Bird Care Tips to Help Your New Bird Thrive at Home

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The happiest birds aren't the ones given constant attention or "rule of the roost" in your home. Just like a child that's been indulged too often, birds that are spoiled can turn into unhappy, uncooperative family members that hamper peace in your home. Thankfully, much can be learned from the habits (and mistakes) of veteran bird owners. To develop a happy, healthy bird, we recommend the following practices:

1. establish BOUNDARIES

Nik, a customer and owner of a healthy Sun Conure, wrote us asking why his bird bit him every time he tried to take him out of the cage. We got our answer when we asked Nik if he had taught the step-up command; he had not. The step-up command allows an owner to safely handle and move a bird and is the foundational command for all other training. It lets your bird know you are the boss and helps curb a number of inappropriate behaviors. In bird training, it's as basic as "sit" or "stay" is to a dog, and it's something Nik wishes he had taught from day one.

2. prevent 1-PERSON BONDS

Since step-up also establishes a bond and decreases fear between the bird and his human handlers, it should be taught to every member of the family. This helps avoid a single-person bond, a troubling behavior in which a bird may act aggressively to handlers other than the primary caregiver. Another way to prevent a one-person bond is to get your entire family involved in bird care tasks. This will help your bird feel secure with all family members.

3. be realistic with ATTENTION

Some new owners make the mistake of giving their bird too much coddling and attention when they first bring him home. Later on, when they are not able to spend as much time with their bird, they are dismayed at their bird's inappropriate vocalization from the cage in a plea for attention. Start your bird out with the amount of interaction you can expect to continue once he is trained and accustomed to your home. On the other hand, make sure you don't ignore your bird during these first few weeks. You want to be sure to establish a secure bond.

4. develop a HEALTHY DIET

Food is probably the most abused source of comfort and appeasement for birds. When you first bring home your weaned bird, you may need to offer him some foods that provide comfort while he adjusts to

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your new home. That's understandable. However, a good nutritional foundation should be established early on, so you don't have to spend time undoing bad habits later. Avoid spoiling your bird with too many seeds, or too much of any one food – even if he shows preferences. See our nutrition article "Nutritional Beginnings."

5. BIRD-PROOF your home

Birds delight in the visual, audio, and olfactory stimulation that playtime outside the cage provides. But, birds use their mouths to explore and want to taste everything at least once. Make sure your home is bird-proof. Electrical cords and outlets, water sources, other pets, plants, toxic substances, chemical fumes, and much more can all be harmful to your bird. Read up on bird-proofing your home and make it safe before you even bring your new bird home.

6. give him RESPECT

Though you expect many things from your bird, he too deserves respect. Know when enough is enough. Lights, conversation, or television after your bird's bedtime is a sure way to invite behavioral problems. Because birds often seek hiding spots in the wild, honor your bird's need to seek retreat within his cage. Avoid teasing your bird. And, when you first bring him home, make sure it is a quiet, peaceful experience; avoid holidays or other hectic times in your schedule.

7. keep things INTERESTING

From foods to toys, from speech training to regular adventures, prevent the mundane with variety. Switch the toys and perches in his cage frequently. Present treats in challenging ways to sharpen his wits. Let him travel with you in his carrier when possible. Put a perch in the shower and let him join you. Play soothing music or a speech-training CD regularly. Give him social interaction with people other than your family members. Offer him a variety of healthy foods. Your bird's life will be richer for it.

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