

Trick Training Preparation

Teach your pet bird fun tricks

By Tani Robar

You have a wonderful, darling bird that does the cutest things. You would love to show your friends how smart he is. But when friends come over, your bird either acts like a statue – or worse, retreats to the furthest part of his cage and refuses to come out. What do you do? If you want to show off your bird's talents, this new online series is just for you.

Training companion parrots, teaching them tricks and having them interact with you is one of the most enjoyable things you can do with your bird. It is a great way to really bond with your bird. Parrots are extremely intelligent and have excellent memories. They seem to enjoy learning and working with you and receiving your full attention. Done with love, patience and kindness, most birds eagerly await their training sessions.

First Things First

Before you begin trick training, make sure your bird is completely tame and socialized. Your bird must be willing to come to you, sit on your hand and allow you to touch its body, feet and under the wings. It should also readily take food from your hand. In other words, there must be a certain degree of trust between you and your bird before you start trick training. If you are afraid your bird will bite you, or if your bird is afraid you might hurt it, no real learning is going to take place. Complete trust is key.

Find a quiet area that is free from distractions and, preferably, away from other birds and the bird's own cage to begin the training. The chosen area must only be used for training so the bird will understand that when it is at this location, it is time to work. Have everything in place on your training table before bringing in the bird, including the food rewards. (Dogs generally will learn for the joy of pleasing their masters, but birds must have an incentive. Most trainers find that food rewards work best. Discover what your bird's favorite food is. Safflower seeds, almonds, shelled raw sunflower seeds or banana chips work well. Reserve this treat for training sessions only.

I teach all tricks using the method popularly called "positive reinforcement." This is a training method in which you immediately reward any behavior you are trying to teach and ignore any wrong moves or bad behaviors. The bird must have some reason to repeat a behavior, and the reward is the reason. No punishment or force is ever used.

The first tricks we will cover in upcoming articles on BirdChannel.com do not involve props. These include the "Turn Around," the "Wave" and "Shake Hands." Other non-prop tricks include the "Kiss," shaking the head "Yes" or "No," rolling over, "playing dead" and the somersault. How about "Taking a Bow," or the "Big Eagle?" All these tricks can be taught without props. Prop tricks include putting a ball in a basket or rings on a peg; all simple props.

[Start with the First Trick >](#)

This new online series is written by Tani Robar and was first featured in the 2006 issues of BIRD TALK magazine. She is a professional animal trainer who spent years training performing animals and teaching others to train their animals. She has produced four videos/DVDs to help people visualize how to teach their parrots a variety of skills and tricks. She recently appeared three times on Animal Planet's "Pet Star" TV show and won the top place on one of the segments with Cassie, her black-headed caique.