



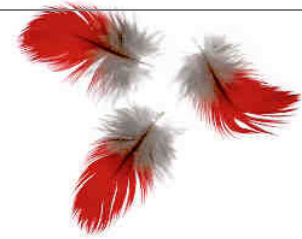
---

# **Living with Conures**

**E-book on the Feathered Family: All about Conures**

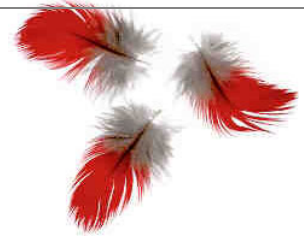
---

© March 2004.



## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IT'S A CONURE'S WORLD</b>	<b>5</b>
Life Cycle of the Conure	6
Watch Them Grow In a Distinct Social Environs	6
<b>Buying your First Conure</b>	<b>8</b>
Pet Stores	9
Bird Specialty Stores	9
Breeders	9
Newspaper	10
Rescue Groups	10
Cost of raising a Conure	11
<b>Essentials of Buying a Conure</b>	<b>12</b>
How to decide on a good pet	13
Personality of the Bird	13
Buy the one that suits your Lifestyle	13
Deciding on the Price Factor	14
Call for a Veterinary Test	14
Are You Buying Someone Else's Conure?	15
Choosing the Breeder Is Important	16
Be an Informed Buyer	16
Working with Fearful Conures	18
<b>Talk, Play and Trick: Rock-n-roll with Your Pet</b>	<b>19</b>
Teach your Conure to Talk	20
Talking Timetable	20
The Importance of Interaction	21
Training methods	22
Starting the training schedule	24
Teaching Responsive Conversation	26
Other Guidelines	27
Trick Training	28
Trick #1: Perch on T-stand	28
Trick #2: "The Wave"	29
Trick #3: "Shake Hands"	29
<b>Maintaining Your Conure</b>	<b>30</b>
Bird Upkeep (wing clipping, nail clipping, beak, etc):	30
Potty Training:	31
<b>Giving Proper Exercise to Conures</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Interpreting Conure Body Languages</b>	<b>35</b>



<b>To Conclude</b> -----	<b>37</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> -----	<b>38</b>



## INTRODUCTION

A man goes into a pet shop to buy a Conure. The shop owner points to three identical looking Conures on a perch and says: "The Conure to the left costs 500 dollars".

"Why does the Conure cost so much?" the customer asks. The owner says, "Well, it knows how to use a computer". The customer asks about the next Conure and is told, "That one costs 1,000 dollars because it can do everything the other Conure can do plus it knows how to use the UNIX operating system". Naturally, the increasingly startled man asks about the third Conure and is told, "That one costs 2,000 dollars." Needless to say, this begs the question "What can IT do?"

To which the owner replies: "To be honest I have never seen it do a thing but the other two call him boss!"

***So.....you finally decided to buy a Conure.***

Contrary to many people's thoughts, not every Conure will automatically mimic sounds that they hear. However, there is certainly nothing to stop you from training your pet Conure to 'speak'. Conures are America's third most popular pets (after cats and dogs) so you will not be the only person who is keen to train a Conure to talk, play and do tricks.

This E-book "Living with Conures" shows you how you can achieve that. This is a composite guide and is aimed at anyone who is interested in owning, maintaining and training their feathered friends. It is written to assist both novices and experienced bird lovers, and can help you to make more informed choices when buying a Conure. Plus,



you can enjoy a wealth of information on looking after and maintaining your new bird in terms of diet and health issues. You will also discover some very useful tips on behavioral problems, an issue which many Conure owners have to deal with. All in all, you can become a pro at dealing with these colorful and lively birds. In our introduction to different Conure species, you will discover a wealth of choices that you can make when buying your Conure. This handy manual is designed to give practical and useful advice to those who wish to know more about choosing a Conure, as well as advice about feeding, health care, and the behavioral traits of these birds. So, welcome to the world of Conures!

## **IT'S A CONURE'S WORLD**

Conures make priceless pets, and are known to be skilled at mimicking sounds as well as being very sociable creatures. They are also capable of learning a vast selection of tricks, making them both popular and entertaining pets.

Conures have a rich and deep rooted history that goes back thousands of years. Paleontologists believe that the history of the Conure species dates back 30 million years and many people consider that the first known bird was Archaeopteryx.

Conures are linked to an archaic lineage, and do not appear to be closely related to any other species. However, they are thought to have a distant bond with pigeons and doves.



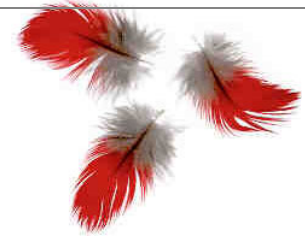
## Life Cycle of the Conure

Despite their societal nature, most Conure species are chaste, and many acquainted for life. This is one of the most distinctive aspects of a Conure's life cycle. Most Conures prefer to raise their babies in existing tree hollows where they can build a warm and comfortable nest for shelter and safety. Habitually, they will nibble off the lumber inside a tree cavern to churn out a spongy surface, on which the female Conures lay their spawns. They can also use their sharp beaks in order to excavate holes in banks, cliff faces or termite mounds. Female Conures usually lay small batches of eggs on alternative days, and they then take the main responsible for the incubation of the eggs. The young are naked when they are born, with no hair or feathers.

Conures are surprisingly a long living species.

## Watch Them Grow In a Distinct Social Environs

Conures tend to be a very sociable species. Pair bonding is very zealous, and young Conures may select their lifetime cohorts before maturity. With the exception of the breeding season, Conures do not tend to be particularly territorial in nature and they can be seen meeting in flocks of small groups or even thousands in number. Given the fact that Conures are largely nomadic, they prefer flying fast and take advantage of varying resources in dissimilar habitats sans competition. Thus, flocking can be considered a measure that can help to alleviate predation. Studies of the mannerisms and habits of the species show that some Conures may even post 'guards' to raise the alarm whenever there is danger lurking. They have a variety of calls used for an assortment of purposes, such as: soft contact calls, alert calls, or calls made to take off.



In captivity, Conures have no choice but to take man as a flock-social partner. This could go part way to explaining why many of the species can be easily taught to imitate human sounds. There is thought to be a direct correlation between Conures' amiable natures and their ability to mimic human words. This is a trait that can be utilized in order to successfully teach these birds to 'speak'. However, you should remember that, just like other pets such as dogs or cats, Conures can also have different characteristics and personalities.



## Buying your First Conure

The first rule, when you are buying a Conure is: NEVER IMPULSE BUY

You may be buying your very first bird, or perhaps you are after another bird as an addition to your existing flock. Either way, a little forethought and research can go a very long way. You should weigh up the various options carefully in order to get the most suitable bird for you and your family. You must assess the personality and behavioral patterns of the Conure to check whether it will fit in with your lifestyle and needs. This is a crucial aspect of buying your bird because Conures are intelligent birds and have very distinct temperaments (for more on this refer to the different species outlined in this book).

When you go to a retailer to buy your Conure, it you should make a point of observing the bird's behavior. This can be done relatively easily as long as the Conures are kept in individual cages. If you are looking for a Conure that can be easily tamed and trained, it is best to choose a hand-raised Conure. This type of bird may cost more, but in the long run they will prove to be value for money because of ease of training and temperament. If you are looking for a cheaper option you may want to buy a second-hand bird, which means a bird that belonged to another person previously. However, you may often find that these birds are untamed and difficult to train. Again, you should ideally check for signs of good health.

But as a first time buyer, it is advisable not to be guided by low prices as you may not know enough about the potential problems. Instead, you should go to an experienced breeder or pet store, which may prove more expensive but will mean that you can get the right bird for you as well as a healthy Conure. For a responsible pet owner, the



heartbreak of watching a beloved pet die is not worth the few extra dollars you might save. Below you can find details on the types of places from which you could buy your Conure:

### **Pet Stores**

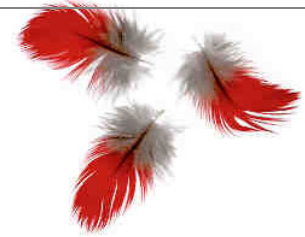
One of the most convenient places to buy your pet, these shops are easy to locate and most of them obtain their animals from breeders. However, there are exceptions, and you may find that the shop owner or the staff is unable to provide you with accurate or up to date bird information. Or, even worse, the living conditions of the birds might be bad. Clearly, you need to be careful. You may also have to pay more for a bird from a pet store compared to other places, so make sure that you are buying a healthy and high quality pet.

### **Bird Specialty Stores**

Pet stores that deal specifically in birds and bird products are a great choice for you because their reputation and profits depend on the quality of the birds they sell. With this in mind, there is a good chance that you will get a good bird here. Most bird specialty stores are run by devoted and committed bird lovers. This means that they are likely to be a reliable source of accurate and updated information on birds, and their merchandise should be of a high quality. You will also find that the owner will probably have sourced his birds from a reputable breeder, which means that the birds may be bred-on-site or hand raised.

### **Breeders**

If you decide to buy your bird directly from a bird breeder, you will find that while some of them breed birds out of love, others consider it merely as a business. When dealing



with 'live' wares, this can cause problems as the breeder's ethics (or lack of them) directly affects the birds. Before you decide that you are definitely going to buy a Conure, try and arrange a visit to the breeding facilities and talk to the breeder. You should also ask to see the coops and the baby area. And, remember to ask for testimonials and call those references before you buy!

### Newspaper

Newspapers are a great source when it comes to finding a variety of birds. However, buying through a newspaper can be a little dicey at times, particularly for the inexperienced. Although you can decide from birds of all categories and ages, there are some conventions that you must follow.

Those interested in buying a baby bird should make a point of visiting the breeding facility. However, if you are looking for an older Conure you must assess its behavioral history and vet/medical history. This will protect you against potential future problems that may arise once you have bought the bird.

### Rescue Groups

Rescue groups are there to take in unwanted Conures that, quite often, have suffered from medical or behavioral problems. These birds are then put up for adoption, and can be considered for those that meet the strict adoption criteria set by the rescue group. Most rescue groups will want you to take bird-care classes with them before they hand a bird over to you. You must remember that this means that you will be giving a home to an older bird which may bring its own problems along with it. On the other hand, if you do experience any problem with the bird after taking it home you can seek support from the rescue organization.



### Cost of raising a Conure

Conures are high maintenance pets, and may cost more than many people imagine. If you think that all you will ever need to spend is the money to initially 'buy' your pet then consider the initial expenses once you have purchased the bird:

1. You will need to buy a good-sized cage which can be anything between \$250 - \$1000 depending on the quality of the cage. Minimum cage size should be 3-4 wingspans wide & 2-3 wingspans in depth. If your Conure has to go for several hours captivated in its coop, it will need a full-sized cage to move and play in.
2. The cost of entertainment for your pet, such as play gyms, swings and other toys will cost approximately \$100 to \$400. You can use lynching play-gyms and tree stands around your quarters to give your Conure some freedom and useful training.
3. Toys = \$50 to \$150

Add food and medical expenses and you can calculate what your approximate annual financial commitment to a Conure will be!



## Essentials of Buying a Conure

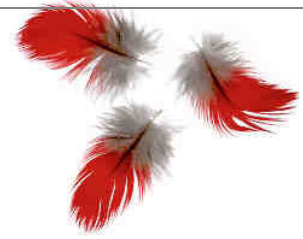
Once you have decided upon the venue or source from which you are going to look for a pet, you should arm yourself with a few vital facts.

Cleanliness should be of THE utmost importance when you decide to start looking for your bird. When you visit the store or venue, the first warning signal that you should look out for is a strong stench of urine and feces. This may mean that the birds and the other animals here are not cleaned or cared for properly by the owners. Ensure that you take a hard look at the birdcages. If you notice all kinds of feces piled at the bottom of the birdcage or on the perches that means that the cage has not been cleaned for a long time.

What about the water bowl? If the water looks swampy, be aware of the fact that it has not been cleaned for a long time. If the food/water cup is empty, then perhaps the birds are being kept on a very poor diet.

The birds themselves may show signs of the terrible conditions that they are living in, so look out for signs of sickness and disease. They may appear puffed up and heavy-eyed, with dull and lifeless looking feathers. As a novice, you may not know the symptoms of an sick or unhealthy bird, but the chances of getting a healthy bird here are slim to none. Therefore, avoid such stores.

A quality place will provide care to its birds every single day. You will find that the birds and their cages are kept clean, and that there will always be an adequate supply of granular food and water. Good stores also tend to supplement their birds' diets with



human food for good nutrition. This is essential to ensure a long and healthy life. A seed and water diet may have an adverse effect on the health of the bird.

### **How to decide on a good pet**

Now that you have enough information from WHERE to buy your Conure, you need to know HOW to decide which one you will choose. As a serious bird lover, you will need to do your homework. If you have read the Living with Conures handbook, and you still have questions, ask the storekeeper and you might get the correct information or you might just get cursory one-liners to make a sale. The thing to remember is do not go for the first bird that you see. Evaluate the birds against your questionnaire.

### **Personality of the Bird**

As a rule, it is always better to know WHY you are buying the Conure, and WHAT you expect from it. Your own life style will play an important role in deciding this. Do you want a sweet, snuggly Conure or a more sovereign one? If you are buying an infant bird, you should remember that its personality is not yet developed and will be greatly influenced by its imminent owner and the care that is provided to it.

### **Buy the one that suits your Lifestyle**

Where do you live? Do you have a large family? How much attention can you devote to your new pet? These should all be deciding factors when you are choosing your Conure.



Also, determine how much time you can spend with your new pet. You should be able to give the requisite amount of attention to the bird. However, do not be bowed down with these considerations. Your breeder is the best person to inform you about the differences between various Conure species, and assist you in buying the right one.

### Deciding on the Price Factor

When you decide your budget, you are not only concerned about buying the bird. You also have to pay for a capacious cage depending on size, diet, and toys to keep the Conure busy. Once you buy a bird, it is your responsibility to give it a good life.

It is best that when you visit the right store, you spend some time listening to all the information that the staff has to offer. If possible, handle a bird or two to get a feel of being an owner. Then give your decision some more thought before you actually buy a Conure. Owning a pet is a commitment. Nothing is worse for a bird than bringing it home, and regretting your decision. If you cannot find it a good second owner, you are practically ruining its life. It is your fault that you made a poor choice. But it is the bird that will pay the price for your hasty decision.

### Call for a Veterinary Test

Always check whether the bird has been vet checked or not. Find out when it was last done. If the bird was diagnosed months ago, then the fallout found at that time could have since changed. In pet stores, birds are open to the elements of bacteria and likely to incur diseases every day because new birds are brought in from different sources. The bird should be checked before it goes to its new owner. But a vet check alone (where the vet just looks at the bird) is no guarantee that the bird is healthy. Find out if



an oral culture has been performed earlier to determine the bacteria level in the bird. Has it also been properly vaccinated against polyomavirus?

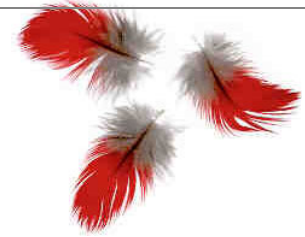
Ask the storekeeper for proof of any tests that were conducted earlier. If he cannot produce any, then you should ensure that you ask for the vet's name and contact number so you can crosscheck or talk to the vet directly.

### Are You Buying Someone Else's Conure?

Are you considering getting a second-hand Conure? Whether you get one from a rescue group or from previous owners who no longer want their pets, you have to be ready to solve many serious behavior problems. Therefore, it is sensible to obtain as much information as possible from the last owner about the bird's history, sex, diet, caging, favorite toys, and whether it was covered at night etc. The experiences of a Conure in the formative years shape his personality. And knowing the details of his previous environment will help you to understand his needs and behavior in a better way.

When you take in a re-homed bird, you have to be realistic in your expectations about the outcome of your efforts. The behavioral problems of the Conure can worsen by the stress of being given up and having to leave it is home, having to adapt to conditions in his new home, and having to form new bonds. This can prove to be stressful for the novice bird owner too. And the fact that bird-owners wishing to offload a Conure are sometimes not too honest about the behavioral problems of the bird can add to your plight. Before choosing to adopt a second-hand pet, it would be advisable to:

- Have prior experience in dealing with young Conures.



- Empathize with the behavioral differences between a sexually mature and an infant Conure.
- Be prepared to seek professional support when required.
- Have a deep sense of steadfastness to keep the Conure despite all the difficulties.

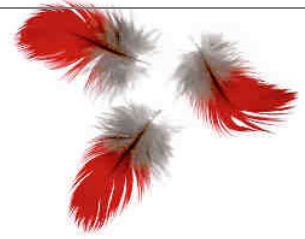
Sometimes, the behavioral troubles in re-homed Conures occur because of poor diets, inadequate environments or scarce attention. These problems can disappear in a new environment. Nevertheless, surprisingly some Conures have no behavior problems at all. They lose their dwelling for no reason other than lack of devotion on the part of the owner. You must, therefore, accept that like the other pets, a second-hand Conure also needs your unconditional commitment when you bring it home. That is the challenge.

## Choosing the Breeder Is Important

How you relate with the breeder is important in the initial days after you bring your Conure home, and are getting to know it. Whether he is a large breeder or a small one, this person should share your love and respect for birds. That is the only way he will share valuable insight with you about the Conure's behavior patterns and taming tricks. So take good care to select the right breeder. Ensure that you share a comfortable relationship with him.

## Be an Informed Buyer

To recap, do your homework well before buying a Conure as your pet. Ask friends. Check the Internet. Read to the extent that you can and so become a clued-up buyer. There is a wealth of facts on bird ownership out there. Learn from other bird owners and the breeder. They have valuable advice to give. Select the genus of Conure and the stubble-jumper carefully. Make sure you are 100% committed before you buy the bird.





## Working with Fearful Conures

Since many Conures have been re-homed in recent times, they have a good reason to be scared of people. If you are an owner of a fearful bird, begin by meeting that Conure at his emotional level. At the same time, provide the fearful Conure with a feeling of physical safety. It is not easy for him to adjust to a new environment and he will take time to trust you and bond with you. The bird's horror levels and its presence of unrefined disabilities are the two chief reasons that are most likely hamper his progress.

The best way for you to deal with this situation is to allow the bird to settle in and become comfortable with his surroundings. Any real behavioral vocation should wait until his confidence has been established. During the initial phases, any pre-existing manners such as repeated biting, blaring ness, feather picking or overanxious behavior will become pre-eminent.

These behavioral problems arise from previous experiences with people. You may never know which incidents have turned your Conure into an anxious, fearful bird. But his behavior is a manifestation of his nervousness. Be extra careful to observe the occasions when your Conure bites or screams. Then work to de-sensitize him. One behavioral no-no is to perch the Conure above your eye level. This can encourage aggression.



# Talk, Play and Trick: Rock-n-roll with Your Pet

Obviously, once your Conure recovers from his problem behavior and begins to trust you, you want to test his speech potential! Talking ability is one of the driving reasons why people want a Conure as a pet. Although young birds can be tamed and trained, only some Conure species are good at imitating the human sounds. While training Conures, techniques that utilize positive reinforcement are the most effective. Here are a few terms that you need to familiarize with:

1. **For every action remember there is a motivation:** Conures, like humans, do things for a reason. Understand and apply this concept as a key to know your Conure better. If he bites you, there is something that motivated him to do so. Determine what that caused your Conure to bite.
2. **Own the responsibility for your bird's behavior:** You must undertake that you have shaped and stylized your bird's mannerism. So, if your bird does something that you do not like, try to understand what motivates the bird to behave the way he did. This will help you to train your pet Conure and develop a better relationship.
3. **Never make s Conure do anything it does not want to do:** Conures do not comprehend the concept of punishment. It is not a part of their nature. Instead, you must focus your teaching on rewarding the positive.
4. **Reward:** Reward your bird when it does something you want and ignore it when it does something you do not want.



## Teach your Conure to Talk

As a Conure owner, the most difficult part is to help your bird talk. This requires you to be a disciplined yet an affectionate trainer. You have to devise ways and means to entice the Conure to imitate new sounds. And much to your frustration, you will as soon discover that teaching the first word to your avian pet is probably the most difficult task you have undertaken.

Obviously, you need to have loads of patience and perseverance. You have to know that Conures are like small children. They do not have a vocabulary of their own. They will learn to talk only by imitating what they hear. And to help them practice certain sounds, you have to diligently repeat phrases and words. The more they hear certain words, the more likely they are to mimic them.

Conures learn to ape new sounds by watching. Therefore, a good approach would be for you to start chitchatting with your new companion from the day one. Talk to your pet about each and everything that you do in simple colloquial words, as if you are teaching a child but never in a child-like intonation. And you will soon discover that teaching a bird need not be a task. It can be great fun.

## Talking Timetable

In the wild, Conures learn natural vocalizations from their parents. By placing them in your home, you are depriving them of their natural stimuli. And to give your companion Conures a fair chance to ever say anything, you – the "surrogate parent" – have to provide them with enough motivation. A Conure will learn to imitate human sounds only from YOU. The first few phrases that he is likely to be taught are usually simple, and often repeated with gusto like 'Hello', 'UP', and 'Hi'. This is a good starting point.



In the initial stages, do not expect too much. A six-month-old baby will not learn the "Gettysburg Address." At times, you might want to immediately correct the incoherent mumbling of your Conure by giving him some intense lessons in clear pronunciation. Halt! Be patient. Give him more time, and your attention.

Learning is a time-consuming process. In addition, any successful learning session, even with intelligent species, requires a lot of patience and sensibility. Contrary to any popular custom, there is no thumb rule that says Conures will not become skilled at anything new after some time. Sometimes, just as you give up any hopes of your pet ever learning to talk, he may surprise you by turning into an avid speaker by the time he is 2 or 3 years old.

## The Importance of Interaction

If your Conure is slow to learn new words, you need to ensure that you are interacting with him for sufficient periods. Just like any young children, Conures too need adequate stimulation AND the necessary responses to encourage them to progress.

A major factor that could hamper your Conure's talking ability could be the fact that you are not interacting with him enough. This is one reason why some Conures are better conversationalists. Conures are social birds, and need to be a part of the flock. They will use the human sounds to get attention from their flock partner, which is you. They learn to talk when they realize that they can communicate with you and express their needs.



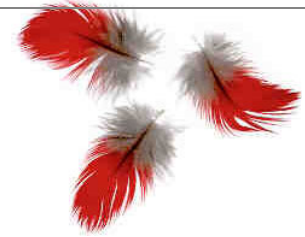
## Training methods

Many Conures learn to talk without much effort from their owners. These will be the words that we use around them, which they pick up without us knowing it. For example, if there is a phone in the room, by hearing you say 'Hello' the bird will slowly begin to imitate you. He can surprise you by mimicking sounds that he hears around the house, or just outside, such as the whistle of a kettle, revving of the car, or even the sound of the doorbell! We recommend that to gain better results you should invest in proper time-management to teach words and expressions. After all, you will not enjoy your Conure screaming "Not again!" every time you walk in through the door for the next seventy years (that is how long some large birds will live with good diet and healthcare).

One way to teach your Conure to talk is through talking tapes and CDs. Although, they are not very efficient for parodying, they are valuable resources for underpinning expressions that the bird has already learnt. Nevertheless, the most effective way for a Conure to learn new words is through interaction. These birds learn to "speak" as a way of social behavior. They will repeat your sentences to please you, to communicate with you, to entertain, and to feel as a part of the 'flock'.

Laboratory studies show that Conures learn best with social interaction. During a one-on-one training session, you can interact with the bird to include 'Association', which is one of the best methods of training a Conure to talk. By associating words with objects, events or even emotions and labeling them for the bird, you are giving a lift to his capabilities to carry out a response-based tête-à-tête, which can be further gratifying for any bird owner.

It can be done casually or deliberately. Repeat similar types of word with animation each time you do something, while your favorite pet watches attentively. For example,



say 'see you later!' when you leave the house, or 'good to see you!' when you return. After a while, the Conure will associate these phrases with your arrival and departure. It will cheerily wave you goodbye, and give an equally enthusiastic welcome.

The best way to encourage your Conure to imitate you is to introduce huge amounts of enthusiasm and excitement in your voice. If you repeat a desired response in an excited tone, with enough clarity, the bird will soon be imitating those words. When he does that, you must reward him for giving the desired response. For a Conure does not talk with the aim to converse. He just wants your attention and approval.

To enable him to imitate human sounds, speak clearly and loudly, emphasizing each syllable. Words said with zeal - using hard consonants - are easy for Conures to learn. Therefore you must refrain from using foul language within the hearing distance of your Conure. We often end up saying profane words distinctly, with a lot of passion and very loudly. And the Conures find them very easy to mimic. Getting rid of this unwanted vocabulary is a mighty task that needs a great deal of knowledge, patience and consistency.

Most Conures can easily imitate your whistling, as they find it a fun noise. The reason probably is its high pitch. But, if you are a poor whistler yourself, your Conure too will whistle badly by virtue of imitation!

Since imitation is the key to making your Conure to talk, here are a few methods that you will find very useful during your training session:

1. **Repetition:** Recap the words or sentences that you would like your companion to speak. When he hears you saying something often, the Conure starts mimicking



the words by recollecting them. Perhaps he assumes that this is an important form of communication between the two of you.

2. **Association:** This as a rule works better if you confer the bird with treats that they like. For example, offer your bird a grape, but before you hand it over repeat the word 'grape' several times. Soon, the bird will begin to make the association between the word he is hearing and the object he receives. Do this often and see your Conure begin to say "grape" every time when he wants to have a grape!
3. **Spontaneous Speech:** Some Conures pick up phrases without being conspicuously taught to do so. Therefore, if you have placed your Conure's t-perch in a place where you expect visitors often, it could easily increase his potentiality to mime and talk. However, if you really wish to watch how Conures pick up the words, keep on repeating the words in front of an avid speaking Conure, and watch it picking up things that you would rather it didn't!

## Starting the training schedule

It is important to know WHEN your bird is ready to learn something. Through observation you will notice that sometimes he stops and stares at you intently. The pupils will change as you speak or whistle. This is a sign that he is receptive to learning. Now you can draw up a list of words or expressions that you would like to teach. Remember to begin with just the simple sounds and words to retain your bird's interest levels. Too many tough-to-mimic phrases will only discourage him from making further attempts.

You also need to stay calm and patient because not all Conures will imitate your voice at the first go. Like humans, Conures too will flounder in their first attempts at learning a



new skill. However disappointed you might feel with your initial efforts, do not let it reflect in your voice. Sound excited when saying the words you are teaching. A bored "Hello" will not fetch you an enthusiastic response, but an excited "Hello!" just might!

Here are a few tips to start you off:

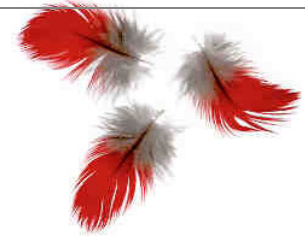
- Tip #1. Plan for a daily bird-talk class. Select a time when you think your bird is most expressive, for example during the morning. This is supposed to be the best time for learning sessions, since the birds are most alert in the mornings.
- Tip #2. Restrict the length of the training sessions to not more than 15 or 20 minutes per day.
- Tip #3. Keep on fostering innovative and specific training schedules daily for what you want to teach.
- Tip #4. Take only one word or phrase at a time. Cramming too many new things will just confuse your bird, possibly even clamming him up. Repeat the same word or phrase over and over. The more the repetition, the better it is.
- Tip #5. Working with a few words gives the bird an understanding of and control over the tonality of what he is learning to speak. Learning too many phrases at once will not give him adequate time to learn to replicate your voice. As a result, all you will hear is an imitation of different phrases in a computer-like voice!
- Tip #6. To help your pet in being focused, remove any toys or other distractions like a radio in the background, during the class.



- Tip #7. To make the relations more cordial, use the basic phrase(s) for every task. For instance, if you want the Conure to learn to request for food, use a phrase such as "want" - "Want some apple, want some squash," and so on.
- Tip #8. Make association interesting for your bird by using a specific phrase in different contexts. For example, use the request phrase "want" to ask, "Want a red apple?". Then continue the exercise by introducing new concepts such as: "Here's the red apple. Isn't it nice?"
- Tip #9. When you acknowledge the responsibility for your bird's talking skills, you will involve yourself in the learning process along with your bird. The more you interact with it the more it will learn.
- Tip #10. Limiting your bird to phrases of human interest alone may end up boring the bird and hampering his progress. It is a good idea to incorporate phrases related to an event or activity that interests him in his environment. And just like you would talk with a child about his favorite game, talk to your bird about the backyard birds if that is what he enjoys.

## Teaching Responsive Conversation

If you are not satisfied with having your pet inanely repeating phrases or words at random intervals, how about some responsive conversation? Tall order, isn't it? After all, you are aware of the efforts involved in initiating the bird into any kind of talking. But if you are really one of those ambitious Conure owners, you will want to know the trick to getting your Conure to actually converse with you.



The secret behind this seemingly impossible task is relatively simple. Before you take your bird through his daily talk session, work out a list of questions and their answers that you would like to include in a conversation. Then whisper the question in a boring monotonous way to the Conure. And then with great enthusiasm, repeat the response.

By keeping the first part a monotone, you are removing the Conure's focus from it. It is not interesting enough for him to bother mimicking. The response, on the other hand, is exciting and therefore intriguing enough for the Conure to want to learn. For example, when you ask him "How are you?" in a quiet voice, he is likely to just listen to you with no indication that he intends to imitate you. When you answer the question with a booming: "Fine! Thank you!!" the bird's attention will be focused on the response.

Although most Conures use the talk to attract attention, you will find that working with a question-answer format equips the bird with cues. And the more you practice, the more your bird will be tuned in responding to different cues. Remember, Conures can come with acute memories, and can be taught to a huge repository of vocabulary that includes many words and phrases.

### Other Guidelines

A word of caution here is that you should never use food deprivation to teach your Conure to say things that you wish to hear, or get it to do entertaining tricks, including verbal responses. Conures do not understand this, and will only respond by falling ill. That is definitely not a desirable response to your trick learning session.

With friendly training sessions, most Conures will easily gain knowledge to respond with verbal signals and praises.



## Trick Training

Start your training as early as you can. If you have obtained a baby Conure, training will be a lot easier as birds of this age bond very easily to humans. If you are gentle, kind and patient, the bird learns quickly. However, Conures are never too old to learn tricks. They must feel secure and safe with you. They will perform only when their needs are met.

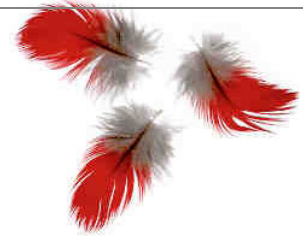
Start deriving simple tricks. Gradually, you can even use their natural abilities such as the wave, wings up, lying on their backs etc, and slowly graduate to “unnatural” activities that will require more time, patience, and repetition. By acquainting your Conure to simple tricks, you can easily teach ‘how to learn’ and observe it to follow your command. Remember, your pet will not repeat any actions for which it has not been compensated earlier. Remember these tips while training your Conure:

1. Conures act in response much more readily to visual nod than to a verbal connotation. The verbal instructions force the Conures to pay attention, and give the trainer attention.
2. Once it has taken hold of this idea, move on to another trick. Do not indulge into the game with endless repetition. Make the lessons as exciting as possible.
3. When your bird displays the desired behavior, reward him.

For starters, here are three simple tricks that you can easily teach your Conure to perform.

### Trick #1: Perch on T-stand

With the bird is sitting happily on the T-stand, feed it a treat, such as sunflower seeds. Talk quietly. Use the "come" domination to have the bird stride onto your hand. Say



“perch” and send him back to the perch. Repeat. Every time he performs the trick, say “good” and offer a treat/seed as his reward.

### **Trick #2: "The Wave"**

To teach your Conure to "wave", let the bird sit on the T-stand again and wiggle the fingers of your right hand as if creating a small wave. Say "wave" or whatever verbal cue you wish to pronounce to make the Conure wave. Offer your hand /finger for the bird to step-on. Watch carefully, as it will try to step forward onto your hand. However, you must not actually let it do that! Every time it lifts its left foot, pull your hand away. Soon it will get a feeling that all it has to do to dig up the reward is to raise its left foot only. You no longer need to call him to step on your hand, but just wave your fingers back and forth and the bird should tentatively raise its foot. When your Conure gets the foot as high as you think it is going to and then starts to drop, reward it immediately, and you have the beginning of the wave. Do this only until the bird is lifting its foot readily.

### **Trick #3: "Shake Hands"**

With the bird still resting on its T-stand, tender your right hand. Undoubtedly it will take a crack at stepping onto your hand with its left foot. Stop! You must persuade the Conure to move up its right foot and step onto your hand with that foot. Be persistent! Watch it finally stepping onto your right hand with its right foot. Follow with the reward. Do not allow it to transfer its body weight onto your hand completely.



# Maintaining Your Conure

## Bird Upkeep (wing clipping, nail clipping, beak, etc):

Questions like when to clip the wings of a new baby bird require you to consider many variables before making a decision. This is one area in which bird owners really have to concentrate in order to prevent any possibility of accidents or prevent the bird from flying away. The best time to wean is easy to notice among baby-Conures as they start showing food anxieties and even cut down their rations considerably. In the wild, this is the time when the chick will soon have to leave the nest. So, he must be self-sufficient.

But before the fledging chick can take flight, he has to develop his breast muscles. So, not only does he diligently work on those wings, he also needs to lose weight to get lift. He could, at this point, lose ten percent of his body weight. The day he takes his first flight, he can think about eating again, which is when a few ccs of baby food should be eagerly accepted.

This is the critical time. Allow him to come out daily to exercise and fly. And just as he gains proficiency in flying, clip him. Early clipping can bring about the weaning period among the Conures making the job more tough and stressful than under normal conditions. It is essential therefore to identify the time to clip a Conure to avoid loss of body balance causing claustrophobic conditions. However late clippings can also make your Conure more resentful and miffed. Determining the duration for each successive clipping period is therefore essential.



How do you do that? Well, first do away with the flight feathers by trimming its inverted patterns. Appropriate caution should be taken if you are carrying the Conure after you have given it the inward clipping since a gust of wind can easily enable him take flight to the Wild West. While clipping the primaries, make sure you have clipped the quill base as much as possible. Clipping birds' wings needs patience as you keep on gliding from one feather to another (sometime inward, sometime underneath) but all that makes your pet establish a look of brilliance and churn with confidence. However once you are done make sure to hide the shaft stub in a form of envelope under the coverts properly.

Beware of incising excessive numbers of feathers that may cause the bird ignoble to glide in future. And the sharp cut feather shafts may just begin a feather-picking episode. For the most excellent results, delicately extend the wings by the tip, and with sharp bird clawed scissors with rounded edges, snip the feathers from its base, taking care of the overlying coverts. Watch carefully or you could inadvertently cut the blood feather.

Strong light flyer needs one or more extra feathers to be clipped on each wing. The best approach to test the flight of a bird is to make sure that it glides to the ground, and does not gain high altitudes while taking a horizontal flight for any length. Make sure both the left and right wings are clipped symmetrically, so that it gives the bird an easy way to slide along. Never denude a bird by cutting off all of its primary and secondary wing feathers. There are other methods to trim wings (leaving the end two primaries, trimming one wing, etc.), but the method discussed here is the most suited to pet birds.

## **Potty Training:**



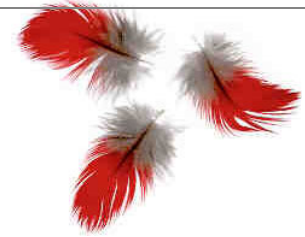
Wouldn't it be nice to be able to take your bird anywhere without worrying about getting pooped on? Luckily, potty training your bird is not as tough as it sounds. It is possible and very easy to potty train your Conure, if you know their characteristics.

For example, the caiques have two customs that aid you in instructing. First off, healthy adult caiques have a great control to hold back their bowels and not to defecate in their roost box. Second, just before it does its business a caique will squat and waggle its tail.

To persuade your bird to get potty trained:

- Decide on a stimulus, for example, a rag or a trash bin.
- Whenever you take the bird out from the cage, while the bird is still on your hand, provide the chosen holder for the bird to defecate on.
- Complement this with an expression such as "Potty." This is imperative because the bird will be able to bracket it together with the need to defecate.
- Soon after, when you notice the bird is indicating that it is going to defecate, use the word and offer the same container.
- When the bird is finished, reward it with a treat.
- If you have not brusque the wings, it can be taught to fly to its "potty" when it needs to defecate.

However, while young birds can be trained easily (sometimes in just a few sessions), it is not easy with an older bird. You can begin by placing the bird where you desire it to poop. Then use a commanding phrase like "Go Potty" in a gentle voice. Always use the same phrase so your Conure knows what you expect from him. As you can see, training your Conure is a lot like training a puppy. All you need is repetition, praise and treats. Potty training is one of the most rewarding tricks for an owner to teach his Conure. And your friends will really appreciate it when you go visiting with your birds.

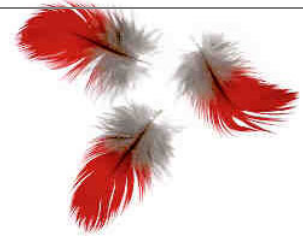


## Giving Proper Exercise to Conures

Conures are very active creatures in the wild, and are therefore not cut out to be confined to a cage all day. Exercise is very crucial part of a Conure's life. Domestic Conures tend to get less exercise than they do in their natural habitat. Most Conures are clipped, thus flying for miles does not exist in the household environment. Your bird needs exercise just as we do to stay healthy. As in all mammals, obesity can lead to arthritis, circulatory disease and diabetes. Ideally, birds fly free and spend fifty percent of their day finding food. There is no question that captivity - and food always available in a dish right under their beaks - leads some birds to weight problems. Lack of exercise also contributes to muscle atrophy and poor conditioning overall.

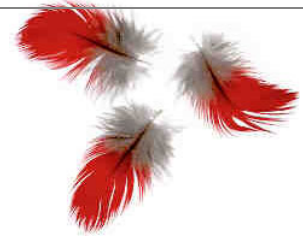
To be on the safe side, before you attempt any type of exercise program for your Conure you should get him examined thoroughly by a veterinarian. So you have to find other ways to exercise and vent its high energies. There are several things a Conure can do in a household environment to use up its high energy. Toys, for one, are the main source of equipment. Therefore, learn to pick toys that allow your Conure to enjoy and do many other different things. For exercise purposes, ropes, swings, bells and boings are some of the best tools for hanging, swinging around and flapping.

You can also use handheld rope toy or swing, and allow your Conure to hang from it while you swing the toy back and forth. Get animated with your voice and bring out their excitement. Your Conure will enjoy this and start swinging in circles, doing flip and flapping its wing happily. Make sure that you are not too far off the ground in case your Conure lets go off the toy. Wing drumming is wonderful exercise for Conures. This activity is often observed when Conures are released from their cages after a long period of confinement, or in the morning when first taken out of the cage. Often they will



stand on the top of the cage at the front edge and drum their wings, sometimes so strongly that they elevate themselves a few inches or even take flight.

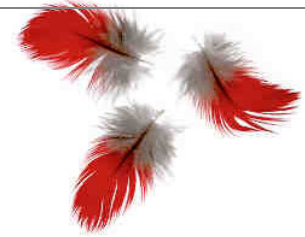
Other things that can help in Conure exercise include: Climbing up and down free hanging ropes, fun showers and playing fetch with a ball. Conures love playing with paper balls. They will toss and tumble over the ball, doing somersaults and bopping their bodies in excitement. Conures are great at swinging while holding onto toys. Feather condition can be improved by showering him daily with water - very warm water and plenty of it. Conures originate from hot humid countries and therefore their feathers are used to having large quantities of moisture on them. So, as long as you keep him out of any draughts, you can give him a real good dousing with lovely warm water.



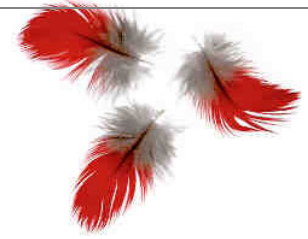
# Interpreting Conure Body Languages

One of the most important aspects in creating and maintaining a successful relationship with your Conure is the ability to understand their vocalizations and body language. Conures and other canaries learn to communicate with us through sounds, behavior and actions. Using their body language and vocalizations they can "tell" us when they are happy, content, frightened, sick, hungry, tired, angry, or ready to be held and cuddled. The ability to communicate is a vital element in any relationship, and it is of utmost importance that Conure owners learn to interpret the meanings of their Conure's sounds and behaviors in order to successfully tame, train, and provide them with the very best of care. If your Conure exhibits any of the following behaviors, try to ascertain exactly what your feathered friend is trying to tell you, and respond (or refrain from responding) accordingly.

- √ Gnarling is an indicator of aggression, growling is sometimes accompanied by dilating pupils and raised feathers on the back of the neck. It generally means that a Conure does not want to be approached.
- √ Tongue Clicking: Rapid "clicking" of the tongue against the beak which generally means "I want to be friendly, I won't hurt you". This invitational behavior is most often seen in Conures.
- √ Grinding Beaks: If your pet scrapes its lower mandible against the upper one producing a grinding sound it usually indicates a sense of security. Normally Conures ooze out such sounds during the night before they go to bed.
- √ Wiping the Beak: A feeling of jealousy or an indication to dislodge something that has been irritating your pet. This signature by the Conure normally indicates an attempt to acquaint you to the fact that there is something that hinges into his personal territory which it dislikes.



- √ Biting: Normally in their teething ages, Conures usually undergo successive emotional changes, and biting is something that is often a gesture by Conures to show that they are displeased with certain incidental occurrences. However, among the younger lots, biting is an indication used to exhibit their tendency to experiment with texture, tastes and resilience towards objects.
- √ When it whistles or sings in a jovial tone, a Conure dispenses a feeling of safety and contentment in accordance to its environment.
- √ A chattering Conure (loud) is how to practice with speeches, words and phrases. However a soft moaning chattering shows how much it is amused with the incidents around it.
- √ If your Conure often lowers its head tucking it underneath the feather, it may be to throw a signal of relaxation, whereas under aggressive stances a slight elevation of the nape is commonly noticeable.
- √ Flipping one or both wings is usually indicative of annoyance or displeasure. Another cause of wing flipping could be that the Conure wants to realign them.
- √ Ruffling of head feathers and fanning its tail indicates displeasure. Never overdo something that irritates the small beast otherwise it could develop the tendency to bite and become irritable.
- √ Contentment and happiness in Conures is further expressed by wagging the lower-end of their tail back and forth or upright.
- √ However, like human, Conures also stretch to relieve. This is especially important for them since they spend so much time on their feet. Birds will stretch one foot and the opposite wing at the same time, which improves circulation and refreshes muscles.



## **To Conclude**

This beautiful bird can be a brilliant cohort. Choose the one that will fit your needs. Make certain that you are not buying a breed whose importation is banned by the law. And remember that keeping a pet is a life long commitment.



## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank the following contributors for their kind permission to use photographs of their beautiful birds in the creation of this guide:

Louise at <http://www.parrotlink.com/>

Arne at <http://www.avianbiotech.com>

Elisabeth DeSimone <http://www.petbirdpage.com/breed.asp?breed=ynamazon>  
and <http://www.petbirdpage.com/breed.asp?breed=wbcaique>

Marc Morrone at <http://www.parrotsoftheworld.com/parrots.html>