

How to Teach Your Bird to Step Up

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An exercise with many benefits

Every pet needs to be trained in some fashion and that includes birds. Since a natural physical behavior of a bird is to step up, this is a fairly easy command to teach. Added benefits of teaching this command include reinforcing your higher status, helping the bird overcome his natural fear of you, and strengthening the bond between you.

As with training any animal, sessions should be short - usually around 15 minutes. Make training a positive game!

- Train in a safe, enclosed, quiet room without distractions.
- Be consistent - pick one command and stick with it.
- Watch for signs of sleepiness, inattentiveness, fear, or aggression.
- If the bird is not used to you, spend several sessions slowly and quietly placing your hand in the bird's cage, away from the bird. With each session, move your hand closer to the bird. Allow the bird to perch on it of his own accord - tempt him with a treat!
- During initial training, you may wish to use a dowel or other stick in place of your finger. Get the bird used to the dowel by first placing it in the cage and allowing him to investigate it.
- End the session on a positive note.

Teaching Step Up

1. Gently push on the bird's breast right above his legs with your finger or dowel. Either one needs to be placed ABOVE whatever the bird is currently perching on.
2. When the bird starts to step onto your finger, say "step up" or "up" Choose only one of these commands.
3. When the bird steps up, praise him and give him a very small treat - something he really likes, but only gets when he obeys a command.
4. Birds may use their beaks to help them step up. Do not pull away, since that may indicate to him that you are afraid and then he has the upper "hand." Also, he will be reluctant to obey "step up" if the finger/dowel is pulled out from under him!
5. As the bird becomes comfortable, take him out of the cage and continue the training in other quiet environments. When away from his cage or territory, he may pay more attention to you.

After the bird begins to learn this command, he will relate it to good things happening, such as attention from you, treats, and eventually rewards such as going to the play gym.