We have started off 2013 with a bang. If you missed our last meeting, you missed a lot. Beverly Critcher of Wildlife Experience gave a wonder talk about her group’s influences in Uganda. They are offering safaris for all of you adventurous people. You also missed meeting her barred owl, similar in size and looks to our Great Horned owl, but much more distinctive with multiple “bars” in the feathering.

We still have board positions open: 1 - secretary, 2 - treasurer. If you enjoy your club, we need you to step up and help out. This is not my club but OURS. Everyone needs to share in the nuts & bolts of this operation.

Keep Sunday May 19 available to attend WorldFest in Woodley Park, Lake Balboa. This is the largest green, compassionate-living festival, and the only outdoor solar-powered celebration of music, the environment, animals, healthy living and social consciousness (their script). We will man a booth and give out our handouts telling about proper care & handling of our parrots. Hopefully, we can recruit some new members during the day. Please plan to come, bring your bird, and hopefully we can generate interest in our club!

If you have any suggestions you may email any board member (click on a board members name on the last page of this newsletter) or slip a piece of paper into the pocket of a board member. This is YOUR club and YOUR input is important (we run out of ideas, believe it or not!).

I’ll end with a kindly reminder that meetings start at 7:30. Come early to socialize and nibble but be ready to be seated by 7:30. Thanks to all of you who bring goodies each month; those of us that miss dinner appreciate the snack.

Your Board. (Thanks to Linda Buesching)
Upon completing her 3-year Masters research thesis on Palm Cockatoos in Australia, Christina joined forces with the Tambopata Macaw Project in the Amazon rainforest of Peru. For 2 months, she worked 13 hours a day, searching for Macaws and checking their nests by ascending 100' trees. As part of an eco-tourism collaboration, she gave her Macaw talk 18 times to visiting tourists during her time in the Peruvian rainforest. Come see that very talk!

Christina Zdenek

Please take an active role with the club. It's great fun. If you would like to help at any of the events, contact Linda at 661-803-1416, lbuesching@thevine.com

Extra: Write an original article and have it published and receive $5 in free raffle tickets or ???????????

Birds are welcome at our meetings, but please:

- Bring “poop paper” for your bird’s use.
- Clean up after your parrot (poop and food).
- Do not allow your bird to roam around at will (on chairs, etc.) or get close to other birds.
- Clip those wings! Meeting hall doors may be open.

- Bio-security may be in place at the meeting entrance.
- Use antiseptic hand wipes before touching other birds—respect other parrots’ health.
- Birds brought to meeting must be healthy and not have been treated for illness for 30 days.
We had a fabulous time with our guest speaker, Beverly Critcher, from Wildlife Experience, Inc. She brought with her a beautiful Barred Owl—an amazing creature. As always, getting together with new visitors and old friends, sharing refreshments, birds, and most of all, bird stories, made for an unforgettable night!
Birds of Paradise: 
ONLY IN NEW GUINEA WILL YOU SEE THESE SPECTACULAR BIRDS. IN THE DEEP, DARK RAINFORESTS OF THIS ISLAND NATION. IT HAS TAKEN YEARS FOR THE INDIVIDUALS ON THIS VIDEO TO TRACK THESE BIRDS AND STUDY THEIR EXISTENCE. BUT, WHY DO THESE BEAUTIFUL CREATURES EXIST ONLY IN NEW GUINEA AND NO WHERE ELSE?
http://www.cornell.edu/video/?VideoID=2398

Extraordinary Video from: 
Angela Cancilla Herschel 
We all know how a trusting relationship is so vital when teaching and when learning. This is a fun video that gives an example of a learner using bank account filling with trust... as an example: 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=vu6KKb_dzms

2 FROM BARBARA HEIDENREICH: 
I was recently going through some video clips from one of my parrot training workshops from last year. I came across this really nice segment with Monte George, the scarlet macaw. In this clip he is learning to trust stepping onto my hand. Video: http://youtu.be/GIaDDSeZKnI

BARBARA & SIRROCO http://www.aol.com/video/i-cant-believe-i-saw-that-whats-humping-my-head/517651298/?icid=maingrid10|htmlws-main-bb|dl23|sec1_Lnk3%26pLid%3D260750

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More from January...
Guest Post: Angela’s Adventures in Seram


A Rebuttal to Biting Birds: So many people have so much conflicting advice....it’s the same with horse trainers....and child psychologists as well. That’s because everyone has some sort of success rate with certain individuals, therefore they think “their way” is the best. It’s been my experience with horses, dogs and birds that no “one way” is the best. It’s tailoring these multiple ways to the individual. The hot-headed, A.D.D. personality of a caique is worlds apart from the personality, of say, an Amazon. And to say a trainer is “bogus” for using terms like “crazy eyes” etc, is more just a way to explain the body language to other people. Biting is NOT a learned behavior! That’s why in the wild as well as in the cage, there are sooooo many tragic accidents with other birds. THEY BITE for dominance, breeding, territory, protection, etc. The key is to understand what’s the particular reason (at the time) the bird is biting...and train according to that. For instance, in raging hormone (breeding season), it is ABSOLUTELY impossible to “reason” or train a bird not to bite. All a person can do is be a better “reader” as to the mood of the bird and act accordingly. Birds have not been domesticated enough through generations of breeding to have taken the “wild” out of them. - Jana Howington
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As seen on Oprah & Jimmy Kimmel Live!
New Dinosaur Fossil Challenges Bird Flight Origins Theories

Jan. 24, 2013 — The discovery of a new bird-like dinosaur from the Jurassic period challenges widely accepted theories on the origin of flight.

Co-authored by Dr Gareth Dyke, Senior Lecturer in Vertebrate Palaeontology at the University of Southampton, the paper describes a new feathered dinosaur about 30 cm in length which pre-dates bird-like dinosaurs that birds were long thought to have evolved from.

Over many years, it has become accepted among palaeontologists that birds evolved from a group of dinosaurs called theropods from the Early Cretaceous period of Earth’s history, around 120-130 million years ago. Recent discoveries of feathered dinosaurs from the older Middle-Late Jurassic period have reinforced this theory.

The new ‘bird-dinosaur’ Eosinopteryx described in Nature Communications this week provides additional evidence to this effect.

“This discovery sheds further doubt on the theory that the famous fossil Archaeopteryx — or “first bird” as it is sometimes referred to — was pivotal in the evolution of modern birds,” says Dr Dyke, who is based at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton.

“Our findings suggest that the origin of flight was much more complex than previously thought.”

The fossilized remains found in north-eastern China indicate that, while feathered, this was a flightless dinosaur, because of its small wingspan and a bone structure that would have restricted its ability to flap its wings.

The dinosaur also had toes suited to walking along the ground and fewer feathers on its tail and lower legs, which would have made it easier to run.

Dr Gareth Dyke is also Programme Leader for a new one-year MRes in Vertebrate Palaeontology, which offers potential students the chance to study the evolution and anatomy of vertebrates, in order to inform and increase our understanding of the workings of modern day creatures.

Dr Dyke's co-authors are Pascal Godefroit of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Helena Demuynck of Earth System Science Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Dongyu Hu of Paleontological Institute Shenyang Normal University, China and Key Laboratory of Vegetation Ecology Northeast Normal University, China, François Escuillié of Eldonia France and Philippe Claeyts of Jilin University Geological Museum, China.
Are Eggs Really Good for My Bird?

By Alyson Kalhagen, About.com Guide

See More About:
feeding birds eggs
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Question: Are Eggs Really Good for My Bird?

Feeding eggs to my pet bird seems sort of cannibalistic, yet many articles on avian nutrition cite eggs as a great food source for captive birds. Is this true?

Answer: Yes. Eggs, including eggshells, are a wonderful source of nutrition for pet birds. In the wild many bird species will consume unhatched eggs and eggshells as they are a vital source of protien, calcium, and minerals. It is completely natural for a bird to eat eggs, and although it may seem strange to us humans, our avian friends suffer absolutely no psychological problems as a result of it.

You can serve eggs to your bird in a variety of ways, but it's important to keep healthy preparation in mind. The healthiest way to cook eggs for your bird is to hard-boil them and then cut them up (along with the shells) into bite-sized pieces. You can also scramble the eggs and broken shells in a very light amount of pure vegetable oil -- but make sure to hold the salt and any other "human" seasonings!

Always make sure that the eggs you serve your bird have cooled to room temperature, to avoid burning your pet. Remove any uneaten egg food from your bird's cage after two hours, to prohibit the growth of nasty bacteria.
Going back a few years, Maynard started by photographing feathers. Then, he arranged them in shadow boxes. But, in his experiments in showcasing feathers, Maynard eventually came up with his own unique art form. The artist creates fascinating, feather-light sculptures, by cutting the silhouettes of various types of birds from actual plumage.

Turkey feather. © Chris Maynard

Amazon parrot and macaw feathers. © Chris Maynard.

Crow feather. © Chris Maynard.
Maynard collects molted feathers from generous zoos, private aviaries and nonprofit bird rescue organizations. “Sometimes finding the right feather is the hard part,” he says. The artist may go into a design with a particular color or size of feather in mind. He uses pheasant and parrot feathers mostly, and, from them, he has cut out a whole slew of birds—hummingbirds, woodpeckers, cranes, swans, cockatoos, macaws, peacocks, turkeys, grouse, bitterns, crows and pigeons. Maynard sketches possible designs in notebooks, but to really nail one, he says, “I need to have a feeling about the bird I am portraying.” Maynard, an active member of his local Audubon group and supporter of a land trust that buys property for conservation, balances work in his studio with quality time in the outdoors. “I go out and observe a woodpecker whacking away at a snag or watch crows relating to each other,” he says.

Next comes the cutting. "When I work, I put on big nerdy magnifying glasses to see the feathers’ details," Maynard says on his Web site. He also uses fine eye surgery tools he inherited from his father, an ophthalmologist. The scalpels and forceps are not completely foreign to Maynard, whose academic background is in entomology—the study of insects. The artist is certainly clever in the execution of his designs. Maynard will sometimes use the shaft of the feather as a branch or a tree trunk, perching one or more birds on it. When he wants
to portray a singing bird, he takes fluffy down and makes a speech bubble coming out of its open beak. As shown in a couple of photographs here, the artist has also made some of his feathers appear as if flocks of birds are flying out of them. Maynard is a perfectionist (“I am pretty mathematical about it,” he says. “I want each piece to be in the right place.”), and it shows. In total, he has created more than 80 extremely detailed works of feather art.

“I hope that seeing birds in a different light through my artwork will encourage appreciation of avian life and hence a desire to conserve it,” says Maynard.

*Maynard’s exhibition “Feather’s Second Flight,” including 25 of his works, is on display through January 20 at the Row House Cafe in Seattle. From January 25 to February 15, his feather art will be shown at the Washington Center for the Performing Arts in Olympia. Maynard and Thor Hanson, a conservation biologist and author of the new book *Feathers*, will be giving a lecture at the center on February 2.*
Whenever we presume to take a psittacine into our home as a companion or pet, we are in effect fashioning the human and environmental input that will determine much of how that parrot behaves for the rest of its life. Premier among the effects of life amongst human keepers is the actual identity our birds begin to acquire during their early training and formative years. In one way, every hookbill has its own unique character; but there are some basic generalizations which can be made about such personality traits, certainly when it comes to the way a pet or breeder bird seems to regard itself.

Take for example a baby Umbrella Cockatoo that is held and cuddled, plied with warm mush food well past normal weaning stages, talked to in human “baby talk”, and altogether treated as if it were a living teddy bear. Is it any wonder that such a psittacine would eventually begin to think of itself as a toddler amongst people? Sure the bird has feathers and preens, eats and sleeps and poops much as its ancestors in the wild did; yet when it looks out of those jet black-turning-to-brownish eyes, it sees only what it desires: human interaction, affection, touch, love, and activity stimulus. Such a pet seldom seeks out dealings with other parrots, let alone its own kind, unless it was lucky enough to spend many weeks in a group of young cockatoos that are encouraged to evolve like fledglings and behave like birds. For the normal limited-experience avian creatures, even the simple process of allo-preening with another parrot can be viewed as a significant breakthrough in their looming identity crisis. Does not that seem rather preposterous—raising a psittacine that is so emotionally mixed up it does not even grasp the basic beak-to-plumage methods of touch between like species, companions, family or flock members!

(Continued on page 14)
(Continued from page 13)

I once had a handfed male Princess of Wales Parakeet named Valiant who, despite all our efforts, chose to court one of our Ambioina King Parrots. The princess hens in the aviary were of little interest to Valiant; he identified with the striking red kings when it came to affection. I don’t know exactly why or how this came about. Perhaps Valiant was handfed at a time when we also had baby kings in our nursery. The point is, ‘tis not all that uncommon in the domestic pet parrot world for a certain kind of psittacine to prefer a different species when it comes to companionship or mating behaviors. Human keepers have a difficult time training parrot ‘children’ about all the proper parrot social roles. I guess it is somewhat similar to the golden retriever which is brought up around pet rabbits or cats and is therefore indifferent to them.

I was once delivering a lecture to a Southern California bird club, lights turned off, slide show in progress, when I began making psittacine vocalisations as part of the talk. When I commenced uttering a male cockatiel call, a single caged cockatiel in the back of the room immediately piped up and began to whistle back to the microphone. The audience and I all had a good chuckle at that moment. But the real point I was making at the time related to how people mostly tend to use human sounds and discourse when ‘talking’ to their birds. That practice has its place in a home, of course, but to me it seems much more vital to use our own imitated parrot vocalisations when expressing warning calls, contact calls, sleep and hunger and relaxation and contentment sounds. How many vocalisations of your birds can you categorize, understand, imitate, and respond to? Such things may seem like a small part of the total package of how you and your pet get along; yet they also indicate just how much natural identity has your parrot—and how much you value and respect that.

I have raised enough baby psittacines here at The Perfect Parrot and at Feathered Friends of Santa Fe to fully realize that it is oh so easy to dote on the chicks and spoil them with un-parrotlike attentions. Love comes effortlessly with young and fledgling hookbills. But we who birth and keep such birds must always remember to treat parrots as parrots, not as tiny human beings. It is just as simple to raise and train your pets in ways that seek to preserve their avian identity as it is to do things which usurp the avian behaviors, instinct, and wild savvy. Neither process would dictate any necessary denial of love or affection. To the contrary, when I work to encourage a psittacine identity in my parrot, I am giving it a unique and lasting gift that will carry it through years of relating to all kinds of persons and other animals. Whereas if I go ahead and treat it like a human toddler, like that Umbrella Cockatoo mentioned prior, I am setting the pet up for a potential traumatic letdown if and when it encounters humans that do not live up to its expectations. Sexuality in a hormonal parrot can instigate just such a letdown. We birdkeepers have to realize that humans cannot supply all of our parrots’ needs and demands. There are some invisible walls between bird and keeper which can never be removed...

What kind of identity has your parrot? Look closely now; it’s never too late to improve upon it in a fully natural manner.

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How to Potty Train Your Pet Bird—Potty Training Made Easy!

By Alyson Kalhagen, About.com Guide
See More About:
potty training parrots
housebreaking pet birds

Ah, bird poop... it's one of those necessary evils of bird ownership that we must learn to live with. The good news is that although many claim that there is no way to "housebreak" or "potty train" a bird, there are in fact ways to teach your pet the proper places to relieve himself -- my Sun Conure, Loco, is living proof! While it won't happen overnight, and can be a bit more complicated than teaching a cat or dog, many owners find that the benefits of such training are well worth the effort.

The first step in potty training your bird is to train yourself. Each day when you interact with your pet, pay close attention to any "signals" the bird may give you before relieving himself. These can be as subtle as a change in posture, a certain "look" in the bird's eyes, or a ruffling of tailfeathers. Every bird is different, and will thus use different body language, but if you know your bird and learn to "read" him, it won't take you long to catch on.

Another thing to pay attention to is the frequency of your bird's droppings. Many birds will use the bathroom as often as every 5 or 10 minutes, but again, this is highly individual. If you watch your bird, you may begin to see a pattern in his restroom habits, and if you take note of the amount of time he or she takes between poops, you will be better at judging when your bird is ready for a potty break.

Once you've gotten a good idea of your bird's natural bathroom schedule, you can begin to work with your bird on learning the right places to go potty. The first thing to do is decide where you want your bird to relieve himself. This can be any number of places, such as the bird's cage, a garbage can, or a piece of newspaper or cage liner. Whatever you decide on, it's important to stick with it as much as possible. Many bird owners train their pets to potty on a piece of waste paper, as this is the most portable and easily disposed of.

When you've chosen the proper place, the only thing you must do is take your bird to it (or if it's a piece of paper, hold it under the bird) when it's time to go potty -- sounds simple, right? The trick is anticipating the bird's need to use the bathroom, which is where knowing your bird's potty habits comes into play. If, for example, you noticed that your bird relieves himself about every 7 minutes, then you should place your bird over his designated poop space every 7 minutes. There may be times when your bird does not need to poop as often as normal, and that's okay -- if you notice that your bird hasn't pooped after being held over the potty space for a minute or two, let him resume playing, and just try again after 1-3 minutes have passed.

When your bird uses the bathroom in the correct area, be sure to praise him with kind words and tasty treats. As time passes, he will begin to understand that pooping in the right place yields great rewards! This can take many months of training, however, so don't be surprised if your bird has a few accidents, and don't be angry with your pet if he "misses the spot". Remember, it's your responsibility to pay attention to your bird's body language and schedule, and get the bird to the proper place to go potty.

With persistence and plenty of positive reinforcement, many birds take to potty training quite readily, and quickly learn that pooping on humans (or furniture) is not encouraged. While it does require effort on the part of the owner to make sure that accidents don't occur, most claim that it's much easier than tending to the laundry and messes that un-trained birds create. Have fun with your bird and make potty training a learning experience for both of you -- and never again worry about losing your favorite shirt to a "bird bomb"!

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Do Pet Birds Need Grit in Their Diets?

By Alyson Kalhagen, About.com Guide

See More About:
- bird dietary supplements
- grit for birds

Question: Do Pet Birds Need Grit in Their Diets?

Answer: Grit is a fine, gravelly substance sometimes offered to pet birds as a dietary supplement. When a bird ingests grit, it makes its way to the gizzard where it helps grind food into particles that are easy to absorb, and aids in digestion.

While commercial grit products are available to add to your bird's diet, it has been found that grit is not nearly as important to pet birds as it is to birds in the wild. The reason for this lies in a captive bird's diet -- most commercial bird foods are formulated to be easy for a bird to digest and absorb, making the need for grit less important than it would be for a pet bird's wild counterparts.

All the same, there are many bird owners that offer their birds grit on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Opinions as to whether or not the grit has any real benefits vary widely within the avian community.

Personally, I do not offer my birds any commercial grit products, as they pose a danger of impaction and other veterinary problems if the bird ingests too much. Alternatively, I add crushed eggshells to the fresh foods that my birds eat once a week. The rough eggshells help make sure that any large particles of food are thoroughly broken down, and they also add much needed calcium to a bird's diet.

If you feel that adding grit to your bird's diet could be helpful, the best thing to do is consult with your avian vet before making any changes in your bird's feed. A qualified veterinarian will be able to assess your bird's nutrition, and suggest any supplemental changes that will be of benefit to your pet's health and well-being.
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Dr. Harwood and his wife, Deanna, live on the Palos Verdes Peninsula where he has photographed birds in their own backyard. He has seen many different varieties of birds migrating through his yard from the Arctic to South America, as well as those who reside in his yard all year round. He sees up to 20 different species a day.

Randy’s childhood passion for wildlife and Nature led him to a degree in zoology at Fresno State. Then he obtained his dental degree from UCLA and started a practice in the South Bay.

His photography has been featured in books and magazines including “Outdoor Photographer” and “Outdoor California,” and many more. He is passionate about nature conservancy and recording nature’s wonders to share with others through photography and video.

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By Pamela Clark, CVT

“Oh just ignore him, he’s just hormonal!” We hear statements like this all the time, but what does such an exclamation really mean? What is “hormonal behavior” any way? There are as many different definitions of this behavior as there are ways to perch a cage. Moreover, this label of “hormonal behavior” doesn’t tell us much about the behavior itself and leaves us nowhere to go, in terms of finding solutions.

It is true, though, that there are many problem behaviors in companion parrots that either stem directly from or are aggravated by increased production of reproductive hormones. Moreover, these behaviors frequently go unrecognized for what they are. From my perspective as a behavior consultant, it is a serious problem. In almost every single consultation I do increased hormone production is a factor that is contributing to the problem.

Specifically, the problem behaviors in companion parrots that stem directly from increased production of reproductive hormones include: the formation of an intense pair bond with one member of the family, constant paper shredding, cavity seeking, loud vocalizations, feather destructive behavior and fierce territoriality.

In some individuals, these occur just seasonally, but in others the condition progresses until it occurs year round. In these cases, problems such as chronic egg-laying, egg binding, cloacal prolapse and self-mutilation can occur. Obviously, many of these not only threaten the parrot’s physical health, but also its ability to remain in the home.

I believe that caregivers often get caught unawares in terms of this issue. They adopt a young parrot who demonstrates an affectionate nature, curiosity, and playfulness. Over time, the parrot changes into a mature adult whose behavior often bears no relation to that he once demonstrated. Some of the new behaviors he displays cause us surprise and laughter. We think it’s cute when he jumps into the sock drawer or wants to hang out in the closet. It’s funny when he regurgitates for his favorite toy.

Unfortunately, nothing has prepared us to recognize these behaviors for what they are and we don’t grasp the potential for harm that can come from encouraging them. Not only do we think that they are cute, but also there are many people who, recognizing these as sexual behaviors, feel obligated to facilitate these because they believe that parrots need a sex life and will be frustrated if they don’t somehow provide for this.

The truth, however, is that wild parrots have evolved a physiologic mechanism to control reproduction. They remain “turned off” sexually for the majority of the year. Their sexual organs actually become inactive and atrophied, which further serves to minimize weight so that flight is easier. Only when conditions for breeding are favorable do the ovary and testes become active.

So, it appears as parrot caregivers that we have failed to recognize two key issues. First, parrots are normally “turned off” or reproductively inactive in nature during most of the year. Second, and most importantly, the conditions that we provide for them in captivity often result in a constant triggering of reproductive hormones.

When living in the wild, parrots are triggered into becoming reproductive active by the presence of changing photoperiod, either substantial or sporadic (seasonal) rainfall, the availability of a suitable nest cavity, adequate food and water, and a pair bond with another parrot.

In captivity, we unwittingly provide conditions that trigger reproductive activity. As we might imagine, they are very similar: changing photoperiod, the presence of a perceived nest cavity, a strong pair bond, and an appropriately nutrient-dense diet. We must remember that our parrots are not domesticated and are driven to a large extent by instinct. Since we are not able to safely neuter parrots at present, they bring these instincts to reproduce with them into our homes. And, unfortunately, our parrots are remarkably good at
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teaching us to provide them with the very conditions that will facilitate this. Let’s first examine how to set the stage for problems. If we can see this easily, then the solution will be clearer as well. One of the strongest triggers for increased hormone production is the presence of an intense pair bond. We, as caregivers, often promote this intense bonding because it makes us happy - it meets our own emotional needs. This type of pair bond forms when we spend lots of time physically close to the parrot, having him on our shoulder or lap for extended periods. Cuddling also contributes to this problem, as does stroking a parrot down his back or under his wings.

As happy as this type of contact might make us, we must realize how unnatural this is for a parrot. As Dr. Fern VanSant states in her article “Hormonal Behavior, “…Physical contact is important in the nest and lavished on young birds. As young adults join the flock, most are driven by a need to sharpen foraging and flying skills. Most flocks are characterized by a discipline that maintains a critical distance between individuals while flying, feeding and roosting. In most cases, physical contact is reserved for courting and breeding.” Parrots in the wild who are not breeding enjoy each other’s company, but this type of bond is maintained through parallel activities and brief, playful interactions, not physical closeness.

(Continued from page 20)

(Continued on page 23)
The second area in which we go wrong is in providing a diet that is too high in carbohydrates and fats. Carbohydrates and fats are two categories of nutrients that are used for energy production. They serve the parrot well in the wild, where energy expenditures are great. In captivity, eating such a diet contributes not only to increased hormone production, but to louder, more excitable behavior. Foods that contribute to the problem include: seed mixes, nuts, dried fruit, pasta, white rice, snack foods, and some table food. The third most significant trigger for increased hormone production is the ability for the parrot to spend time in perceived nesting spots. This is the area in which we can see the amazing flexibility demonstrated by our companion parrots. As you assess your own parrot’s behavior in order to see if he searches out such places, remember that, if it has three sides, it’s likely to be deemed suitable. Typical favorites for companion parrots are closets, drawers, brown paper bags or cardboard boxes, playing under the covers, crawling down the owner’s shirt, small bathrooms, the area under the couch, sleeping huts in the cage, etc.

When these environmental triggers are present in our homes with our parrots, we are likely to find ourselves living with at least one of several behavior problems. Many parrots engage in resource guarding behavior when hormonally triggered. This means that the parrot may become extremely aggressive if anyone gets near to a perceived nest site. One African Grey male that I know is a perfect gentleman until he gets down and spends time under the couch, whereupon he turns into a demon near whom you had better not come. He becomes extremely aggressive as he defends what he perceives is a potential nest site.

If such a territorial parrot also has pair bond with someone in the home, he may become extremely aggressive toward anyone who comes near that individual. These can be very dangerous, both for the “intruder” and for the favored person, who may be bitten in a misguided attempt to drive the bonded person away from the intruder.

Hormonal parrots who are allowed to hang out in small, dark places or other perceived nesting sites can do a huge amount of damage to your home as well. One female Grey who was obsessed with getting into the laundry room chewed up huge sections of the floor covering. In the majority of cases of feather destructive behavior with which I deal, increased hormone production is usually a partial cause. In extreme cases, self-mutilation can result. Along with this potentially life-threatening problem, we can add chronic egg-laying and cloacal prolapse.

If you recognize some of the signs listed above, there is no need to despair. Just as we can trigger increased hormone production, we can also change environmental provisions to decrease hormone production to the extent that this is possible.

With many species, it is possible to manipulate photoperiod. This appears most effective with cockatiels, Amazons, macaws, Pionus and many of the other New World parrots. This requires that you provide at least 12 to 14 hours of complete darkness. Simply covering the cage is not likely to be effective, if light can creep under the cover. The most effective way to do this is to set up a sleeping cage in a separate bedroom or office, and to place black-out shades on the windows. This will not be however effective with African Greys or Eclectus, who breed year round and often go to nest in the fall and winter.

Next, remove access to “small, dark places.” Remove the sleeping hut from the cage, if the parrot spends time in there during the day as well. Don’t allow your parrot to crawl down your shirt or up your shirt sleeve. Don’t allow him to crawl under the bed, couch or ottoman. Don’t allow him to burrow into the couch cushions. Don’t let him jump into your drawers or hang out in the closet. If you have an African Grey, you may need to bar him access to the bathroom or laundry room.

Perhaps most importantly, remove the mate from the picture. With any parrot, it is best to limit cuddling, confining your petting to the head only. Believe it or not, a hands-off approach is really the best. (Remember: parrots don’t pet each other in the wild.) Further, you must limit the time you allow the parrot to sit on your
shoulder or on your lap to no more than 5 to 10 minutes once or twice a day. If you currently spend a much longer time physically close to the parrot currently, then you can decrease the amount of time spent gradually. Lastly, don’t encourage regurgitation or masturbation. If your parrot begins to show you attention of this sort, simply tell him cheerfully, “Thanks, but no thanks!” and then put him down immediately. You don’t want to, of course, punish this behavior, but neither do you want to encourage it. Similarly, if the parrot has a particular toy that he masturbates on, then you should remove that particular item. At all times, ignore this behavior and instead give the parrot attention for more productive behaviors.

If the parrot has a pair bond with another parrot, consider caging them separately. The best set-up in these situations is when the two parrots have separate cages, but a playstand in between so that they can still enjoy some interaction when they are out of their cages. If the pair bond exists with your partner or another person in the home, then this is the time to have a serious conversation about this information.

Next, provide an optimal diet. This would include a good quality, organic, formulated diet. This can then be supplemented with abundant vegetables and low-sugar fruits, with perhaps some whole grains and cooked or sprouted legumes. Seed mixes and snack foods should be eliminated, but can be reserved for use as training treats. If your parrot currently eats a seed mix as a staple in the diet, it is critical that you gradually transition him to eating a better diet. Not only are seed mixes low in nutrients necessary to good health, but they are so high in fat that they lead to debilitating diseases, such as fatty liver disease. Please consult with your avian veterinarian or an experienced behavior consultant who can guide you to success in this endeavor. It can be difficult to transition a parrot off of a seed mix and onto a better diet, but this can easily be done with the right information. Diet is merely a training issue.

When beginning to improve the diet, a valuable rule is to eliminate absolutely any foods containing sugar, or any form of sugar, in the first five ingredients, any food that is not 100% whole grain, and any food that contains hydrogenated or trans fats.

Another aspect of the environment that serves to foster increased hormone production is a degree of sameness to the environment. Therefore, a valuable strategy for reducing hormone production is to provide challenging and new experiences. Ideas include rides in the car, trips to visit friends, the introduction of new toys or cage furnishings, increased exercise, new foraging opportunities, and the ability to learn new things. Positive reinforcement training has gained great popularity in recent years. This is simply the process of teaching a parrot to perform new behaviors through the use of small rewards. You might teach a cute trick, such as turning around on cue, or a core behavior like going into a carrier on cue. No matter what you teach, this process is perhaps the very best way to evolve a pair bond with a human into a healthier relationship. The truth is that parrots will always offer behavior that makes the most sense within the context of the bond that they have with you. If you have a pair bond with a parrot, that bird will offer you a lot of regurgitation, physical closeness, attempts a masturbation, etc. If you evolve that bond through training, the parrot will then begin to offer behaviors that make sense within the context of a “teacher/student” bond.

We must remember what Jamie McLeod of The Menagerie said so eloquently, “Parrots are what we make of them.” The environmental provisions and the diet we construct for them has the power to dictate the type of parrot with which we live. We can create a parrot who screams when we leave the room, who bites anyone who comes near us, and who constantly climbs down off of the cage to seek out small, dark places. Or, we create a calm parrot who interacts with his toys up on his cage, readily interacts with foraging opportunities, who loves his training sessions and who is, all around, a good citizen in our homes.

Pamela Clark, CVT, Parrot Behavior and Care Consultant

[Email and website information redacted]
Parrots On Shoulders

Before you let your parrot perch on your shoulder, follow these shoulder rules.

By Laura Doering

When I first became enamored with parrots as a youngster, it was because I imagined having my very own pet bird happily perched on my shoulder, nuzzling my neck and gently talking in my ear. When I finally saved up enough allowance and whatever spare change I could scrounge up, I made sure my big brother followed through on his promise to accompany me to the pet store so I could pick out my bird. I couldn’t have been more excited to bring home Elvis, my cockatiel. Elvis wasn’t close to being hand-tamed but that didn’t stop me from insisting he perch on my shoulder. When I finally got him to actually perch there, he directed his protest at my ear, hissing and then charging at my earlobe; not quite breaking the skin but inflicting an affective pinch. Even though Elvis and I started off on the wrong foot, after I started all over with baby steps like getting him to perch on my hand, we managed to foster a friendship that spanned 21 years. Much of our time together included him contently perched on my shoulder playing with my hair and tickling my neck while I did homework or watched TV.

Years later, I adopted a male double yellowed-headed Amazon parrot, Sunshine. But there was no way I was going to offer my shoulder as a perch. It was right after my first bird conference and where I met a woman with a stitched-up nose and swollen lip. She explained that she did something to frighten her macaw, and he reacted by biting into her face. She actually had an appointment for some “minor corrective surgery.” With Elvis, I was OK with the thought of a potential nip if I did something to offend him, because even his fiercest pinch was something I could physically and emotionally get over within a short period of time; I could handle the potential aftermath of an irate, even downright angry cockatiel inflicting his biggest, baddest bite. With Sunshine, however, I knew his bite could involve a band aid or even stitches. That was the difference for me; an Amazon parrot’s beak packed a much bigger punch,
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and I didn’t want to risk it.

Inherent Risks With Parrots On Shoulders
But still, there are many pet bird people who share their shoulders with their parrots, large and small. (Actually, parrotlet expert Sandee Molenda pointed out that parrotlets have a hard time holding onto a person’s shoulder because their feet and stance are so small, they often slide off.) The other problem is that it can be a downright challenge to get a parrot off of your shoulder if it is determined to stay there and, again, you might be looking at a bite that could be directed at your face, ear/shoulder/cheek when you insist your bird step off.

Many experts warn against it, mostly because you can never be 100-percent positive that something won’t frighten, irritate or anger your parrot and cause it to lash out at you.

In her book, “The Companion Parrot Handbook,” avian behavior consultant Sally Blanchard points out that eye contact is one of the best ways to establish control or discipline with a misbehaving parrot. When your bird is on your shoulder, you can’t make eye contact without making your face vulnerable to injury should the bird attack.

According to Blanchard, “A parrot that has been consistently allowed on the shoulder may create serious problems as it becomes more territorial. Parrots bond strongly to their primary person’s face. If they are bonded to us and we allow them to sit on our shoulder, I believe their perception is one of sitting together with us on one moving branch. Our body becomes their territory. If that territory is threatened by any intruder (your husband, wife, child, dog, etc.) it is instinctive for the bird to defend that territory.” Blanchard then points out that the parrot can’t defend both its “mate” (you) and your mutual territory, so it bites you so you’ll flee to safety and leave it to defend the territory. The only problem, of course, is that you can’t flee your own shoulder.

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, noted some potential hazards to a bird perched on the shoulder, such as a fall if the pet bird has a recent nail trim and can’t hold on. Wissman has also seen parrots with strands of hair wrapped around a toe, causing constriction and lack of blood flow to the toe. “Human hair is strong and can wrap around a toe, cutting deeper and deeper into live tissue,” Wissman said.

Breaking The Shoulder Perching Habit
Shoulder perching can be a hard habit to break in parrots. Once a parrot is used to this high perch spot, it can be very adept at running up the arm and reaching this destination before you have time to react. A common mistake many people make when trying to discourage a bird from climbing onto the shoulder is to drop their hand/wrist once the bird starts to walk up the arm; this now makes the shoulder even more attractive because birds prefer to climb up, not down. A better reaction is to raise your hand above shoulder level and dip your elbow to distract it, and then quickly have the bird step up on your other hand.

Your Parrot Must Respect The Shoulder
Once you have received a bite to the facial area, there is no guarantee that it won’t happen again, even if you were at fault (e.g. you suddenly stood up, which spooked your pet bird or you didn’t notice your bird’s body language telling you that it wanted to go back to its cage, etc.). Unless you are OK with the possibility of a nip or bite, taking into account that the bigger the beak, the bigger the bite — think cockatiel pinch versus macaw chomp — re-training your bird to perch on your lap or hand is a safer way to go. This might take some persistence on your part — having your pet bird step up onto your hand each time it heads for your shoulder and then returning it to a more acceptable place to perch — but your bird will eventually get it.

One factor to consider before allowing your pet bird to perch on your shoulder is the bird’s age. A younger bird is less likely to become aggressive/territorial than when it reaches sexual maturity. Your bird might be a respectful shoulder-perch buddy for years and then one spring day, it suddenly becomes aggressive. The species and gender of the parrot can also be factors when hormones are involved.

The shoulder, more so than any other perch spot, must be treated with respect; after all, your face is at stake. If your parrot respects that it can be there only when you allow it (and not by running up your arm and putting up a fight when you ask it to step off), you’re more likely to avoid trouble. But there is always the potential that a bite could come — can you take it?

Shoulder Rules
Blanchard offered four rules for allowing your parrot on your shoulder:
1) The parrot is not allowed on your shoulder unless you put it there. Instead of allowing the bird to run up your shoulder, use the “OK” cue to place the bird there and the “Down” command every time you remove the bird from your shoulder.
2) The parrot is allowed on your shoulder only if it readily steps onto on your hand when requested, such as with the “Up” command. (A bird that “attacks” your hand to stay on the shoulder should not be allowed there.)
3) Your bird is banned from your shoulder if it has ever displayed aggression while perched there. Be especially careful of the bird’s body language if others are in the room; some birds are OK on their person’s shoulder when no one else is around.
4) Don’t assume your bird will behave on your shoulder. Give your bird something to do while it is there, like a foot toy. Don’t inadvertently reward shoulder misbehavior by yelling at the bird, giving it a “drama reward.”

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7:00 p.m. on Thursday, 1 week preceding the General Meeting. Location is Denny’s Restaurant, 16575 Sherman Way, (just West of Hayvenhurst), Van Nuys. All members are welcome. Please confirm with Lauren at 818-727-1594 or via e-mail [thewestvalleybirdsociety@gmail.com](mailto:thewestvalleybirdsociety@gmail.com), since meeting dates and times are occasionally changed.

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