

The Avian Practitioner's Role in Conservation

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Veterinary surgeons with special interest and training in avian species are well positioned to be involved in wildlife conservation. These include: presentations, education, intake, triage, treatment and rehabilitation of wild birds and participation in “recovery programs” of endangered species.

Although one might assume that spending time and effort is a drain on one's resources and cash flow, the “good will” generated by providing pro-bono service generates income by attracting clients and the public to the surgery. It is an excellent ethical way to advertise.

Educational opportunities are daily events. Clients presenting feline patients are a “captive audience” for discussions on the benefits of house confinement. Not only is this a benefit to the longevity of the cat and there for more years for us to provide service to the patient but curtails feline hunting activity. If not killed out right by the cat and if bitten, it is estimated that 90% of bitten birds die from *Pasturella* septicemia even if started on anti-microbials in a timely fashion.

Members of the public contacting the surgery need advice on capturing, supporting, feeding and transporting injured and orphaned birds to the surgery for evaluation and care. Trained support staff can provide this information. If appropriate after evaluation and possible treatment birds can then be transferred to trained “carers” for ongoing maintenance until released.

Volunteering to visit and speak to classrooms of children is a most productive educational activity. Sensitising children to conservation, wildlife care, the “natural world” and veterinary medicine and it's involvement helps to set up youngsters as “junior conservationists”. They also go home and tell their parents about the visit and many of these families become clients of the practice.

Speaking to service groups, such as Rotary and Lions, not only increases awareness of conservation but also may generate economic support for projects as well as encouraging members of these groups to volunteer their time and services.

Lecturing to classes of carers and students sharpens one's own skills. “Teach what you need to learn most!”

Injured and orphaned wildlife presented by the public or a government agency to the surgery for evaluation, care and treatment can be viewed as taking up valuable time or of great value

to the practice and practitioner. I would suggest that the latter is true. Taking in wildlife , in my experience, has been a very successful public relations activity generating new clients for the practice. People appreciate the service , especially when it was their cat or car that did the trauma, as the person quite often feels guilty.

Working on wildlife provides an excellent opportunity to practice and hone skills that can be applied to private patient care. Experienced practitioners, new graduates and students can all benefit from doing this. The high number of creatures requiring euthanasia may be deemed as failure, but is actually a humane act.

The opportunity to participate in a recovery program of an endangered species utilizes all our skills. Advising on facility design , nutrition, health evaluation, disease prevention and the like draws on many aspects of our training and skills. Treating sick and injured individuals as well as providing necropsies provides service to the recovery program. Our efforts can make the difference between success and failure.