

## Hello Love! Bye-Bye Birdie?

**Don't let your new relationship destroy those you have already built with pet birds**

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The editor of BIRD TALK mentioned to me that she was seeing an increase in the number of people who were giving up their birds because of romantic relationships. As a lifelong and avid animal lover, this concept is almost inconceivable to me. However, in 25 years of working as an avian behavior consultant, it is something that I have seen many times. Throughout those years, and in my particular experiences, I have made some observations.

Courtesy Laura Ktistes

Don't let your new relationship destroy one you have already built with a pet bird.

Sometimes, giving up a parrot companion is absolutely the right thing to do. For example, it would be appropriate in cases when a person's physical health declines to the point that he or she can no longer care for one. Some people need to find homes for their birds because someone in the household has developed severe allergies. Giving up a bird is also a good idea when the bird was an impulse buy, and the new owner realizes that he or she is not good "parent" material. In those situations, it is best to find the bird a new home soon so that it experiences as little disruption and emotional trauma as possible.

There are some reasons for which finding a new home for a bird may be necessary. However, I find it particularly aggravating and saddening if indeed more people are deciding to get rid of their birds in order to appease a loved one – usually a spouse or significant other. Many times, people have called me, choking back tears, to tell me that their new romantic partners cannot get along with their birds and they must get rid of them to "save" the relationship.

In over 30 years' experience, I have seen very few of those relationships hold up over the long run. Often, when I see one of these clients several years later, either the relationship is over or the person has become a prisoner in his or her own home. This is an extremely important fact to ponder, and it forces us to look at the big picture to examine why this happens.

In most situations where the bird is given up to appease someone else, the individual who doesn't like the bird may not actually say that it has to go. The person making the request may be petulant and quiet – giving the silent treatment and saying that the bird is creating whatever problems that exist with that individual or the relationship. The person might say that the bird is "too noisy" or "too messy," or that the bird's behavior "ruined their day," etc. The bird becomes the focus of the person's problems, a fact he or she will never admit.

The real problem is that the person requesting the change simply wants to control everyone and everything, including the owner of the bird. Once the individual is able to get the other person to give up something so vital and so loved, that individual will continue to influence the removal of other loved beings and situations, and even the favorite hobbies or pastimes enjoyed by the person they supposedly love.

But, despite how much the person tries to comply to the wishes of the manipulator, the proverbial carrot is always just out of reach. Once the manipulator accomplishes what he or she wants, that person will think of still another goal for the other person to achieve. It will always take "just one more thing: to make life and the relationship "perfect." The manipulator will gradually undermine all that the former bird person loves, until nothing of that person's individuality remains, especially self-esteem.

A very interesting aspect of this situation is that, contrary to expectations, the people who get consumed by such controllers are usually extremely intelligent. Many have advanced degrees. It is as if years of studying have lessened their ability to listen to their own gut feelings. Instead, these people believe what they are being told by the person they love and continue to reach for the nonexistent carrot – sometimes for years.

I have also found that the very people who complain about the bird's behavior often tease the bird when the owner is not around. Basically, that person is actually responsible for the bird's behavior that he or she complains about!

In other cases, the owner will want to work with altering the bird's behavior and will ask (forgetting that he or she is an

adult and should not have to ask anyone at all) for an opportunity to do so. The other person might accept this proposal but usually will not be willing to work with the behavior. In such cases, it is impossible to create a consistent training environment. The bird will not get any better and the person who does not like the bird might then berate the bird owner, saying, "I told you it would be this way." Others might give the silent treatment to the bird person for having "wasted" money. Either way, the intent is to belittle and control the other person by making the loved one get rid of something they love and value.