

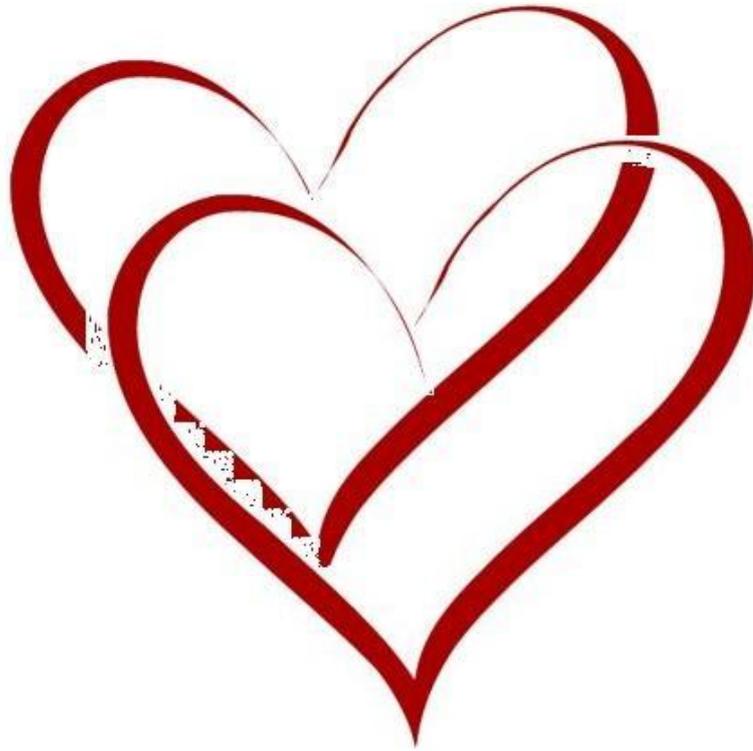
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Welcome to Birdline UK LTD Parrot Rescue



**We have put this welcome pack
together to help you with advice on
caring for a bird**

These are guidelines for Birdline UK LTD members only.
If you have any questions, please contact your Area Co-ordinator.



**In loving memory of Doddie Kent 7/4/1945 – 28/9/2017
Your life was a blessing, your memory a treasure.
You are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure.**

This pack was produced by Doddie Kent and Melinda Laws on behalf of Birdline UK LTD.

The information provided in this pack is designed to provide helpful information in the care and wellbeing of psittacines. This information is not meant to be used, nor should it be used to treat any medical condition. For diagnosis and/or treatment of any medical problem, ALWAYS consult an Avian Veterinarian. Birdline UK Parrot Rescu accepts no responsibility or liability for any damages or consequences from any treatment or actions to any animal/person following the guidance within this manual. References are provided for information only and do not constitute endorsement of any websites etc.

Disclaimer:

The information contained within this guidance is true and complete to the best of our knowledge. All recommendations are made without guarantee on behalf of Birdlike UK Parrot Rescue.



BIRDLINE PARROT RESCUE

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5: BEHAVIOUR AND ENRICHMENT

5.1: Gentle Dominance

Gentle dominance means you assert that you are the head of the flock without frightening, intimidating, or physically harming the bird. You cannot be in charge of your "flock" (even one bird constitutes a flock in their minds) if the flock doesn't trust you.

Aggressive training methods are simply lazy training methods. Screaming at your bird creates more dominance issues. A gentle voice of support and encouragement will turn around an aggressive bird almost instantaneously! Try it! Even if you are furious that you've been bitten, try speaking in a gentle tone, calming the bird. You'll be pleasantly surprised. If you feel you have to win at being the nastiest in the flock, you're in for a very long (and endless) battle.

Stepping Up and Down

The primary way to maintain the "highest branch" in your flock is to use the "Step up" command. You should use the "step up" command every single time you pick up your bird and some version of the down command when you set the bird down. This might sound too simple to be true, but believe it, it is highly effective. Consistency is important. Don't only say "Up" when the bird has done something wrong and you want to move him.

A basic rule-of-thumb is to not allow refusals to the "step up" command. If you have a hormonal bird, sometimes this might seem difficult. Putting a towel under your sleeve can help. If the bird is frightened of hands/arms, try using a cushion or perch to step up onto instead. Assess the bird first; don't use anything the bird is frightened of.

Dropping your bird to the floor as a training method is highly ineffective. It merely teaches the bird that you are an unreliable perch. The bird might be shocked into temporary submission, but this does nothing to promote a long-term relationship.

Control the Environment

One other major rule-of-thumb is this: when you open your bird's cage for it to come out, have the bird step up on command and remove him from the cage yourself. Don't let him just crawl out on his own. This further establishes your place in the pecking order. A parrot that's allowed to come and go out of its cage at will, or fly around the house, is not going to make good decisions for itself and be well behaved. Parrots



defend the territory they occupy. Parrots need structure, and feel most comfortable with people that feel comfortable around them in a defined territory.

Physical Positions

Height is a position of dominance. A parrot that is allowed to hang out on top of a cage, play-stand, or your shoulder, may exhibit more aggressive behaviour. It is impossible to have eye contact with a parrot when it's on your shoulder. The ideal level for a parrot is your chest level, or lower. Too low (on the floor) and a parrot will feel vulnerable and insecure.

It is a good idea to have a separate play area rather than one on top of the cage, especially if the cage is too high for you to reach straight across it to pick your bird up. Having a separate play area where you can place the bird also helps avoid territorial aggression associated with the cage. There should be food and water available on the play area.

Teach your bird that fingers are not toys. Don't play with your bird with your hands in that way, especially with young parrots that are exploring and learning with their beaks. Present a toy or something to chew on instead of your finger

5.2: What is normal behaviour?

Parrots are naturally gregarious and social, so some vocalization is to be expected. Parrots like to communicate with the flock (you) in the mornings and evenings, and when they greet you. In the wild, a parrot is constantly calling to the flock when it is not resting. It is natural for a parrot to be noisy. However, it should not be screaming incessantly. Any parrot is capable of biting, especially if provoked, afraid or over-excited.

Signs your bird is overexcited

Some parrots experience an excitement overload phase, which is not the time to handle the bird. Frequently it will displace this excitement into a bite. Hormone surges can also make a parrot aggressive, especially if it is mating season. Learn to read your parrot's body language and recognize when your bird is not receptive to being handled. The following are all signs that your parrot should not be handled. Wait until signs subside before making any attempt to handle.

- Pinning eyes
- Flared tail
- Posturing
- Tightening of the feathers
- Raised Crest



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- Excited or dramatic vocalizations

5.3: Why do parrots scream or bite?

Usually a behavioural problem doesn't lie with the bird, but with the owner. The best way to change our birds' behaviour is to change our behaviour and expectations of the bird, the 'wild' creature we share our lives with.

Fear

Parrots are prey animals, and safety is important to them. Most parrots bite out of fear. Excessive environmental stimuli can lead to nervousness and aggression. Make sure your parrot's visual area is clear of 'perceived' threats.

Punishment

A parrot doesn't understand punishment. Thumping the beak to make a parrot stop biting is a sign of aggression and will only make it worse. So will spraying a parrot with water, or shouting at it to shut up when screaming. All you're doing with these 'punishments' is reinforcing the bad behaviour. Parrots love drama and attention. They usually scream to get attention. By giving them any attention, like spraying them or yelling back, you have actually given them a drama reward, which is what they wanted, and you have taught your parrots to scream even more. Once this bad habit is entrenched, it is very hard to break.

Boredom

Some parrots will scream out of boredom. In the wild, a parrot is very active: flying, foraging for food, interacting with the flock. What is a day in the life of your bird like? Is there plenty to do? Make sure your bird gets plenty of exercise. A large, horizontally built cage is best, but if your space is limited, provides ladders, swings and toys to help your bird keep busy. Take your bird out every day and give it 'flapping' exercises.

Diet

Diet also has an effect on behaviour. It has been published that birds on mostly seed diets are louder and more aggressive. Dietary change may not solve the problem, but it is part of the solution. Remember - diet is what a parrot actually eats, not what it is offered.

5.4: Stopping my Parrot screaming or biting

Any parrot is capable of biting, especially if provoked, afraid or over-excited. Correcting a biting or screaming problem is a step by step approach.

1. First, the owner needs to establish a position of flock leader. Establishing controls with our companion parrots is always a first step to resolving behaviour problems. Owners must have sufficient 'rank' in the parrot's eye before the bird will respond to training. Teach "step-ups" to the point where the step-up command is automatic.



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2. Ensure your bird gets enough sleep. Our companion parrots need at least ten hours of undisturbed sleep every night and can get cranky when they don't get enough. This can be an underlying cause of biting or screaming. If the parrot is housed in the centre of activity, try transferring the bird to a sleep cage at night. This is a smaller, spartanly-equipped cage, set up in a room that is unoccupied at night with no audio or visual stimulation.
3. Observe your bird's body language. Do not handle your bird when he is showing visual signs of overexcitement.
4. Handle your parrot when you are calm. A parrot knows if you are afraid of it. Flock creatures behave in a manner similar to other members of the flock. The emotional tempo of human flock members will have a direct impact on avian behaviour.
5. When a parrot is screaming and you know nothing is wrong (it has food, water, not caught in a toy etc.) it is best to just ignore the bird. Or you can try responding by using a soft contact whistle, and ignoring (thus replacing) the loud raucous calling. When praised for positive behaviours, the bird will learn to concentrate its attention on them, while rejecting undesirable activities that gain little or no response from the owner. Praise is one of the most important tools for altering behaviour. Try praising your bird when it is sitting quietly.
6. Keep a journal recording the time of day the screaming or biting is occurring, what is happening at the time, your response, and so forth. Notice patterns of behaviour and change the way things are done to avoid these - you should notice gradual improvement over time.

In conclusion, our feathered companions are fully armed with all the same instincts that their wild counterparts possess. They are in unnatural environments, which encourage unnatural behaviours. Behaviour changes take time, especially if the behaviour has been habituated over a long time. All members of the household need to participate in a behavioural modification program. If the owners can't define clear and appropriate boundaries for the parrot, how can the bird be expected to know what is acceptable?



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5.5: Light

Most keepers of parrots assume that the light coming through the windows will be enough for their feathered friends, especially if augmented by the normal incandescent (light bulb) or fluorescent tube room lighting. However, Parrots thrive on a balanced amount of light, both in terms of its wavelength, duration and timing.

In the wild the majority of birds wake up at dawn and go to bed at dusk. This provides the bird with approximately 12 hours of sleep a day. Maintaining a similar balance with your companion bird will provide the best environment for your bird's health – both physical and mental.

However without a dedicated UVAB light, it is impossible to achieve the correct wavelengths of light required inside the house. There are quite a few 'natural' light sources available on the market. The better ones tending to be fluorescent tube based, although there are some incandescent varieties available. Manufacturers have spent considerable resources and money developing these 'natural' lights so that the light they provide forms an even spread across the spectrum. Birdline recommends Arcadia bulbs/lamps, which are specifically designed for birds, as opposed to those that claim to be beneficial to both birds and reptiles.

You can't beat natural sunlight however, so putting your bird outside safely i.e. in a carrier/cage in the warm weather is advised under supervision. Please always make sure the bird has access to shade, especially if it has been showered/wet. This is so that if the bird gets too warm it can seek shelter.