

## PARROTS AND PARROT BEHAVIOUR

To give a pet parrot a good life, you must understand a bit about wild parrots and their behaviour.

### Parrots live in families

A pair of the larger parrots mates for life, and with luck will raise a family every year. Young parrots are cared for in the nest, then continue to fly and feed with their parents until they are sexually and socially mature. This may not be until they are anything from two to five years old (depending on the species).

This means that a young parrot is a very different bird to an adult. The young bird relies on those around him or her for guidance, and is very much a 'follower'. Once he or she has grown up, he becomes independent of his 'parents' - be they his true parents or 'human' parents - and wants only to find a mate with whom he can pair for the rest of his or her life.

### What this means for the parrot owner

For the owner of a parrot, this means that there is likely to be a change in your pet when he or she reaches adulthood. A young parrot is often prepared to be equally accepting of all members of the family. An adult parrot usually chooses one person to be his or her 'mate'. (Usually they choose someone of the opposite sex, but not always.) Once the mate has been chosen, the bird may be either indifferent or even aggressive to anyone else who tries to have anything to do with himself or his mate.

### Parrots in pairs

If you watch a bonded pair of parrots, you will find that they spend much of the day in close physical contact with each other. The daily timetable of a pair of wild or aviary parrots goes a bit like this:

- .Wake up, greet dawn noisily.
- .Find and eat breakfast.
- .Preen self and mate, chatting all the time.
- .Mid-day sleep, usually sitting close by mate.
- .Afternoon meal, chatting all the while.
- .More preening and conversation.
- .Evening chorus.

Young birds do all these activities in groups. You rarely see a parrot on its own by choice. Parrots caged on their own have no-one else to preen and talk to until their owner comes home. This may result in stress or boredom. Giving a bird your company for a couple of hours a day is no substitute for a constant companion.

If you are out of the house all day, consider getting two young parrots (preferably of opposite sexes) and let them grow up together. They will be no less tame, if they are hand reared birds, than if they were on their own. And a bird does not have to be on its own to learn to talk!

### Parrots and behavioural problems

Caged birds often suffer from behavioural problems.

Some of the problems are mainly problems for the owner - these include screaming, growling and biting. Some of these are problems for the parrot - the bird is unhappy or stressed in some way. This may show itself in excessive preening (which may lead to feather picking or plucking), inactivity (healthy parrots don't sit still all day), nail chewing, self mutilation or what vets call stereotypic behaviour - repetitive movements with no obvious function.

### What causes behavioural problems?

Abnormal or undesirable behaviour in parrots is an illness, and may be due to a physical or a mental cause. If you have any worries about your parrot's health or happiness - please consult your vet!

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