

Top 3 Funny, Clowning-Around Pet Birds

Meet three wild-and-crazy guys: the caique, the cockatoo and the conure.

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By Cioli & Hunnicutt/Bowtie Studio/Courtesy Samantha Jenny
Caiques, like this black-headed caique, are very playful birds.

By Cioli & Hunnicutt/Bowtie Studio/Courtesy Omar's Exotic Birds
Conures, like this young sun conure, can be very vocal.

By Cioli & Hunnicutt/Bowtie Studio/Courtesy Linda Buesching
Cockatoos, like this bare-eyed cockatoo, are extremely active and playful.

Funny Caiques

These fun and colorful acrobatic clowns of the parrot world want nothing more than to be the center of attention. Caique parrots are extremely sociable, can talk and love to play. Besides their bright, startling colors, caiques' natural fearless antics make them funny clowns. Also, caiques have a unique characteristic: these parrots like to hop around like rabbits.

Trick trainer Tani Robar of Washington has trained her black-headed caique, Cassie, to perform more than 150 tricks. Robar uses a system of positive reinforcement to train her birds and has created four bird training videos to help owners teach their birds tricks.

Caique Cassie appears in Robar's instructional videos and has performed three times on Animal Planet's pet talent show Pet Star. Her award-winning bird tricks include climbing ropes, doing flips, taking bows, shaking hands and riding a skateboard.

Robar has many pet birds at home, so Cassie, the smallest parrot, is in constant competition with the larger parrots. This caique asserts herself by standing straight up and fluffing her feathers. She's a perfect clown because her clever antics and tricks make her so lovable.

Faye Bircheat, a BIRD TALK reader from Alabama, has two caiques: Lily, a white-bellied caique, and BooBoo, a black-headed caique. Bircheat says that the caiques' metabolism won't quit. They like to play with just about anything, anytime. "Both of mine are constantly on the go, climbing, hopping, wrestling, hanging upside down, playing with their toys, playing with each other, playing with me. They're natural-born entertainers, and they have an energy level you have to see to believe. They don't even need an audience, because they'll play together even when no one's watching." She said if you're planning to own a caique buy lots and lots of toys. "The biggest expense a caique owner faces is the toy investment, but it's also one of the keys to keeping them happy."

Virginia residents Robert Stout and his wife Sarah have a caique named Vegas.

Vegas loves to be petted after a shower or bath. "After Vegas showers, I'll lay a towel over my shoulder, place Vegas on it, and he will rub every feather on his entire body on the towel, cleaning himself and drying himself off. He grasps his feet on the towel and moves his entire body without moving his feet. It's hilarious to watch, but he loves it!"

Caique Vegas is a snuggler as well as a funny clown. "At night when things calm down, he likes to be on our shoulder and lay against our necks. It's not uncommon for him to lay upside-down on the bottom of his cage and play and juggle his foot toys." Vegas laughs along with the Stouts, too, when they tickle his belly. Stout said Vegas even wants to snuggle with their two cats, but he keeps an eye out to make sure he doesn't.

Active Conures

Aside from conures' loud vocalizations, these playful and colorful parrot clowns enjoy hanging upside down and getting lots of attention. Like the caique, conures have a limited vocabulary but can learn to talk, and they have great intonation when

whistling. Mostly these friendly and fun-loving South American parrots love to play and are very inquisitive and energetic.

Cheryl Burns, president of the International Conure Association, theorized that conures, the genus *Aratinga* specifically, are sometimes referred to as parrot clowns because of their looks and behaviors. "Many of the *Aratingas* have what appears to be a huge grin on their face and big eyes that express a bit of a tease while they play." Conures tend to be extremely active and playful, and each individual parrot has its own distinct personality.

Conures absolutely adore toys. Burns selected her first pet because she saw him hanging upside-down by one foot from a toy, twirling around with a look of glee in his eye. Pet conure owners soon learn which bird toys are favorites and enjoy providing new things for their pets to explore because conures so enjoy their toys. "These parrots can provide the most excellent companionship, and they are extremely flexible if their situations change. However, their owners should be dedicated to providing a good environment, healthy foods and a trusting relationship," related Burns. "Conures are good at entertaining themselves, but they enjoy interaction with their human families as well. I have conure breeder pairs who still exhibit pet quality and enjoy interacting with me."

Burns said her conures are loud when first waking up or welcoming her home from being away. Once they settle down and get a little attention, they are quiet as they busily play on their cages. "I have been in the aviary with more than 18 conures, and it is completely quiet once the birds have greeted me after first entering the building. Some species, such as sun conures, jenday conures and dusky-headed conures, will sound the alert when something or someone new comes into the area, and I find this to be like feathered watch dogs."

Barry Gale-Williamson of Washington, D.C., didn't hesitate when asked which is the most clown-like of all the birds. "Of course without a doubt, conures are at the top of the list! They are innate clowns, just ask any conure owner." He says his blue-crowned conure, Baybee, is the most affectionate pet bird he's seen and may be the most entertaining. "Conures love to perform and — need I say it? — are great acrobats."

Michigan reader Margaret Madison had a few words to say about her beloved sun conure, Whammy and maroon-bellied conure Cozzy. While Whammy likes to snuggle, Cozzy prefers acrobatics and climbing on just about everything. Madison knows the explanation for things that go bump in the night. "If I hear a 'thump' or a 'bang' when I'm not watching, I can bet that it is Cozzy tossing a toy or falling from practicing a new stunt." Cozzy has a very affectionate side. This maroon-bellied conure blows kisses and says, "I'm your sweet man" and "My sweetheart." "He does love attention," she said, "and he is so very smart."

Playful Cockatoos

Cockatoos love to cuddle and sing, plus these parrots' endearingly clownish antics and pratfalls are renowned. Katy McElroy, Ohio cockatoo breeder, described her bare-eyed cockatoo, Nicky, that loves potato chips. "He's not allowed to have any because they're salty and greasy. If anybody is careless enough to leave a bag of chips open, he will quietly sneak around — under and around furniture — until he is close enough. Then with a flying/running leap he'll dive headlong into the bag and flip over on his back. When you pull him out of the bag, he has as many chips as he can hold in his feet and beak — and he obviously figures that those are his to keep." One of McElroy's other bare-eyed cockatoos waits until she spots another cockatoo napping in her cage. She quietly climbs to the top of the cage, lies on her belly with both legs hanging through the bars and grabs the sleeping bird's crest in her feet — giving it a good yank. Then she flies off laughing.

Rae Latella of Florida has a 25-year-old umbrella cockatoo named Precious. Precious loves to sing and play see-saw. This parrot's favorite song is "Old McDonald." When outside (under supervision), he talks to all the birds, squirrels, and even the neighbor's dog, which he has learned to mimic. He also loves to take showers. Latella said Precious will ask for a shower and keeps saying "shower" until he's done. He also plays with musical baby toys. His vocabulary includes "Hello," "Bye-bye," "Thank you" and "What was that?" He's also fond of looking at and playing with mirrors.

Ohio reader Mary Jane Mesojedec has a 2-year-old medium sulphur-crested cockatoo named Lonnie Bird. She said that Lonnie Bird is absolutely crazy. "We have several bird playgym around the house. He figured out how to get off nearly all of them and go either looking for us or getting into some kind of mischief." Her home was up for sale and during an open house, the three parrots were all on playgym in the kitchen. The couple went upstairs to talk to some potential buyers and — low and behold — Lonnie Bird came upstairs looking for them and saying his name "Lonnie Bird, Lonnie Bird."

"He loves to get up on my arm and 'dance,' bobbing his head side to side and up and down," said Mesojedec. "He likes to hang upside down and is always asking 'What-cha-doin?'"