

How To Potty Train Your Parrot

-By Chet Womach

How to potty train a parrot? What a question. I have told numerous friends about my successes with potty training our parrots. And I have to be honest. Most friends just laugh. But when I talk to other parrot owners about potty training their parrots, their eyes widen and their ears perk up.

“Can parrots really be potty trained” they say?

And of course the answer is yes, but you already knew that. After all, this book would be quite dull if I wrote it on the subject, and the conclusion of my book was, therefore it is impossible to potty train a parrot.

This subject is so popular that companies even invented products designed around this entire subject. Did you know that there is one company whose sole purpose is manufacturing and selling diapers for parrots? And I know of another lady who made her living selling towels that were designed to be

fastened over the shoulders to protect a parrot owner from unwanted accidents.

But to be honest, those are just gimmicks. They are like a doctor treating the symptom and not the cause of the problem. If you go with the bird diapers and the towels that fasten over you, sure you will keep poop off of you. But you'll look like a dork. And your bird doesn't exactly look strikingly beautiful in a pair of Pampers.

Instead why don't we attack the problem head on, like we would in potty training a child. Let's help the parrot communicate with us. Let's help him let us know when he needs to go. And let's in turn teach the parrot to hold his bowels in a bit longer, until we tell him its okay to go. Doesn't that sound like a better plan?

The fact is that potty training a parrot to hold it is just not that hard. So I wish I could have written a 30 or 50 page book on the subject, but it just doesn't take that many words to say. So I want to warn you that this is not a long book, or booklet. But it is still just as powerful. I read tons of 400-600 page texts in college and can't remember one thing from it. But within these

few pages of text, you will actually learn a trained behavior, and it will have a long lasting effect, on you and your parrot, unlike your college text books. So with ought further ado, lets get started.

If you were to go back throughout the history of parrot ownership you would undoubtedly find thousands of different parrot owners who have mastered the skill of potty training their parrot, it just simply isn't that hard. It just takes a little work. And potty training isn't particular to any species, which is nice for you. These methods will work on Cockatiels, Macaws, Cockatoos, Conures, Quaker parrots and just about everything in between. Parrots are extremely smart and many studies have shown that they have the intelligence of a two year old; and other birds, whether you believe it or not, have actually mastered speech that is in context. That means they can actually understand what the words you say mean, and reply in a logical manner with words and complete thoughts. An animal with those kinds of abilities can certainly be trained to "hold it" a bit longer.

Before we get into exactly how to potty train your parrot, you will need to understand some basics. Some of these basics you will probably already know, but others you may not. For example you need to know that a bird starts to digest its food fairly quickly. Usually within 20-30 minutes, many times even less. And on top of the quick digestion, the parrot will store food in his crop that is released into his stomach over a period of a few hours.

This means that your bird will poop every 20-30 minutes for 2-3 hours after a meal.

I usually like to potty train a younger bird between 3-5 months. This is the age where they seem to gain enough control of their bowels and can be capable of learning to hold it in.

After learning a few of those basics I just went through, you are going to want to start to take real careful notice of your parrot, and his frequency to poop. You might find it a good idea to use a small journal and record when your bird seems to go poop. How often does he wait in between eliminations? Does he poop right before he flies? What about right after he lands from a flight? Or does he poop in the morning, like most birds do?

You will also want to know how you want to train your parrot. Do you want him to poop with a verbal command? Or just every time you put him over a waste paper basket, or garbage can? My brother, who you see in some of our videos, is a full time magician, and uses our Umbrella Cockatoo in his show. And one of the tricks that my brother does in the show, is get Linus,

our to poop on command. Dave trained Linus to do was poop every time

Dave said “Linus....Sit!”

Of course this gets a good reaction from the crowd, because it sounds so much like another four letter word I won't repeat. But I tell you this for two reasons. One is that your bird will be very keen at repeating whatever command you decide to use when potty training, so make sure you pick a word that you can handle for the rest of your parrots life, which may be 80 years for some of you. And the other reason I bring this up, is because when you train your bird to use a verbal command to go to the bathroom, then it doesn't matter where you are. You could be on stage like my brother, you could be at a friends house, or anywhere and your bird will be potty trained. This is often a better way to train then using a garbage can or other prop like a litter basket that might not always be available.

Here is the step by step process:

Figure out how often your parrot goes poop. Once you know when he is going to go, and you know it like clockwork, then you can anticipate when he will make his next dropping and catch him in the act. It is then, when you catch him in the act, that you can reward him and start to shape his behavior.

Watch for warning signs:

Some parrots will squat down before pooping. Others will ruffle their tail feathers in a certain way, and still others have their completely unique tell tale signs that give them away every time. Learn what your parrot's body language for having to go poop is and use this to help you anticipate.

For example Linus our Cockatoo always walks over to the edge of the bed, table or whatever he is standing on, if it is a flat surface, to poop. He does this so he doesn't have to step in it. And my little cockatiel could care less if he steps in it, but man does he give himself away when he has to go, because he crouches, takes a few steps backwards and then wiggles his tail feathers.

How do you want to train your parrot?

You must figure out if you want your parrot on a verbal command or if simply holding him over a garbage can should be the cue. You should spend time thinking about this, because once you decide there is no going back.

Take into consideration the different environments the bird will be in, and the availability of any props used in teaching your parrot to be potty trained.

The Actual Potty Training

Once you have figured out everything we have already talked about, the rest is easy. Simply be patient and aware of when your bird is going to do its thing. And right when you see your parrot start to poop say the phrase that you have decided is going to be the cue to get the parrot to go poop. After the parrot is finished, give tons of praise, and even pet him in his favorite spot. However, do not reward him with any sort of clicker or treat, as rewarding him with treats will actually cause him to poop more often to earn a treat from you. The whole point of saying the word as the parrot is pooping is so that he starts to connect the phrase you are telling him with the act of pooping. Don't worry it will take a few days, but your parrot will start to connect the phrases, he is smart enough.

Repeat this phrasing as often as you can. Try to adjust your schedule so that when your parrot is ready to poop again, you can be right there to say the phrase again when he starts to poop, and reward with tons of positive praise and attention for obeying your command.

When you are performing all of this, you want to keep all variables the same. In other words you don't want to be adjusting the location of the perch your parrot is on while potty training, it might confuse him. Instead pick out the litter box, and have the bird aim for that until he fully masters it. Some birds catch on in a day or two, and some may take up to 3 weeks, but don't give up, they truly can make the connection.

You will want to test your parrot after you think he might be making some progress. If he is supposed to poop every 20 minutes, then go back at 18 minutes and repeat the phrase you have assigned and see if he poops early for you. If he does you have mastered the behavior. Congratulations!

Closing Tips And Thoughts

If you want your bird to only poop in, on or over one specific item, then never vary from that item. The bird can be trained to be so used to pooping while only on a certain perch or above a certain object, that it will not poop unless over it, and will do its best to actually waddle, fly or climb over to his designated spot before going to the bathroom.

So before you dive into potty training really spend some time thinking about exactly what you want your parrot to do, and where you want him to do it. I have enjoyed our time together with this fun and interesting subject, and hope to be back with you soon.

My last little tip is this, if you see your parrot pooping and you were too late to repeat your phrase to him before he did “his thing” DO NOT REWARD! He only should be awarded when he does the behavior correctly.

Enjoy,

Chet Womach