



Biting and Screaming

Biting

A bird may bite out of fear or aggression. They may be protecting their territory or asserting their dominance. Their powerful beak can break the skin and hurt. If your bird tries to bite you, remember to keep your fingers together and curled inward. It is harder to bite a flat surface than individual fingers. Pull your hand a short distance out of its reach but hold your ground. If the bird does bite, try to remain calm. If the bird is on your hand and biting, some recommend a short downward shift of the bitten hand but do not drop the bird. A stern verbal "NO" is useful. The bird has to learn that you are the boss and that you will not tolerate biting. NEVER hit a bird as they do not respond to this sort of discipline plus they will lose their trust in you and may learn to fear hands. You will have to gain the birds trust in a gentle, gradual fashion. You will also have to learn to read the bird's body language to understand that he may need some personal "space" at certain times.

Screaming

This is a challenging dilemma. Screaming or vocalization is a happy way for parrots and other birds to communicate with each other in their natural wild flock environment. They will also scream if alarmed. They usually scream in the early morning and towards dusk. You are part of their "flock" and they want to communicate. Unfortunately, this can be a very annoying behavior to most people in the confines of our homes. So, how do we stop a perfectly natural behavior? The bird does NOT understand that it is NOT acceptable to scream and squawk or otherwise communicate in your house. It is a human problem. The bird is screaming to communicate or "talk", **and** to get attention. Some will squawk if bored, lonely or stressed.

There are many different opinions on dealing with this situation. Often people tend to make it worse while trying to control the situation. There are both positive and negative reinforcements of this behavior. Rushing to the "aid" of your distressed bird or yelling at him are both giving him the attention he may be requesting. Most birds will quickly learn that when they scream, they will get attention from their human companions.

Some people cover the cage or turn off the light when the bird screams. This is, in one way, another reinforcement for the bird as you have given him attention even if it was just to cover the cage. Covering the cage could be seen as unjust as it is NOT fair to keep the bird in the dark all the time.

If screaming appears to be attention seeking then ignoring the screaming and paying special attention to the quiet times (positive reinforcement) may limit the screaming. Trying to pay attention to what might be bothering the bird can lead to solutions.

Your avian veterinarian may be able to help or refer you to a bird behaviorist for consultation.