

Educating Yourself About Avian Care and Behavior

By Denise Kelly

Avian care and behavior is a relatively new field, as compared with dogs and cats, and many schools of thought have been developing. The various methods and approaches to physical care, environment, and behavior have not been tested over time, so it's difficult to find a single source or philosophy that is universally accepted or based on standard accepted scientific methods. There are no degrees or accreditation for avian behaviorists.



When considering sources for information on avian care and behavior, make sure the context treats birds as wild prey animals, and not as domesticated animals like cats and dogs. Avoid so-called behaviorists who claim they have a quick fix solution to bird behavior problems and/or offer advice on getting birds to talk or perform. These methods may raise people's expectations, only to result in disappointment when their efforts fail or even cause matters to worsen.

It is interesting to note that while different types of dogs are different breeds, they are all the same species. However, there are more than 350 species of parrots. Making any generalizations on behavior across species can be misleading and totally inappropriate. Every bird is different. Understanding their behavior is best approached on an individual basis.

One of the most effective methods of behavior modification is based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), where the emphasis is on the use of positive reinforcement to change problem behaviors such as feather plucking, aggression, nervousness, or screaming.

Here are some recommended online resources that provide information on avian care and behavior:

- Susan Friedman, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Utah State University, runs a wonderful online course entitled Living and Learning with Parrots: The Fundamental Principles of Behavior. You can find out more at www.parrottalk.com/about.html.
- Greg Glendell of Pet Parrot Consultancy in the U.K. has published a book called *Pet Parrots Advice Direct*, available through his website (www.greg-parrots.co.uk), or you may reach him by phone at 011-44-870-757-2381.
- Steve Martin is one of the best-known trainers of animals and birds using positive reinforcement methods. His website features several insightful articles on parrot behavior. Read more at www.naturalencounters.com/parrot.html.

- The goal of The True Parrot website (<http://thetrueparrot.homestead.com/>) is to provide information on what living with a parrot is truly like.
- The Avian Welfare Coalition website (www.avianwelfare.org/welcome.htm) has many useful articles about bird care, behavior and environment. For example:
 - “10 Things You Should Know Before You Adopt a Bird”:
www.avianwelfare.org/issues/articles/10things.htm
 - “The True Nature of Parrots”:
www.avianwelfare.org/issues/articles/truenature.htm
- These two websites may also be useful: www.avianprotectionsociety.org and www.birdadoption.org.
- Natural Bird (www.naturalbird.com) is a website that promotes natural environments for captive birds.
- For a comprehensive listing of publications on bird care, behavior and environment, visit www.avianpublications.com.

Here are some recommended books on bird care, health and behavior:

- *Captive Birds in Health and Disease* by John Cooper and Margaret Cooper
- *My Parrot, My Friend: An Owner's Guide to Parrot Behavior* by Bonnie Munro Doane and Thomas Qualkinbush
- *A Guide to a Naturally Healthy Bird* by Alicia McWatters
- *Holistic Care for Birds: A Manual of Wellness and Healing* by Dr. David McCluggage and Pamela Leis Higdon
- *An Owner's Guide to a Happy, Healthy Pet: First Aid for Birds* by Julie Rach and Dr. Gary A. Gallerstein
- *The Complete Pet Bird Owner's Handbook* by Dr. Gary A. Gallerstein
- *Companion Parrot Handbook* by Sally Blanchard

Finally, many avian rescue groups and local bird-club adoption programs offer hands-on assistance to adopters, and educational classes and seminars on proper bird care for the public. They also serve as a resource for other avian-related services, such as vets, grooming, and care products.

Denise Kelly is a co-founder and board member of the Avian Welfare Coalition. She has been active in animal welfare and protection and exotic bird issues for 20 years.