affection with Tazara, a Brazilian Scarlet Macaw. Perched on his shoulder is Jane, a Blue and Gold Macaw, and looking on from their cages are Caesar and Alexandria. Above: A Cockatiel takes advantage of one of the many perches in Driggins' home.



It's apparent Christopher Driggins has a passion for birds from the moment you walk in his door.

His living room, dining room and family room have been transformed into a haven for his vibrant collage of avians.

Instead of sheetrock, the walls are lined with warm, brown bamboo. Foliage fills the corners and elaborate branches weave together around the ceiling's perimeter. Thick rope stretches from one side of the living room to the other, offering places to perch and swing. Bird cages, some as tall as 5 feet, sit side by side and fill almost every available wall space.

"I've tried to mimic their natural environment," Driggins said. "It's inspired by the Tikki Tikki room in Disneyland."

As of mid February, Driggins was caring for 25 adult birds, two weanlings and two newborns. The timeline is important since the head count changes frequently.

Some of the birds, which include Amazons, Macaws, Conures, Parakeets,

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Birds get new direction, life under Vancouver man's care

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Cockatiels, Lorikeets, Cockatoos and African Grays, were rescued from abusive situations, Driggins said. Others were given up when their owners lost interest, didn't have the time or didn't know how to deal with the birds. Many are available for adoption.

Driggins' love for the birds is apparent. He murmurs encouraging words to each, sharing affection and treats.

"Can we scratch?" he asks Sammy, a 65-year-old Lilac-Crowned Amazon. "You want an apple, right?"

"Give me a kiss," Driggins says after introducing Caesar, a Goffin Cockatoo he's had 16 years. Caesar leads in for a smooch. "Good boy," praises Driggins.

Driggins acquires the birds in a variety of ways: through word of mouth, since many know of his bird fascination; from friends and veterinarians; from co-workers and customers; and from pet shops. Their stories run the gamut.

There's Rosita, an Ecletus, who plucked out all her feathers except for the ruby-red ones surrounding her head.

She belonged to a college student who kept her in his dorm, Driggins said. Despite her spot in a high-traffic location, Rosita was essentially ignored until she started pulling out her feathers. When she discovered it

was a sure-fire way to get attention, she soon stripped herself of her entire coat. Despite her sad-looking state, Rosita seems perfectly happy. Driggins said it will take about a year and a half for the feathers to return.

Cocoa, a cross between a Lesser-Crested Cockatoo and a Goffin, also had a troubled past. Jealous of his owner's new wife and abused by her children, Cocoa went into attack mode, breaking through closed doors and attacking undefended toes.

Driggins said he has taught Cocoa to take his aggressions out through dance. He picks the bird up, turns up the volume on the stereo, and Cocoa begins to bob up and down, then sway side to side. A hand on his back cushions Cocoa's deep, backward dips.

Virtually all of Driggins' spare time outside his work at an area car dealership is spent with the birds. He strives to give each 20 minutes of individualized attention daily, a task that can keep him up late at night and get him out of bed early in the morning.

Except for the very large birds, all are free flight. As soon as Driggins returns from work, the birds are out of their cages. They perch on branches, visit their bird friends and keep a close eye on Driggins. They're not shy about voicing their displeasure or demands for attention.

"Some people are cat people, some are dog people," Driggins said. "I'm



Rosita, an Ecletus, seems as pleased about her new life as Driggins is. The bird is recovering from a stressful situation that caused her to pull almost all her feathers out.

just a bird person."

Driggins said he admires the birds' affection, intelligence and longevity.

"I have to turn off all the ringers in the house because they'll mimic the phone, and they know I run to the phone," he said.

Driggins said he always welcomes charitable donations for the care of the birds. Items such as bird cages, artificial foliage, bowls and appropriate feeds are also appreciated.

For more information, contact Driggins at 360-BIRDMAN.