

**Carol and Keith Kendall** share their 4,000-square-foot house in rural Virginia with 11 parrots of various sorts, including two types of cockatoo and a peach-faced lovebird. Carol, 57, does bookkeeping at home; Keith, 60, works for the county. They bought their first bird, who no longer lives with them, on a whim in 2004. Most of the current flock were rescued birds. The Kendalls spend about five hours a day on the parrots. The good-night ritual alone takes two hours. These are long-lived animals; cockatoos can easily outlive their owners. Ms. Kendall, who has four grown children, is now arranging to have the birds cared for when she's gone. "This is going to be the rest of my life," she says, "and I am ready, willing and able to do it."



#### FAMILY DINNER

"When we have dinner, we'll pick a few birds to bring in, and we'll give them a bowl or plate and let them snack off that while we are eating. If there is something they can pick off our plates, we'll let them take what they want. Some people might be grossed out by that, but birds don't have liquid in their mouths, so it isn't disgusting in any way. The birds can eat almost anything. They enjoy chicken, beef and turkey. They also eat organic pellets and fruit and Cheerios. And a couple of times a day I will give them a treat, like a peanut butter cracker. The only things they can't have are avocados and chocolate. Pure chocolate isn't good for them. And I have been told that avocados are like poison for them."

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



#### SHOWERED WITH AFFECTION

“Putt Putt loves the shower. He puts his wings out and flings the water around his head and dances around. I guess it feels like rainfall to him. I take him in there now and then. I make the water comfortably warm, but not like I’d like it. And it has to be a gentle shower. We have a rain-head shower that’s pretty gentle.”

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



#### **CLEANING ROUTINE**

“We have eight birds living in the sunroom. It’s 14 by 56 feet — almost a quarter the size of the whole house. It needed to have lots of windows. I put down laminate floors for cleaning purposes. I clean the cages on Saturdays, and it takes 12 hours. Then I have to clean the floor and the ledges around the sunroom. And their toys. They poop all over everything. The bigger birds don’t poop as often as the smaller birds. The birds’ respiratory systems can’t take a strong cleaner. Bleach would kill them. I use a product called Poop-Off, which is made to clean bird cages.”

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



#### **STAYING GROUNDED**

“This is Scarlet sitting on a desk chair. The birds don’t fly. The vet comes every three months to give them checkups and clip their

wings. They can float a little, but they can't go far. I spend about \$3,500 a year on veterinary care, about \$1,000 on their toys, \$4,000 on their food. It's more than \$8,000 a year total for bird maintenance."

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



### TALKING THE TALK

"That's Ms. Poncho. She is a big talker. They all use English words, but she sounds like she is carrying on a conversation. She has even cursed at my husband. I believe that the birds do know exactly what some of the words that they use mean. When someone walks in the door, they say, 'Hello.' Or they'll ask, 'What are you doing in the kitchen?'"

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



### TV IS FOR THE BIRDS

"Sometimes we will bring the birds out to watch television with us. We'll have a group family thing with all of them. It isn't a daily thing, because it is a lot of work. They don't always want to come in at the same time, and we give them crackers and the crumbs get everywhere. It's fun every now and then, though. Most of them like to watch TV. Those that don't will look out the windows. Sometimes there will be a little spat, and you have to separate them. One might crawl into your lap. They don't get too jealous that

often, but they consider themselves part of a flock, so they see us all as family. For the most part they accept the attention another might get.”

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



### PARROT APART

“This is me in bed with Sunshine. He’s a cuddler. He loves to get under the covers. Cockatoos are very affectionate with people. But Sunshine hasn’t been around other birds before, so he wants to be dominant and he attacks them. That’s why he lives alone in the family room. He lived upstairs in my office for a while, and he would jump down or hop all the way up. He loves the stairs. He fell down a couple of times, but then he figured out how to use the rails to help him.

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times



Pollo and Petey live in the office now. Pollo [on the left] is blind, and one of the other birds could kill him. Petey takes care of him. If he thinks there is danger, he’ll yell at Pollo to move.”

Photo: Catherine Ledner for The New York Times