

ABTC ADVICE: Helping your Parrot cope with the lifting of lockdown?

Our Parrots will have become very used to our full-time presence at home during lock-down and will have enjoyed the extra attention and time out of their cage. In order to prevent distress at our return to a more normal life, including leaving them alone again, these simple tips might help ease them into accepting the changes to their routine.

Try to establish a similar routine now as you did before the pandemic began.

- Keep to a similar feeding and out of cage schedule.
- If working from home in the same room as your parrot, then change the location of your workstation to a different room.
- When possible and safe to do so, leave the house for short periods of time each day and go for a walk or sit in your car.

To see how your parrot is coping when alone; then, set up your tablet, laptop, phone or camera and wi-fi so you can see the cage.

Use a video conferencing app such as Zoom or Skype, do the same on your phone and leave the house for no more than half an hour and watch what your parrot does.

- Remember, if using a tablet, laptop, or a phone, to turn off your audio and visual so that the parrot can neither see nor hear you, as to do so may cause them stress.
- Please don't be tempted to speak to them when they are alone in the house.

If s/he is screeching, feather plucking or showing other signs of distress, then s/he is indicating quite strong emotions that could be linked to a separation disorder and will require the assistance of a professional. Please see the Help section below.

Tips to help

Parrots are flock creatures - all parrots live in flocks. A lone parrot in the wild is a dead parrot as there is safety in numbers. When some parrots are foraging, others will be watching for predators. When we bring a parrot into our home, we become their flock. They feel safe and

secure when we are with them, and some feel frightened or insecure when we are not with them.

Parrots in the wild give flock calls that tell other members where they are. These communications also serve to call other members of the flock back to them.

DO establish a flock call with your parrot in the home, so that s/he knows where you are - that you have not abandoned them or worse, been eaten by a predator. By doing this you may be preventing a screeching problem later.

- When you leave a room and it is not possible for your parrot to follow you, then tell them where you are going; and, what you will be doing.
- When your parrot calls to you from another room, answer them; again, this will help to prevent or reduce screeching, as they do not need to raise their voices to locate you.

DO teach your parrot that when you leave the house, you will return. You can do this by gradually increasing the time they spend alone in the house.

DO teach a cue word for leaving the house so that the parrot will associate this word or phrase with your departure and return; for example, "I'm going to work; see you later!" and they settle down and not worry about being on their own.

Mental Stimulation

Being bored mentally can be stressful by itself; and, add to any stress caused by being alone.

Discover what is enriching to your parrot, for some this may be chewing wood or paper, it may be nest building and for others it might be foraging toys or feeding enrichment. Provide your parrots with enrichment that suit their preferences.

Remember that many species of parrots are neophobic, that is they have a fear of new objects. So, introduce any new enrichment in a gentle manner starting from a distance. Place the enrichment item close to their cage and gradually moving it closer over a period of days to finally inside their cages.

To encourage parrots to play with toys, play with the toy yourself, as this shows the parrot it is safe, and the parrot's natural curiosity will ensure that s/he comes closer for a look.

Useful guides to making enrichment toys are:

<https://www.avianstudios.com/captive-foraging-dvd/>

<http://www.parrotenrichment.com/foraging.html>

<http://foragingforparrots.com/>

Get Help

Please remember any sudden changes in behaviour can be an indication that something is amiss. If your parrot suddenly starts behaving in a way that is not normal for them and that is out of character, there will be a reason – it may be behavioural, but it may also be medical.

If you are concerned about your parrot's behaviour do talk to your Vet in the first instance, in case there are any underlying medical causes. Please remember, if your parrot is not doing well when alone, you need professional help. Qualified behaviour help is available from the Animal Behaviour and Training Council <https://abtc.org.uk/practitioners/> Separation related and other problems lend themselves very well to remote consultations with a behaviourist.