

A PARROT'S BILL OF RIGHTS

By Stewart A. Metz, M.D.

1. GET TO KNOW ABOUT PARROTS BEFORE YOU BRING ME HOME - I am not a domesticated pet like a dog or cat. I still have the spirit of the jungle in me. I have special needs which you may find it hard to fill. Please don't learn these too late for my well-being. And please don't acquire one of my cousins wild from the jungle-it will jeopardize his survival and well-being, and that won't be a party for you either!

2. GIVE ME THE LARGEST HOME POSSIBLE - I am use to flying through rainforests or savannas. I have given up this great gift for your pleasure. At the very least, give me enough room to flap my wings and exercise. And I need toys for my amusement and wood to chew-otherwise, I might confuse your Home with the forest and its trees.

3. GIVE ME A NUTRITIOUS DIET - I need a wide variety of fresh and nutritious foods, even if they take time to prepare. I cannot survive on seed alone. Take time to learn what my needs are.

4. LET ME HAVE A "SOCIAL LIFE" - I am a gregarious flock animal-but I am not one of you. I need lots of socialization to learn how to act with you, and with my siblings. I also need to have adequate quality time with you every day-no matter what your schedule or other needs are. I am a living, feeling creature. Above all, I need to be able to have complete trust in you, and count on your predictability in looking after me-every day.

5. LET ME BE CLEAN - I may like to drop food or even throw it, but I need meticulous cleanliness to be healthy. My skin itches without frequent showers, the barbs of my feathers won't seal if they become oily and, worst of all, I may become ill if my food or water is not always sanitary.

6. I NEED MY OWN DOCTOR - You may not understand my physiology and therefore you may not recognize it early on when I get sick. And it may be too late when you do, because I hide my illnesses (remember what I said about my being an animal of the jungle, where there are lots of predators). And I need an avian vet-a specialist (no HMOs for me please). If you can't afford one, perhaps you shouldn't have taken me home.

7. PLEASE DON'T PUNISH ME - Just as I don't always understand your peculiarities, you may not understand mine. I don't TRY to get in trouble-remember, a house is not the jungle. if I do screw up, don't yell at me and never hit me. I have sensitive ears and I may never trust you again if you strike me. Hands are sometimes scary things to us (why in the world would you not be zygodactylous like us?) Even more importantly, we don't learn by punishment. We are gentle creatures who only strike back to protect ourselves; we learn through patience and love.

8. SPEAK MY "LANGUAGE" - I know you get upset with me when I knock over my water bowl, throw food, scream or pluck my feathers. I don't do these to annoy you-I am probably trying to tell you something (perhaps that I am hurting, lonely, or sad.) Learn to speak MY (body) language. Remember that I, alone of all creatures on this planet, learn to speak yours!

9. SEE ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL - I am a unique and feeling being.. .No two of us are alike. Please don't be disappointed in me if I don't talk like you wanted, or can't do the tricks that your friend's parrot can do. But if you pay close attention to me (and I always empathize with you, whether you know it or not), I will show you a unique being who will give you so much more than talking and playing.. .Give me a chance to show you who I am; I think you'll find the effort with it. And remember-I am not an ornament; I do not enhance ANY living room decor. And I am not a status symbol-if you use me as such, I might nip at your up-turned nose!

10. SHARE YOUR LOVE WITH ME - Above all, please remember that you are my Special Person. I put all my trust and faith in you. We parrots are used to being monogamous. (No bar-hopping for us!). So please don't go away for long periods or give me away-that would be a sadness from which I may never recover. If that seems to be asking a lot, remember-you could have learned about my needs BEFORE bringing me home. Even having a baby or taking a new job isn't a fair reason-you made a commitment to me FIRST! And if you think that you must leave me because you might die, provide for me forever after you leave. I may live to a ripe old age but I can't provide for myself. Remember I'm in a small cage amongst people who are not of my blood.

11. YOUR RIGHTS - You have lots of rights, but I can only assure one. And that is, if you treat me the way I described above, I will reward you with unwavering love, humor, knowledge, beauty, dedication-and a sense of wonder and awe you haven't felt since you were a child. When you took me home, you became my Flock Leader, indeed, my entire universe-for life. I would hang the moon and stars for you if I could. We are one in Heart and Soul.