

Handle A Bird's Aggressive Behavior To Phones

Some parrots show a negative and aggressive behavior toward phones in the home

By Liz Wilson, CVT, CPBC

Photo Courtesy Erin Guerrios, California

Take steps to make sure you are not rewarding a bird's negative behavior to phones.

Negative Reactions - Excessive Screaming

Probably the most common negative reaction we see between parrots and telephones has to do with excessive screaming. Years ago, my friend Chris, whom had a large flock of pet macaws, got in the habit of giving her parrots nuts to hush them up when she tried to talk on the phone. This, of course, taught the macaws to scream when the phone rang, because they knew they would soon be rewarded with nuts. As is so often the case, in an effort to block a behavior we don't want, we accidentally reward it. When Chris asked parrot behavior consultant Sally Blanchard what to do, Sally jokingly suggested that Chris have her phone reinstalled in a closet.

Seriously, phone conversations need not be curtailed due to noise. As always, the first approach is to prevent the problem from developing by ignoring a parrot's noise when the phone rings. If that does not work, portable phones can make life much easier. When a parrot starts vocalizing, the human can frown and leave the room with the phone.

Parrot behavior consultant Mattie Sue Athan had another suggestion. When talking on the phone in the same room with a parrot, the human should turn to face the bird and act as if she/he is having the conversation with the bird instead of the person on the other end of the line. So, instead of shutting the bird out by having a dialogue that excludes it, the parrot is brought into the interaction. I have used this suggestion several times with clients, and they generally express delight at how successful this simple technique can be.

Parrot Behavior Toward Phones

A parrot behaviorist addresses the motivations behind parrots' reactions to telephones. [More>>](#)

Aggression Toward Phones

A serious mistake that many people make is to try and talk on the phone while in close proximity with a parrot – especially with the bird on the shoulder. Most bird species are incredibly territorial creatures, and parrots are no exception. As a result, a bird is likely to be deeply offended by this mechanical thing being thrust into its jealously guarded space by the human ear. As a result, many human ears get bitten.

Karen Webster learned this the hard way with her Meyer's parrot, Maxine. Maxine has what appears to be a borderline psychotic hatred of the phone, whether it is being used or not, and Webster has the scars to prove it. She reports that Maxine will try to "get" the phone, even if it's lying unused on the table. In her manic efforts to push the detested thing on the floor, she's been known to have the antenna so firmly gripped in her beak that she ends up doing repeated somersaults due to the violence of her attack.

Marguerite Floyd's brown-headed parrot, Charli, reacts negatively to the phone also, although not as dramatically. Giving her a dirty look, Charli bites Floyd – or the phone – if Floyd dares try to speak into it within range of Charli's beak.

Phone Etiquette Tips Around Parrots

Prevent problems between your bird and your phone with these phone etiquette tips. [More>>](#)

Other parrots have never gotten accustomed to phones, so when one comes in close proximity to their faces, it frightens them. While phones are small compared to other machines we might use, they are often quite large compared to the size of the bird. Fear triggers the fight-or-flight response, but because many companion parrots have wing-feather trims, fight is the only option left to them. After all, we know from sports that the best defense is a good offense, right? Some parrots with dramatic wing-feather trims have jumped from their humans' shoulders in an effort to escape the threat of the phone and have gotten injured as a result.