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**BIrd Bandit Nabs 'Chi Chi'**

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Vicki Warg's split-level home near Purcell Park stands as a tropical sanctuary to exotic creatures of the air and sea.

African grays, Indian ringneck parakeets, a stingray and a discus fish. Cockatiels, a blue and gold macaw and a dragon fish.

You name it, Warg probably owns it.

The 49-year-old purchasing manager at Sylvia's Pets on Neff Avenue has been an animal buff since she was a kid growing up in Harrisonburg. So it came as a shock to her that someone would break into her home and steal one of her prized possessions, a 16-year-old scarlet macaw named Chi Chi.

But Warg knows the financial reality behind these rare birds, which have amazing vocabularies and can fetch up to $3,500.

"It's a big business," said Warg, fondly recalling what made Chi Chi so coveted. "He sang 'He Left His Heart in San Francisco.' He could count to five. He would say hello, goodbye, and I love you."

Early Tuesday morning, Warg says, someone broke into her home at 305 Monument Ave. The thief, she explains, must have had inside knowledge of the home and known that the bird was kept downstairs in a cage.

"Whoever did it wanted the bird," Warg said, noting that nothing else was stolen. "They tried not once, but twice."

At about 4 a.m., her dogs started barking, waking Warg and apparently thwarting the thief's first attempt. About half an hour later, she says, "All I heard was the bird holler. I went downstairs within about six seconds and the bird was gone."

Warg's ex-husband, Bill Dovel, lives downstairs.

"The dogs started barkin' and I didn't think anything about it," he said. "Then they started barkin' again and I was hollerin' at them to be quiet. And all the while, somebody was stealin' the bird."

Warg, who thinks more than one person might be responsible, is offering a $500 reward for information that leads to the bird's safe return.

"We have our suspects," she said, "but we're not really allowed to say."

On Thursday, the Harrisonburg Police Department issued a press release describing Chi Chi as "red with yellow on the wings and approximately 3½ feet long."

"The parrot talks and sings very loudly," said Becky Teter, a crime prevention officer at the HPD. "He is very temperamental and will not adjust well to new surroundings. He will probably refuse to eat and his health may deteriorate very quickly."

Warg is concerned about her macaw's welfare, fearing that Chi Chi might have even suffered a heart attack when yanked from his cage. Needless to say, Warg expects the worst.

"I'd like to say good things, but I have my doubts," she said. "I don't think he's going to eat. I don't think they're going to take him to a vet."

In the meantime, Warg takes solace in Regis, gently petting her 6-month-old blue and gold macaw while pondering the fate of Chi Chi. "This is the only home he knows. The only family he knows. � I just want him returned. No questions asked."

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