

BIRD TALK Editor's Note: When Birds Don't Flock Together

Laura Doering, Managing Editor

Just when I think I know my birds — how they will react to things, what gets them excited, etc. — they go and throw me a curve ball. Case in point, my recent pet sitting of a co-worker's cockatiel, Maisy. My own 'tiel, Gracie, is very social. He's always trying to make nice with my nanday conure, who doesn't give him the time of day. He also loves to woo the birdie in the mirror and cheerfully whistles spur-of-the-moment melodies into my ear. I was looking forward to putting our guest 'tiel's cage next to Gracie's to see how excited Gracie would be at the site of a real, live cockatiel.

Before I go on, I want to make it clear that I wasn't trying to "hook up" Gracie with Maisy, (Indeed, I wasn't putting them in the same cage with a nest box. Also, Gracie and Maisy are current on their medical checkups.) I just wanted to see if they could be friends. Surely, Gracie would whistle up a storm and try to impress Maisy with his head-banging skills ... he'd finally get to put all that song and dance practice to use. So there they were side-by-side — in perfect silence. And I'm pretty sure Maisy got Gracie's backside, the ultimate birdie diss. Maisy tried to be a gracious guest, uttering a few cheerful, "Nice to meet you" chirps, but they seemed to fall on deaf ears.

After a couple days, I put them out on the same play stand. Gracie immediately went to the high perch. Maisy, again, did her polite chirp, but stayed on the lower perch. I've had Maisy a week now. They try their best to act indifferent toward one another. The only thing Maisy and Gracie have done together is thrash about their cages when something scary appeared outside the window.

I'll take liberty here to anthropomorphize a bit. Perhaps Gracie is so enamored with Maisy, he feels intimidated by her ... afraid that she will find his whistle and dance purely routine juvenile male behavior. Perhaps he likes the challenge of getting someone to like him who doesn't (as in the case of the nanday), and Maisy just needs to take that cue and act a little more aloof. Perhaps Maisy just isn't his type. (Gracie's type must be an exact replica of himself, evident by his exuberance for his mirror reflection.)

Just goes to show — you might have two birds of the same feather but you can't predict that they will want to hang together; which is why we don't always advocate getting a bird for your bird.

— Laura Doering, Managing Editor