

Speak Bird In No Time

Not sure what your bird is telling you? Pick up on your bird's subtle body language cues with this guide

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Pay attention to your bird's body language to find out what it telling you. Courtesy Diane Squires, Pennsylvania

Interested Bird

Look for these cues before handling your bird: A bird that wants to play or be picked up, usually looks directly at you. It might stretch out its neck or wings to indicate that it wants to go somewhere, perhaps with you. Other birds pace back and forth, hop up and down or emit a particular noise or call when they're interested in something.

Our pet birds' eyes are another gateway into what they're thinking. A bird often dilates or pins its eyes when excited, scared or just curious about something. Some species more than others have particularly expressive eyes. These include African greys, macaws, conures, Amazon parrots and Poicephalus bird species.

Sleepy or Relaxed Bird

Birds spend a good part of the day — the afternoon especially — napping or just relaxing. When relaxing with you or in its cage, your bird might balance on one foot. This is a natural position for a bird. In fact, a bird unable to balance on one foot might indicate illness.

Just like humans, birds sometimes need to stretch. They'll open up their wings and hold them above their heads or behind their backs. They also fan out their tail feathers and stretch out their legs from time to time.

When really sleeping, your bird will tuck its head behind its wing, lift a foot, close its eyes and drift off to dreamland (well, we don't know that birds actually dream). Because they're prey animals, however, birds sleep lightly and the slightest noise, movement or flash of light could startle them awake. To ensure your bird a good night's sleep, position its cage or sleep cage in an area where it will be undisturbed for 10 to 12 hours.

Fearful or Disinterested Bird

A bird that does not want you to touch it might lean away from you or flatten its crest. Depending on the species, it might also hiss or growl at you. It might also give you a warning nip. Leave this bird alone, and return when it's more interested in interacting.

A bird that hops, flies or otherwise scampers away from the situation might be in panic mode. Allow your bird to calm down before you approach it again. It's also wise to remove any object that might have caused the reaction.

Aggressive or Territorial Bird

If your bird doesn't want to be touched, talked to or moved, it will let you know — in one way or another. It's up to you to look for these body language tip offs to avoid a bite or other confrontation.

An aggressive bird might fan its tail, pin its eyes or puff up its feathers to appear bigger. Unfortunately, this also describes an excited bird, so you'll need to watch your particular bird for patterns. Beak snapping or lunging also indicates an aggressive attitude.

Before a bite, a bird often strengthens its grip on its perch, pins its eyes and leans forward, beak open. At this point, you should back away. Allowing a bird to bite you, reinforces the behavior. So does reacting to it by screaming or any other physical reaction.