

When Your Pet Bird Loves To Be Petted

Sometimes petting is more than just affection to your pet bird.

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Courtesy Olivia Loya, West Virginia
Stick to the head when petting your pet parrot.

There is a down side to petting parrots, and this is exemplified by a common situation between many companion pet cockatoos and their people. A primary reason many people choose a cockatoo is how “pet-able” they are, and heaven knows they enjoy it.

The Wrong Kind Of Petting

Unfortunately, people often accidentally stroke their pet birds in a manner that the parrots finds sexually stimulating. The result can be high levels of frustration that can manifest in a variety of negative behaviors, such as serious aggression, excessive screaming and feather destruction.

It is not usually difficult to judge if cockatoos are getting excited, as many pet birds pant when they are being petted — clear evidence of sexual stimulation. The rule of thumb for petting adult pet birds is to stick to the head, and totally avoid stroking down the back, tail, or elsewhere on the bird’s body. Once again: Stick to the head.

In reality, people want to pet animals because it makes people feel good. Studies done in the 80s proved that petting an animal actually lowers the blood pressure of the person doing the petting. To our delight, dogs seem to enjoy being petted, so this is a clear example of a symbiotic relationship, with both parties benefiting from the behavior. Nevertheless, parrots are totally different from dogs, and their differences must be understood and respected.

If your parrot loves to be petted, make certain you are not inadvertently sending a sexual message to it. Make very sure your relationship involves wonderful games, tricks and foraging, rather than just that of stroker and strokee. Parrots are much too intelligent and complex to be satisfied over the long term with a relationship that only entails being petted.