Good Bird® magazine!

Volume 3-2 Summer 2007

Empower the Human/Animal Bond with Positive Reinforcement

Avian Aging

One Week to Nail Trims

Teaching your Parrot to Play

Lots of Stuff for Your Birds to Do

Breaking the Old Rules of Parrot Behavior

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Photo credit: Shane Hancock, Nicholas Bishop

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"Empowering the human-animal bond with positive reinforcement"

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Front Cover: *A Slender Billed Corella making his presence known. Photographed by Dean Moser of www.shadesofeclectus.com. Bird model courtesy of Tex Gagliano.*

Back Cover: *A Wood Stork in flight in Florida photographed by Matt Edmonds. To purchase photographs by Matt visit www.mewondersofnature.com*

From the Editor's Perch

THE NOT SO SILENT REVOLUTION

I was not looking to become a cat lady. But I might have ventured down that path inadvertently. When I first moved into my house I noticed a small cat hanging around the house. She would immediately bolt anytime she saw me head into the yard. One day I thought "just for fun" I will see if I can get that cat to approach me. Armed with some canned tuna, I tossed a trail of tidbits. Within three days I could touch her, within 2 weeks she hopped in my lap. Now a year later she would sit in my lap all day if I would let her. She meows a lot. So I named her Juliette after a very chatty furniture salesperson I met who would not stop talking.

I have done pretty well to limit it to one cat in the yard. But I do have an oasis in the Serengeti. I have a pond that quenches the thirst of, I suspect, many a neighborhood feral cat stuck out in the Texas heat. One day I looked out my back window to find four kittens on the back porch! I should clarify, they are not Juliette's (she is spayed). They belonged to a female that was far more feral. I caved, I fed them. Who wouldn't? But I fed with a purpose. Chow time would be training time for this family of five. It didn't take long for all four kittens and the mom cat to learn to enter a kennel to be fed. I then worked on slowly closing the door behind them. One short session a day for a few weeks and the behavior was trained. The cats often run into the kennel when they hear I am coming. They are still quite fearful of people, but they are gaining confidence. The mom cat no longer hisses, and even rubs up against a chair prior to being fed. The eventual goal is to find homes for the kittens and have the mom cat spayed. I am confident when the time comes I will be able to at least kennel her without incident for the trip to the vet.

It may seem to be a small thing, but positive reinforcement training is quite often finding its way into other parts of my life, such as taking on the neighborhood's feral cat population. And I hope it is for readers of Good Bird Magazine as well. Do you find yourself wanting to help a person being dragged down the street by their dog, or give your neighbor some alternatives to managing a difficult child? Of course it isn't always an easy task to hand out advice. However I would like to encourage readers to make it a goal to share at least one thing you have found useful about the positive reinforcement approach to behavior with someone in your life. Why? Because we have a revolution going on here. And it is a good and noble cause. My personal motivation to teach about positive reinforcement training is so that people will be kinder to animals. There are kinder alternatives to methods that have been traditionally used in the past to modify and create behavior. I want people to know those alternatives and use them. Your goals may be different, and that is perfectly fine. Whatever the motivation is, the end result can be just fabulous for people and animals. Those who are experiencing the wonderful results can share their testimonials with friends, colleagues, and relatives. Next thing you know positive reinforcement could be the norm! So pass on your knowledge and help this revolution grow.

One of my favorite sections in Good Bird Magazine is the Reader's Success Stories. This is a perfect example of fueling the revolution. When people apply the information to their real life situations and have desired results, there is no denying positive reinforcement works. And best of all they share their story with many. This quarter there are five excellent success stories. I can't express what a thrill it is when I learn someone has been able to use information gained from Good Bird Magazine to improve their situation. Kris Porter's story about Gracie is one such story.

Good Bird Magazine loves you success stories. Keep 'em coming! Look for details on how to submit your story following the reader's success stories in this issue.

Besides excellent reader success stories, this issue is packed with information on enrichment, behavioral science, training advice and more. We also have a nice international flavor this time with contributions from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia and the Netherlands. It is truly a global revolution.

Barbara Heidenreich

Correction: Please note in the last issue of Good Bird Magazine Volume 3 Issue 1 Spring 2007 on page pg 44 www.theperchstore.com should be www.theperchstore.net.

Positive Reinforcement for Good Bird Inc

Hi Barbara,

I thought you might be interested in some positive feedback. In our parrot behavior discussion group, one unanimous opinion seems to be that your magazine is one of, if not the only one out there that is of quality. One of the list members said it best in her reply to the original discussion message: *"Thank heaven for Good Bird Magazine. The avian publishing panorama is pretty gloomy otherwise."*

I have to agree with her and could not have said it better myself. Before I was introduced to you and Good Bird and Susan Friedman and Living and Learning with Parrots, I had been told that I had to get some well known titles on parrot behavior that were must reads for new parrot owners. Not to say that there isn't any valuable information in those publications, there is some, but there is also a great deal of misinformation. I'm just glad I am a thinker and researcher and I found Pam Clark. Through her I found you and Susan; and through all of you so many more articles and good reading lists.

So now I would like to take the time to send you this note and personally thank you for providing us all with a long awaited *Good* Bird Magazine!

Hope you have had some time to yourself. I don't envy your schedule, but do appreciate that you travel so much to teach us. I have your books and tapes, but seeing you demonstrate your training in person makes all the difference.

Thanks for all you do! A big hug to you!

Kris Porter

Barbara,

I have a 3 and1/2 year old female Umbrella Cockatoo named Baby. I got her when she was 4 months old and I have made every mistake imaginable with Baby. I am now in the process of retraining myself and her with the help of positive reinforcement.

I have been beating the drum loud and clear. Ten of your books have been recently bought by some of the folks in my message board. I am seeing a lot of excitement being stirred over positive reinforcement.

Here is one of the posts that I use to give the heads-up:

Positive Reinforcement Works

We unknowingly cause aggression in our birds. So if we learn what we are doing wrong and change our behaviors then we can help our birds to change their behaviors for the good. There is too much "old school" ways of correcting unwanted behaviors. Unfortunately these ways are very prevalent in the avian community and are doing our birds harm!!!

You want to get the book "The Parrot Problem Solver" by Barbara Heidenreich. You can get it at amazon.com

Also go to www.goodbirdinc.com and order all their magazine back issues as well as sign up for their quarterly subscription. The DVD is excellent as well.

Also, you should read every article and paper written by Dr. Susan Friedman. And you can take some of her courses on-line.

You will have an eye opener.

Barbara... I just sold four more copies of your book "The Parrot Problem Solver". You better have the printer kick it into high gear.

Best to you and thank you for all that you do for our birds.

Regards,

Larry Houston

continued on page 16

Pavlov's Parrots: Understanding and Extinguishing Learned Fear Triggers

By S.G. Friedman, Ph.D.

Parrots don't just toss out behavior willy-nilly.
Photo credit: Dean Moser

When it comes to behavior analysis, we usually focus on our learners' voluntary, or *operant*, behaviors because most of our teaching challenges lie there. Companion parrots voluntarily choose to step onto people's hands, forage for hidden treats, and sing "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." They also choose whom to bite, where to perch, and what to chew. Like all animals, parrots don't just toss out behavior willy-nilly. Operant behavior is a function of its consequences. That is, parrots choose to behave in ways that produce valued outcomes and they modify or suppress behaviors that produce aversive outcomes.

Antecedent stimuli are important too but they don't elicit or trigger operant behavior in any automatic sense. Antecedents convey information that a particular contingency is available: If you display the corresponding behavior, then reinforcement will follow. For example, an offered perch signals that stepping up will be reinforced. Still, in the presence of an offered perch, an animal may choose to step up or back away. This is why we describe operant antecedents as *setting the occasion* for, or promoting, a behavior rather than causing or triggering it. It is consequences -- strong positive reinforcers -- that build reliable antecedent cues and strong behavioral responses.

Antecedents convey information that a particular contingency is available: If you display the corresponding behavior, then reinforcement will follow.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Based on an understanding of these basic operant principles, effective teachers teach new behaviors and decrease problem behaviors using the most positive, least intrusive, effective strategies such as shaping and differential reinforcement of an alternate behavior. The overriding goal is to thoughtfully arrange the environment so that the right behavior is easier to perform than the wrong behavior and more reinforcing.

A DIFFERENT PROCESS

Although operant teaching technology has widespread applicability, not all behaviors, or behavior problems, involve only operant processes. There is another category of behavior, called respondent behaviors, which involve a different kind of behavior-environment relation. Respondent behaviors are automatic, involuntary responses. They are part of an individual's genetic history and include simple reflexes (e.g., blinking, endorphin release, and rapid heart rate), and complex action patterns (e.g., nest building, bathing and

mating patterns). Respondent behaviors are a function of *eliciting antecedent stimuli*, not consequences. Once the eliciting stimulus is presented, the corresponding respondent behavior is triggered automatically. For example, blinking is triggered by a puff of air, and complex mating patterns are triggered by a combination of antecedent stimuli, such as longer days, abundant food, and the presence of a potential mate.

Respondent behaviors are "pre-wired" in the animal's nervous system thus they require no prior experience to be demonstrated.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Another important feature that distinguishes operant and respondent behavior is what is learned (see table for a list of some distinguishing features). With operant learning new behaviors are learned but with respondent learning new *eliciting triggers* are learned. Respondent behaviors are "pre-wired" in the animal's nervous system thus they require no prior experience to be demonstrated. Whereas operant learning is described with a 3-term contingency, stimulus-response-stimulus (antecedent-behavior-consequence, ABC), respondent learning is described with a 2-term contingency, antecedent stimulus-stimulus (S-S; since the behavior is not learned, R for response isn't usually included in the notation). You will sometimes hear people criticize operant learning, or behavior analysis, for its mechanistic, simplistic S-S scope. These are people not well informed about the field of learning and behavior, as S-S learning describes respondent behavior; and operant learning is far from mechanistic. As a result of this misunderstanding their information can be woefully misleading.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF OPERANT AND RESPONDENT BEHAVIOR

Operant Behavior S-R-S (A-B-C)	**Respondent Behavior S-S-R (US-CS-CR)**
Environmental Basis	Genetic Basis
Learned Behavior	Innate Behavior
Voluntary Behavior	Automatic Behavior
Behavior that is a function of its consequences.	Behavior that is function of its antecedent stimuli.
What is learned: New behavior.	What is learned: New antecedent eliciting stimuli.

It is this process by which new triggers are learned for innate behaviors that is of utmost importance to parrot caregivers as it accounts for one of the most common and devastating behavior problems we face with our birds: Sudden, seemingly inexplicable, extreme fears.

It is this process by which new triggers are learned for innate behaviors that accounts for one of the most common problems we face with our birds: Sudden, seemingly inexplicable, extreme fears.
Photo credit: Roelant Jonker/Grace Innemee www.CityParrots.org

RESPONDENT LEARNING

There are several specialized terms and corresponding acronyms used globally to describe respondent learning (also known as classical and Pavlovian conditioning). Some terms are used to describe both operant and respondent processes. Like any new language, these terms take some practice but once mastered they improve our ability to communicate easily and precisely with one another. The main terms follow below.

A *stimulus* is any object or event capable of affecting behavior. Both antecedents and consequences are stimuli. Antecedents stimulate present behavior and consequences stimulate future behavior. As discussed above, respondent antecedents are automatic elicitors, whereas operant antecedents are just occasion setters or promoters of the behavior they precede. The word *unconditioned* means innate or automatic (requires no prior experience). The word *conditioned* means acquired, as in something that is learned (requires prior experience). With respondent behavior, an unconditioned stimulus (US) automatically elicits an unconditioned response (UR) such as when a loud, sudden noise (US) elicits a startle response (UR). Animals don't learn to startle at sudden loud noises -- the relation is innate.

Animals don't learn to startle at sudden loud noises -- the relation is innate.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Respondent learning takes place when a neutral stimulus acquires the eliciting function of an unconditioned stimulus (US). This is accomplished by the repeated, close temporal pairing of the neutral stimulus and the US. Once the neutral stimulus elicits the innate behavior, the neutral stimulus is called a conditioned stimulus (CS) and the innate behavior it elicits is called a conditioned response (CR; indicating that it is a response triggered by a CS, rather than a US). Thus repeated CS:US _ UR pairings enable CS _ CR, as with the familiar example of Pavlov's dogs: As Pavlov demonstrated, meat-in-mouth (US) elicited salivation (UR). After repeatedly pairing the US with a preceding tone, the tone became a CS that elicited the CR salivating. This is the same process by which a clicker or other secondary reinforcers such as praise acquire reinforcing strength. By tightly pairing the click sound with a food treat (or other well-established reinforcers), the sound of the click quickly becomes a learned reinforcer (technically referred to as a secondary reinforcer).

With this background, it is easy to connect the dots between the process of learning new triggers for respondent behaviors and the distressing advent of a beloved parrot's sudden, extreme fear reactions to stimuli that have never frightened them in the past and cannot hurt them in any case. The vast majority of birds demonstrating these extreme fears are not neurotic, psychotic or any other reified diagnostic construct. These birds have learned to fear specific items or events due to the process of respondent learning, which unfortunately often occurs below the radar of our every-day awareness of our birds' lives in captivity.

The vast majority of birds demonstrating these extreme fears are not neurotic, psychotic or any other reified diagnostic construct.
Photo credit: Roelant Jonker/Grace Innemee www.CityParrots.org

For example, when a suddenly darkened veterinary exam room precedes being grabbed (US), it is not the parrot's fear responses (UR) that are learned but rather, potentially, a new trigger for fear, i.e., suddenly darkened rooms (CS). Neutral stimuli can also become a CS

by being paired with other well-established CSs. This is known as higher-order conditioning. In this way, pairing neutral stimuli with suddenly darkened rooms (CS) can result in a cascade of new CSs for fear such as towels, scales, white lab coats, eye glasses, tall men, etc., all of which were closely paired with an existing CS, the suddenly darkened room.

A ROBUST SOLUTION

Systematic desensitization is a type of behavior therapy known as counterconditioning that is used to reverse the effects of prior respondent learning. It is a long-standing treatment that has proven to be highly effective for helping individuals to overcome a wide variety of extreme fears and anxieties. The basis of systematic desensitization is *respondent extinction*, the procedure of repeatedly presenting a CS without the US, until it no longer elicits the CR. With systematic desensitization, this is accomplished by gradually exposing the fearful individual to the fear-eliciting stimulus in small, incremental steps. The criterion for advancing to the next step is calm behavior and the increments should be sufficiently small as to never trigger more than the very mildest anxious response. At the final step, exposure to the CS no longer triggers fear responses. To implement systematic desensitization effectively, one needs to be knowledgeable about what fear and calm behaviors look like, not only for the species in general, but the particular individual they are working with as well. In the case of parrots, this requires very keen observation of the subtlest changes in feathers, torso, eyes, legs, feet, head positions and activities.

With systematic desensitization, counterconditioning is accomplished by gradually exposing the fearful individual to the fear-eliciting stimulus in small, incremental steps.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

In contrast to systematic desensitization, a procedure known as flooding consists of presenting the feared stimulus in full strength, all at once. The animal is blocked from escaping until the respondent trigger is extinguished. With parrots, this often takes the form of forcefully restraining a struggling parrot in a gloved hand until it exhausts itself. Few, if any, educated practitioners consider flooding an acceptable form of behavior therapy, especially given the more positive, less intrusive, effective alternative of systematic desensitization.

A HYBRID SOLUTION

In a previous section, I made the point that not all behaviors involve only operant processes and we have seen the way in which respondent processes can account for learning new triggers for automatic fear responses. Now it's time to flip the coin to make the point that not all fear responses involve only respondent processes. Since escaping a fear-eliciting stimulus reduces anxiety, the behaviors used to escape it (e.g., shrieking, moving away, flailing, and biting) are strengthened through the operant process called negative reinforcement (i.e., the strength of an escape behavior is increased by contingently removing an aversive stimulus).

By pairing systematic desensitization with negative reinforcement we can boost the effectiveness of our intervention. For example, consider a bird who responds fearfully to a particular family member approaching its cage. Starting at the closest distance that is comfortable for the bird, the person should advance only as many steps as the bird remains calm, perhaps two feet, and then hold still at that distance.

When the bird shows any sign of relaxing further (e.g. preening, rousing, eating), the person can take one-half step back, thereby negatively reinforcing the behavior. In this way, the relaxed behaviors will increase as the automatic fear responses decrease. After a few seconds the person can advance another two feet, and again retreat one-half step contingent on an increase in relaxed behaviors. Once the person can stand close to the bird's cage without triggering fear and escape behaviors, a food treat can be dropped into a food cup to positively reinforce calm behaviors (i.e., the strength of a behavior is increased by contingently adding a positive consequence). By repeatedly pairing the food treat with the person delivering it we once again rely on respondent conditioning of a new trigger, the caregiver, but this time she is a CS for positive automatic responses because her close proximity to the cage has been repeatedly paired with the food treat (US). Further, we expect to see an increase in operant approach behaviors, at which time contingency learning can begin: When I approach the cage, if you come forward, then I deliver a treat.

CONCLUSION

Although operant and respondent behaviors are often presented as a sharp dichotomy, they more accurately represent a continuum. Clearly, both processes are involved in the production of all behavior. Simple reflexes can be modified with sensitization and habituation, and complex action patterns can be modified with experience. At the same time, as Bob Bailey has often said, "Pavlov is always on your shoulder." Bailey further explains that our job is to reduce fears and other respondent behaviors to the greatest extent possible, in order to maximize animals' operant learning potential.

From an evolutionary or survival perspective, the process by which new fear triggers are conditioned makes so much sense. One only needs to get stung (US) by a bee one time for a buzzing (CS) sound to trigger fear responses (CR) and set the occasion for escape behaviors, which are negatively reinforced whenever the bee is successfully evaded. Yet, this same behavioral flexibility works against an animal's quality of life when new triggers are in fact harmless. By understanding both operant and respondent learning processes, we are much better prepared to understand, predict and prevent benign neutral stimuli from becoming fear triggers. We can also resolve the problem more effectively and humanely when it unexpectedly arises.

Susan G. Friedman, Ph.D., is a psychology professor at Utah State University. An applied behaviorist for more than 25 years, her area of expertise is learning and behavior, with a special emphasis on children's behavior disorders. Prior to living in Utah, Susan was a professor at the University of Colorado after which she lived in Lesotho, Africa for 5 years. While there, she directed the first American School of Lesotho.

Susan has written on the topic of learning and behavior for popular parrot magazines and is the first author on two chapters found in G. Harrison's Avian Veterinary Compendium and A. Luescher's Manual Parrot Behavior). Several of her articles can be found on the web at www.thegabrielfoundation.org/HTML/friedman.htm. Susan has taught animal behavior workshops with Steve Martin at his ranch facility (see www.naturalencounters.com) and several zoos around the country; speaks at bird clubs and conferences; and is a core member of the California Condor Recovery Team. Her well-attended on-line course, "Living and Learning with Parrots: The Fundamental Principles of Behavior", is described at www.behaviorworks.org.

When asked how she became interested in working with companion parrots in particular, Susan explains with a wink, "I have always enjoyed working with juvenile delinquents."

continued from page 10

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT FOR GOOD BIRD

Hi Barbara,

Just wanted to let you know how great it is to be able to refer people to your site. I am a moderator at Tooz Talk at Birds n Ways. Behavior comes up a lot with Tooz and people really try to learn ways to give their birds a good life and foster good relationships.

I feel so comfortable referring people to your site having attended your seminars and one of Susan's and receiving your magazine from day one. The information you provide opens new worlds for those that really want to learn. This IS good for our birds. Drop by anytime to say hi to a few of your fans. (http://www.birdsnway.com/boards/2t/)

Just wanted to say thanks.

Peggy Mayworm

Hello Barbara,

I have purchased a two year subscription and while I am anxiously waiting for the first issue to arrive I will be busy pouring over the spring back issue you recommended. *(Will likely buy more)*

Thank you very much for all your help - and especially for sharing your expertise; your DVD has given me the tools (and confidence) to approach my macaws and help make their lives better.

Respectfully,

Sandra Moore
www.mooreoriginal.com
Genesis Aviaries

Hi Barb,

I just got the new issue and I've read about half of it and I wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed the article on Living with Flighted Birds. I would like to read much more on this topic.

I don't have the article in front of me right now but I really liked the point that you made that birds don't always need to be touched to be handled. A lot of biting often happens when we physically handle a bird that doesn't want to be. I know that my flighted birds definitely have days when they would rather fly than be petted…and because they have that choice, they often choose to fly. This is fine and a joy for me every single day....and you are absolutely right that it IS a lot of fun to train for flight!

I could not imagine life with my little Senegal Babylon if she were clipped. Flighted, she is a mischievous, eager, mercurial, opinionated little Gremlin that expresses herself in flight so perfectly (and she ISN'T ALWAYS in a GOOD MOOD)....and I look at her and wonder how those moods would translate if she were clipped and I had to "step her up" rather than target fly her to where I need her to go. I think I'd be wearing band aids.

Right now, if I need her to go into her cage, I target fly her from across the room. I call "Babylon! - Get on your perch".....and she flies to the top of her cage and inside to her perch without fail for her treat (making Senegal whimpers all the way).....and even my bird sitter and HUSBAND can do this without fear of being nipped or refused. (Babylon - like any Senegal - is very capable of biting but seldom does if we focus on managing her via flight)

Many days, Babylon steps up and wants to cuddle - but there are days when she just does NOT and that is okay....and we still interact and reinforce our relationship by focusing on lots of different flight training behaviors (like retrieves, target flying and recalls) in place of the "hands on" stuff. It's just another way to reinforce the fun of being a parrot caretaker for ME and the fun of interacting with me for HER.

Any way, THANKS FOR THE ARTICLE and I look forward to many more!

Mona
Phinneous Fowl (aka Phinney) Timneh African Grey
Babylon Senegal
Doug (spousal unit)
Jack and Bailey (Gremlins)
Buddy (Timneh African Grey on vacation)

Barb,

Thank you so much. Now I have both magazines I ordered, so will have lots of reading to do.

I have four parrots; a female red bellied named Roo, a male lovebird named Stitch, a blue Indian Ring Neck named Gloria and a male lutino Ring Neck named Sunny. Both my ring necks are rescue birds, so we don't know too much about their history. They both have some feather destruction issues, but we seem to be resolving it slowly. The articles on training and behavior in your magazine have been a tremendous help. And strange as it may seem, working on training with both birds seems to have done wonders with the feather problems.

Anyways, thanks again for responding to my problems so quickly, and thanks so much for an informative and interesting magazine!

Di Barham

WORDS ON THE WORKSHOPS

Hello Barbara!

I just attended your one day workshop on Saturday March 10th. Dr. Driggers and Susan Friedman were also speaking and everyone was wonderful! It was my first parrot related seminar and I couldn't have been more pleased.

I belong to a yahoo group that teaches clicker training with positive reinforcement. I've been trying my darnedest to get my birds to understand the retrieve and haven't been getting very clear cut "directions or

help" from the group. After I reviewed my packet of information from the seminar I found your brief QUICK SIMPLE easy way to teach retrieve! Let them drop it in the bucket a few times and see if they'll move a bit to drop it in there. So simple I should have thought of it to try!

Anyhow I just wanted to say thank you for the inspiration and encouragement! I can't wait to start today!

Stacey Loula
Scooby - 2 yr Sun Conure
Pip - 1 yr Sun Conure
Pancho - 17 yr Blue and Gold Macaw
Wasabi - Rescue male Double Yellow Headed Amazon (my BEST bird out of all of them!)

A follow up on Scooby from Stacey:

Here is a little video of Scooby doing her retrieve, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FolDvuNi58 I know it's a tad hard to see and a bit fast, but your method worked brilliantly! She's now up to a couple of rings, but I haven't gotten a chance to work with them recently. She remembers everything I've "taught" her so far though! Smart little bugger!

Hello Barbara,

I wanted to thank you for coming to the Phoenix, Arizona area and presenting last weekend.

The seminar you and Susan gave was wonderful and each time I attend your seminars I am inspired and educated.

As an avian veterinarian I feel the information you and Susan are providing to us veterinarians and people who live or work with birds is truly essential and crucial for the well being of these wonderful creatures! Thank you for taking the time to travel here and for your dedication and efforts.

I just purchased your new exam room DVD and can't wait to receive it. I also renewed my subscription with my updated address.

Thank you again. I look forward to seeing you in August at the Association of Avian Veterinarians conference.

Sincerely,

Tracey Ritzman, DVM, Dipl ABVP-Avian
Palm Glen Animal Hospital
Phoenix, AZ

Good evening!

I just wanted to drop you a note of thanks for the wonderful weekend in Scarborough. I was delighted to meet you and absolutely thrilled with everything I learned from you and Susan. My birds (and puppy!) will certainly benefit from my experience with the two of you. I'm already looking forward to next year!

Pam Haswell

BUZZ ON THE NEW DVD

What a great idea!!! I saw Dr. Brian Speer at the Mid-Atlantic States Association of Avian Veterinarians conference and he used your methods in a hands-on lab. Gave you credit, too!!! This is a DVD everyone should have!!

Terri Jones
Director
Arcadia Bird Sanctuary and Educational Center
www.ArcadiaBirdSanctuary.org

Hi Barbara

I am so excited about this DVD, and I'm sure I'll get many people to purchase it. Husbandry behaviors are kind of my "thing" so this will be so wonderful! You know, I clean my birds' nares every evening with a toothpick. And my birds so enjoy being "examined" and getting the "salon" treatment that we have found that nail filing is a reinforcer!

JJ (my other half) had trouble getting one of our birds to step off of him while I was away last month, and he decided to try showing her the nail file (a good thing, not a punisher) She went right to her perch and lifted her foot for her pedicure - so cute! I've actually used this "ruse" before when this particular bird started exploring the corners of the floor. I typically will just sit in the middle of the floor filing my own nails, and she'll stop whatever she's doing and run over. But JJ has the training now, so I let him figure out the solution. I was so proud of him and my bird!

I can't wait to see what content the DVD has. Just about the only husbandry-type thing I haven't trained (that I know of) is a blood draw, and that's probably because I'm too squeamish.

Thanks again,

Wendy K.

Hi Everyone,

This is an excellent hands on training DVD that I believe would be beneficial for the Friends of the Aviary to consider purchasing. If anyone one wants to see a preview, the Parrot Club of Southwestern Ontario, Hamilton Chapter will be showing it at next months meeting. Tammy Jackson, Caroline Fehr and I were fortunate to have been able to attend a private viewing of this amazing DVD with Barbara Heidenreich in Scarborough at Pat Phillip's home. Barbara's gentle, intuitive methods of teaching and training can be easily applied to the Aviary birds to reduce their stress levels during vet examinations and ensure their health for themselves and the public to enjoy for many more years.

Lori Gibbons

Good Job Barbara!!

I really enjoyed watching the video. I came away with two new behaviors I want to employ!

I loved watching the macaw having the nails trimmed while resting on the back. You know, that is a GREAT idea. My macaw, Blue, will present his feet for nail filing, but I ALWAYS have a hard time getting to those back toes and have to turn his feet at an odd angle. He doesn't fuss, but he looks down like, "Hey, my toes don't bend that way!" Since he LOVES to lay on his back and play and is very accepting to tactile exploration in that position, I am going to train nails trims in this position....THANKS!!!! I think this position must be a treat for macaws...my grey does not "like" (for lack of a better word) this position near as much.

The other, was the open mouth exam. I have tried different methods of training this behavior. All with touching the beak with a finger or multiple fingers. While this is ok, you really can't see inside the mouth with my hand in the way. Doing it like that always seemed to confuse Kena (my Congo African grey). Since I too use my hand as a target a lot, she was more or less looking for a reinforcer to come out of it, rather than opening her mouth to be bridged and reinforced. I will resort to using a favored toy to train this behavior.

Lastly, thanks for exposing (Hah!) Dr. Echols!!!! I have passed his foraging DVD on to as many people as I could who have pet parrots. I am truly blessed to have access to him as my avian vet, and can't say enough good things about him and his efforts in trying to educate the pet parrot owner. His exams are thoughtful, insightful and more than anything educational.

Thanks again for a wonderful training and resource tool.

Terri

Hi Barbara,

We received our DVD today! It looks fantastic. I have wanted so badly to work on these issues with Ozzy, my Senegal Parrot.

Thanks!

Susan Dobrowolsky

Chirp n Squawk

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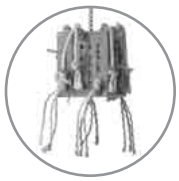



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What is Your Bird Saying?

LEARNING TO READ AND INTERPRET BIRD BODY LANGUAGE

By Barbara Heidenreich

Training is a way for people to communicate to parrots. But how do parrots communicate to us? They communicate through their body language. Subtle changes in feather position, eye position and body posture can give us a glimpse into what a bird might be thinking. Some postures indicate fear or aggression. Others let us know our birds are relaxed and comfortable. The greater our sensitivity is to our bird's body language the easier it will be for us to avoid doing things that might cause our birds to be uncomfortable. In turn we can help foster an even stronger relationship based on trust.

Look at the following photos and see if you can read and interpret the body language of these birds. A practice that can help you fine tune your skills is to try to describe the exact body postures you are observing, rather than using general labels such as content or nervous. Answers are on page 33.

WHAT IS THIS BIRD'S BODY LANGUAGE SAYING?

Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

1._____

Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

2._____

Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

3._____

Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

5._____

Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

5._____

“Quoth the Raven...er, we mean the Parrot”

Photo credit: Roelant Jonker/Grace Innemee www.CityParrots.org

“A great soul can appear among us at any time, in the form of any creature. I’m keeping my eyes open.”

- Sy Montgomery “The Good Pig”

Lots of Stuff for Your Birds to Do

By Adrianne Mock

Who wouldn't want to play in this?
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Parrots are active, curious, busy creatures. Wild parrots may spend hours foraging for food, eating their food, playing, flying here and there, preening themselves or each other, raising and caring for young, and watching for and avoiding predators. But in our home environments many individual birds may spend hours in their cages with nothing to do. And as Dr. Susan Friedman reminds us "Birds are built to behave, not to be still."

People come to the Parrot Behavior Analysis Solutions list (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ParrotBAS/), to the many and varied pet-bird lists, to their veterinarians, to behavior consultants and to their friends asking for assistance with behavior problems. The most common include the following:

- Screaming, especially for long periods of time (more than five to ten minutes at a time)
- Feather destructive behavior
- Clinging. The bird wants to constantly be with the caregiver. The caregiver has become the entertainment center for the bird!
- Biting

After all dietary, physical, physiological and medical reasons for these behaviors have been ruled out, for many birds a common cause for some of these maladaptive behaviors is a lack of activity.

As responsible caregivers and owners, we need to be sure our birds are actively engaged. Foraging and other stimulating activities, including chewing, shredding and playing, often referred to as "enrichment", are important to increase the activity levels and independent play in our birds. Some birds will need to learn to play independently with toys. (Editor's note: See Rebecca O'Connor's article in this issue about Teaching your Bird to Play) Observe to be sure your birds are actually using the toys and items you place in their cage. If they do not use them they are, as a friend says, "cage art" and the birds do not benefit.

The following are various ideas that may be utilized to keep busy beaks, busy. Please note this is a general list of ideas. It is recommended caregivers watch their birds as they engage in the various activities. Toys and enrichment items should be appropriate and safe for each individual bird. Here are some additional safety considerations. It is recommended that all rope or chain

Chain should be short enough so it cannot wrap around a neck or entangle legs. Links should be welded closed
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

be short in length. Length will vary depending on the parrot. It should be short enough so it cannot wrap around a neck or entangle legs. Links should be welded closed. Examine rope and cord for frayed areas. These should be clipped off, or the rope should be replaced. Observe birds to ensure they are not eating paper or plastic. Avoid toys with small parts that can be broken off and/or swallowed.

Some birds may be nervous or apprehensive to approach new items, especially at first. Be patient, and go slow when introducing new things to these birds. Don't overwhelm a bird by locking the bird in a cage with an item that elicits a fear response. Use systematic desensitization to gradually introduce new items. Once they are comfortable with the items, their interest can be increased through positive reinforcement training strategies. (Editor's note: See Rebecca O'Connor's article in this issue about Teaching your Bird to Play)

FOOD ITEMS AS ENRICHMENT

Food can be fun for your bird as well as a source of nutrition. Foraging behavior involves creating challenging ways for your bird to acquire his diet and/or preferred treats. It may be necessary at first to show your bird where the goodies are hidden. As your bird becomes more proficient at finding the items you place around the cage, you can increase the difficulty of the foraging activity. When utilizing foraging as enrichment carefully observe your bird's intake to ensure he is receiving an adequate diet.

Food enrichment suggestions:

- Weave or hang leafy greens from the cage bars or top of cage. Examples include kale, mustard greens, and dandelion greens.
- Hang carrots (with the tops) from the bars or top of the cage.
- Wrap nuts or other treats (dry cereals, dried unsulphured fruits, dried hot peppers) in brown, white or colored paper. Place these in various areas of the cage.
- Wrap treats in unwaxed paper cups. Place these in various areas of the cage.
- Drill small holes in larger nuts like walnuts. Let them chew away the shell and get at the tasty treat inside.
- Wrap portions of your bird's daily diet in paper cups or in brown, white or colored paper. You can also use folded paper plates tied with short pieces of sisal, leather strips or thinner cotton rope.
- Wrap treats or food in small paperboard boxes. Tie with sisal, leather strips or cotton cord.
- Cover your bird's food dish with a piece of paper or cardboard. At first you will need to make this easy. Start by placing the paper on top of the dish. Make a hole so that your bird can see the food. As the bird becomes more proficient at removing the paper, you can increase the difficulty by folding the paper over the dish and eliminating the holes.
- Offer whole fruits: apples (small), oranges (small or use half), grapes in a bunch, tangerines, half or one quarter of a pomegranate, corn on the cob, chunks of red or yellow bell peppers, chunks of purple cabbage or radicchio, Brussels sprouts, broccoli (with the stems and tops), whole carrots (with the tops.) Many of these can be placed on stainless steel food skewers made for this purpose and hung up in the cage. These special skewers come with a cap for the pointed end.
- Provide cinnamon stick pieces (in moderation)
- Hang millet sprays.
- Hide popcorn.

TOY (NON-FOOD) ACTIVITIES AND ITEMS

- Wrap beads or other non-food items in paper (colored, brown or white) or unwaxed paper cups.
- Paper toys:
    - o Stacks of coffee filters or paper plates can be placed on a short piece of sisal, cotton or leather strip or a stainless

Provide cinnamon stick in moderation for a simple enrichment idea
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

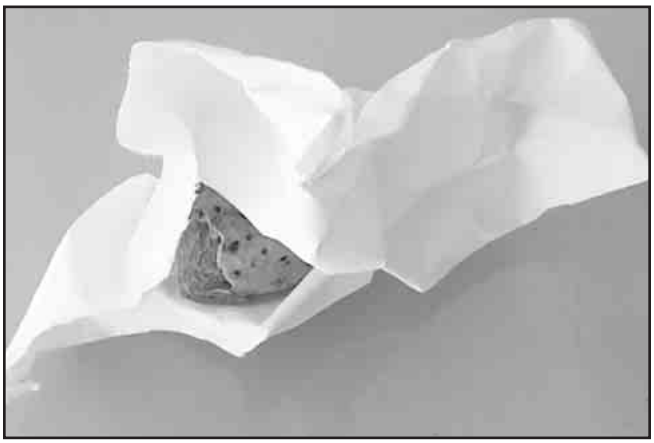
steel toy hanger. You may want to add beads in between layers or at the top and bottom. Cut the paper half of the way through to the center. Fluff them up to form a ball. These are great for birds that like to over preen their feathers. Observe to be sure your bird is not eating the paper.

o Place shredded paper or dried cornhusks in a paper bag (along with nuts, dried fruits, beads, etc.)

o Make paper balls with a surprise in the middle.

o Provide "finger–traps" (sold as party favors) with treats or beads hidden within them.

o Old phone books and paperback books can be hung on the top of the cage. These are messy but FUN!



Make paper balls with a surprise in the middle
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Old phone books and paperback books can be hung on the top of the cage. These are messy but FUN!
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

• Many birds like to play with beads. String them on short pieces of cotton rope, leather strips or sisal with knots in between. Attach to the cage bars or offer as foot toys. Be sure the size of the beads is safe and appropriate for your bird.

• Wood is a natural favorite for many birds. Here are some suggested ideas for wood.

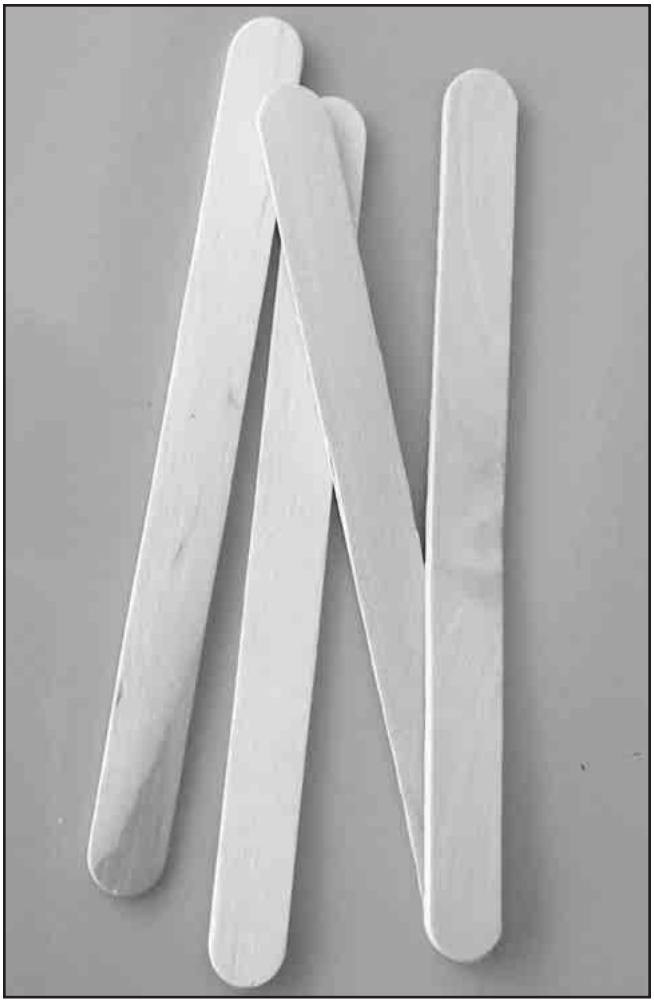
o Offer fresh branches from bird safe trees. (Editor's note: see Good Bird Magazine Volume 3 Issue 1 Spring 2007 for information on toxic plants) Including buds, leaves and fruits can provide hours of foraging activity. Be sure branches have not been sprayed with pesticides or taken from the roadside. Roadside plant life is subject to the emissions and debris left behind by cars.

o If fresh branches are not available, you can add leafy greens, pieces of fruit or treats wrapped in paper or cups to the branches. Tie or skewer the items to the branches.

o Provide lumber from your local home center. 2 x 4's, 1 x 3's or "furring strips" are usually available. Look for non treated wood. Most home improvement places have a "cutoff bin" somewhere in the back of the lumber department. You may be able to find cut off ends of various sizes for very little cost. You can cut these into smaller pieces, then string them on short chain, sisal or cotton rope, stainless steel toy holder, or simply place them in the cage as a foot toy. To increase interest, you can drill holes in the wood to stuff with treats or beads.

o Purchase small or large alphabet blocks made for children. Many have raised letters. You can drill holes in them and hang them. You can also offer them as foot toys or use as parts for larger toys.

o Get creative with wreaths. Large and small grapevine wreaths and willow wreaths can be found at many major craft stores during the winter holiday season. Right after the holidays the prices are very low. I suggest you stock up! Attach beads, cord/string/leather strips, stuff nuts into the wreaths, add paper strips and more. Get creative.



Wooden craft or Popsicle sticks can be used inside other items to increase complexity of a toy.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

- Make rope toys. Use pieces of sisal, cotton or Paulie rope with lots-a-knots and/or beads. You can also use dog rope pull toys (sizes range from very, very small to huge). And attach items to spiral-swings (Boings) and rope perches.

- Pine cones can be fun. Sterilize them in a 200 degree Fahrenheit oven for twenty minutes and let cool before offering them to your bird. Pine cones can be offered as is, wrapped in other things (paper, cups, folded paper plates) or stuffed with treats (nut butters with seeds or dried fruit).

- The following is a list of plastic toys that can be provided to your parrot.

  o Infant rattles and "key" rings.

  o Toy figures (animals, people, etc). Observe your bird to make sure he does not eat little bits of the plastic.

  o Stacking cups (you can hide treats, beads, and shredded paper in between the layers).

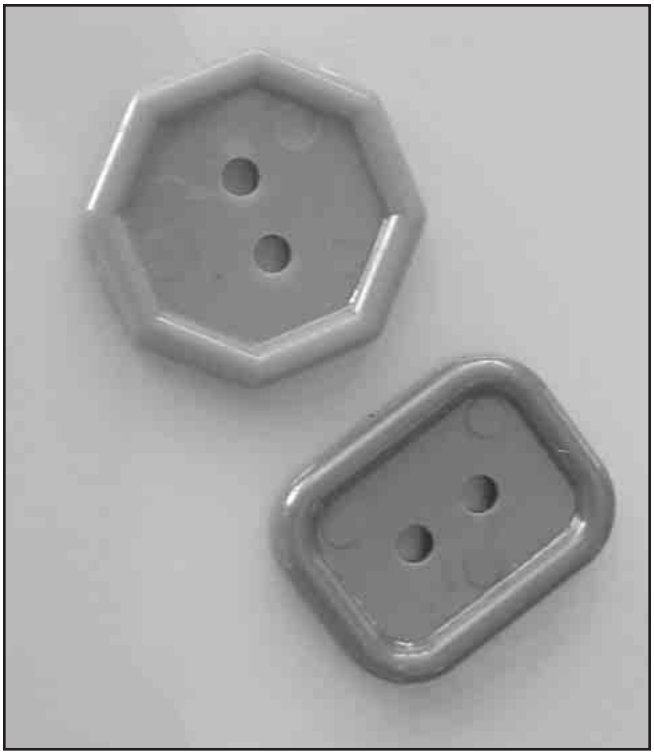
  o Measuring spoons on a ring.

  o Beads from discount stores and craft stores. Choose a size that cannot be swallowed by your parrot.

  o Whiffle or waffle balls can be stuffed with paper, treats, pieces of rope (with or without knots), bits of wood (a great way to recycle pieces of toys) bits of leather, beads or whatever you can fit into the holes. You can put the toys in the cage as is (foot toys) or hang them from short pieces of chain, rope, leather strips or stainless steel toy hangers.

  o Other ideas include plastic soda bottle tops, very big buttons, straws tied together in the center with a zip tie.

Toy figures (animals, people, etc) are fun parrot toys. Observe your bird to make sure he does not eat little bits of the plastic.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich



Very large plastic buttons can add to your list of acceptable plastic toys.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Whiffle balls can be stuffed with many different items.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

FORAGING TRAYS, BASKETS, BUCKETS AND MORE

- Stainless steel buckets can be purchased from feed and supply stores or pet supply stores, and then filled with toys.

- Foraging trays can be made from cafeteria trays.

- Purchase plain, uncolored baskets or those made of palm fiber. Attach to the cage for larger birds. Fill with fun "stuff" (beads, shredded paper, dried corn-husk, nuts, etc.)

- Use brown paper bags (lunch bag size) to hide surprises.

- Re-use plastic containers, such as small condiment containers, to offer more places to forage.

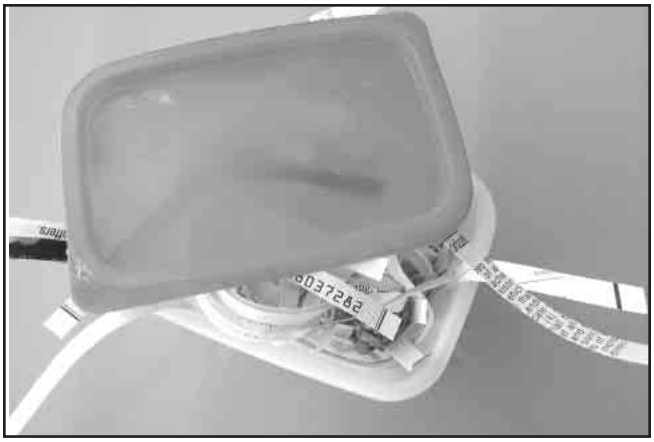
- Essentially you can consider anything that is bird safe and can hold other stuff as a potential enrichment item.

- To make your containers interesting add some larger river rock (check your home improvement stores for these) and include seeds, nuts, beads of various sizes and textures, pine cones, grains (wheat, spelt and kamut are great!), paper balls (large and small) and anything else your bird might like to hunt for (remember to hide some "stuff" in the paper balls too). Once full with enriching items, heavy containers may need to be placed on the bottom of the cage instead of hung.

- Another idea is to use shredded paper in a basket. Although if you have a bird that likes to nest this might not be such a good idea, especially if he or she starts to show aggressive behavior around the nest.

- Inexpensive cardboard boxes can be filled with goodies and wrapped in paper and tied with sisal, cotton or leather strips. You can even place one box inside another box. Once the birds figure out there is "stuff" in side...stand back and let the paper fly!

- Also reasonably priced are PVC tubes. You can drill large holes in them to fill with Popsicle sticks, craft sticks and other stuff. Caps on the ends can prevent material from falling out. You can hang these from a chain as well.



Re-use plastic containers, such as small condiment containers, to offer more places to forage
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

This macaw found hours of enrichment from a plastic container lid.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

RECOMMENDED PRE-MADE TOYS OR ENRICHMENT PRODUCTS

- Treat and Nut "cages" available from bird stores and online stores.
- Acrylic foraging wheels and toys. Know your birds. Some of these are not suitable for some of the more destructive, larger birds!
- Stainless steel toy and food hangers.
- Spiral rope perches.

SOURCES FOR ITEMS

- Dollar and 99-cents stores.
- Home improvement stores.
- Goodwill and Salvation Army stores.
- Discount stores (Wal-Mart for example) and overstock/outlet stores.
- Internet stores including e-bay. In my experience they are especially good for beads and rope (in particular cotton bird safe rope and "Paulie" rope).
- Your local bird store.
- Yard and garage sales.

LINKS TO WEBSITES WITH ENRICHMENT IDEAS AND INFORMATION

Many of these links contain valuable general information on behavior, training and enrichment for different species of animals, not just parrots. Fortunately the principles apply to all species.

Kerwood Wolf Information Center
http://www.kerwoodwildlife.com/TIGERSENRICHMENT.htm
http://www.kerwoodwildlife.com/MEETINGCHALLENGEENRICHMENT.htm

Lincoln's Folsom Children's Zoo
http://www.lincolnzoo.org/animal_enrichment.html

Lincoln Park Zoo
http://www.lpzoo.org/animals/Animal_Care/training.html

Baylor enrichment- Animal Enrichment Field School
http://www.baylor.edu/environmental_studies/index.php?id=15294

Cleveland Metro Parks Zoo
http://www.clemetzoo.com/whats_new/enrichment.asp

Delta Society- Animal training and behavior resources (links to books)
http://www.deltasociety.org/dsr120.htm#training
http://www.deltasociety.org/dsr120.htm#behavior

Houston Zoo Animal Enrichment Program
http://www.houstonzoo.org/Life_at_the_zoo/Animal_Enrichment_Program.aqf
Careers: Animal Trainers
http://www.iseek.org/sv/13000.jsp?id=100236

Disney Animal Kingdom Theme Park- enrichment program
http://www.animalenrichment.org/

Smithsonian National Zoological Park
http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/AnimalEnrichment/

Asian Wildlife Animal Enrichment Program
http://www.asianwildlife.com/enrichment/

Young, Robert J. Environmental Enrichment for Captive Animals
Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, 2003
Blackwell Science LTD.

If you go to www.google.com and do a search for "animal enrichment birds" or "animal enrichment parrots" there are literally thousands of sites.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many, many, many thanks to Gay Noeth, Naomi Zemont, Dr. Susan Friedman Ph.D., Shauna Roberts, Janice, the Superb Threadleader Crew at Parrot BAS and all the wonderful birds and their equally wonderful caretakers who contributed information and creative ideas to put this information together. I could not have done it without you!

Adrianne grew up surrounded by animals. These included typical pets like dogs, but also included turtles, as well as some even more unusual creatures such as squirrel monkeys, geese, ducks and the occasional orphaned songbird and squirrel.

She purchased her first parrot, a Congo African Grey named Captain in 1982. She has been fascinated by parrots ever since. She learned about clicker training, which led to an interest in behavior analysis and how it applied to parrots. A particular interest has been addressing biting behavior and screaming for attention. She has taken the Living and Learning with Parrots workshop offered by Dr. Susan Friedman PhD ("an eye and mind opening experience!") and has since participated as a thread leader. She offers assistance on many pet bird internet lists serves, and along with her husband Guy, volunteers with a local parrot rehab/rehome/ rescue organization in San Diego (Parrot Rehabilitation Society www.parrotsociety.org).

She currently is the automatic food and treat dispenser for her dog Bogart, cat (with cattitude) Casper ,the Mollucan Cockatoo Destruction Crew (Penny and Pippin), Umbrella cockatoos Corky and Sydney, Bare-eye cockatoo Angel, Peka (Congo African Grey who does a superb microwave beep), Prozac (Blue and Gold macaw who should be noted arrived with that name) and Casper the Umbrella Cockatoo who arrived biting, screaming and afraid of hands. With Adrianne's help Casper now steps ups, likes attention and cuddles, and is learning to wave, shake hands and follow a target.

Teaching your Parrot to Play

By Rebecca K. O'Connor

Photo credit: Rebecca K O'Connor

One of the most important things a parrot can learn is to play. Depending on their environment and personality, some parrots seem born to play with any and every toy. Other parrots take a little more convincing. Fortunately, with a little thought and a lot of positive reinforcement, you can mold your favorite bird into a parrot toy-aholic. Playing isn't just fun though, it is an important component to avoiding undesirable behavior such as screaming and feather destructive behavior.

In my home the most important thing a parrot can learn is how to use their "indoor voice." I work all day in my home office, talk to clients on the phone, transcribe interviews and try to focus on figuring out the perfect word to use. This kind of work requires not silence, but definitely a lack of repetitious ear-drum busting noises. I simply can't work with screaming parrots in the house. All three of my African parrots certainly vocalize all day, but on the other end of the phone people say, "You have parrots, really? Why can't I hear them?" I've made a concerted effort to teach my parrots that they can get what they want (me to interact with them) without screaming. So they don't. I've also made sure that they have plenty of ways to keep themselves busy with enrichment. It's not impossible, but it is difficult to scream and chew at the same time.

Let's define this though. All parrots vocalize. Some parrots normal vocalizations have a much higher decibel level than others. This isn't "screaming." In the way most of us define it, screaming is not a normal behavior. Screaming is learned. Screaming is an extremely loud, repetitious noise that goes on and on and on. I'm guessing this isn't comfortable for any parrot. As Dr. Susan Freidman once said to me, "Imagine screaming at the top of your lungs for a half an hour in order to get what you want." Yikes!

TAO – A MINI MACAW WITH A NOT SO MINI VOICE

I was reminded of the importance of play to circumvent undesirable behavior when a new parrot recently joined my flock. I foster occasionally for Parrot's First, a rescue in Los Angeles and found myself bringing home a yellow-collared macaw named Tao. Not surprisingly this rescue mini-macaw can be loud. I didn't mind the little guy letting off a little steam now and then, but I had to make sure it didn't become a learned behavior.

Not reinforcing any screaming behavior was of course, my responsibility, but I also needed to make sure that he had more interesting things to do. I believe that parrots often scream as a means to control their environment. In other words, they're bored! Big problem with this little guy because he hadn't played with a single toy I had given him! Believe it or not, he had to learn to play. Quite possibly it is the most important thing he would learn while he lived with me. Playing was crucial for his mental and physical well-being.

So what had I tried to introduce to him? I tried chewable wood toys, plastic chains, dispensing toys, shredding toys. No interest. It was time to get proactive. I needed to find some inventive ways to create interactive toys and train him that investigating led to rewards.

DESENSITIZING FOR NEW TOYS

If you have a bird that is not playing, chances are that she is nervous around new toys. She will need to be desensitized or your chances of convincing her to play are minimal. Systematic desensitization involves grad-

ually exposing your parrot to the object in question without arousing fear responses. This will allow a parrot to determine that the object is non-threatening. If you notice your parrot reacting to something fearfully by thrashing, trying to flee, flapping her wings, leaning away, and/or growling, then back off. Place the offending object where the parrot can see it, but far enough away that she isn't reacting to it. Gradually move it closer, watching the parrot for avoidance behavior. Try interacting with the object yourself, so that your parrot can see it's non-threatening to you. Go slow, and be thoughtful. If you were afraid of spiders, you wouldn't want someone to throw one on you. Respect your parrot's fear as legitimate.

It is never a good idea to take the attitude of, "Oh, she'll just get over it." If you force your parrot to deal with objects she reacts to as frightening, she may get over it eventually, but she may also start to react to everything new as something that will be forced on her. For example, if you can't swim and your best friend pushes you into a pool, you may learn to swim and even get over your fear of water, but you probably aren't going to trust your best friend as much. Being associated with aversive experiences could quite easily ruin your relationship with your feathered best friend.

THE INCREDIBLE IRRESISTIBLE EGG CARTON

I had recently finished up a carton of eggs and after checking that there had been no egg leaks on the carton, I cut it up for a little parrot fun. My own guys are familiar with this toy so it went directly in their cages, but Tao is afraid of everything and had to be desensitized first. After I was certain he was confident with the odd blue contraption, I filled it with treats and zip-tied it to the cage.

This little guy didn't know yet that there is much to be gained by investigating new things in his cage. He wasn't too sure he wanted anything to do with the egg carton. A couple of molluca nuts on the top of it gave him reason to investigate and reward himself. I had discovered in his first few days with me that white-striped sunflower seeds, molluca nuts and almonds were great motivators for Tao. Nutriberries, healthy people food, vegetables and fruit were of no interest to him. It is possible though, that when he learns to investigate new things he may have more interest in investigating these "strange" foods. Another great reason to train Tao to play.

Despite the rewards on top of the egg carton, he wasn't too sure about ripping it up to get to the goodies inside. So I kept putting nuts on the top now and then throughout the day, in different places, shoved in the holes so he could pry them out, etc. Every time he investigated and got a little more adventuresome with his new toy he would get a reward.

Over two days he went from cautiously grabbing a nut from the edge of the egg carton, to reaching across it to grab one, to prying an almond out of a crevice, to finally beautiful destruction. I got up an hour after dawn on the third day and the egg carton was destroyed, its innards plundered. The next egg carton I gave him was annihilated in a matter of hours.

Tao wasn't too sure he wanted to have anything to do with the egg carton.
Photo credit: Rebecca K O'Connor

A couple of molluca nuts on the top of it gave him reason to investigate and reward himself.
Photo credit: Rebecca K O'Connor

I had discovered in his first few days with me that white-striped sunflower seeds, molluca nuts and almonds were great motivators for Tao. Photo credit: Rebecca K O'Connor

Over two days he went from cautiously grabbing a nut from the edge of the egg carton, to reaching across it to grab one, to prying an almond out of a crevice, to finally beautiful destruction. Photo credit: Rebecca K O'Connor

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The egg carton was a means of teaching Tao to investigate. Now I can try giving him boxes loaded with treats, paper bags, treat dispensing toys and anything else that will continue to encourage this behavior. If I can catch him investigating other new toys that don't dispense treats, I can be the treat dispenser instead. If I see him chewing on the new wood block toy I can call out "good" to mark the event and bring a treat. It's going to take some time still, but at least we are on our way!

Egg cartons can now be a part of his enrichment rotation, but it is important to understand that there MUST be a rotation. A recent article in the journal Applied Animal Behavior Science authored by Rebecca A. Fox put science to me and my colleague's assertion that change is critical to molding well-adjusted parrots. The results of their study at UC Davis with orange-winged Amazons demonstrated that the rotation of enrichment objects was much more successful in reducing fearful behavior than simply providing enrichment objects. Fox also noted that the types of toys and individual preference must also be considered for success. So teach your parrot to play, assess her playing preferences, offer variety and change it up frequently. You will both have tons of fun!

I got up an hour after dawn on the third day and the egg carton was destroyed, its innards plundered. The next egg carton I gave him was annihilated in a matter of hours. Photo credit: Rebecca K O'Connor

REFERENCES

Fox, Rebecca A. and James R. Millam, "Novelty and individual difference influence neophobia in orange-winged Amazon parrots *(Amazonia amazonica), Applied Animal Behavior Science* 104 (2007) 107-115.

Rebecca K. O'Connor has been training birds for over a decade. She has worked and consulted at free flight bird

shows in Mexico, Australia, Ohio, Florida, Texas, and California. Believing in empowering parrots and their human friends, she is a frequent contributor to Good Bird Magazine and her book, A Parrot for Life! was released in February 2007 from TFH Publications. She consults with parrot owners helping them to problem solve and enjoy an enhanced and meaningful life with the birds in their home. Lectures and workshops are also an important aspect of the work that she does. She is a falconer, constantly working with her own birds, occasional foster parrots and lives with three African parrots, a flock of homing pigeons and a Brittany spaniel. Read more about Rebecca at: www.rebecca-koconnor.com

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continued from page 21

ANSWERS TO "WHAT IS THIS BIRD'S BODY LANGUAGE SAYING?

1. It appears this all over body scratch is heavenly to this Harlequin Macaw. The wings are held slightly away from the body, likely in response to the positioning of the hands. In addition this is one of those scenarios in which what is happening with the eyes can give a lot of information. In this case the eyes are closed and the bird's back and head are oriented away from the person offering the scratches. In this situation it would appear there is such a level of comfort and lack of concern that the bird is willing to take her eyes off of her surroundings completely. Her closed eyes could be the result of fingers being close to her eyes, but closed eyes paired with the orientation of her body seems to indicate more than likely the bird is simply very relaxed, and one might assume trusting of the person delivering the attention. The weight of the bird is also low on the perch and her hind quarters are directed upwards slightly. This can be important to note to avoid drifting into the realm of reinforcing courtship type behaviors (such as presenting the cloaca). Parrots can learn to present sexual behaviors to the point of it becoming a problem. It is often recommended parrot owners be sure to include a wide variety of interactions/behaviors to reinforce when spending time with their parrots to avoid possible problems associated with reinforcing only courtship behaviors.

2. The eyes have it once again, but they are communicating something different in this photo. With a very round eye, large visible iris and small dark pupil, one would describe this as eye pinning. In addition the typically white skin around the eye has a red tint to it. The beak is slightly open. The feathers while fluffed are not fluffy all over. It can be noted that the feathers just above the beak are not raised as high as they can be. Some portion of the feathers on top of the head and definitely the nape of the neck are raised. Although not shown in the photo, I would venture so say the bird is not sitting with his weight distributed low to the perch. He is likely standing somewhat tall. The wings are out from the body. (Macaws will often raise both wings together when greeting another macaw.) This information together indicates a somewhat aroused parrot. This could be a signal of aggressive behavior to come or indicative of a bird that is excited. Either way this body language would be a signal to the trainer to give the bird some time to relax and show body language that indicates comfort before attempting more interactions.

3. Despite appearances this is not an attempt to wring this parrot's neck! How do we know? This Yellow Naped Amazon parrot's body language explains it. The bird's body weight is distributed low on the perch. The contour (body) feathers are loose. They are not slicked tight to his body. Feathers around the base of the beak, over the top of the beak, along side the eye and on the back of the head are fluffed up. Note the subtle difference in what feathers are fluffed compared to the Blue and Gold Macaw in picture #2. There is no eye pinning here as evidenced by the big dark pupil and the sliver of orange iris visible. This Amazon parrot is showing relaxed and comfortable body language while he receives his neck scratches.

4. It must be a sleepy afternoon. Little "Smudge" seems barely able to keep his eyes open. His very loose contour feathers are evident in this photo. His head is fluffed into almost a perfect ball. Feathers below the beak, above the beak, on the side of the face, top of the head and back of the head are all fluffed. His beak is closed and weight distributed low. With a little quiet time, Smudge will likely soon be drifting off to sleep.

5. The little birds are as expressive as the big birds. This lovebird is not testing her wings for flight. Instead she is doing her best to impress with a courtship dance. When launching into flight the bird has often leapt off of the perch just before the wings come out. Since this birds feet are firmly planted she is more than likely simply holding her wings out. It can also be noted that the tail is positioned upward, perhaps to present the cloaca. The lovebird dance also typically involves repetitive clicking type noises. As with the macaw example reinforcing courtship behavior can lead to problems. With female lovebirds it can often lead to excessive egg laying. This in turn can sometimes lead to calcium deficiencies. It is best to focus on non sexual behaviors when interacting with your lovebird.

Profile of an Animal Lover

Why are we drawn to animals? Some theorize it is in our genes. "Biophilia" is the word coined by E.O.Wilson for the human propensity to affiliate with other life forms. Wilson suggests that humans have an innate affinity for living things which has evolved over many years of learning and experience with nature.

Perhaps our genes do influence the desire to be around animals, but clearly there are undeniable rewards from the opportunity to develop a loving caring relationship with a species other than ourselves.

If we are fortunate to have a love of animals fostered in our lifetimes we can learn about responsibility, empathy, the value of life, companionship, nurturing, commitment and many times unconditional love.

Have animals had a profound influence on your life? Share your photos or story with Good Bird Magazine. Email 300 dpi photos to info@goodbirdinc.com.

OUR FEATURED PROFILE:

Debbie Goodrich owns and operates "The Parrot Lady Educational Entertainment" where she personally manufacturers enrichment and foraging toys and provides hours of Educational Entertainment to thousands of people every year. Her work began with her own horse ranch she helped her mother run for nearly 14 years. From there, she got the itch to train animals and enrolled in the University of California, Santa Cruz where she earned her BA in Psychobiology focusing on the study of cognition and intelligence in animals. She was fortunate enough to be selected to do field biology with elephant seal behavior and wrote an essay about dolphin reintroductions that received honors. After graduating, she was hired by Rainforest Cafe where she was quickly promoted and created her own unique bird show in Seattle, Washington. When they retired the bird program, she continued her work in educating the public with her Seattle flock as The Parrot Lady. She has given lectures about enrichment from local bird clubs to workshops such as the Regional Aquatics Workshop in Houston. Her motto is "Yes! You can even enrich a fish." Visit her website at www.parrotlady.com and look for her ad featuring her Parrot Pockets in this magazine.

Behind the Curtain: Preliminary Training for a Show Routine

By M.V.Z. Ana Alejandra Arroyo Lambaer of Africam Safari, Puebla, Mexico

Photo credit: M.V.Z. Ana Alejandra Arroyo Lambaer

To successfully train animals to present natural behaviors in a conservation education program in a zoo, the animals must be comfortable and familiar with the facilities, staff members, necessary props and equipment and the schedule. This can be achieved via habituation, systematic desensitization, positive reinforcement training and generalization.

Before initiating training behaviors suited for the show, it is necessary for the animals to learn behaviors that will make their routine care and management easy. This also prepares the animal for future learning. Some preliminary behaviors animals need to learn include learning to accept reinforcers from the trainers hand, moving from point A to point B, holding their position at a designated location, allowing a harness, leash and/or telemetry transmitter to be attached to their bodies, and entering a transport cage or box.

ACCEPTING REINFORCERS FROM THE HAND

This may not appear to be a difficult exercise, but for some animals it can be a challenge. The first contact a trainer has with an individual animal is the most important. This is because it is critical to develop trust between the trainer and the animal. The time necessary to achieve this goal depends on the capabilities of the animal in question and the trainer's ability to read and interpret the animal's body language.

STATIONING

Teaching an animal to stay still in one position is very useful. It can be helpful when acquiring a weight on an animal, assessing physical condition, and for putting on transmitters and harnesses. After they have learned to accept reinforcers from the hand it can be easy to capture the behavior of staying still by using a bridging stimulus followed by the reinforcer. (To watch a video of a toucan trained by the author to station to allow beak cleaning and manipulation visit this link www.youtube.com/GoodBirdInc.

HOP ONTO THE HAND

Once an individual bird has become very familiar with the learning process, the trainer can progress to teaching the bird to hop onto a hand, or gloved hand for raptors. Training this behavior requires good observation skills and reading of bird body language to determine how quickly to move through the identified approximations. Moving too fast can damage the bond of trust forged with the animals.

MOVE FROM ONE POINT TO ANOTHER AND/OR FOLLOW AN OBJECT

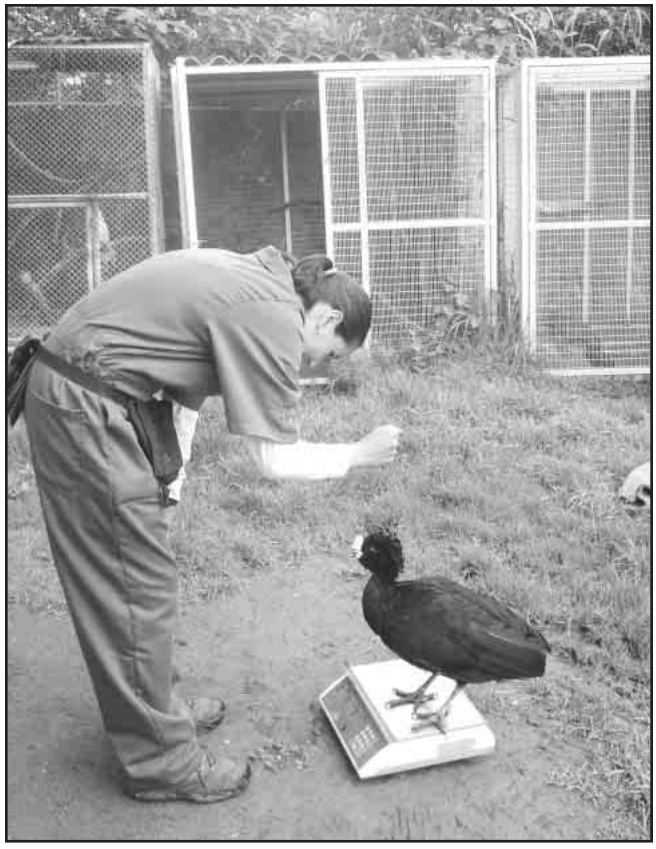
Moving from point A to point B, following an object or target, and coming to the trainer or other location when cued are similar exercises to train. These behaviors are particularly important because they are used to help generate physical exercise which in turn is used to create optimum conditioning for free flight.

SCALE TRAINING

An important behavior used to monitor the health of the birds is scale training. This particular behavior uses previously learned behaviors to accomplish. For example a bird needs to be able to accept reinforcers from the hand, hop to the hand and scale, and station on the scale. For accuracy the goal is to weigh the animals at the same time each day and in the same manner. This means any equipment, such as leashes or harnesses, that might be used with the animal for weighing are used each time the animal is weighed.

DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSICAL CONDITION

Birds that fly in shows need to be in good physical condition and demonstrate excellent flight abilities. Exercises such as vertical flights, A to B flights of varying distances and directions, and flights in windy conditions are practiced to ensure birds are physically fit.



A currasow stations on a scale.
Photo credit: M.V.Z. Ana Alejandra Arroyo Lambaer

ENTER TRANSPORT BOXES

Entering transport boxes, kennels or cages requires that the animals have developed a great deal of trust in the trainers. The goal is for the animals to voluntarily enter the boxes and remain calm for a period of time. This period of time is increased gradually.

PUTTING ON TRANSMITTERS, HARNESSES AND OTHER EQUIPMENT

In some cases it is necessary to attach a telemetry transmitter or a harness as a safety measure for animals that are trained to present behaviors that include higher risk, such as free flight. To achieve this goal trainers can teach the animal to station long enough to allow the attachment of the accessories. For some animals this may also require teaching specific cues to help modify body position for easier attachment of the devices.

CONCLUSION

As a spectator, it is hard to think of all the actions that must take place to perform a successful show. This

Spargo the King Vulture waits patiently in his kennel
Photo credit: M.V.Z. Ana Alejandra Arroyo Lambaer

Attaching a harness to Beva, the capybara, is an important safety measure.
Photo credit: M.V.Z. Ana Alejandra Arroyo Lambaer

hard work is easily unnoticed, and is really a series of routine activities that must be followed with discipline. This includes the daily cleaning of the enclosures, monitoring the health of the animals, monitoring the weight, preparation of diets, preventive medicine programs and of course, the training, which is indispensable. The training allows the animals to learn certain behaviors that can be reproduced in the show and it provides occupational therapy with which we can reduce stress that may be caused by a captive environment. All this allows us to achieve important goals for the zoo. One goal being to provide for the health and welfare of the animals, while maintaining them in optimum conditions, and another being to educate visitors by showing them animals performing natural behaviours appropriate for each species while maintaining a high level of respect and dignity for the animals we showcase.

M.V.Z. Ana Alejandra Arroyo Lambaer or "Ale" for short is an animal trainer at Africam Safari in Puebla, Mexico. She is also a trained veterinarian, but found her true calling when she accepted a position working with the animals in the presentation. On a daily basis she trains hawks, owls, eagles, vultures, condors, toucans, parrots, guinea fowl, pigeons, ravens, chickens, kinkajou, capybara and a large great dane. More information about Africam Safari can be found at http://www.africamsafari.com.mx

Learning to Fly

"Learning to Fly" is devoted to understanding, discussing, and exploring the many intricate details of flight. Whether one chooses to clip flight feathers or accept the responsibilities of caring for a flighted bird is a personal decision. However, there are many things to know and learn about flight that can be helpful to flighted and non flighted bird owners everywhere. (Especially when that supposedly non flighted bird flies out the door!)

Flighted behaviors may not be a good goal for every bird or caregiver. Should you decide to pursue this path, keep in mind that flighted behaviors are most successfully trained to the highest level following a structured plan based on positive reinforcement training strategies. Following these practices can reduce, but do not eliminate, the risk of flying birds outdoors.

Photo credit: Dean Moser

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA FLIGHT LABORATORY

By Barbara Heidenreich

Are you a junkie for flight? Then we have your fix. In doing a bit of research for a paper on flighted parrots, I was fortunate to re-discover a favorite website of mine. The University of Montana Flight Laboratory located at http://dbs.umt.edu/flightlab/. Headed up by the incomparable Dr Kenneth Dial, this lab produces a wealth of information about birds and flight. Dr Dial has a lengthy list of academic accomplishments. However some readers may know him from his entertaining and educational program "All Bird TV." He shows his genuine enthusiasm for all things "bird" in this program.

Here is a little more about Dr Dial, excerpted from his website:

"I continue to focus on the ontogenetic development, neuromuscular control, skeletal biomechanics, mechanical power production, metabolic energy costs, limb, tail and body kinematics, and flight styles associated with the ecology of avian flight. In an effort to communicate outside the college classroom, I developed and hosted twenty-eight 30-minute television programs for Discovery Communication's Animal Planet focusing on avian biology and evolution. This program continues to air reaching a world-wide audience of over 100 million. In addition, I have been fortunate to have my flight research highlighted on many popular scientific television programs (NOVA, PBS, BBC, Discovery Magazine, Scientific American Frontiers, National Geographic, and other independent film makers) as well as public museums (e.g., British Natural History Museum, Museum of Science, Boston, Yale and Berkeley public museums). In these efforts, I have attempted to impress upon the layperson an understanding of the utility of science from broad perspectives (functional morphology, ecology, behavior, paleontology, neurobiology, and evolutionary biology). We have consistently had 3-4 undergraduates, predominately women, work in our lab each semester. My funded research has always represented a fundamentally collaborative effort with experts in: neuromuscular control, skeletal kinematics, modeling, animation, paleontology, and life history biology. Initially trained as an ecologist, yet engaged in studies within functional experimental morphology (muscular activity, skeletal movement, mechanical power-output, growth and development), my current research involves collaboration with several experts in diverse areas of biology (paleontology, biomechanics, physiology)."

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The research focus of the Flight Laboratory is the what, how, and from whence of bird flight. Using a variety of laboratory (wind tunnels, electromyography, pressure transducers, flow probes, strain gauges, sonomicrometry, 3-d kinematics, high-speed film/video) and field techniques (60 Hz video, telemetry,) we seek to answer questions regarding the physical mechanisms, performance, and ecological implications of bird flight. Ultimately, we hope that the answers to these questions are useful in constructing a cogent story of the evolution of this remarkably diverse group of animals.

Past Research

- Neuromuscular control of avian flight
- Skeletal mechanics
- Intermittent flight
- Avian breathing
- Maneuvering flight
- Mechanical power output of birds
- Regional contractile properties of the pigeon pectoralis
- Intermittent flight and body gliding in Zebra Finches
- Scaling of mechanical power output in Galliformes
- Mechanical power output of magpies
- Mechanical power output of European Starling

Editor's note: When perusing the website clicking on each past research topic brings you to links to read abstracts on published journal articles. Also worth downloading are the slow motion videos showing various aspects of flight assisted running with chukars http://dbs.umt.edu/flightlab/videos.htm,. Follow the instructions on the top of the page for downloading. Don't forget to download the introduction to the lab video on the homepage also.

Current Research

- Scaling of mechanical power output of Anseriformes
- Scaling of maximum power output in Columbiformes
- Metabolic efficiency of a bird in flight
- Maneuvering performance: Predator evasion and the use of 3-D environments
- The evolution of bird flight: neotony, and models of

early theropod fliers. Abstract - WAIR and the Evolution of Flight | AAAS - WAIR

Future Research

- Life history and developmental strategies of locomotor performance
- Telemetric tracking of migration

EQUIPMENT

The following describes some of the equipment used to facilitate the research projects at the lab.

The Flight Laboratory wind tunnel

The wind tunnel was built in 1988 to dimensional specifications that would allow its use in the x-ray cinematography facility at Harvard University. As large, AC electric motors frequently create large amounts of voltage noise that can be picked up by the sensitive instruments used to measure physiological processes, the tunnel's fan is driven by a 15,000 Watt DC motor running on a series of deep-cycle batteries. With a flight chamber measuring 76x76x91cm, the tunnel will accommodate birds up the size of a magpie, although it is better-suited aerodynamically to birds the size of a parakeet or starling.

Electromyography (EMG)

Electromyography is the use of electrodes to detect the electrical activity of muscles as they contract. The Flight Laboratory has used electromyography coupled with kinematics taken from high-speed film to determine bird muscle function in flight.

Strain gauges

Strain gauges are used to detect linear deformation, or strain, of a material. When bonded to the surface of a structure such as a bone, they can detect even the slightest bending (that is, change in outside diameter length) in that structure. They function on a principle first described by Prof. William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), who found that the resistance of metal wires changed when they were subjected to tensile strain. By fixing such a wire - in the form a strain gauge - to the surface of a structure, the wires will be stretched as the material is stretched. By measuring and calibrating the change in voltage resulting from this change in resistance, the strain gauge can determine the degree of deformation of a material. In turn, the degree of deformation can then be calibrated to the force causing the deformation.

Sonomicrometry

Sonomicrometry is the measurement of distances using sound. Transducers made from piezo-electric ceramic material (commonly called "crystals") transmit and receive sound energy. Typically, these transducers operate at ultra-sound frequencies (1 Mhz and higher). To perform a single distance measurement, one crystal will transmit a burst of ultrasound, and a second crystal will receive this ultrasound signal. The elapsed time from transmission to reception is a direct and linear representation of the physical separation of the crystals.

Any sonomicrometer is therefore a timing device, repeating this measurement of transit-time hundreds or thousands of times per second. The Digital Sonomicrometer measures this transit time similar to the operation of a digital stop watch; that is, in discrete time steps (about 15 nano-seconds). The resulting transit time is easily converted to a distance if the speed of sound in the material being measured is known. Typically, in biological materials, this speed is 1540 meters per second. Given the speed of the ultrasound propagation and the size of the discrete sampling steps, the resulting resolution of the sonomicrometer would be 1540 m s-1 x .000000015 s = 0.000023 m (0.023 mm). The resolution of any sonomicrometer depends on its ability to accurately detect the received ultrasound signal and on its ability to measure transit time.

Sonomicrometry is used in the Flight Lab to measure the contractile properties (strain, or change in fiber length/total resting fiber length; strain rate) of avian skeletal muscle. Thus far, the technique has been used to measure the regional contractile properties of pectoralis muscle, and to measure the fiber length change of the pectoralis (while simultaneously measuring muscle force with strain gauges) to estimate muscle power output.

Three-dimensional kinematics

Pigeon wing and body movements were tracked using a high speed (200 Hz) 3-d motion analysis system (Motion Analysis Corp.) designed for human kinematics. The system uses cameras that produce and collect the infrared light reflected back from markers on the bird. When calibrated, the cameras view objects in a three-dimensional coordinate space. The coordinates for the objects traveling through that space are recorded, and from these coordinates, the kinematic parameters of interest are calculated.

High-speed film and video

Most of what birds do they do faster than we can assimilate; some, like humming birds, do things faster than we can see. To give big, slow humans a chance to appreciate and understand bird flight, tools such as high speed film and video are essential. In the past, we have used the Redlake Low-cam 16mm film camera, shooting primarily Kodak Ektachrome high-speed tungsten film (up to 500 frames s-1). We have recently added a Redlake Imagining MotionScope video system capable of capturing up to 2000 fields s-1. The advantages of high-speed video over film are many - not the least of which is the cost. Shooting at high frame rates uses an enormous amount of film, which, in turn, is extremely costly to process. Moreover, the researchers cannot immediately view the pictures; they won't know what they have until it returns from the processors. Digitally captured and stored on inexpensive VHS tape, high-speed video is immediately available for viewing, enabling the researchers to determine if the action (in our case, the flight) was the behavior they wanted to see and if that action has been usefully captured.

High-speed video (NTSC or SVHS) can be captured using frame grabbers (such as Iomega's Buzz card) or, in the case of Redlake Imagining's new PCI system, downloaded directly into computers as AVI files. Kinematic parameters can then be quantified using any one of a variety of image analysis software (e.g. Scion Image).

As important the ability to quantify behaviors is, the images gathered by high-speed film and video are equally important as tools to that often-skipped first step in traditional scientific inquiry: observing. Existing in a very different temporal frame of reference, it would be nearly impossible for a big, slow researcher to hone into a useful scientific tool an intuitive sense of bird flight. That is, we wouldn't know what questions to ask, or where to begin in answering them.

Science not only helps us discover ways to improve the health care of our companion parrots, but it can also give us insights into what makes them fascinating creatures, such as their amazing abilities to fly. I hope you found this introduction to the University of Montana Laboratory of Flight intriguing. Your journey of discovery has just begun.

SCIENCE FOR THE BIRDBRAIN
(A SYNOPSIS OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS)

Avian Aging

By Diane Starnes

Fannie is estimated to be over 40 years old
Photo Credit: Diane Starnes

INTRODUCTION:

I have wondered for several years now when some kind of testing would be developed to determine the actual age of birds, especially the long-lived Psittacines. It seemed with the advances that have been made in the field of Molecular Biology and the new technologies emerging there must be some kind of marker that could be used in a test for detecting chronological age in birds. Inquiring with some of the molecular diagnostic companies exhibiting at AAV (Association of Avian Veterinarians) conferences about the possibility of such testing I was always told that such testing was unlikely as it was too complex and there were no single definitive markers.

It is relatively easy to determine whether a bird is a juvenile or is sexually mature, generally by examining feather coloration and sometimes tail lengths and eye color; but once a bird has passed sexual maturity it

National Parrot Rescue and Preservation Foundation's beloved mascot George was thought to be over 65 years old.
Photo Credit: Diane Starnes

becomes exceeding difficult, if not impossible, to figure out exact age. Age determination in mammals can be easily calculated by such things as bone density and length, the amount of graying or wrinkling that has occurred, or the wear and types of teeth present. The evolutionary development of birds has caused a hollowing of the bones and replaced the jaw and teeth with a beak, thereby disallowing any such demonstrations of age. Signs like layering or wrinkling of the beak and the texture and color of the feet and skin can sometimes be an age indicator, but it can also be an indicator of disease or malnutrition at some time in the bird's history. Most with pet birds raised in captivity can rely on leg bands for information on the age of our bird, but these bands are often lost or have been removed for safety reasons. In the case of birds caught in the wild the band only serves to tell when that bird arrived in this country, not how old it is. In wild populations of birds, and especially wild parrots, only a small number are ever banded, and many of those bands are lost over the lifespan of the bird.

Having the capability of determining the chronological age of a bird would be one more piece in the puzzle for those working in avian rescue and sanctuaries, where so little is often known about a bird's background, or for pet owners with re-homed birds. It would end the guesswork now involved in determining just how long some psittacines can live both in captivity and in the wild. Actual reproductive years could be defined more accurately, and it would aid in the appropriate pairings of critically endangered species. It would be revolutionary for the conservationist and field biologist to be able to know the ages of a flock and thus whether it was growing or had become static. They could easily tell when a population was in trouble long before it became critical. It would become possible to see if age influenced diet or behavior. From a medical prospective it could be useful to know if age related illnesses such as eye changes (cataracts, etc.), stroke, chronic heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease, etc. were consistent with the age of the bird or are brought on by other causes.

Having the capability of determining the chronological age of a bird would be one more piece in the puzzle for those working in avian rescue and sanctuaries, where so little is often known about a bird's background, or for pet owners with re-homed birds.
Photo Credit: Diane Starnes

No one knows the age of this ringneck parakeet found at someone's bird feeder.
Photo Credit: Diane Starnes

I was quite surprised and delighted when I came across a poster at the 2006 AAV Conference in San Antonio on this very topic and felt it was something that needed to be reviewed. The following is the result of a search on this topic.

Pentosidine as Biomarker for Chronological Age in Birds
(Jesse Fallon, Cochrane, Dorr, Avery & Hillar Klandorf)

Pentosidine (Ps) an Endproduct in Skin Collagen as Age Marker
(Sell et al.1996; Chaney et al.2003; Fallon et al.2006).
Association of Avian Veterinarians Conference; Poster Session 2006; San Antonio TX.

DEFINITION AND FUNCTION OF PENTOSIDINE

One unavoidable outcome of aging is the modification of proteins by sugars which, through a nonenzymatic process known as the Maillard reaction, can lead to the formation of crosslinked compounds termed "advanced glycation endproducts"(AGE). The Maillard reaction, long known to food chemists, consists of the nonenzymatic attachment of reducing sugars (that is, glycosylation) to susceptible amino acid residues of proteins, which causes "browning." Cooked meat is an example of a Maillard reaction. "Browned" proteins may have differing chemical and physical traits than their unbrowned precursors, or the glycosylation itself may interfere with the active site of enzymatic proteins.

Pentosidine (Ps) is one such AGE and a well documented Maillard structure. Pentosidine is a protein crosslink that is formed through nonenzymatic glycation of lysine and arginine residue bound by a pentose sugar. The elevated plasma concentration of glucose contributes to the nonenzymatic attachment of glucose to proteins and generates glycoxidation crosslinks in tissue (such as Pentosidine) which ultimately impairs function in tissue cells.

Pentosidine is an established indicator of both glycative and oxidative tissue damage in both mammals and birds and its concentration increases with age. These protein crosslinks, like the process of aging, are irreversible. Because of their stability, AGEs are cumulative in long-lived tissues such as collagen. Collagen is a ubiquitous tissue protein that constitutes nearly 30% of the protein in mammals. The physical properties of collagen change as a result of crosslinking and result in the stiffness in skin, joints, tendon, and overall tissue rigidity. Collagen crosslinks can be divided into two major areas:

1.) Crosslinks that are important in normal development and maturation and are controlled by the enzyme lysyl oxidase.

2.) Crosslinks that are derived from nonenzymatic additions (such as Pentosidine) of carbohydrate moieties and contribute to accelerated tissue aging.

The measurement of Pentosidine in the tissue of animals is greatly facilitated by its acid stability and its fluorescent properties. This makes it a valuable biomarker of aging that can be measured in the laboratory. Interspecies comparison of Ps accumulation in mammals has demonstrated that Ps accumulates at different rates in different species, and that an inverse relationship exists between maximum longevity and Ps. That is, species with shorter life spans tend to accumulate Ps more rapidly than those with greater maximum life expectancies.

PENTOSIDINE AS AN AGE DETERMINATION TOOL

The interspecies comparison results were disappointing but could have been due to a variety of factors. The differences could be due to diet since one study population(grouse) was captive but was compared to an

avian species (cormorant) that was wild and free ranging and therefore subject to diet restrictions. There is now convincing evidence that dietary restriction may act in part by decreasing oxidative stress and increasing antioxidant defenses and repair. The free ranging group had longer life spans and lower Ps accumulation. The distinct difference of Ps accumulation between short and long-lived birds could be linked to species-specific skin biology. It's possible the long lived species inherited a more efficient system to replace cross-linked skin collagen which would lead to a reduced rate of Ps accumulation. It has also been suggested that the remarkable longevity of individuals in the class Aves is linked to their production of the endogenous antioxidant uric acid. Perhaps, the longer lived species are able to retard the formation of Ps and prevent some oxidative damage by maintaining more efficient antioxidant systems, which include higher concentrations of uric acid. Differences in rates of Ps accumulation appear to be tied to overall longevity of the individual species, as is also suggested in mammals. It is possible that the smaller, more metabolically active avian species have a higher respiratory quotient and more rapid oxygen consumption, which leads to an increase in free radical mediated damage, thus an increase in Ps resulting in a shorter life span.

Whether skin biology, glycemic index, dietary restriction, composition of diet, metabolic rate, oxidative stress, or a combination of these factors influence the accumulation of Ps in birds, it seems unlikely that a generic relationship between the age of individual birds and Ps accumulation will be applicable to all species. Perhaps Ps accumulation between closely related species or species with similar life spans will coincide enough to make some generalizations possible. Further investigation into family-, genus-, and species-specific models are needed to confirm this.

Although these studies presented some variation in age estimates, they also revealed a strong correlation between Ps accumulation and age within individual species, which suggests that this technique may develop into a useful tool for age estimation. Further study into these possibilities may not only improve our understanding of the differences in rate of Ps accumulation, but also contribute to our understanding of the aging process in general.

THE AGING PROCESS

Differences between avian species

Birds age physiologically much more slowly in comparison to their mammalian counterparts. However, among various avian orders there is broad variation in aging rates and patterns. Although data sufficient to critically evaluate this notion is lacking most weak fliers, birds of the order Galliformes (quail, pheasants, grouse, turkeys, etc.) tend to be exceptionally short-lived. By contrast, strong flying long distance ranging or migratory birds (hummingbirds, seabirds, songbirds, parrots, raptors, etc.) have exceptionally low mortality rates. Some members of this latter group have exceptionally long life spans and retarded aging rates for their body size. Hummingbirds are the most disproportionate long-lived birds. They are the smallest avian species at 15 gms. with the highest metabolic rate and can live to 14 yrs in captivity. Long held hypotheses of aging suggest that an organism's longevity is inversely related to its metabolic rate. But based on substantial evidence from comparative studies of various species of birds a reassessment needs to be made of metabolic rate as a major determinate in the aging process.

The distribution of avian aging must be tempered with the fact that most analysis currently come from mark and recapture studies. These depend on initial banding and subsequent recapture efforts which are often opportunistic making the reliability of conclusions about longevity of individual species extremely variable. There is also longevity data from a handful of cage bird species but much of this is unsubstantiated and the variety of species is low. As stated previously there could be many reasons for the differences in longevity among avian species which need further study.

Aging in birds verses mammals

Wild birds live nearly two times longer than captive mammals of comparable body size and captive birds live three or four times longer. One reason suggested for this phenomena could be due to selective pressures in the environment when all else is equal. Flight gives birds greater protection against mortality from predation and accidents or local habitat deterioration. An evolutionary history of low mortality leads to the evolution of retarded aging rate and predicts that most birds should age more slowly.

The different life spans of birds as opposed to like size mammals still begs an explanation and it still remains to be explained why the process of oxidative disregulation takes so much longer to occur in birds than in mice.

Birds as animal models for aging

The longevity of birds provides researchers with an interesting paradigm because birds exhibit several traits which should render them more susceptive to the degenerative processes of aging.

-Birds have a metabolic rate 2-2.5 higher than those in similar sized mammals and consume 2-3 times as much oxygen per gram of body tissue per lifetime.

-Their plasma glucose is 2-6 higher than mammals.

-Their body temperatures tend to be approximately 3-5 degree Celsius higher than mammals.

An increase in any of these parameters should contribute to accelerated tissue damage. Birds should be especially prone to the formation of glycosylated proteins, because the Maillard reaction is accelerated by increasing the concentration of glucose which is the primary reactant, or by increasing the temperature of reaction. Birds seem to have developed mechanisms to protect against free radical damage and advanced Maillard reaction that are the consequences of high metabolism, elevated blood glucose and body temperature. Clearly birds have evolved some type of especially effective mechanisms for protecting against the accumulation of oxidative damage. The details of these protective measures remain elusive. It may be that birds produce fewer reactive oxygen species (free-radicals) per unit of oxygen consumption or that birds have more active enzymes (antioxidants like uric acid) for detoxifying these molecules. The belief from the Pentosidine study is that one of the reasons birds successfully evolved higher body temperatures was to maintain elevated tissue concentrations of the powerful antioxidant, uric acid. That is consistent with reduced rate of nonenzymatic attachment of glucose to proteins in birds relative to mammals.

Birds have a great deal to teach us about the successful management of factors thought to be centrally involved in aging, such as oxidative load and the long-term toxic effects of glucose. Study of the design of avian defenses may illustrate how we might improve human defenses against these processes.

CONCLUSION:

Pentosidine has been found to be a stable indicator of chronological age in individual species of birds; however, Ps accumulation at the same ages differs between species. Therefore data must be compiled for each individual species before it can be used to study maximum and average life spans, generation spans, the length of reproductive age and much more.

Pentosidine concentrations have greater variability as the age of the birds increase. Difference in metabolism, diet, habitat, sex, as well as other factors could play a role in pentosidine accumulation from species to species. However a strong correlation between pentosidine accumulation and age still exists when these factors are removed from the model. This still makes Ps measurements a useful tool within the same species. Further data collections are necessary from a variety of avian species to obtain the correlation of pentosidine accumulation as a function of habitat, diet, and sex.

In the last 10 years or so the nature of aging research has changed dramatically; the free radical theory of the fifties is rapidly attracting the interest of the mainstream of biological research. The tools of molecular biology are now sophisticated and accessible enough that researchers have adopted them. Results from disparate experimental systems have recently shown that oxygen radicals play a role in degenerative aging, and the pace of discoveries is quickening. The likely result of this collision of scientific approaches will be the unraveling of the physiological tangle of aging, and it seems safe to say that one of the important knots will turn out to be oxidative stress. However, despite the growing consensus that the oxidants and oxygen free radicals are involved in degenerative aging, countless mechanistic questions remain to be uncovered, as well as a central outstanding unknown: Do oxidants determine maximum life span in mammals and birds?

Part of the purpose of writing this column is to familiarize the reader with advances in avian medicine and research and to hopefully developed a broader support base for this research. If you or your club would like to support the work on avian aging you may send donations to:

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For more information on this topic refer to the references or the following websites:

http://kitkat.wvu.edu:8080/files/2157/Chaney_Jr__Richard_Thesis.pdf

Factors Affecting the Accumulation of Pentosidine in the Skin of Wild Birds
By Richard C. Chaney Jr.

http://www.nis.wvu.edu/2005_Releases/bird_age_research.htm

Diane Starnes has worked in areas of bio-medical research for twenty-five years in both private and academic sectors. She has hands on experience in areas of microbiology, virology, cloning, PCR replication, DNA extraction, and sequencing. She has been involved with birds her whole life, and with parrots for the past fifteen years. She worked briefly as a technician with an avian veterinary clinic after retiring from research. Currently she serves on the board of the National Parrot Rescue and Preservation Foundation, doing parrot rescue and education, and assisting in presenting the Parrot Festival seminar in Houston, Texas, USA each year.

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Scientific Studies and Feather Picking. Part Two

By Natasha Laity Snyder, CVT

Lack of exercise seems to be linked to a higher probability of feather picking in parrots.
Photo credit: Dean Moser

The majority of studies on feather destructive behavior have been done in chickens, and some findings in chickens seem to apply to parrots. Parrot caretakers may want to consider the implications of these studies and test the results in their own flocks if they are having problems with feather damaging behavior. In the Spring 2007 issue of Good Bird Magazine we looked at the importance of foraging. There are other factors in a bird's husbandry that also seem to have an impact on the rate of feather picking.

One component of bird care is encouraging the bird to exercise. Wild birds are very active. Lack of exercise seems to be linked to a higher probability of feather picking in parrots1. Orange Winged Amazons (Amazona amazonica), and Crimson Bellied Conures (Pyrrhura perlata perlata) who had high rates of feather picking were also observed to move around their cage less than the birds with low levels of feather picking2. Poorly furnished cages that discourage play have been shown to increase feather picking. Adding a combination of physical and foraging activities together seems to be the most effective husbandry change that prevents feather picking.

Adding toys to an enclosure was shown to increase the amount of time playing and decrease the amount of time preening.
Photo credit: Roelant Jonker/Grace Innemee www.CityParrots.org

Adding toys to an enclosure was shown to increase the amount of time playing and decrease the amount of time preening. Birds that feather pick were observed to spend much more time preening than birds that do not feather pick. Changing perches did not decrease preening behaviors unless the perches moved or swung. Giving a captive bird both new perches and toys increased exercise and significantly reduced feather picking. Toys made out of natural materials such as branches and woven baskets were most successful in encouraging play.

While enrichments that encourage exercise should be utilized, it has been shown that foraging toys are even more influential on the parrot's feather picking behavior.
Photo credit: Roelant Jonker/Grace Innemee www.CityParrots.org

If the bird explores looking for treats which are hidden in different places each day, his exercise level increases dramatically.
Photo credit: Roelant Jonker/Grace Innemee www.CityParrots.org

While enrichments that encourage exercise should be utilized, it has been shown that foraging toys are even more influential on the parrot's feather picking behavior. Foraging toys add the benefit of random rewards for exercise which will encourage the bird to hunt for food hidden in his cage. If the bird explores his cage looking for treats which are hidden in different places each day, his exercise level increases dramatically.

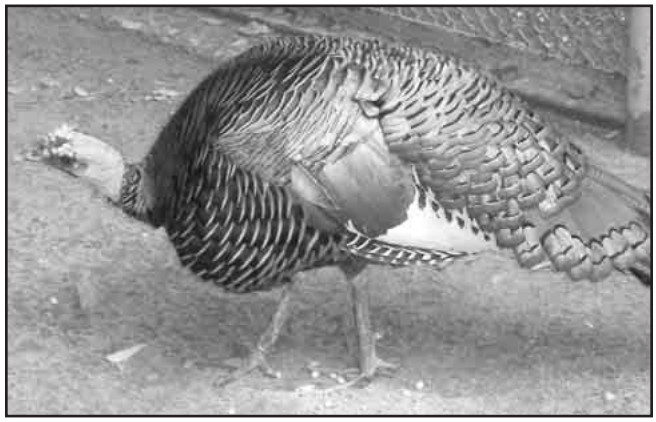
Vocalizing is another way that parrots can perform an alternative behavior to feather picking. Wild parrots call as they fly and feed. Crimson Bellied Conures (Pyrrhura perlata perlata) with lower levels of feather picking spent more time making natural vocalizations than birds in the same flock who had higher levels of feather picking. Being allowed to make natural vocalizations periodically through the day may help the bird use up energy that otherwise might be spent feather picking. Owners can play loud music or sing along with their birds in order to encourage healthy vocalizations.

While normal vocalizations should be encouraged, excessive repetitive sounds or screaming could be linked to the likelihood of feather problems. Orange Winged Amazon parrots with lower levels of feather picking spent less time producing stereotypic vocalizations than the birds with higher feather picking in a laboratory environment. Stereotypic vocalizations are aberrant behaviors where the bird makes the same noise for a long period of time. In the wild, this type of behavior would use too much energy to be a useful tool. Many birds who were lacking in enrichment spent the time vocalizing excessively, and these parrots seemed to be the same birds who were prone to feather picking. Repetitive calling may be triggered by stress in some birds, and it is possible that birds who were more sensitive to stressors would both feather pick and use stereotypic vocalizations.

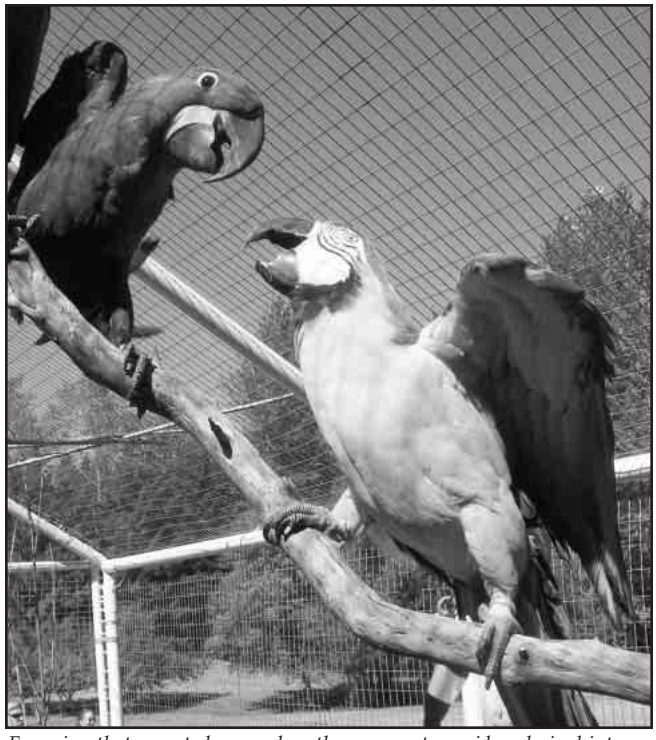
Even though chickens and parrots are very distantly related, many of the factors that cause chickens to feather pick may apply to parrots as well. A natural behavior for chickens and parrots is to perch high in part to avoid predators. The ability to perch on an elevated place seems to reduce the severity of feather picking3. Chickens that use perches have a lower level of feather picking than chickens who sit on the floor. Chickens who sit on lower perches are subject to more severe feather picking interactions than chickens who sit on higher perches. Chickens on the floor reach up and peck the legs and vents of the chickens on the lower perches, while the higher perched chickens avoid this problem4.

Even though chickens and parrots are very distantly related, many of the factors that cause chickens to feather pick may apply to parrots as well.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

The chickens who were allowed to perch were given more control over their environment. They could choose whether to stay on the floor or fly up to the perch where they were safe. The chickens who flew to the highest perches were the most protected from aggressive interaction. Wild game birds perch in trees at night, and perching at night is an instinctive behavior for chickens. It may reduce stress for the chickens to be able to satisfy this instinct. Ensuring that parrots have a place they can go to avoid undesired interaction



Wild game birds perch in trees at night, and perching at night is an instinctive behavior for chickens.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich



Ensuring that parrots have a place they can go to avoid undesired interaction and a protected place to sleep at night may be an aspect of stress reduction.
Photo credit:Barbara Heidenreich

and a protected place to sleep at night may be an aspect of stress reduction.

The more time the parrot spends in activities where he is not damaging his feathers, the better his feathers will be. An extension of the amount of time spent eating seems to reduce feather picking, which could be one reason why foraging works so well. Hens fed a ground mash diet instead of a pelleted diet pick feathers less because the hens spend more time sorting through the food and eating7. The activity of foraging or prolonged eating may also satisfy a psychological requirement that would otherwise be replaced by feather picking. Feeding birds a diet that takes longer to eat could be a simple way to reduce feather picking by allowing the birds to act out more of their natural patterns of behavior.

Recommendations for treating feather picking birds often include replacing the bird's pelleted diet with a mash diet. The assumption is that the bird may be reacting to an ingredient in the pellet that is causing the bird to pick his feathers. This hypothesis may be true for certain birds; however, consider that hens pick less if fed a crumbled up diet instead of a pelleted diet even though the ingredients are the same. When a bird is fed a mash diet, he takes longer to eat because he picks up each piece individually and manipulates it. Perhaps it is not the ingredients in the pellet, but the actual form of the food that is causing the change. This finding may help people who are struggling with feather picking problems even though they are feeding a high quality mash or pelleted diet. Cutting the food into smaller pieces or feeding a smaller size of pellet would lengthen the time the bird spends eating and possibly decrease his feather picking.

Feather picking is a problem that seems to be caused by aspects of living in captivity. Studies show that feather picking can be reduced by allowing birds to act out natural behaviors such as foraging, exercising or types of perching opportunities. Adding swings and toys to parrot cages and feeding a diet that takes longer to eat may reduce feather picking. All of these changes require a minimum of effort and some financial commitment. If your bird picks his feathers, and he has been examined by an avian veterinarian to rule out medical causes, some of these husbandry changes may be of help.

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Natasha Laity Snyder is a veterinary technician with a special interest in birds and animal behavior. She is the fortunate caretaker of six birds, three cats, three dogs, one goat and three llamas on a small farm in Virginia. Her Meyer's parrot's handsome face can be seen in "The Parrot Problem Solver". She is currently an educator for American Humane Association in their shelter training program, and she gives classes about parrots and their husbandry to anyone who will listen.

A Pot of Gold Named Rainbow

By Sue Marshall

Rainbow is a shining example of how positive reinforcement can change or even save lives.
Photo credit: Sue Marshall

Rainbow is a seven year old Harlequin Macaw that came to live with us in November of 2005. We were asked to "just give her a safe place to live out her life". Rainbow came with labels such as vicious, hopeless, aggressive, lunging biter and so on. By the time she came to us, Rainbow had learned to deal with humans by being the aggressor. In her previous home she found that her strategy worked fairly well to keep people away from her. They mostly left her alone, only periodically donning a leather jacket and chasing her around the cage until she gave up and stepped up on the evil arm. She would then be taken out of the cage for a short "lesson in who is boss", only to be returned and left alone for another period of time. Understand that the caregivers were not mean, nor deliberately abusive, just schooled in the old ways of parrot training. After two years, this couple decided that the best thing for Rainbow would be a different home. At that point we were approached to take her. They thought that she might bond better with a man in the house, as the first owner, a man, was the only one who she had ever allowed to touch her.

Rainbow joined our flock of a Blue and Gold Macaw, an African Grey, and an Umbrella Cockatoo. She was immediately given wooden toys to destroy, foraging opportunities and a fresh, varied diet. After a couple of days she quit lunging at my slow approach and started to occasionally take pieces of food from my fingers. Trust me. Those pieces were always large enough to protect my fingers! If she lunged, I quietly turned away and offered the food to some other bird. This is one smart girl and she quickly learned that lunging and being aggressive cost her a lot of goodies and gained her nothing in return.

My strategy was very simple…

1) Empower the bird by giving her choices in her life.
2) Enrich her life with opportunities to forage, chew, play etc.
3) Reward the behaviors I wanted to see and ignore the others.

Our first goal was to encourage her to come out of her cage to play on a hanging gym that hung nearby. When the cage door was fully opened it provided a bridge to the gym. It took only a week or so for Rainbow to venture closer and closer to the opening and finally onto the top of the door. Every time she calmly moved toward that opening, I was there with an encouraging word and a treat or two. It was a celebration the first time she came out all the way to the gym! Once out of the cage she lost much of her bravado and was much more willing to allow me to interact with her. Within two months, this "hopeless, vicious" bird was consistently taking pumpkin seeds from my fingers and allowing me to touch her feet and chest. It was at about this time that she would occasionally step up for my husband, which allowed us to move her from room to room and be more a part of the family.

I recall an instance that I think was the real turning point for Rainbow. She was on a play stand and when I offered her a treat, she lunged at my hand. I whirled around to another bird that sweetly accepted the gift and received much praise. It was at that exact moment that I think it really hit home for Rainbow. She understood that her own actions cost her that treat! She stomped around, back and forth

on the perch. If she could have kicked her own butt, she would have! She finally, truly, understood that lunging had consequences that she did NOT like! After that, our relationship progressed rapidly. First came a calmness in Rainbow… she was no longer always on guard. She allowed more touches, she quit flinching at the slightest fast move, and the screaming lessened. She came to signal that she WANTED attention and love.

Now, some 18 months later she's a whole new girl. She loves to come out of her cage, take showers, try new foods. She loves dancing and playing footsie. She still has issues with hands at times and I never, ever let her near my face without holding her beak but we kiss and sweet talk each other. She loves to go for rides in the car or play outside in the aviary.

We owe ALL our success to the lessons learned from Barbara Heidenreich, Dr. Susan Friedman, PhD and all who work so hard to show the miracles of using positive reinforcement. I am not a particularly good student or trainer either one, but Rainbow is a shining example of how positive reinforcement can change or even save lives.

We were very lucky in that Rainbow clearly wanted to become part of a family and she has been willing to forgive the unkind treatment she has received at the hands of humans. I have to think our situation was not too unlike many others out there. If we can find this kind of success… you can too. Keep focused on even the smallest steps in the right direction. Body language is everything so you must learn to read the tiniest nuances. All family members need to be onboard if you're going to really make progress. You can do it!!! Patience, patience, patience.

Antecedent Change, My New Best Friend

By Beverly Penny Owner, DebRan's Bird Toys

What do a vinyl tablecloth, a piece of duct tape, a piece of acrylic and a picture frame have in common? They are all antecedent changes. Huh? What is an antecedent change? Don't let those big fancy psychology words scare you. The experts use words like positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment (yes, there is such a thing) operant conditioning, and antecedent change just to name a few. They also use a lot of symbols too. I still haven't figured them out, but I will. Right now I want to tell you about my new best friend, (drum roll here) antecedent change. The best way to explain my new best friend is to show you. Once you understand antecedent change, I am sure it will become your new best friend too. Figure 1 is a picture of a table cloth over my chest freezer. That table cloth is an antecedent change. It was placed there to prevent my birds from chewing holes in the very expensive gasket that fits around the freezer door to keep the cold in and the warm out. The table cloth is the only thing between my very expensive gasket and my birds' very destructive beaks. Figure 2 is why the table cloth is there, and that was within a week of getting the freezer.

Figure 1. The table cloth prevents my birds from chewing holes in the freezer gasket.
Photo credit: Beverly Penny

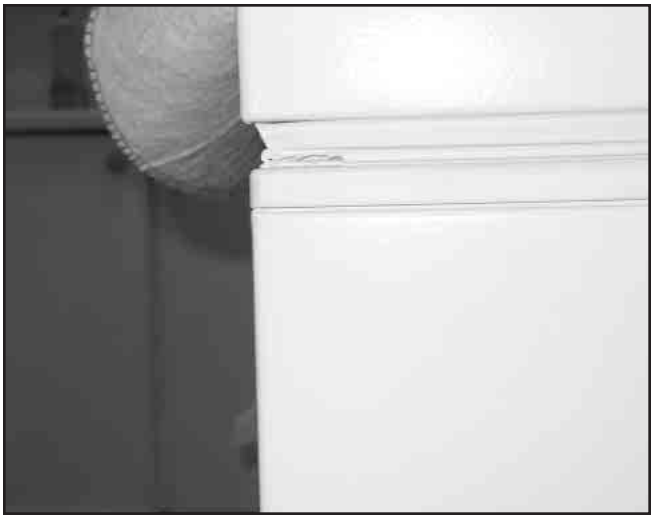

Figure 2. This is what my birds did to my freezer that required the antecedent change.
Photo credit: Beverly Penny

Figure 3 is my favorite antecedent change. For a couple of years, the solution to this one eluded me. My African grey, Sally (brilliant as she is) would shut off the power to my entire entertainment system by turning off the wall mounted power switch. This included my stereo, TV, and the DVD player. Now you know that meant I had to reset the clocks on every one of those machines, which is no fun even at the best of times. The solution was a simple piece of duct tape placed over the switch in the "on" position. End of problem. In other words, a simple antecedent change was the solution to what had become a very complex problem for me. Sally wasn't turning that switch off to annoy me, but the fact that I came running out of the bedroom at 60 miles per hour might have been a bit of a reinforcer for her. The entertainment unit might be considered another antecedent change because as long as all remotes are in there, they are safe from destructive beaks.

Figure 3 My African grey, Sally (brilliant as she is) would shut off the power to my entire entertainment system by turning off the wall mounted power switch.
Photo credit: Beverly Penny

Figure 4. Another antecedent change is a piece of acrylic placed over the top of the freezer to protect, what else……. the gasket.
Photo credit: Beverly Penny

Then there is the damage done to one of my picture frames. Gypsy my other grey thinks she is a sculptor. She mainly works in wood. The antecedent change was moving the picture across the room so the little grey gymnast cannot reach it. Now why do you think she chewed that frame? Was she mad at me? Was she jealous because I was on the phone? These are all constructs that we use that prevent us from trying to find a solution based on the science of behavior. (That's a whole other story.) The reason Gypsy chewed the picture was because it was within chewing reach. Once I moved the picture to a wall across from her, she could no longer reach it. That is an antecedent change in its simplest form. I love that. I really do. Although I still don't know what I'm going to do about the missing chunks from that frame. Any ideas?

These are simple solutions to hundreds of complaints I have heard from parrot owners. My bird did this because he was mad at me. My response is "No, he didn't. He did it because it was there." My bird did

Figure 5. The antecedent change was moving the picture across the room so the little grey gymnast cannot reach it.
Photo credit: Beverly Penny

this because he was jealous. "No, he didn't. He did it because it was there." Using antecedent change, you too can keep your valued items, beak-mark free for the life of that item, or until you forget and place that item within reach of that beak again. Then you only have yourself to blame. Your bird does not care if it is a $10 toy or a $3000 piece of furniture, it all makes good chewing. If you have a problem with your parrot destroying your things, please make sure you give your bird lots of acceptable things to destroy. Now I'm not saying that will prevent further destruction of your stuff because if it is there, they will chew it. But if you sit down and think about some antecedent changes in your home, you and your birds will reap the rewards of those changes. It's that simple. Now, how about checking your home to see if you can come up with some antecedent changes that you didn't even know you had?

I would also like to say that if you ever get the chance to go to the workshop "A Step Up and Beyond" with Dr. Susan Friedman and Barbara Heidenreich, please go. It is absolutely fantastic, and I mean that 150%. I would also like to thank Pat and Lorne Phillips for having the courage to bring this workshop to Toronto. This was the second great year! Great job, Pat and Lorne!!!

One Week to Nail Trims

By Pam Thompson, owner, Winging Your Way, LLC

Mickey and Pam
Photo credit: Pam Thompson

Let me begin by saying that I have approximately two dozen parrots. A few were purchased, and others were given to me by owners who did not want or could not care for them any longer.

In each parrot cage, I have several perches of various sizes and types – including ones designed to help keep nails trim. However, I began to see that several of my parrots had red spots on their pads. After consulting with my veterinarian, I was told that some of my parrots seemed to have problems with the rougher perches. Thus, I needed to figure out how to keep my parrots' nails trimmed so that I could carry and play with the bird, without looking and feeling like I was being stuck by needles.

Because of the number of parrots I have and my desire to reduce the cost and stress of taking all of them to the veterinarian's office for nail trims, my goal was to learn how to train my parrots to let me file each of their nails with an ordinary nail file. I knew I had gained some of the training techniques to do the task as I had attended lectures on parrot training, took Dr. Susan Friedman's on-line behavior modification course, attended a seminar presented by Barbara Heidenreich and had attended a week seminar on behavior modification for companion parrots.

Since I knew my goal (trim nails with a nail file while the parrot is sitting on his perch.) I decided that I needed to break the task into several smaller steps. Then both the parrot and I would get some positive reinforcement when we completed a step. I began my training approach with one of my Blue Throated Macaws, Mickey. I divided the goal into the following steps:

(1) Lightly touch one of Mickey's nails, with my finger, for a short period of time. When Mickey let me touch his nail, I would say "Good" and reinforce the behavior by giving him one of his favorite treats, a shelled pine nut. When he was comfortable with me touching his nail, I lengthened the period of time I was touching the nail always saying "Good" when the task was successful and then reinforcing the behavior with a shelled pine nut.

(2) Touch one of Mickey's nails while I hold an ordinary nail file in the same hand. This allowed Mickey to get used to the nail file without the file touching his nail. Each time Mickey let me touch a nail with the file in my hand, I would say "Good" and reinforce the behavior by giving him a shelled pine nut.

(3) Touch the file to Mickey's nail. Each time I touched Mickey's nail with the file, I would say "Good" and reinforce the behavior by giving him a shelled pine nut.

(4) File one nail. Each time I made one pass with the file over the nail tip, I would say "Good" and reinforce Mickey's behavior by giving him a shelled pine nut. Once that task was successful, I worked on passing the nail file back and forth across the nail tip once. With each successful pass, I would say "Good" and reinforce the behavior with a shelled pine nut.

(5) Repeat steps 1 – 4 with each nail on one foot.

(6) When I was able to file each nail on one foot, I repeated steps (1) through (5) with the other foot.

By the end of the week, I had successfully completed teaching both Mickey and me how to file his nails
Photo credit: Pam Thompson

I had two training sessions per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Depending on Mickey's attention span, each training session lasted approximately 10 minutes. By the end of the week, I had successfully completed teaching both Mickey and me how to file his nails. Wow, what a personal rush! I could not believe how quickly Mickey learned, nor could I believe how easy it was on both of us.

I believe that my success was based upon the fact that I knew exactly what behavior I was trying to shape (filing each nail on both feet.) I then developed a plan breaking down the final behavior into smaller more easily identified steps that would get me the end results I wanted. Also by identifying each step, I was able to determine when to positively reinforce Mickey. Thus both Mickey and I got positively reinforced when a step was successfully completed. If Mickey regressed, I would stop advancing and take one step back in the training to master it again before proceeding to the next step. I found that it was important not to dwell on one successful step, but keep progressing so that Mickey did not become bored. The end result was priceless!

Imperfect Birds make Perfect Pals

By Winny Weinbeck

Stevie the blind African Grey parrot enjoying his perches.
Photo credit: Winny Weinbeck

One of my African Grey parrots was born blind. He came from a nest of three. His brother and sister are normal healthy birds. Since a blind bird needs special attention and care, the breeder did not want to keep the bird. Therefore I bought the bird from him.

You can usually recognize a blind bird by the following behavior. They may remain quite calm if they are being approached slowly, but can react in an aggressive way the moment they are touched. It is therefore important to let the bird know you are coming by calling his name and speaking to him well before approaching him. He will then likely stretch his wings, lift and swing his head in order to catch a sound. Often the bird will respond with aggressive behavior when you touch him.

Still, even with a blind bird you can count on your parrot's extraordinary ability to learn. Building trust by using positive reinforcement, which can be applied in endlessly creative ways can be very effective.

I named my bird "Stevie" after Stevie Wonder and to me he appeared to be quite a "wonder".

The bird was 14 weeks old when he arrived at my place and was fully weaned. At first I gave him time to settle into his new cage. I arranged the cage so that he could reach one perch easily from the other. He soon found out where his food and water bowls were. I also gave him a few toys to explore. It is important for a blind bird that he has a good grip on his perches, so I used rope perches and Java Tree perches.

After a few days of getting used to his new surroundings and my voice, I thought it was time to introduce the other birds. As expected all went well with my oldest African Grey.

It took some more persuasion for my Blue fronted Amazon to accept Stevie, but now they are friends and sometimes play together.

I started to train Stevie to step up by very gently pushing my hand to his chest (since he could not see my hand in front of him) and rewarded him when he managed to step up. He very quickly mastered this and now he lifts up his foot whenever I tell him to step up. It is very rare that he does not lift up his foot whenever I ask him to step up. This is usually because he is busy with something else. I do not push and try again at a later time. I like to give him the choice to step up when he wants to and he shows it by lifting his foot. This way it is always a positive experience (unless of course there is a necessity to get him away from danger).

Birds are designed to fly and it was essential for Stevies's proper physical development that he be allowed to have the power of flight while his body was still developing. It is also a natural response even for a blind bird to attempt to take flight when they panic. Although Stevie cannot see where he is going, he still is a bird and wants to fly. Especially when he hears the other birds flying around him.

At first I covered all the bare spots on the floor with a cloth so he could not hurt himself while trying to learn how to fly. He flies like a helicopter and goes more upwards than forwards. I have taught him to fly towards me when I call him and then I catch him before he comes down. I started by putting him on the back of the couch and stepped less than two feet away from him just calling his name and telling him to come towards me. Because he is blind I could not use any other signals apart from my voice. His first attempt was greatly rewarded and gradually I increased the distance, all at his pace, closely watching his comfort level. Now he doesn't fly more than one or two meters at a time, but he is thrilled and very excited when he manages to fly a bit. If you could see how happy it makes him, you would not consider clipping a bird's wings. I do not use food as a reinforcer. Stevie seems to be working for the pleasure of the flying and attention he receives during of the interaction.

By teaching adaptive, desirable behaviors to your bird you can replace aggression and fear with competence and confidence. Stevie's trust has grown and now he has literally blind trust in me. Whenever he is on his Java Tree and starts flapping his wings, I know he wants to fly. He waits until I start calling him towards me and he relies on me catching him. I found it is important to keep on calling him until I catch him, so he hears in which direction he must fly. He also understands "No, wait" and never starts flying without me telling him it's OK to come.

I also direct him with my voice whenever he is walking around on the floor. When I want him to come towards me, I start calling him and praising him whenever he is moving in the right direction. He will hold his beak on the floor in front of him as a sort of rader, investigating strange objects on the way, until he gets close enough for me to cue him to "step up." He will then lift up his foot to step up. I then reinforce him with praise.

A blind bird also needs stimulation and new things to explore. So I frequently rearrange the things in his cage. I always leave the food and water bowls in the same place, as well as one rope perch in the top of his cage. I change the other perches, but always in such a way that there is a logical connection between one perch to the other. I provide different toys. I avoid materials like chains and sisal rope that can easily tangle his feet. I use musical toys, bells and toys with beads to produce noises. Also cotton ring swings, pinatas and palm toys are a favorite. Wood and rope toys provide plenty of climbing and chewing opportunities. I always make sure that any loose threads are cut off immediately. Foot toys come in many varieties and are also great fun for Stevie.

I bought him a big Java Tree to which I attached some ropes, swings and a few toys. There are also ropes, swings and ladders hanging from the ceiling, plus a parrot gym. Stevie's confidence has grown so much that he managed to climb from his Java Tree on to the swing and ropes on the ceiling, and back. He is not afraid of trying out new things and is eager to learn.

By building a relationship based on trust through the use of positive reinforcement and giving Stevie a choice, it has eliminated any aggressive behavior that could have been anticipated from a blind bird. Stevie may have a unique challenge, but he has turned out to be the perfect parrot pal for me.

From Out of the Blue

By Kris Porter

Gracie came out of the blue
Photo credit: Kris Porter

Literally, from out of the blue came our Gracie. On April 30, 2007 at about 3 PM, my husband, Jerry, and I pulled into our driveway and were approached by a woman walking her dog. She asked if we could help her retrieve what she thought was a parrot outside in a tree. She knew we had parrots and thought we might know what to do. She showed us where the bird was in a tree in the yard of the neighbor directly across the street from us. Jerry and I went over and saw it was a cockatiel.

As luck would have it, I had recently received my Spring 2007 issue of Good Bird Magazine in which Barbara Heidenreich had included a reprint of her article "Strategies to Utilize when a Flighted Parrot Escapes." In that article she suggests: "If he has another bird he likes, put that bird in a cage and bring it to the area you last saw him. Walk away from the bird in the cage. It might encourage the bird in the cage to scream. This may inspire the lost bird to scream. Keep talking to a minimum so you can listen for the scream."

I immediately thought of Boo. Boo is a male cockatiel that had belonged to a client of our avian veterinarian, Dr. Jackie Frederickson. The client had passed away suddenly and Jackie took her birds into the clinic until she could place them. We decided to adopt Boo along with a budgie named Tiny and they had only recently come to

live with us. Boo usually calls out when he is removed from sight of Tiny. So I thought if I could bring Boo close we may be able to call the lost cockatiel down. I went into the house to get a portable cage and Boo, while Jerry stayed put at the tree to keep the lost bird in sight.

From left to right, Gracie, Tiny and Boo on their play stand.
Photo Credit: Kris Porter

When I got back outside, Jerry and the woman were walking toward our house. In the few short minutes I was inside getting Boo, our neighbor had found a ladder and attempted to retrieve the bird. He was unsuccessful and scared the bird into flight. Jerry, the neighbor and the woman lost sight of where the cockatiel had flown.

Boo was now performing his repetitive loud vocalizing, so I decided to follow Barbara's advice. We had no history with this lost bird, but Boo was another cockatiel and it was worth a try. We live in Eagle River, Alaska and the temperature was still getting down to the low 30's (Fahrenheit) at night. I was concerned about the low temperatures as well as predatory birds and wanted to bring the lost bird to safety. I started walking up and down the bike path behind the houses as well as the streets in front, carrying Boo in his portable cage with hopes the other bird would answer Boo's calls. Then I heard the other cockatiel!

The two cockatiels were calling back and forth to each other. I was glad for the late spring and bare leaved trees. I was able to zero in on the calls and locate the lost bird high in a tree in the yard about four houses up the street from where we first saw it. I put Boo's cage on the ground in front of that tree, backed away and waited, fingers crossed. Then I was privy to the most amazing scene. I watched as that little bird flew down a few branches, then down a few more branches and finally to the ground, literally running over to Boo's cage.

I'm not that familiar (not yet anyway) with cockatiels, but it looked like a female to me. I tried to approach to capture her but as I did she flew away. She didn't fly up into a tree; but over the fence into the neighbor's backyard. With the help of a woman who was walking by, I managed to get over the fence into the yard and put Boo's cage on the ground. I backed away and the bird again ran right over to Boo's cage. I asked the woman who had come to help to run to my house and tell Jerry she needed a bowl of seed, while I waited and watched the found cockatiel circle Boo's cage and peck at the ground. The woman returned shortly with seed which we scattered on the ground near Boo's cage. I had on a light jacket which I was able to toss over the cockatiel as she was focused on the seed we had thrown down. Then I gathered her up in the jacket while the other woman picked up Boo's cage and we headed for home.

Jerry was waiting at the house with the garage door open and a kennel ready. I put the found bird in the kennel and took Boo inside and upstairs to his cage. I set up the portable cage with food and water dishes, perches, beads and a mirror. We decided to leave her in the garage as it was heated and on a separate air system from the rest of the house. It would suffice for quarantine. On closer inspection I noticed she had plucked under her wings and on her back. I thought she might have been outside for about two or more nights because our neighbor said he thought he heard her calling the last few nights, but paid no attention since he thought it was our birds he was hearing.

That same evening I put up flyers at the local vets, pet stores, coffee shops, video rental stores grocery stores and on sign posts in the neighborhood. At about nine in the evening I received a call from a woman who didn't identify herself, but said she thought I should know that she thought the cockatiel I found had been let loose on purpose. She was reluctant to answer questions from me. She just said she thought I needed to know that information and hung up. That was the only call I ever received in response to the flyers.

The author preparing a flower bed while Gracie looks on. Gracie was still in quarantine and this was an opportunity for Gracie to come out of the garage for fresh air and sunshine.
Photo credit: Kris Porter

The next morning I took the cockatiel in to Dr. Jackie Frederickson for an exam and I requested she also draw blood for disease testing, as it was my plan to keep this bird if no one came forward to claim her. Dr. Frederickson confirmed she was indeed a female and that she looked pretty good considering being outside with low temperatures at night. She also suggested, given her plucking pattern and that giardia is known to be common in cockatiels, that we treat for giardia.

In a short time she was no longer the "found cockatiel", she was our little "Gracie" and as soon as we could, we brought her out of quarantine and into the house. Gracie was a bit shy of hands and stepping up at first. She didn't bite, but was what I would call fussy (short quick pecks at your hand) when asked to step up. Dr. Frederickson donated a very nice cage for her which had a front door that opened wide enough that I could reach my hand in and offer Gracie the choice to step up and reinforce her with food treats.

We were able to put Gracie in her own cage between Boo and Tiny. Boo and Gracie are living comfortably and to my great joy, quietly, side by side. I didn't want to put Gracie in with Boo as I was reluctant to encourage a breeding situation, but I was also concerned they might call back and forth incessantly if housed separately. It appears we lucked out. It's a little early to be sure, but it also looks like Gracie might be growing feathers where she had previously plucked.

We have play stands for all our parrots and it is routine for everyone to get out in the early evening for a warm meal on their play stands. Gracie picked up on this routine right away. Now when Jerry or I reach in and offer a hand, Gracie readily steps up to go to her place on the play stand in the living room.

While she steps up to come out of her cage and is comfortable on a play stand with Tiny and Boo, Gracie prefers not to be handled too much. She'll ride on your shoulder and go to a shower perch. I wouldn't go so far as to say she enjoys a shower but she tolerates one quite well. Overall she is what I would call an independent spirit and we respect that. She has started playing with toys and chewing on the branches I put in her cage. Boo, Gracie and Tiny are teaching me what types of toys are of interest to them and I must say it is a particularly enjoyable learning experience for me as well.

Submit your Success Story!

INSPIRE OTHERS BY SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TRAINING.

Please include the following:

The Back Story: Describe some history on your bird and any problems you were trying to address.

What You Did: Describe what strategies you used to solve the problems.

The Results: Describe what the situation is like now.

Recommendations: Provide three tips you think were important to your success.

Please use the following guidelines for your submission:

Length: 1500 -2000 words is preferred

File Type: Microsoft word documents are preferred

Font preferences: Times New Roman, 12 point font size

Titles and Headers: Bold may be used for headers or titles (please avoid underlining, italics or using all capitol letters)

Single space, no tabs or indentations for beginning of paragraphs

One space in between paragraphs

Please do not number pages

Photos that are 300 dpi at 5 inch by 7 inch size are appreciated

Description of photo content is also appreciated

Avoid the use of abbreviations and symbols such CAG, DYA, LOL, FYI, BTW, &, +, etc. Please spell entire word(s).

Please be sure to include the following in your document:

Date of submission

Title of article

Author's name

Contact information for author (mailing address, phone number and email address)

Photographer's name if different from author

Submit your article and photos to info@goodbirdinc.com. Electronic submissions are preferred. For mailed items please send materials to the following address:

Good Bird Inc
PO Box 684394
Austin, TX 78768 USA

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Out of the Mouths of Parrots

Good Bird Magazine takes a pretty scientific approach to behavior. We also fully understand that the "A" word, (anthropomorphism: projecting human emotions and feelings to an animal) can cause a miss-interpretation of behavior. But don't let that mislead you! We also enjoy a loving relationship with our birds and get a kick out of those stories about birds doing things that seem uncharacteristically human. Perhaps the tales we enjoy the most are the ones in which a parrot seems to say the right thing at the right time. We realize birds may or may not understand what they are saying, but it makes us laugh anyway.

THE AVIARY IN SPRING

By Georgi Abbott

Pickles is a Congo African grey parrot owned by Georgi and Neil Abbott Here is a story courtesy of Georgi.

Pickles and I are hanging out in the aviary on a warm spring day, Pickles perches above, preening and content in the warm morning sunshine. Our yard is lovely in its semi-wild state and a flock of Evening Grosbeaks is frolicking. Trees and shrubs dot the long, semi-circle perimeter of the yard. People walking by briefly appear and disappear between the foliage due to the gaps of a mere foot or two between the outer border of trees.

An old man strolls by, lost in thought, appearing here and there between the perimeter trees. As he appears between the first gap in the shrubbery, Pickles spots him and greets him with a "Hellooooooo". The man's startled face glances up just as it's disappearing behind the next bush. "Hello" says the bush. A moment later the man appears on the other side.

The infamous Pickles.
Photo credit: Georgi Abbott

The old man stops, smiling and ready to engage in neighborly conversation but there's nobody to be seen in the yard. Looking a little embarrassed, he turns to continue his walk. Now, all this happens in an instant so before I can respond, and as he is disappearing behind the next bush, Pickles inquires "Aren't cha hungry?"

"What?" asks the bush. When the man comes out from behind, he doesn't stop this time. He only slows down while his eyes dart around, desperately looking for the source of the voice. Again, just as he's walking behind the next bush, Pickles calls out "Don't cha want sum breakfast?"

This time as the man comes out from behind a bush, I wave and say "Over here!" But he's picked up his pace. Although he's looking in the yard, he doesn't have time to spot me before the next bush, or the one after … or after that … because now he's practically running. I'm only catching quick glimpses of a scared little old man. He's gone. High tailed it right on out of there with Pickles screaming after him …"Want some pom pom breakfast?" (pomegranate) "Eat your breakfast!"

I was standing in the middle of the yard by then and before I can recover from my dismay and embarrassment, a car goes by. Inside are two young men, cruising slowly, arms out the windows, moving to the music. Pickles lets out a loud wolf whistle. I'm praying they don't hear it over the loud music, but I never seem to have that kind of luck where Pickles is concerned. And sure enough, I hear the car stop and back up. They find a gap in the trees, where they can see me. I'm horrified.

"Sorry" I say. "That was my parrot", I explain as I point toward the aviary. "Oh" the driver says, "Cool." But I don't think they believed me, and you could see the disappointment in their faces that I wasn't some hot young chick. Then, just as they start to drive away, Pickles hollers "Score!" Oh man … I'm dying here. However, I was thankful that they were out of earshot when Pickles did his loud Bull Frog. It sounds more like flatulence. Thank goodness for small favors.

"My God Pickles!" I exclaim, "You are SO embarrassing, I could wring your little neck!"

"Take your pills." He said.

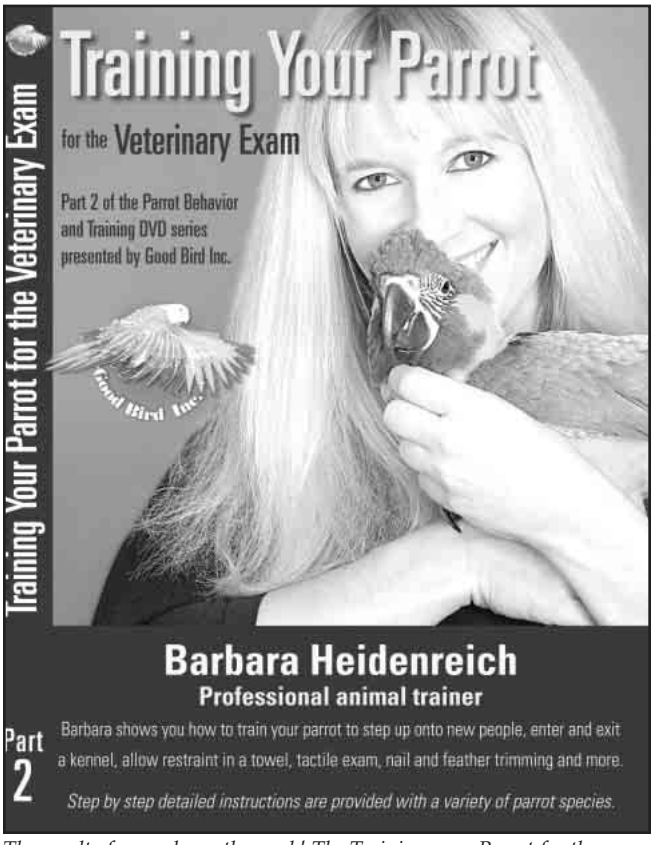
Foot note:

Pickles seems to have an uncanny understanding of the word "score" which he picked up from watching hockey with us. When I pick up his talon toys off the bottom of the cage and throw them in his bucket Pickles shouts "He scores!" When daddy kisses mama….. "Scooooore!" When Pickles beaned me on the top of my head from a branch ….. "SCORE!"

Conference, Event Reviews and Press Releases

By Barbara Heidenreich

With a healthy travel load for the past few years it seemed appropriate to stop and smell the roses for a spell. Of course for this animal trainer that means diving into other projects such as production of the Good Bird Inc Training your Parrot for the Veterinary Exam DVD. I am pleased to report the DVD is in stock and available to help caregivers achieve a stress free veterinary experience for their avian companions. Visit www.GoodBirdInc.com to order your copy.

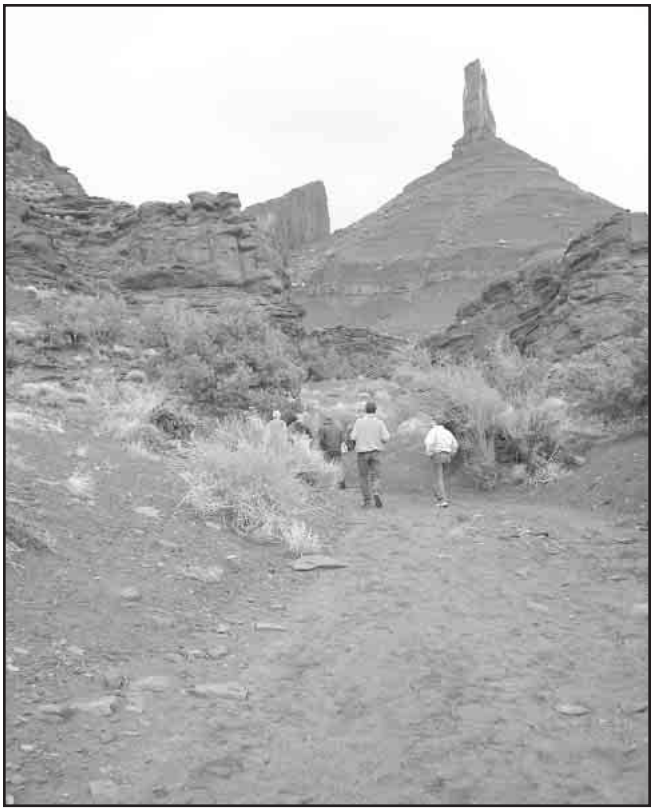


The result of several months work! The Training your Parrot for the Veterinary exam DVD is here.

Early spring travels included a visit to Gilbert, Arizona. Positive reinforcement enthusiast Gail Naylor and Avian Veterinarian Dr Todd Driggers organized a fabulous event that found me and Dr Susan Friedman presenting in a movie theater! The 100 seat event was sold out and due to such excellent attendance allowed a donation of $5000 to be presented to the Oasis Sanctuary. The response to this one day event was so strong that a two day event has been scheduled for spring 2008. Be sure to check the Good Bird Magazine upcoming events section for more information as it becomes available. Events will also be posted on the Good Bird Inc website.

I remained in the Phoenix area for an afternoon of different presentations hosted by Dr Hilary Frank. Another unique experience awaited, as I had the opportunity to present in a high school auditorium. Much like presenting in the movie theater this was another first for me. I can now say my lists of venues includes veterinary hospitals, pet stores, parrot sanctuaries, hotels, living rooms, recreation centers, churches, botanical gardens, office buildings, a nightclub, movie theater and a high school auditorium. Pretty eclectic! After some slight panic dealing with audio visual equipment, we were underway! We had a good turnout for this Sunday afternoon gathering. Although I am sure many were tempted by the gorgeous sunny weather to go play outside.

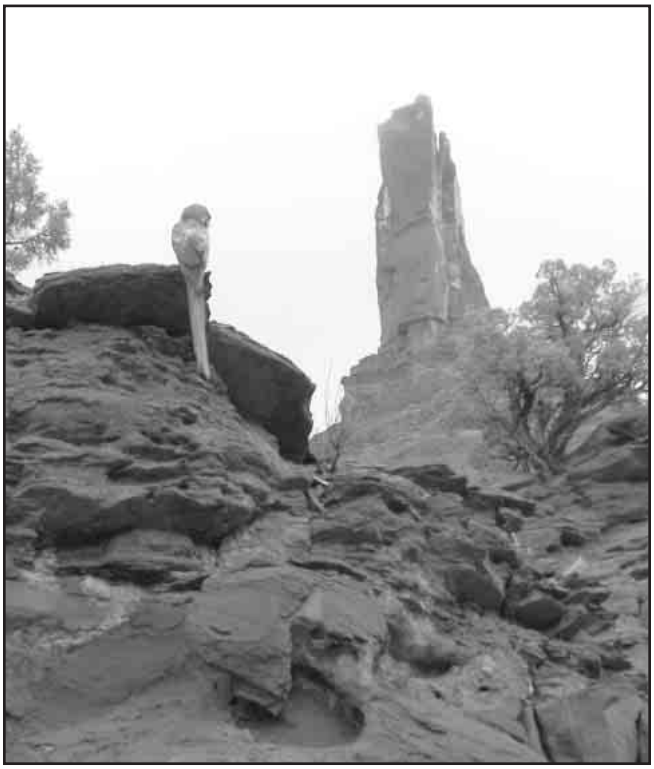
Shortly after the excursion to Phoenix I was able to participate in the Winging it Live seminar in the beautiful Moab, Utah. The event was hosted by Chris Biro and Susan Hilliard of Nature Choice Essentials. You may also be familiar with Chris as the "Pirate" of the Pirate's Parrot traveling parrot show. In addition Chris's free flighted birds have been gorgeous cover birds for Good Bird Magazine. The small but intimate group experienced classroom lecture and live free flight demonstrations in the beautiful landscape of this desert country. Lectures included a condensed version of the Living and Learning with Parrots course presented by Dr Susan Friedman. I presented the often controversial topic of managing how a bird's diet is delivered to create motivation for food reinforcers. This also included discussion on the extremes on either end, be it working with a bird that has no interest in food to one that is being unnecessarily compromised to create a response. Discussion was lively and needed on this important topic, and occurred ironically over dinner. Dean Moser gave a very informative presentation on how he captures the incredible photographs readers have seen here on the pages of Good Bird Magazine. As a rank amateur I find photography absolutely fascinat-



Winging it Live participants head out into the desert.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Chris Biro's macaws.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Birds and people take a break.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich



Hiking and flying to higher elevations.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

Getting a drink of water.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

ing. Experts like Dean make it look easy. Another superb photographer, Kevin Sharp also participated in the event. However he made sure our palates experienced as much pleasure as our eyes and ears did. That man can cook! Visit this link for detailed discussions and descriptions of the event by participants. http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Freeflight/

The next workshop on the calendar had participants traveling from all parts of North America to Scarborough, Ontario, Canada. Pat Phillips and her husband Lorne could not have been more gracious hosts. Pat describes the event in her own words in the following pages. It is a nice treat for readers to experience the participant's perspective on these events.

After a week of consulting with a zoo it was back to the northeast to somewhat familiar grounds. I was born and raised in upstate New York and it was a pleasure to see the familiar landscaping and architecture. Best of all the apple trees were in bloom. The aroma was divine. Avian veterinary specialist Dr Laurie Hess organized a workshop for veterinary professionals in the area. I applaud Dr Hess for being one of the veterinarians really championing the positive reinforcement approach to behavior. Veterinarians play a very important role in helping the information reach the parrot owning population. I look forward to more veterinarians following Dr Hess's example.

Closer to home, I had the opportunity to speak to an audience different from my usual parrot enthusiasts. It was an eye opening experience to have the opportunity to meet with professionals involved in animal control in Texas. This dedicated group works very hard to try to protect animals from the injustices animals sometimes suffer at the hands of people. It was difficult to watch some of the other presentations and having to acknowledge how heartless some people can be. In the positive reinforcement arena we are often encountering people who are so very dedicated to their animals, we sometimes forget not everyone is a committed to the best for their pets. Fortunately the folks at this conference are out there trying to make a difference for those neglected animals. A needed refreshing treat to cap the day's presentations was a visit to a nearby wildlife refuge. I was able to watch wild spoonbills, black necked stilts, crabs and more at this peaceful breezy sanctuary by the ocean.

A new item to this year's calendar is a series of workshops being presented at Austin Community College. With a new campus and state of the art equipment the accommodations could not be better. Our first class included veterinary professionals, a primate trainer, and private individuals interested in training. This workshop is catered towards all animal training and features plenty of video from my zoo animal training experiences. With lots of interactive activities we were able to take real life examples from the participants to practice problem solving strategies and demonstrate the effectiveness of training with positive reinforcement. This class is scheduled for three more dates in 2007. Visit the Good Bird Magazine upcoming events sections and also www.goodbirdinc.com for more information.

Keeping it in Texas, my next presentation brought me back to the familiar faces of the Alamo Exhibition Bird Club. The word "Alamo" ought to be a hint as to where in Texas. That's right, San Antonio! After some directions from Dean Cheney over the phone, I found my way to the club's new digs on the east side of town. This club always seems to have very good attendance for their events and I was flattered to hear that a few newcomers were there to hear me speak. As always with AEBC, everyone was well fed on some home cooking. There is such a nice family feeling at this club. If you are a San Antonian you may want to get involved. Their website is www.aebc.org. This group also puts together one heck of a bird mart every year, an event not to be missed.

Late summer and fall will be especially busy with travel this year. Please check the upcoming events page as there is a very good chance I may be in your neck of the woods. Hope to see you on the road!

Parrot Behavior and Learning: A Step Up and Beyond

Presented by Susan Friedman Ph D and Barbara Heidenreich
April 21 & 22, 2007
Reviewed by Pat Philips

Parrot participants.
Photo credit: Lorne Phillips

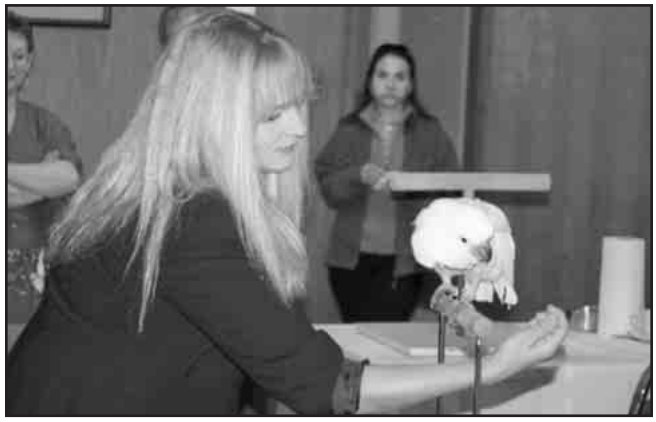
They came from Alaska, New York, Saskatchewan, Kentucky, Montreal, Michigan and Southern Ontario. "They" were the forty-three people who gathered in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada to learn the best possible ways to train their parrots…or dogs, gerbils, even spouses. And they learned from two of the best.

On Saturday, Dr. Susan Friedman, a popular behaviorist from Utah State University, reviewed the principles of applied behavior analysis and taught everyone how to use those skills to assess and change problem behaviors. For many, the main insight of the day was that in all interaction with our parrots, there is training happening. Dr. Friedman taught us how to use that positively to achieve desired behaviors.

Dr Susan Friedman (third from left) and Parrot Behavior Analysis Solutions list serve thread leaders.
Photo credit: Lorne Phillips

My husband, Lorne, and I, hosted an informal social in our home on Saturday night. Workshop participants were able to continue discussions with Susan and Barbara and network with each other. Barbara also let us preview her new DVD, Training for the Veterinary Exam, which at the time was due to be released very soon.

On Sunday, Barbara Heidenreich, an internationally known animal trainer, demonstrated the ease and effectiveness of positive reinforcement training. Using participants' parrots, brought to the workshop for just this purpose, Barbara used shaping first to gain trust, then to teach a step up and put it on cue, for example. As she worked her way around the room, from Jazz, the Hyacinth Macaw, to Mrr Mrr, the Moluccan Cockatoo, we learned about parrot body language, how positive reinforcement varies from parrot to parrot and how to capture behavior and put that on cue. Bertie, another Moluccan was happy to end the demonstrations doing some tricks that she'd learned previously in clicker training.



Barbara Heidenreich works with Mrr Mrr during training demonstrations.
Photo credit: Lorne Phillips

All in all, the workshop was a resounding success. Raffling the cage and accessories donated by Mark Hagen, generated $850.00 for Proventricular Dilatation Disease research. Almost everyone left with one of many donated door prizes. The lunch buffet on both days was great. The atmosphere throughout the two days was one of warmth, friendship and intense learning. And, we managed to pay all the bills.

Mark your calendars for next year's workshop already in the planning stages. On April 12 and 13, 2008, Dr. Susan Friedman will be back by popular demand. And presenting with her will be Bob Bailey (www.hsnp.com/behavior/) and Phung Luu (animal trainer extraordinaire). You really do not want to miss it.

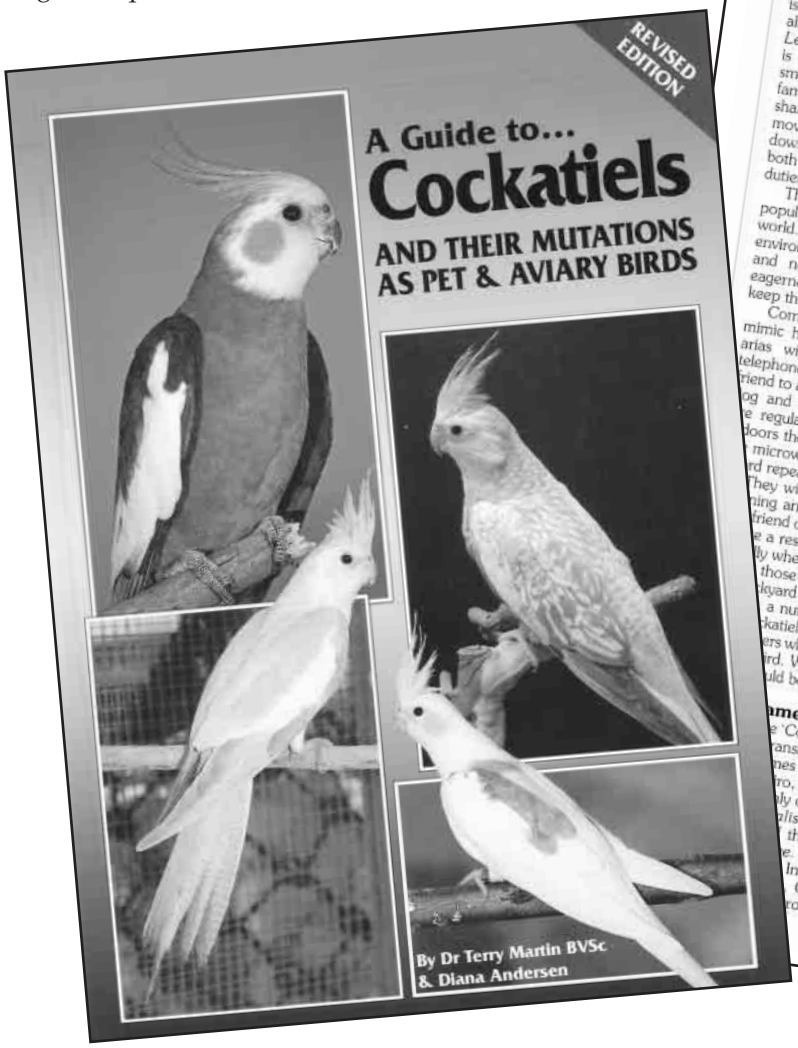
Book Review

A GUIDE TO COCKATIELS AND THEIR MUTATIONS AS PET AND AVIARY BIRDS BY DR TERRY MARTIN BVSC AND DIANA ANDERSON

Reviewed by Barbara Heidenreich

Giant brown eyes, twittering whistles, delicate and expressive crest feathers…. it is no wonder cockatiels are found in so many homes. For such small birds they have tons of personality. Devotees of this special species are in for a treat. ABK Publications has produced a stunning 200 page book that is about the most in depth read available on one of the most common pet parrot species found in homes today. The book starts off on the right foot with an important introduction to the natural history of the cockatiel. Wisely the authors address the age old question of "how to tell the girls from the boys" almost immediately. Even more interesting is a chart showcasing the various food items cockatiels have been observed eating in the wild.

The following section spares no detail in explaining the optimal conditions for establishing and maintaining a cockatiel aviary. The book addresses acquisi-



The scientific name for the Cockatiel is *Nymphicus hollandicus* (Kerr 1792), although it was formerly known as *Leptolophus hollandicus*. The Cockatiel is now widely accepted as being the smallest member of the Cacatuidae family (cockatoos). Features that this bird shares with its larger counterparts are a movable crest, the presence of powder down in the plumage and the fact that both the cock and hen share incubation duties.

The Cockatiel is one of the most popular pet and aviary birds in the world. It is the perfect bird for a captive environment, suiting all types of interests and needs. Its charming personality, eagerness to breed and hardy constitution keep this species in constant demand.

Companion Cockatiels can learn to mimic human sounds, whistle operatic arias with enthusiasm, sound like a telephone (and also call their human friend to answer it), bark like the resident dog and mimic the calls of birds that are regularly in the vicinity. If housed indoors they will quickly learn to imitate a microwave beep or any other sound and repeatedly in your home.

Normal Cockatiel cock.

They will cheerfully include you in their family and allow you to participate in the ning and raising of their young, sometimes to your embarrassment. If you need a friend or a constant companion, a Cockatiel can make you the centre of its life. This e a responsibility, and before adopting a young bird as a pet, you should consider ly whether you can live up to your pet's needs.

those beginning in aviculture and wanting to enjoy a hardy, undemanding bird dyard aviary, the Cockatiel is an ideal subject. Provision of well-planned suitable a nutritionally balanced diet and a variety of enrichment items will ensure that ckatiels live long and productive lives.

ers who want to learn, develop or improve a strain of birds will find the Cockatiel rd. With a long list of already recognised mutations and more being added, a uld be spent developing this facet of Cockatiel husbandry alone.

ames

e 'Cockatiel' is generally accepted to be an adaptation of a Dutch/Portuguese ranslated, means 'little cockatoo'. Cockatiels are still known by regional nes throughout Australia. Western Australians may refer to them as the ro, names reportedly adapted from aboriginal words. Eastern Australian ly call them Quarrions.

alist's Library (Jardine 1836) features a handpainted illustration by the Red-cheeked Nymphicus. This bird was identified as *Nymphicus* e. Scrutiny of the illustration clearly shows that the bird is the Australian In other historical literature the Cockatiel has been known as Corella, Crested Ground Parakeet, Grey Parrot, Yellow Top-knotted Parrot rot.

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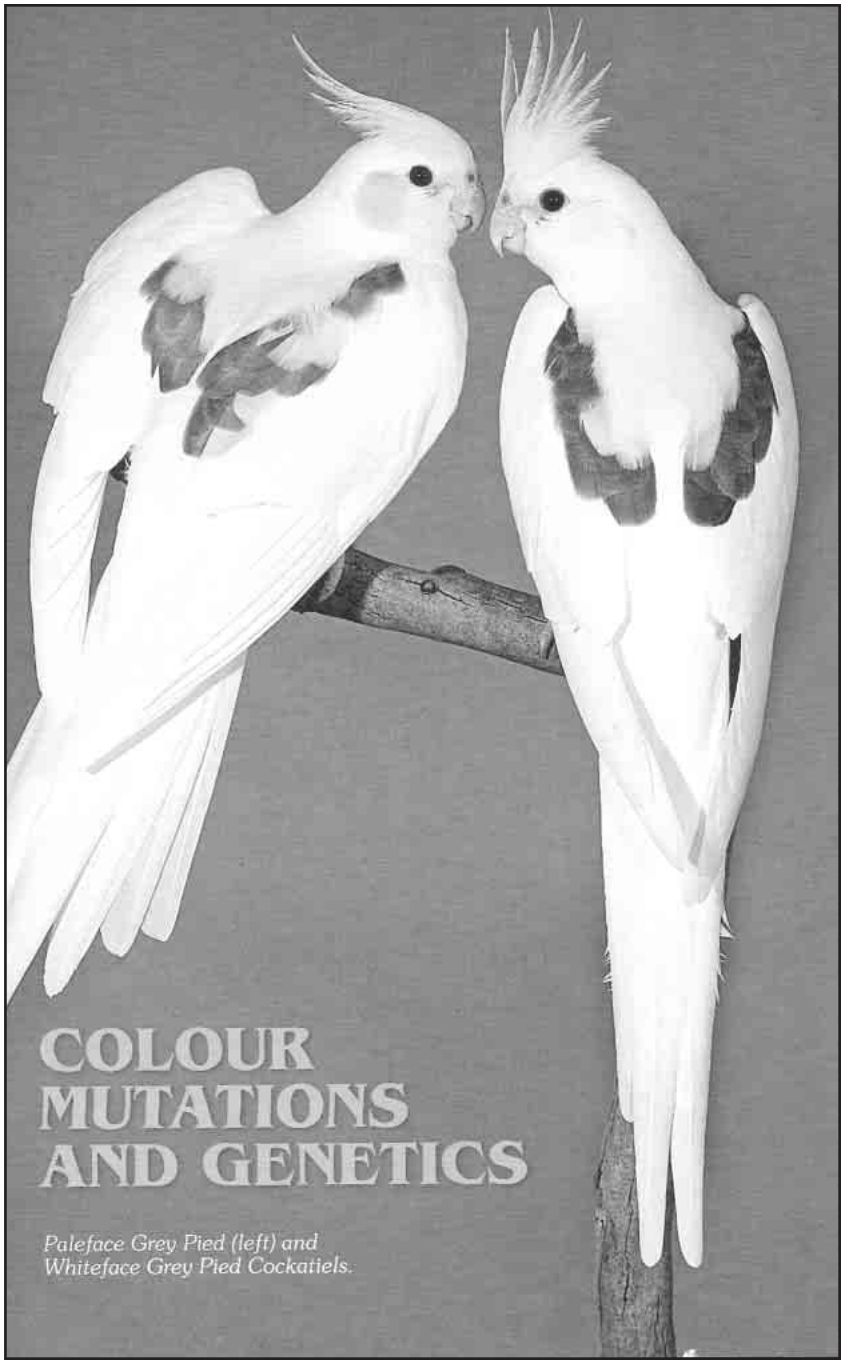
tion, quarantine procedures, aviary construction, diet, nest boxes, breeding, incubation and even rearing young.

Knowing that cockatiels can be such excellent companion birds the authors have also included a section devoted to the specifics of having a cockatiel in your home. Good Bird Magazine contributor Jim McKendry offers important behavior and learning information in this section. With Jim at the helm one can be assured a positive reinforcement approach to behavior is recommended.

A most fascinating section features the various mutations achieved over the years through selective breeding. Many are familiar with descriptive cockatiel terms such as Pied, Cinnamon and Lutino. However the list goes far beyond those well known identifiers. Even more intriguing are the multitude of fantastic photographs that give a visual to accompany the terminology. For the ambitious, the book also includes discussion of genetics. Ah, where is Gregor Mendol when you need him? Fortunately the authors make the section user friendly. Even a novice can grasp the basics.

A final important section covers health and disease issues for cockatiels. Broken down into easy to digest sections and featuring a handy reference chart, this section proves to be invaluable. Photos clearly illustrate symptoms of illness caregivers should look for in their birds.



A fabulous photograph by Peter Odekerken

Not only a feast for those hungry for knowledge, this book also features an unmatched collection of cockatiel portraits. This feast for the eyes includes image artistry from world class bird photographer Peter Odekerken.

Published in Australia, authored by Australians, photographed by Australians and featuring an infamous Australian bird species, a cockatiel enthusiast cannot go wrong with this book in his or her collection. Books can be ordered directly from ABK Publications. Visit www.birdkeeper.com.au to order your copy.

Recommended Resources

LITERATURE

Don't Shoot the Dog! The New Art of Teaching and Training
By Karen Pryor (1999 Bantam Publishers)

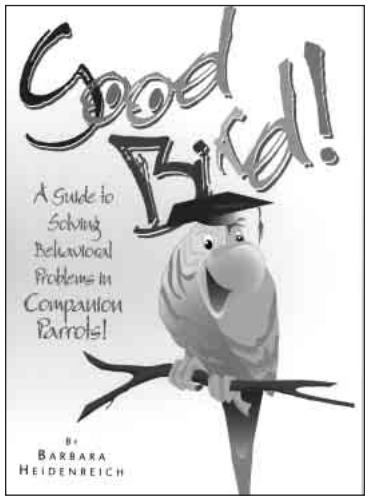
This book is essential to anyone's collection. It discusses some basic training principles in very simple language. The training principles are then applied to everyday situations to help understand how they can be used with animals and people. It is easy to read and inexpensive as well. Available through www.clickertraining.com

Animal Training: Successful Animal Management through Positive Reinforcement
By Ken Ramirez (1999 Shedd Aquarium Publishers)

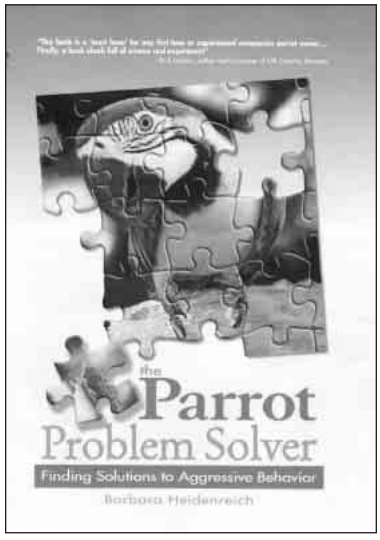
This book is a collection of articles written about animal training. It is very comprehensive and includes a great deal of information. Articles cover a variety of animal species. It is a large book and a bit more expensive, but worth it. It is available by calling toll free 1-888-732-7883 (1-888-SEA-STUF) or visiting www.sheddnet.org. This book is also available through www.amazon.com.

Good Bird Magazine
Published quarterly by Good Bird Inc. Available at www.goodbirdinc.com

Good Bird! A Guide to Solving Behavioral Problems in Companion Parrots.
By Barbara Heidenreich. Available atwww.avianpublications.com



The Parrot Problem Solver. Addressing Aggressive Behavior.
By Barbara Heidenreich. Available atwww.avianpublications.com



Clicking With Birds: A Beginners Guide to Clicker Training Your Companion Parrot
By Linda Morrow. Available at www.avitrain.com/manual.html

Recommended Resources continued

Clicker Training with Birds
By Melinda Johnson. Available at www.clickertraining.com

A Parrot for Life
By Rebecca K O'Connor. Available at
www.amazon.com and
www.rebeccakoconnor.com/parrots

INTERNET RESOURCES

Good Bird Inc
www.GoodBirdInc.com

Applied Companion Animal Behavior Network- Avian Pages
www.acabn.com/avianlist.html

An Animal Trainers Introduction to Operant and Classical Conditioning
www.wagntrain.com/OC

The Writings of Susan Friedman, PhD.
www.behaviorworks.org

The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE)
www.IAATE.org

Animal Behavior Management Alliance (ABMA)
www.theABMA.org

The Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies
The website offers forums to discuss behavior and an excellent collection of definitions of applied behavior analysis terminology. www.behavior.org

Raising Canine
Telecourses on animal training
www.raisingcanine.com

Practice the timing of your bridges
www.clickertales.com/clickertimingame.html

WORKSHOPS:

Parrot Behavior and Training Workshops -Good Bird Inc
Barbara Heidenreich
Offering workshops specifically catered for the companion parrot community and also veterinary professionals
www.GoodBirdInc.com

Living and Learning with Parrots: The Fundamental Principles of Behavior
Online Class
By Susan G Friedman, Ph.D.
www.behaviorworks.org.

VIDEOS:

Parrot Behavior and Training by Good Bird Inc. Available at
www.goodbirdinc.com

New! Training your Parrot for the Veterinary Exam.
Available at
www.goodbirdinc.com

LIST SERVES:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/clickbirds/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BirdClick/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pickinparrots/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ParrotBAS/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GoodBirdGroup/

Fledglings: Feathered Fun for Young Aviculturists

By Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

PARROT SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

www.parrotsociety.org.au

Shane and Nick (pictured here) hope to inspire future avian enthusiasts. Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

"Fledglings" is a publication targeted for young people made possible by the support of the Parrot Society of Australia Inc. Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

With the increased distraction of technology, the lure of cyber entertainment and restrictions of high-density living, people's traditional backyard hobbies are sadly declining worldwide. Unfortunately, aviculture is one such victim of these complications of the modern era. Consequently, within the last decade, there has been a noticeable decline in young people joining avicultural clubs as a result of this change in society. Avicultural clubs then in turn suffer from this lack of new blood drawn from a younger generation of bird enthusiasts coming through the ranks. More importantly though is the loss of inherited experience and practical advice from being passed on whilst sharing in the management of our hobby.

Two Australians have recognized this problem and are leading the charge to address it with the help and support of the Parrot Society of Australia Inc. (PSOA) Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop have both come through the traditional ranks of belonging to many avicultural clubs and benefiting from the hands on knowledge their members provide. According to Shane, "face to face networking is one of the best ways to improve your knowledge and learning experiences, particularly for the novice or beginner." As relatively young men themselves, both have witnessed first hand the

Shane Hancock (left) and Nick Bishop (right) have both come through the traditional ranks of belonging to many avicultural clubs and benefiting from the hands on knowledge their members provide.
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

reduction in younger enthusiasts or even from their pier group entering the hobby of bird keeping. Subsequently, they decided to do something about reversing this trend through reaching out to children directly and marketing aviculture at their level as a fun and rewarding experience.

Shane and Nick possess a wealth of avian experience between them with many native and exotic avian species from poultry to parrots, finches to raptors. Having met for the first time at "Parrots 2006", the Parrot Society of Australia's biannual international convention in Brisbane, Queensland, they conceived the idea of a junior version of the highly successful PSOA News club magazine. Thus, the concept of ''Fledglings'' was hatched! The following months saw planning and development meetings and with the approval of the PSOA Management Committee for funding. The first issue went to press in November 2006 with the bi-line reading, "feathered fun for young aviculturists." With four issues under their belt and another six in development, it has now secured its place as an ongoing educational project for themselves and the Parrot Society.

So far, Shane and Nick have written issues covering Cockatoos, Lovebirds, Rosellas, and Conures. The next issue looks at Cockatiels, with Kakarikis to follow soon after. "We have targeted those parrots which are both financially obtainable and familiar to children. Currently, each issue alternates between a native Australian and an exotic parrot species, providing general information, specific facts with a responsible conservational message pertaining to that species or group" explains Shane. "We want kids to appreciate that the birds they keep at home have a wild cousin that is not so lucky. It is about responsible pet ownership and citizenship to be informed, get involved and to make a difference" says Nick. Each issue also has a "fun and games" section that reinforces relevant avian names and terms via a puzzle, a downloadable coloring activity and an email competition.

Currently, each issue alternates between a native Australian and an exotic parrot species, providing general information, specific facts with a responsible conservational message pertaining to that species or group" explains Shane
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

"We want to get effective and useful avian information in the hands of children aged 7 to 16yrs, something they can apply directly at home to their own birds and

Cartoons help get effective and useful avian information in the hands of children aged 7 to 16yrs.
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

We want kids to appreciate that the birds they keep at home have a wild cousin that is not so lucky.
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

A coloring activity for children can be downloaded for free at www.parrotsociety.org.au under the "Fledglings" menu tab.
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

learn from" says Nick. "Shane brings his professionalism as an experienced early childhood teacher and aviculturist while I contribute behavioral training techniques and good practice strategies. My qualifications in ornithology don't go astray either!" Nicholas currently works for one of Sydney's most famous tourist attractions, Taronga Zoo. He is member of the renowned "QBE Free Flight Bird Show" team that presents a huge variety of free flying birds in a spectacular amphitheatre perched on the edge of a cliff top, with an amazing view of the Harbor Bridge, Opera House and Sydney skyline as a backdrop.

Shane brings his professionalism as an experienced early childhood teacher and aviculturist to "Fledglings."
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

"Nick is a fantastic artist in his own right" explains Shane. "His drawings and caricatures are brilliant. When I first saw them, I thought that they provided a perfect opportunity to compliment each issue with a downloadable coloring activity for younger readers. Not only do they appeal to children with their detail, but from an educational perspective, they make the children notice the specific feather colorations of each parrot species." Shane's motivation to include this fea-

Nicholas currently works for one of Sydney's most famous tourist attractions, Taronga Zoo. He is member of the renowned "QBE Free Flight Bird Show"
Photo Credit: Shane Hancock and Nicholas Bishop

ture in "Fledglings" also served as a deliberate and clever attempt to get children and parents alike to visit the Parrot Society of Australia's informative club website to download them. Whilst there, they can explore information about the Society, its goals and endeavors as well as learn more about parrots and aviculture in the process.

"Fledglings" is distributed free to every PSOA member as a high gloss, four page, A4 format, professionally produced publication. It is a wonderful compliment to the Society's 52 page club magazine of the same quality. It is intended to be given away to any child that is interested in parrots by Parrot Society members. Additional copies have been utilized by schools. Anybody can go online to download a PDF copy from www.parrotsociety.org.au under the "Fledglings" menu tab. Once there they will find extra information specific to the publication including the young Palm Cockatoo mascot "Weipa" and the biographies of creative team who work hard to bring it to print.

One of the most surprising and somewhat disappointing news is that "Fledglings" has received no industry or private financial support, which hasn't been for a lack of trying. "We have approached large companies with a vested interest in selling avicultural products to the public for sponsorship. This would help offset the production costs and enable "Fledglings" to double or triple in both size and content. We are voluntarily giving up our time and knowledge for the betterment of aviculture and not one company we approached for support has come on board, even though they admit to seeing the benefit of such a professional publication" says Shane. "We are both dumbfounded, as it is not only a direct marketing opportunity for their avian products and services but also exposes young aviculturists to what is available in the marketplace." Neither Nick nor Shane wishes to see "Fledglings" become saturated with advertising either. Rather, they would like to have a corporate sponsor who has branding rights and exclusivity. "No child would be happy to read an ad filled document about parrots. It is about selective and clever marketing that is mutually beneficial" explains Nick.

One Australian business though who has given its ongoing commitment to supporting "Fledglings" and promoting aviculture to the younger generation is ABK Publications, publishers of Australian BirdKeeper magazine. The Editor, Ms. Sheryl Steele-Boyce, has been fantastic in assisting the Parrot Society of Australia Inc. with raffle prizes and free advertising to promote "Fledglings" as a worthwhile endeavor. In turn, this initiative has also inspired ABK to develop a "Young BirdKeeper" forum on their website to further advocate the work Shane and Nick are doing whilst showcasing young bird keepers at a national and international level.

With such a strong partnership in place, the possibility of financial sponsorship, the support of ABK Publications and the backing of the Parrot Society of Australia, the hobby of aviculture is sure to benefit from the initiative of these two creative aviculturists.

If you are able to help support "Fledglings" in any way, regardless of your geographic location or personal circumstance, then please email fledglings@parrotsociety.org.au. A little bit of help can go a long way to assisting Shane and Nick with continuing to develop this worthwhile project.

Oatmeal Pancakes

By Beverly Penny

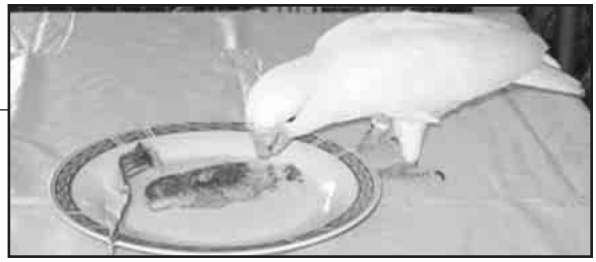


Photo credit: Beverly Penny

1 and 1/4 cups McCann's Quick Cooking Oatmeal

1 cup low fat plain yogurt (1 or 2 %)

1 cup low fat milk or soy milk

1 teaspoon honey or sugar (use pasteurized honey only)

1/2 cup whole wheat flour

1 tsp baking soda

1 tsp salt (I use 1/2 tsp)

2 large eggs, beaten

1/4 cup pecans or walnuts (whichever you like)

1. In a large bowl, combine oats, plain yogurt, low fat milk/soy milk, and honey. Stir in flour, baking soda and salt. Add beaten eggs and mix well. Add chopped nuts. Batter will be thick.

2. Heat a cast iron or stainless steel frying pan over medium heat. Spoon about 1/4 cup batter into frying pan or griddle for each pancake. Cook until bottoms are browned and bubbles on top start to pop, about 3 minutes. Flip and cook until other side is browned, about 2 minutes. Repeat with remaining batter. Add additional milk if batter becomes too thick.

Photo credit: Beverly Penny

Serve hot with maple syrup or fresh fruit. Yields approximately 12 pancakes. These freeze really well.

I mash up 1 ripe banana with a tsp of maple syrup or just the banana and microwave for 20 seconds. Top pancakes with banana mixture. Enjoy with your birds.

Photo credit: Helen Dishaw

Photo credit: Dean Moser

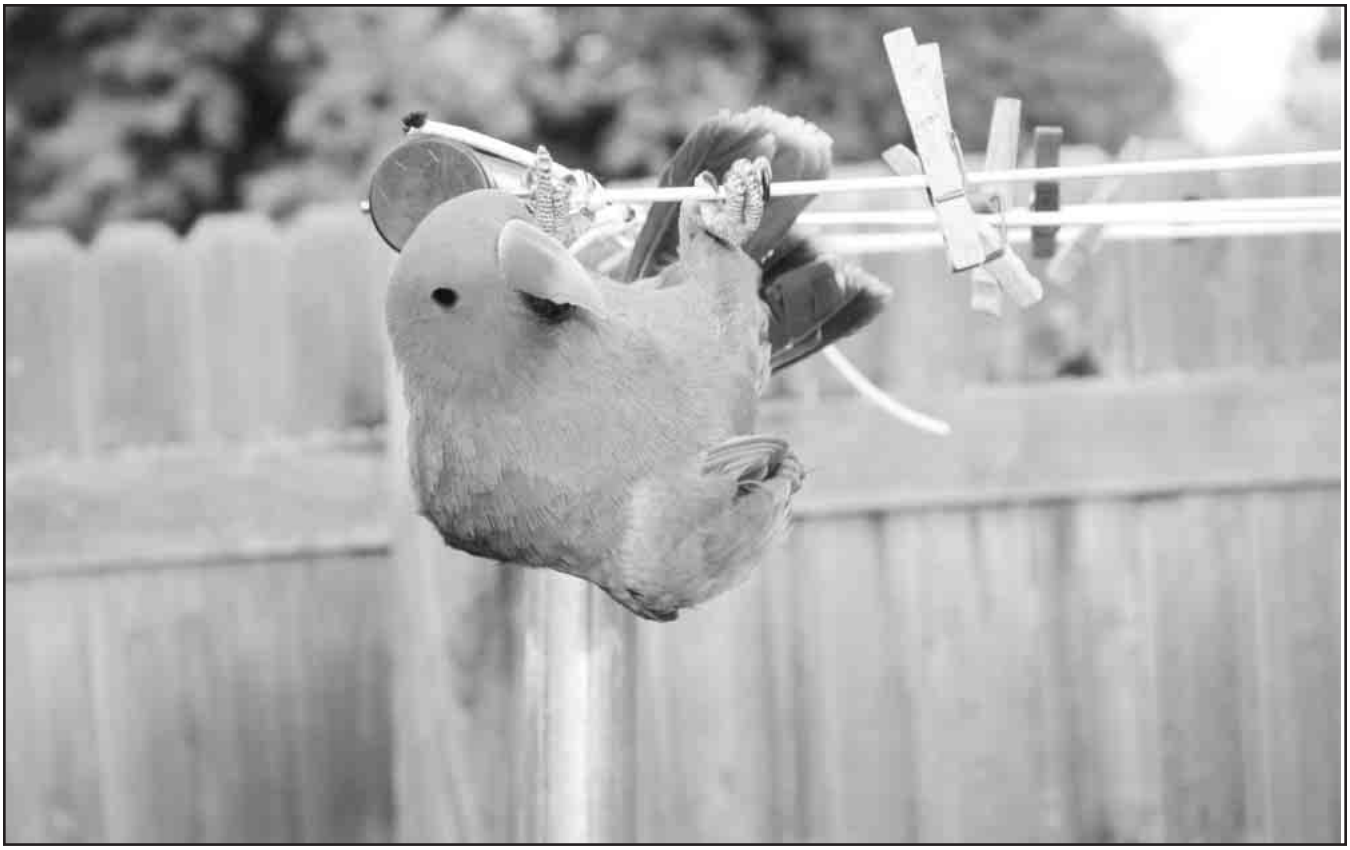


Photo credit: Dean Moser

Eco-Tips

Saving the earth for ourselves, for our companion parrots and for all animals in the wild is sometimes as easy as making a few simple changes in our lives. Here are four activities you can try to help make a difference. We suggest you try adding one of the four activities every few weeks until your next issue of Good Bird magazine arrives. Before you know it each activity will become second nature…… and you will be helping nature.

As always we suggest you start your conservation efforts by re-using and recycling Good Bird magazine. Keep Good Bird magazine on your bookshelf for future reference. Good Bird magazine offers a great deal of information that will continue to be useful. Share Good Bird magazine with friends, you bird club, and your veterinarian. Give old magazines to health clubs, retirement homes, and libraries. We don't even mind if you use it line the bottom of the bird cage! If it is time to discard an issue, please be sure to place it in the recycling bin. We appreciate your efforts.

Photo credit: Helen Dishaw

1. Think globally, recycle locally. The Freecycle Network provides an online community tool for giving and receiving free stuff. www.freecycle.org. The Freecycle Network was started in May 2003 to promote waste reduction in Tucson's downtown and help save desert landscape from being taken over by landfills. The Network provides individuals and non-profits an electronic forum to "recycle" unwanted items. One person's trash can truly be another's treasure!

2. Natural Fertilizer: Leave grass clippings on the lawn as fertilizer.

3. Buy food from local companies whenever possible. Support your area's Farmer's Market. If possible, grow your own fruits and vegetables using organic gardening practices. You can find local farmer's markets, community supported agriculture, restaurants that cook with regional cuisine, and food cooperatives through www.localharvest.org

4. Learn about the effect your diet is having on the environment with the Eating Green Calculator www.cspinet.org/EatingGreen/calculator.html

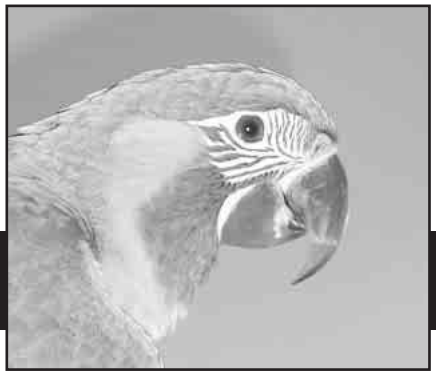
A Special Thank You

To the businesses and individuals who helped make the "Training your Parrot for the Veterinary Exam" DVD a success

PLEASE BE SURE TO VISIT THEIR WEBSITES!

Parrotdise Perch
www.parrotdiseperch.com

Wendy's Parrots
www.wendysparrots.com



The Bird Endowment
www.birdendowment.org

Breaking the Old Rules of Parrot Behavior

By Barbara Heidenreich

My Blue Fronted Amazon Parrot "Tarah"
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

I am here to confess I have broken all the rules. I had a moment in which it occurred to me perhaps I should keep that to my self. As a so called parrot behavior expert would I be unveiling a better left alone secret? And then I realized instead, I might be freeing some other closeted "rule breakers."

I confess:
My parrot does not obey the step up command.
My parrot quite often can be found higher than my heart, eyes and head.
My parrot is allowed to sit on my shoulder.
My parrot is rarely locked in his cage.
My parrot is not covered at night for 12 hours of darkness.
My parrot does not have a separate sleep cage.
My parrot does not receive an hour of undivided attention from me daily.

There, my secrets are out! Before I am judged as an unfit caregiver, allow me to elaborate on each broken rule.

My parrot does not obey the step up command.

My bird is not expected to obey any command. Instead I give my bird the choice to step up. Should he choose to do so, he is lavishly reinforced with gobs of attention. And the result is that he pretty much steps up anytime the request is presented. Furthermore, unfortunately my little guy suffers from arthritis in his legs. Were I to force myself upon him, not only would I create a bit of emotional distress, I would be causing physical discomfort as well. My heart breaks to think of ever doing such a thing to my parrot. Many have experienced the tremendous level of trust that can be fostered between a human and an animal, when the animal is given choices. Knowing this I can't imagine using a strategy that doesn't empower my parrot.

It is OK for a parrot to be higher than my heart, eyes and head.
Photo credit: Dean Moser

My parrot quite often can be found higher than my heart, eyes and head.

Breaking this rule challenges the notion that a parrot considers himself dominant to any one positioned lower (literally) than the bird. Although around for some time I had not heard of this rule until many years after I had been working with free flighted birds in bird shows. I shrugged it off as an off hand recommendation floating around. Only to come to realize this rule had gained some serious momentum. As a profession-

My experience with free flighted parrots showed me that height did not influence whether a bird would cooperate or not.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

al bird trainer I found it surprising, mainly because free flighted birds were far above my head every single day in the shows I presented. And every single day those birds would willingly return to my hand for positive reinforcement, certainly not because I had dominated them. My experience showed me that height did not influence whether a bird would cooperate or not. Instead I needed to create a desired consequence for the bird to do the behavior I requested, even if the bird was positioned higher than me. I apply this same thinking with my companion parrot. Whether he is perched high or low, coming to my hand is something my parrot eagerly anticipates due to a positive reinforcement training strategy.

My parrot is allowed to sit on my shoulder.

I guess the secret was out when the photo with my bird on my shoulder appeared on the back of my book "The Parrot Problem Solver." This is a big one, right? I suppose it can be, if the parrot in question is known to present aggressive behavior or is not trained to step up off of the shoulder for positive reinforcers. Certainly I do not put any part of my body at risk with a parrot that does not show evidence of likely behaving in a calm manner in close proximity to any part of me. However 20 years of reading and interpreting my bird's body language has allowed me to recognize when my bird is relaxed and comfortable and when he is not. I pay attention to this the entire time my bird is on my shoulder. Should the situation change (for example the phone rings and my bird shows excitement which may lead to redirected aggressive behavior), it is a simple request to step up and my bird returns without incident to his cage prior to exhibiting serious problem behavior.

I must also confess I cherish the moments of interacting with my bird in this manner. Quite often my bird will be gently preening my face (as he is as I write this),

I guess the secret was out when this photo with my bird on my shoulder appeared on the back of my book "The Parrot Problem Solver." Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

he will cuddle in close to me, offer gentle sounds of comfort, and I get to inhale the distinct smell of Amazon parrot. Much like mom's cooking represents love, the smell of an Amazon triggers a similar response for me. Does this mean I advocate all birds on shoulders? No, however it does mean I do not rule out the option entirely.

My parrot is rarely locked in his cage.

Boy, am I asking for it. I can see the hate mail now. Before the fingers meet the keyboard, let me explain a few things. Out of sheer ignorance this practice was implemented years ago when my bird was first acquired. The truth is back then I let the bird out and did not know how to get him back inside the cage. If I did get him in, for example by tossing a tasty tidbit inside, after he finished the treat he would pace frantically wanting to be released. Seeing an animal distraught was too much for me and I would let him back out. As I learned more about bird training, safely and successfully managing a bird on top of the cage became the training goal. This meant making the cage highly reinforcing so that my bird chose to stay on the cage. It also meant bird proofing the house so that bird and home were safe should by chance a little roaming occurred. Which has been extremely rare due to the fore mentioned highly reinforcing cage area. It has also meant being highly conscientious of doors, windows, other animals and people in the house. However being highly sensitive to what it takes to keep ones companion parrot safe is often very familiar to caregivers. No doubt almost everyone is careful about non stick cookware, self cleaning ovens, burning candles, access to chocolate, cleaning chemicals, etc. Once the awareness is there it becomes second nature to implement safe practices.

The top of the cage is highly reinforcing to my bird and therefore he chooses to stay on the cage. Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

By offering food, water and enrichment items inside the cage, my bird learned to voluntarily enter the cage. Now he often naps inside the cage of his own volition. Locking the cage door with my bird inside, should it be necessary, is no longer a challenge. Oddly enough in part by giving my bird the freedom to choose, I now have the ability to safely manage my bird both inside and outside the cage.

My parrot is not covered at night for 12 consecutive hours of darkness.

I am not here to contradict the idea that some birds may require for health reasons long hours of darkness. However I can certainly present one example of a companion parrot that sleeps plenty, but never for 12 hours in a row. And never covered. My bird naps throughout the day, as do many parrots. But usually officially retires around 11 at night and rises around 7 AM. For the life of me I cannot find a behavior or medical problem that exists for my bird that I would contribute to lack of 12 consecutive hours of sleep in darkness. This is not say that sleep is not important, and by no means

do I advocate depriving a bird of sleep. However generalizations that include recommendations that don't seem to fit ones circumstance should not necessarily be an indication that something is being done wrong. Australian Parrot Behavior Consultant and writer Jim McKendry offers his insights on parrots' sleeping practices as well.

"I've never actually seen my African Grey sleep. My Galahs will fly and screech in their aviary at all sorts of weird times at night. The pair will even feed each other at night sometimes. I can't get within 10 meters of my birds in their aviaries without them knowing. (So much for a "deep sleep") On the wild side we have flocks of Short-billed Corellas that can be seen flying around well into the night when there's a full moon. It's quite spooky seeing a flock of 10 or 12 ghostly white birds flying in formation with a moonlit background. Here you can sit and listen to the Rainbow Lorikeets squabbling and jostling for perching position as late as 10 or 11 at night. Let's not forget the humble Kakapo, the mother of all contradictions when it comes to generalizations about parrots. It's nocturnal!"

My parrot does not have a separate sleep cage.

If you have a hustling and bustling household that never seems to calm down, a sleep cage may provide a welcomed respite for your bird. However in this household a sleep cage would likely create chaos. Why? Because all things wonderful are currently associated with the heavily reinforced primary abode. In my opinion it would be a significant training challenge for my bird to learn to abandon the preferred cage and location for a distant new one only at night. An added reinforcer for my bird is that his cage is in the same room in which I sleep. My companionship has proven to be positively reinforcing for my bird. Furthermore, with a relatively peaceful household, reasons for training such a behavior are hind to find. Sleep is easily accomplished in his existing situation.

My parrot does not receive an hour of undivided attention from me daily.

Anyone who has taken a peak at my calendar knows there is no such thing as a routine schedule in my life. Flexibility has been an important element in my bird's

response repertoire. This has inadvertently been trained via my lifestyle. My bird has been exposed to a lack of routine for some time now. This adaptability has served us both well. Time devoted to undivided attention is limited, but time spent together while engaged in other activities is plentiful. I may be working steadfastly at my desk and my parrot will sit on my shoulder, explore the desk, and crawl through the drawers. Nights relaxing in front of the TV also means hours of allopreening. In some way these practices have lead to a companion parrot equally capable of entertaining himself and also of interacting with me when the moment presents itself. This balance has avoided the common pitfalls of a parrot that relentlessly demands attention and is constantly seeking out the caregiver, or a bird that has no interest in people.

These practices have lead to a companion parrot equally capable of entertaining himself and also of interacting with me when the moment presents itself.
Photo credit: Barbara Heidenreich

I would venture to say the rules were developed with the good intentions of giving easy to follow guidelines for effectively interacting with a companion parrot. Kudos to that! However now that companion parrot owners have ventured into the shallows, and some into the very deep end (and I mean that in a good way), of behavior analysis we can understand why some of the rules have been effective, but also explore better options and/or conclude if it is the right choice for the individual parrot in question. We can take what we have learned from those old rules and use them as the launching pad for creating the next best practices.

I did not happen to get lucky and acquire a perfect parrot. My bird by no means has been a well behaved angel his entire life. He will absolutely bite if pushed to do something against his will. Early in our relationship he learned to scream for attention. At one time he wandered the house in search of nest sites. He can get very aroused by phone conversation, people visiting and loud music. In these moments he shows a higher likelihood to display aggressive behaviors should the right trigger be there. However each and every one of these situations has been successfully managed with kinder methods available from the science of behavior analysis.

Does breaking all the rules make me less of a caring companion parrot owner? I may be biased but I tend to think not. As I have a well loved, well behaved, engaging healthy companion parrot that gives me great joy. What I do hope is that it shows me to be a critical thinker. I have been able to maintain an incredibly successful relationship with my parrot by using the knowledge gained from behavior analysis. The evidence is here and out there. Other companion parrot owners are showing the same successes. And I applaud then for their courage to challenge what has been for some time now accepted without question. Instead of breaking the rules, I think perhaps it is time to change the rules.

Barbara Heidenreich has been a professional in the field of animal training since 1990. She owns and operates a company, Good Bird, Inc., (www.goodbirdinc.com) that provides behavior and training products to the companion parrot community. These products include Good Bird magazine, books, videos, consulting services and behavior and training workshops. She is the author of "Good Bird! A Guide to Solving Behavior Problems in Companion Parrots" by Avian Publications and also the "The Parrot Problem Solver. Finding Solutions to Aggressive Behavior" by TFH Publications. She is the past president of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (www.IAATE.org).

Barbara's experience also includes consulting on animal behavior and training in zoos and other animal related facilities. Her specialty is free flight bird training. She has been a part of the development and production of more than 15 different free flight education programs. Barbara continues to provide consulting services to zoos, nature centers and other animal facilities through her other company Animal Training and Consulting Services (www.ATandCS.com). In her career she has trained animals, trained staff, and/or presented shows at facilities around the world.

Upcoming Events and Seminars

July 16, 2007 Animal Training Continuing Education Course Austin Community College. Austin, TX, USA
6PM to 10PM. Presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc this course will be an introduction to training animals with positive reinforcement. Designed for animal training enthusiasts including animal industry professionals and companion animal caregivers. Visit www.goodbirdinc.com or www.austincc.edu/ce for more information.

July 21, 2007 "Parrot Behavior and Training Workshop", Des Moines, IA, USA
Hosted by Mid America Cage Bird Society. Day long workshop on the basics of training parrots with positive reinforcement presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. For more information visit www.macbs.org or contact John Grimm at bjbp@hotmail.com Phone: 515-707-3977

July 22, 2007 "Flight Training Workshop", Des Moines, IA, USA
Hosted by Mid America Cage Bird Society. Half day workshop on training and managing your flighted parrot presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. For more information visit www.macbs.org or contact John Grimm at bjbp@hotmail.com Phone: 515-707-3977

July 29, 2007 "An Introduction to Training with Positive Reinforcement", St. Louis, MO, USA
Hosted by Gateway Parrot Club. Evening presentation by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. For more information visit http://gatewayparrotclub.org or contact Education@GatewayParrotClub.org

August 4 -9, 2007 Association of Avian Veterinarians Annual Conference, Providence, RI, USA.
Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will be presenting at this event. Visit www.AAV.org for more information.

August 11, 2007 "Parrot Training and Enrichment Workshop" Burlington, NJ, USA.
Hosted by Bird Paradise. Day long workshop featuring Robin Shewokis of the Leather Elves speaking on enrichment and Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc speaking on parrot training and behavior. For more information visit www.BirdParadise.biz. Phone Kathie at: 609-747-7777

August 18, 2007 "Parrot Behavior and Training Workshop", San Diego area, CA, USA.
Details are pending on this workshop to be presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. For more information contact Martin Parks at MartysMacaws@cox.net Phone: 760-436-1770

August 22-25, 2007 American Federation of Aviculture Annual Conference Los Angeles, CA, USA
Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will be presenting at this event. Visit www.AFAbirds.org for more information.

September 10, 2007 Animal Training Continuing Education Course Austin Community College. Austin, TX, USA
6PM to 10PM. Presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc this course will be an introduction to training animals with positive reinforcement. Designed for animal training enthusiasts including animal industry professionals and companion animal caregivers. Visit www.goodbirdinc.com or www.austincc.edu/ce for more information.

September 12, 2007: Telecourse: Shaping Plans to Train your Parrot for the Veterinary Exam
presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc.
10:00 AM -11:30 AM Central Standard Time. Participate in this course from the comfort of your own home. Visit www.raisingcanine.com for more information.

September 22, 2007 "Parrot Behavior and Training Workshop", Minneapolis, MN, USA
Hosted by Minnesota Companion Bird Association. Day long workshop on the basics of training parrots with positive reinforcement presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. For more information visit www.mnbird.org or contact Mary at quister65@msn.com

September 28-30, 2007: "Parrot Learning and Behavior for Veterinary Professionals" Denver, CO, USA.
Hosted by the Gabriel Foundation. This one of a kind seminar is a unique opportunity for veterinary professionals to learn the fundamentals of positive reinforcement training and learning theory. Not to be missed! For more information visit www.thegabrielfoundation.org

October 6, 2007 "Parrot Expo" Long Island, NY, USA
Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will be speaking at this event. Hosted by the Long Island Parrot Society. Visit this link for more information www.liparrotsociety.org/annualshow

October 9, 2007 "Bird Club Presentation" Connecticut, USA
Hosted by the Connecticut Association for Aviculture. Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will present at the monthly meeting. For more information visit www.cafabirdclub.org

October 20-21, 2007 "Parrot Behavior and Training Workshop" Stockholm, Sweden
Seminar on the basics of training parrots with positive reinforcement presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. Check back for details.

October 27, 2007 "Parrot Behavior and Training Workshop" London, England
Seminar on the basics of training parrots with positive reinforcement presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. Check back for details.

November 10-11, 2007: "Parrot Behavior and Learning: A Step Up and Beyond" Milwaukee Area, WI, USA.
Two day seminar featuring Susan Friedman, PhD and Barbara Heidenreich. Details pending. For more information contact: Theresa at tzakutansky@aol.com

December 5, 2007 Animal Training Continuing Education Course Austin Community College. Austin, TX, USA
6PM to 10PM. Presented by Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc this course will be an introduction to training animals with positive reinforcement. Designed for animal training enthusiasts including animal industry professionals and companion animal caregivers. Visit www.goodbirdinc.com or www.austincc.edu/ce for more information.

January 25-27, 2008: Parrot Festival, Houston, TX, USA.
Hosted by the National Parrot Rescue and Preservation Foundation. Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will be presenting at this event. For more information visit www.parrotfestival.org

February 22-24, 2008: Aviculture Society of America, Phoenix, AZ, USA.
Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will be presenting at this event. For more information visit www.asabirds.org

March 5-8, 2008: International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators Conference, Alphen ann den Rijn, Netherlands.
Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc will be participating in this event. Visit www.IAATE.org for more information.

April 26-27, 2008: "Parrot Behavior and Learning: A Step Up and Beyond" Phoenix, AZ, USA.
Two day seminar featuring Susan Friedman, PhD and Barbara Heidenreich. For more information contact: Gail Naylor at gail.naylor@cgcmail.maricopa.edu

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Good Bird® Magazine is the ultimate resource for individuals seeking to learn kind and gentle ways to create desired parrot behavior. Our primary focus is behavior from an applied behavior analysis approach with an emphasis on positive reinforcement training. However we also cover other topics related to the well being of parrots in our homes and in the wild.

More and more people are discovering the joys of creating desired behavior with positive reinforcement. Good Bird® Magazine is here to keep the movement growing and thriving. We hope everyone can experience the incredible relationship that can be created with your bird when you train with positive reinforcement.

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