

a parrot club a while back parading a frightened parrot around the room. The bird would occasionally fly part way across the room, crashing to the floor after exhausting its clipped wings. The man would dutifully go pick the bird up and return to his seat. It was obvious to me and many others in the room that this poor bird was scared half to death by all the commotion in this new environment. The repeated attempts at flight and hard crashes to the ground were even more difficult for me to accept when the man made the excuse to the group that the bird is nervous because "he was abused." How true, I thought.

For some, the term "abuse" is little more than an excuse to hide behind. I have heard many people say things like, "my bird doesn't talk, he was abused." Or, "he bites me all the time, he must have been abused." I cannot deny that many parrots have suffered at the hands of humans. Often these people are misinformed, well-meaning people who just don't know any better. Sadly, other times they are people who simply don't care. However, no matter what the past has dealt a parrot, it can still enjoy a comfortable and fulfilling life, provided it receives proper care and treatment. The problem is there are so many opinions as to what is proper and what is not.

The best way I know to decide what strategy is best when working with a parrot is to allow the animal to be part of the decision. Start by learning to recognize the negative signs of stress, fear and anxiety in your bird. Also learn to recognize the positive signs of comfort, happiness, and play in your bird. To choose the best strategy for working with your bird always pull from your bag of positive approaches and avoid the negative approaches. For many people, this may be more difficult than it seems.

Humans have a long history of using negative approaches to get their way. People have grown up using heavy-handed techniques to shape and



This Umbrella Cockatoo is a playful, contented bird, not a human-dominated one.

Photo: Rosemary Low

modify behaviour. This culture is innate to us and difficult to change. To complicate the issue, a negative approach sometimes gives the illusion of success to a parrot owner. Most anyone can force themselves on a parrot, especially one with clipped wings, and realize some level of perceived success. However, the behavioural fall-out from this approach may be far reaching. Sure, the bird can learn to perform dutiful behaviours to avoid negative interactions, but at what price? We may never know the psychological effects negative interactions have on parrots. But, is it really worth the risk? Isn't it better to use positive methods to "allow" birds to perform desirable behaviours rather than force them to comply with demands? Certainly a reward of a favourite treat, a scratch on the head, or verbal praise is better than forcing a parrot to perform an action out of fear or discomfort. Plus, the positive approach creates an environment where the bird wants to perform creates more lasting results, and promotes a better relationship between bird and human. For any behaviour or action you want your bird to perform, positive reinforcement works better than negative approaches. It's as simple as that.

Though it may happen on rare occasions, it is difficult for me to believe that anyone would purposely abuse or mistreat a parrot. The vast majority of parrot owners are responsible, caring people who want only to do what is right for their birds. Too often, they are confused by the myriad of conflicting information available to parrot owners. One source says force your parrot to comply with your commands and don't let him get away with anything, while another says use positive reinforcement to create the best relationship possible with your bird. Both methods produce results. However, positive methods will never be associated with the word "abuse".

Conclusion

The past does not equal the future. A bird's history is important, but not nearly as important as the present. The events of today shape the rest of a bird's life. Today is the perfect day to give your bird a voice through its body language and let it have a say in its care and treatment. Today is the day you can decrease the frustrations and increase the rewards for both you and your companion parrot.



The Hyacinth Macaw Retires from the WPT 12

As the largest of flighted parrots and among the most spectacularly coloured, the Hyacinth Macaw (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*) has long been the most sought after bird in aviculture. Because of its playful nature and impressive stature, this species has suffered intensive trapping in its home in Brazil, causing alarm among parrot conservationists that it might be driven to extinction in the wild like its



smaller cousin the Spix's Macaw (*Cyanopsitta spixii*).

Since 1987, as a result of improved law enforcement in Brazil and work by several NGO's, this alarm has been turned into effective conservation action. For many years we at the Trust have focused on the conservation of this species in the wild by creating the Hyacinth Fund and supporting the study of its biology and encouraging protection through ecotourism. We now feel that the species - which likely numbers about 5,000 individuals in the wild - has recovered sufficiently that we can refocus our resources on more critically threatened species in South America and elsewhere around the globe. The Hyacinth still faces serious threat from widespread habitat conversion for soybean production, and with any slack in enforcement, the trapping will very likely resume. Our hope is that with the ongoing protection, education, ecotourism, and other conservation action, this species will continue to recover and lend its spectacular stature to the conservation of the entire region.

Thus, we are now retiring the Hyacinth Macaw out of our WPT 12 and into our Parrot Portfolio which will remain our way of drawing attention to our growing collection of success stories in parrot conservation. By making this change, we will now have the opportunity to add the more critically threatened Blue-throated Macaw to the WPT 12 which will help us focus more conservation resources on this tiny population in Bolivia, which hovers on the brink of extinction.

