

Questions to Ask When Buying a Parrot

By EB Cravens



We have all heard stories of acquaintances who went into a bird shoppe and spontaneously fell in love with a baby psittacine. Soon thereafter, the parrot is purchased and taken home to live with its new owner. Sometimes it works out. Sometimes it does not. For, the positive “fit” of a new pet bird into one’s household is seldom a matter of chance. On the contrary, a well-thought-out hookbill addition is much more likely to become a long-term stable pet in the home. These are some of my favorite questions to pose before deciding to buy...

- 1) Is the parrot healthy? This sounds like a given, but there are actually many instances of sellers withholding important health history from the potential owner. Has it ever been to see a veterinarian? Was it ever sick or not feeling well? Ever on any kind of medication including the “routine” kinds placed in daily feeding formula by some fearful hand raisers?
- 2) How long did this baby spend with its parents? This is critical to knowing how much human “imprinting” the pet will acquire. Was it incubator raised or pulled from the nestbox before its eyes were fully open a time? Parrot chicks learn early groom-and-be-groomed habits in the confines of the box.
- 3) Was the chick properly fledged? Did keepers take the weeks necessary to perfect advanced flying and landing skills so that confidence of being airborne replaces fearfulness, and so the bird’s musculature develops to a high degree? Can it fly when wet? Take off from a hanging position? Land on owner’s arm when called? Critical techniques these!
- 4) Did this baby wean at its own pace, or was it forced by cutting back on number of daily feedings on a strict schedule? How long did it take? Was

- it first in a clutch or group to wean or was it one of the last? Did it fly during weaning? What were the favorite weaning foods? Did it ever reject the syringe or spoon or throw up formula?
- 5) Do the parents of the parrot pluck? Was the chick ever plucked by parents or siblings? Such questions can provide a history of feather grooming problems in the psittacine family.
 - 6) What sort of “socialization” was the fledgling provided? Has it learned to get along with other birds? Strange people in different clothing? Both men and women keepers? Has this baby ever seen small birds (i.e. canaries, budgies) and large birds (i.e. *Ara macaws*)?
 - 7) Has it been taught to eat a wide variety of foods? So many baby birds are sold with a very limited diet training. Does it know how to open in-shell nuts? What about nut kinds already cracked? Will it eat fresh green stems and crispy veggies? Does it like or dislike extruded/pelleted diets? What about cooked beans, rice, lentils, etc? Which fruits with seeds has it been offered?
 - 8) Is this a male or a female psittacine? This may sound like a trivial question but gender in a new pet can be closely related to how it behaves in a home—both towards humans and towards other pet parrots. Has it been genetically feather sexed or is the breeder experienced enough to know the gender from raising many of the same species? Knowing the sex of your birds will not only help you to understand behavior and know what to watch for at puberty, but it will provide background for a veterinarian should a health visit be desirable.
 - 9) What kinds of outdoor and new experiences has the parrot known? Is it aware of fresh greenery and flowers and leafy branches to climb in and chew upon? Does it understand rain, direct sunlight, wind, snow, thunder and lightening? How about the garage and automobiles? Loud

appliances, television and stereo music? Has the new bird been exposed to a dog, cat, seen a hawk or flocks of other wild birds? Such kinds of introductions can go a long way towards preparing a pet parrot to be calm and well adjusted in its new pet household! Cloistered, over-protected psittacine fledglings may well turn out to be timid and un-worldly.

- 10) Was this psittacine ever traumatized? Was the pulling-from-nestbox experience a shock to its mental or physical makeup? Does it have any faint black stress lines on feather plumage? Did it ever have to be grabbed by human hands against its will? Was it abruptly grounded by wing clipping? Did it fly into a window or wall or other object and fall seriously? Was it traumatized by another pet animal or bird, a vet visit, or a shipping container? How does it react to hats on humans? These and many more such inquiries are yellow flags to new owners about the sensitivities and potential fears of the new hookbill.
- 11) What are the bird's likes and dislikes? Does it seem to prefer men or women more so? Is it dependent upon its cage or used to getting lots of freedom? Where does it prefer to sleep—up high, in a box, covered or in the open, etc—and at what hour of the evening? Does it like closeness and affectionate touch or is it standoffish? How does it prefer to bathe? Of course many of these topics will be covered by the conscientious seller of birds, but sometimes in the days of purchase we can forget to ask.
- 12) And finally, what are the negatives or the down side of the bird species being considered for purchase? This is a key question since many breeders or pet stores either are too blinded by their love for certain parrots to see the full characteristics, or else will “gloss over” many traits out of worry that telling the entire truth may affect the choice of the client. Here we are talking about what kind of *adult psittacine* this will be.

Everyone loves baby birds (also puppies and kittens!) but they all grow into adults. Is the species known to be noisy? How “needy” for affection is it? Is it a strong chewer of woodwork? What about jealousy or close bonding to a single human? Will it hesitate to attack other birds it perceives as competition? What about nervousness and possible feather picking? Are such pets prone to hyperactivity? Shyness? Inquiring about behaviors and tendencies, even though responses are never “cast in stone,” will give the future owner a solid outlook upon which to begin early schooling of the pet? Knowledge only serves to make it more likely the buyer will understand his or her new bird in order to commit to keeping it for the long term!