



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Bird Whisperer

(ASNSW Meeting - March 2005)

(Brief description: Notes taken by our editor, Paul Henry, for the April 2005 issue of the Avicultural Review.)

Presented by Jesse James

Jesse gave a talk about the training of pet or companion birds.

Jesse was born in England and later immigrated to South Africa then again to Canada. This is where his parrot training skills were honed.

The name bird whisperer originated from a horse trainer who Jesse met, who specialised in non-violent training of horses. He thought if this man can train horses this way I can train parrots the same way.

At this stage no one he spoke to knew what made parrots tick or why they behaved as they did. It must be remembered that the majority of parrots are only first generation domesticated.

One of the first things a person must understand before buying a large parrot for a companion bird is that they may live for eighty years or more, longer than the owner in the majority of cases.

From an early age they develop the mental age of a human child of about four years, but this does not change however how long they live.

Basic Requirements

Before you buy a large companion parrot make sure you can tolerate these conditions.

The major requirements, including the bad habits, of companion parrots are:

Do you have room for a large cage?

- Can you put up with the bird being noisy?
- Can you put up with the mess?
- Can you put up with the destruction?
- They are extremely high maintenance.
- They can't be kept in a cage all the time.

Grooming

The first requirement is to trim the wing of all companion parrots, this is a must for training. The wings must be trimmed so the bird can't gain height when it flies. The preferred method is to trim the last seven primary flight feathers so the bird can glide or fly to the ground without injuring itself. Use a sharp pair of scissors. The birds toe nails will also need trimming at times. Do not use nail clippers, use a Dremmel drill with trim attachments. If you do accidentally cut the blood vessel in the toe nails, dip the nails in corn flour to stop the bleeding. Never trim the beak.

Some Do's

- When you first purchase a bird give it 24 hours to settle down before taking the bird from its cage.
- The step up command is the most important command a bird can learn. It's also the first training goal.
- Most parrots come from equatorial countries so they love bathing, but never spray them with water. They do however love going in the shower with you.
- Where you situate the cage in your house is very important. It must be in an active part of the house (kitchens are good). People think that a bird wants to be near a window, to look at the trees or nature, they don't give a damn – they want to be with you. Place the cage in a corner with at least one side against a wall; birds are always afraid of being attacked from the rear.

Some Don'ts

- **Height:**
Never let a parrot be higher than you, or your bird will become the dominate one. Never allow the bird to sit on your shoulder, carry it on our hand in front of you.
- **Birds love melodrama:**
They take far longer than a child to calm down.
- **Noise:**
If you have a noisy household you will have a noisy bird.
- **Aggression:**
You can't be aggressive with the bird. Avoid looking the bird in the eye; this can be upsetting to the bird as this is a form of aggression.

Bad Behaviour

There are many ways a bird can develop bad behavioural habits. Any of the following points could lead your bird into bad behavioural habits.

- They want your attention whether it's through good or bad behaviour, just like a young child.
- Screaming is probably the most annoying habit a parrot can develop. It is normal for a parrot to screech for 2-3 minutes both morning and night. If your bird starts to screech excessively take the bird into a separate room, such as a bathroom, by itself. Place it on an unfamiliar stand and allow it to stay in this room by itself, for several minutes, no more. Then bring your parrot back and make no fuss of him/her. You only have to do this three or four times for the behaviour to modify.
- When trimming a birds feathers use a sharp pair of scissors to trim the flight feathers neatly, if this is done poorly a bird may develop the habit of feather plucking to alleviate the discomfort.
- Anything you give a parrot will be destroyed. So make sure it is not given anything which you will not accept being destroyed.
- Take no nonsense from your bird, give it an inch and it will take a mile. It is like a child – if it is allowed to get away with bad behaviour it will repeat this behaviour. But you must never hit or physically hurt the bird.

Certain behaviour is innate to a bird; you will never change this behaviour. Some examples of this behaviour are:

- They will never step onto anything unless they are certain that it is safe.
- A parrot will always test the security of your finger before stepping onto it. So never take your finger away when the bird mouths your finger with its beak. It is just testing the safety of your finger. If you pull your finger away this will start the habit of biting.
- Parrots need uninterrupted sleep at night. Cover half the cage with a blanket during the day so that at night the remainder of the blanket can come down and cover the whole cage.

Diet

In the old days we used to give sunflower seed and monkey food (peanuts). I'm a great believer in pellets but they can be very boring on their own. So give fruit and vegetables every day, but remember parrots are different in their taste so you may have to experiment to find out what your bird finds most enjoyable. Also parrots are great chewers, so branches or sturdy toys are good for chewing on.

Remember birds are normally lactose intolerant so no dairy products. Also no alcohol or junk foods like chips or crisps which are high in salt.

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