

Risk Management and Multiple Companion Flocks

Category: Companion Parrot Lifestyle

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I've been asked quite often if I'll "give rides" on my motorcycle. I always decline. It's one thing for me to take chances, that's my choice and my price to pay for the end result. But for me to gamble with someone else's future, that's not right. I'm a firm believer in my rights to take any chances I deem acceptable for myself, but I won't include others in that decision. I knew that was a solid choice the day I was hit by a car. My Ducati and I went down, but no one else. The accident wasn't my fault, but I knew the chances of being a rider. A head injury was the cost.

What's this got to do with parrots and other companion animals? Common sense and risk management. I was hit in 2006, back before healthcare and insurance was massively broken or completely scary. It's 2015. I don't ride anymore. Not because I am not a good rider. Not because I don't trust my bike. I stopped riding because of the state of healthcare and it's dismal promise of taking care of me. I don't trust that part of the equation anymore. I was forced to change my risk management because the environment and implications changed. Modification by observation with common sense and clear risk management requirements is what we do with our money and health in a general sense every day.

It's easy to look at our Companions and realize the risk management that needs to take place for and with them as well. The better we know our companions, and the more honest we are with the general risks of cohabitation it should be easy to create rules and simple practices for safety. It just requires an honest heart to what the word accident means. An accident is simply an unintended result of actions or choices not planned nor corroborated to create that result. Generally "accident"™ is applied to negative happenings.

We have two dogs and eight fully flighted parrots. The way our house is laid out structurally and the way we live daily has these companions mixed all day, every day. It's our job to set the limits and rules of space sharing. Kirby our IRN is a floor walker. So is Snickers our Macaw. Two floor walkers isn't a big deal with 2 dogs when a human is in the room directing traffic, and keeping the traffic flowing on different sides of the room. But all birds stay off that floor all day long if I'm working. I'm working in the very same room, but my attention is divided between phone calls, writing and a bird or two and Felix hanging on me. So no Birdie Walkabouts. Sounds simple enough, because it's common sense. Sharing a home is spacial understanding.

What of the videos online of birds singing next to dog bowls while dogs are eating? Or a parrot grabbing the face of a cat, or how about that one where a parrot is feeding spaghetti to a dog? There are hundreds of videos online featuring parrots and cats/dogs/lizards and yes, a snake. But these aren't cohabitating examples. These are videos on the internet featuring extreme moments for shock value and monetization. Who would ever put a physically weaker parrot at the mouth of an eating dog? There is no reason for that risk at all. But the cost is huge. What of the cat and African Grey parrot? The parrot continually tries to clasp the cat's face, and in the end fails. Why put that risk into action? Cat soliva and claws carry bacteria that will kill a parrot. That's fact. One scratch, one simple light bite (if there is such a thing) will most certainly cause an infection and an infection for a parrot is a serious issue, if not fatal.

It's about risk management. It's about common sense and the knowledge that whatever "cute" value comes from moments of exposure and chance are absolutely not worth the chance of injury or death. It's just not worth it. Yes, I do believe my parrots and my dogs will coexist successfully because we set rules of engagement, if you will. Snickers still seeks out Bruiser our Golden Retriever to push him around. This is only when Dad is home, next to Bruiser and when Snickers has yet to get to Dad. Typical Macaw. So Dad makes sure he's right there to scoop up a bossy Scarlet Macaw. And I during the day, make sure Snickers is off the floor at all times.

You can not autopilot cohabitation. You can't assume they will all be fine, because they have always been fine. A very large percentage of parrot parents also have dogs and cats and other companions in their home. It's the nature of us, we love our animal companions. I won't preach not to create an animal dense environment. I have that environment. But I will strongly suggest that much like harnesses outside, we must actively enforce risk management laws. We've had both our dogs since they were mere weeks old. They are now 14 and 12 years old. The 12 year old has no teeth, and has a bit of a time seeing. The 14 year old is loosing his hearing, has painful joints and walks like an old man. Not anyone's idea of predators to be sure. In all their years our dogs have never injured, bit, snapped or hurt a person or creature. They have had a benign lifetime. But I still won't leave them alone with our parrots, who can fly away. The risk is not worth the lapse of concern.

To this day I don't think the girl in the Mercedes that hit me intended to slam into me. I know because she was far too busy talking on her cell phone. I saw her chatting as my helmeted head hit her driver's side window. It was an accident. Who passes a motorcyclist on the right while the motorcyclist is signaling and turning right? It was an accident.

Next time there is that moment of risk you normally entertain between your companions, consider the possibilities. Are they really, no matter how remote, worth the chance? If that driver had chosen to wait to use her phone, that would have made all the difference in my world. Our parrot's rely on us to make all the differences in theirs.

Together we can give every parrot everywhere, a happy home!

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