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One-Winged “Rio” Passes His Exam With Flying Colors

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Letter from the editor

In the land of publishing, editors come and go with the frequency of the seasons. They acknowledge the efforts of their predecessors, and they talk of following tough acts, passing batons, and filling large shoes.

Bellwether has not had a new editor for 30 years. Editor Helma Weeks retired in August 2004 after building a Communication Office designed to meet the information needs of audiences as varied as alumni, the media, and grateful clients. She presided over *Bellwether* as it grew from a small newsletter to a magazine enjoyed by more than 8,000 readers across the world. She interviewed subjects and wrote feature articles, managed a cadre of writers and photographers, and oversaw a major redesign in 2003. Under her watchful eyes, *Bellwether* became the informative, effective publication it is today.

It is now up to me as *Bellwether's* new editor to ensure that we continue to publish a high-quality, well-designed magazine delivering content that matters to our readers. My goal is to

provide relevant information about the evolving field of veterinary medicine and to confront issues that impact us all. I hope you will look to us, either in print or online, for captivating features, informative articles, and the latest news as the School fulfills its missions of teaching, research, and healing.

You'll see changes in the months ahead. My plans for *Bellwether* include streamlining our pages, publishing four times a year, and using effective visuals to enhance our look. In addition, I want to know how you, our readers, think we can improve. I encourage you to give us feedback, and to complete the Reader's Survey you will find in our next edition.

I am tremendously excited to have this opportunity, because I believe in the incredible potential of *Bellwether*. And while I can honestly say I have a tough act to follow, I accept the passed baton and I will do my best to fill some really big shoes.

—Gail Luciani

About our cover



Photo by Sabina Louise Pierce.

When "Rio," a ten-year-old blue and gold macaw, couldn't spread her wings to their full four-foot span, Christine Phelps knew something was wrong. After all, this was Rio's favorite trick to perform for the

hospitalized children she visited as a therapy bird. In mid-May, Christine noticed a lump on the carpus ("wrist") of the bird's left wing after she had fallen from her perch. The mass seemed to grow rapidly, and Rio appeared to be in pain.

After Christine brought Rio to the Ryan Hospital, **Jeleen Briscoe-Reitz, V'02**, a resident in the Special Species Clinic, had radiographs made of Rio's left wing. The bird had a large bony mass at her right carpus that indicated osteolysis (degeneration of bone tissue through disease). The mass seemed to extend up her radius and ulna bones, both of which were fractured by the mass. A biopsy revealed the tumor to be malignant. Christine's first priority was to make Rio more comfortable, so, after talking it over with the doctors, she opted to have the wing amputated.

Rio went through surgery well and was obviously more comfortable as soon as she woke up. She was dancing, singing, eating, and climbing all over **Fred Wininger, V'05**, who worked on

her case. Rio did have a bit of an adjustment period after the surgery, though. She seemed to realize something was different and would turn away whenever anyone tried to look at the surgical site. It took her a few months to spread her other wing again, but by November she was back in full swing.

"Rio has been a fantastic patient—definitely one of my favorite (her owner has willed the bird to me upon her demise)," says Dr. Briscoe-Reitz. "She was the ultimate ambassador for parrots while she was here—she stepped up onto everyone, was very friendly, and has always been a performer."

Macaws are long-tailed, brilliantly colored parrots native to Central and South America—and blue and gold macaws are among the largest and showiest. Because of their even temper, intelligence, and beauty, macaws like Rio are among the most popular pet parrots in the world. With an average lifespan of 50 years, the blue and gold macaw often will outlive its owner.

Blue and gold macaws have been seen in many countries throughout Central and South America. Unfortunately, they are currently disappearing from many areas—due largely to hunting, trapping, trade, and habitat destruction. For pets, blue and gold macaws are regularly bred in captivity.