

Trick Of The Month: Shake Hands

Teach your pet bird this simple trick

By Tani Robar

Don't forget to give your bird lots of praise and rewards during your shake hands, trick training sessions. Courtesy John & Jill Hall, Pennsylvania

Our next trick, "shake hands" is going to be a lot of fun. My most memorable occasion turned out to be with dreamboat Mario Lopez, the emcee of "Pet Star." He introduced me and Casey, my black-headed caique, to the audience. Then he asked to shake hands with my dog. I hesitated just a minute and then said, "Of course Casey would love to shake hands with you, but you know she is a bird." We had to do the take all over again, but I have Casey on video shaking hands with Mario.

When teaching this trick, remember it is always wave with the left foot and shake hands with the right. Think of it like people that always shake with their right hand.

With the bird sitting comfortably on the training stand, extend your right hand across its body to the front of the right foot. This is just the opposite of teaching the "Wave" when you extended your left hand in front of his left leg. In essence, it is like asking for a Step up with your right hand. Your bird will undoubtedly try to use its left foot, because that is what you asked for with the wave.

Be persistent and your bird will finally offer its right foot. Let your bird place its right foot on your hand, but do not let him transfer any weight. Remove your hand the minute the bird touches it. At first your bird won't understand this, but if you give him lots of praise and rewards (P&R) for touching your hand, he will quickly catch on.

At this point, don't try to grab onto the foot or to keep the foot on your hand for any extended time. Get your bird comfortable with simply touching your hand. As this becomes easy, ask your bird to leave its foot on your hand for just a few seconds, but without transferring any weight. You can do this by withholding the P&R for a few seconds longer each time. Start making small up-and-down movements with your hand, as though you are shaking hands. If this scares your bird, go back a step until he is comfortable. Only when he accepts this movement should you try to touch the top of his foot with your right thumb.

If you have been practicing all the "socializing" behaviors, such as holding and playing with his feet, then he should not object to your thumb on top of his foot. Make it into a game by playing with his feet at other times.

Have your bird shake hands with someone he knows while in his own training area. Demonstrate to your friend the proper way to shake hands with your bird. After a few friends have been successful, take your bird to other places and have him shake hands with others he does not know until the process becomes easy for him. Have treats available for the other person to feed him. Both of you should provide lots of praise. Think of what pride you will feel when your bird lifts his right leg offering to shake hands upon meeting a new person. Wow! Don't forget lots and lots of P&R.

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