

Conure Reader's Stories: Chapter Three

Bird owners share thier conure story

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Cinnamon
Courtesy Erik Lares, California

About a year ago, my family got a green-cheeked conure from a pet store, and he has not calmed down since that day. Every day, now matter how tired he is, he will always play, always putting his all in shredding his toys. But on one specific day, he decided to go for a roll. My brother was sitting on the couch, playing with the Cinnamon, or Munchkin, depending on who's addressing him, and Cinnamon was having a great time nibbling at my brother's fingers and wrestling with his hand. Before we know it, there is this delighted squawking, and this little green thing rolling down my brother's chest. Come to find out, he decided to go for a roll, and he has not done so afterward, he just falls off his cage.

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Baby
Courtesy Sally Bock, New York

My beautiful sun conure, Baby, came to live with us when he was 3-1/2 months old.

He was already happy to sit on his human friends' hands and socialize. He will be 5 years old on July 27th. He is totally bonded to me (his primary care-giver), but not so happy to see other human rivals around. My husband and Baby had a very good relationship up until the time hubby decided to change Baby's cage water and was rewarded with a hard bite on his hand. I guess he was telling him that I'm the only one allowed to touch his cage. Unfortunately, my husband is gun-shy now and won't hold Baby anymore. They do still share orange juice in the morning and Baby is very calm and gentle while he drinks the offered juice from my husband's glass. However, I think Baby is feeling very powerful and, if my husband walks too close when Baby is on my shoulder, Baby makes a half-hearted lunge in his direction.

When Baby first came to live with us, my veterinarian told me that since these birds are highly intelligent animals, I should look him in the eye and talk to him. I have been doing that and I can even get Baby to stop screeching to come out of his cage when I explain that I'm going to work and I'll be back later. He quietly watches me leave the house and jumps down to eat his food and play with his toys. He'll even climb into his cage by himself when he knows I'm getting ready to leave or if he's on the top of his cage and I ask him to go inside, he will comply sweetly. I always tell him what a good boy he is. He's not too verbal, but he understands the words I use. When I pick up the phone while I'm holding him, he will often say, "Hello" proving that he knows just when it's applicable.

I try to explain to him when he is going to the animal hospital to be boarded while we are on a trip, and I'm sure he knows what's happening. An article I read advised me to either hold up my fingers or show him a calendar to explain how many days I'd be away. People look at me like I belong in a cage when I tell them that story. I have a special cage that I use when we board Baby. The other day, Baby saw this cage on the dining room table and although he usually jumps out of his cage as soon as the door is opened, he refused to come out. I kept talking to him and he finally jumped onto my hand and exited his refuge.

A recent article in BIRD TALK magazine gave me great information about the quantities to feed parrots and made me realize that I was giving Baby too much food and adding treats too frequently. His main diet consists of pellets and nutra-berries, and I do try to add fruits and vegetables. He has definite favorites and especially loves to be hand-fed by me. I know that Baby is a very spoiled little guy, but we enjoy each other's company.

We have definite play times on my lap and on his play-gym, and he lets me know when he's restless and ready to go back to his cage. Before that, he loves to snuggle inside my shirt. When I ask him if he's ready to go to sleep, he answers me with a little squawk and a flap of his wings and then goes inside his cage eagerly.

Baby takes up a great deal of my time and energy, but he is so worth it and, yes, I'm one of the crazies who has a wallet full of my bird's pictures always with me and ready to bore anyone in sight. He may be Bird Channel's featured species for July, but with all his idiosyncrasies, he's still my featured guy for every month.

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Tiki
Courtesy Christine Gordon, Ontario, Canada

I am the happy owner of my young green-cheeked conure, Tiki! I have owned a lot of animals over the years and, by far, Tiki has been the most outstanding. Her personality is one I never expected – so fun, curious, excited and talented! When I watch TV, she has me carried away in moments. I always end up watching her swing from toy to toy, and do all the humorous things she does in and outside of her cage! Tiki is very attached to me. Whenever I leave the house, she screams making me come back for her. When I walk in the door, she's the first one to greet me at my feet. Tiki loves sharing my breakfast in the morning, and every glass of juice I drink, she's climbing up the side and dipping her head in. Tiki loves joining me in the shower where she sings and dances on my shoulder. It's so funny because there is one thing my Tiki cannot stand one bit –the sight or movement of human toes! She will attack at any chance she gets if she sees them. This is a terrible habit she has, but hey, we all have habits and pet peeves! I love having Tiki in my life because of all these things! She would be thrilled to be July's calendar bird!

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Shrek
Courtesy Yvonne Ely, North Carolina

I spotted Shrek at a bird show in Morganton, North Carolina. The lady who was selling him said he was a breeder but had been hand-fed, I was looking for a tamed one but kept going back and looking at him. It was like he was calling me! Finally I said I would take him. When I walked in the door and my husband saw him and groaned, I told him we needed a name for him. He named him Shrek because he thought he was an "ugly, little, green thing." I didn't agree! It took about a month to get him to Step up, and he started immediately cuddling. He loves to sit on my shoulder and lean into my neck. In the short time I have had him he has learned to say: "Hey baby," "Night-night," "What cha doing," kissy sounds and "Love you." He is so funny just to watch running around his cage and hanging upside down – he is just a bundle of energy! The funniest thing though is to watch him when anyone walks in the kitchen. He is a bottomless pit when it comes to food and if you are eating it, he has to have some, too! Including Dad's toast and honey every morning for breakfast! It's so cute to walk in the door and hear kissing sounds and a loud, "Hey Baby!"

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Miss Pookie Parrot
Courtesy Pookie's Mom, Massachusetts

Miss Pookie Parrot is a pineapple green-cheeked conure, the first parrot I've ever known. What began as curiosity turned into this scientist's all-out-search for "The Best of All Possible Parrots." Hundreds of conversations, emails and investigative trips later, I felt discouraged and overwhelmed. Yet something told me to keep on.

The chance to adopt Pookie came on a rainy Friday night. I felt the unmistakable certainty that anyone who looks back on the golden opportunities they said "Yes" to in this life remembers forever, "Do this now."

Weeks later, on a cold Monday night, 500 miles from here, Pookie's Pak-O-Bird was secured beside towels, pillows and enough food and toys for 10 parrots in the back seat of the Jeep. At the next rest area, I nervously opened her carrier for the first time. Gently, but surely, Pookie made her way up my arm, looked at me for quite awhile, then nestled under my hair, where she slept.

When she awakened, Pookie climbed back to my shoulder, waited for me to glance her way – then said her word for me, with a sort of a question mark afterward. I smiled, and she pressed against my cheek, and said the word again, with certainty. I can't say when I've felt more accepted or more appreciated.

Who knew the human heart could be so warmed by one ratchety syllable, the grip of four tiny pink toes or the sight of dozens of book pages with jagged little triangles bitten from them? All the while, I'd searched for "The Best of All Possible Parrots" to bring into my world. Then Pookie found me, and brought me into hers.

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Martini
Courtesy Jo Ann Moor, West Virginia

My sun conure, Martini, is 3 1/2 years old and a big part of our family. Although he can be very loud at times, he is quite fun. He loves to play "Boop," which is where I touch my nose with my finger and say "Boop." Then I say "Boop" again and put out my finger in front of his beak. When I say "Boop" again, he taps his beak to my finger. We go back and forth doing this, and he thinks it's a lot of fun! He loves NutriBerries, pizza crust, vanilla ice cream and cheesecake. He also loves to be cuddled and get a "birdie massage." We love him very much!

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Zuni
Courtesy Lynda Travers, Washington

Conures are the terriers of the bird world, being so rambunctious, feisty and yappy! The reason people love terriers so much also applies to conures: They are loving, lively, forgiving and packed with personality-plus. My conure, Zuni, fits the description to a "T." She turned 4 in May 2007 and has been with me since she was about 7 months old. Her yapping can be exhausting! Seriously, sometimes I would rather hear earth-shaking squawking from an umbrella cockatoo. While the volume is loud, the lower-pitched notes don't pierce the timpanic membranes as painfully as a conure's, whose high-pitched shrieking can be absolutely earsplitting and maddening.

In spite of its negative impact, Zuni's screeching has saved a life. As I typed a note at the computer, Zuni started squawking up a storm. Before I could finish, I went to her cage to see what Miss Drama Queen wanted. I don't usually do that, but she was so persistent. It was then I saw our budgie, Indy, rolling around in the current of the aquarium filter at the bottom of a 30-gallon freshwater tank! I flung off the lid and rescued him and administered first aid. Miraculously, Indy was fine and remains so to this day. Anyway, Zuni's voice saved his life. She was giving a distress call over and over, until it finally registered in my head that it was not her usual daytime, playtime vocalization.

My conure also warns me in full-jungle "Tarzan" yell whenever any long object – like a big "boa constrictor" broom stick – is near us (it's hard to plug your ears and sweep at the same time.) When people see Zuni after they hear her, they wonder how so much sound comes out of such a tiny body. I also think we have some kind of psychic communications bond, but that's another story – probably true of every type of parrot. When I walk home from work, Zuni calls to me when I am about half a block from home (she can't see me). Our Chihuahua used to bark when I was within two houses away, but Zuni has taken over that and knowing first when the postal carrier comes.

Zuni also uses her voice to administer commands to the tiny pup. Whenever the dog sits on any human lap, a super jealous conure will go into full screech mode until the cowering canine jumps down. Of course, Zuni becomes quiet once her objective is achieved and, to my human eye, it almost seems as if the parrot has quite a self-satisfied look about her. Psitticines apparently rule over canines at our house – with one screech!

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Basil
Courtesy Jessica Tice, Ohio

Basil is our 8-month-old green-cheeked conure. He is our very first parrot. We did a lot of research before we decided on a green cheek. My husband and I cannot believe the absolute joy this little parrot has brought into our lives. He is full of spunk and makes us laugh everyday. This is a picture of Basil and his favorite toy. He beats it up during the day, and at night he puts his head into the little bucket and falls asleep. We really do think it is his little pal.

Dixie
Courtesy Rose Adler, Massachusetts

I live with a green-cheeked conure, a sun conure and two dusky-headed conures. I love them all, but my favorite is Dixie, my green-cheeked conure. Dixie is a very smart little bird, and I don't know where I'd be without her. She has been through so much and she is still here with me. She has a broken beak and wasn't supposed to make it past the first surgery, but she did. Dixie is one of four of our conures that perform their tricks all over the Cape Cod area and beyond. Along with her cousin, Trixie and her sister and brother conures Kallie, my sun conure and Gabby, my dusky headed conure. Trixie is a jenday conure. They are in constant demand here, entertaining everyone from nursing homes to children in schools and libraries, to senior centers and garden clubs and even bird clubs. The things they do are basketball, sliding down a slide, the old shell game, a high wire act, pushing a baby carriage, and setting a table and then putting the dishes back in the cabinet. They also bowl and do ring tosses and pull a bucket up from the well. They can load a wagon, and pull it just to name a few things. When people see them, they just can't believe a bird can do such things. They come away from our show with a new idea of what a bird really is.

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