

April/May, 2003

Volume 2, Issue 1



Feathered Friends

The Newsletter for Parrot Lovers

Overcoming the Fear of the Beak

-By Gena Everhart

Inside this issue:

<i>Parrot Q & A</i>	2
<i>Water Bottles for Clean Water</i>	4
<i>Low Cost Alternatives for Bird Care</i>	4
<i>"Parrot-Toys and Play Areas" Book Review</i>	5
<i>Time in the Outdoors for Your Bird</i>	
<i>Birdie Boutique Specials & Coupons</i>	6
<i>Road Trips with Your Bird</i>	6

You have finally made the decision to acquire your first pet parrot or perhaps you've just decided to add a larger parrot to your household in addition to a smaller hookbill. Once you are in the pet or bird shop, you watch with fascination as your potential pet picks up and cracks a huge walnut in it's beak with apparent ease and you realize he could do the same to your finger! How do you overcome the fear of that beak? Here are some tips to help you do just that:

- Start with a very young bird. Go and spend time with your chosen young bird weekly until he is weaned. Handle him so that the two of you get accustomed to each other's touch. This allows both of you to "grow up together" and prevents many biting behaviors later on.
- If you can't begin with a baby bird, learn proper step up and handling techniques and begin to study your bird's body language. Many bites could be avoided if you are offering a firm surface for your bird to step up onto instead of a surface that "gives" under the bird's weight when they try to step up. You also need to remember to give the step up command each time that is what you expect the bird to do. Otherwise, your bird may be puzzled as to what is expected. Another common mistake that new bird owner's make is to pull the hand away as soon as the bird leans forward. This is a completely natural response that you MUST train yourself to ignore. Almost all birds steady themselves with their beaks and test the perch surface with their beak before they will attempt to step up onto it. New owners usually mistake

this as an attempt to bite. They pull the hand away just as the bird attempts to test the surface. Each time the hand is presented and the bird displays the same reaching with the beak—they believe their bird intends to bite them. The owner doesn't know what to do and neither does their bird! Keep that hand firm and steady to allow your bird a successful attempt to step up onto your hand. Each successful step up, builds trust



on the part of the owner and the bird. It just gets easier after that.

The 'big guy' parrots have beaks that can crack nuts easily. Their sharp beaks are formidable to most inexperienced bird owners.

Present your hand with your thumb folded against your palm and your other four fingers held firmly one against the other and with the back of the hand facing the bird. If you suspect a bite, bend your four fingers a little at the knuckle to make the skin taut. Keep your thumb down against your palm. The idea is to minimize the loose skin surfaces and the "meaty" parts of the pads of your fingers for the bird to grab with it's beak. If there is to be a bite, this is the best way to avoid damage to your hands. This is also the most natural position of the arm and hand to push toward the bird if you do receive a bite. The tendency is for you to pull away. However, pulling away when being bitten will only increase the damage. Pulling back will also cause the bird to distrust the perch and will likely cause the

(Continued on page 3)

Special points of interest:

- Don't forget to look for past issues of this newsletter on the Birdie Boutique website.
- The next Feathered Friends group meeting for companion parrot lovers hosted by The Birdie Boutique, will be on Thursday, April 24th at 7:15 pm. Come early and shop from 6pm until 7:15 then stay for the meeting! See page 6 for full details.
- See the back page for valuable new coupons.

Parrot Questions and Answers

-By Dr. Greg Burkett Diplomate ABVP Avian-



Dr. Greg Burkett Diplomate ABVP Avian can be contacted with your questions at ask-thetvet@birdieboutique.com

Q: It has been much like spring the last few weeks. My parrot is trying very diligently to "nest" and to show me where he would like to nest all over the apartment. The nest-sites include various cubby holes in the kitchen, under the computer table, in the coat closet and his apparent favorite, the armoire in the bedroom (which has perfect nest-like boxes lined with soft wool sweaters). He seems to crave these dark tiny spaces, however I discourage him from going into such places - partly because of the safety concerns, but also because I am concerned that he would spend hours there. (*He does not have a nest box in his large cage, though he has a "Happy Hut, which he does indeed nap in and sleep in at night.*) Am I correct to dissuade him from this particular nesting behaviour? He did not go through this degree of intensity last year, so I haven't anything to compare this behaviour to.

A: It sounds like Floyd is growing up. Are you sure this is a male? Have you had Floyd sexed? It is important to know because allowing males to do these things is acceptable, but females can be stimulated to lay eggs, which can lead to problems.

Q: We have a 10 month old sun conure who screams when we are not present in the room. As soon as we sit down he is fine. Is there anything we can do to stop his screaming?

A: This is a very common response. The noise your bird is making means that he wants his flock to all be together or in sight. This is his assurance that no one has been taken by a predator or simply lost. When he cannot be with the flock, seeing is acceptable. Otherwise he feels isolated because he sees no one in his flock. Much of the screaming is normal conure noise making.

If your bird is screaming, that is not the time to go to him. This will only serve to reinforce the behavior. You need to ignore the bad behavior and reward the good behavior. Wait to go to him when he is not screaming; or learn his pattern of screaming and get to him before he begins screaming. This will reinforce good behavior.

Q: We love parrots and cats. We saw a baby Meyer's parrot and fell in love with it! Did you ever hear of a cat and parrot living together?

A: This is a common question because many bird owners have other pets as well. Cats and parrots *can* coexist in the same household but only with supervision and awareness. You should not leave access to your bird by your cat at night or when you are not at home. Remember, you can take the cat out of the hunt but you can't take the hunt out of the cat. Your cat still has a hunting instinct and this should be respected. Your bird can come out regularly as long as the cat is watched carefully or out all together. Of course, your bird should always be supervised at all times when he is out of his cage. Parrots have a way of getting into all sorts of trouble when they're out of their cage because they are curious creatures.

Q: How would be the best way to teach my pionus how to talk ? Is less than a year old far too young? I REALLY want my bird to learn how to say at least a few words. Any info you could give me would be so great and really appreciated.

A: You need to talk to your bird. When you enter the room call the bird's name, greet your bird, etc. Over time when you come in the room your bird will greet you and repeat its name. It associates entering the room with the words. This same association can be used with food. Say to your bird "Wanna' treat?" each time you put food in its cage and each time your bird sees food "treat" will be the word. Again, association.

CDs and audio tapes can add words to your bird's vocabulary. They can be effective. The new ones called Feathered Phonics have a good method of teaching included on the CD. These are available through our catalog order site at www.birdieboutique.com/specctrainta.html

Cats and parrots *can* coexist in the same household but only with supervision and awareness.



Did you know that parrots should not be kept in round cages? Round cages have no points of reference and can cause disorientation for the bird..

Fear of the Beak (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

bird to bite the next time your hand is offered even if that was not the bird's original intention. The original intention may have only been to test the perch with its beak for sturdiness before climbing on. You should make up your mind before asking the bird to step up, that should a bite occur—you will push forward—and stick to it! Pushing forward forces the bird to release with the beak. Then you can remove your hand from the vicinity of the bird's beak and attempt the step up again when you're both ready. When presenting your hand for perching, don't approach from above the bird as this is how a predator would approach. Bring your hand into view from the front and a little to the side and move your hand from below the bird's feet upward to be placed at the location the bird's legs meet with his body. Push slightly upward so the bird's balance will shift and he will have to step up. At the same time, give the step up command. Upon a successful step up, offer praise immediately. "Good bird" or a treat or both is a good idea.

- If your bird seems determined to bite or you're just too nervous about having that beak on your hand to steady himself, try holding a toy or treat in your left hand while pushing gently against the body right above the legs with your right. The bird will not think about what he is doing and will step up to remain balanced. As pointed out, it's important to establish a series of successful step ups at first and this is one way this can be accomplished.

- If you're still having trouble—try using a short wood perch to have the bird step onto. Each time the bird successfully steps onto the perch, praise lavishly and move your hand forward a little to make the wood surface just a little shorter. Pretty soon, you'll be presenting the hand and not the perch.

- Pick your times carefully for step ups and watch your bird for signs that he is not ready. If he is in

the middle of eating or resting, he may give you definite warning signs to let you know that now is not the time. Don't worry, there will be plenty of opportunities later. Just don't wait too long to accomplish these critical first step up contacts.

- Keep the bird away from your face. I'm afraid this was a mistake I made when I first acquired my african grey. I was so eager to cuddle her that I moved her toward my face once a successful step up had been achieved. I almost had a pierced nose to show for it! I learned my lesson. Keep the bird away from your face until you know them very well. Even then, be cautious when you have a bird near your face.

- Most of all, if you truly want a pet parrot, accept the fact that you WILL be bitten sometimes. Even the sweetest and best natured parrots occasionally bite. They still love you but they are just being parrots. You must accept and overcome your fear just as you would if you are afraid of water but wish to learn to swim. Bolster your resolve, take the time to learn the proper techniques and your desire plus knowledge will carry you to your goal.

Most bites are not serious. Many don't even break the skin. However, if you are a professional hand model, you may want to re-think your pet choice. Remember that your future relationship with your pet parrot is dependent on your being able to relate to him in the beginning. This means that overcoming your fear of the beak is important to a long and happy life together.



Photo by: Jason Everhart 2007

Establishing a good relationship with your parrot means getting over your fear of his beak.

Most of all, if you truly want a pet parrot, accept the fact that you WILL be bitten sometimes. Even the sweetest and best natured parrots occasionally bite.



Even though vegetables and fruits are important to your bird's diet, there are some foods in these groups that should never be offered to your bird. Among these—any part of an avocado and seeds from an apple. Both are toxic to your bird.

Water Bottles—Not Just for Hamsters

Your bird deserves sparkling clean water at all times. Basically, if you wouldn't drink the water available to your bird, your bird shouldn't either!

For good health, the best way to provide this for your bird is through the use of a glass water bottle with drinking spout—just like the kind you're accustomed to seeing in a rabbit or hamster cage. Why a water bottle? It's a closed water system that helps to keep debris out of the water supply and this is the best way to discourage the growth of dangerous bacteria that can make your bird ill.

Let's look at some other good reasons to use a water bottle. 1) Easy access to the bottle. The bottle is held on the outside of the cage and is easy to remove. Easy access means faster, easier water changes for busy bird owners. 2) Because the bottle is held on the outside of the cage, it takes less space inside the cage. This may not mean much to you—but your bird may have a different opinion about that! 3) Water bottles generally hold more water than open water bowls assuring a ready fresh supply of water at all times, 4) A closed

water system makes spillage less likely. Even if some water spills from the spout because your bird suddenly discovers he just LOVES playing with the spout, there's plenty left to quench his thirst. If he spills all of the water from his open water dish while you're away, he has no more water until you arrive home. 5) Some birds love to dunk their food into an open water bowl before eating it. Unfortunately, this results in food particles floating in the water and growing colonies of bacteria. This is not good for your bird. Water must be changed much more frequently when you have a 'dunker' in combination with an open water system. Bottle systems prevent dunking of food. They also prevent your bird's droppings ending up in the water—a very dangerous situation.

It is still essential that a water bottle system be washed thoroughly daily and refilled with fresh water just as with any type of water system. We cannot stress enough the importance of cleaning water containers in hot soapy water and filling with clean water daily. Additionally, you should tap the drinker tip ball to check for water flow. If it is flowing cor-

rectly, you should see bubbles and/or drips of water. Glass bottles are easy to clean with a bottle brush and thorough rinsing. Special smaller brushes are made especially to clean the metal spouts. Glass bottles can also be placed in the dishwasher for complete sanitizing.

Most people worry about switching their bird to a bottle system for water because they are afraid the bird cannot learn to use such a system. If hamsters can learn to drink from a bottle, surely our intelligent birds can. They quickly figure out what to do with the spout. When my cockatiel, Ally, came to me, she used only an open container for water. I switched her to a water bottle but she just didn't seem interested. I used her curiosity to help teach her. I placed a toothpick between the bars of the cage and moved it around until she came over to investigate. Then, I gently pushed up the ball in the water spout to allow just a few drops to come out. It didn't take long before she figured out how to push the ball up with her beak to get a drink and there has been no going back. Allowing your bird access to dirty water is a disaster waiting to happen. Try the bottle. You'll like it!



Closed water systems with a glass bottle are the best kind to use.

"Most people worry about switching their bird to a bottle system for water because they are afraid the bird cannot learn to use such a system. You needn't worry."

Low Cost Alternatives Bird Care Tips

With this issue of Feathered Friends, I'd like to begin offering a low cost alternative tip for bird care in each issue. The tip for this issue is in regard to making an inexpensive basket perch for your bird. Simply purchase a natural basket that has a sturdy handle, then purchase a ball of natural jute string or some type of white

cotton string or rope with no chemical additives. I used new cotton clothesline rope. Beginning at one side of the handle, wrap the entire handle with the string or rope to allow your bird a surface they can grasp easily with their feet. You can then place something heavy that does not have any sharp edges, in the bottom of the

basket and cover it with 2-3 layers of paper towels. Use small pieces of string or rope to tie toys onto the handle. The basket perch is very affordable and completely portable. Your bird can still enjoy a wonderful perch and play area without your having to purchase an expensive parrot stand.



New baby birds often result in expensive bird equipment purchases..

Book Review: Parrot-Toys & Play Areas

-Carol S. D'Arezzo and Lauren Shannon-Nunn

The book is entitled **Parrot-Toys & Play Areas, How to Put Some Fun Into Your Parrot's Life**. It begins by outlining parrot play habits including toy safety, the importance of toys in your parrot's life, placement of toys in your parrot's cage and introduction of new toys. Also useful is a discussion of various parrot

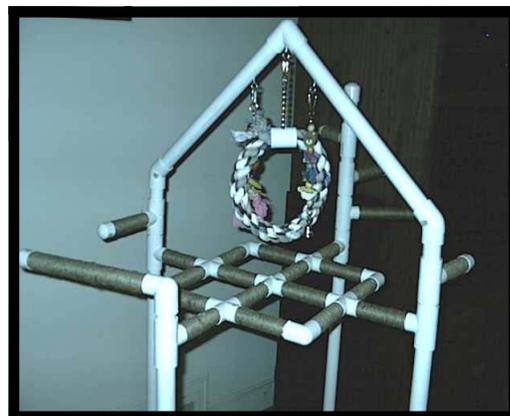


play-type groups such as Buzz Saws, Gatherers and Acrobats and the various play habits of each group. Then, the book gives all types of toys available by breaking them down into different types such as Push N Pulls, Foot Toys, Food Finders

and Preeners. In each segment, ready-to-purchase toy choices are given. However, what

really separates this book from others are the low cost alternative toys you can make yourself given in each section that serve the same purpose as the more expensive toys in parrot play .

Another wonderful feature of the book are the complete instructions for play gyms and t-stands made from PVC. The book gives complete materials lists, written instructions and drawings to help you put your play areas together with ease. The authors even give time requirements for each project. I built the standard PVC play gym pictured at right in about 2 hours from start to finish. This is exactly the time requirement given in the instructions. The designs are well thought out with safety, stimulation for play and durability in mind. It is apparent that real bird owners designed these projects and they did so for those



of us that are not necessarily handy in the workshop.

Overall, the book is not only instructional but entertaining as well. However, it does not contain photographs so don't expect it to be a 'coffee table' book. It does include cute cartoon like drawings throughout. If you're interested in providing your parrot with interesting playthings, it is a must have for your library. -ge

Spending Time in the Great Outdoors with Your Bird

-by Gena Everhart

Spring is upon us in our part of the country and it is tempting to allow our parrot companions outside to enjoy some fresh air. There is nothing wrong with allowing your parrot outside as long as you take some precautions to protect him.

First, you should be aware that being outside may cause your bird some stress because of a fear of predators. Our companion birds have an instinctive fear of other predatory birds flying overhead. In our part of the country, hawks are plentiful. We must be careful to place our bird in a protective environment so that they feel as safe as possible. You should also know that hawks have actually been known to successfully grasp companion pet birds in their talons and fly away with them. This is a sad way to lose a pet and your bird has no defense against such a savvy predator. He depends on you to take care of him. If you cannot be certain that your bird is well protected from predators, it is better to allow your bird to enjoy the fresh air from a protected screened or otherwise enclosed porch when the weather is nice.

You should also be on guard against your bird overheating in the sun. Birds do not handle heat very well. They have no sweat glands and cannot cool themselves well. If you notice your bird holding his wings away from his body when he is in the sun, he is most likely too hot and should be moved to a cooler location immediately.

Another common problem is exposure to bacteria from wild bird droppings as well as concern about exposure to insects. Last summer, the West Nile virus was responsible for many wild bird casualties in our area. I have to confess that I played it safe and chose to keep my birds inside to protect against mosquito bites that were responsible for spreading this nasty virus. You should pay attention to what is being reported in your area before deciding whether or not to take your bird outside.

Limit your bird's outside time. Make it supervised time and in a well protected environment to help your bird enjoy the outdoors this spring.

"We must be careful to place our birds in a protective environment so that they feel as safe as possible."



Your bird doesn't have to sit inside. However, you must take extra precautions before deciding to take him outside.

Produced in cooperation with:
The Birdie Boutique, Inc.

The Birdie Boutique, Inc.
3039 University Drive
Durham, NC 27707

Phone: 919-490-3001

Fax: 919-403-0218

Email: info@birdieboutique.com

VISIT US ON THE WEB
WWW.BIRDIEBOUTIQUE.COM



Female solomon island eclectus parrot.

We need your bird photographs for the newsletter.

If you have a digital image of your bird that you would like to see in an upcoming feature of this newsletter, please send it to us. You may send it as an attachment to an email message to:

Everhart-
fam@mebtl.net

Thank you!



The Birdie Boutique, Inc. is owned and operated by Dr. Greg Burkett Diplomate ABVP Avian and Missy Ripple. Dr. Burkett is also a practicing veterinarian at Four Paws Animal Clinic in Chapel Hill, NC. Dr. Burkett specializes in avian veterinary services. He will also answer avian veterinary questions at his email available at askthetvet@birdieboutique.com.

The Birdie Boutique, Inc. will host it's second parrot enthusiast group meeting on **Thursday, April 24, 2003 from 7:15 to 8:30 pm** at The Birdie Boutique. Come early and shop (don't forget to bring your coupons!) from 6:00 to 7:15 pm then stay for the meeting. Don Brightsmith will be our guest speaker this month. His topic? Parrot Research in the jungles of South America. Come and hear how the wild parrots live! We will also share our parrot experiences and learn more about caring for our birds. If you are thinking of acquiring a bird for the first time, this is also a perfect opportunity to learn about birds from those that live with and care for them .

Road Trips with Your Feathered Buddy

Must Haves: A sturdy travel cage with secure perches that can be gripped easily (essential in a moving vehicle!), fruit to provide moisture on the trip, your bird's usual pellets and seeds, towels for covering the cage to calm your bird in unfamiliar places and to place under the cage to stabilize and cushion against a bumpy ride, damp paper towels or washcloths sealed in a zipper plastic bag for the trip, extra cage bottom paper, bird safe antibacterial cleaner and a 'scrubby' sponge to clean the cage, wide sticky shipping tape for easy pickup of food particles from surfaces (in place of a vacuum!), favorite toys, a portable perch and a secure place in the car for your bird's travel cage, a roll of paper towels and a spray bottle of water, a few bottles of water that you bring from home so your bird will drink the same water he's accustomed to. You'll need a handy tote bag to devote to travel with your bird. It makes things so much easier if you can simply keep one bag packed with most of the items at all times. Happy traveling!

April/May Specials



Use the convenience of ordering your supplies online from The Birdie Boutique catalog order center at www.birdieboutique.com

When finalizing your order enter coupon code **springfling**
To receive 10% off your total order.

Expires May 30, 2003
1 offer per household



Clip and bring in this coupon to receive a 10% discount on any one item priced at \$20

or above at The Birdie Boutique shop in Durham.

Expires April 31, 2003 1 offer per household, cannot be combined with other offers.