



*Many have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it.
You remain responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.*

— Antoine de Saint - Exupery

The Gabriel Foundation® is a 501(c)(3) avicultural and veterinary affiliated parrot welfare organization licensed by the state of Colorado, promoting educational outreach, conservation, rescue, rehabilitation, adoption, and sanctuary pertaining to the needs of parrots everywhere.

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The ABC's of Parrot Care

It must be stated from the beginning that parrots as pets are not for everyone. If you are the kind of person that doesn't mind excessive noise, constant mess and living with a needy, feathered toddler the rest of your life, please read on. If this sounds like something that might not be a problem for your lifestyle, please know that there are many aspects of sharing your home with a parrot and you must do your homework long before you bring your new companion home.

We use the word "companion" when we refer to a "pet" parrot because that is what they are and that is how they must be viewed. Parrots are inherently flock animals and since we have removed them from their native habitat, it is very important that we do our best to replicate what they have lost by living in our homes. We have become their flock and it is our job to learn how that impacts the parrot that we bring home. As their flock leader, we also need to remember that parrots are still wild animals. They have been tamed, but they are genetically still wild and function from that point of view.

Anyone who lives with a parrot is constantly asked, "Does your parrot talk?" "Well of course he talks. He talks 'Parrot' and some English with a few Spanish words thrown in and has great body language!" Getting a parrot to speak OUR language is not nearly as challenging as learning to speak 'Parrot' ourselves. We must learn to speak 'Parrot' if our relationship with the bird is to flourish on all levels. This leaves many people thinking, "What does this mean, speak 'Parrot'?" Well, it means many things. No one can expect to go to a foreign country and immediately interact with the native people without speaking or learning their language. No one should even consider bringing a parrot home without taking some lessons in how to speak or understand their language and learning what they need to be happy.

So, just in case you think you might like to have a parrot companion in your life and would like to be bilingual, here's a crash course in Parrot-speak 101.

- **Squawk!** This means, "I am hungry. I cannot live on just seeds. I need fresh veggies and fruit; I really like cooked, whole grain mashes; and parrot pellets are yummy. I think nuts are great and I will always enjoy a small amount of good quality parrot seed mix. I also like to eat with my flock, so when I see you eating I will always want to eat with you. I will also want to eat what you are eating, but make sure it is low fat, low salt, and low sugar. I cannot have chocolate, avocado, alcohol or caffeine, either."

- **Squawk, Squawk!** This means, “I am bored. My cage is not big enough for me to climb around in and spread my wings, and I do not have enough to do. I need lots of toys to chew on, fight with, hide behind and cuddle up to. I also need different kinds of perches to stand on so my feet don’t get sore. I need sunlight and maybe a window to look out of but most important I need special one-on-one time with you. I like to be with you or at least in the same room with you when you are home. I really like to take showers with you, but if you are in a hurry, a misting from a spray bottle works well, too. My most favorite thing to do is going outside in the sunshine for a ride in the car or a visit with your friends. But, don’t forget that even though my flight feathers are trimmed, I can accidentally fly away if I get scared. Take me out in a harness or a carrier so you will never lose me. Just because I love you does not mean that I will know how to find you if I get frightened or lost out in the scary world.”
- **Squawk, Squawk, Squawk!** This means, “I am sorry. I did not mean to bite you. I am scared or maybe I do not feel good. In the wild, we do not bite each other because we can fly away if we do not like or understand things. Maybe you need to find someone to help you speak parrot better so you will understand how I am feeling about things that are happening around me. Maybe it is time to see a doctor that really knows about parrots and can make them feel better. I am trying to learn to speak human but you are very puzzling to me sometimes. Sometimes I do not understand why you do the things you do and the only thing that makes me feel better is pulling out my feathers and squawking.”

As anyone who has tried to learn a new language, it can seem overwhelming and impossible at times. The few things that have been addressed here are just the tip of the parrot iceberg. But one thing that I can assure you of is this: once you learn what your parrot’s innate needs are and how to speak its language so that all needs are met, you will possibly have a friend for your life or your parrot might outlive you. Parrots are extremely intelligent and empathetic creatures that want nothing more from you than your respect, trust and love. Do your homework and continue learning and I assure you that your hard work will return to you ten fold in the feathered form of the best friend you have ever had.

Things to think about before bringing a parrot home:

- What types of birds are parrots?
- What species of parrot is the best for me and my lifestyle?
- Where is the best place to find a healthy parrot?
- What do parrots need to eat to be healthy?
- How large should the cage be and where will it sit in my house?
- How long do parrots live with the right care?
- Is there an experienced avian veterinarian near my home?
- How much time do I have to spend with a parrot?
- Will the rest of the people in my family like the parrot?
- Will my neighbors mind the extra noise?
- Can I really afford all the expense of providing the best care for a parrot?
- What are the best resources for accurate parrot information?

- Who will take care of my parrot if it outlives me?