



# birdcalls

The latest news from the National Aviary



## NATIONAL AVIARY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2008

Members and friends of the National Aviary, now's your chance to pick the bird that you think has what it takes to lead the National Aviary and its flock. With construction of a new theater, exhibit changes and lots of planned improvements ahead in the next few years, this is a critical election year. Read the candidate profiles and vote for your favorite at [www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org).

### PENGUIN for PRESIDENT

**Leadership philosophy:** Despite my appearance, I don't see things in black and white. In fact, my favorite color is gray – the color of a good fish dinner. I'm able to see things from other points of view – when you hang out with hundreds of brothers and sisters and you share responsibility for caring for the eggs and the babies, you tend to learn to compromise. I'll make sure that all the birds at the National Aviary are equally represented, from the little fruit eaters to the raptors.



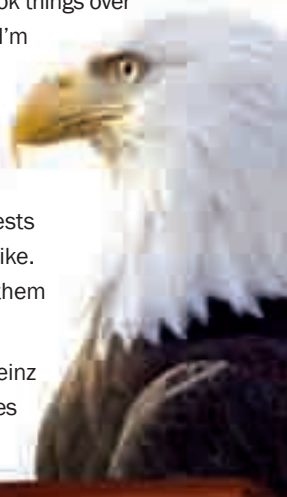
**Priority actions:** Construction of a penguin exhibit for the National Aviary. Sure we like coming out for the FliteZone™ bird show and other special appearances, but it's time we penguins had more than our 15 minutes.

**Personal dream:** A Seafood Watch card in every wallet and me, center ice at Mellon Arena, swimming in a 2009 Stanley Cup in front of thousands of screaming fans.

**And your opponent?** That eagle is a loner – he has no clue about caring for the flock. Sure he's all noble and regal looking, but don't be fooled – inside he's all about the meat.

### EAGLE for PRESIDENT

**Leadership philosophy:** I'm not afraid of a challenge, but I weigh the risks before taking action. You won't find me making hasty decisions that put the National Aviary into a bad position – I look things over carefully before swooping in. But when I do go for it, I'm deadly accurate and you can count on me to get the job done. Family values? I'm your bird. Bald eagles mate for life, and we add on to our nest each year.



**Priority actions:** Getting an eagle into the outdoor bird show. It's time for National Aviary guests to see what a real close encounter with nature is like. You think the vultures are cool? We eagles make them look like pussy cats.

**Personal dream:** Sailing over the crowds at Heinz Field during a Steelers/Browns game. Big Ben tosses out a pass; I swoop down, talons outstretched, heading straight for the Cleveland defense and I... oops sorry. Got carried away there. Sailing over the crowds at Heinz Field. Yeah, that's it.

**And your opponent?** All this whining about oil spills. I say grow up, stop building your nest on the ground, and get some real wings like the rest of the birds at the National Aviary.

★ ★ ★  VOTE  ★ ★ ★

**PENGUIN**

Check out my campaign videos at [www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **ELECT** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**EAGLE**

Check out my campaign videos at [www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org)

# Dancing, Somersaults, Eating on the Fly, They're All part of his Aviary Job

by Linda Wilson Fuoco/Post-Gazette

Dave Miller knows how to make flamingos dance. At the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, the daily dance of the pink birds is always a big hit, but audience participation is needed. Mr. Miller also knows how to get children and adults to “honk” and clap to get the dance started.

Mr. Miller, a Chartiers resident, trains and cares for the birds who live in the Wetlands of the Americas exhibit – one of the most popular because the birds fly free in the wetlands habitat, which is a happy sight for bird-lovers.

Aviary visitors walk along a paved path, while Mr. Miller and other Aviary employees discreetly watch birds and people to make sure that everything goes well. “Limit your movements,” he tells visitors, “because the birds are watching you.” His comments come as a group of children, moms and dads assemble at 1 p.m. for the regular afternoon feeding, which is also a kind of educational bird show.

“One of the best things about my job is getting personal with each and every bird in here,” Mr. Miller tells the audience. “Every day we have to feed every bird in this room to make sure they are healthy. The best way to do that is to call each one.” More than 100 birds live in the aviary wetlands, representing 50 species. Mr. Miller knows all of them, calls them by name and recruits children and adults to help. While he tells the audience what will happen during the show, birds circle closely over his head because they know what’s coming. Mr. Miller stands next to a food cart that contains live wax worms and meal worms, fruit, sunflower seeds and raw fish that are about the same size as canned sardines.

A young boy named Ian is the first to volunteer to pick up a slimy fish. Following Mr. Miller’s instructions, he holds the fish above his head. An Inca tern flies over, gently grabs the fish and flies on without even slowing down. More hands go up as children and adults volunteer to help with the training and feeding.

A golden conure named Woodstock comes when she is called and perches on a tree branch. She gets a treat for that. Mr. Miller notes that conures are parrots and “parrots are so agile, they can do somersaults on the branch.” Woodstock does her somersault, much to the delight of the audience, and gets a sunflower seed.

“Training helps to keep our birds healthy,” Mr. Miller says. He calls Woodstock and gives her a dose of liquid vitamins. “For that, she gets a big treat,” he says, giving her a green grape.

“All of our training is done through positive reinforcement.” Other birds are weighed – and rewarded – during the show to make sure they have not lost or gained weight.

“Have you ever seen flamingos dance?” Mr. Miller asks. Members of the audience leave their seats to follow him to the railing that overlooks the wetlands pond.

Five flamingos look up at him expectantly. “We are going to honk like flamingos to try to make them dance,” Mr. Miller says. At first, honks from the people were few and far between and a bit on the timid side. Mr. Miller gets the children and adults to step up the honking, and then he leads them in a round of rhythmic clapping.

The flamingos start by picking their feet up and down. Then, nearly in unison, they spread their wings, wave and end by doing what looks like a group bow to the audience. The dancing is actually a ritual the birds use to attract mates, explains Erin Estell, manager of community outreach and education. The Aviary flamingos do not breed because flamingos need to be part of a very large flock to breed and reproduce, she says. The flamingos are rewarded with food from the audience, while a young brown pelican named Ralph looks on. Mr. Miller supplies the kids with fish, which the children throw to Ralph. “Every experience these birds have with the public makes their life a little more interesting,” Mr. Miller says.

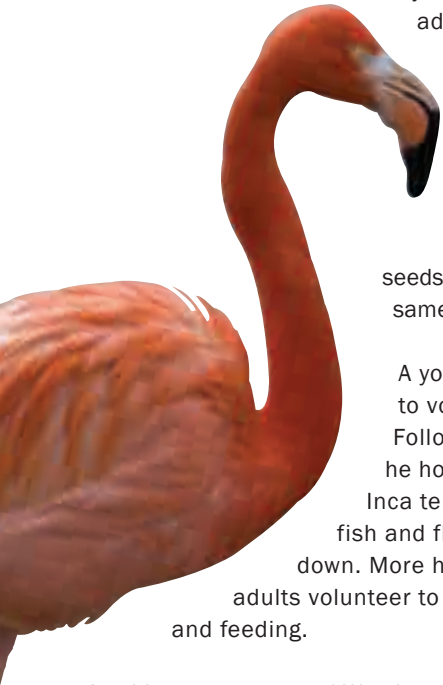
He has worked for the Aviary for nearly eight years, and he clearly loves his work. “I never have a bad day with the animals. Every day I feel fortunate,” says Mr. Miller, who attended Robert Morris University and Miami University. “I have a degree in filmmaking. I wanted to make documentary films about animals. I came here to learn more about animals and I never left. As a filmmaker, I wanted to educate the public about animals. Here, I do that every day.”

For information about daily feedings, outdoor shows and other events, see the Aviary Web site at [www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org) or call 412-323-7235. Linda Wilson Fuoco can be reached at [lfuoco@post-gazette.com](mailto:lfuoco@post-gazette.com) or 412-263-3064. First published on June 15, 2008 at 12:00 am



Trainer Dave Miller gives Woodstock, a golden conure, a treat after the bird voluntarily ate his vitamins during a feeding session at the National Aviary on the NorthSide.

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Droke/Post-Gazette



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## 'Meet a Patient' at the National Aviary's New Bird Hospital Annex

National Aviary visitors have a new opportunity to get close to the birds and gain unique insight into the advanced healthcare offered to the more than 200 species that call the Aviary home.

Each day at noon, veterinary staff bring one of the birds out into the hallway for "Meet a Patient." Staff members talk with guests about the featured patient of the day, and answer questions about the challenges of treating birds that range in size from tiny songbirds to meat-eating raptors.

Looking into the window, you can't miss seeing Smiley peeping out at you in the closest crate. A trogon with special needs, Smiley became critically ill when he was just a fledgling and for the first few years of his life battled a liver disorder. He now is fully recovered except for his delicate feet, for which he is given special padded perches, foot soaks and salves. Smiley enjoys his lookout position up front where he can keep an eye on visitors passing by.

Another bird usually seen at the window during exams is Gracie, a geriatric chestnut-mandibled toucan. Guests will enjoy getting

an extreme close-up of her candy colored feathers and amazing beak. Gracie has a common but serious toucan lung and liver disorder. She needs regular medicines, x-rays, and blood tests to stay healthy. Under this ongoing care, she continues to feel great and enjoys playing in the window with her toys.

"The 'Meet a Patient' program is a special opportunity for visitors to get to know the Aviary's birds as individuals and to hear their stories," says Dr. Pilar Fish, National Aviary Director of Veterinary Medicine. "We believe it will give our guests a greater appreciation for birds while raising awareness of bird healthcare. We also hope that it inspires some of our young visitors to pursue a career in animal care or veterinary medicine."

*Meet a Patient takes place daily at noon and is included in general admission. Meet a Patient is sponsored by Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield.*



## Fall Happenings

For more information or to reserve your spot, call 412-323-7235 x209

### Hawk Mountain Weekend Trip

Join the National Aviary on an exclusive trip to Hawk Mountain, widely regarded as one of the best sites in the eastern U.S. to watch birds of prey on migration! The trip also includes a visit to Powdermill Nature Reserve and its Avian Research Center. Children over the age of 12 are welcome.

**October 11th 8:00 am through  
October 12th 8:00 pm**

Accommodations, transportation, and some meals included. Advanced registration required.

### Attracting Backyard Birds

Come to the National Aviary on October 25th to learn how to turn your yard into a backyard habitat! You will also get to meet backyard birds of prey and discover why they make wonderful neighbors.

**Saturday, October 25th  
10am – 12pm**

Members \$8, Non-members \$13. Admission is included. Space is limited.

**CHECK OUT OUR VIDEOS  
AT WWW.AVIARY.ORG**



## Eco Tours

**An international birding adventure awaits!**

The National Aviary invites you on an excursion to Costa Rica with the world-renowned Classic Escapes on November 10-18, 2008. With its abundance of forests, concern for conservation and truly astonishing wildlife, Costa Rica is one of the top destinations in the world for travelers interested in birds and nature. Encounter incredible mammals, extraordinary plant life, and a myriad of bird species. Zipline through treetop canopies, travel by gondola, visit the active Arenal volcano, and shop the unique markets of San Jose. The adventures are endless. For detailed information and itinerary, visit [www.classicescapes.com](http://www.classicescapes.com)

Travelers with Classic Escapes receive first-class treatment – from deluxe accommodations to a professional birder and naturalist who escorts guests through every part of the journey.

Contact Classic Escapes representative Amanda Ortiz at 1-800-627-1244 ext. 20 or by email [amandao@classicescapes.com](mailto:amandao@classicescapes.com) to book your trip today!

### Training 101

In this workshop, you can discover how we train the behaviors you see in our indoor and outdoor FliteZone™ bird shows. You'll leave the National Aviary with all of the basic tools you need to start training almost any animal – including your dog, cat, parrot, or even spouse!

**Saturday, November 15th  
10am – 12pm**

Members \$8, Non-members \$13. Admission is included.