

Quick and Easy Tips to Groom your Pet Bird

Learn how to towel your pet bird, trim toe nails and wing feathers.

By Elise Kaplan

Once your pet bird is used to be handled in a towel, you can easily groom it.

Parrot Towel Conditioning

Get your pet bird used to the towel. Regardless of whether you groom your parrot yourself or have a trusted groomer do the job, accustom your bird to being handled in a towel. It can help you groom your bird gently and safely, it reduces tension during regular vet visits and it can save your bird's life in an emergency.

Lay a solid-colored towel out on a bed, and let your bird play on it. Avoid towels in loud patterns or startling colors, which may frighten your bird. A velour-type towel is less likely to snag toenails than a terry loop. Get your parrot onto the towel by peak its curiosity — scatter a few toys on the towel. If your parrot is reluctant, start off slowly. Your parrot might feel better about the towel after your bird sees it near its cage for a day or two. Once your bird is comfortable standing on the towel, raise both ends, and gently encircle your parrot in it. Again, praise, enthusiasm and paying attention to your parrot's comfort level are key. Give your parrot its own towel to take with you to the vet or groomer as a soothing touch of home. Whenever you need to towel your bird for any reason, be calm and friendly as you approach it from the front. Don't try to fool it, or sneak up on it. Bring the towel up, over and around your bird. Gently encircle its head or neck in the towel, and make sure the bird's feet and body are supported. Give your bird lots of encouragement, and talk calmly to it. Do not constrict your bird's chest. It needs to be able to expand it in order to breathe.

Make Toenail Clipping Easy

When approaching grooming, the first step is to relax and make it fun. You are building on the time you spend with your bird, scratching and having fun. Let your bird get used to having you handle its toes as part of play. With a young bird, this will probably be quite easy; but even with an older bird, a little "High five" or "Shake hands," together with a gentle tap on the toes, will usually encourage it to raise its foot for you. Reward the behavior with lots of enthusiasm, and repeat the activity as part of your regular interaction. Leave the scissors, clipper or file where your bird can see it. When you are playing with your parrot, let it bite the handle. Snip a tiny bit off your fingernail. Explain what you are doing, and let your bird observe. Once you or your groomer is ready to groom your bird's nails, the whole process should seem much more routine. Provide a rough-textured grooming perch for your parrot so you won't have to clip toenails as frequently. Place the perch where your bird will naturally use it often, but not as the preferred perch.

Trimming Parrot's Wing Feathers

Familiarize yourself with the proper wing trim for your bird before trimming your bird's wing feathers yourself. Also recognize and treat blood feathers. Visit an experienced groomer, or have your vet show you proper wing feather- and nail-trimming techniques. Accustom your bird to allowing you to touch and lift its wing feathers. Some birds enjoy having the underside of their wings scratched and will lift a wing up so you can offer a scratch. If your bird is like this, hold scissors or clippers in your hand (without using them at first) when you scratch under its wing so your bird gets used to its presence. Whenever your bird spreads its wings, applaud enthusiastically and use a consistent phrase such as "Eagle boy" or "Big bird!" until your bird spread its wings on cue. Gently extend one of your parrot's wings while you are playing, but remain respectful of its comfort level.

Being groomed might never be your parrot's favorite activity but, in time, it might consider the act just a routine chore — one it trusts you to complete without unnecessary fuss or stress.