

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Parrots

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Bring home the
right parrot for you

Connect with your
feathered friend

Expertly tame and
train your bird

Nikki Moustaki, MA, MFA

Companion parrot expert and advocate



Parrots

2nd Edition

by Nikki Moustaki MA, MFA

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Parrots For Dummies® , 2nd Edition

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Introduction

Welcome to *Parrots For Dummies*, Second Edition, a detailed guide to parrothood. Get ready to dive into the wonderful world of parrots ... and the not-so-wonderful world of parrots. Though a parrot may seem like the perfect pet, you'll see that parrots aren't even *pets* at all, but wild companions to be respected, catered to, and cared for with extreme attention to detail. I wrote every sentence in this book with the human/parrot relationship in mind. I know, that might sound over-the-top now, but keep reading, and I promise that you'll understand.

About This Book

Parrot care and behavior can be baffling. Most of it is counterintuitive because human intuition doesn't work well with parrots. You have to learn what they need and want, because recognizing those things aren't in your natural hard-wiring. You're programmed to read subtle cues in other humans and even in some other mammals, but not so with parrots. But when you live with parrots long enough, and you take the time to understand them, your human intuition shifts, and you begin to think using *their* modes and standards.

In this new edition, I add some new and updated information about the following:

- » How to teach your bird to know colors, to count, and maybe even read
- » How to communicate with your parrot on a higher level
- » How to make a parrot piñata for your bird to play with and destroy

- » Ten things that may surprise new parrot guardians
- » Updated nutrition advice and meal plans

You can read more about the following topics here to discover more tips and tricks to being a parrot guardian:

- » **The lowdown on different parrot species and which type of feathered pal is right for you:** From the tiny parrotlet to the giant macaws, you have a lot to choose from. I also help you figure out where and how to purchase or adopt your bird.
- » **The practical nitty-gritty of sharing your home with a parrot:** You can find what you need to know on providing parrot housing and accessories, bringing a parrot home, parrot-proofing your home, and properly interacting with your parrot from day one.
- » **The care for your parrot:** Parrot nutrition, grooming, and health care are important topics.
- » **The ways parrots behave:** Parrot behavior isn't simple. Parrots do the funny and odd things that tend to baffle guardians. Read about normal and abnormal companion parrot behaviors, as well as advice for living in a multiple-parrot household.
- » **The ins and outs of taming and training and more:** No matter whether you're a new parrot guardian or an expert parrot guardian, you can find some strategies for beginning and more advanced training your bird. You can also find out more about breeding and showing your birds in bird shows.

Getting inside the mind of your parrot is important. It's not going to happen the other way around. I have had parrots nearly all of my life (for *all* my adult life), having bred them, rescued them, gone through just about every

avian illness and injury with them, tamed and trained them, and lived with them as companions and friends. I worked in pet shops for most of my teens and early 20s, and managed an all-bird shop for a while. I learned a lot in those years, dealing with just about every species you can mention, and my personal flock grew as I took in many homeless parrots.

I became heavily involved in large and small bird clubs in my area and even wrote a newsletter for one of them for a couple of years. I had wonderful “birdy mentors” in those days, people who had been involved with birds for decades. I kept myself in the birdy loop, reading everything I could on the topic (and still do). My whole life was birds. Eventually, I became a birdy mentor too, and started my avian behavior and care consulting practice.

I use *he* and *she* interchangeably in this book when referring to parrots. I didn’t want to settle on one pronoun, because both are commonly used in the parrot community. (Parrot guardians sometimes even use *it*.) In general, people usually assign a gender to their parrot when they first get it, usually starting with a name, and then they use the corresponding pronoun. This can backfire, however. Case in point is my African grey parrot, Hope, who turned out be male after I confirmed his gender with a DNA test. I mention this particular bird quite a bit in this book.

Foolish Assumptions

I wrote this book assuming any of following about you, my dear reader:

- » You’re considering getting a parrot and you’re doing your birdy homework.

- » You a new parrot guardian and are looking for all the basic information to get started.
- » You've been a parrot guardian for a while and want to find some valuable tips and information.

No matter how much experience you have, I give you some sophisticated methods of parrot care, taming, and training. So whether you're parrotless for the moment or you have a whole flock, this book is for you.

Icons Used in This Book

Every *For Dummies* book has pictures in the margins called *icons* that help you navigate the text of this book, and this one is no different. Here's the lowdown on what each icon means:



TIP

Gives you practical information that you can put into practice right away.



WARNING

This icon tips you off to dangers to your parrot's health and safety. Please heed these warnings.



REMEMBER

Here's where I repeat important information, generally for clarification. This is good info to tuck away as you become more involved with your parrot.

Where to Go from Here

[Chapter 1](#) is a good place to begin if you want to get a solid overview of the rest of the book so that you know what to look for as you read. If you want to dive right into things, start with [Chapter 2](#). If you're looking for something in particular, the table of contents is a quick reference to a basic section. For a much more thorough reference, check out the index. You can also go to www.dummies.com and search for "Parrots For Dummies Cheat Sheet" to access some other helpful information.

Part 1

Introducing the Parrot — Your Wild Child

IN THIS PART ...

Discover the essentials of what it's like to live with a parrot if you're considering welcoming one in your home.

Find out what you can expect from parrot guardianship.

Uncover the important characteristics and details on the variety of the more popular parrot species.

Recognize how to choose the best parrot species for you, your family, and your living arrangements.

Chapter 1

Meeting the Parrots, Just the Basics

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Announcing the parrots**
 - » **Creating a good parrot home**
 - » **Reflecting a bit on parrot behavior**
 - » **Becoming friends with your parrot**
-

Welcome to the wonderful world of parrots. It may be wonderful, but it's not utopia. There's a lot to know and a lot to do in order to make a parrot happy and keep him healthy in the average home. This chapter gives you an overview of this entire book and shows you where to look for the important information you'll need to get started with parrots.

Introducing the Parrots

If parrots were human, they'd be supermodels. They'd want their spring water and their carrot sticks, and they'd want them *now*. Parrots are beautiful, temperamental creatures that need a lot of handling from a good manager — that's you, the parrot's guardian — to make sure they're cared for properly (see [Figure 1-1](#)). It's in the fine print of the parrot's contract: You'll do the bird's bidding, and you won't ask any questions.



Photo by Priscilla Schmidt

FIGURE 1-1: These tame budgies are wonderful companions and are as close to officially domesticated as parrots get.

Well, doing the bird's bidding sounds a little un-fun, doesn't it? I don't mean that you're the bird's servant, though it can sometimes feel that way. What I mean is that parrots have a lot of requirements that need to be met *or else*. The *or else* means high veterinary bills, a very unhappy parrot, and perhaps even a dead bird. The *or else* isn't a place you want to go.

You have to feed the parrot right, house him right, and give him your full and total attention. You have to provide him with toys, friends, things to do, health care, and everything else he needs. A parrot is a complicated companion, far more so than a dog or cat. If you read

this book cover to cover, you'll have a great handle on how to properly care for your bird.

From pet to companion

The first and most important thing to know about parrots is that they're not like other pets. They're *companions*. Rather than being the owner, you're the *guardian*. This is the vocabulary I use throughout this book. The language you use to describe other people is how you perceive and relate to them, and the same goes for the language you use to describe the animals in your life. You can find out more about all of this in [Chapter 2](#).

MASTERING SOME BIRD LINGO

Here's some lingo you might see or hear in bird circles. Most of these definitions apply to the bird world:

- **Birb:** A playful internet nickname for birds, mostly used online for videos or photos of birds behaving silly or cute. According to www.knowyourmeme.com, the first example of the word used online was on Twitter in 2012.
- **Borb:** Chunky bird.
- **Fids:** Feathered kids.
- **Floof:** Fluffy bird.
- **Hooman:** What a birb might call you.
- **Parront:** The hooman guardian of a birb.
- **Seeb:** Bird seed.
- **Scratches:** A combo of *scratches* and *itches*, used when you gently pet a bird's head or face, usually against the feather growth.
- **Smol birb:** An adorably tiny bird.

I use some of these terms throughout the book.

A little bit of wilderness

Having a parrot in your home is like bringing a little bit of the rainforest, grasslands, or plains inside. A parrot is a wild animal and always will be, no matter where the parrot lives. When you live with a parrot, you have the unique responsibility of caring for a truly natural (not human manipulated) creature, one that hasn't been domesticated in any way. Captive parrots and wild parrots share the exact same instincts, developed over millions of years of evolution to keep them safe and help them find food, shelter, a mate, and rear babies. See [Chapter 11](#) for more details on how instincts inform your parrot's behavior.



REMEMBER

Some parrots are indeed easier to care for than others. Which parrot you choose should depend on how much space and time you have. There's never really enough time in the day to give a larger parrot the attention he wants because a parrot that's bonded to you will want to hang out with you all day, the way he would with a mate in the wild. Smaller parrots, such as parakeets and lovebirds, are often kept happily in pairs, which is a great option when you can't interact with your bird enough. Large parrots love each other's company as well. Because parrots are social, flock-oriented animals, they tend to like to be together. [Chapter 3](#) gives you the lowdown on which parrot species might be right for you (as in [Figure 1-2](#)). [Chapter 4](#) shows you how to choose a healthy parrot from the right kind of place.



Photo by Shari Markowitz

FIGURE 1-2: Parrots have some funny behaviors, like this caique eating a big cookie with one foot.

Home Tweet Home: Welcoming a Parrot into Your Home

The average home must be modified to accommodate a parrot, whether it's a little budgie or a large macaw. You have to parrot-proof your home the way you'd kid-proof it for toddlers. Parrots can get into even more trouble than toddlers, because not only can a parrot open the cupboard under the sink, but he can also get up to the cupboard above the refrigerator. He can eat through

drywall, pick at the chipping paint near the window, and dunk itself in the toilet. He can get outside and never come back again. Parrot-proofing is crucial. See [Chapter 7](#) for parrot-proofing ideas.

Making birdy comfortable

After you've parrot-proofed, you have to find acceptable housing for your bird. In parrot circles, the idiom *bigger is better* is applied to bird cages, aviaries, and habitats. Birds are meant to fly, so it's great if you can offer a safe flying space. Flying is essential for healthy respiratory, muscular, and skeletal systems.



TIP

Where you place the bird's housing is also crucial. Parrots like a secure spot close to a wall, out of drafts, and in a room where there's a lot of traffic. A parrot relegated to the garage or back room is a lonely and miserable bird. [Chapter 5](#) gives you lots of housing do's and don'ts.

Parrot paraphernalia

After you decide on housing, you need a lot of parrot paraphernalia. Fortunately, manufacturers of birdy stuff have gotten incredibly creative over the years, and a cornucopia of parrot accessories are out there that will make your bird more comfortable, give him things to do, and perhaps even save his life. Check out [Chapter 6](#) for your parrot shopping guide.

Parrot Care 101: Taking Care of Your Bird