

Normal Parrot Behavior

Pet bird behavior is complex, and it is crucial that bird owners have a realistic understanding of what to expect from their pets.

Important concepts in pet bird behavior:

- Parrots are wild animals. Even hand-raised birds are not truly domesticated, and early socialization is important. It is not necessary, however, to hand-feed a bird to bond with it. In fact, the practice of purchasing a baby bird that still requires hand-feeding is strongly discouraged.
- Parrots are prey species with instinctive fears of and responses to prey animals.
- Birds do not really understand the concept of master and subordinate. Instead they approach the humans in their household as if they are part of their flock. Within the flock, birds will try to obtain a dominant position. Owners must strive to establish themselves as flock leaders.
- Parrots are highly social. In the wild, parrots stay in touch using contact calls. Always be sure to greet your parrot when you first come home, and say good-bye when you leave the room. Also give a gentle, simple response to contact calls. Parrots will give an occasional chirp, & a short response like “HI, what are you doing” from you would be good.
- Parrots are highly visual. They communicate through eye contact and body language. Eye contact is an important way to communicate with your bird. A gentle, loving expression is a great way to express affection and calm a parrot. When a parrot misbehaves, use of what behaviorists often call the “evil eye” for a few seconds is a quick and effective way to communicate disapproval.
- Parrots have been compared mentally and emotionally to toddlers. They are intelligent, playful, and possessive. They have short attention spans, lots of energy, and they seem to enjoy dramatic displays.
- Finally, parrots are highly empathic. Their behavior and mood may reflect the energy and mood of their humans. Calming down and lowering our energy is an important way to calm our birds.

Natural behaviors

- In the wild, parrots spend the majority of their time grooming themselves and others and foraging for food. Destruction of leaves and fruit is a natural part of food gathering behavior. In captivity, this behavior may translate into throwing food, tearing up cage substrate or even furniture instead.
- Expect some loud vocalizations (i.e. screaming) from your parrot—particularly in the morning and evening. These sounds are equivalent to “Time to rise and shine!” and “It’s getting dark! Let’s go to roost!”

All of these descriptions of parrot behavior are generalities. Variations in behavior are observed among species and individuals, particularly as reproductive status varies.

Personality traits of a successful bird owner include:

- Consistency
- Patience
- Reliability
- Empathy
- Humor
- Serenity
- Dedication to learning.

Excellent sources on training and behavior include, but are not limited to: Sally Blanchard's Companion Parrot Handbook, Guide to a Well-Behaved Parrot by Mattie Sue Athan, My Parrot, My Friend by Bonnie Munro Doane and Thomas Qualkinbush, and Birds for Dummies by Gina Spadafori and Dr. Brian Speer.

References

Athan MS. *Guide to a Well-Behaved Parrot*. Barron's Educational Series; Hauppauge NY. 1999.

Blanchard S. Teaching basic skills. *Companion Parrot Handbook*. PBIC, Inc.; Alameda, CA., 1999.

Lightfoot T, Nacewicz CL. Psittacine behavior. In: Bays TB, Lightfoot T, Mayer J (eds). *Exotic Pet Behavior*. Saunders; St. Louis, Missouri, 2006. Pp. 51-101.