

Perfect Poicephalus Parrots

See why bird owners find these friendly African parrots to be “just right”

By Becca Manning

Poicephalus parrots, like this Senegal, enjoy a variety of games and bird toys. Courtesy Lisa Darcy, New Jersey

What's In A Name

People love to name their pets, whether it's after another family member, a favorite celebrity or something completely unique. Parrots can be particularly fun to name — they may even choose their own handles.

Eva Dochstader of Florida, said the way her 9-year-old un-Cape parrot got his name was not exactly how she'd planned. Because he was an African parrot, Dochstader christened him “Zaire” and began greeting her pet every morning by saying, “Good morning, Zaire,” to which the bird would respond, “Good morning.” When Zaire was about 18 months old, however, he began answering the usual morning “Hello” with a surprising, “Good morning, Albert.” “We were stunned at first as we tried to think who we knew as Albert,” Dochstader said. Unable to figure out whom this “Albert” was, she and her husband finally decided it must be the bird himself, and “Zaire” became Albert.

Other parrots choose their own names through their actions. Michelle Pinegar of Kansas, decided to name her brown-headed parrot “Ariel Duckbutt” because of the way the bird perches with her tail in the air like a duck. And Beth Bottom of Virginia, said her 2-year-old Senegal parrot's name also sums up his antics. Sam's name is an acronym for Such A Monkey. “His favorite pastime next to singing and dancing with me is to hang upside down from his playgym and swing like a monkey,” said Bottom, who taught Sam to make monkey sounds to go with his behavior.

Sometimes, deciding who gets to pick a pet's name is difficult when shared owners have different ideas. Jeanne Juhos and her husband, both of Ohio, came up with a solution when they adopted their friendly Senegal parrot: “My husband would name him if he were a male, and I would name him if he were a female,” Juhos said. The proud new parents had their bird sexed and discovered he was a boy. Juhos' husband chose the name “Fritzi,” and she had to save her choice for a future pet.

Birds Of Few Words?

With their moderate size and easygoing natures, Poicephalus parrots make good apartment birds. Owners report they are not as loud or talkative as many larger parrots and live well in smaller spaces. Jane Rockley lives with her Meyer's parrot, Rachel, in a small apartment in California, and said laidback Rachel is usually a quiet, happy bird that “just makes cute mumbling sounds.” Despite a few shrieks now and then, and the “every-10-second-loud-peeping” that Rachel sometimes does to tell her owner when she wants something, Rockley said the two get along well in their little home.

Retired kindergarten teacher Sharon White of Utah takes her Meyer's parrot, Charlie, to her old school when she volunteers there. Charlie, who entertained the students when White was teaching, still likes to chirp and sing along with the classes when the two go to visit. “It makes them sing better, and they are on their best behavior when we come,” White said. At home, Charlie greets White and her husband with a happy tweet, and while he has not picked up on any talking, he does like to wolf whistle.

Travis LeRoy of Colorado shares a sense of humor with his red-bellied parrot, Frasier. “If I laugh at something on TV, he starts to laugh as well,” LeRoy said. Frasier also is vocal when it comes to getting his human's attention. “When he wants out of his cage, he will call me by name,” LeRoy said. “If that does not work, he will meow like a cat.”

While many Poicephalus owners said their birds don't talk a lot, others have somewhat chattier feathered friends. Beau, a nearly 2-year-old red belly from Texas, asks his human, Gloria Mata Pennington, “Are you ready?” when he wants to be let out of his cage. Since his first words at 4 months (repeating “Hi, Baby” after his owner one morning), Beau has developed a good-sized vocabulary, telling her, “Want a bite” when they sit down to breakfast and responding, “Thank you,” when she shares toast — his favorite. Beau also is a very affectionate parrot. “He will say ‘Gimme a kiss’ and then put his beak gently on my lips and make a smacking sound,” Pennington said.

Poicephalus Personality

A playful parrot, Poicephalus enjoy a variety of toys and games. Pinegar said Ariel loves to chase a toy ball with a bell inside it. “Bells drive her totally insane,” she said. Ariel also enjoys a game of face-to-face, hanging upside down on her owner's bangs while she watches (or tries to watch) TV. Ariel swoops down and pulls at her friend's eyebrows or lightly

nips her nose or ears. "She lunges down and just attacks one facial feature, then disappears with lightening speed to plan the next attack," Pinegar said. The game, which she has dubbed "Birdie Blitzkrieg," usually ends with her laughing.

A very active acrobat, Senegal Kiwi entertains Lindsay Thomas of California with his funny antics. "Once or twice a day he gets a spurt of energy and plays rough with his toys," Thomas said. "He does complete somersaults on his perches and attacks his toys." Though she has only had him for a few months, Thomas said she has grown to love Kiwi's playful personality, and admits to spoiling him into a "Mama's boy." "He loves to play and is very interactive," she said. "He doesn't just sit in his cage all day and look pretty."

Poicephalus parrots are best described as having "personality plus," many owners said. Take for example, red belly Jessie, who entertains his owner, Terri Pakula of New York, with his tricks. "He loves his toys, especially a steering wheel sound toy," Pakula said. "He gets one of the buttons stuck on purpose so I have to come over to stop the sound — then he chuckles in glee and runs back to do it again!" Jessie also does about 10 other tricks, including putting coins into a piggy bank and pulling a bucket up on a string.

Karen Jeffery of New Mexico calls her Senegal "a pocket-sized barrel of fun" that is "eager to please." "Norman loves to shred paper and shreds it into confetti as a source of entertainment," Jeffery said. "Forget about the toys I buy; he would rather play with the packaging." And Ginny and Steve Daut of Illinois said their Senegal Trina is a little "diva" that finds fun in just about anything. "She likes to hop on the floor and try to run off with a sock or put a hole in my underwear," Daut said. "One time she even jumped on the back of my mom's dog and tried to ride him like a pony!"