

## Birds Love To Get Wet

**Bathtime can be a fun experience for you and your bird.**

*By Connie Cho*

At the first sound of rain in the distance, does your bird spread its wings, welcoming the pending downpour, or does it run for the nearest hiding spot? Although it is not essential for a bird to bathe every day, a good soaking does promote healthy skin and feather conditions.

This Eclectus holds its wings out in the spray of the water.

Courtesy Debbie King, Minnesota

A shower perch is a great way to share bathtime with a pet bird.

Many owners have learned that when it comes to bathtime, each bird prefers its own method of bathing. Birds often let their owners know when and how they like it.

There is no “right” way to bathe a bird. The varying responses bathtime elicits depend on the bird’s own level of comfort. Whether a bird likes to take a dip in its water dish or loves a misting from a spray bottle, bathtime is a fun experience to share with your bird.

### Bring On The Rain

Showers not only get your bird nice and soaked, they are also a good way to bond with your bird. Many owners enjoy showering with their birds, because birds learn by observing flock members – including you.

Most owners utilize a shower perch sized to fit their bird. “It is important to choose a perch with the appropriate-sized diameter to secure the bird’s footing while showering,” said Angel Modica-Baty, secretary of the Buffalo Hookbill Association in New York. Shower perches should suction securely to the shower wall or door and away from the direct stream of water.

Other perches stand upright in the bottom of the tub to prevent falling. The bird catches the drops off of you, and the perch allows the bird to move in and out of the droplets. Avoid the use of human soaps and shampoos unless specifically recommend by an avian veterinarian. Soaps, shampoos, creams and perfumes can be harmful to birds.

The prospect of a shower gets some birds so excited they become quite vocal. Some birds spread their wings while happily singing, screeching and becoming louder than the shower itself. Diana Holloway of the Amazona Society said, “For an Amazon parrot, bathing is one big fiesta. They like to be drenched in the shower – wings spread, head bobbing, screaming with joy. The fun starts when the wings drape over their face to get the last drops.”

Florida resident Terri Ton’s Vosmaeri Eclectus, Isabel, relishes her shower experience. “Isabel turns all around to make sure she gets every last feather wet. She even lifts her wings to make sure the fine mist of water hits everywhere,” she said. “If I turn on the shower, she comes running across the floor to the bathroom and waits for me to say ‘Step up.’ If you say the word ‘shower,’ she yells out and goes into the bathroom.”

Being thrust into the shower might frighten some birds or reluctant bathers. Start off with a gentle mist of lukewarm water from a spray bottle instead. Merliee Hook, vice president of the Kansas-based club Parrot Education and Entertainment People, maintains a flock of Amazon parrots, parrotlets and cockatiels. She recommended owners get in on the act:

“While you are spritzing with a spray bottle, spread and flap your arms, sing, laugh, and in general act like an Amazon that is having a good time. Your bird may look at you like you’ve lost your mind, but it will more than likely decide that if you’re having that much fun, maybe he will give it a try as well.”

Never spray water directly at your bird. Point the nozzle above the bird and spray a fine mist that falls onto it.

### Bathtime Anytime

Bathing also helps control dander and improves skin conditions, especially on dusty African grey parrots, cockatiels and cockatoos. Many African grey parrot owners find that African grey parrots prefer to wade and dip into shallow water.

Joan Redondo of the American Cockatiel Society recommended “spraying cockatiels with tepid water from a plant sprayer

or taking them into shower to keep feathers sleek.” Julia Allen of the National Cockatiel Society said, “Birds actually feel invigorated when they’ve been sprayed or take a swim in their water bowls. The water tightens and shines their plumage.”

Lin Westgard of the Alaska Bird Club writes that in Alaska they “are challenged with no humidity for over eight months of the year and must bathe [their] birds more often.” Westgard’s sulphur-crested cockatoo “doesn’t like baths at all and would prefer to have wet lettuce or Swiss chard leaves hung from the top of his cage so he can get inside them and get wet that way.”

In the wild, birds often have to wait for rainfall in order to receive a bath, but pet birds will sometimes jump into the sink at the sound of running water. Cheryl Berlow of California said that her green-cheeked conure, Cookie, “has a certain shriek when I turn on the water in the kitchen. She dunks her head, runs up my arm, wipes her face off and does it again.”

As a director of the America Lory Society, Dick Schroeder has had plenty of experience with these enthusiastic bathers. “Most lorries that I’ve known love to bathe if provided with a large enough water dish, or even in the sink with shallow water. My aviary birds enjoy rubbing in the wet foliage to bathe.”

Other birds are motivated to bathe by less obvious methods. Russ Shade, executive board member of the Pionus Breeders Association, said, “We’ve found simply turning on a vacuum cleaner is generally all it takes to get them to react. They turn upside down and spread their wings to catch the expecting rainfall.” Apparently the thunder-like sounds of the vacuum because the birds expect rain.

Sue Mitchell, vice president of the Northwest Exotic Bird Society in Washington noted that “birds typically found in a more arid climate don’t participate in the bathing as willingly as those from a tropical climate. My Australian species have to be coaxed.”

Deb Wilson of the Peninsula Caged Bird Society of Virginia provides fresh water for her finches and doves. “They love to bathe in the water dishes, climbing in and opening their wings to dip.”

#### The Joy Of Preening

Bathing birds during warmer months allows them to dry off before getting chilled. During colder weather, give your bird plenty of time to dry by gently rubbing it dry with a towel. Some bird owners like to use a blow dryer on their birds. It is not generally recommended, however, because the extreme heat and possible nonstick polymer emissions from the blow dryer can be harmful to your bird.

Bathtime should be an entertaining experience for both you and your bird. Patience for overenthusiastic bathers as well as more hesitant ones may be necessary. Esther Scholz, first vice president of the Delco Bird Club in Pennsylvania, suggested owners “experiment with different ways of bathing their bird to see what works for them.”