

# Bird in a Cage

*When your color vision tires, you can see colors that aren't really there.*

## Try this:

- Stare at the red cardinal while you slowly count to 20. Then look into the birdcage. You'll see the faint, ghostly image of a blue-green bird.
- Try the same thing with the green parrot. You'll see the image of a faint pinkish-purple (magenta) bird.

## What's going on?

The ghostly birds you see are called afterimages. An afterimage is an image that stays with you even after you've stopped looking at something.

The back of your eye is lined with light-sensitive cells. Some of these cells are only sensitive to certain colors of light.

When you stare at the red bird, your red-sensi-

tive cells start to lose their sensitivity. When you suddenly shift your gaze to the white background, you see white light minus red light where the red-sensitive cells have tired out. White light minus red light is blue-green light. That's why the afterimage you see is blue-green, and in the shape of a cardinal.

The same thing happens when you stare at the green bird, but this time it's the green-sensitive cells that get tired. White light minus green light is magenta light, so you see the afterimage as a magenta parrot.