

Trick Of The Month: The Turn Around

Teach your pet bird this simple trick

By Tani Robar

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Teach your pet bird this fun and simple trick, the "Turn Around."

If your bird readily learned "The Wave" from last month's "Trick of the Month," then you're ready for the "Turn Around." Start with a couple of practice "Step-ups," and then review a few quick waves. Reward your bird and move on to the "Turn Around."

First, decide which way your bird naturally prefers to turn around. Place the bird on its training T-stand with its back to you. Which way does your bird turn to look at you as you walk away? This is the direction you want to teach your bird to perform the "Turn Around" with, because it's the bird's natural behavior. Many of my birds prefer to turn to the left, so we'll use that as the example here.

Hold the treat in your right hand in front of the bird's head. Slowly move the treat to the left of his head, and watch the bird follow to reach for it. The idea is to go all the way around until the bird is facing front again. If your bird stops halfway with its back facing you, stop here, too and immediately praise and reward (P&R) the bird with the small treat (a sliver of an almond, for example). Then try to coax him to finish turning around to receive more P&R.

When the bird makes complete turns quite readily, start holding your hand higher, so the treat is not directly in front of your bird's face. Also, switch hands to give out the reward, so the bird is receiving the treat from your left hand now. Once this is working, you'll remove the treat from your right hand completely, holding it only in your left. Give your bird the cue to turn around, but let him understand that now he will be receiving the reward from your left hand when the turn is completed. As this progresses, raise your right hand higher and higher until it becomes just a small circle with your pointed index finger. If you want a verbal cue, simply say, "Turn around."

There are many trick variations possible here. One of my birds does her "Turn Around" on skates as she goes from one end of the training table to the other. Another bird dances to music while performing her "Turn Arouns," first in one direction, then the other. I call them her pirouettes. Do not, however, try to teach this trick by circling your hand under the bird. It will limit the variations you are able to work on.

Stop the lesson when the bird has the idea. Don't bore your bird with endless repetitions. Some people claim parrots have short attention spans. They don't if you keep the lesson interesting. A lesson can be anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour and twice a day or twice a week — it is up to you. After the bird has mastered the first trick, move on to something else, but don't follow a lesson with playtime. Make the lesson itself be his special time with you.

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