



Medical Center for Birds

www.medicalcenterforbirds.com

3805 Main St
Oakley, CA 94561
Brian Speer, DVM, ABVP/ECZM (Avian)
Brenna Fitzgerald, DVM

Ph: 925-625-1878
Fax: 925-625-8511
Geoff Olsen, DVM, ABVP (Avian)

Social Interaction – Basic Training

Since many pet birds are hand-reared, they often have learned to recognize people as other members of their species. This recognition and the interaction that comes with it is what helps to make parrots such enjoyable companion birds in our homes. Normally, other flock members would teach the juvenile bird what social behaviors are appropriate through a system of examples and trial and error. To set your bird up for lifelong success (which can be up to 100 years in some species), it is important for you to fill this role as mentor and “Parrot Parent”. It is essential to start with a foundation of basic behaviors. These basics include step-up, step-down and staying on a perch where placed.

- ❑ “Step-Up”: Stepping up is a foundational maneuver upon which most training and behavioral guidance relies. If your bird is already fairly tame or even used to know how to step-up, then simply press your hand gently up against the front of your bird’s legs and / or say “step-up.” The verbal command “step up” is not an absolute requirement – your bird will be quite sensitive to your movements and body language, and will most often already know what is being requested. Once the bird places its foot onto the edge of your hand, lightly press the toes, and lift the bird up. Provide a firm and solid perch with your hand – a shaking, hesitant or unsure hand will not be a desirable perch for most birds to transfer their weight to. If your bird is not tame, you may have to start by “bribing” your bird to your hand by offering a small piece of a nut or seed. If the bird does not respond immediately then eat the reward in front of them (with obvious relish) and try again later. When they do step onto your hand to get to the bribe, lift your hand and the bird should hold on and follow your motion.
- ❑ “Step-Down”: Stepping down is important simply to allow for you to guide your bird’s movement. To step your bird down, with your hand positioned lower than the perch you desire it to go to, gently roll your hand towards the perch, shifting the bird’s weight forward so that they step down. In most cases, the bird should be encouraged to grasp the perch with its beak, and then climb up to the perch from there. In this sense, the bird is actually climbing up when being stepped down most of the time.
- ❑ “Stay”: Staying on a perch, where placed, is important for your bird to experience “normal” flock social interaction while outside of its cage with you. This simple behavioral requirement will allow your bird to share time with you, but not on you, and will not allow your bird to have free roam throughout the home. The free-roaming pet parrot is significantly positioned for increased risk of traumatic injuries and household poisonings. Behaviorally, the free-roaming pet parrot will be at risk of developing pair bonded interactions with one person, and may be less able to be guided into general flock interactions with others in the home. Portable table - top perches are great for this training since they can be put anywhere and are not usually higher than people. Set your bird on the perch and occasionally offer a stroke or reward—as long as they stay put. If they climb down and walk around, put them back without any verbal cue or other reward. Come back a few minutes later and offer a reward if they stay put, or work to devise other positive reinforcement methods that will help your bird decide that staying on the training perch is a desired thing – from their point of view.