

# FLIGHTED FEATHERS STARTER GUIDE



# WELCOME.

Welcome to the Flighted Feathers starter guide. This document has been created to increase your understanding about your feathered friend and to assist you in developing a successful long term relationship.



If you have any questions or would like assistance with your bird, we are here to help!  
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# ABOUT FLIGHTED FEATHERS

Welcome to Flighted Feathers, where our mission is to help birds reach their full potential through expert training and care. We have a deep passion for our feathered friends and take great pride in our work. We have a intimate understanding of bird behaviour and communication, and we use this knowledge to build strong foundations with each bird. We believe that flying, either indoors or outdoors, is an essential part of a bird's innate nature, and we are dedicated to helping birds live up to their full potential in this way.



Flighted Feathers employs ABA (Applied behaviour analysis) training principles, in conjunction with LIMA (Least intrusive, minimally aversive) techniques, to ensure the most effective and efficient training/behaviour modification.

We offer personalised;

- Online Consultations
- In-person Consultations
- Free Flight Courses &
- Bird Beginner Courses

Our Specialties;

- Bird Training
- Behaviour Modification
- Free Flight Training
- Problem Solving
- Skill Building
- Hand Raising &
- Rehabilitation



***Training  
for Birds  
&  
their  
Humans***

*Steph Biggs*  
PHOTOGRAPHY

***Your Bird is Never Wrong. What You Get is What You Have Reinforced.***

# HOW TO TRAIN YOUR BIRD

Birds of all sizes, from Parrotlets to Macaws, are highly intelligent animals with the ability to learn complex behaviour sequences. The first step to training any behaviour is to identify your bird's favourite treat. Once you know what it is, you can use the treat to reward your bird for desirable behaviour. These may include step up, returning to the cage and any other skills you would like to teach them.

The more you reward a behaviour, the more likely it is to occur in the future. This goes for both good and bad behaviours. There are two common ways to teach a bird a new behaviour through positive reinforcement, these include 'capturing' and 'luring'.

## **Capturing**

This process involves waiting for the bird to perform a behaviour and then reinforcing the behaviour. The capturing method is good for behaviours the bird naturally does including, wave, step up, big wings and vocalisations.

## **Luring**

For other non-natural behaviours, luring may be the best option for teaching a skill. Luring involves guiding the bird to perform a behaviour and rewarding the behaviour upon completion.

## **Positive Reinforcement**

A reinforcer (aka reward) is anything that increases the likelihood of a behaviour occurring more frequently in the future. Positive reinforcers include anything that can be dispensed in a timely manner including, treats, praise, toys etc.

## **Markers**

These are very important in the process of training a behaviour. A marker communicates to the bird, at the right time, that it has completed the desired behaviour and a reward is imminent. By reinforcing the behaviour we make it more likely to occur in the future.

## **Cues**

A cue is a verbal, visual or tactile signal that tells your bird to start a behaviour. Words and hand gestures are most commonly used eg. a gesture of a finger to signal wave, 'come' to signal recall.



**BIRDS CAN LEARN AN EXTRAORDINARY NUMBER OF BEHAVIOURS. THESE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVOURITE TO TEACH;**

## **Recall**

This is both a skill and a safety mechanism. A strong recall is vital if your bird ever finds itself outdoors. This skill will help your bird safely return to you.

## **Target**

Introducing target training is both a fun skill and can be the foundation to teach many other skills. Once a bird knows how to 'target' movement of the target stick can be used to guide a bird to complete new behaviours.

## **Talking, singing and whistling**

Reinforce desirable vocalisations and ignore undesirable vocalisations. By doing this you reduce the chances of screaming and other nuisance noises.

## **Stationing**

A fantastic skill for your bird to learn. Not only is the skill itself incompatible with many problem behaviours but it also reduces codependency by teaching your bird that good things can come despite being away from you.

## **Reward the Good**

Always remember to reward your bird when they are being good. As humans we have a predisposition to ignore good behaviour and punish bad behaviours. Don't forget to acknowledge your bird when they are being good eg. independently playing, foraging, bathing etc



Steph Biggs  
PHOTOGRAPHY

# WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE FIRST DAY

Bringing your bird home for the first time can be an overwhelming experience. The manner in which the bird has been raised will have a significant impact on the bird's ability to adapt to its new environment. In some cases, the adjustment period is quick, but for others it may take days/weeks for the bird to become comfortable in your home. Take things slow, allow

your bird to move at its own pace and don't ask too much from it. Introduce new items, people and other animals in the household slowly, always checking that your bird is not overwhelmed. Each individual, including visitors, should be introduced in this manner. Ensure people do not rush or crowd the cage but instead remain calm and offer positive reinforcement.



# DANGERS IN THE HOME

Birds are naturally inquisitive creatures and their curiosity has the potential to get them into trouble. There are many everyday items in the household that are hazardous to our feathered friends and could prove fatal. Some of these items include;

## Air Pollutants

- Self-cleaning Ovens & Teflon Cooking Utensils
- Cigarettes, cigars, pipes & vapes
- Cleaning products & cooking fumes
- Paints, glue, varnishes & solvents
- Deodorants, air fresheners, hair products & makeup
- Mould, dirty air ducts & mothballs
- Insecticides & pesticides

## Common Household Items

- Ceiling fans
- Open water - toilet bowl, aquarium, pots
- Hot plates, open flames, ovens & barbeques
- Mirrors, windows & reflective surfaces
- Electrical Cords
- Heavy Metals

## Other Pets & Plants

- Dogs & Cats - predatory instincts & saliva in bacteria



Eclipse Studio

## ENCLOSURE SET UP

Setting up your bird's enclosure appropriately is vital to their long term health. Here are a few tips;

Avoid the use of dowel perches. Dowel perches are harsh on your birds feet as they are uniform and often slippery requiring consistent grip force and unnecessary strain. Natural branches vary in their structure and by providing a variety of sizes we can ensure that our birds' feet remain healthy.

Utilise stainless steel or ceramic bowls for eating and drinking. Despite cleaning, plastic bowls often harbour bacteria and present a significant health risk to your bird. Clip in stainless steel bowls are great for birds who like to throw their bowls on the ground.

A frequent rotation of toys is required for your bird. Toys are designed to be destroyed so don't feel disheartened when you find toys chewed to pieces, this is a sign of an entertained bird.

Natural bird safe browse is a fantastic, free addition to your

bird's home. Leaves and branches allow a bird to express natural foraging behaviours as seen by their wild counterparts.

Placement of your bird's home area can influence their behaviour and overall wellbeing. An enclosure placed in a high traffic area will have a different impact on your bird's behaviour than an enclosure locked in a separate room. Both areas have their pros and cons.

No matter where and what your bird's enclosure includes, it is important that it is a fun and safe area for your bird to hang out.

It is not recommended that your bird lives free range inside your home however, if you choose to do so, ensure your home is entirely bird safe and your bird has a safe sleeping area.

Covering your bird's enclosure may help your bird sleep well or placing them in a quiet, dark room. Test which works best for



YOUR BIRD'S ENCLOSURE  
MUST BE A FUN  
ENVIRONMENT WHERE  
THE BIRD FEELS SAFE AND  
COMFORTABLE.



## ENCLOSURE MAINTENANCE

The fragile nature of our bird's immune system means we need to make cleanliness a priority. Ideally, fresh water and food should be provided twice daily in a clean bowl. These times are also a good opportunity to remove waste and wipe down surfaces. A bird safe disinfectant should be used frequently.





# THINGS TO AVOID

## Unintentional Reinforcement

Your bird will display many behaviours throughout its lifetime. The behaviours they find the most rewarding are the behaviours they perform most frequently. This includes less desirable behaviours such as screaming that you may unintentionally reinforce by looking at your bird or covering it. These methods are seldom successful as your bird has achieved its goal by getting your attention. A good method to start you along the correct path is to reward the behaviours you like and ignore the behaviours you do not like. It is also important to understand that all birds have natural tendencies and it is unrealistic to expect those tendencies to be removed from their behavioural repertoire completely.

## Heavy Petting

Petting can be a very enjoyable experience for you and your bird but it can also spell trouble if not done appropriately. Birds in the wild and in captivity form and maintain close bonds with their partner through touch. The back, wings, belly and tail are reserved for intimate relationships and as such they are the areas we want to avoid. Petting should be kept to the head exclusively, with very limited touch to other areas of the body when necessary.

## Warm Food

Warm, mushy foods can replicate the sensation of regurgitation. This is something that is done between a baby and parent or between intimate partners. By providing warm foods, we give our birds the impression of regurgitation and position ourselves as a potential mate to our bird.



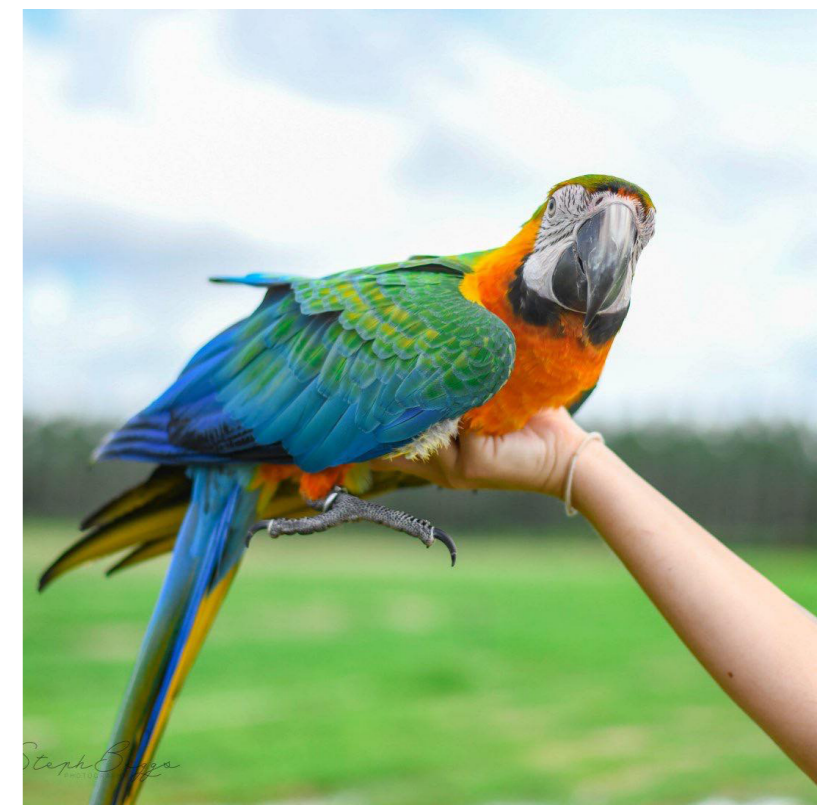
# WHY BIRDS BITE



Birds use their beak in their environment in the same way we use our hands. They also use their beak as an extension of communication. If your bird is biting, they are trying to tell you something. The intensity of the bite increases the more you fail to 'listen' to what your bird is saying. Imagine you ask your friend a question and they fail to answer, you may try speaking louder or reaching out to touch them. Each failed attempt increases your frustration in the same manner that your birds biting increases when you do not recognise the more subtle signs of communication.

Let's take a look at a common problem, a bird biting when you ask them to 'step up'. This answer is simple, your bird is communicating to you that it is not interested in complying to your command and is pushing you away. Most often this occurs when the bird lacks the knowledge, skills or motivation required to perform the behaviour. Therefore, to overcome the problem we must first ensure that the bird understands what we are asking, can physically complete the behaviour and has the motivation to do so. Motivation is minimal when reinforcement is inconsistent or inappropriate. You can increase the motivation by employing rewards such as favourite treats, scratches, toys and social interaction.

So what about when your bird bites for no apparent reason? This one is a little more complicated however, there is always a reason. Your bird may bite due to overstimulation, fear, or they have been unintentionally reinforced to do so in the past. To overcome this we must look at all aspects of the behaviour, the environment, our body language, the antecedents and consequences. Once you have an understanding of these aspects, you can implement measures to achieve behaviour modification.



# KEEPING YOUR BIRD FIT & HEALTHY

The physiological and psychological wellbeing of your bird is paramount to a long and happy life. Many birds kept in captivity suffer from diseases related to a sedentary lifestyle. These are a few easy ways to keep your bird active, improve cardiovascular fitness, feather condition and overall health.



## Enclosure Set Up

Incorporating items such as ropes, swings and ladders encourage your bird to utilise its whole body for balance and movement. These items are significantly more important in birds that have clipped wings and are unable to fly for exercise.

## Foraging

A great way to simulate the behaviours of our birds' wild cousins. Foraging helps to keep your bird busy during the day, reducing undesirable behaviours. Whilst specific foraging toys can be purchased, there are many free household items you can utilise such as toilet paper rolls, newspaper, cereal boxes and milk cartons.

## Flight

Your bird was designed to fly. Flight not only improves your birds physiological health but their psychological health too. Teaching your bird to recall will allow you to encourage daily exercise through flight. It is also a great way to keep your bird safe if they were to find themselves outdoors one day.

## Baths

Bathing is an important behaviour for all birds to partake in. Frequent baths maintain feather health and cleanliness. Your bird should never be forced to bathe, instead if your bird is hesitant, try misting, lightly splashing in a small bowl or moving the enclosure outdoors during light rain.

## Sunshine

Similar to bathing, sunshine and fresh air is important for our birds' health. Daily exposure to natural sunlight provides our birds with Vitamin D for improved feather quality and organ function. If you are unable to move your bird's enclosure, we recommend using a



# AVIAN PHYSIOLOGY



## Lungs

Birds have a very unique respiratory system. They possess nine 'air-sacs' throughout their body making the process of gas exchange more efficient.

## Beak

Similar to human nails, the outer part of a bird's beak is made of hard keratin. As such it grows continuously, and sheds the top layers at times. The estimated bite force of a large macaw is between 500-700 psi.

## Feathers

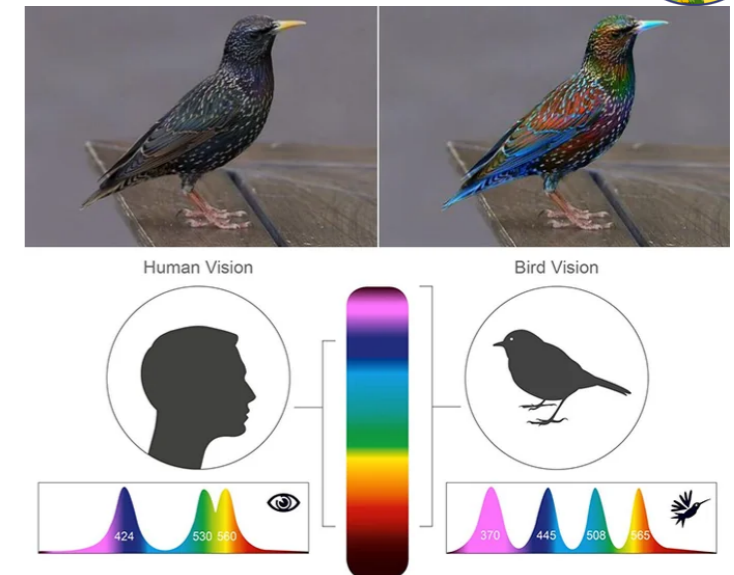
Besides the obvious function of allowing a bird to fly, the feathers on a bird also allow them to stay warm, keep dry, camouflage and stand out. A new feather, known as a pin feather, grows within the protective case of keratin sheath and resembles the quill of a porcupine. As the feather develops, the blood supply retracts and the keratin sheath dries and flakes, revealing the feather within.

## Feather types



## Vision

Birds rely heavily on their vision both in the wild and captivity. The eyeballs are asymmetric, favouring binocular vision and can be moved independently to each other. Their ability to see colours is far superior to humans as birds can see UV light. Many bird feathers, fruits, flowers and insects reflect UV light making it easier for a bird to see.



## Hearing

Birds' ears help to detect predators, to orient the environment and communicate amongst each other. As new bird parents, you'll notice an apparent absence of an external ear, instead the internal ear is the only part present in a bird.

## Taste

Compared to humans, birds have a poor sense of taste. Where the human tongue contains 9,000 taste buds, parrots are estimated to have 300-400.

## Crop

The crop is a muscular pouch located on the front of a parrot's neck. It allows the bird to store food prior to being digested. You may notice the crop becomes enlarged after your bird has consumed a large meal and will slowly shrink as the food is digested.

## Preen (Uropygial) Gland

This gland is found just about the tail in most birds and produces an oil for the bird to distribute over its feathers whilst preening. It is absent in Amazons, Hyacinths and pigeons.

