

## Correcting Bird Biting Behavior

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# Bad Bird Behavior

To start correcting a biting problem, first determine the cause and correct any underlying problems such as treating an illness.

**Correcting aggressive biting:** The human needs to be seen by the bird as having a higher ranking. To start this, the parrot needs to be taught the ['step up'](#), 'ladder' or 'up' and 'down' commands which are used to get the bird to move from the perch to the owner's finger and back to the perch, or from one finger to the other. Short daily training sessions should begin ideally from the first day the bird is brought home, before behavior problems occur. Training sessions should take place away from the bird's usual environment. If the parrot has already been biting for a some time, and the owner is wary of the bird's beak, training may need to occur in a totally new environment. The bird will be

much less likely to bite the only human it knows when it is in an unfamiliar place. Try your veterinary clinic, if needed. Family or friends may also let you use their house for the short training sessions.

Parrots respond to facial expressions and verbal praise. This type of positive reinforcement should be used when an appropriate response is given by the bird. If the bird responds inappropriately, raise your head above the bird's level and say "no" in a normal speaking voice. Do not use a loud voice or yell. They may think you are 'squawking,' which they love. No aggression or punishment is involved in the training. The daily lessons need to continue until the bird responds willingly to the commands. Once the commands are followed, discontinue the training but continue to use the commands during the daily handling of the bird.



Higher altitude means higher ranking to birds, so it is important that the biting bird should not be above the human's heart level while in or out of the cage. Do not allow these birds to ride on your shoulder. It increases their ranking as well as puts your face, ears, eyes, and lips at risk of a serious bite. The owners need to learn to anticipate the biting and stop it with a stern look and command before it escalates to a bite.

If a bite occurs, reprimanding needs to be immediate and effective. If the bird is on the hand, the owner can drop the hand a short distance to unbalance the bird. If on the arm, the arm can be rotated causing the loss of balance. The bird should never be made to fall, just lose its balance for a second. The bird should not be rewarded with the drama of yelling. Having the bird do 'step-ups' 5-6 times with a quiet command and a stern look on the owner's face, is also successful in reprimanding the bite. Some birds may need to be placed in a cage for a 'time-out,' but be sure this is not what the bird was hoping for when he bit you. Once the reprimand has been given, the episode is over. Do not continue to punish the bird, such as isolating it for a long period. Take into account the parrot's temperament when providing a reprimand. Some birds respond well to just a stern look, others need a stern look and a quiet verbal no, and others need a time out.

**Correcting fearful biting:** If a bird is biting out of fear, it is important to determine the exact thing or situation that is causing the bird to be afraid. Sometimes, the fear may be understandable, such as the sound of a vacuum cleaner. Other times, it may appear illogical, but perhaps something happened in the bird's past that causes it to fear something we consider harmless.

Once you've isolated the cause of the fear, avoid exposing the bird to it. If that is not possible, try exposing the bird to it from a long distance, at which the bird is not normally afraid. Praise and give the bird a [treat](#) for remaining calm. Over the course of weeks, gradually move the bird closer to the fear-causing stimulus, always staying at a far enough distance to keep the bird calm, and giving it positive reinforcement. The bird may then learn to associate the stimulus with good things happening, and lose its fear of it.

## Conclusion

To control biting behaviors of birds, it is important to know why they may bite. Then, with time and perhaps help from an experienced avian behaviorist, you can help your bird be much more fun to be around. Your bird will be happier, too.

