

# Evergreen Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

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## Basic Bird Training

Hand-reared birds incorporate their humans as part of their flock and social structure. Normally flock members teach baby birds how to be a member of the flock and what the rules of behavior are. You fill the role of parent and need to teach your bird basic behaviors. The basics include step-up, step-down and staying on a perch where placed. All members of the family need to give exactly the same commands and same training techniques so that the bird does not receive mixed messages. Training periods initially should be conducted in a quiet area for 10-15 minutes/day to keep the bird's undivided attention. Remember that your bird has the intelligence of somewhere between a 2 and 5 year old human child and a fairly short attention span. Consistency is the key!

**Step-Up:** Press your hand (present whole hand, not just a finger) gently up against the front of your bird's legs and say "step-up". The verbal command is not an absolute requirement as your bird can be sensitive to your movements and body language. Your bird will often know what is being requested, but the verbal command reinforces the action. Your hand should be steady and provide a stable "perch" for your bird to grasp. Once the bird places a foot onto the edge of your hand, lightly press the toes and lift the bird up a small bit. Reward the bird verbally with "Good Bird" in a positive voice. If your bird is not tame, you may need to bribe him/her using a food treat in the hand to achieve the same action. Give the bribe when he/she has stepped up.

**Step-Down:** With the bird still on your hand, position your hand slightly below the perch you want the bird to step onto. Gently roll your hand toward the perch. The bird will step forward and it wants to keep its balance. In many cases the bird will first take the perch in its beak before stepping forward and climbing onto the perch, so it is a good idea to be sure your hand with the bird is slightly away from the perch to allow this posture. Technically the bird is climbing up rather than stepping down. Reward the bird verbally for doing so.

**Stay:** This command and action keeps the bird on the perch or training stand or other furnishing. This helps when you have the bird out in a room and you're working with normal social activities. It prevents the bird from roaming free in the house. A free-roaming bird can get into trouble, experience trauma, or even possibly pair-bond to just one person (flies to that person consistently), or chew on possibly toxic substances or damage household items. It is helpful to have a table top perch set below your shoulder height, although the top of a cage can work if it is below your shoulder level. This allows you to establish dominance. Set the bird on the "perch", say "Stay", wait a few minutes if the bird sits there, reward with a stroke, verbal "good bird", and possibly a treat. Gradually back away, and as long as the bird stays put, keep rewarding (probably verbally is best). As the interval and your distance gets longer, you may try going into another room, then come back and reward if the bird has stayed put. Practice placing the bird on this furnishing and repeating the process. If the bird climbs down and walks around or flies off, put them back on the furnishing without any verbal cue (do not say 'bad bird' or anything else). Return a few minutes later and if the bird is still on the perch, reward him/her with whatever positive reinforcement you think works the best (verbal, treat, stroke, etc).