

# Why Birds Act Out and How to Stop It

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Behavior problems often develop when a bird's basic needs are not being met. These needs include food, water, shelter, sleep, and social interaction. When a companion bird is stressed, he will also act out. And because your bird is closer to the wild state than most other companion animals, you need to be extra diligent about easing stresses that he might face. If his stress level becomes too high, your bird may bite, scream, act aggressively toward others, feather pick or even become phobic. Some common stressors that the bird owner may not initially think about include separation anxiety, fear, wrong size or shape of cage, wrong type, size, or shape of perches, and surprisingly, not enough toys.

## Manage Your Bird's Stress and Behavior

Emotionally, birds are like toddlers. They have short attention spans, tiring quickly of any activity. With nothing to do, they will find even self-destructive behavior to be satisfying. To optimize physical, mental, and emotional health, you need to engage regularly in activities to challenge, stimulate, and train your pet. Normally, correcting or eliminating the immediate cause of the stress will solve these problems. Sometimes, however, things will not be as simple as they seem on the surface. A combination of factors could be troubling your pet. Under these circumstances, you will need to be patient, observant, and willing to try a number of things to get him through his troubled time.

## Provide Physical Challenges

A sedentary bird is a bored bird. If possible, provide your bird with a [flight cage](#) and make sure your larger bird has ample space to spread its wings. Finches and canaries especially need sufficient space for side-to-side flight. For members of the parrot family (psittacines), afford your bird time out and away from the cage, both to alleviate boredom and flex his muscles. An out-of-cage [playstand](#), complete with ladders and toys, provides a secure station for your bird and an opportunity for self-diversion. Large birds can comfortably spend more time out of their cage when equipped with a [Flight Suit](#), designed to control

## Exercise Your Bird's Brain

Interacting with your bird is every bit as important as providing an interesting environment. The secret to keeping your bird happy is



the frequency of attention, not the duration. A few minutes of attention every half hour or so works wonders to relieve stress. Mental growth comes from engaging in a variety of life experiences. Experiment to discover the types of [toys](#) your bird finds the most interesting and challenging. Keep in mind that no matter which toys you provide, and regardless of how intriguing, your bird will eventually tire of them. It is important not to place too many toys in the cage at once, which may over-stimulate your bird and cause stress. It's better to choose a select few and to rotate them every few days.



From time to time, your parrot or other psittacine may appreciate a change of scenery, even if it comes by simply moving his cage about your house. Also, many birds and their cages travel quite easily. Consider taking him along on your next vacation or long weekend. Teaching also brings you and your pet closer together. If you have a talking bird, a number of audios are available to build his vocabulary. Others provide song and speech examples to stimulate your bird.

Pay attention to what your bird is telling you. It is key to avoiding behavioral problems.

### **When Nothing Helps**

Sometimes, stimulation alone won't resolve the boredom-induced problem. You can provide all of the basics - food, water, shelter, sleep, and social interaction - but undesirable behavior may persist.

If so, your pet may be ill, or suffering anxiety, stress, or phobias. Under these conditions, we recommend that you consult with an avian veterinarian to identify and treat the problem.