

## Bird Behavior - "Normal" Bird Noise

**Find out how much bird noise is normal.**

*By Rebecca Sweat*

Vocalization is a normal part of life with a pet bird, including screaming.  
Courtesy Daniella Slanina, California

So how much bird noise is normal? To understand that, take a look at how birds live in their natural habitat. In the wild, most parrot species live in flocks. They squawk and scream as a means of communicating with each other.

Contact calls are one of the most common forms of vocalization. To a parrot, survival means staying with the flock. "When you're a flock animal and you're left behind and your flock disappears on you, you're open to predators and that's not good," said Cathy Johnson-Delaney, an avian veterinarian in Seattle, Washington. If one of the flock members gets separated, the "lost" bird will call out in an attempt to locate its flock. Other birds in the flock will call back, helping the lost bird to find its way back to the group.

"It is important for wild parrots to be heard from great distances — to alert flock members of predators, to signal food availability, inform others of roosting sites, to find a mate, to locate the flock, to let others know where they are, and sometimes they scream to just hear themselves," added Gregory Burkett, DVM, an avian veterinarian in Durham, North Carolina.

Parrots are especially vocal at sunrise and sunset. "This is the time that they call the flock together and see that everyone is present and accounted for," Burkett noted. They do make noise throughout the day, but much less.

When we bring parrots into our homes, we become the bird's flock. Our pet parrots will try to communicate with us, just as they would with their fellow birds in the wild. Sometimes pet owners perceive their birds' vocalizations as excessive or inappropriate, when they are actually normal bird behaviors.

"Usually dawn and dusk will get a parrot cranked, and a certain amount of exuberant noise during the day is also normal," said Gayle Soucek, a pet trade consultant in Illinois, and author of *The Parrot Breeder's Answer Book*.

Your pet bird might vocalize because it wants attention, it may be hungry or thirsty, it may be trying to locate its flock members, it might be attempting to mimic others in the flock, it may be practicing speech, it may be screaming just to hear itself, it may be startled or frightened by something, it may be breeding season and it is calling for a mate, it may be lonely, or it might be alerting the flock that it is time to wake up and go foraging, or time to roost for the night (i.e. calling the flock together).

You shouldn't be surprised if your parrot starts screeching at the crack of dawn; that's just its way of saying "Good morning! Where are you, other flock members?!" If you leave the room and your parrot starts screaming, it's only doing so because it wants to know where you're going. If your parrot's cage is next to a window, and it sees a hawk in your back yard, it's only natural that your parrot is going to send out an alarm cry. A bird that is hungry or wants a slice of your pizza will sound off, and most pets will vocalize to greet you when you first walk in the door. These kinds of squawks and screeches are to be expected.

There are, however, steps you can take to control "normal" vocalizations. If your parrot's early morning awakenings are too early for you, buy some room darkening blinds to artificially "delay" sunrise at your house. If your parrot is screaming because it sees your neighbor's cat through the window, move the cage to another part of the house where your parrot has a different view with no cats. If your parrot screams when you go to a different room, take it with you or set the bird in a position where it can see you at all times so it doesn't feel like its being left behind. Or, get a second bird so that you don't have a solitary psittacine that is only looking to you for companionship. Although, then there will be twice the chatter.