

Houstraining Birds: Teaching Your Bird to Poop on Command

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You have heard of house training cats, dogs, and even rabbits, but birds? Yes, some birds can be house trained. House training a bird means you are teaching him to "poop" on command. As with other animals, it takes commitment, patience, consistency, and positive reinforcement. Younger birds are generally easier to house train than older ones. Larger birds are generally easier to house train since they do not have to relieve themselves as often. A budgerigar (parakeet) may need to go three or four times an hour, whereas a large parrot can "hold it" several hours.

Step 1

Pick a command: Start by determining what word or phrase every member of the household will use as the command for "going to the bathroom." It should be short and not easily mistaken for another command or the name of a person or pet in the household. "Go potty," "go poop," or "do it now," are often good choices for house training birds. Each person needs to use that same phrase in the same intonation. It may be beneficial at first to have one person responsible for the house training until the bird actually understands what behavior you want from him.

Step 2

Anticipate the behavior and watch for cues: Again, as with dogs, you will want to anticipate when your bird will want to relieve himself, and be a step ahead of him. Most birds will relieve themselves first thing in the morning, after they have eaten, and sometimes, immediately after you place them in or take them out of the cage. For several days, keep track of when your bird is most likely to relieve himself. Be ready at those times, and watch for cues. Most birds will show some change in behavior before they relieve themselves. It may be a different stance – like crouching, movement of the tail, stepping backward, or fluffing up the feathers.

Step 3

Start the house training: As you anticipate your bird is going to need to "poop," have your bird "[step up](#)," and then hold him over whatever item you will want him to use for his toilet. This could be his cage or playpen, wastebasket, newspaper, or paper plate. (Remember, though, he will eventually make the connection between that item and relieving himself. And, he may not distinguish between his toilet and the newspaper you have not read yet, or the paper plate with your pizza on it.) As your bird displays the cues that he is going to relieve himself, say your potty command and then praise him when he does go. The praise may be in the form of words, stroking, or a special, very small tidbit. Pick a treat your bird really enjoys, and be sure the only time he gets it is when he has followed the "go potty" command. These steps will need to be repeated in the same way multiple times before your bird will make the connection between your words and his action.



Do not reprimand your bird when he does not go in the proper place. Punishment is not effective, and he may actually start "going potty" as an attention-seeking behavior.

Step 4

Take final responsibility: Many birds can learn to "go potty" on command, but not all of them learn that there are certain times when they should not "go potty." If your bird is one of those, it is your responsibility to help. If your bird has been out of his cage for 15 minutes or so (in the case of a budgie), have him "step up," take him to his toilet place, and give your command. When he goes, you know you probably have another 15 minutes before you will need to have him go again. Some birds will eventually learn that when they are out of their cages they need to go back to the toilet area every time they go. Some "talkers" may even start saying the potty command themselves.

House training your bird is a way to spend more time with him, make that time more enjoyable, teach your to look to you for behavior cues (especially important for some parrots), and can result in a lot less cleaning up you will need to do.