



## FREE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

*This ebook was not meant to take the place of a Species Specific book about your bird. However you can use this ebook in concert with other books on the care of birds, it has many tricks others don't know about, and can help you get by until you can find a book written for the species of Bird you have.*

**By Bill Wintermute Known as Parrot Bill**

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## About the Author



My fascination with Macaws started at a very early age, when my mother took me to Parrot Jungle in 1956, I remember telling her on the way home (as any child might do) that I wanted a Macaw for a pet. She countered that with, "Well work real hard...save ALL your money...then grow up and move away from home." I have carried my fascination of Macaws with me all my life and now have a flock of my own.

I started working with my first Macaw in 1978 and had my own [Performing Parrot Show](#) since 1985. By that time I still hadn't heard about clicker training, and didn't learned about it until about 1999 when Doug Cook contacted me and enlightened me to the benefits of clicker training. Doug started out as a professional Dolphin trainer but had trained a number of other species of animals and finally settled into Training Birds using methods referred to as [Operant Conditioning](#) otherwise called positive reinforcement training. He also had one of the first bird clicker training web list. He touched a lot of lives with clicker training techniques, and helped as many folks as he could to have a better relationship with their pet

birds through training with clickers, right up until the time that he passed on in January of 2004. You will find, as many people have already, that while training birds to do tricks that their bond with you will increase immensely. They will look up to you as the teacher and look forward to being with you everyday more than ever before.

Even though I was already performing a [Parrot Show](#) by the time Doug contacted me, my training methods were pretty rudimentary, and took a long time to train each trick using the bridge "Good Bird" or "Good Job". I remember I would demonstrate the prop to my bird/student and show it what I wanted it to do, then gave the bird a shot with the prop, until eventually the bird would pickup the trick I was trying to teach. This proves true to that age old saying that "Even a blind bird can find a worm once in a while". Unfortunately this method took two weeks to train my first bird to play Basketball. Just recently, using a clicker, I trained a Scarlet Macaw to play basketball in 3 five minute training sessions (15 minutes total training time). Just to give you an idea of how much a the precise sound of clicker can streamline a trainer's ability. Of course the bird's ability had something to do with how fast it learned, so I can't take all the credit.

Then of course I couldn't have written this book without giving mention to my good friends in the industry, who over the years gave me encouragement and helpful training advice we are never self taught. This book was written to teach the methods that I developed from a combination of advice, research and personal experience working with birds over the past 23 years, doing public Shows & events.

Photo Acknowledgements:

For the Photo on this page taken by Ed Waterman who also took the shot in Chapter 4 under Husbandry

Behaviors "How to condition a bird to allow you to hold it for "Taking Anal Swab and Blood Samples.

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## Preface

Many times after a person buys the bird, cage and all the supplies they need, they have neglected or couldn't afford getting a book to help them with the care of the bird at the time of the sale. As a result some birds don't make it. So this is what this book is all about, I have included tips that will help avoid the very basic but common mistakes that many people don't think about until something goes wrong. I've had birds all my life, I had my first parakeet when I was 5 years old, I also bred 150 pair of cockatiels & parakeets in my younger years, so believe me when I say that I have already made all the mistakes there are to be made and found all the solutions to keep it from happening again. This ebook is to help keep others from making the same mistakes with their new pet. I have made it as brief as possible to keep it simple and easy to remember.

In the rest of this ebook you will learn to build a good working relationship with your pet bird/student, so that it will not only love you more, but when you start training, it will want to learn what you teach, for no other reason but to please you. With dogs, you establish yourself as the pack leader...the Alpha dog. But there are no leaders in a flock of birds, so it is useless to try and dominate a bird to get it to do what you want it to. Negative reinforcement has no place in training animals and with birds it will only be counter productive if you try. This is a mistake many people make in training, but with birds it will always take time to undo the damage. You must build a relationship based on friendship and mutual trust with your bird first, then you can coax it into doing what you want it too.

I will cover many subjects in the other books in this series of Ebooks concerning birds and their training, from the proper care and feeding of a bird, to talking, husbandry behaviors, curbing bad habits & trick training basketball, ring toss and money in the bank. I have built a much stronger bond with my birds by showing them that there are other more interesting things that they can do with these props, rather than simply destroying them. That there is a purpose for these props that make them a fun game to play, once they know how to use them. Just like kids I have some birds love their props so much, that they are very possessive when it comes to their particular toys or props, and don't want to share them with the other birds.

You will learn to train these tricks to entertain your friends and to become the hit at any party, or you can use these techniques to build a stronger relationship with your bird, both will happen regardless of what motivates you. Your bird's bad habits like screaming, biting and feather plucking will fade away as you and your bird develop a stronger bond together. Basic care, ties into training, as much as the tricks you train your birds to do, because a happy, healthy bird will focus and perform much better.

Face it...we all want the best for our pets. As a professional trainer/performer I can tell you that I have never thought of my birds as anything less than my extended family and treat them with the same respect. As in training...and with writing these books, I will help you build good "Trainer Habits", one step at a time right from the very beginning. Instead of just telling you how to trick train a bird, I will go into every aspect of training. So that you will have a complete well rounded understanding that will relate to better training success, and a stronger relationship with your bird. Each trick is a stepping stone to the next and will make it easier on you and the bird if you take one step at a time, starting with the easier tricks first.

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## ***Chapter 1- Housing & Car***

### Housing

Many folks have a problem picking out a suitable cage for their bird, and this is just as important as anything you will do with a bird. So I want to cover a little about that before we go any further. The state of Florida has

good guide lines of basic requirements for caging professional animals, and these requirements are very basic and focus on the comfort of a bird, so I will use those. There are 4 basic requirements that are not hard to remember, and you can keep in mind when buying a cage.

- A cage must be tall enough that when perched, the bird does not touch its head on the top of the cage.
- The perch must be high enough that the tail of the bird does not touch the bottom of the cage.
- The cage must be large enough that the bird can stretch its wings without being obstructed.
- Water & food bowls must be clean at all times as well as the cage.



These Cages provide comfort and are easy to clean

These are only basic requirements for comfort, and you shouldn't give your bird anything less. You can spend a lot of money on cages that don't meet these basic requirements, and you can spend less on cages that do. I have found that I can use collapsible kennels, (that you find in most pet stores) for my birds, and still be within these basic requirements for my birds to remain comfortable. They are not as nice as a \$600. cage, but when I'm on the road these are more practical to use. For one reason...if I keep them at home in large cages, and then use portable kennels on the road, it will throw my birds off their game and they won't perform as well the first few days while they're becoming accustomed to their travel cages again. So I use the portable cages to house them at home as well as on the road. This way when we go on the road and I setup their cages...they are at home and perform as well as always. Birds don't like changes in their life style, so the less changes in their lives the better they like it. I also like the kennels because they are simple, pack into a small place for transport and the plastic bottoms are easy to clean with a water hose or pressure washer. With these cages you can't use paper to line the bottoms, because the birds will pull it all up and shred it all over the place, but the bottoms are easy enough to clean without the paper liner. A cage is not meant to keep them in all hours of the day and night, simply a place where they can sleep and eat safely while unsupervised. Just as with children, a house can be very dangerous for birds as well. In keeping birds, it's your primary responsibility to give them plenty of time out of their cage to play, exercise and to socialize and keep them safe from harm. For instance an electric wire is chewy and like bubble gum to a bird, so don't use electric lamps, heaters or other electric appliances in a room where your bird might have some out of the cage free time. If you need a heater in the room then don't let the bird out of its cage while it's setup. When it warms up a little in the day time, take the heater out of the room before you let your bird out of its cage.

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Feeding & Water



Parrots have a very bad habit of dunking their food and this can pose a problem keeping the water clean enough for your bird to drink. I have had birds get a bacterial infection from a bowl of water that I changed and cleaned daily. Some pellet diets will dissolve in the water and promote bacteria within a few hours, especially in the warmer months. Using a rabbit water bottle will get around this problem, and keep the water fresh at all times. They will learn to hold food in their beak while drinking from the bottle, to mix the water with dry foods, and this works just as well as dunking only the water stays clean. I even take it one step further and use clear one liter soda pop bottles, most rabbit bottle nipples will easily fit a soda pop bottle top. So that I can see the water levels at a glance as opposed to the foggy plastic bottle that come with the rabbit bottle nipple that is harder to see the water level in. Plus they are disposable and cuts down on your cleaning time, so you don't have to wash bottles. But you have to train your bird to use one or they may dehydrate not knowing that this is where the water is. Not a hard job to do, simply place the water bottle in a day before you plan to take the water bowl out, many birds will investigate the nipple and discover how to use it on their own. But if not, then take out the water bowl when you planned too, and wait an hour or so for the bird to get a little thirsty. Then go into the cage and have the bird step up on your arm, then talk to it and stroke it on the head, then gently grasp it by the head and place it's beak over the nipple until it hits the steel ball and gets a few drops of water on its tongue. Then let go of its head and place the bird back on its perch so it can have a drink on its own. This is called "Training Husbandry Behaviors" but is not a big deal.

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## Diet

It doesn't matter very much what Parrot Diet you choose to use, because there are a lot of good ones out there, but some folks think it matters a lot. Your choices are Seed Mix, or Pellets, but neither are what I would call a complete diet by themselves without supplementing with 60% fresh Fruits and Vegetables and a few hard nuts a day. In nature...seeds are only available in the dry seasons, but fruits and greens are out there all year round, so seeds are more of a treat to birds than a staple, and only a minimal part of their real diet. Their main diet should always be fresh cut foods and two to three hard nuts daily. As for a Pellet only Diet...some say it's the best, it is certainly easier to give your bird all its basic nutritional needs with pellets, but how would you like a food that tasted like oat meal...day in and day out for the rest of your life? I prefer a variety diet for my birds, a good seed mix, with 25% pellets mixed in, and 3 hard nuts placed on top of the fresh fruits and veggies cut in bite size pieces. This way they can enjoy a variety of flavors each and every day. My birds have to eat through a pile of fruits and veggies before they can get to the seed mix. Even though they could throw the salad out to get to the seed mix, I find that they don't eat much seed mix when fed this way and stay healthier. In any case, whether you use Pellets or a Seed Mix, any good vet will tell you that they need 60% of their diet to be fresh Fruits and Vegetables, and they seem to like it better as well.

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## Weaning Young Birds

The best time to buy a bird it seems is when it isn't weaned so that it has a stronger bond with the owner. This can also be the worst time to buy a bird for a new owner who has never hand fed or weaned a bird

before, the bird could die or be stunted if this isn't done right. Most parrots are weaned within 4 months, they won't wean on their own as long as you are willing to feed it, so you have to know when to start. I have seen birds still being hand fed at a year old by someone who didn't know how to wean a bird properly. Get most of your information from the breeder but these are tips incase you are left hanging with not much information.

You can find your formula at any large chain pet store, directions are on the package and you will need a food thermometer to make sure the temperature is right...the instructions will say between 102 and 110 degrees I like it at about 107 degrees and about the consistency of oat meal or pudding. You don't want it too dry because the bird is getting all of it's hydration from the diet but you don't want it too wet at the cost of nutrition. You will have to play with it but a good consistency can just barely be drawn up into a syringe. You will want a catheter syringe with a long nipple so you can get it comfortably into the bird's mouth for less spillage. The rest you can get from the instructions on the package and make sure you read them ALL!

Now for my little tricks to help with weaning easier without stressing the bird. Give the bird it's morning feeding by syringe and when it is time for the next feeding make your formula as thick as peanut butter then spread it on a slice of whole wheat bread and sit down with the bird and break pieces off and put it into it's mouth until it realizes this taste the same as before, only delivered in a different package. Once the bird is eating this off a plate you can give it, it's midday meal like this from now on, adding some banana, cooked sweet potato, white potato, corn on the cob, broccoli with other soft foods and weaning pellets, but make sure you take the bread formula out after about an hour or so because it will spoil and grow bacteria. As the bird starts eating more on it's own, you syringe feed it less until it is eating everything on it's own.

You will want to weigh the bird regularly with a digital [mail scale](#) from the first day you receive the bird to see how well it is gaining weight. I know...your wondering how to keep it from falling off the scale while you weigh it, you can always find a plastic bowl or cardboard box to place on the scale and zero it out, then place the bird in it and get your reading. Other methods of weighing the bird are discussed in chapter 4. It may lose a little weight during weaning but if it starts to consistently lose weight a day or two in a row, you will want to intervene and start syringe feeding again for a day or so to get it back on track. This is a very crucial time, if you wean it to fast it won't eat solid foods and literally starve, then get very sick and could die. A baby bird won't eat seed mix for a month or two after it is weaned so make sure you have good fresh fruit & veggies out for it all the time and leave the seed in there for it to start playing around with.

It's much better if you leave the hand feeding and weaning up to a professional and pick your bird up right after it is weaned and starting to eat soft foods on it's own. Many people will buy the bird at 8 weeks old and leave it with the breeder but come by several times a week to see and hold and talk to their baby. So when it is weaned and they come to pick the bird up, it already knows them and has a bond with them. You really can't see the difference in the bond done this way, from a bond to the person who hand raised the bird and it's a lot safer to leave it up to the pros.

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## ***Chapter 2 - Breaking Bad Behaviors and Habits***

Many times someone gives away or sells a "used bird" for what ever reason, the bird has developed bad habits that the previous owner no longer can live with, or the owner was moving and couldn't take the bird, or no longer had the time to give the bird, that it deserves. What ever the reason many second hand birds have developed bad habits that a new or young bird may not have. Screaming, biting or destructive behaviors almost always stems from not enough activity or attention in the bird's life and can always be curbed by giving the bird more activities and play time out of its cage with you. If you don't have the time to give a bird then maybe you should have a "Pet Rock" instead. Birds are very much like children and need your love and attention and just like children will respond to neglect with bad behavior, screaming, biting and destructive out burst.

This can always be turned around with enough attention and giving it more activities out of its cage to do and experience. Clip its wings and take anywhere you go, when you're not working. Start with quieter places, like ride in the car or a slow ride with you on a bicycle, take it to the laundry mat with you, or shopping on the weekends. Take it to the pet store while you shop for bird stuff, let it pick out things that it likes. This will

make the bird feel like it is a special addition to your life as well it should. I like bike rides the best, because it stimulates good behaviors while the bird takes in the sights. Another way is to build an outdoor playground for your bird to play on while you are working or relaxing in the yard. Put it in a shady spot but in plan view of where you are going to be most of the time. This gives it something to do while giving you room to do what you want while in the yard, it always wants to be in eye sight of you because you are its protector and the one it loves.

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## Screaming

In the house...there will be times that the bird will scream and display bad behaviors demanding attention. There could be reasons for it to scream, sometimes it's because it's feeding time and you missed it by a few minutes or it's time to go to bed and you haven't turned off the lights yet. Believe me, a bird knows better what time it is with it's internal clock, than you do most of the time with a real clock. But you can't run to it every time it screams or this will reward its behavior and will cause the bird to start screaming every time it wants you.

If you have it in a "Bird Room" or room of its own, then go to the door and slap the door in the middle with your open hand to make a loud bang. This will stop the screaming for a minute, so that you can enter the room a few moments later while the bird is quiet and not reward the screaming behavior. If it's feeding time, don't go in there without its dinner, but never reward bad behavior with what it wants or you will only reinforce the behavior and make it worse.

Bad behaviors are learned behaviors, and usually bad behaviors are directly related to how you or the previous owner worked with this bird, and is totally not the bird's fault. If you have taken in a bird that already has problems, realize this and understand, that learned behaviors can be also unlearned.

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## Stop Biting with Proper Step Up Training & Redirection

Biting is also a learned behavior, birds don't bite each other in the wild, they may chew bark, wood or leaves, peck at other birds, but they never bite, unless it's out of fear or in defense. Usually in captivity biting is done because of the way the bird has been handled.

One way it could have learned to bite is in the way it has been picked up, or maybe it was doing something and didn't want to be bothered at that time so it scolds and goes to bite or nip, and when you pulled away it found this was a good way to be left alone. Rule number one, when you go to pick up the bird and it goes to bite, show it that this behavior has no merit. That no matter what, it is going to get on your arm or stick (if its stick trained), and it is going to do what you want, at the time that you want. This isn't dominating but it is discouraging biting for the purpose of being left alone. If you leave it alone you have re enforced bad behavior and the bird will bite more frequently.

But a very common reason for biting to be learned is by the way you pick your bird up. When you say "Step Up", are you holding your hand lower than the perch the bird is standing on, and actually making it step down? When stepping down a bird needs its beak for balance (it's much easier for a bird to step up), but when it puts its beak down for balance, you may think its going to bite, so you pull away and the bird almost falls. After this happens a few times, I think I would start biting as well. ALWAYS hold your arm higher than the perch the bird is standing on, and close enough so it won't have to stretch too far to step up, then if your bird putting it's beak down, you have no doubt and know it isn't doing this for balance, then you can counter this action accordingly. (See more on step up, and stick training in "Husbandry Behaviors")

Don't pull away from a bite, simply "Redirect" the bird's attention away from a bite, by quickly pointing at the bird's face with your free hand to get its attention, then bring your finger up higher than its head. This will focus the bird's attention up away from the arm or hand it was going to bite, and focus on the other hand moving above its head, while it steps up on your arm.

Sometimes while standing on you, it will reach down to take a nip for no other reason than, it is bored, and looking for a little excitement. Redirect it again and again for as long as it takes to curb this behavior. Redirecting is always the way to keep a bird from biting, and when you do this enough the bird will eventually

forget about biting all together. Sometimes it's like a game to a bird, but it is not a game that you want to participate in, or encourage.

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## Good Training Attitude with Toys & Playgrounds

Now that you have curbed a few bad behaviors, the bird needs some free time out of its cage to develop a healthy attitude and occupy its time. You can have a playground setup for your bird/s to give free time out of the cage, and give you time to do other things as well. If you have multiple birds as I have, the playground needs to be large enough to give them room to play, and space to do what they want without interfering with each other. I built my playground out of small dead trees and fallen branches, nailed to a cluster of growing tree out in the yard, so the cost was minimal and the benefits were maximized. Birds need sunlight so an outdoor play ground is a great way to provide this while they play. An indoor playground when and outdoor one is not an option would have to suffice. As they chew and destroy parts of the playground, it's always easily replaced. But you can also buy ready made playgrounds, if you don't have the time or skill to do it yourself. Still you can add things like rope ladders or swings, and these are easy to build. Rope ladders are so easy to make by simply cutting a number of perch size branches to uniform lengths and drilling a hole all the way through on each side of them for the rope to go through. Then when you have all the rungs for the ladder made, you tie two lengths of rope on part of the playground where you want it, and close enough to match the holes in the ladder rungs. Then you start stringing your rungs on the rope, and as you do this, you tie a knot under the rung where you want it to stay and gravity will do the rest. Move down to the next rung and the next one, until you have a ladder that goes from where you want it to start, to where you wanted it to end.



A Playground large enough for all of your birds to keep busy and enjoy

It doesn't take an engineer to make one and your bird/s will love it. You will want toys like hanging swings for your birds to play on as well. The more they have to do and explore, the happier they will be during play time. One easy swing to make is to tie two ends of a loose loop of rope to a horizontal perch, or also tying rope to a horizontal perch in a Tarzan style rope swing.



Other types are easy to build as well, by taking one foot and a half, fat piece of a limb (maybe 3 inches in diameter) and 2 smaller pieces and inch or so in diameter. Then drill two holes half way through the larger log about the size of the smaller pieces using a drill with a hole saw. You may have to whittle the two uprights down a little, to make them fit in the holes snugly but when they do fit, nail a small nail through the big log into the smaller ones, to set and lock them together. Then get 4 screw eyes and screw one in each end of the swing and two into the playground where you want them to hang and open one set of screw eyes with pliers and





attach the swing to the playground, then close the screw eyes the same way and it's ready for use. A "T-swing" is easier than that to make, by drilling one hole in the middle of the larger perch, stick the smaller branch in the hole and nail the two pieces together and hang it like the other.

Keep in mind though that chew toys are not necessary to have here, because the entire playground is of wood and bark and is one big chewy toy in itself, the rope on your rope ladders gives them a different texture to chew as well, so there is no need for any store bought toys on a playground that is built out of natural materials, like this one is.

While we are talking about toys...in the store, bird toys are designed to make the bird owner happier more than the bird, from the way they are built to the colors they use, totally cater and designed to make the bird owner happy first, and the bird second.



Swing made of natural materials doubles as a chew toy

All the bird wants is something to chew, he doesn't care what color it is or what it's made of, a stick that has fallen into the front yard would make it just as happy. Leather and soft plastics can be chewed into small pieces and swallowed. Then expand in the digestive system and create a blockage, so use them at your own risk or better yet...not at all. The best small toys that vets will recommend for your bird, is something that is hard enough that a piece cannot be broken off and swallowed or if it is swallowed that it will break down and pass through a bird system harmlessly. For instance a ring of old house keys on a chain, a spoon on a chain or a pine cone works well and is recommended. You can find a fallen limb of safe non toxic woods and cut it with a table saw or skill saw into one inch wafers. Then drill a hole through each one to string them on a chain and hang in the cage for your bird's enjoyment. This is way cheaper than paying \$20 bucks for a store bought toy that will last a week, and this will only take a few minutes to build. The first thing you want for your bird is to keep it safe while keeping it happy, you want your bird to be healthy, both physically and mentally before you start training it behaviors or tricks.

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