

Basic Bird Training: How to Train Your Bird to Step Up

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Just as you train a young puppy to "sit" as one of his first commands, there is a first command you need to teach all pet psittacine birds. That first command is "step up." It is an easy command to teach a bird because the physical motion is something he normally does many times during the day. By teaching your bird this command, you will decrease any fear the bird may have of you, reinforce the bond between you and the bird, establish your authority, have better control over the bird, and decrease the chance the bird will become territorial. After the bird begins to learn the command, he will relate it to good things happening, such as attention from you, treats, and eventually rewards such as going to the "play gym."



Good training begins with...

As with training any animal, sessions should be short, usually around 15 minutes. Never start a session if you are agitated, tired, or impatient. Patience is always the key to good training. Make the training a positive experience for both you and the bird. Have fun. Make it into a game.

The training should take place in a quiet room without distractions. A safe environment needs to be provided, and this means you need to prepare for the possibility the bird may become loose. Close windows, doors, and curtains; turn off any fans; do not have other pets in the room; and the bird should have his wings clipped. Training sessions should always end on a positive note, and praise or a reward given. Consistency in the use of commands is another key ingredient to success. Use positive reinforcement. Do not hit, use a loud voice, or give any other type of punishment.

You will need the bird to focus on you and be comfortable. Watch your bird for signs of sleepiness, inattentiveness due to hunger, etc., fear, or aggression. Signs of fear and aggression include the bird standing upright with wings held slightly away from his body, with or without his beak open; vocalizations; flapping of the wings; the bird holding very tightly onto your finger, or [biting](#). If it appears you will need to end the session, end on a positive note, and without the bird thinking he is the "winner" of any confrontation.

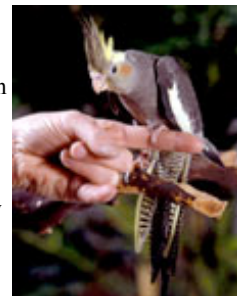
Acclimating the bird

If the bird is not used to you, for several sessions you may want to just slowly and quietly place your hand in the bird's cage, away from the bird. When you approach the cage, and work with the bird, you should always be slightly higher than the bird's eye level. Too far above, and the bird may be more afraid. Too low, and the bird may start to interpret it as submission on your part. With each session, move your hand closer to the bird, and allow the bird to perch on it of his own accord (you may want to tempt him with a treat). Once your bird is comfortable with your hand close to him in the cage, the real training can start.

If the bird is large and already a biter, you may wish to use a dowel or other stick in place of your finger during initial training. If so, get the bird used to the dowel by placing it in the cage and allowing him to investigate it.

Teaching "step up"

1. First, get your bird used to taking special, very tasty treats from your hand. These types of treats should be reserved for training purposes.
2. Next, by holding a treat in one hand, lure the bird to come closer to the "step up" hand, which is held in front of the bird at a higher level than the perch. At first, you will want to reward the bird for simply coming close to the "step up" hand.
3. When the bird starts to step onto your hand, say "Step up" or "up." Either command is fine, but choose only one and say it each time the bird steps up. Consistency is the key - all family members, and you, need to do it the same way every time.
4. When the bird steps up, praise him and give him a very small treat - something he really likes, but only gets when he obeys a command. At first, you may reward the bird for only putting one foot on the "step up" hand.



Larger birds may use their beaks to help them step up. Do not pull away if the bird uses his beak on your finger or appears he will bite. This is true for smaller birds as well. He may soon learn you are afraid of that, and then he has you right where he wants you. Do not let the bird think you are afraid of him. Also, he will not want to obey a command to "step up" if he thinks the finger or dowel may be pulled out from underneath him.

As the bird becomes comfortable, take him out of the cage and continue the training in other quiet environments. When away from his cage or territory, he may feel more vulnerable, and pay more attention to you.

"Step down"

When you wish to have the bird step off of your finger or dowel, place whatever you want him to step onto, e.g.; a perch in the bird's cage in front of him. You will need to use the same technique you use for a "step up"; with a treat, lure the bird onto the object you want him to step onto. The object should be in front of the bird and higher than your hand. Have the bird face you and step onto the object while you give the command "step down" or "down." Again, either command is fine, just be consistent. When moving from your finger to the object, the bird is actually stepping upwards, but the command should still be "step down," which really means, "move from my finger to what I am showing you." Again, the bird will probably use his beak to help accomplish the "step down,".

"Laddering"

When the bird has learned "step up," it is time to teach the bird to "ladder." This means having the bird step up from the finger of one hand to a finger on the other hand, which is held higher. Each step should be accompanied by the "step up" command. The bird should become accustomed to doing this repeatedly. This is a command which should be repeated on a daily basis.

Summary

Teaching "step ups" is key to successfully training a bird. It is a command every bird should know. This one command will help establish a great life-long relationship between you and your bird from the very beginning.

