



Multi-species household

In the wild parrots are prey species, while dogs, cats and humans are predators. These innate predator/prey instincts never fully leave our pets when they live in our homes. Even if they do not seem to show it, this can lead to parrots feeling they are under constant stress. There are also various zoonotic diseases that may pass between these different species living together in close quarters. Greater but gradual socialisation of the birds to us humans and controlled encounters with your dog/cat will help the birds gain more confidence.

Parrots are particularly sensitive to certain viruses and bacteria from dog and cat hair, saliva and scratches. If you suspect an infection may have occurred, please consult your avian vet immediately.

We discussed the different preventative measures in your home to reduce the possibility of your being able to reach your bird. The ideal solution would be to put your bird in a different room that your dog/cat cannot access, such as the lounge. You would need to consider how to time-share their 'out' time with the rats'. Never leave your dogs/cats free in the same room as the bird unsupervised (even if they're in their cage). The other thing to remember is to still give your bird plenty of attention and mental stimulation (**see Part 2**), especially if you choose to put them in one of the spare rooms, which your family naturally don't visit as much.

(i) Changing the environment

The key to avoiding fatal accidents is constant supervision and vigilance when your different pets are in the same room together.

- **Sturdy, tall cage:** it's great that your bird's cage is heavy and tall enough that it cannot be toppled by Your dog and that they're out of his reach. The cage also requires **strong locks**, which cannot be opened by any clever paws, claws, jaws, or beaks!
- **Positioning of cage:** to make your bird feel safer from the world in general, cover over a top corner of the cage. It's great that the cage is in the corner of the room and you've put cardboard around the bottom of the cage - these are natural visual barriers for Your dog to observe the bird and vice versa. You could also consider more thick branches and toys within the cage. A wider seed catcher around the bottom of the cage is also ideal, as it discourages Your dog from foraging around the bottom of the cage for treats.
- **Hidey holes:** to make your bird feel safer from the world in general, cover over a top corner of the cage. You could also consider more thick branches and toys within the cage.



- **Alternative prey outlets:** instead of your bird providing a great fun focus Your dog's predatory instincts, provide him with appropriate alternatives to fulfil these drives. You should play with him at least twice daily at home for 5-15 minutes, such as with a good ol' tug or fetch game.
- **Deterrents:** think about different objects that could be introduced to deter your dog/cat from approaching the cage without using punishment. For instance, an opaque surface (e.g. a piece of cardboard) could **cover the bottom** of the cage - make sure you introduce this slowly to your parrot, however. A wider seed catcher around the bottom of the cage is also ideal, as it discourages your dog/cat from foraging around the bottom of the cage for treats.

II. Inter-pet familiarisation

Each of your pets could be individually habituated to each other slowly through a series of short sessions (perhaps every few days) and over a long period of time (several months) - always under your constant supervision.

If any dogs or cats are in the same room as your bird, she needs to be in her cage with the door securely locked, while the dogs and cats should be on a houseline (a long light lead that can trail behind them).

In this way, they become used to each other to the point that they find each other boring, but you retain control. So in the inevitable event when one of your preventative measures fails (e.g. your bird manages to open her door while your cat/dog is still in the room), all of your animals are generally nonplussed by each other and it is less likely that your bird will be harmed.

Ideally, this familiarisation or 'socialisation' process should occur as early in each animal's life as possible - puppies, kittens and chicks that grow up together are so much more likely to get along. Unfortunately, this isn't possible now with your pets, but do instigate some socialisation as experiences continue to matter upon maturity and as your pets become elderly gents/ladies! However, even with all the greatest socialisation in the world, an animal's instincts are sometimes just too strong. So if your bird were to suddenly fly over your cat/dog's head, your cat/dog will probably not be able to help himself from leaping up to catch your bird. Likewise constant exposure to predator animals, even if paired with her yummiest treats, will always be stressful for your bird.

It will also be very useful for you to do lots of consistent reward-based training with each of your pets, which you could then utilise in 'real-life' situations.

- **Dog training exercises:** train your dogs to understand the rules in life. One of these rules could be not to approach your bird or her cage. Other useful signals you could teach your dogs is to 'come away', 'boring', 'relax in to your bed' and a remote down or 'drop' (let us know if you're not sure how to train this).
- **Train your bird:** you can use essentially the same positive training techniques, such as with a clicker and a food reward, with your parrot, as you do with your dog. Train your bird to understand what is appropriate behaviour towards other animals - e.g. chew this toy, instead of the dog's ear (although hopefully they won't get that close!)! You can also train your bird **recall** - i.e. to fly to your outstretched arm when you call her. Another simple, but very useful command for your bird is '**step up**' (see enclosed handouts). Please note though that this training should only occur when there are no other animals around,



but it will come in handy in emergency situations.

- **Praise vs. distract:** reward your dog/cat with a piece of sausage or tuna when they react to your bird in the way you want them to (i.e. calm, non-reactive postures). For any unacceptable behaviours (e.g. observing or batting at your bird, even with her in her cage), quietly pick up the end of their **house-line** and lead them out of the room. Alternatively, if you can't get there quick enough, the best backup option is to distract them from your bird (e.g. with a toy), then move them to another room until the next supervised session (wait a while for everyone to calm down).