

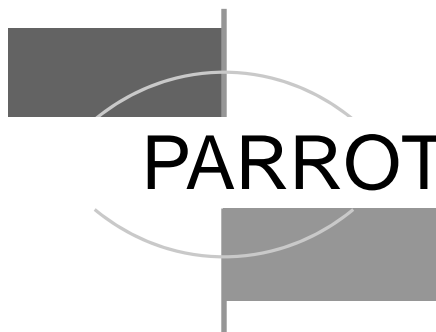
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Behavior Tips:

- Too much cuddling and petting can prevent normal behavioral development
- Interact dynamically with your bird
- Teach all birds to “step up”, “step down”, and to “stay”.
- Never hit, deprive, or otherwise cause harm to your bird.
- Don’t allow your bird onto shoulders. It encourages pair bonding and aggressive behavior.
- Allow your bird to “hang out” with the family as much as possible
- Relax and enjoy your bird’s company.

Inside:

Enjoy your bird	1
Talking	1
House breaking	1
Dominance	2
Taming wild birds	2
Behavior Problems	3
Confidence games	4
Behavior classes	4



PARROT BEHAVIOR

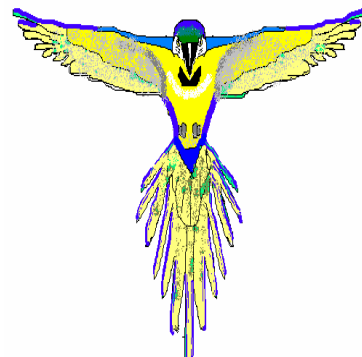
ENJOY YOUR BIRD

In our efforts to protect birds from infectious diseases, drafts, and other environmental factors, it is easy to put our birds into plastic bubbles. To sentence the bird to spend its entire life in a single room is not fair. They are intelligent, sensitive animals that deserve better. Have fun with them and they'll have more fun too.

It is advisable to have more than one area where the bird spends time. Get an extra cage for a different part of the house. Alternatively, a T-stand will suffice. If your employer allows, take the bird to work. Birds make excellent greeters for businesses and many customers get to know them well. Of course be careful that the

bird is kept where he/she cannot get into trouble or nip customers fingers! Take your bird for car rides. Many of them really love it. Bring them into the shower with you (there are perches made for the purpose).

The enjoyment you get from your parrots depends on how much you are willing to put into socializing them. Have fun and you and your parrot will both be happier.



Let your bird's personality take flight

TALKING

Teaching birds to talk simply involves talking to them. Start with short easy phrases and short frequent sessions. As the bird gains vocabulary they learn easier. Many birds can learn word associations or even more complex language skills. By using phrases in appropriate situations, birds will maintain more interest and also will learn to use them appropriately as well. Species selection is important since certain species are inherently better talkers, such as mynahs, African greys, Amazon parrots, and lorries. Some cockatiels are very accomplished whistlers.

HOUSEBREAKING

Many birds can be "housebroken". The principles of housebreaking a dog apply here but most birds have to "go" much more frequently. For most birds it will be at 10-30 minute intervals (shorter for smaller birds). Watch the bird to get an idea about the frequency. Select a place where droppings are allowed. The bird is not held or played with until he passes a dropping. A verbal command can be used (this is controversial). The bird is rewarded by giving him attention. Just before another dropping is due, the bird is put back on the selected area until a dropping is produced. Again success is rewarded by attention. This process is repeated whenever the bird is handled. The bird will eventually learn to go to the selected area. Care should be taken that the bird does not hold its droppings for extended periods as this may lead to medical problems in the urinary or intestinal tracts.



Intelligence and long life make parrots ideal long-term companions

DOMINANCE

Like dogs, parrots are social animals. In the wild these birds live in groups and establish social hierarchies (pecking orders). In the wild, the most dominant bird has greatest access to resources. In captivity, birds need the guidance of their human hosts to adapt to the home environment. Dominant individuals will not accept this guidance and therefore can become very unhappy and very unruly pets. Larger species of bird are more likely to develop dominance problems, but

even lovebirds can get an "attitude" at times. In order to avoid problems, several measures can be taken. First, all birds should be taught the "up" command and the "down" command (stepping onto or off of the hand, respectively). Second, birds should be kept at chest height or lower for greater control. Height gives a dominant bird greater confidence. Finally, the owner should accustom the bird to various types of handling, such as laying a towel on the back, handling the beak,

handling the feet, and extending the wings. These should be done gently but firmly. Start out with very brief sessions and extend the time gradually.

TAMING WILD BIRDS

Training (teaching a specific behavior) and taming (removing the fear of humans) of birds are important both for the birds' benefit and for improving their pet quality. Handfed birds often do not require any taming since they are imprinted on humans. On the other hand wild caught birds may take weeks of work to become tame. Patience and positive reinforcement are the crux of taming. The bird must be shown that there is nothing to fear from humans. Additionally they must learn that people are the source of food and social interaction.

Finger or hand training involves offering the finger or hand as a perch and rewarding the bird when it steps on. This is facilitated by rendering the bird flightless by clipping the

wings. Parrots climb with the beak and it is infuriating to them when the hand offered to them is jerked back when they reach for it. If you are afraid of being bit, get someone else to do the initial work with the bird. For large, aggressive hookbills, a stick or perch may be offered instead of a hand for obvious safety reasons.

An alternative taming technique is called towel taming. This involves restraining the bird with a towel in a normal perching position and scratching or "preening" the bird's head feathers until they settle down and eventually begin to enjoy the petting sessions. These sessions should always be short and should leave the bird wanting more. If the bird does not settle down within 3-5 minutes the session

should be ended and tried again later.

Both finger training and towel taming should be used and should be done away from the security of the bird's cage. This makes the bird look to the trainer for security. The combination of finger training and towel taming will result in a bird that will come to the owner and enjoy the attention and petting that it gets.

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Taming wild or frightened birds makes their captive life less stressful for them.

BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

As in any other type of pet, there are occasional behavioral problems. For birds, these inappropriate behaviors are usually abnormal sexual behavior, feather picking, excessive vocalization, biting or a syndrome called night panic. When dealing with any behavior problem it is helpful to start a log book of when they occur. When behavior modification is instituted the problem may gradually reduce over a period of time. Rarely will a behavior just suddenly disappear. By logging the frequency, duration, and severity of "offenses", this gradual decline in the behavior can be seen and it helps prevent discouragement on the part of the trainer.

NIGHT PANIC

Night panic, a sudden attack of fright at night, can usually be alleviated by providing a night light for susceptible birds, namely cockatiel mutations. Safe construction of the cage is also very important for these birds.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Sexual behavior, including masturbation, regurgitation, and aggressiveness, can sometimes occur in parrots. Some of these are quite natural and cause no problems other than a bit of embarrassment for the owner. Suppressing normal behaviors can lead to other behavioral disorders. Occasionally, the behavior becomes harmful to the bird or

dangerous to the owner. In these cases the behavior may be controlled by environmental or hormonal manipulations or by behavior modification.

SCREAMING

Excessive vocalization, while sometimes a normal behavior, often is a plea for attention. Some birds call to keep contact with "flock" members. In the wild, losing contact with the flock can be fatal. Keeping up a constant whistle, hum, or song while moving out of sight can prevent excessive calling by the bird. Remember that birds are social creatures and need a certain amount of attention. Do not sentence them to a life of isolation. It also helps to provide the bird with a distraction, such as food or a favorite toy, before the time when the vocalization begins. It is important that the bird is not accidentally rewarded by giving it something to "shut it up". Just as important is positive reinforcement for good behavior. Make sure to say "Hello" or scratch the bird's head at times it is being quiet.

FEATHER PICKING

Feather picking is a problem for which a veterinarian should be consulted. Many times a medical problem is the initiating cause. A full medical workup is indicated. If no physical abnormalities are found, then the feather

picking is characterized as behavioral or psychological. Behavioral feather pickers may be treated medically or with behavior modification techniques at the discretion of the veterinarian. Normal play, exercise, and preening are especially important in affected and in susceptible species (African Greys, cockatoos).

BITING

The strong hooked beaks of parrots make biting a serious problem. Parrots bite for several reasons. The most common of these in wild caught birds is fear. A bird that bites out of fear must be tamed and socialized so that it no longer fears humans. The second reason is dominance. If a bird feels that it is dominant to its owner, then it feels it has the right to bite as a way of disciplining the subordinate. If this is suspected, measures to re-establish dominance over the bird are warranted. The other common form of biting aggression is territorial aggression. This usually occurs in mature birds. Parrots will fiercely guard their nest areas, mates (or perceived mates), and offspring. In these cases, the victims must be integrated into the bird's flock so that the bird does not see them as threats. The wings of aggressive birds should be clipped to slow down the attacks and to reduce the bird's "feeling of power" over the people it attacks. The intended victims should work to establish some respect from the bird.



Screaming is often a plea for attention

birds are social creatures and need a certain amount of attention. Do not sentence them to a life of isolation.



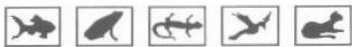
Continuous confinement can lead to serious psychological problems.

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We're committed to making the bond with
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HOUSE TOUR GAME

Theory:

In the wild, fledgling birds follow parents and flock mates around their environment. By seeing the response of the adult birds to various stimuli, they learn what to eat, what to fear, what to avoid, etc. This game is intended to do the same thing.

How to play:

The bird must be tame and must know basic step-up command. Carry the bird on the hand and walk around the house. Point out everything you see and say its name. Most importantly, be very calm. By seeing that you are not upset, they learn not to be. Don't forget to introduce all of the human and animal household members. Also, do not neglect sounds. Take the bird near the source of some sounds and do the same exercise. The bonus of this game is that talking birds often learn how to identify people and things in the house

COLOR GAME

Theory:

Parrots are very visually oriented and intelligent creatures. This game helps stimulate their curiosity.

How to play:

Take pieces of colored construction paper. Say the color to the bird. Repeat for all of the other colors. Keep in mind that the bird sees colors slightly differently than you do, but can still distinguish them well. More advanced lessons will ask the bird what color. For even better results, do this game with another person in front of the bird. When the person gets the answer correct, he/she is lavishly praised.

maintaining contact. If they cannot hear the response of the group, they think they have lost contact, then they call louder. It is often said to never respond to a bird's vocalization. Imagine the following scenario. You are at home alone and you hear someone come in the door. You think it is your spouse so you call out his/her name but you get no response. You call again and still no response. At this point you start to panic and get ready to call 911! This is what we are doing to the bird when we ignore their calls.

How to play:

In order to take the flock contact initiative away from the bird, announce where you are as you move about the house. This is especially true if you are out of sight. Try whistling, humming, singing, or talking as you go.

WHISTLE GAME

Theory:

In the wild, parrots vocalize to maintain audio contact with members of their flock. Being alone puts birds at greatly increased risk of predation. Survival depends on

BIRD BEHAVIOR CLASSES

The importance of the connection formed between a bird and its owner cannot be overemphasized. As social creatures, birds need the interaction with their flock members, which is the family that they live with. We are seeing increasing numbers of birds given up by their owners because they have become unacceptable pets. Worse, many of these birds are sold as breeders so that we are selecting for the worst of behavior instead of the best.

To help build and maintain this

relationship, we offer an avian obedience class at All Creatures Animal Hospital. Normal and abnormal behaviors are discussed and then a number of exercises are done with the birds. This also offers the bird an opportunity to get out of the house, interact with other people around, and become better socialized.

In order to protect the health of the enrolled birds, we request that birds be examined and have a new bird workup prior to starting the obedience class.

Ask one of our staff if you would like more information about bird obedience.