

Basic training for your parrot

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Why should I train my parrot?

- Parrots are intelligent animals but they can be aggressive or destructive if they become bored.
- Regular training sessions can bond you and your parrot, as well as allowing them to use their natural intelligence to perform useful tasks, such as stepping up on to a hand when it is time to be placed back into the cage, or allowing examination of their wings.

Where and for how long?

- The training should take place in a different room from where the parrot lives and plays. This will reinforce the fact that when they are taken there, training is planned.
- Training sessions should be brief to start with and should not be longer than your parrot's attention span (often as little as 5 minutes to start with).
- The amount of training required is determined by how you and your parrot live together.

How should I train my parrot?

- For each behaviour you are trying to promote, you will need a vocal command. For example, 'step up' to tell the parrot to step on to your hand.
- Each behaviour needs to be split up into tiny stages that can be achieved easily. For example, training your parrot to 'step up' might involve first getting them comfortable with your hand in the cage, then allowing them to investigate your hand, before they eventually climb on to it. The final stage is to encourage the parrot to step up in the cage on command.
- Successful completion of each stage should be rewarded with praise or a food treat. This is known as 'positive reinforcement'.
- The behaviour can then be attempted in a different setting, still using positive reinforcement. Once your parrot understands the command and consistently performs the behaviour, the positive reinforcement can gradually become less frequent and less predictable, so they do not know when a treat is coming. This will reinforce the behaviour more strongly.
- 'Negative reinforcement', such as hitting your pet, should NEVER be used.
- It is often tempting to shout at a bird that is behaving incorrectly, but most parrots see this as attention and therefore good. It is better to completely ignore incorrect or 'bad' behaviour. Parrots generally hate to be ignored!

Problem behaviours

- If your parrot becomes suddenly aggressive or destructive, they should be examined by your veterinary surgeon.
- If medical conditions are ruled out, training is likely to be the root of the solution for behavioural problems.
- For severe problems, your vet will be able to refer you to a specialist in bird behaviour problems.