

## **THE PET CONNECTION**

By Deb Waldron

### **GONE TO THE BIRDS!**

Now looking back I noticed that I've done a whole lot of writing about dogs, some sharing about cats, but I have totally neglected our feathered pet friends!

Ahhh, the birdies. Whether they be big or small they have a lot to offer us with both their affection and their sheer entertainment value! I myself own a little blue parrotlet called Pip Squeak, who got his name because he weighs in at around 3oz., but man does he pack a lot of personality into those three ounces! As I type he is chewing on my eye glasses and messing with my hair, let's face it, he has a vested interest in this month's column :)

Birds relate to us on a whole different level than dogs and cats, but make no mistake, birds love their people. And I do mean THEIR people, not so much other people. In fact most birds only really like ONE person, and that person they are only nice to about half of the time. But if you are owned by a bird you do not care, because when they are being nice to you they are so delightful that it makes up for all the times when they are not so nice to you. Am I right bird lovers?!

Now we all know it is Spring, and what are the birds and the bees doing right now? Well they are making more birds and bees of course! In honor of the season Pip Squeak has been trying to make love with my toes for a couple of weeks now. He does this little romance dance around my feet and then regurgitates a bit of food on them, it's soooo endearing ..... OK, enough fooling around (ha ha), it's time for some serious bird talk.

Birds are pretty low maintenance pets, (if you don't count the amount of time they need to interact with their people), but they do have some basic needs that will help to keep them healthy and happy. Seed diets are OK, but try supplementing bird seed with things like veggies, beans, rice, pasta, or hard boiled eggs. Introduce items one at a time until you discover what your feathered friend likes and dislikes. One of Pip Squeaks favorite "other" foods is cooked oatmeal, he perches right on my bowl and helps himself every morning. I can hear all the non bird owners saying "ewwww"! Any fresh food your bird does not finish needs to be removed the same day it is given so that it does not spoil.

Bathing is important for healthy skin and feather growth. Some birds like bird baths, others like to sit under a gently dripping faucet. I know one owner of a big Macaw who lets her bird shower with her. (More "ewwwing" from the non bird owners right?!) Make sure that your bird has a draft free, preferably sunny place to preen and dry off after his or her bath. If your bird won't take a bath himself you can try lightly spraying him with a plant mister bottle a couple of times a week.

OK, let's talk beaks and wings. Both need to be clipped sometimes. If you do not provide your bird with a hard wood block, cuttle bone, or other safe material to wear his beak down naturally, it might grow too long and need to be trimmed. A beak that is too long can hinder a birds ability to eat properly. Wing clipping is done mostly too keep birds from flying around the house and either hurting themselves or accidentally escaping to the out of doors. Large birds only need the flight feathers on one wing clipped, small birds, because they are so light, need the flight feathers of both wings clipped to keep them from being able to gain altitude. You should leave beak and wing clipping to the professionals though, because in both cases trimming back too far can cause bleeding.

One last thought, while finches and canaries are happy to live in their cages, birds like parakeets, cockatiels, conures and parrots need time out of their cages to play and interact with their environment. A bird left out of its cage unattended can get into all kinds of trouble and end up hurting itself, so “playtime” should be supervised, especially if there are other pets or small children in the house. By the way, birds do enjoy music and watching the TV. My Pip Squeaks favorite movie is Walley, he sings and chatters the whole time it is playing!

If you would like to see a specific topic discussed in a future column of The Pet Connection please send emails to: [Debbie@PamperedPawsSalon.com](mailto:Debbie@PamperedPawsSalon.com)