



18th October

Revisit Avian Behaviour and Welfare Assessment for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens

As per the plan outlined in the previous assessment performed on 9th August, I visited the Dunedin Botanic Gardens on 18th October to do a follow-up assessment of kākā Charlie.

The report from 9th of August is now an appendix to these findings and is still relevant to my overall assessment of Charlie.

The following are my observations from this site visit:

Distance Exam

S/O: BAR. Charlie was sitting on a perch when I arrived at 11:15am. She was just observing what was going on around her and did not appear distressed or bothered. At 11:39am she moved along the perch to the left side of the aviary, swung for 3 seconds but then proceeded to move to one of her favoured spots at the front of the aviary amongst the browse. I have seen her use this spot a fair amount since she arrived in Dunedin. There is reasonable sunlight, depending on time of day and weather, as well as decent browse for security so she can feel safe sitting there and watching what is happening in her environment. She sat there and preened, napped and watched me. Bling was relaxed and just hanging out and doing some exploring at the back of the aviary. The neighbouring kākā were not extremely active either and were just relaxing, roosting, preening or out of sight. Occasionally the pair in the aviary on the right of Charlie and Bling would fly to the front perch, check me out and then retreat to the back of the aviary. Charlie's wing was held normally (for her) the entire time I was present, I saw nothing that concerned me with regards to her pre-existing injury. I stopped my observations at around 12:30pm. Charlie was still roosting in the browse at the front of the aviary when I left.

Further to the above, I decided to watch some of the video footage that has been captured and posted on a facebook page which is dedicated to returning Charlie to Te Anau.

I watched the videos with no sound as I didn't want the videographer's commentary to influence me. I needed to form my own unbiased opinion of the behaviours filmed in the clips without any external influence.

I have chosen which videos I watched mostly at random however I am targeting longer length clips in order to get a better, more comprehensive impression of behaviours seen in the videos. I have seen some of the shorter clips and because they generally tend to cut out

right at critical points in a “negatively perceived behaviour” I have found them to be less useful due to confirmation bias.

The longer clips are more accurate for me to quantify/interpret as there is sufficient time on either side of a perceived stereotypy/alleged negative behaviour so I can give a more accurate opinion on said behaviours and potentially an opinion on what stimulated the behaviour. I have used these videos as an extra tool, on top of my own observations made when I visited the aviary recently, to deliver my expert opinion as an avian and wildlife veterinarian regarding what is currently happening between Charlie and her mate, Bling, currently housed in the aviary with her.

15th October 2024

Video link: <https://fb.watch/vhvMugOjiO/>

I picked this video because I was concerned about the associated caption and wanted to watch the video to make sure Charlie was ok because the reports of distressed weaving and worsening wing sag are definitely of concern to me as Charlie is an out-patient under my care.

Caption: A heartbreaking live update. Distress weaving. Wing sag. Harassed and abused by the frustrated male. An absolute disgrace and a disaster for Charlie Girl Kākā.

Video Description:

Video starts with Charlie hanging from the roof of the aviary for around 1 minute. After 1 minute of hanging on the roof Charlie returned to the perch adjacent to the playboard. Bling is noted on the perch closer to the front of the aviary. At approximately the 3 minute mark Charlie moved to the side of the aviary and hung there. I note both wings held in a normal position for Charlie, taking account of her pre-existing injury. While Charlie is on the side of the aviary Bling can be seen in the background on a perch chewing some branches. At 4:23 Charlie moves off the side of the aviary and returns to the perch by the puzzle board. She proceeds to move down to a lower perch and then Bling is observed running towards her. What I observed next at about 5:23minute appears to be normal mating behaviour as Bling hops on Charlie’s back however the filming is immediately disrupted at this point. The camera pans back up to the perch reasonably quickly however the mating display has ceased however both kākā are still on this middle perch. Bling approaches Charlie but quickly leaves. Charlie remains on the middle perch and is just observing what is happening around her. At 7:10 minutes Bling approaches Charlie again and hops on her back and displays normal mating behaviour. This only lasts around 4-5 seconds before he hops off again.

At 7:40 minutes Charlie is looking in the direction where Bling disappeared off screen as if she is trying to find him, even taking a step in his direction. At 8:37 minutes Bling approaches Charlie again and hops on her back to mate with her once more. This continues until 9:14 minutes before Bling flies off. Charlie remains on the middle perch until 12:43 minutes and continues to observe her surroundings. The camera operator is swaying a lot at this point making it quite difficult to watch. At 12:43 Bling enters again and flies up to the high ladder perch at the front of the aviary. Charlie just watches him from her spot on the

middle perch. At 13:13 Bling flies down to the floor of the aviary. Charlie remained on the middle perch until 15:03 minutes, she appears calm and relaxed in my opinion. Bling flies back into screen at this point and lands again on the front ladder perch. Charlie edges towards Bling, remaining on the lower perch. Bling flies away at 15:13 minutes. Charlie climbs up to the upper middle perch as Bling flies back in at 15:21 minutes and lands on some perching just in front of her. The filming gets quite erratic at this point until 15:50 when Bling appears to move towards the perch Charlie is sitting on. He walks away from Charlie and once again the filming gets erratic and hard to watch. The filming now focuses on the back of camera but it's hard to interpret as there is a perch obscuring the view of Charlie. This continues until 16:40 where it appears Bling returns and Charlie heads up to the higher perch by the puzzle board. The filming returns to the aviary and not back of camera at this point. Bling is flying around and Charlie is now on the roof of the aviary displaying swaying behaviour (16:51). The filming returns to back of camera, this time easier to observe Charlie as no perches obscuring the view. Again the wing drop is symmetrical. At 17:13 Bling enters and intermittently leaves and re-enters the shot but doesn't get close to Charlie. Charlie continues to swing or hang from the roof of the aviary. She displays brief periods of swinging followed by directing her attention to the camera operator and staring in the general direction of the filming. At 20:23 she moves to the side of the aviary and uses the mesh to assist her to climb to the floor of the aviary. You lose sight of her at around 21:15. It's hard to tell whether she is just behind the browse or is now below the privacy barriers on the outside of the aviary. At 21:30 she pops up into view again onto the browse at the front of the aviary. She uses the mesh on the front of the aviary to move across to a different piece of browse and at 21:44 disappears below the privacy barrier. At 22:03 Bling is observed flying up from the ground onto the lower perch in the aviary. At 22:40 Charlie appears again to the right of the screen on the browse at the front of the aviary. Charlie sits at the front of the aviary occasionally chewing the wood or just observing her surroundings until 25:54 when she disappears below the privacy barrier again. At this point Bling can be seen flying across the top of the aviary. He using the front ladder perch and the side of the aviary to stop between bouts of flying. Charlie reappears again at right of screen at 26:46 perching on the browse at the front of the aviary. Blings flies to the back of the aviary and lands on the nest box but then immediately flies across to land on the mesh at the top front of the aviary. He pauses briefly before flying down the middle perch at the back of the aviary. The filming is not focused on Charlie at this point but at around 27:08 you can see she is not sitting at the front of the aviary again but there is no way of knowing when she left this spot. She doesn't reappear in the video and the clip ends at 27:27 with Bling having flown to the middle upper perch.

Interpretation:

The caption of the video claims there is a dramatic wing sag. I see bilateral wing sag with no majorly concerning difference between the two wings when Charlie is hanging upside down. When she is perching or climbing she holds her wings normally for her and her pre-existing injury. The cause of the "wing sag" is likely due to gravity especially as it is generally symmetrical. Charlie is receiving meloxicam daily for arthritis and I did a health check on her on 1/10 and was satisfied that all was well with her physically.

Findings from clinical notes on 1/10/24:

S/O: BAR and very curious. BCS 4/9 - lean but to be expected as is normal for her as she doesn't have much pectoral muscle mass due to reduced flying ability. Feather condition good. Wings feel ok. No deterioration in preexisting healed left radius/ulna fracture. Old healed fracture in left tibiotarsus feels ok as well. No other injuries or issues noted.

Mating behaviour displayed between Bling and Charlie is normal, a female parrot will not allow the male to mount her if she is not receptive to breeding. I observed multiple mounts with one lasting around 30 seconds. It is important to note that distressed animals will not display normal mating behaviour (see previous welfare/behaviour assessment in appendix for more information regards this).

Swinging upside down is the classic presentation of the pre-existing stereotypy. Out of the 27:27 long video Charlie was observed hanging on the roof for 4 minutes and 39 seconds however this entire time was not dedicated to swinging, she also hung on the roof and looked around as well as often staring directly at the camera filming her after short bursts of swinging. Charlie's attention was eventually redirected and she retreated to the ground of the aviary.

Overall conclusions of this video: I see two parrots using the aviary to the full extent i.e. moving around, flying (in the case of Bling), engaging with enrichment, observing their surroundings with interest, and displaying normal courtship and copulation behaviour. Bling is Charlie's old mate from Te Anau so these two have a pre-existing connection. The mating behavior in particular is very positive and in my opinion as it suggests that neither Charlie nor Bling are in distress. Distressed birds do not display normal patterns of mating behaviour.

22 October 2024

I picked this video due to the claim that DOC are wilfully mistreating native parrots. There are also claims that other birds are in distress and that Charlie's pain is worsening each week. I wanted to see if anything had changed in this video from the earlier videos as claims of increased pain are extremely concerning to me.

Caption: Doc is wilfully mistreating our native parrots and making excuses instead of providing proper care. They ignore her former keeper who rehabilitated her and cared for her for ten years. Keep visiting Dunedin and documenting all the birds showing concerning behaviours. Keep advocating, keep sharing, keep speaking out. Nothing will change until enough people speak out against DOC. They act like this is a world class facility full of happy birds but so many are in distress. Charlie is suffering and in pain and worse every week.

Video link: <https://fb.watch/vo2p4KvDzr/>

Video Description:

This video starts with Charlie hanging from the roof of the aviary and swaying/pausing to observed surrounds/occasionally preens and then sways again. I note both wings are dropped symmetrically which indicates no worsening of the issue with the pre-existing

injury in her wing. She is still on daily meloxicam to provide analgesia for arthritis. At 5:45 she moves to the right side of the aviary and hangs there until 6:18 when she returns to the top of the aviary to start swaying again. At 9:53 she moves to the side of the aviary again and then the video ends.

Interpretation:

This is the longest I have personally seen Charlie display the swaying/hanging behaviour however I have not spent days on end observing her which is why these videos are quite useful in that regard. Ideally we need a 12-18 hour time budget to determine how much of Charlie's time is spent engaging in this behaviour as this will give us more information rather than short video snippets. I still advocate for an independent observer (not myself, not the videographer and not someone who knows Charlie and who Charlie knows) to spend at least 3 full days documenting this type of information with no emotion, just pure observations of her behaviour and time spent engaging in said behaviour.

16 October 2024

I picked this video purely because it's longer than 10 minutes. There was nothing specifically concerning in the caption associated with the video.

Video link: <https://fb.watch/vo6xf-aRAY/>

Video Description:

The video starts with Charlie sitting in her favourite spot at the left front of the aviary in some browse. At 2:58 she moves to the front of the aviary and uses the mesh to move below the privacy barriers. Bling can be seen flying across the aviary between the back perch and the top front ladder perch. At 4:04 Charlie is still off display but Bling lands on the lower front perch and looks at the ground. Charlie reappears suddenly on the right front of the aviary at 4:09. Bling flies to below the privacy barrier and Charlie uses the front of the aviary to climb to a spot in the top right corner. She spends some time observing what Bling is doing on the ground. At around 4:40 she continues to use the mesh to head over to the top middle perch. The filming gets a bit erratic but does pan out and at 5:05 you can see Bling sitting on the lower perch towards the left of the aviary and Charlie has settled on the right of the upper ladder perch. Bling appears to have something in his right foot that he is eating. It is normal for parrots to hold objects/food items in their feet to aid with eating and or investigating said object. At around 5:42 Bling starts to chew on the browse he is sitting on. At 5:58 he flies to the ground and is off display below the privacy barrier. Charlie starts to move around a bit on the top perch and at 6:16 she moves to the side of the aviary onto the mesh and appears to start moving towards the lower part of the aviary. It is hard to determine what exactly she does as the filming pans away from her a little. Bling reappears at 6:22 and flies to the spot that Charlie was previously occupying on the top ladder perch. At 6:35 Bling flies to the back of the aviary. Hard to see where Charlie is as the filming is a bit erratic with movement. At 6:39 Bling flies to the front upper right perch again. He flies between this perch and the back of the aviary a few times. I can't see Charlie at this point, I assume she is below the privacy barrier somewhere but because the filming was quite erratic it was hard to track her. At 7:46 Charlie appears at the lower left of the aviary confirming she was indeed below the privacy barrier as suspected. She climbs up onto the

browse and starts to chew it. Bling is still flying between the back and front upper perches. Charlie is not paying Bling any attention, she sits at the front of the aviary and interacts with the browse, observes what's going on outside the aviary and just generally appears calm and relaxed. At 10:09 she starts to move again but then the filming gets really erratic again. At 10:19 Charlie retreats once again below the privacy barrier. At 11:25 Bling lands on the lower middle perch and runs across to the right of the aviary and uses the mesh to climb to a higher spot. Charlie reappears bottom left at 11:38 and returns to perching and chewing on the same browse as before. Bling continues to fly at the top of the aviary. Charlie continues to ignore him. At 13:33 Charlie once again moves below the privacy barrier. She reappears in the spot at 14:11. She looks like she has something in her beak which she then uses her left foot to grab so she can chew the object. At 14:22 Bling lands on the lower back perch and the runs back and forth along the perch. Charlie watches him but doesn't display any distressed behaviour or signs she is trying to retreat/hide from him. At 14:46 Bling climbs the right side of the aviary again to get to the top perch. The video ends with Charlie still sitting in the browse on the lower left and the aviary and Bling flying between the back and front perches at the top of the aviary.

Interpretation:

Nothing in this video is suggestive of birds in a distressed state. I see two Kākā using the aviary to the fullest i.e. exploring, flying and moving between perches which are provided at multiple different heights. I know there is good provision of enrichment items and food on the floor of the aviary so this is likely what Charlie, in particular, kept disappearing to go and engage with.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Charlie appears to be engaging with her environment as well as can be expected for a parrot with pre-existing stereotypical behaviour. It is difficult to still quantify if the stereotypical behaviour is worsening and what might be the trigger for the behaviour due to incomplete daily observation records from the curator. The reason for this is due to the presence of another independent observer who is, in my opinion, making very biased videos and emotive claims about Charlie, and other parrots at the DBG aviaries.

My recommendation still stands that the curator needs to be given time and space to form a bond with Charlie. The ability to do this has been disrupted the past 5-6 weeks which has slowed down progress in this regard.

As mentioned under the video where Charlie swung/hung for a prolonged period of time; Ideally we need a 12-18 hour time budget to determine how much of Charlie's time is spent engaging in this behaviour as this will give us more information rather than short video snippets that generally have little context and unfortunately a lot of bias. I still advocate for an independent observer (not myself, not the videographer and not someone who knows Charlie and who Charlie knows) to spend at least 3 full days documenting this type of information with no emotion, just pure observations of her behaviour and time spent engaging in said behaviour.

I am very encouraged to see how much Charlie moves around the aviary and interacts with enrichment items as well as the display of normal breeding behaviour where Charlie will allow Bling to mate with her. This is indicative that she is comfortable sharing the aviary with her old mate. Bling does appear to get frustrated at times if Charlie ignores him for long periods however, due to poor record keeping in Te Anau it is difficult to quantify if this is normal for these two parrots.

Lastly, I would just like to counter the repeated false claims on social media that Charlie is not receiving pain relief for her arthritis. Charlie has a prescription for metacam which has been active since she arrived in Dunedin and is a continuation of the prescription issued when she was in Te Anau. **She receives metacam on a daily basis.** As it is spring we are currently working with ^{9(2)(g)(ii)} to find the lowest possible dose that will still manage Charlie's discomfort. She is due for a repeat blood fibrinogen test which will help us determine if the current dose is working. Depending on the results we may have to change the dose rate again.

The welfare of Charlie, as well as all the other birds at DBG, some who have been targeted on social media as being distressed and in a poor welfare state, in particular kākā Cleo, kākā Jimmy, and Kea Rotoroa, is of the highest priority. All of these birds are under my care and I am in regular contact with ^{9(2)(g)(ii)} regarding them as well as performing my own observations of them intermittently throughout the year. I have the utmost confidence in ^{9(2)(g)(ii)} ability to care for these birds appropriately and to notify the DWH veterinary team promptly if she has any concerns.

s.9(2)(a)



Appendix – Previous Assessment

9th August 2024

Avian Behaviour and Welfare Assessment for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens

publicly available <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/oia-responses/2024/> Search for OIAD-4522



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