

Adopting A Pet Bird

Thinking of adopting a pet bird? Follow these tips to pet bird adoption.

By Bonnie Kenk

Courtesy Cindy Wilson

There are many pet birds in need of permanent homes.

Not all bird-person unions are "happily ever after" tales. Some people simply didn't know what they were getting into when they brought a pet bird home (birds, after all, are called exotic for a reason) And, because parrots are among the longest-lived pets, a dramatic life change can make caring for a bird impossible. The result? Birds in need of adoption.

The transition to a new home can be easy for some pet birds. For others, the change can cause growing pains for both pet bird and owner. Here are some tips to help you navigate the sometimes bumpy road to opening your home to a parrot in need:

Not A Fix All

Adopting a baby parrot from a reputable breeder or bird store is no guarantee that behavior problems will not occur. If you're an experienced pet bird owner, you may already know how to deal with problems and stop them before they become a habit.

If you're not experienced, you may be surprised and unprepared when your once cute, loving baby bird reaches sexual maturity and you now need to deal with raging hormones. Unfortunately, sexual maturity — which can vary from species to species — is the time when most parrots lose their homes.

Get To Know The Real Pet Bird

Some parrots in need of re-homing — but certainly not all — come with "baggage." If a pet bird is given to a reputable parrot rescue organization, that pet bird's behavior problems will be worked on by trained volunteers.

By adopting an older bird from a reputable parrot rescue organization, you will be apprised of that pet bird's specific issues. You will also be taught methods that work in correcting those issues as well as any new problems you may come across. The advantage is that not only will you be helping an older pet bird in need of a new home but, as a bonus, you will receive an education in that specific parrot's personality as well.

Questions To Ask

Reputable parrot rescue organizations want to make certain that the new home is going to be the very last home the pet bird needs. Therefore, they will give you as much history as possible on the bird you are considering.

If you're adopting the bird directly from the current owners, prompt them to tell you as much as you can. The following questions will help you obtain pertinent information: Why is the bird being re-homed? What type of behavior problems does the bird have, and what has been successful in correcting them? What is the bird's basic diet (i.e. seed vs. pellets)? What are its favorite foods? Its least-liked foods? How is the bird bathed; does it enjoy bathing? Is the bird covered at night? If the bird talks, what does it say? Does it say anything unusual? Any obnoxious vocalizations? Who is the bird's avian veterinarian? When was the bird's last vet visit? How does the bird enter and exit the cage (i.e. on a hand, on a stick, on its own)? What, if anything, frightens the bird? Or what, if anything, causes it to act aggressive?

Choose the Right Pet Bird for You & Your Situation

If you have a very busy household with lots of noise and commotion, you probably don't want to adopt a timid or high-strung pet bird. If you don't have a tolerance for a lot of noise, you probably don't want to adopt a parrot that has the potential to damage eardrums. If you are away a lot, you probably don't want to adopt a pet bird that has a potential for separation anxiety.

Whichever pet bird you do decide on, if you adopt from a reputable parrot rescue organization, they will help guide you in your decision once they become familiar with you and your lifestyle. Most parrots are in rescue programs for great lengths of time, so the volunteers in the organization get to know the birds very well. These volunteers know the parrots' likes and

dislikes and their little quirks, and will be very able to help you choose the right bird.

Where Do I Find A Pet Bird?

Most people locate pet birds in need of re-homing through a web search for organizations that provide adoption services for parrots in their area. A lot of bird clubs also provide this service.

If there is no bird rescue organization or bird club in your area, consult the listings of birds for sale in your local newspaper. Use the questions listed above to make sure that the bird you are adopting is the right bird for you.

You don't need to be a bird's first owner to have a fulfilling relationship. Parrots are surprisingly adaptable, resilient and, in many cases, just waiting for the right person to come into their lives. With a little foresight, research and dedication, you can be that person to a bird in need.

Tips For Bonding

Take steps to build a bond between you and your new pet bird:

- 1) Use the "honeymoon" period to your advantage to switch your new pet bird to a good diet and to correct any behavioral problems. If you adopt a bird directly from the previous owner, the bird may not be on the best diet. After making sure the bird is healthy, immediately start the process of switching it to a healthy diet, although make certain it is still eating enough.
- 2) If the bird has a behavior problem, start working with the bird the first day it enters your home. A parrot behavior consultant may be of help to you. Visit the parrot behavior division of the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (www.iaabc.com).
- 3) Always go at the bird's pace. Do not do anything to jeopardize the trust you're trying to build with your new pet bird by expecting it to accept you immediately. Some of these birds have come from homes where people may not have taken the best care of them. They may be leery of new people. Take your time and let the bird learn that it can trust you.