

little dinosaur

Background

Populations of parrots have declined worldwide more than most species.

The 2018 State of the World's Birds, released in April, finds that nearly 40 percent of bird species throughout the world are in decline.

...as a whole, parrots face a higher rate of extinction than any other comparable parrot group. Indeed, 56% of all parrot species are in decline.

Parrot keeping has also been in decline for many decades. People still visit parrots at zoos and theme parks but these interactions are often at a distance.

Parrots play essential roles in understanding ecosystems and in understanding the evolution of intelligence. They also provide essential therapeutic support to people with autism and PTSD as well as companionship to the elderly.

Finally, parrots are creatures that are uniquely inspirational to people of all ages. This encourages a general love for the natural world.

Structure

The structure of Little Dinosaur would be a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, possibly paired with a for-profit arm if that were required to carry on any of the planned activities.

Mission

Little Dinosaur will seek to increase awareness of the plight of parrots in the world by fostering a closer connection to them. This could cover the full lifecycle of keeping a parrot. An example list is below:

- Encouraging parrot keeping
- Sourcing parrots
- Matchmaking
- Adoption
- Fostering
- Post-adoption and fostering services
- Vet bill assistance
- Education
- Curated product sales
- Pet sitting

- Classes
- Home visits
- Behavioral consulting
- Lost and found parrots
- Sanctuary
- Curate and fund research

Services

These are all potential services Little Dinosaur could provide. It could pick and choose individual activities or combine multiple activities for a more comprehensive approach.

Encouraging parrot keeping

How many people do you know that keep birds? The answer is most likely zero. How can we change that?

Inviting people into the living rooms of staff and volunteers where especially friendly parrots are present could turn many people into parrot owners. Even if they don't become owners, they will leave with a positive feeling about parrots. Also, bringing parrots to people in schools or nursing homes, among other places, would help spread the word.

Extensive use of social media could present a picture of what keeping birds could be like.

Sourcing parrots

Everything starts with securing a supply of parrots to bring into people's lives. While most people obtain parrots in pet stores (supplied by breeders), they can also be found in shelters and rescues, just like dogs and cats. The goal would be getting plugged in to all the sources of birds so that a compatible parrot can be found for anyone expressing interest.

An important part of this is bridging the gap between various parrot communities. These include rescues, pet stores, trainers, breeders, and shelters. While there is sometimes great animosity between them, all these groups can find some common ground.

Little Dinosaur would encourage people to consider a bird from a shelter or rescue but would honestly present the pros and cons of all options. The ultimate goal is turning more people into bird keepers.

Note that supply exceeding demand is likely. It would be up to Little Dinosaur to stimulate more interest in parrot keeping to counteract that. Also, parrots could be exchanged with shelters, breeders, and other interested parties to make sure every parrot finds a home.

Matchmaking

The goal is to match a family with an appropriate parrot. The sources of parrots mentioned above each have their pros and cons.

It's important to gauge the level of commitment a family may have to socialise or help a rescue parrot recover from what may have been a bad situation. For some people, this is an exciting challenge. For

others, they simply aren't up for it. New parrot owners may opt for the pet store route, but could perhaps be encouraged to try a rescue bird instead with the ability to send it back. Alternatively, it's great to have a second bird in a household so that bird could be a rescue.

Despite the supply of unwanted birds, it's a disservice to fail to match someone with a bird just because a rescue bird isn't best for them.

Adoption

For rescue birds, the ultimate goal is adoption. This is a long-term commitment for a family to make, especially for larger birds that live longer. An interview would take place to make sure they understand the basics and safety concerns. The matched bird would be brought in to observe the interaction with the potential new family. Should everything go well, the family would go home with the bird.

People of limited means could be helped with expenses such as cages and food.

Note that this type of interview is normal for a shelter, but significantly less arduous than what is employed by bird rescues, which typically have an application, an interview, a 3 hour parrot care class, and a home visit. It's no wonder they are overburdened with parrots.

Little Dinosaur can't afford to turn intelligent and caring people away because they don't know all the details of bird keeping.

Fostering

A great alternative to adoption is becoming a foster family. When birds are rescued or arrive at a shelter, they often need a short-term place to stay while waiting for adoption. Sometimes these can be the most challenging cases. The parrot may not be tame, have a behavioural problem, or be ill.

The goal would be for fosters to always be short-term and for Little Dinosaur to do everything it can to ensure this happens. Parrots could be exchange between fosters as needed. Note that fostering can be an alternative to adoption for people who are unsure they are ready to make a long-term commitment.

Post-foster and post-adoption services

After the adoption, you're on your own for the most part with shelters and parrot rescues. Little Dinosaur would use post-foster and post-adoption services as a significant differentiating factor. Once an adoptee or foster goes home with their parrot, they will always have support when they need it. Many ongoing services could be offered that cover everything a parrot keeper could need.

Many of these are described below.

Vet bill assistance

Just like with cats and dogs, parrots can run up expensive vet bills. And rescued parrots can sometimes have more serious health problems. Some people are of limited means and keeping a parrot can be a hardship if they become ill. We don't want large vet bills or the cost of preventative care to lower the quality of life for the parrot or strain the relationship with the family.

Little Dinosaur could insist on preventative care and pay for it on a sliding scale. In exchange, Little Dinosaur could also cover other vet visits on a sliding scale. Emergencies could also be covered subject

to the euthanasia policy described later. Re-homing a bird where expense is an issue would also be considered.

It should be noted that a large number of parrots surrendered to shelters are for economic reasons. Why not prevent an agonizing decision for a family and trauma for the parrot by providing financial assistance?

Education

Caring for a parrot is a learning process and it starts before you even get a parrot. Little Dinosaur should make itself available to educate fosters and adoptees before and after the process. Anyone wanting to learn what it means to be a parrot keeper should get the information they need.

A website or app could provide science-based information that is available for everyone. Fosters and adoptees could have access to chat, email, and phone services. This could potentially be a paid service with some level of free access. Low income people could be exempt.

An already existing project is Free Range Parrots, a blog that encourages keeping parrots in a way that provides them with freedom to be themselves.

Curated retail sales

There's an opportunity to sell hand-picked products for the parrot community. This could be food, toys, cages, or anything else. The internet has virtually no well good parrot stores and the general pet stores just sell whatever crap their distributors can get. There is no curation involved. Pet owners always worry they are buying safe and engaging toys and other products and this could be a way to generate income as well.

Pet sitting

There are lots of pet sitters, but few have parrot experience. The ones that do have little beyond just filling seed and water cups. Parrot need attention and also people that can assess their health or administer medications if needed. Many people pursue this as a sole career with cats and dogs.

Little Dinosaur could have an opportunity to be the place to go for pet sitting. Perhaps one could be on staff and part of the income could go to the non-profit.

Classes

Advanced classes could be offered for a fee. For example, a professional instructor could come in and teach a parrot training course and money could be charged to fund it and make a return.

Home visits

For families that already adopted or fostered parrots, home visits could be done for a fee or a sliding scale for those with lower income. Perhaps it could be a "lite" vet visit where the parrot's life can be assessed and changes could be suggested.

For example, an in-home visit at some point could serve as a great point to educate people further about their parrots. We want people to integrate their parrot into their family and not to return it because they don't understand something about parrot keeping. Happy customers talk to their friends.

Parrot behavior consulting

Anything from learning tricks to unlearning bad behaviors can be trained using a method called operant conditioning. Credentialed parrot consultants make excellent income and it could be a decent revenue generator. As always, a sliding scale could be employed. There is also the opportunity to train parrots for events, shows, or petting zoos. Like with pet sitting, a behaviour consultant could be on staff and some income could be generated from their work.

Lost and found parrots

People that lose their parrots have no unified place to go. There's a hodgepodge of websites, shelters, rescues, Facebook pages, and Craigslist. If Little Dinosaur could be highly visible as place to go for parrot-related matters, it could easily be the place for lost and found parrots.

Additionally, retrieving found parrots from rooftops or whenever they may be could be a valuable service.

Sanctuary

There is a tremendous need for a parrot sanctuary in the Bay Area. A sanctuary would be a place for parrots that aren't suitable for adoption to live out their lives. Some examples of unsuitable parrots:

- Parrots with behavioral problems that have not been able to be corrected
- Sick parrots that need ongoing daily medical attention
- Parrots that need special accommodations due to physical problems

A sanctuary could simply be a piece of bare land where an indoor/outdoor aviary is built and someone to check in on them. It would need power and water and due to land prices and potential for noise, it would likely have to be fairly remote.

Even if space were rented, this would be a significant financial outlay. But it would provide an incredible service to parrots that have nowhere to go but aren't suitable for euthanasia.

Curate and fund research

There is a lack of research into pet parrots and how to care for them. The bulk of the research being done really is by processed parrot food manufacturers and their results generally say "buy our products" so it's not super useful.

The research that exists is difficult to comprehend. Free Range Parrots demystifies the research but more work needs to be done. Little Dinosaur could also fund research into companion parrots, either itself or contributing to known researchers.

As an example, a comprehensive nutritional survey of all popular parrot food products could easily top \$10,000. This has never been undertaken. What a shame.

Philosophies

Staff

In an area with expensive cost of living and people work long hours, it's difficult to have an organization that consists only of volunteers. Organizations consisting entirely of volunteers tend to be operationally inefficient and generally more chaotic as there is a lot of turnover. You need a small number of people that consider the organization a job, rather than something to do with their spare time.

A mix of mostly volunteers plus a small paid staff is often the most efficient and is what shelters like Peninsula Humane Society do and they have great success. Additionally, there could be some compensation to volunteers for specific activities that support fosters or adoptees or travel costs for transporting parrots and equipment.

Get the word out

People don't know about resources for parrots and getting the word out would be one of the top strategies of Little Dinosaur. The organisation should be synonymous with parrots and even non-parrot keepers should know their name. Little Dinosaur should help them or point them to the right resource. Social media would be an obvious resource to leverage. Cute pictures and videos of parrots can go a long way to informing people of the existence of Little Dinosaur.

Heavily leverage technology

The website (or app) for Little Dinosaur should be a one-stop information resource for potential and current adoptees/fosters. It should show all available parrots for adoption, parrot care information, and provide easy ways to engage with staff and volunteers.

Staff and volunteers would use an internal version of the same site so that no one person needs to be relied upon for important bits of information. Information about all fosters and adopted parrots, dates, notes, history. Everything that Little Dinosaur needs to do or has done needs to be logged.

Organizations run by all volunteers tend to not be very savvy technologically and fall back to phone calls, emails, chaotic Facebook pages, and mailing lists to manage incoming and outgoing parrots. This is very inefficient and leads to a much lower adoption rate compared to animal shelters that are well run.

In addition to the website, social media would be employed used to publish available parrots, highlight the progress of foster parrots as they get ready for adoption, as well as provide education. Little Dinosaur should make its name known by everyone in the parrot community as well as vets, pet stores, zoos, and potential parrot owners.

Euthanasia

Ending the life of a sick or injured parrot is a difficult decision but the suffering of the parrot must be above the suffering of the owner. Parrot rescues and some vets and staunchly anti-euthanasia, which not only prolongs the suffering of parrots but can drain a rescue economically. If a parrot is suffering and it's likely to be long-term, euthanasia is the answer. It's one big thing we can offer parrots that not available to them in the wild.

One system employed calls for making a list of the 5 things a parrot loves to do the most. If they can only do 2 or less of them anymore, then it's time to euthanise them.

Income

There are plenty of opportunities to transition from a donation model to a mixed model that uses revenue from the following activities.

- Matchmaking services, including sharing income with breeders and pet stores for larger or rare birds.
 - Adoption fees. These could be on a sliding scale based on income.
 - Exclusive chat, email, and phone support for adoptees and fosters.
 - Finding lost parrot services.
 - Sanctuary could earn money by selling space to those that want their parrots to live out their lives there. Also, people may call for care of their parrots in their wills.
 - Donations to fund parrot research, possibly for specific diseases afflicting an owner's parrot.
 - Income from patented products coming out of parrot research.
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Expenses

Paid staff

5 people at an average of \$35/hr

Vets

This is often the largest expense of any parrot rescue. Based on other animal rescues, a very rough estimate appears to be about \$1,000 per parrot per year. I expect this is very skewed by extraordinary measures on a small number of parrots, but assuming 100 parrots per year, that would be \$100,000.

Economic assistance

Little Dinosaur should offer reimbursement for foster families or economic assistance for financial hardship or low income families. I would estimate that to be about \$25,000 per year, especially since this area is relatively wealthy,

Facilities

Storage facilities might be necessary for supplies or cages, perhaps \$5,000 per year. Any other facilities would be quite costly and would be difficult to estimate. For example, if there were to be an adoption center or foster center, even in a low rent district, I would expect something on the order of at least \$60,000 per year. It may not provide enough benefit to justify the cost.

If a sanctuary were to be pursued, land for sanctuary were to be purchased and a facility were built, that would be a very large outlay, perhaps \$500,000 or more depending on the location. Sanctuary space

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could perhaps be rented as an alternative and would not need to be done in a first year. But this would be a great long-term goal.

Total

Conservatively, that would be about \$380,000 per year at a bare minimum. There is also the matter of having a cushion during the startup phase and also so that fundraising doesn't end up dominating over parrot care until Little Dinosaur matures enough to hire someone to handle it.

Conclusion

Even if only one of the proposed activities were carried out, parrots would benefit by getting the word out about their plight. But many of them could work together to have a measurable impact that could spread beyond the Bay Area.