



PARROT KINDERGARTEN
STOP GUESSING, START TALKING!

TREATS & REINFORCERS

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What is a Reinforcer (aka “Treat!”)?

To answer that question, we must first understand “**reinforcement**”. Reinforcement is the procedure of *providing consequence* for a behavior that increases or maintains the strength of that behavior, making it more likely to happen again.

For instance, if Ellie touches a target stick and gets a pine nut, she is likely to touch it again, because she likes to eat pine nuts. So, then, a reinforcer is a consequence for a behavior that will increase or maintain the strength of that behavior (touching the target).



What are some common reinforcers for parrots? What are some common “good” consequences that can be provided to parrots to increase or maintain your target behavior?

- Food/Treats
- Toys
- Tactile/Touch
- Praise/Attention



What if my bird won't take treats?

Whether something is a reinforcer for a bird is up to the bird, it is not up to us. 😊

Each bird, like each of us, is an individual with its own likes, dislikes, and preferences. While one parrot may choose to eat peanuts, another parrot may choose to throw them out of the bowl. All animals must eat to survive. That is why using food as a reinforcer is often the quickest way to train and maintain behaviors. If your bird is not taking the treats you are offering, consider the following.

What does your bird consider a treat?

To see what your bird considers a “treat”, or reinforcer, look at the varied diet you are currently feeding your bird and observe what your bird chooses to eat first. The items your bird chooses to eat first are often their favorites. If you can isolate those items and reserve them for training, your bird will be eager to train. Often, the items your bird chooses to eat first may be those that are more fattening, for example seeds, nuts, and dried fruit. By only using those items for training, you can decrease the amount of those items your bird consumes, and, therefore, increase the health of your bird.

Use a variety of treats!

By using a **variety** of favorite food items for training, you can increase your bird's learning potential. If your bird earns the exact same treat for every repetition of a behavior, your bird may become satiated or bored. If your bird earns a different treat for each repetition of a behavior, your bird may continue to offer behaviors to discover which item will be offered after each repetition. Alternatively, if you begin a training session with treats that are liked by your bird but not the top favorite, when your bird's attention span begins to wane, you can switch to a more valued treat and your bird may choose to continue learning for a longer period of time. Also, you can deliver treats based on the difficulty of the behavior your bird is learning. When your bird is learning a new skill, you may use your bird's favorite treats. As your bird masters that new skill, you can deliver desired but less favored treats and reserve the most favored treats for training new or more challenging behaviors. Your bird will tell you, through its body language, if the behavior is easy or challenging. A behavior that is challenging today may be easy tomorrow and vice versa. Having a variety of treats with you whenever you train your bird will give you flexibility in how you respond to your bird's unique learning style.

Train before a meal

If your bird is not interested in the treats you have to offer, you may also consider when you are offering the treats. If your bird normally receives breakfast at 9:00am or dinner at 6:00pm, consider doing a training session before you deliver that meal to take advantage of your bird's

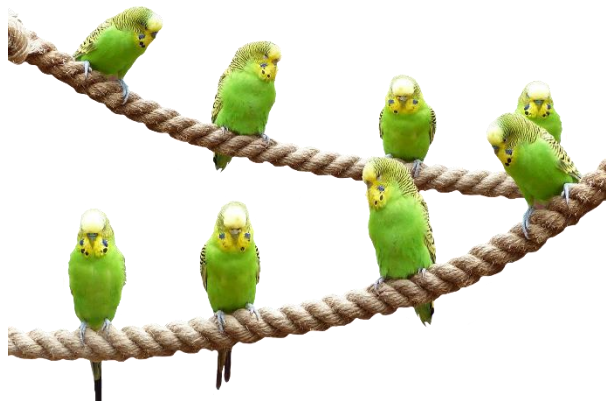
routine expectation of receiving food at that time of day. To further increase the likelihood that your bird will be interested in the food you have to offer, you can remove any leftover food from your bird's enclosure in the evening before bedtime so your bird won't be snacking on leftovers before mealtime and may be more eagerly awaiting your food rewards.

Is your bird a bit nervous?

If your bird won't take food from your fingers, consider your relationship with your bird. If your bird is fearful of you, consider delivering the treats in a way that builds trust. If your bird won't take food from your fingers, your bird may take food placed in a bowl or placed on the surface the bird is standing on. If you back up and give your bird more space, your bird may be more comfortable to take the treats. If you deliver the treats closer to your bird and farther from you, your bird may be more comfortable as well. As your bird builds confidence and trust in you, you can begin asking your bird to come closer to you to receive the food rewards.

Common favored food items for parrots

- Seeds (unsalted)- sunflower, millet
 - In or out of the shell
- Nuts (unsalted)- almond, walnut, pecan, pistachio, pine, hazelnut, macadamia, brazil
 - In or out of the shell
- Fruit- grape, blueberry, strawberry, apple, mango, papaya, banana
- Dried fruit
- Birdie bread
- Human items- dry or cooked pasta, rice, cracker, pretzel





Learn More about Your Behavior Teacher Cassie!

Cassie Malina has been training people and animals professionally worldwide for over 20 years. After graduating with High Distinction from the Pennsylvania State University, Cassie joined the animal training team at Natural Encounters, Inc. During her many years with NEI, she produced and performed in free flight bird shows across the country. She performed in free flight bird shows at Disney's Animal Kingdom since the park's inception through March 2020. She also instructed on the art and science of animal training in numerous workshops, seminars, lectures, webinars and presentations across the country. As part of the NEI team, Cassie consulted on animal programs across the US and abroad.

Cassie has been coaching animal caregivers since 2004. She has maintained her CPBC certification from the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC) since 2015 and her CPBT-KA certification from the International Avian Trainers Certification Board (IATCB) since 2013, and she completed Dr. Susan Friedman, Ph.D.'s Living and Learning Course. Cassie has been an active member of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE) since 1998 and has been an Executive Board Member of the IAATE since 2004. In 2020, the IAATE presented Cassie with a Lifetime Achievement Award.