

Deter Avian Advances

A close bond with your pet bird is OK, but a mate-like bond can lead to behavior problems in a frustrated and confused psittacine

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As a normal part of reproduction, parrots regurgitate to feed their babies and mates. A pet bird that regurgitates as a breeding behavior usually has an obvious love interest like a person, another bird or a favorite toy. If there is no such recipient, regurgitation may be indicative of a medical problem, such as an infection of the crop caused by a fungus called *Candida*, or perhaps a foreign body obstruction.

Discourage Regurgitation

For many years, people thought it was wonderful when pet parrots acted as though humans were their mates. It was considered the most enviable level of relationship one could have with a psittacine. However, as we continue to learn, we have started to realize the extent of our error. Instead of being proof of how much they love us, a “mate bond” between a psittacine and a person can often be the source of numerous physical and psychological problems for the parrot.

Resulting behavioral problems include exponential increases in aggressive behaviors and excessive screaming, frequently resulting in psittacine abuse and/or abandonment. Violence and abnormal vocalizations on the bird’s part, however, make perfect sense when we realize that we are giving our parrots the message that we will follow through with raising a family — and then we don’t. These aberrant behaviors are unquestionably a direct result of the incredible frustration we have caused with our naïveté and misunderstanding.

You should not punish your bird for romantic behavior. It is, after all, just doing what is natural for a sexually maturing psittacine. Be your bird’s friend and teacher, not its mate. When your bird regurgitates for you, put your bird down and move away. If your bird is inside its cage, starting to regurgitate as it signals that it wants to come out to be with you, briefly close the cage door. Return in a couple of minutes, and try again. If your bird continues to behave in an amorous manner, move away again. Make it clear in a kind and loving manner that you do not wish that sort of relationship with it. Cease behaviors that seem to initiate her amorous response (such as touching her in a particular manner).

As with humans, passion in parrots can manifest itself aggressively in seconds. Therefore, when a parrot is acting amorous, it is also capable of biting with little advance warning. Be aware and pay attention to your bird’s body language, and you should easily avoid any confrontations.

Trick Them

Trick training can be a wonderful outlet for redirecting a human-psittacine relationship that is headed astray. Teach your bird to sing a song or name colors. Show it how to put pegs into holes, or wave on cue.

By becoming your bird’s instructor, you can redefine your relationship as one of teacher to student, not mate to mate. In so doing, you resolve any confusion on your bird’s part as to what its bond with you is based on. This will enable years of joyous interaction based on honesty, rather than frustration.

Vomiting Vs. Regurgitating – An Important Difference

When a parrot vomits, it brings up food all the way from the proventriculus or first stomach. Regurgitation, on the other hand, entails bringing up food from the crop, a food storage organ at the base of the neck. This differentiation is important (although not always easy to distinguish), because vomiting in a psittacine always indicates a medical problem requiring veterinary attention.