

# TEXAS A&M AVIAN HEALTH CENTER RECEIVES DONATION SUPPORTING NUTRITION RESEARCH

Story by Courtney Price, VMBS Communications

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The Texas A&M Schubot Center for Avian Health has received a \$250,000 donation from Harrison's Bird Foods to advance avian health research, with a focus on nutrition, and allow the center to hire a postdoctoral researcher to help lead projects.

The new research to be conducted by the Schubot Center will determine how different diets contribute to the overall health of birds, including parrots. The planned work will advance not only the understanding of nutrition for caged and pet birds but also for bird populations in the wild.

The Schubot Center was founded in 1987 to improve the lives of birds and their environments through research, teaching, and outreach. It is housed within the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (VMBS) and has a membership of more than 85 faculty, staff, students, and clinicians across seven Texas A&M departments and three colleges/schools.



(from left to right) Dr. EV Voltura, Dr. Bianca Murphy (Harrison's Bird Foods), Dr. Greg Harrison, Dr. Sarah Hamer, and Debra Turner (Senior Research Associate and Aviary Manager, Schubot Center).

*Photo by Alyssa Moore '27, School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences*

“We are extremely excited to be working with the professional staff at Schubot Center, the enthusiastic students, and with a group of long-term captive birds,” said Dr. Greg Harrison, the former first president of the Association of Avian Veterinarians and founder of Harrison’s Bird Foods. “Together, we have the opportunity to document the specific effects of diet in pet birds and be able to make scientific-based recommendations to the bird-owning public.”

“This new investment in nutritional research at the Schubot Center will allow us to take a comprehensive look at the health of birds exposed to different diets all in a controlled environment, including advanced bloodwork, microbiome analysis and even spectral analysis of feathers” said Dr. Sarah Hamer, the director and Richard Schubot Endowed Chair at the Schubot Center and a professor in both the VMBS’ Department of Veterinary Pathobiology (VTPB) and the Department of Veterinary Integrative Biosciences. “This donation will allow us to expand our center’s mission to improve bird health, and we are excited to engage veterinary students and undergraduates in all aspects of our center to provide them with unique training opportunities.”

As part of the donation, postdoctoral research associate Dr. EV Voltura will join the Schubot Center to help oversee part of the nutrition research.

“I’ve admired both Harrison’s Bird Foods and the work done at the Schubot Center for a long time,” Voltura said. “I knew that there was potential for an amazing research collaboration, and I was very fortunate to get to play a role in bringing everyone together.”

The donation will also fund additional nutrition studies focused on parrots led by Dr. Donald Brightsmith, also a VTPB professor and a member of the Schubot Center, in collaboration with Hill Country Aviaries and Harrison’s Bird Foods.

“We are excited to be working together to improve parrot diets,” Brightsmith said. “Many of the leading health concerns for captive parrots are related to diet, which is a similar issue in humans. Better diets means healthier parrots, so being able to combine the long history of nutritional products from Harrison’s Bird



Foods with VBMS researchers should be a win for everyone. We are also excited about the prospect of working with Harrison's on parrot conservation work and using their products to help rescued wild chicks and other parrots slated for release back into the wild."

Dr. Greg Harrison shows students how to conduct an avian wellness exam.

*Photo by Alyssa Moore '27, School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences*

Members of Harrison's Bird Foods visited the VMBS and the Schubot Center in mid-April to tour the center. Harrison gave an educational talk and demonstrated how to conduct avian wellness checks for Doctor of Veterinary Medicine students at the school.

"We were very happy to host Dr. Harrison and his team and are looking forward to continuing to promote avian nutrition and wellness together," Hamer said.

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