

## Curb Panic And Anxiety

### Minimize the stress of a re-homed bird

*By Liz Wilson, CVT, CPBC*

There are so many birds and parrots that need good homes. Those that generously open their hearts to these pet birds should be complimented. They might, however, encounter some unexpected behavior problems that the bird learned in its earlier home.

Although your re-homed parrot is not a child, it might help you understand your bird's behavior if you visualize it as a foster child. Your new parrot does not understand why she is in a strange location or what happened to her previous owners. She is confused, and it is totally logical that she does not yet trust that she is safe in your environment. This can cause a bird to act frightened of its new owners or to exhibit fearful behavior. I know of an adopted Senegal that panicked whenever anyone walked near the cage.

I suggested several things to make this Senegal feel more comfortable in its new home. First, move your parrot's cage out of high-traffic areas and away from doors or other entryways. People shouldn't have to pass by the bird's cage to get to somewhere else in the house. For now, an ideal location would be in a corner on a wall opposite a doorway. If there is a window near the cage, make certain that her cage is only partially in front of it, allowing some solid wall behind her for security. This should curb her fearful behavior.

Give her a hiding place so she can hide from you as well as the outside world. A sheet draped over part of the cage will provide such a haven or even a large toy that allows her to hide behind it.

When you need to service the cage, approach slowly, talking quietly to your parrot so she doesn't think that you are sneaking up like a predator. Keep your head down a little and slightly averted. Don't make direct eye contact for more than a second or two. A two-eyed predator's stare can unnerve a prey animal like a parrot.

For reasons that we don't fully understand, it often seems that a parrot startles more around its territory, such as the cage, than when the bird is elsewhere.

Parrot behavior consultant Sally Blanchard's "chair exercise" is excellent for helping frightened birds become comfortable with humans in close proximity to their cages. Gradually move a chair closer to your bird's cage. Over several days, move the chair a few inches toward the cage, then walk away. Only move it enough so that she still appears relaxed. Eventually position the chair close to the open door of the cage. Sit down facing slightly away from her, so she sees your face from the side. Read aloud from a book or magazine in a calm and friendly voice. Show her the pretty pictures in BIRD TALK. Do this for five to 10 minutes every day.

As you are doing this, watch your bird's behavior with your peripheral vision. Is her body language beginning to relax, or is she becoming tenser? If she tenses and acts more afraid, slowly back off. If you look up at her, look away after a couple of seconds. When she starts to relax with you close by, bring a favorite food treat the next time you visit the cage.

Patience is crucial to your success with overcoming fearful behavior in your parrot. The more you allow her choices in her interactions with you, the more likely she will be to seek your company. Take your time, and let her move at her own speed; this will make all the difference. You have years to enjoy each other; there is no rush.