

Can Bird Roommates Get Along

Work with your bird before you bring a new bird home

By Chris Davis

Work with your bird and your relationship before bringing a new bird home. Courtesy Carole Brown, Pennsylvania

Q:I have a green-winged macaw and a timneh African grey parrot. Both were abused before I adopted them. The grey used to talk but hasn't said much since I got the macaw, which has a pretty good vocabulary.

They are great pets and I want to get more, but I don't have room for another cage and am unsure if either would take to a roommate.

I am trying very hard to get the macaw to be friendlier, but she rarely moves away from her cage and tries to bite me quite often. The grey is OK with me, and they both love my husband.

They are both females, and I am wondering if I got a male for either one of them, would they be able to go into the same cage?

A:Getting a bird for an existing companion bird does not always work out, and you can end up with problems, such as two birds that do not get along.

1) Work with your birds first, and create a relationship where they understand that you are in control. Proceed slowly, gently and with loving confidence, to teach both birds some simple commands.

Your current situation sounds as if your macaw and African grey parrot are neighbors in an apartment complex who don't really interact with you. Ideally, they should get on and off a hand or stick when asked, and they should be clear about the areas where they are, and are not, allowed to perch. Your African grey parrot will probably get on the hand already, but you may need to use a stick to keep from being bitten by the macaw. They should also understand what "No" and "Good bird" means and respond appropriately.

2) Motivate them with favorite treats. Be sure that they always have access to their regular food at all times, but begin to give them treats from your hand only, so that they need to interact with you to get them. Praise them liberally when they take the treat gently, so that they associate praise with a positive interaction. Once you lovingly focus their attention on learning new behaviors, they will begin to see you as having more value and will want to interact with you on a regular basis.

3) Birds are vain. Tell them how cute they are while they are playing or eating or doing anything acceptable. Tell them they are beautiful, and draw the words out so they can feel what you are conveying. Even if they are just sitting around, contemplating their little toes, tell them what good birds they are, that you are happy they are with you, and you will always love them. Be theatrical, silly and fun. Birds are suckers for goofiness.

Adding Baby Birds

Do not house your new baby bird in with an older bird. Just move the sofa, a table or an easy chair, make room for another cage, add the bird of your dreams and adore it. Interestingly, aloof birds often finally understand how you wish to interact with them by watching you snuggle a friendlier bird. I have seen many make an almost instantaneous change in their behavior, once they understand the situation. Also, since neither existing bird is closely bonded with you, jealousy should not be an issue.