



MEDIA RELEASE

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UFAW AWARDS £50,000 TO SUPPORT THE WELFARE OF CAPTIVE BIRDS

Charity supports study to investigate whether flight is important to captive birds

UFAW is pleased to announce that it has awarded a £50,000 grant to Professor Innes Cuthill of the University of Bristol and colleagues at the Universities of Guelph, Canada and Utrecht, the Netherlands for a study which will test the theory that restricting flight leads to welfare problems in caged birds and the prediction that welfare will be poorest in the species which are most flight-dependent in the wild.

Investigating the importance of flight to captive birds by experimentally restricting or preventing flight in itself is a welfare concern. Professor Cuthill and his colleagues therefore propose to use data on welfare from an online survey of pet parrots worldwide and from zoos that have agreed to help the study, combined with a statistical technique that takes into account the evolutionary history of parrot species and existing information on flight dependency to determine the effects of flight-restriction on welfare. Parrots have been chosen as a focal group as they are well represented in captivity, are commonly kept in restrictive cages or enclosures and may also be physically prevented from flying by wing clipping or pinioning (removal of a wing joint to prevent flight). In addition, there are many species of parrots (psittacines) from budgerigars to cockatoos to macaws and from ground-dwelling and flightless birds to swift flying and migratory varieties.

Together, the information will improve understanding of normal parrot behaviour in captivity and highlight factors that may play a role in the development of common behaviour problems. With this knowledge, parrot owners and keepers can make informed predictions about how to best optimise their parrots' living environments – or about which solutions might best reduce, or even prevent, problem behaviours from occurring. This data will also guide potential owners towards the species least likely to develop welfare problems in captivity.

In setting out his project proposal, Professor Cuthill said: “*This study has the capability to gain both species-specific and fundamental knowledge with the potential to improve the welfare of many millions of captive parrots. Our findings will have a number of widespread*

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UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK.
Tel: +44(0)1582 831818 Fax: +44(0)1582 831414
Website: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk>
Email: ufaw@ufaw.org.uk

benefits, including tailored practical recommendations for addressing welfare issues based on successful identification of biological risk factors, informed best practice and husbandry guidelines and suggestions for species that are pre-adapted to suit captive conditions.”

UFAW’s Chief Executive and Scientific Director Dr Huw Golledge said: *“It is important to understand which species might be most likely to experience poor welfare if their flight is restricted. This work has the potential to improve the wellbeing of millions of birds from a variety of species by testing our assumptions about the effects of captivity on different varieties.”*

It is expected that the extraction, analysis and interrogation of the data will take 18 months. The results will be shared with zoos and pet parrot owners, as well as disseminated via relevant media, an appropriate scientific journal and at national and international conferences.

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Note to editors:

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals’ needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and ‘best practice’ guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

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