

Evergreen Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

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Social Requirements for Birds

Our pet birds are actually flock birds, in the wild never living a solitary life. For our pet birds, this is often a conundrum as the bird is solitary, substituting humans and even other pets for its flock. Many of our pet birds were individually hand-reared, and never really learned from other birds that they in fact are birds. Some of our pet birds seem to believe they are small humans from their reactions to humans and the environment. This lack of “bird-dom” recognition has been thought by some to be part of the initiating problem for feather destructive disorder, although why birds destroy their feathers is multi-factorial in its complexity.

How can you help the bird be social and have a healthy “home flock”? One way is to keep your bird below eye level so that you always are the dominant flock member. Another is to spend regular, quality time with your bird being in the center of family activity. It helps if the bird’s housing is in the busiest area of the home. If that is the kitchen, then certain safety procedures need to be in effect. No non-stick cookware should be used in a home with a bird, as overheating of these can release toxic gas (“Teflon poisoning”). Self-cleaning cycle of ovens should not be used. The bird should be safely in its cage when the stove is in use as a bird may fly and land on a hot surface or even into a pot on the stove. The bird should also not be able to land in the sink when dishes are being cleaned.

A bird’s cage should be covered at night to give the bird some good sleep and comfort.

Many birds suffer from separation anxiety, not unlike what you read about for dogs and cats. The bird may pluck its feathers, tear at itself causing wounds, and generally be agitated, screaming, and frantic. The bird can be trained to minimize these fears and anxiety. One way is to just leave the bird in its cage, walk into another room where the bird can’t see you. Do it for just 2-3 minutes to start with, gradually increasing the time away from the bird. This is very similar to how you train a dog to deal with separation anxiety. Always praise the bird and make a fuss over it when you return from the time away. This is primarily a problem in hand-raised birds that don’t know how to be alone (without constant “human flock” attention).

Many screaming behaviors have their roots in separation anxiety, fear, and lack of flock socializations. The bird may be screaming from insecurity and from declaring territory or dominance. There are many scenarios to work with a screaming bird, most center around correcting the environment and pinpointing what starts the screaming and fixing that trigger. More information on this will be forthcoming.