

Meyer's Parrot Screaming

A bird owners asks for advice on how to stop pet birds from screaming during the day.

By Sally Blanchard

Q: Please give me any suggestions to stop my Meyer's parrot from screaming! He has taught my red belly hen to do the same. They were supposed to be quiet parrots. I try to ignore the yelling and reward the quiet, but it's not working. When they are home without me during the day, I have the radio on in their room.

A: Ignoring a parrot's screaming might not reward the behavior, but it rarely stops it. Even parrots with a reputation for being quiet can become quite noisy under certain situations. Most parrots are as noisy as the environment they live in. There is no doubt that your two *Poicephalus* are feeding off of each other's noise. If the two birds have a strong bond with each other, since they are closely related, there is a possibility that they have formed a sexual bond with each other and some of the screaming is a result of that. To know for sure what is going on, I would need more information. For example, does the Meyer's parrot scream when you are giving the red-bellied parrot attention? Do they scream when you are in another room or when you are with them? Do you think that they are they screaming to get your attention or to get each other's attention?

Without knowing the answer to these questions, I recommend that you spend time with each bird individually teaching it a few positive basic behaviors. An easy one would be to teach the birds to spread their wings on cue. There are two ways to do this. The first is to watch them carefully and every time you see one of them spread its wings to stretch, say "Eagle Boy" or anything that you think is appropriate for the behavior. The other is to have one of the birds on your finger and move your hand up or down so that it flaps its wings and then say the command. The reason I recommend this type of positive interaction is because when one of the birds is screaming, you can use the cue to distract it from screaming, and then when it does the wing spread, you can reward the bird with lavish praise. This may take some time to train the bird to this behavior, but it will be far more effective in the long run to change the screaming behavior than rewarding the negative behavior with a quick-fix type punishment.

Another idea is to lower the energy of the birds when they are screaming. The vast majority of companion parrots are very empathic and mimic our moods. If they start screaming and you become agitated by the noise, chances are the screaming will worsen. However, if you walk over to the cage without making eye contact and slow yourself way down by lowering your head and taking a few deep breaths, they will most likely match your energy. Another way that often works is for you to quietly hum, whisper or whistle without looking at them. When my caique, Spike gets wound up and starts his repetitive beeping, I start whistling "Over the Rainbow" and he starts whistling with me immediately, even if I am across the room ignoring him.