

Five Easy Tips for Solving Parrot Behavior Problems

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By Barbara Heidenreich

Parrots can provide us with great joy in our lives. However, at times their behavior seems completely inappropriate for the home. Sometimes these unwanted behaviors can lead to desperate efforts to find a new home for a beloved parrot. While some unwanted behavior may be too difficult to modify without help, many behaviors can be addressed by applying the following simple principles.

1. Learn how to read and interpret your bird's body language: This is how your bird communicates to you. Notice how your bird holds his feathers, how his eyes appear, what he is doing with his mouth, etc. during different times of the day. Decide by what you see if your bird is comfortable, relaxed, showing a fear response, or aggressive behavior, etc. Try to remember what body postures go with what "state of mind". Use this information when you interact with your bird. Try to avoid doing things that cause your bird to display behavior that indicates he is scared, nervous or aggressive. Focus on interactions that seem to promote a relaxed and comfy bird. For example, if you try to pick up your bird and his body language shows that he might bite, respect what he just told you with his body language and try again later. You can also try to persuade your bird to look forward to stepping up by using a treat or reward.
2. Find a treat that works: Having a food treat that your bird really likes to use to reward good behavior is an excellent tool for modifying behavior. The treat is your way of communicating to your bird that what he just did was "good". An easy way to identify a good treat for your bird is to feed your bird his normal diet in the morning. Notice what food item your bird eats first. That is probably his favorite food. Take that item out of the regular morning feeding and use it to reward your bird for good behavior throughout the day. Many parrots also enjoy sunflower seeds, peanuts, nuts, grapes, etc. Make sure to break big items into smaller pieces for more opportunities to reward your bird and to help avoid feeding your bird too many treats
3. Don't make your bird do anything he doesn't want to do: This may seem like common sense, but it is often easily overlooked. Reading your bird's body language is very important when trying to do this. Recognize when your bird is telling you "no" with his body language. Instead of continuing to force the issue, try to find a way to get your bird to do what you want using positive methods, like using treats and rewards for steps in the right direction. This will help build a positive and trusting relationship between you and your bird.
4. Ignore undesired behavior, reward desired behavior: It is easy to react to undesired behavior when we see it. However, this isn't always an effective way to modify that

behavior. For example, if your parrot screams for attention, walking over to his cage to yell at him can actually be the attention your bird was looking for. This can teach your bird to scream to get you to come over to his cage. If instead you wait until the bird stops screaming, or does something else, and then go over to your bird, you will teach him “quiet” or other behaviors will get the desired attention.

5. Teach your bird to do what you want by rewarding little steps of progress towards the desired behavior: It may take longer to teach your bird to do something using positive methods, but in the long run both you and your bird will be happier. Instead of forcing your bird to do whatever you would like him to do, break the behavior down into little steps in your mind. After your bird performs each step, give him a treat. Eventually you can get to the desired behavior and the entire process will have been positive and fun for your bird. For example you can teach your bird to step up by rewarding him for taking a step towards your hand, for lifting a foot, for putting a foot on your hand, for putting both feet on your hand, for allowing you to move your hand and so on. By doing this, you can create a bird that looks forward to doing what you ask him to do. Applying these basic principles can help shape your birds behavior. This can lead to a long, happy and harmonious relationship with your bird. Give it a try! Want more information on solving behavior problems? Try the book “Good Bird! A Guide to Solving Behavior Problems in Companion Parrots” or “The Parrot Problem Solver. Finding Solutions to Aggressive Behavior” or the new DVD "Understanding Parrot Body Language" by Barbara Heidenreich. Visit <http://www.goodbirdinc.com/> to order.