



## *Excessive vocalisation*

### *(i) Why does your parrot make so much noise??*

**Contact calls:** It is natural and normal for parrots to try to keep in touch with mates or members of their flock - unfortunately they do this a bit loudly for us at times! Your bird may have formed a strong bond with a particular someone in your household. If someone familiar is present, your bird will be satisfied. If left alone, she will attempt to communicate with her flock when you are out of sight, or if she hears you nearby. Post-weaning, parrots need a secure, unchanging environment; otherwise they may squawk out of fear of being left alone. If this occurred when your bird was young, she may have developed a rather loud habit and may still harbour this fear. Sometimes if parrots see other birds outside, they may just contact call to them too.

**Alarm calls:** Sometimes parrots call out to their flock mates in a high-pitched series of calls if something scares them (e.g. a snake-like rope on the floor), or if they have suddenly been injured. It doesn't sound like this is the major reason for your bird's calls, so it's wise not to ignore these loud calls if they do happen.

**Busy environment:** In a loud environment with lots of different sounds going on, a parrot will be encouraged to make noises themselves. You may notice your bird be particularly keen to join in your conversation when you're on the phone, especially after you've been quiet for a bit. Your bird didn't realise you weren't quite so keen for her to join in! Your parrot can also sometimes vocalise out of jealousy or frustration at not being able to join in with whatever their owner is doing, such as chatting on the phone to a friend, or joining in the family meal. Parrots are very sociable creatures and enjoying eating together, so if you are munching on your lunch, your parrot may just want to too!

**Frustration:** If the owner is present and the parrot is in their cage, they sometimes shriek out of jealousy or frustration at not being able to join in with whatever their owner is doing, such as chatting on the phone to a friend. Parrots are very sociable creatures and enjoying eating together, so if you're munching on your lunch, your bird may just want to too!

**Attention-seeking:** Parrots are very quick learners - if you are already present, then run to them whenever they scream, the shrieking will be rewarded and they will not give up soon in trying to get this to work again in the future. Yelling at them to be quiet will make them think that actually you're joining in their excitement. Bored birds without much social contact will be much more likely to try to seek out your attention.

**Hormones:** During the breeding season (usually sometime in spring or summer), parrots' hormones change. For females, this means being extra protective around their 'nest', while males get a rush of testosterone. So during this time your bird can be under particular stress and generally more irritable, whether towards one of you, or she may even attack one of your dog or cat. This may in turn provoke counter-aggression from an animal that is much bigger and has much bigger teeth/claws. So keep this in mind and stay extra vigilant - it may be appropriate to move your bird to a quieter area at least during this period.



Unpaired males are the noisiest during their breeding season, trying to attract suitors, as well as keep away rivals! It's not totally clear whether your bird is a she or actually a he (**see respective handout**). If you notice your bird being particularly loud during a certain time of year, he'll be feeling it's his time to shine!

## *(ii) How do we teach our parrots to chat to us quietly?*

- **Never punish** or tell your bird off for vocalising in any way, as it a completely natural behaviour. Parrots are so sensitive to punishment and she will not understand why she's being told off, so any telling off will only damage your relationship with her.
  - In fact, if you run up and yell at your bird to be quiet while she is screaming, then she may just be rewarded with your attention, even if its negative, or she will think you're joining in.
  - On the other hand, **don't ignore sudden screams**, as your bird may be alarm calling (e.g. if a cat is after her) and feels she needs immediate support.
- If you notice a particular **time of day** when she tends to be noisier, schedule a feeding/play/training session just before this time.
- Your bird's vocalisations seem to be predominantly contact calls, so let's introduce two types of consistent **returning contact calls** for the humans in the household!
  - **Short-term:** If you're just leaving your bird for a short period of time (i.e. just popping into the adjacent room) choose a particular whistle combined with her name;
  - **Long-term:** if you're leaving your bird for more than half an hour, make a different 'call', such as 'I'm off now, bye-bye your bird' in a sing-songy voice, as well as perhaps making a visual signal, like a wave and close the room door.
- Wherever you are in the same room as your bird, always communicate in a **quiet voice**, or whistle and sing quietly with her. Reward and reinforce her whenever she makes 'good' vocalisations (i.e. not screaming while you're present). The reward could be a peanut, or a head scratch (as long as you're sure she enjoys a scratch).
- Whenever your bird screams while you're present, immediately turn your back, look away, remain still and quiet. The second that she is quiet, turn around and quietly praise with a treat. Alternatively, leave the room until she is quiet.
  - There is likely to be an 'extinction burst', which is where your bird will scream all the more before they get better. Keep at it - this means the end is in sight!
  - Count seconds in intervals of silence and increase if possible.

## *(iii) A few tips to increase your chances of success!*

- If you need to leave the room, but can't focus on training, offer another positively reinforcing activity prior to leaving the room (e.g. a food puzzle). This may buy you a short window of time to move freely between rooms without screaming behaviour. However, you will still need to include training sessions at some point.
- Get some earplugs to help you cope with the screaming during the extinction burst.
- Plan to wait in the other room. Prepare in advance a quiet activity you can do when trying to deal with a screaming session.
- Manage your activities to help set yourself up for success. For example, keep the lights off or your bird covered for a few extra minutes in the morning until you are prepared to deal with the screaming with good training strategies.



- Get support. If neighbours are having a problem with your screaming parrot, explain to your neighbours that you are working on training your bird not to scream.

*Focus on fixing the problem instead of your frustration. Believe you will get there. This strategy does work.*

- Keep notes if necessary, to determine how and when this behaviour might be getting reinforced. Eliminate any reinforcers for screaming.