

# **The Bird School**

## **Biting & Aggressions**

**Ann M. Castro**



**Volume III**

**How to Solve Problem Behavior with Clicker Training**

**for Parrots and Other Birds**

**AdIA**



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How to Solve Problem Behavior  
with Clicker Training:

## Biting & Aggressions

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The Bird School. How to Solve Problem Behavior with Clicker Training: Biting & Aggressions for Parrots and Other Birds by Ann Castro  
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ISBN-13 for epub edition: 978-3-939770-63-3  
ISBN-13 for print edition: 978-3-939770-61-9

Layout and photo work: Ann Castro  
Front cover photo: Lena Schenk  
Editor: Kimberly Collins, [www.newimagedocuments.org](http://www.newimagedocuments.org)

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This book is dedicated to all the parrots and humans whose relationships no longer function. I hope I can help you with this book to find the way to each other, again.

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# 1. *Introduction*

Aggressive behavior is a typical problem in parrot keeping. It is the most common reason why parrot owners seek my help.

Unfortunately, they are usually looking for help when the initial behavior deviation has already developed into a massive problem. At that stage the issue is much harder to resolve as the behavior has already become firmly established.

Many parrot owners do not recognize in the early stages of a behavior issue, that a problem is developing. Once it becomes obvious to them, they often try first to fix the problem themselves. They surf the internet, diverse message boards, or ask other parrot owners for tips regarding the resolution of the problem behavior. Unfortunately, these tips are often a disaster. They do not only heighten the problem behavior or worsen the relationship between owner and pet, often enough they have animal welfare relevancy. In addition, valuable time is lost in which the undesirable behavior is more

firmly established. This helps neither the owner nor the animal.

With this book I would like to assist you in recognizing and warding off potential aggression problems at an early stage. I would also like to show you how to implement behavior therapy measures to solve even advanced behavior problems yourself. To accomplish this the book gives you step-by-step instructions walking you through the procedures carried out by behavior consultants to resolve biting and aggression problems.

An effective behavior therapy consists of four modules. These are usually implemented more or less in parallel:

1. Veterinary check-up
2. Optimizing the bird's keeping conditions
3. Occupation
4. Training

In this book I will explain to you what each of these modules precisely means and how you may carry them out correctly. I will be very direct and brutally honest in my communication with you. Some things I write may surprise you. At times you may even feel somewhat offended, especially as the information given may be contrary to what you have been told for many years. I do not want to upset you;

however, the goal of this book is to help you effectively, by allowing you straight access to my knowledge. Only through this will you be able to help yourself, your animals, and possibly even other bird owners.

During my personal consultations, I communicate much more diplomatically, of course. But for this book to be of maximum use to you, I must give you the best information in clear words leaving nothing open to interpretation. You need to know what I am thinking and why I resolve a certain issue in a certain way.

Before we begin, I would like to point out that the method I use for behavior therapy is clicker training. This book is an additional module to volumes I and II of my Clicker Training Series. Thus, if you are not already an experienced clicker trainer with birds, you should read both of my books, *Clicker Training for Parrots and Other Birds*, Volume I, and *More Clicker Training for Parrots and Other Birds*, Volume II.

The knowledge in those two books is required to understand the concepts in this book. Furthermore, we will use exercises from those two books for problem solving and behavior training. Thus, you need to practice those exercises with your bird first. Whenever I mention information in this book that is derived from

one of the other two books, I will reference it, so you will know where you can look for more information.

During behavior therapy please keep in mind that your bird's problem behavior did not appear "overnight". Similarly, it will not disappear "overnight" either. You must continuously and patiently stick with your behavior therapy in order to be successful with it. Please also take care that you do not overtax your bird with marathon training sessions. Several short training units with a pause of at least one hour in between will yield results far more quickly than one marathon session. The latter will usually lead only to frustration, lack of motivation, and annoyance. You do more damage than good with such sessions.

If you have further questions, you may post them in my discussion group or book a personal consultation. Information on both is given on my website ([www.thebirdschool.com](http://www.thebirdschool.com)). I hope that soon, you too will have established happy and healthy relationships with your birds. For now, I would like to wish you much fun and success with the behavior therapy for your biting or aggressive birds.

Take care,  
Ann Castro.

## 2. *Veterinary Check-up*

A good behavior therapist will always insist on a thorough examination by an experienced avian vet before starting any kind of behavior consultation. This is not only beneficial for the animal and its owner, but also to protect the therapist. I urge you to diligently do likewise even if you are carrying out the behavior consultation by yourself.

The main reason is that behavior changes and problems, particularly those that appear suddenly, may be caused by health problems. The animal is in pain or feels unwell. To eliminate this as a cause or to recognize and treat it you should, without exception, see an experienced avian veterinarian when you notice any behavior changes in your birds.

I emphasize that the veterinarian must not only be specialized in birds, but that he also needs to be experienced. Proper diagnostics

in parrots are difficult and an art rather than just a science. It can only be accomplished well with special training and significant amounts of experience. If you have not yet located such an avian veterinarian, you need to find one. Try asking other parrot owners. Particularly owners of very expensive kinds of parrots tend to know who the superior veterinarians are. Ask them whom they take their animals to.

In my opinion any parrot regardless of its size or monetary value deserves the best medical care you can find. It is a living being that feels and suffers. Therefore, I urge you to go exclusively to veterinarians recommended for very valuable parrots even if you only own a relatively inexpensive bird.

The second reason for my recommendation to have the bird examined by a veterinarian is that I often encounter owners who have never or extremely rarely been to the veterinarian with their birds. This may cost these animals their lives. Parrots, being prey, tend to hide their illnesses for as long as they are able to. An ill parrot will only start to show symptoms that are recognizable to most owners when he has become too weak to hide them any longer. At that point the illness has progressed to a stage in which it is much harder to cure. It may even

be too late for the bird. I often hear comments from owners who claim that their parrots were totally healthy, until they suddenly and literally “fell of their perches” and died to the owners’ great surprise. The problem is that these animals were not healthy. Instead, the owners simply did not notice their illness, until it was too late.

Do not judge these people. This problem is very common. These owners are not any more stupid, blind, or careless than anyone else. It is simply almost impossible to determine a parrot’s illness at an early stage without the appropriate equipment and tests.

Over the years I have adopted many parrots. They always undergo thorough veterinary examinations, before they are allowed to join the flock. In all those years, I have not encountered a single bird that did not have to be treated for something or other. In several cases the birds were even carriers of lethal viral diseases that could have ended up killing my flock, if I had adopted them.

Without exception, the owners in each case were certain that their bird was healthy. They thought that I was wasting a lot of money and stressing their bird unnecessarily going through all those examinations and tests. Therefore, I

implore you, please do your birds and yourself a favor and have them examined by a specialized and experienced avian veterinarian at least once per year.

The third reason for my recommendation of a veterinary check-up is that it can save your bird much suffering and even his life in an emergency. When parrots get ill they often deteriorate rapidly. It is a big advantage in such a situation to know a veterinarian whom you have already taken the bird to for an initial examination and regular well bird update check-ups. Such a veterinarian knows the animal and has its baseline information. This is invaluable in an emergency. In addition you should not underestimate how helpful it is for you, when in an emergency you already know whom you can take your bird to instead of frantically searching around for a good avian veterinarian.



### 3. *Optimize Keeping Conditions*

Behavior does not arise in a vacuum, but is impacted by several factors. Keeping conditions are one of them.

Appropriate keeping conditions significantly help in having happy and healthy animals with no behavior issues. Poor keeping conditions may turn a happy and healthy bird into a mental and physical wreck within a fairly short period of time. Please do not underestimate the importance of appropriate keeping conditions. Time and again I have seen behavior issues dissolve virtually by themselves after the keeping conditions of the animal were optimized.

Books could be written regarding the proper keeping conditions for all the different types of parrots. For our discussion, I will focus on the most relevant aspects pertaining to our topic – biting and aggressions. These problem behaviors are most severely affected

by insufficient space, lack of a mate, and too little occupation.

### **LIFE IN THE WILD**

To understand clearly how parrots ought to be kept, it behooves each of us to observe parrots living in the wild. I do understand that most of you will not be able to gallivant around some jungle for weeks at a time. Most of us will be lacking in time and funds to do so. However, there are a multitude of videos, for example on youtube.com, that show parrots in the wild.

I have set up a resource section for this book on my website ([www.thebirdschool.com](http://www.thebirdschool.com)) where I will post links to such videos. When you view them you will quickly see that parrots are highly social and intelligent flock animals. Researchers have determined that parrots have the intelligence of three to five year old children. They also fly many miles each day and keep themselves busy with searching for food, social interaction and grooming, as well as with breeding.

Looking at those videos you will quickly realize that it is totally unnatural to keep parrots alone in a cage. Who should then be surprised that such animals start to display behavior

problems sooner or later. To put it very bluntly: Keeping a parrot alone in a cage is cruel and has nothing whatsoever to do with love of animals.

### **MATE AND MINI-FLOCK**

A single parrot is not only bored and lonely, he is also under permanent stress.

In the wild a single parrot is a dead parrot. His mate and flock give him not only social interaction, but also protect him from predators. Thus, a parrot that is being kept alone feels as if he were permanently in a life-threatening situation.

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End of preview for this book

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