

By Chris Sheldon [csheldon@mail.thewesterlysun.com](mailto:csheldon@mail.thewesterlysun.com)  
The Sun Staff  
January 2009

HOPKINTON – Foster Parrots Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary at 87 Woodville Alton Road was the subject of a British Broadcasting Company documentary that will cover the establishment of trusts for pets such as cats, dogs and parrots throughout the United States.

On Saturday, the BBC sent a cameraman along with New York attorney Rachel Hirschfeld, a primary authority on establishing legal pet trusts, to show how the sanctuary is a place where people who can no longer care for their parrots or other animals can turn to for help.

“While many of the animals residing at the expansive Foster Parrots Sanctuary complex come from disastrous circumstances, there is an increasing trend of responsible owners who are concerned about the long-term welfare of their valued family friends and companions should they become too ill to care for them or die,” said Public Relations Director of the Foster Parrots Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary Joseph Correia. “The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary in Hopkinton is one of the very few facilities anywhere that offer a permanent care plan.”

Correia said Hirschfeld was instrumental in bringing the BBC to the Sanctuary and is a pet lover herself.

“I think of animals like children and members of your family,” said Hirschfeld. “I want to raise awareness that people can find continuing care for their pets.”

“If you know your bird is going to outlive you, you know it will need continuing love and care.”

Hirschfeld and the BBC have previously traveled Manhattan, Hollywood and Los Angeles to film organizations like the Sanctuary that take in other animals such as dogs, cats, reptiles, horses and rabbits. Hirschfeld has appeared on TV shows such as The Today Show, and Nightline where she spoke about a document she created called a Pet Protection Agreement.

“Wills are not always enforceable, but you can’t change a Pet Protection Agreement,” said Hirschfeld. “You can’t write instructions for care in a will because it only allows you to disperse property, and pets are considered property.”

She said for \$80, any pet owner can set up a Pet Protection Agreement which is simply a questionnaire which asks the owner specific questions about their pet and what care they would like it to receive after the owner dies.

Hirschfeld is also spearheading legislation in New York that will ensure bird cages are correct sizes, that the birds are brought into the country legally and that the buyer is educated about bird care before they purchase their pet.

Ann and Ed Snape of Hingham, Mass. were also being interviewed by the BBC. The couple found out about the sanctuary through word of mouth and thought it would be the best place to give their two cockatoos, Henry and Humphrey.

They were forced to give up their birds 18 months ago, after Ann suffered from a lung disorder which is adversely affected by bird dander. The couple had Henry for 21 years and Humphrey for 17 years, and said it was hard to give them up.

“We couldn’t just sell them because they’re like members of the family,” said Ann. “It was a wonderful idea to set up the trust with and we’ll help them in the future if they need it.”

Ann and Ed can visit their birds anytime they wish and that she still loves them. However, she said that if she knew how intelligent the birds were, she would never have gotten them. She said they require a tremendous amount of attention and agreed with Hirschfeld’s belief that people should be educated before they buy a bird.

Co-Director of Foster Parrots Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary Karen Windsor also agreed that people need to understand what to expect before they make their purchase.

“Birds are very difficult companions,” said Windsor. “They can live between 50 and 100 years compared to about 14 to 15 years for dogs, and they can be loud and destructive.”

Windsor said the sanctuary’s retirement program was set up because birds are the third most relinquished pet but are the third most popular behind only cats and dogs.

The sanctuary is home to 475 birds and several other species including Patagonian Cavies, tortoises, rabbits and porcupines.

Only five of those birds are endowed at the sanctuary, two of which are the Snape’s cockatoos. Windsor said the sanctuary receives over 25 calls a week from people looking to give up their birds, but they can’t possibly take them all.

The sanctuary opened in May 2008 following a ribbon cutting ceremony given by Dr. Jane Goodall, Rhode Island Representative Brian Patrick Kennedy, and Massachusetts Senator Robert Hedlund and is New England’s first non-profit permanent care facility for parrots and other exotic wildlife. It is funded by private donors and organizations.

There are plans to expand to expand the facility and add more outdoor aviaries for the birds in the summer.