

Poicephalus Parrot Reader's Stories

Bird owners share their Poicephalus parrot story

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Senegal parrot

Jessy
Courtesy Kimberly Cunningham, Michigan

I had a budgie (Chiquita) and a quaker parrot (Charlie) sharing a room in separate cages for five years before my Senegal parrot, Jessy, arrived. I taught Charlie several words and the peek-a-boo game. Chiquita and Charlie enjoyed chirping at each other everyday, and Charlie could imitate Chiquita's chirp flawlessly.

When Chiquita died at 12 years old, I looked for another bird to keep Charlie company. Jessy, a Senegal parrot, was 6 months old when he joined the family. He shared a room with Charlie. They would spend play time together on a playgym everyday with my supervision. I tried to teach Jessy how to talk, but he was more interested in getting me to cuddle and scratch his head. He was very affectionate.

Jessy learned how to imitate the house burglar alarm beeps immediately. Charlie took it upon himself to teach Jessy how to talk. I watched Charlie teach his reluctant pupil. He would stand in front of Jessy repeating words and tricks between preening each day. After a while, Charlie and Jessy learned to play peek-a-boo with each other, but Jessy never played peek-a-boo with me.

After six years, Charlie died unexpectedly at 11 years old. Jessy and I were devastated by his loss. When Charlie was alive, Jessy was a reluctant speaker. Our discussions happened between doorways and walls. A favorite game was the calling game where I was in another room and would say "Jessy" and Jessy would say "Charlie," and Charlie would say my name, "Kim" back and forth for 15 to 20 minutes. After Charlie died, Jessy tried to start the game again by calling for Charlie. I could not respond because I missed Charlie too much. It has taken about a year for Jessy to stop calling Charlie's name. He has finally opened up and become very vocal. He does not speak as many words as Charlie could, but he can say every word he knows two ways. He has Charlie's quaker parrot (Donald Duck-like voice) and his own Senegal, clear and high-pitched voice. He interchanges between these voices regularly. We play peek-a-boo every morning and he imitates Charlie's quaker parrot screeches with budgie chirping from Chiquita when he is not practicing his words. Jessy is a very smart and understands several commands such as, "Up" to step on a perch, "Shower" to get ready for bath time, "Gotta go" for potty time when visiting a shoulder and "Night night" for when it's time to go to bed. Some of the words Jessy can say are, "Good bird," "Bad bird," "Gimmie-a-kiss," "Kim," "Charlie," "Jessy," "Peak-a-boo," "Hi" and "Bye-bye." Jessy can imitate the burglar alarm beeps, smooch noises and mmmmmm! (while eating his favorite fruit).

He is a very calm bird that enjoys watching television. I turn on the local PBS station when I go to work so he can watch children's shows. Barney and Sesame Street seem to really peak his interest. He is a great companion, and together we have gotten over the loss of our fellow bird friend and grown closer.

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Senegal parrot

Nalla
Courtesy Beth Lowry, Tennessee

My parrot, Nalla (which means "beautiful" in African), will be a year old in February. I have had such a great experience with her. She is very loving and affectionate. She likes to say "Hi baby," "What are you doing?" and "Where's Britt?" (my husband, who she always tries to bite!). We like to sit out on the front porch in the mornings and read the paper. She is very protective of me and is jealous of our other animals. In fact, she will attack the dogs or cats if they get too close when she is out of her cage. One of Nalla's favorite foods is scrambled eggs. I think that is so funny! Nalla sings to me every morning when she hears me get up and I whistle back to her. I think what makes this type of parrot so special is that they are relatively quiet. If your not one for noise, this is a great bird to have.

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Meyer's parrot

Mars
Courtesy Val Streit & Consuela Morales, California

Mars is a 7-year-old DNA-sexed male Meyer's parrot that came to us through adoption from a local group. Mars is a big boy at 128 grams and had been living in an older small cage. His original owner had health issues and Mars could no longer live with him. The owner's brother took Mars and knew nothing about parrots. He got bit and Mars ended up spending more time alone and in his cage. He came to us with a stick that we were told to use to handle him. It was apparent from the first day that all Mars wanted was to have out-of-cage time and some attention.

He now lives in a bigger cage, has a playstand and some smaller parrot friends. After almost two months, he is becoming more secure, more trusting and enjoying the affection and attention, as well as plenty of out-of-cage time.
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Senegal parrot

Hope
Courtesy Gayla Geist, Texas

I adopted Hope from a local bird rescue in February of 2007. The bird rescue was pretty full, and Hope was in a cage on the floor looking very scared. I bent down to look at her and noticed she had no toes. I felt so sorry for her. I assumed she would have trouble being adopted with so many other birds to choose from at the rescue. Her parents had bit all of her toes off and chewed the wing tips off her left wing, so Hope was also flightless. Within minutes of meeting her I knew she was coming home with me. Even though her previous owner said she has a vocabulary of two words, I haven't heard them yet. But she has started to pick up on two words, "Pretty bird" and "Come'er" from my two other parrots. Hope is very sweet and pretty quiet.

Despite being toeless she gets around her cage quite well. I've even seen her hanging upside down! I've added two flat grates to her cage and placed them up high. I covered them with soft material fastened by velcro. Those are the two places she hangs out the most. She loves head rubs, grapes, apples, teddy grams and chewing on cotton rope. Once she sees me, all she does is dance. I hope this means she is very happy at my house.
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Senegal parrot

Orion
Courtesy Anne Lieser & Art Thompson, Minnesota

Orion is the first bird I have ever had and the second for my husband. I never knew what personalities these feathered friends have within them.

Orion loves oatmeal and I always share my breakfast with her. One day she was patiently waiting for me to feed her. Before I did, I got up from our couch and set down my bowl of oatmeal with my spoon to grab some juice in the kitchen. When I came back, there she was eating my oatmeal with my spoon! I quickly grabbed the camera and the photo is what you see! I always eat my oatmeal with a plastic spoon because so many times now Orion was over zealous with the oatmeal that she would take the spoon from my hands, telling me she wanted more. So I thought plastic was safer than metal. I think the photo says it all. She was not going to wait until I gave her the oatmeal, she was wanted it now! She is eager for her oatmeal. I find it amazing how she figured out how to use a spoon just by watching us eat. We've never taught her anything that comes even close to using a spoon.
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Senegal parrot

Penelope
Courtesy Alice Roberts, New York

Penelope was hatched around December 2006. I had wanted a bird for a long time, and I fell for the baby bird trick of the cutest little snuggle bug climbing up my arm 'cause she was hungry. The pet store let me feed her and showed me how to syringe her food. We did that for about a month until the vet said she should be weaned. That was quite a relief, and we've been working it out as we go along. She now has a sun conure buddy, Molly, who keeps her company all day while

I'm at work, but I fear she's going to bite her tail feathers off one of these days. I'm cautiously still "howdie'ing" them and scooching their cages a little closer every day.

Penelope has a couple of ways of getting attention. Sometimes she charms me with mimicking one of my whistles, other times she tries to get away with force: flutters to the floor and chomps down on my ankle or a toe if I don't pick her back up quickly enough. She very rarely tries the latter anymore. Thanks to the helpful advice of experienced breeders and parrot-guardians, I've learned to manage that so she gets ignored and banned from me when she bites.

Her favorite toys are the boxes the toys come in. Actually, she loves anything with wicker, especially the wicker "cigars" she can shred, and she loves pocket books and craft store bird houses that I hang off of her manzanita playstand. She'll hang in those all afternoon chewing on the bells and other toys dangling off of them.

Penelope's unique in that after a couple weeks of shower training (she loves the showers) she has claimed my shampoo shower caddy as her roosting perch. I quit trying to fight it and return her to her cage, so I just set it up with her ladder and a manzanita with water and millet spray. When I sleep-in on weekends, rather than a contact call, her millet crunching wakes me.

Poicephalus are very lovey-dovey and sweet. When she was a baby, she would nap on my shoulder after eating. Then if the phone rang, or any other loud noise, she'd cringe and run under my chin for cover.

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Senegal parrot

SweetPepper
Courtesy Teri Carlson, Illinois

I am the proud owner of a 4 ½-year-old, female Senegal parrot named SweetPepper. She absolutely lives up to her name of being sweet but with a peppery personality. I started late in life with owning birds. My family started with one little blue and white budgie that became three budgies. They were fun and quite amazing. When the last one died, we waited a year before getting our next bird, which was a cockatiel. We then rescued a lost cockatiel a few years later so we had two cockatiels. I always read all the articles in BIRD TALK and found one about Senegal parrots. They sounded like an absolute dream bird, a medium-sized bird with a big bird personality. I read all I could on the species hoping that one day I would be the owner of a Senegal. Then one day, while at our local bird fair buying bird toys and food for the cockatiels, I came across an adorable young Senegal. She let me pick her up and hold and cuddle her. She was so sweet. It was like she knew me. When it was time to leave and hand the bird back to the breeder, the little Senegal wouldn't go back. The breeder said that she would not have anything to do with anyone else that came to see her. I was the first person allowed to hold her and cuddle with her. I found out that the breeder lived very close by and told her that I would have to discuss it with my folks as we already had two birds. My folks said, yes, that I could have the Senegal. So I called the breeder that evening hoping she didn't sell the bird. What luck, she didn't.

We made arrangements for me to pick up the Senegal later that week. In the meantime I got a cage and some toys and food. The breeder had been calling the Senegal SweetPea which I didn't know, so it was funny when I came up with the name SweetPepper. SweetPepper was 5 months old when she came into my life and things have been wonderful ever since. When we met, it was like we were meant to be together – it was pure fate. I couldn't be more happier with her. She is quiet, yet very playful. She loves to cuddle but also loves her personal playtime. The greatest thrill was when she started talking. She doesn't have a large vocabulary, but what she says is just so cute. Her favorite word to say in many different ways and tones is "Baby." I never bought a bird just for talking ability, but for their personality and she has lived up to hers. SweetPepper and I will always be together.

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Senegal parrot

Turtle Bird
Courtesy Roberta Nordheim-Wallace, New York

How to Own a Human, By Turtle Bird

My human was assisting me with some blogging on Birdchannel.com recently, and I noticed that BIRD TALK was planning

a feature on Poicephalus birds such as myself. As the name of your publication is BIRD TALK, after all, I felt I should put my two cents in about owning humans. We Poicephalus have a natural talent for taming these featherless giants.

For most birds, owning a human is a challenge. I suspect many of my feathered, non-Poicephalus brethren would like to know exactly what it is that makes us so special in this regard. Although I have only owned humans for three years, I know one Jardine's named Topper, a distinguished fellow Poicephalus, whose human has been so well-trained she actually works for him as a chauffeur.

Indeed, humans are delightful creatures who can be trained to perform many charming and amusing tricks, in addition to the basic food, beverage, house cleaning and toy-fetching that most of our humans have already mastered. This morning, for example, I taught mine several original whistles, which she repeated back to me (with some prompting). It is important when training to reward often, perhaps with a smile or some verbal encouragement. Much patience will be required, however, especially with the tougher tricks such as "Opening cage on command." In spite of intensive training, mine has yet to master that one.

We Poi's know that sometimes discipline is necessary. Humans have short attention spans and may require the occasional smart nip to bring them into line. Encumbered by their excessive height, they are slower to understand than we superior birds, so great patience may be required during the training process. Talk soft and carry a sharp beak is my motto here. Also, I try not to rush to judgment when they react inappropriately to my decision to remove the keys from the cell phone. I tell myself that if the keys weren't meant to be bitten, they wouldn't be so chewy, clearly a truth my humans are too dim to grasp.

Humans are not always appreciative of our more refined aesthetic sense. I have tried to assist my own by improving her limited couture with some daring ventilation or creative additions, such as peanut-butter epaulettes or a raisin brooch. Sadly, mine seems unable to grasp my creative Poicephalus vision. Although at times it really yanks my tail feathers when my efforts at beautification result in terrible shrieking instead of the awed praise they deserve, I remind myself that humans are simple beings, even though they do make lovable pets.

My fellow Poicephalus parrots already know that, when all else fails, it's best to be adorable and make your humans laugh. Most have a pretty good sense of humor and, even though they cannot comprehend our sunset orations on the origin of the universe, they can all appreciate an upside-down pratfall into the food dish or a one-footed inverted shrieking hang-down. We Poicephalus are natural comic stunt-birds, and we will always have the last laugh.

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Senegal parrot

Claude
Courtesy Paula Rutland, Georgia

Claude came to my home from an abusive environment. I got Claude in 2004 and believe he was 3 years old at the time. He seemed to really like my son, but, as he became a young man, Claude quickly turned his attention to me.

I felt so bad for Claude because he really did not trust anyone. He was nervous and would not utter a sound. He would growl, bite very hard and would not come out of his cage. I worked with him for about a year, and all of his issues became a part of his past, and he finally started voicing his opinion. I love to hear him make his favorite sounds and whistles (and he gets pretty loud, too). I believe he is happy now.

He does all kinds of tricks and dances for me to show off and wants to help me clean his cage, but I draw the line there. He has to sit on his portable perch stand and watch cartoons until I finish. He likes to cuddle next to my neck and give me kisses on my cheek. Yes, he still nibbles but does not bite at my fingers, and he screeches when I tell him that it is "Sleepie sleep, night night time" or if he is not ready to go back into his cage. He is spoiled rotten, and his nibbling is because he is telling me that he still wants to play or just sit quietly on my shoulder to be near me.

Claude is a big part of our family now and has found his final home. I hope he will always remain a happy little Birdie Boo.

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Senegal parrot

Piglet
Courtesy Lana Litwin, Michigan

Piglet, our Senegal princess, is about 10 years old. Life with her has had its ups and downs but always been worth the effort. She wears her emotions on her face and the way she carries her body. We have never had a bird whose face shows so much emotion. She is moody, irritable, happy, and can look very, very sad. She can look blissfully happy. She can look very angry or jealous. She fascinates me.

She tends to be a one person bird. When we bought her, she was mine. I instantly could pet her, but she ran from my husband. She would flip over on her back and stay there while I petted her head. She learned tricks in five minutes flat. She tried to talk, but the sounds weren't clear.

She avoided my husband and ran in the opposite direction. My husband and I worked on socialization. For a while she went to everyone, including strangers. She began to tolerate my husband. I took a trip after a little over a year. My husband stayed home. When I returned, she wanted nothing to do with me. I have had to rebuild my relationship with her. She adores my husband. She wants to be with him if my husband is home or in the room, and is distant with me. If he is not there, she is OK with me and gives me kisses. She is an opportunist and tries to get food treats out of me. She sees me and any other bird we have as competition. We have to watch when the other bird is out.

Up until this year, she chewed constantly; carpeting, cupboards, leather, wood, electrical wires – anything available. She did this despite us trying to give her suitable substitutes. Although small for a Senegal, she could open up large kitchen cupboard doors and hop in. She requires constant watching for her safety. If she sees something, she goes after it. We have always trimmed her wing feathers but that didn't curb the chewing or where she went. She is very agile. This year, we redid our kitchen. She has thankfully stopped eating the cupboards or perhaps my husband is watching her more. She obeys me but not my husband. I can get her to go back to her cage just by talking to her. She doesn't listen to him.

She can be funny, affectionate and exasperating but we love her. I don't know if she is typical for a Senegal. She is unique. She is Piglet, the Senegal princess.

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Red-bellied parrots

Baby & Kiwi
Courtesy Deborah Coggles, British Columbia, Canada

Baby was our first red-bellied parrot. We purchased him over five years ago from Gay Noeth at On African Wings in Saskatchewan. Baby became very attached to my husband, Jim, and decided that Jim was his girlfriend and often displayed his love for Jim through various birdie activities. Jim would promptly respond by putting him back onto his cage play area. Baby is a lot of fun to watch and loves to play with toys and ring bells. He also talks a fair bit although, most of the time, it is when he is pouting so he mumbles under his little birdie breath with his back to us. It is very funny.

When Baby was about 4 ½, we acquired a real girlfriend for him. Her name is Kiwi.

When we first introduced them, Baby was extremely inquisitive and wanted to know who this pretty little thing was.

She, on the other hand, was a little apprehensive of the moves he was making on her, and his original pick up line, "What ya doin?" did not impress her.

After only a few weeks, we were able to put them together in a neutral cage and they seemed to do well. Kiwi had her side of the cage and Baby had his, although he did like to cross the line onto her side on occasion. They were never aggressive toward each other so we kept them together. After only one month they seemed to have fallen in love. Jim and I watched in fascination as Baby preened Kiwi all over her head and neck and she just turned into mush.

Kiwi is a beautiful 9-year-old female that has a very extensive vocabulary; well, we think it is. She says "Love you," "Food," "Did you have a good day?" "Hi Kiwi," "Good morning," "Good night," "Pretty bird," "Mommy," "What are you doing?" "Hey Ki," "Here kitty," "Come here" and "Did you poop?" She will knock with her beak and say "Come in" She also has a few favorite whistles, and she loves to dance to music. She also calls the dog, Rudy, and has learned new words in the past few months as well. She speaks clearly and is an absolute sweetheart.

The lady who we got her from took wonderful care of her and certainly loved this adorable girl. We are truly blessed to have her.

Since then Baby and Kiwi have had three clutches.

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Senegal parrot

Cooper
Courtesy Julie Lively, Illinois

My husband saw the ad on the grocery store bulletin board, called me at home wanting to know if I wanted another bird. I had adopted an African grey, Bailey, four years ago, and had never considered having any other bird but him, He's my buddy, but I said if he wanted to check into it, go ahead. He called me back with such a sad story; here was this beautiful little bird with an owner who was afraid of him, used a giant leather glove whenever he was handled, had a cage with no toys and one small perch. His life was not a happy one.

We had a decision to make, could we deal with the baggage this bird already had? How would Bailey accept sharing us with another bird? We took a couple of days to decide to adopt him. When my husband went to get him, she had him loaded in the car and was literally on the way to sell him back to the pet store he came from. We got to him just in time. Cooper, our Senegal parrot came to us almost 1 1/2 years ago, scared, with a really bad wing clip (he had no wing feathers left). I will never forget when we moved him from the carrier into his new cage, he just came over and pressed into the side of the cage where I was kneeling and let out a big sigh. My heart was won over right then and there. He was a biter, but we made up our minds that we would not use a glove. It took only one week before we could get him to Step-up without drawing blood. After six months he tore up his first toy, I was overjoyed. Our vet thought he was about 8 years old. I wonder what kind of life that eight years had been. Cooper is not overly affectionate. He is my sweet, serious little man, but what a joy he has brought to our household. There was room in our hearts for one more.

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Meyer's parrot

Ollie
Courtesy Sarah Pfister, Pennsylvania

I have owned a Poicephalus parrot for five years now. Her name is Ollie, and she is a Meyer's parrot. Where do I begin on how she changed my life? I never owned a parrot, however, somehow I ended up with her. She came from an extremely neglected home. Her and about 30 other birds were hardly fed, had green water and were just so sad and lonely. I heard of these birds needing homes, and thought I could make some difference somehow by saving one of them.

Well, she turned about to be the sweetest little angel that I cannot live without. I have learned that Poicephalus parrots are so sweet and mild mannered. Among all the others I own, I would rather have them all have the sweetness of a Meyer's. Ollie has given me so much joy. She was an import, and believed to be around 32 years old. I hope you can share my story and see how Ollie and I have made a difference in each others lives.

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Red-bellied parrot

Rocky
Courtesy Brian Bellor, Arizona

Rocky is a male red-bellied parrot (*Poicephalus rufiventris*) that I've had since July 2006. I got him from a local bird shop and went there every day for three weeks while he was being weaned. While there, he would readily Step-up, and we would walk around the store checking out toys and stuff. I especially liked watching him in the store's play area socializing with the other young birds, some of which were much larger than he. Rocky happily played and never seemed intimidated by them. Even during an occasional playful squabble, he always held his ground. I was a proud daddy and would point him out for the other patrons to see and announce "That's my boy."

Bringing the Rockster home was a smooth transition. He had two playstands and two large cages waiting for him with lots of perches and toys. He adjusted quickly and shares my home with me and my first bird, a female cockatiel named Buddy.

Having Rocky for a little over a year now, he's turned out to be quite a character and quite the little talker. While he speaks in his own voice, he seems to be able to repeat almost anything I say and often in context. He even mimics my laugh, which really gets me rolling and, of course, the more I laugh the more he laughs. It's hysterical.

Rocky also has a unique way of playing, which I could watch all day. He'll hang upside down, often by one foot and attack the closest available toy. He's such a show-off.

I truly enjoy having Rocky. He's amusing and lovable and yet very challenging and complex. He definitely keeps me on my toes, but I love every minute of it. I look forward to many more great years with him.

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Senegal parrot

Apolo Ohno
Courtesy Debra Pasquerette, California

Apolo Ohno – The Senegal with a mission

The first time I met Apolo he was skating across the floor of my favorite bird store. Apolo was born with splayed legs, and the manager of the store explained to me that he would have some special needs. I immediately fell in love with him, and within a few weeks he came home with me. He was named Apolo Ohno after the Olympic speed skater because he looked just like a speed skater when he walked. I fashioned a special cage for him with lots of platforms and ladders so he could exercise his legs and strengthen his body.

Apolo has an amazing attitude and, just like an Olympic athlete, seemed to be training for something special. In his first six months he learned to crawl up ladders to find his favorite apples and grapes and perfected his little "Hello." He seemed to thrive around people, especially children.

I work at a theater and produce the family programs, and one day I brought Apolo with me to work. He was a huge hit with both the children and parents.

Soon after, I found out that our theater was starting a campaign to "Go Green." I realized that I had found the perfect job for my special Senegal. Apolo has now become the spokes parrot for going green for our theater. He comes with me to all the shows, and we talk to the audience about the importance of conservation, recycling and taking care of the environment. He even has his own column in all of our programs. Apolo's favorite part of the day is giving his autograph to the children. The other wonderful thing is that, because of his disability, kids who have special needs feel a kinship to this wonderful little ambassador.

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