

Learn To Negotiate

By Laura Doering

There's nothing like a cockatiel's sunrise whistle serenade to get you up and moving in the morning; at least, that's my sunny disposition after a good night's sleep. After a sleepless night, it can be as intrusive as a neighbor's car alarm going off.

I don't have the heart to take away Gracie's mirror, which sits on the cage bottom so he can prance back and forth in front of it. But when I need a little more shut eye, I lay the mirror flat and cover it with crumbles of millet, or I break apart his pellets into even smaller bits, which he appears to lick up (yes, lick up). His morning appetite is as voracious as his self-admiration, so we're both happy with the results.

My conure is as patient as can be, until he hears my footsteps hit the floor; then there's a hearty nanday screech in case I forgot that he's been awaiting my arrival. He'll allow me sleep-in time as long as I make a beeline to him to deliver the head scratches. What I have here are two birds and two approaches to avoiding the same unwanted behavior — an early wake-up call. With the 'tiel, it's a bit of tasty bartering (distraction); with the conure, it's the knowledge that he will be first in line for my attention (conditioning).

When it comes to bird behavior we'd rather avoid, don't forget that our birds are more open to negotiation than we give them credit for. Find out what works for your flock ... and thank them for the compromises they make for your benefit.

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