

## The Scary Top 7

### Readers reveal what their birds find scary

By Crystal Apilado

A part of sharing our lives with birds is being able to recognize when something frightens them and making sure that you take measures to make them feel safe. Being prey animals, pet birds can be frightened by even the most seemingly inoffensive item (rice cakes, socks and hats, oh my!). Here's what bird owners say scare their birds the most.

Courtesy Mary Weeks

Watch your bird's body language to tell you if it's scared of something.

#### 1. Wild Birds

Wild birds were the No. 1 thing bird owners reported as scaring their pet birds. Some birds have screaming fits at the sight of a bird of prey's shadow flying overhead or if they catch a glimpse of a crow passing by a window. A crow's caw can also send a pet bird fluttering off its perch in fright.

Wiscon resident Patricia Wieneke related how Willow, her blue-fronted Amazon, began her alarm cry from inside the house when an eagle's shadow was cast over her pet dog, which was outside playing. Willow lay low on top of her cage, fanned out her tail feathers and spread her wings. Toodles, a blue-and-gold macaw, crouched down as if she were about to launch forward. "I think they were both afraid," Wieneke said. "But I think they also were being protective of the dog. They pick on him all the time. Why let anyone else have their fun?"

#### 2. Loud Noises

Another list topper is loud noises. Construction going on across the street, slammed doors and blaring emergency vehicle sirens can often catch our parrots off guard. Kris Richardson of New Jersey said that fire engines are a big stressor for her flock. Richardson's teal-and-black-faced lovebird and two cockatiels come screaming to the front of their cages when they hear sirens. "If they are by the window, they all start screaming and flying around the room," Richardson said.

#### 3. Other Pets

Fido might just be looking for scraps flung from the cage, but his sniffing around can be frightening to a bird. A number of bird owners said that their birds are afraid of other household pets. Sara Angus of Michigan said that her green-cheeked conure, Sam, is still frightened by the three cats that he's lived with most of his life. "Despite the fact that none of them have ever paid him any attention, he panics anytime one of them walks by," Angus said. Sam makes his frightened scream, which sounds like "Ack," for several minutes and flings himself to the other side of his cage toward his comfort toy.

#### 4. Toys

Sometimes birds are frightened by the very things meant to bring them joy — toys! Put yourself in your bird's shoes — err, perch — and you might be a bit more understanding. A bird's cage is its sanctuary, and the sudden appearance of something new is often met with a scrutinizing eye. Lorraine La Boyne of Florida said that Pat, her yellow-naped Amazon, will attack a new toy first to see if it'll hurt him. After Pat is convinced the toy is harmless, he will eventually play with it.

#### 5. Strangers

People passing by the window and visitors to the home elicit varying responses from birds. La Boyne's African grey, Cody, talks when he's frightened. He'll say "It's OK" and calls out "Mommy" to be reassured it's alright. Joe Keating of New Jersey said that his blue-and-gold macaw is frightened when people that he's not familiar with get too close to him. "He tries to scare you off by lunging toward you," Keating said.

#### 6. The Dark

Just like when we were kids, some birds are afraid of the dark. Megan Hughes of Florida said that her entire flock is frightened of the dark, and each bird has a night light in their bird rooms. Hughes covers each cage just enough so that her birds can peek out and see the light when she puts them in their cages to sleep. Barbie Schlafer of Pennsylvania said that her three cockatiels will start to flap around the cage if they are left in the dark without a night light. Schlafer said that dark-colored covers also give her 'tiels night frights, so she uses light yellows and neutral colors for her cage covers.

#### 7. Balloons

Some birds are terrified of balloons and will vocally express their displeasure. Kimberly Mastykarz of New York said that her jenday conure, Calvin, becomes very upset if she brings balloons into the house. For each of the birthday parties that she's thrown in her home, Mastykarz has had to sneak the balloons in without letting Calvin see them. "If he gets a glance at one of them from across the room, he goes into a squawking fit," Mastykarz explained. "He puffs his chest out and stands up real straight, all the while screeching non-stop." The last time Calvin saw a balloon, Mastykarz had to temporarily cover his cage, and it took him about 15 minutes to calm down.

#### More Scaredy-Birds

Bird owners told us some random but specific things that frightened their birds. Some birds were afraid of strollers and wheelchairs, sunglasses, water and food items. Kating's female Congo African grey growls at the vacuum cleaner, and Hughes' umbrella cockatoo, Kilo, is afraid of socks.

Of course, what scares us can also scare our birds. Schlafer's female umbrella cockatoo reacted to a scary movie. "She was sitting on my lap watching and, all of a sudden — as heads were flying on the screen — she stretched way out with her crest up and wings out and started making this loud, 'Woo Woo' noise as she moved her head up and down." Schlafer said. "She would not stop until we shut the movie off."