

No More Bitey Birds!

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By Susan Chamberlain

Biting is often a result of abuse, fear, lack of sleep, noise and confusion in the environment, improper handling, or the failure of the owner to read the bird's body language. Some parrots' alternately enlarge and retract their eye pupils just prior to biting. This is called "flashing" or "pinning." Others flare their tails, raise the feathers on the neck or spread their wings as if to frighten an enemy.

Has your bird ever bitten you when you put your hand inside its cage? This is territorial biting. Your bird is programmed by nature to protect its cage and belongings from invaders. Avoid territorial bites by removing your bird from its cage before cleaning and replenishing food. Refrain from making eye contact with your pet at this time, as it may be perceived as a sign of aggression, causing your bird to act even more defensively. Teach your pet to step onto a proffered stick when it wants to come out of the cage. Raise the far end of the stick slightly, and the bird will seek the higher end, safely out of biting range of your hand.

Has your bird ever bitten you at the approach of another human? This is displacement biting and even occurs among birds themselves. A bird, trying to protect its mate, may first nip at the mate, then attempt to drive the intruders away. Never permit a bird prone to biting to sit on your shoulder. Don't encourage biting by teasing your bird or jabbing fingers through cage bars. The Guide to Companion Parrot Behavior by Mattie Sue Athan will give you more insight into biting and other avian behavior issues.