

When is a Bite NOT a Bite

In nature, parrots live free. They rarely bite a member of their flock. Biting does not commonly happen even when fighting over a desired nesting space.

People often confuse “beaking“ for biting. Parrots are accustomed to using their beaks to step up on a tree branch or a cage perch. They rely on beaking for balance. A branch - a perch - a leg - an arm - a shoulder all have the same usefulness to a parrot. If we are afraid and jerk away, a parrot only gets confused and defensive. Do you or don't you want your parrot to sit on and with you?

In nature, parrots fly freely, choose their favorite tree hangouts, and use branches and twigs to play with and sharpen their beaks. In human homes, parrots likely live in cages, where they are forced to be confined and sedentary, with little time given to exercise, explore, interact with their human friends, and act like the wild creatures they are.

If we bring a parrot into this unnatural setting, the least we can do is take the time to understand bird communication. When our parrots send us messages - whether vocal or by biting - we need to recognize we'd better respond positively... or the negative behavior will happen again.

What being a pet means to a bird

Parrots in captivity can't be as physically active living in a cage, having their wings clipped, and interacting almost exclusively with humans.

We may make life easy for parrots, supplying them with food and water and providing shelter. But by taking them out of their native environments, we also make it impossible for parrots to fly for miles, find their own food sources, interact with their flock, learn to avoid predators and other dangers, roost together at night, choose and create nests, defend their baby chicks, and teach the new generation all they have learned.



A Bit about Biting



HOW DO WE MINIMIZE BITING AND BE BETTER HUMANS?

- **Watch your parrot!**

Listen to every sound your bird makes. Look at your bird's eyes; dilated pupils mean excitement, and contracted pupils are a warning sign. Wing action tells you if a bird feels aggressive (spread out wings) or annoyed (a small wing flip). Feather puffing occurs if a bird wants to appear large to scare another away or if the bird really just wants to rest. Cockatoos indicate mood with their crests: raised could mean aggression, fear, or ready to play. Spend time with your parrot to learn its body language.

- **Messages you send that can cause a bite**

Loudly entering a room.
Picking up an object the bird doesn't like.
Coming too close too quickly (your face, hand, whole body).

Recognize actions and movements you make that cause a parrot to be frightened or angry. If you change your behavior, your parrot will change too.



- **Modify your reactions**

Parrots respond instinctively to a threat by biting to protect themselves. While YOUR first instinct might be to then protect yourself, never overreact. Your goal is to stop the behavior, not to punish or reward negative behavior.

If you swat at, hit, or throw the bird down, you risk injuring and even killing the bird. All you've taught the bird is to fear you and attack again.

If you start yelling and jumping around, your parrot may become excited by all that entertaining action. Your response may be viewed as a reward and a reason to bite your toes or shoes again.

The best approach to a bite is to say "no" in a calm, firm voice and place the bird in a time out and safe area.

WHY PARROTS BITE: IT'S MOSTLY OUR FAULT!

- **Companion parrots bite because:**
As captive pets, they can't do what birds in nature do. Their instincts and behaviors change, living in a cage or aviary rather than free to fly for miles and live in family flocks.

We humans aren't great at understanding birds, and we are completely alien to how a bird thinks.

When a parrot does bite, analyze why. What were the circumstances? What was the trigger? What did YOU do to cause the bird to react? What can you do to change your behavior and your parrot's reaction to lessen the chance of repeated biting?

- **A parrot may bite because:**

Mood - just doesn't want to interact with you, tired, not feeling well, would rather eat or play with a toy.

Fear - has learned to be afraid of you and doesn't trust your actions, no set routines established with or by you.

Alerting - tries to tell you danger is nearby, doesn't understand why you don't see the same threat, can't attack the danger so bites you instead - even to defend you and your shared home territory.

HORMONES! - as far as your parrot is concerned, it's breeding and nesting season; your parrot wants even more undivided attention from you.

Fun - if your parrot does something that causes you to entertain the bird, the parrot will do it over and over to provoke your reaction.