

Is Caging A Pet Bird Abusive?

Follow these tips to make a bird cage your pet bird's home.

By Liz Wilson, CVT, CPBC

A pet bird should consider its cage to be home, sanctuary and safety. This also appears to be the case with dogs that are properly crate trained. Instead of viewing their crate as imprisonment, they seek it out when they want time to themselves. Rather like having your own room.

Refusing to lock birds in cages can allow them too much freedom, and this can lead to serious troubles in our homes. As they become sexually mature, many pet birds take increasingly larger spaces as their own personal territory. This is a natural progression related to reproduction, and it can become seriously problematic if a bird starts to enforce which humans are and are not allowed in this territory.

From my experience, this level of “freedom” for a pet bird often ends up costing a psittacine its home. Some bird owners claim that they do not need to lock their parrot in its cage because their bird “never gets down” from the cage, but we should be cautious about predicting future behaviors in our pet birds. Psittacines are intelligent animals that continue to learn throughout their long life spans.

Make The Bird Cage A Bird Haven

Some pet birds behave as if cages are abusive because they have learned that a cage means only negative things like isolation. Owners need to change that perception from negative into positive. Using the basics of operant conditioning, offer special food treats once the bird goes compliantly into its cage. Once in, immediately remove the bird again, and allow more play time outside the cage before returning it to the cage again. Keep sprinkling positive rewards into the training, and a bird will learn that going into the cage is a rewarding experience.

An overly dependent pet bird also tends to dislike its cage, because being alone is not a happy thing to the psittacine. Incapable of being content unless it is physically attached to a human, the overly dependent bird is rather like a child with a broken television or video game — there’s nothing to do.

The overly dependent bird desperately needs to learn to amuse itself, as over-dependence in a companion psittacine is likely to lead to home-threatening behavior problems such as excessive screaming, aggression and/or feather destruction.