

their presence known to other birds, or possible to re-establish relationships among the flock. Soft chattering is often how a parrot amuses itself, and is normally a sign that the parrot is feeling safe and content. This muted chatter is also heard when a bird is practicing speech; words and phrases can sometimes be heard if you listen closely.

**Preening:**

Preening is the activity that a bird conducts to keep his feathers in top condition. It consists of running feathers through their beaks from the base to the tip to straighten and clean them. Some birds have oil glands at the base of their tails, and will take some of this oil and run it through their feathers, creating a "sheen" and protectant that repels water instead of absorbing it. Preening is also a social activity; birds will preen one another to remove feather sheaths that they cannot reach by themselves. Birds may also attempt to "preen" their humans hair. Preening should not be confused with feather biting or plucking. A feather-biting bird will bite his feathers and snip them off at the base, close to the skin or directly at the feather follicle. A plucking bird will pull and pluck the feathers out completely.

**Perching:**

On one foot: Shows that a bird feels comfortable in his surroundings and secure in his environment. A secure bird will sleep with one foot tucked up to his abdomen and his head turned around and tucked into his back feathers.

**Crouch Stance:**

A bird that is crouching with his head down and pointed forward, tail feathers flared, body feathers ruffled or "hackled", and exhibiting pupil dilation is one angry fellow! DO NOT approach a bird who is exhibiting this behavior, as it means, "I am big, mean, and mad; if you come any closer I will bite you!"

Mickaboo Cockatiel Rescue is a non-profit bird rescue organization, located in the San Francisco Bay Area. We are dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and placement of parrot type birds that have been sick, injured abused or neglected.



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UNDERSTANDING  
YOUR BIRD  
*www.mickaboo.org*

One of the most important aspects in creating and maintaining a successful relationship with an avian companion is the ability to understand your bird's vocalizations and body language. Birds learn to communicate with us through sounds, behavior and actions. Using their body language and vocalizations they can "tell" us when they are happy, content, frightened, sick, hungry, tired, angry, or ready to be held and cuddled.



The ability to communicate is a vital element in any relationship, and it is of utmost importance that bird owners learn to interpret the meanings of their birds' sounds and behaviors in order to successfully tame, train, and provide them with the very best of care. While the actions of one particular bird or species do not necessarily mimic the meaning of the same action in all other birds, we have found there to be a general similarity in the actions and meaning of some basic avian behaviors. If your bird exhibits any of the following behaviors, try to ascertain exactly what your feathered friend is trying to tell you, and respond (or refrain from responding) accordingly.

#### **Flashing/Dilating Pupils:**

Flashing, dilating pupils can be a sign of aggression, excitement, nervousness, or pleasure. Pay close attention to other behaviors that accompany flashing/"pinning" pupils in order to correctly ascertain the reason for this particular behavior. In a bird that is exhibiting additional aggressive behaviors such as tail fanning, this behavior means "Back Off!". If you persist in attempting contact, you may get a nasty bite for your trouble. Your bird may also be exhibiting this behavior in response to another bird, animal, or human in the vicinity that is disliked.

#### **Barking:**

Even in a household without dogs, some birds will "bark" in excitement, during a "chatter" session, or in an attempt to display their dominance over their cagemates or other birds in the household.

#### **Beak Grinding:**

This is similar to the sound of a child grinding his teeth at night, and is a result of a bird scraping the lower mandible against the upper mandible. It is usually a sign of a bird feeling secure and content. This will often be heard after your bird settles in for the night, right before he drops off to sleep, and sometimes during sleep.

#### **Beak Wiping:**

When done in the presence of another bird, it is usually an attempt to tell the other bird that it is intruding on personal territory. When done while alone, it usually indicates one of two things: the bird is trying to dislodge something stuck to his beak, or the beak wiping is a displacement aggression activity. Displacement aggression means that the bird cannot perform the activity he would like to and is aggravated, which he displays by wiping his beak on another object. We've observed this particular cause and effect in a jealous Amazon who is over-bonded to his male owner, and never fails to bite the owner's wife when given the opportunity. Whenever the bird is caged and observes acts of affection between the owner and his wife, the bird commences beak wiping and aggressive behavior.

#### **Biting:**

With young birds, there is often a "teething stage" encountered where the youngsters will "beak" almost everything it comes in contact with. A bird's beak is filled with encapsulated nerve endings, and is used to experience sensation, texture, taste, resilience of objects, etc. In these instances, the "beaking" cannot be considered as biting but as experimentation. "Beaking" of human fingers, which may lead to biting later, can be gently discouraged by redirecting the bird to an appropriate toy or other approved chewable item. With older birds, biting is obviously the most definitive form of showing displeasure. Biting birds do so for a reason. The bird may be feeling threatened, frightened or startled. Birds will bite during display; to protect their nest; or when the owner is doing something the bird dis-

proves of. Birds may also bite their mate or beloved human in an attempt to protect them. A bird's instinct is to flee when faced with an intruder, and in an attempt to encourage his "mate" to flee, may bite the owner as a way of encouraging this. Biting can also be caused by displaced aggression; when unable to bite the desired object, your bird will bite the closest thing at hand. When encouraging a bird to step up onto your hand, do not misunderstand an open beak aimed at your hand as an attempt to bite. Birds almost always "test" a perch before stepping onto it to ensure its stability, and will touch his beak to your hand before stepping onto it.

#### **Whistling, Singing, Talking:**

These activities are usually indulged in when the bird is feeling safe, secure and content in his surroundings. Expected times are during the early morning hours when the sun rises, and at dusk when the sun is going down, but also occur anytime the bird is feeling especially exuberant and happy!

#### **Regurgitating:**

When done in the presence or in close proximity to a human, it normally means that the bird has chosen you as its mate, and wants to feed you! This action is also sometimes performed on a favorite toy or other object. Bonded birds show their affection for each other by feeding each other, and accomplish this by regurgitating food. This activity consists of bobbing the head up and down to bring up food from the crop, and depositing it into the mate's mouth. This is also the manner in which parents feed baby chicks.

#### **Chattering:**

Loud chattering or crowing is usually heard at dusk, when bird(s) are settling down for the night. It is believed to be an attempt to make