



# **How to Get Your Macaw to Talk and Do Astonishing Tricks**

**E-book on the Feathered Family: All about Macaw Training**

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## Talk, Play and Trick:

### Rock-n-roll with Your Pet

Once your Macaw recovers from his behavioral problem and begins to like you and trust you, you will have a blast! First and foremost, begin by exploiting its speech potential. Well, what did you buy a Macaw for if you didn't want to hear it talk and mimic your voice? Although young birds can be trained, only some Macaw species are good at imitating human sounds. While training Macaws, positive techniques are the most effective. Here are a few terms that you need to familiarize with:

1. **For every action there is a motivation:** Macaws, like humans, do things for a reason. Understand and apply this concept as a key to know your Macaw better. If it bites you, there is something that motivated it to do so. Instead of scolding it, find out what caused it to bite someone so familiar.
2. **Own responsibility for your bird's behavior:** You must take responsibility for having shaped and stylized your bird's mannerism. So, if your bird does something you do not like, try to understand what motivates the bird to behave the way it did. This will help you to train your pet Macaw and develop a better relationship.
3. **Never make a Macaw do anything it does not want to do:** Macaws do not react to punishment. It is not in their nature. Instead, teach your Macaw better by rewarding anything good it does.
4. **Reward:** Reward your bird when it does something that you want and



ignore it when it does something you do not want. That will show what you approve of and what you don't. Punishment is beyond the beautiful bundle of colors!

## Teach your Macaw to Talk

As a Macaw owner, the most difficult part is to teach your bird to talk. This is a demanding task. You have to be disciplined and an affectionate trainer. You have to devise ways and means to entice your Macaw to imitate new sounds. And much to your frustration, you will soon discover that teaching the first word to your avian pet is probably the most difficult task you have ever undertaken. But, don't give up. You will forget all the difficulties when you hear your bird answering the door-bell even before you open your mouth!

It is quite obvious that you need loads of patience and perseverance. You have to understand and believe that Macaws are nothing different from 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 practise certain sounds, you have to repeat phrases and words, over and over again. The more they hear certain words, the more likely they are to mimic them and remember them.

Macaws learn to ape new sounds by close observation. Therefore, building a good rapport with your Macaw from day one by chatting it up is one of the best approaches. Tell your pet about each and everything you do in simple colloquial words, as if you are teaching a child, but never in a child-like intonation. Make it a listener to everything you have to say about anything and everything. And you will soon discover that teaching a bird need not be a task. It can be great fun. And, within a very short period, you will make a wonderful friend who, unlike most humans, will be ready to listen to all your problems.



## Talking Timetable

In the wild, Macaws learn natural vocalization from their parents. By bringing them home, you are separating them from their natural surroundings. So, as you surely understand, it is a sensitive situation. And to give your companion Macaw a fair chance to talk, you – the "surrogate parent" – have to provide it with enough motivation. A Macaw will learn to imitate human sounds only from YOU. The first few phrases that he will readily learn are usually simple, and often repeated with gusto like 'Hello', 'UP', and 'Hi'. This has always been a good starting point.

In the beginning, even if you find your Macaw repeating everything you say instantly, do not expect too much. Please keep in mind, a very intelligent six-month-old baby will not and cannot learn the "Gettysburg Address". At times, you might want to immediately correct the incoherent mumbling of your Macaw by giving it intense lessons in clear pronunciation. **Halt!** Be patient. Give him more time, and your attention. It will learn and learn really well.

Learning is a time-taking process. Think. Did you learn everything in school very quickly? Isn't it better if your Macaw learns everything slowly but steadily? Moreover, any successful learning session, even with intelligent species, requires a lot of patience and sensibility. There is no thumb rule of teaching your Macaw to talk and communicate with its human family. And what's the rush? If your Macaw doesn't learn today, the next week, or even the next two months, you are not losing your job! Macaws will take time. Some learn faster than the others. Sometimes, just when you give up hope of teaching your pet to talk, it may surprise you by turning into an avid speaker by the time he is 2 or 3 years old. Believe me, these are not stories. They are real-life experiences.



## The Importance of Interaction

If your Macaw is taking unusually long to learn new words, you need to spend more time with it. Just like young children, Macaws too need adequate stimulation AND the necessary responses to encourage them to progress. If you give only half an hour a day to your child and expect him/her to learn a lot at one go, it's you who should be punished, and not the child. You need to interact with the child more and more to make it comfortable in your presence. Similarly, your Macaw needs to know you more to be able to learn to speak.

Some Macaws are better conversationalists than others. Macaws 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. Isn't that a very human response? You will open your heart only to those who are willing to listen. Similarly, your Macaw will naturally talk more and mimic human speech better if it gets adequate attention from its human flock. Isn't that darn simple?

## Training methods

Many Macaws learn to talk without much effort. These are usually the words that we use all through the day, which they pick up without us knowing it. For example, if there is a phone in the room, you say 'Hello' when you pick it up. Your bird will slowly begin to imitate you. It can and will surprise you by mimicking sounds that it hears around the house, or just outside, such as the whistle of a kettle, sound of the car, or even the ttring-ttring of the doorbell! We recommend you to manage time well when it comes to teaching words and expressions. After all, you will not enjoy your Macaw screaming "Not again!" every time you walk in through the door for the next seventy years! (yup, that is



exactly how long some large birds will live with good diet and healthcare).

You can also teach your Macaw to talk with the help of talking tapes and CDs. Although they are not very efficient for parodying, they are valuable resources for improving expressions that the bird has already learnt. Nevertheless, the most effective way for a Macaw to learn new words is through intensive and extensive 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’. If this pretty bundle of colored feathers is doing so much to grab your attention, isn't it ethically right for you to usher total love in return?

Laboratory studies show that Macaws learn the most with social interaction. During a one-on-one training session, you can interact with the bird to include the method of ‘Association’, which is one of the best methods of training a Macaw 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. Present your pride to your friends and see it winning everyone's hearts.

It can be done casually or deliberately. Repeat similar types of words 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 Macaw 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 Macaw to imitate you is to add enthusiasm and excitement to your voice. If you repeat a desired response in an excited tone, with enough clarity, the bird will soon imitate those words. When he does that,



you must reward him for giving the desired response. You must understand that a Macaw does not talk to converse. It just wants your attention and approval.

To enable him to imitate human sounds, speak clearly and loudly, stressing on each syllable. Words said with zeal – using hard consonants – are easy for Macaws to learn. Therefore, you must refrain from using foul language within the audible distance of your Macaw. We often end up uttering profanity with total passion and clarity. We forget Macaws learn them quite easily. As it is, teaching a Macaw to talk is tough. Then, teaching it to forget something is tougher. The patience, tolerance and perseverance you need to make your Macaw forget something is double the effort you need to teach some basic vocabulary.

Most Macaws easily imitate your whistling, as they identify it as a funny sound. Why they like it is its high pitch. But, if you are a poor whistler yourself, your Macaw too will whistle poorly. Don't blame it then!

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

1. **Repetition:** Repeat the words or sentences you would like your feathered companion to learn. When it hears you say something quite often, the Macaw will start mimicking the words by recollecting them. Perhaps it 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, your bird will begin to make the association between the word it is hearing and the object it receives. Do this often and see your Macaw say "grape" every time he





wants to have a grape!

3. **Spontaneous Speech:** Some Macaws pick up phrases without any training process. Therefore, if you have placed your Macaw's T-perch in a place where you entertain visitors, it could easily increase his potentiality to mime and talk. However, if you really wish to watch how Macaws pick up the words, keep on repeating the words in front of an avid speaking Macaw, and watch it picking up things that you would rather it didn't!

## Starting the training schedule

It is important to understand WHEN your bird is ready to learn something. You may notice sometimes it stops whatever it was doing and stares at you intently. Its pupils will change as you speak or whistle. This shows that he is receptive to learning. This is the best time to begin. Now you can draw up a list of words or expressions that you would like to teach it. Remember to begin with simple syllables and words to retain your bird's interest. Too many tough-to-mimic phrases will only discourage him from making further attempts. Have a heart. Don't force the poor and cute bird.

You also need to stay calm and patient because not all Macaws will imitate your voice at the very first attempt. Like humans, Macaws too will flounder in their first attempts at learning a new skill. No matter how disappointed you get with your initial efforts, do not let it reach your voice. Sound excited while repeating 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:

1. Plan a daily bird-talk class. Choose that time of the day when you think



your bird is the 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.

2. Restrict the length of the training sessions to not more than 15 or 20 minutes per day. Your Macaw is not a PhD student!
3. Think of innovative and specific training schedules for what you want to teach daily.
4. Take only one word or phrase at a time. Cramming too many new things will just confuse your bird, possibly even shutting it up. Repeat the same word or phrase over and over again. The more the repetition, the better it is.
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! Moreover, you might hear incoherent mumblings that will not only dishearten you, but will also irritate you. Remember, too much of anything is not good.
6. To help your pet focus, remove toys or other distractions like a radio in the background, during the class. This does not mean you will be more severe to your bird-student.
7. To improve relation, use similar phrase(s) for every task. For instance, if you want your Macaw to learn to ask for food, use a phrase such as "want" - "Want some apple, want some squash," and so on. You



Macaw will associate this phrase with food easily.

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?”
9. When you take 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.
10. Limiting your bird to phrases of human interest alone may end up boring the bird and hampering its progress. It is a good idea to incorporate phrases related to an event or activity that interests it in its environment. And just like you would talk to a child about his favorite game, talk to your bird about the backyard birds if that is what it enjoys. This is all the more important because a bored Macaw can drive peace away from your home in days!

## Teaching Responsive Conversation

If you are not satisfied with your pet inately repeating phrases or words at random intervals, how about some responsive conversation? Tall order, isn’t it? After all, you know (more than anyone else) the efforts involved in initiating the bird into any kind of talking. But if you are really one of those ambitious Macaw owners believing in the extraordinary talent of your bird, you will want to master the trick of making your Macaw converse with you.

The secret behind this seemingly impossible task is relatively simple. Before you take your bird through its daily talk session, work out a list of questions and their



answers that you would like to include in your conversation. Then whisper the question in a boring monotonous tone to your Macaw. And then, with great enthusiasm, repeat the response.

By keeping the question deliberately low-key, you are removing its focus from the question. You are making the question uninteresting so that it doesn't waste time mimicking it. The response, on the other hand, is exciting, and therefore intriguing enough for the Macaw to want to pick it up. For example, when you ask "How are you?" in a quiet voice, he is likely to just listen to you with no apparent intention of imitating you. When you answer the question with a booming: "Fine! Thank you!!" the bird's attention will be focused on the response. This is the usual method of teaching your Macaw.

Although most Macaws win numerous hearts by talking, 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 get tuned to respond to different situations. Remember, Macaws often have sharp memories, and can easily build a huge vocabulary bank consisting of both words and phrases.

## **Important Guidelines**

A word of caution for those who care about their Macaws! You should never deprive your Macaw of food to teach it to say things you wish to hear, or make it perform entertaining tricks. Don't punish your Macaw. Macaws do not understand this, and will only respond by falling ill. I am sure that is definitely not something you expect out of your efforts to teach it tricks.

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



## Clicker Training

Many people think that clicker training is something new. However, professional animal trainers have used “clicker training” for ages. It wasn't called clicker training until a few years ago when Karen Pryor coined the phrase. Before that it was simply known as animal training.

### What Is It All About

The clicker is a device that communicates to an animal that a reward will be given. We use the clicker to "mark" the exact second that the animal did what we wanted. By doing this, the animal knows exactly what it is being paid for. Because it now knows that it will be rewarded when it does this, it is likely that he will repeat it. The clicker is known as a "bridge" because it bridges the time between marking the correct response and reinforcement.

Clicker training is operant conditioning training as defined by B.F. Skinner. Operant conditioning means that we are teaching new behaviors using the animal's voluntary behaviors. We give the animals choices and completely avoid force. The correct choices are rewarded and the incorrect ones are ignored.

### Getting Started

Now that you know what clicker training is all about, let's help you get started with your training. For the clicker to have any meaning to your bird, you must first "condition the clicker". It is best to do it with food and, that too, with its favorite treat(s). Also, train it before its feeding time. If it has just eaten, it may not be motivated enough to learn. If you use something it really likes, but only gets for training, you may find it readily motivated. Use tiny pieces of treats; you want it to learn and not devour its treat. The treat will distract its attention from the primary focus, i.e., the training.

### Conditioning the Clicker



Have you found a good treat? If not, think what your bird likes the most. Is it a scratch on the back of the neck? If so, and you cannot find a treat that it will eat in front of you, then use the scratch of the neck for the motivator. It is best to use food for training, but at times, it is difficult to motivate birds with food. If possible, take the bird to an area away from its cage for training. You may start by putting it on a T-stand or training perch. If you try training on the floor or even a table, you may find that your bird is more keen to take a stroll than to sit and learn.

Once you have your clicker, treat and bird at its station, "click" the clicker and hand your bird its treat. Repeat this several times. In a short session or two, the bird will easily recognize that click is equal to a treat. If you are training your bird in its cage, then click and drop the treat in its food bowl. A bird will take time to understand that click is synonymous to a treat, unlike a dog, but they are smart and will figure it out soon enough.

Now that you have conditioned the clicker, you are almost ready to begin training its behavior.

## Target Training

Target training is teaching a bird to touch an item with an open beak or a gentle grab. When the bird learns to do that, then you can use this method to lead or direct your Macaw by having it follow the target. This is a great tool for leading your Macaw to a new prop, a toy that he is afraid of, to come out of his cage and for physical actions such as "turn around". Also, by teaching it to gently grab, you can apply the same method to make it pick up an object or push an object, etc. You can use such objects as a chopstick, a plastic bar or even a familiar toy as the target.

A target does not need to be a stick type object. Since the target is a "prop



behavior", there is no need to teach you bird any other cue; the target will be the cue to initiate the behavioral reaction. Most people prefer to teach this from a station or a T-stand first, so that the bird doesn't wander. Hold the target near the bird. Click and offer treat for any movement toward the target. Repeat this until your bird reaches the target. Once he knows how to grab the target, you will only click and offer treat for the gentle grab of the same. Then move it up, down, right, and left, each time clicking and giving treats for each gentle grab. What you want is this. You want your Macaw to follow the target and remember it in the future.

Once it is reliably doing that from its station, it's time to try it in the training area. Don't bring the target to your Macaw; make it come to the target. How do you achieve this? As always, you may have to reward any movement toward the target in the beginning till he gets comfortable in the training area. Once it starts going towards the target on its own more than once, then click and reward only for gently grabbing the target. There are some important things to remember about your bird reaching the target. Do not let your Macaw grab the target and pull it out of your hand or, even worse, attack the target. Use the target only to direct the bird with its beak, not for anything else. Otherwise, you end up sending mixed messages to your bird. Also, while teaching the bird "to target" is a behavior, it should be thought of as a tool to aid in training other behavior patterns. Your Macaw should only take a few short sessions to get trained. Ensure that the entire process is simple and straight. Too many will only puzzle your bundle of feathers and make things more difficult for both of you!

## Trick Training

Start your training as early as you can. If you have bought a baby Macaw, training will be a lot easier as they bond very easily when they are infants. If you are gentle, kind and patient, your bird learns quickly. However, Macaws are



never too old to learn tricks. They must feel secure and safe with you. They will perform only when their needs are met with. Also, they will learn easily when they feel loved and cared for.

Start with simple tricks. Gradually, you start using their natural abilities such as the wave, wings up, lying on their backs etc, and then move up to “unnatural” activities that will require more time, patience, and repetition. By acquainting your Macaw with simple tricks, you can easily teach ‘how to learn’. Watch closely whether or not it is following your command. Remember, your pet will not repeat any action for which it has not been rewarded earlier. The following may come handy while training your Macaw:

1. Macaws respond more readily to a visual nod than to a verbal expression. The verbal instructions force the Macaws to pay attention to the trainer.
2. Once it has mastered one trick, move on to the next. Do not indulge in a game with endless repetitions. It will completely bore your Macaw. Make the lessons as exciting as possible.
3. When your bird displays the desired behavior, reward it without delay. By doing this, you win its confidence and its desire to follow your instructions the next time you ask it to get you something.

For beginners, here are a few tricks you can easily teach your Macaw to perform.

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

With your bird sitting happily on the T-stand, give it a treat, such as sunflower seeds. Talk quietly. Use the "come" domination to have the bird walk 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. Watch it learn the commands faster than you ever thought possible.





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

To teach your Macaw to "wave", let it 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 think would convey the message, to make the Macaw wave. Offer your hand/ finger for your birdie to step-on. Watch carefully when it is trying to step 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 win the reward is to raise its left foot only. You no longer need to call it to step on your hand, but just wave your fingers back and forth and it should gradually raise its foot. When your Macaw gets the foot as high as possible and then starts to drop, reward it immediately, and BINGO! You have the beginning of the wave. Do this only if your bird is lifting its foot readily. Repeat this method over and over again to get a nice and colorful wave.

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

With your bird still resting on its T-stand, tender your right hand. Undoubtedly, it will think you are asking it to wave. It will try to step onto your hand with its left foot. Stop! Remove your hand immediately. You must persuade your Macaw to step onto your hand with its right foot. Be persistent. Repeat till it finally steps onto your right hand with its right foot. Follow this with a reward. However, do not allow it to transfer its body weight onto your hand completely.

## **Trick #4: "Retrieving Objects"**

A Macaw is an extremely intelligent bird, which is always ready to learn new tricks from people they are comfortable with. As a matter of fact, they thrive on intellectual exercise and are stimulated by new behavioral patterns. However, they can be stubborn at times and might require a "carrot" to goad them into performing.

To start off, choose relatively uncomplicated tricks and use the bird's own natural instincts to help it master his act. When it has learned to perform simple tricks,



raise the bar and try teaching him complicated acts.

A simple trick that you could start off with is “the retrieve”. Your bird should have fun picking this one up.

- First, place your Macaw on a T-shaped perch about a foot long. This is to ensure that he doesn't wander off while being trained.
- Place a small washer or any other small, heavy object in your open palm and offer it to the bird. Nine times out of ten, he'll pick it up from your palm with his beak. If he doesn't, try placing a small item of food behind the washer so that the Macaw picks the washer up to get the food. However, instead of a visual clue such as its favorite food, you could also use a verbal clue. Repeat “Pick it up” or click a clicker. Every time your bird picks the washer up, reward it. This “reward” can be in the form of a food treat such as sunflower seeds, by saying “Good” or by clicking a clicker. Repeat the method till he learns to pick up the washer.
- Get a bowl and hold it under the Macaw. At some stage it'll get bored of holding the washer in its mouth and drop it. Catch the washer as it falls and, when it hits the bowl, “reward” the bird. Try this routine several times. It will then identify the dropping of the washer in the bowl as a trick.
- After both of you get used to the routine, try a different pattern. Move the bowl away slightly so that the bird misses hitting it when it drops the washer. When this happens, do not “reward” it. Keep changing the location of the bowl once in a while, sometimes allowing the washer to hit the bowl and sometimes not. The bird will soon realize that the object of the exercise is to drop the washer in the bowl. If this doesn't happen there is no reward. This will make your bird drop the washer only in the bowl, even if the latter is kept far away from its perch.



Before very long, your Macaw will be able to pick up objects in its beak when the order or click is given and drop it in a bowl thereafter

## **Trick #5: “Marble and Cup Trick”**

This is a very interesting game which you can teach your Macaw. Once your bird masters it, it'll amaze all those who watch it perform.

Get three identical looking cups. Have your Macaw watch the action while you put a ping pong ball or a marble under one of these overturned (bottoms-up) cups. Then move the cups around till it's impossible to tell which cup has the ball hidden below it. Let the bird walk up to the cups, turn the right cup over and bring out the ball / marble. At the end of this performance, it is essential that you “reward” it as that will act as its incentive to do it correctly in future.

To train your Macaw to do this, follow the steps below.

- On one of the three cups, make a small marking. Use a color that stands out on the color of the cup.
- Direct the Macaw's attention towards the marking on the cup by tapping on it.
- Encourage it to move towards the marked cup by giving it a food reward or a scratch on the head every time it makes even the slightest movement towards it. Don't rush it. You will not be able to complete this training in one or two sessions.
- After some effort (on your part and your Macaw's) you will come to a



situation where your Macaw, at a given signal, will go and touch the marking on the cup. You will then have to proceed to the next phase of the training, i.e., have him knock the marked cup over.

- Show the Macaw what you want it to do by toppling over the marked cup yourself with a finger. Then, whenever your Macaw completes the first trick of touching the marked cup with its beak, gently hold it down with your hand and make it topple the cup over using its beak. As soon as the cup topples over, reward it immediately so that your Macaw understand what you expect from it.
- Follow the usual training routine of having your Macaw set off towards the marked cup at a given signal ( either say “Go” or click on a clicker ) and then withhold rewarding it unless it touches the marked cup AND topples it over. With practice, it will master both steps of the trick.
- When it begins to knock the correct cup over, place the ping-pong ball / marble under it.
- Ensure that a) the cups are placed in such a position that the audience doesn't get a view of the marking when the trick is being performed, b) the ping pong balls / marbles are washed thoroughly so that your bird doesn't pick up any infection.

### **Points to keep in mind**

Try to keep the sessions as simple as possible and don't repeat the same exercise too many times. This will only increase the tension between the two of you. Relax. It's only a trick. It is important for both of you to stay in good humor.



And, why should you lose peace over a simple trick? However, it's obvious the going gets more difficult for you since the bird gets the occasional "reward" and you, nothing. For you, the reward lies in seeing your Macaw perform these amazing tricks. So, great guns going! Unfortunately, the going sometimes gets too long. But, you knew it when you got your Macaw. Don't blame your Macaw. Blame your decision, if anything as bad arises.

## **Maintaining Your Macaw**

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

When should you clip the wings of a new baby bird? This question can be answered after considering a number of variables. Beware bird owners! Your decision in this situation will cause or prevent the possibility of accidents or any unwanted flight. The best time to wean is easily noticeable among baby-Macaws. This is when they start showing food anxiety and cut down their rations considerably. In the wild, this is the time when the chick knows it will soon have to leave the nest. So, it must be self-sufficient.

But before the fledging chick can take flight, it needs well-developed breast muscles. So, not only does it diligently work on those wings, it also needs to lose weight to get lift. It may lose ten per cent of its body weight. Don't get alarmed. Your baby is growing up. The day it takes its maiden flight, it can think about eating again. At this point, if you offer a small amount of baby food, it will simply lap it up.

This is the most crucial time. Allow daily exercise and flying attempts. And just



when it gains proficiency in flying, clip its wings. Early clipping can pre-poned the weaning period making it more difficult and stressful than under normal conditions. It is essential, therefore, to identify the time to clip a Macaw to avoid loss of body balance causing claustrophobic conditions. However, late clippings can also make your Macaw more resentful and miffed. Determining the time period between each clipping period is, therefore, essential.

How do you clip your Macaw's wings? First, do away with the flight feathers by trimming its inverted patterns. Be careful when you are carrying your Macaw after you have clipped it inward. This is because it will require only a gust of wind to enable it to take flight to the Wild 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 gliding from one feather to the other (sometime inward, sometime underneath); all that makes your pet look brilliant and bright with confidence. However, once you are done, make sure to hide the shaft stub in a form of envelope under the coverts.

Do not cut down too many feathers at one go. This may not allow the bird to glide in future. And the sharp cut feather shafts may just lead to feather-picking. For best 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. Be careful not to cut the blood feather, by mistake.

A strong and light flyer needs one or more extra feathers to be clipped on each wing. The best way 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 its primary and secondary wing feathers. There are other methods to trim wings (leaving the last two primaries, trimming one wing, etc.), but the method



discussed here is the most widely accepted by pet bird owners. It is the most scientific and causes no harm to your Macaw.

## **Potty Training:**

How would it be if your Macaw stopped embarrassing you by not pooping on you or your guests? I know that is an ideal situation, but not really unachievable. Experts believe potty training a Macaw is not as difficult as it is believed to be.

For example, caciques have two well-defined signals that tell you it's time to visit the toilet. First, healthy adult caciques have fantastic control over their bowels and do not defecate in their roost box. Second, just before it empties its bowels, a cacique will squat and waggle its tail. Now, all of us Macaw owners should not expect to be so lucky.

What all you need to do to persuade your bird to get potty trained:

- 1 Decide on a stimulus (which also acts as the toilet), for example, a rag or a trash bin.
- 2 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.
- 3 Repeat the expression that gives it an clue why it is being taken out, such as "Potty." This is imperative because the bird will be able to identify it with the need to defecate.
- 4 Soon after, when you notice the bird indicating it is going to defecate, use the word and offer the same container.
- 5 When the bird is finished, reward it with a treat.



- 6 If you have not clipped the wings, you can teach it 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 takes time with an older bird. You can begin by placing the bird where you want it to poop. Then use a commanding phrase like "Go Potty" in a gentle voice. Always use the same phrase so that your Macaw knows what you expect from it. As you can see, training your Macaw 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 Macaw. And your friends will really appreciate it when you go visiting with your birds. Potty train your Macaw with patience and take it to long trips sans embarrassing situations.





## Giving Proper Exercise to Macaws

Macaws are full of life in the wild, and are not made to be confined to a cage all day. Therefore, exercise is vital in a pet Macaw's life. Domesticated Macaws tend to get less exercise than they do in their natural surroundings. Most Macaws are clipped so that they do not fly away. As a result, flying for miles does not exist in the household environment. Your bird needs as much as, if not more, exercise than us to stay healthy. As in all mammals, Macaws may become obese, which can lead to arthritis, diseases of the circulatory system and diabetes. In nature, birds fly free and spend fifty per cent of their day finding food. They do not know captivity. However, as pets, Macaws have food that is always available in a dish right under their beaks. This, too, leads some birds to weight problems. Lack of exercise also leads to muscle atrophy and generally poor health.

As a wise owner of Macaws, consult a reliable vet before you decide to initiate an exercise regimen for your Macaw. As you cannot allow its natural tendency to fly for miles, you have to find other forms of exercise and avenues for it to use its high levels of energy. There are several things a Macaw can do in a household environment to utilize its high energy levels. Toys form the main source of exercise equipment. Therefore, learn to pick toys that allow your Macaw to enjoy and do things that will use its energy. For exercise purposes, ropes, swings, bells and bongs are some of the best tools. These are used for hanging, swinging around and flapping.

You can also use handheld rope toy or a swing and allow your Macaw to hang from it while you swing the toy back and forth. Make your voice enthusiastic and bring out your bird's excitement. Your Macaw will love this game and start swinging in circles, flapping its wings in joy. Make sure that you are not too far away from the ground in case your Macaw lets go off the toy. Wing drumming is



also a wonderful exercise for Macaws. This activity is often observed when Macaws 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. Make sure you are witness to it and in a position to help if something untoward happens.

Other things that can help in your Macaw's exercise include: Climbing up and down free hanging ropes, fun showers and playing fetch with a ball. Macaws love playing with paper balls. They will toss it and turn it and tumble over the ball, doing somersaults and bopping their bodies in excitement. Macaws are great at swinging while holding onto toys. The quality and glaze of feathers improve by showering it daily with water – very warm water and plenty of it. This is because Macaws originate from hot humid countries. Their feathers retain a lot of moisture in them. So, as long as you keep it out of draughts, you can give it a real good dousing with lovely warm water. It's delightful to watch your Macaw enjoying the warm bath. This also keeps the Macaw clean and healthy.



## Interpreting Macaw Body Languages

One of the most important aspects in establishing and maintaining a successful relationship with your Macaw is to understand its vocalization and body language. Macaws communicate with us through nasal and vocal sounds, physical behavior and bodily actions. If you follow their body language and vocalization, you will be able to "tell" when they are happy, contented, 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 Macaw owners learn to interpret the meanings of their Macaw's sounds and behaviors. This is the only way to successfully tame, train, and care for them. If your Macaw exhibits any of the following behaviors, try to find out what exactly your feathered friend is trying to tell you, and respond (or refrain from responding) accordingly.

- 1 **Gnarling:** Gnarling is an indication of aggression. Growling is sometimes accompanied by dilated pupils and raised feathers on the back of the neck. It means that a Macaw does not want to be approached. It wants to stay alone. Please respect its feelings.
- 2 **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 Macaws. Go all out to make friends. And, your Macaw may become one of your best friends in life!
- 3 **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, Macaws make such sounds during the night before they go to bed.
- 4 **Wiping the Beak:** A feeling of jealousy or an indication to dislodge



something that has been irritating your pet. Please don't ignore this reaction. Try and find out what hinges into his personal territory, which it dislikes.

- 5 **Biting:** Normally in their teething ages, Macaws undergo successive emotional changes, and biting is a common gesture by Macaws to show that they are displeased with certain incidents. However, among the younger lot, biting is an indication of their tendency to experiment with texture, tastes and resilience towards objects. You can't but allow some feathered rebels under your roof!
- 6 **Whistling:** When it whistles or sings in a jovial tone, a Macaw expresses a feeling of safety and contentment in accordance to its environment.
- 7 **Chattering:** A chattering Macaw is one that practices speeches, words and phrases. However, a soft moaning chatter shows how amused it is with incidents around it.
- 8 **Tucking head:** If your Macaw often tucks its head underneath its feathers, it may be a signal of relaxation, whereas in aggressive situations a slight elevation of the nape is commonly noticeable.
- 9 **Flipping wings:** Flipping one or both wings is usually indicative of annoyance or displeasure. Another cause of wing flipping could be that your Macaw is realigning them.
- 10 **Ruffling head feathers:** Ruffling of head feathers and fanning its tail indicates displeasure. Never overdo something that irritates the small bird, otherwise it could develop the tendency to bite and become irritable.
- 11 **Waging tail:** Contentment and happiness in Macaws is further expressed by



waging the lower-end of their tail back and forth or upright.

12 **Stretching**: However, like humans, Macaws also stretch to relax. This is especially important for them since they spend much of their time on their feet. Birds will stretch one foot and the opposite wing at the same time, which improves blood circulation and refreshes over-worked muscles.

## To Conclude

This beautiful bird can be a brilliant cohort. Choose the one that will fit your life. 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. Only if you follow the above information regarding buying and caring for your Macaw, go for one. Don't neglect them or see them as an additional burden in your life. Don't break the little beauty's heart.



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