

Squawk 'n Talk

Volume 6, Issue 4

April 2006

Greetings from the Presidential Perch!

It appears that Spring has finally arrived and I am very happy to see it!

With less than five months until the annual fair, we have much to do. Committees have been formed to make this year a well organized affair as well as another successful fair. Our national speakers are Barbara Heidenreich, author & behaviorist, and back by popular demand for the third time, Michelle Karras, avian behaviorist. Barbara will be speaking twice on Saturday and once on Sunday. Michelle will be speaking on Saturday and her very popular "Circle of Knowledge" on Sunday. She has added many new props to make this even more fun this year! For those who don't know, Barbara is the founder of the new magazine, "Good Bird". We are very excited to have both of these wonderful speakers here this year as well as our own Dr. Kersting who will be presenting updates from the AAV Convention. This should be extremely informative. I hope everyone makes an effort to attend these seminars this year.

Our hospitality dinner will be a bit different again this year. We will have caterers there for an old fashioned BBQ, to be cooked on site, and will most likely be selling dinners to the general public. This is something we are still considering. Vegetarians, we haven't forgotten you! We will have food items for you as well as Boca Burgers! Any member wishing to donate anything for the dinner is welcome to do so. The GPC will be supplying the desserts and drinks again this year.

Please contact Debby Martin to sign up for the various committees. Her contact information is listed in the newsletter. Debby does an excellent job of organizing the volunteers so that all goes smoothly. Thank you, Debby!

Don't forget, the next GPC meeting will be April 9th, the second Sunday of the month due to Easter falling on the third Sunday. We are

honored to have Jonathan Reyman again this month speaking on the "Bird Myths of South America". Jonathan spoke at last month's meeting as well about his Feather Distribution Project. He is a very interesting speaker and always welcomed by the GPC. If you have any feathers for Jonathan be sure to bring them to the next meeting or contact Dorene Olson to drop them off to her.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting!

Phyllis

Tidbits

Trey Shaffer

The March meeting featured Jonathan Reyman, founder of The Feather Distribution Project. Dr. Reyman talked about how we can help both captive and wild birds by collecting the feathers our birds molt. So start putting those feathers in an envelope or bag and bring them to a meeting. We forward them periodically to Dr. Reyman for distribution.

Jonathan Reyman will be back for our April meeting to discuss bird myths of South America. He is by the way an Anthropologist at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield. I'm looking forward to this presentation, to learn more about how these peoples have seen our birds through the centuries.

Reminder, in case you didn't notice it on the cover... the meeting this month is April 9th, the **second** Sunday, rather than the usual third Sunday, which happens to be Easter.

We are still trying to catch up with membership renewals for 2006. If you haven't renewed, please do. We will discuss this at the upcoming Board meeting, but expect your postal mail newsletter subscription to stop soon if you are not current. There should be an insert in this month's mailed newsletter for those affected.

Please welcome Niki Shaffer as a new Board member. Larry Martin has recurring conflicts with our meetings and his work schedule, and has resigned. We look forward to Larry's continuing participation as his schedule permits, and thank him for his efforts.

Michelle Karras

GPC members are familiar with Michelle from appearances at our Annual Fairs. We are happy she will return this August. In this issue, we have her bio information and an article on Step Up training. Look forward to more practical, informative articles from Michelle in coming months...

From Michelle's bio



Founder/President - The Polite Parrot

Avian Behavior Consultant

Published work, Birds USA, 2004/2005 - Rabbits Magazine 2005

Video: Positive Parrot Behavior: Volume 1, "The Importance of Toys"

International lecturer - Hallmark Channel, National Geographic Documentary

Director of Avian Behavior for a Refuge for Saving the Wildlife,

Director of Passion's Tree Of Life Foundations, Intl., A Private Foundation of Passion Tree House, LLC, Home of BirD-icious! Species-Specific Exotic Companion Bird Foods.

Avian Specialist for petag

Michelle has worked as a practice manager, veterinary technician, and animal behavior consultant for a small animal and exotic vet clinic in Lisle IL. for eight years. Michelle has also worked in affiliation for 18 years with Narnia Pet Behavior in Naperville IL. While working with Narnia Pet Behavior doing dog, cat, rabbit, pig, and bird behavior she realized the extensive need for someone to concentrate solely on parrot behavior in the Midwest. With two years

of psychology and after working with hundreds of rescued parrots to rehabilitate them to be able to be placed into loving homes The Polite Parrot was established in 1996. Michelle kept the parrots with the most issues and continues to work with them, although most issues are resolved and they are living happily within the Karras home, she has chosen to keep 12 of the parrots including: one Cockatiel, five Congo African Greys, Two Blue and Gold Macaws, one Meyers Parrot, two Umbrella Cockatoos, and one Mustache Parakeet. The Karras home also includes two children (under the age of two), three dogs, two cats, one rabbit, and an iguana. Michelle's techniques are all based on positive reinforcement and redirection of undesirable behavior, yet still allowing a parrot to be a parrot. Her days are very busy continuing to do behavior consulting via phone, e-mail, and in your home consultations. She works in synchronicity with your certified avian veterinarian and also helps you and your family, understand your feathered friend to work out issues that are able to be resolved. She donates her time freely to licensed avian rescues, and also donates time for avian conservation with her writings and hands on knowledge. Yes, she has bred birds in the past to study their natural instincts by allowing the parents to raise the babies; studying how often the parents fed them and how the parents teach the babies to fledge. Having kept track of the babies that she bred in the past, it is delightful to see that none of them have developed issues. This was a two-year study and the parents are now tame and no longer breeding. She works hand in hand with many reputable bird supply stores and also with reputable breeders. She believes that we should all be working together to help make the avian community an abundance of knowledge to help make our feathered friends as happy and healthy as they can be in captivity.

Michelle's motto is:

**R- REDIRECTION NOT REACTION
E- EXERCISE
S- SLEEP
P- PATIENCE
E- ENTERTAINMENT
C- CONSISTENCY WITH TRAINING
T- TRUST**

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Who Are YOU???

Debby Martin

Mozart and Ginger have tried so hard to learn it's OK to step up on someone else's hand – but it's SO easy to get scared or startle or just feel fussy! After all, in the wild they are prey animals and have no innate programming about “stepping up” or going to a strange hand. I noticed in the Companion Parrot Quarterly an article by Pamela Clark on this issue with helpful pointers:

- Make sure your bird is handled by a variety of people when it's young – this is just critical!
- New persons aren't part of the flock and the parrot knows it and reacts as prey animal. Ms. Clark has her bird step up on her hand first and then explains to the parrot what she wants them to do and they will be safe. Then she has the bird step up.
- If your bird is a high energy bird that focuses intently on what he's doing, make sure you've got his full attention so he isn't startled.
- If your bird hasn't had his special one on one time with you that day, it might not be a good idea to introduce new people.
- When new people come, take them to the cage immediately and introduce them. Encourage the visitor to talk to the bird – that may reduce screaming for attention.
- If your bird falls into a semi-sleep after twilight and sort of dozes, it would not be a good idea to ask them to go to a stranger's hand at that point in time.
- If your bird is hormonal, don't ask him to go to a stranger's hand.
- Take your bird on outings so they get used to change.
- Mozart suggests the visitor be the purveyor of specially yummy treats – Mozart's vote is almond silvers.



THE POLITE PARROT

Step-up Training

Michelle Karras

The term step-up is a universal command to “ask your bird to place themselves onto your hand to be moved or to spend time with you”. Step-up is as universal as the sit command is to a dog and should be instilled upon your parrot as sit is to a dog. Parrots' being wild animals and not domesticated, you will have to be a bit more patient when training especially an older parrot or a parrot that has not been handled in awhile. I believe a parrot should be asked if they would like to step-up as they are not domesticated and do not always want to do what we tell them. Therefore, showing respect to them by asking and using the correct body language when asking is always appropriate. By asking I mean do not walk up and demand that your parrot step-up onto you, this is just asking for a bite. You should be relaxed in demeanor and calmly walk up to your parrot and ask, “Would you like to step-up” during this time you will want to watch the parrots' body language. Some parrots' may put their foot right up for you. Some may strike to intimidate you. Some may pin their eyes and flare their tails, and some may step-up and then bite. The outcome of having a wild animal step-up onto your hand there will always be a risk of being bitten. If you show fear or apprehension the parrot will sense this, therefore if you feel that you are not confident enough you should use a perch or a Booda rope for stepping up to help give you the confidence you need when working with a parrot that is unknown to you or has not been handled in awhile. Know that a bite is always a possibility, yet the more confidence and trust you show the parrot the better chance you will have in succeeding in this process.

Many people I see use what I call “Noodle Hand” this is a limp hand that you put out when you ask your parrot to step-up, no parrot will step onto a perch that they feel is not secure. So your hand should be firm with your thumb tucked into your palm. This shows the parrot that this is a strong safe perch for them to place their body onto. This also shows that you trust the parrot and that you are confident in your handling capabilities. Many young parrots may use their beaks to test the perch before stepping onto it, the mistake we make as humans is that we will try and reprimand

them for this when in all actuality we should not respond and let them test the waters. Once a parrot feels your hand is a secure perch especially a baby you gently push your hand into their belly and ask them to step-up. If they refuse, try to bite or strike at you, you can switch to using a small perch or Booda rope (my preference because they cannot run right up to you shoulder because you will keep the rope perch bent in a U shape) to help you and the parrot feel more confident.

Another method is to give them a choice of an unfamiliar item versus a familiar item. The unfamiliar item being something they do not know yet is not scary in any way such as a magazine, strange toy etc. Hold this item with your opposite hand, off to the side, slightly above the parrot to distract, and ask them to step onto the familiar being your hand. This technique works like a charm with many parrots. Remember when working with parrots that tend to get very nippy to keep their minds distracted by going right into another step-up or wing flap them. Once they are a little tired they are more amicable to being worked with, as parrots fly anywhere from five to twenty miles a day in the wild. They work all day; they do not just sit on a perch in the wild. We as humans expect our parrots to adapt to us when we should be adapting to them and their needs. Once again showing them respect is of the utmost importance. When you give respect you receive respect back. Many people could use a lesson on exactly what respect is.

RESPECT: To have to have courteous regard for: esteem, to treat with politeness or kindness, to avoid intruding upon; Regard as sacred, a high regard for appreciation and worth. To be treated as sacred.

Knowing this, take a different look as to how you interact with your companion parrot. Do you treat your parrot with respect? Or do you expect?

Example: Every morning when I wake up my flock, I go into their room and go around and change waters, I say good morning to all of them, I do not rush them out of their cages. Once everyone has had their morning greeting, food, and water change, I go from cage to cage and ask them if they would like to come out and play? Some do, some don't. They are all required to come to the perch on the door if they would like to come out. There is a perch on the door of every cage, I never enter their space with my hands, if they want to come out they come down to the perch, the cage door is opened and I ask them to step-up. They are then praised and I place them out in the room. This is their morning time where they play up high without me interrupting or trying to

pet or handle them. I know I do not like to be bothered right when I wake up so I give them that same respect. After a couple hours they are climbing down and asking me for attention and scratches and loving. I respect their space and they respect mine. I do not ever force touching or petting on them, I wait until they ask for it and then they shall receive. I have nine-foot ceilings in my bird room and they all play up high. Do I have aggression problems? NO. Why? Because they know that if they do not step up for me when I ask them, whether it is to move them to a play gym or place them back into their cages; they know if they do not step-up that up-high privileges will be taken away the next day and step-up training will be done through out the day, on and off. This shows respect on both sides. I respect their time and they respect me for it. FYI, up high privileges has not been taken away from my parrots for over five years.

Okay, now let's go back to step-up training. Step-up training should be done in short segments of a few minutes with lots of praise and reward. It should be done from a T-stand, and if the bird is having aggression problems it should be done in a neutral room that is used only for training sessions. Although I do firmly believe that you should also move the T-stand into familiar areas to work with the bird once you are comfortable with handling. Praise should be done with each and every wanted behavior that your bird shows you. The first time a parrot steps onto your hand you should praise the parrot for at least five seconds, go into another step-up praising the whole time that the parrot is pleasing you. Be excited but not too excited. At the end of the session reward your parrot with a favorite food that is used solely for these sessions. After your parrot has the step-up command instilled, you can do the training sessions a few times a week instead of a few times a day. Always break the sessions up into small segments and always, always end on a good note. If your parrot goes to bite because it is tired, distract and have them do one more step-up onto the T-stand to end the session on a positive, not a negative. If you stop when your parrot bites, you have just taught it that all it has to do is bite you to end a training session. Eventually the bite will come before you even begin.

How many sessions should be done and how long should the sessions last?

This will depend on each individual parrot. If you have a baby that you have just brought home, sessions should be very short about one to two minutes, three times a day. If you are working with a rescue bird or a bird that has issues, sessions should be about five minutes three times a day. If you are having no problems just

simply asking them to step-up each time you handle is usually enough, although I do like to give my guys a little refresher course about once a week for about three to five minutes.

Some things not to do:

- Never chase a bird around a cage to get them out
- Never wear gloves
- Never use force or demand
- Never yell, hit or scream
- Never handle a parrot when you are stressed
- Never just expect your parrot to step onto you without being asked

Things to do:

- Be calm
- Be confident
- Be respectful
- Be patient
- Set boundaries
- Be positive in all training
- Give lots of praise
- Set your parrot up to succeed in training

Most of all, remember they did not choose to be taken from the beautiful blue skies and green trees and raised in captivity by man; so be aware that this is not their choice and we need to adapt to their needs by giving them as fulfilling a life as possible.

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2006 Meeting Schedule

Here is the year ahead, as it is shaping up. Mark the dates. More information will come later on topics for each meeting.

Date	Topic
April 9	South American Bird Myths – Jonathan Reyman <i>Note: This is the SECOND Sunday of April</i>
May 21	Dr. Kersting - First Aid and more...
June 11	Toy making party. <i>Note: This is the SECOND Sunday of June</i>
July 16	TBA
August 26-27	All American Hookbill Fair
September 17	TBA
October 15	Dr. Van Horn – AAV conference update, Bird flu
November 19	Eco-Tour of Peru, Dorene Olson Nominations for offices
December 17	Elections – Holiday party

March Attendance

Mandy	Ray
Baumgardner	Hurt
Bob	Judy
Buchele	Kandlinder
Phyllis	Keifer
Cotton	Joe
Bridget	Lawler
Cramer	Nancy
Cathy	Marion
Dervalis	Debb
Suzanne	Sherr
Dohack	Sherr
Janet	Miles
Draper	Donna
Danielle	Mount
Herro	Sister
Dick	Barbara
Horwitz	Payne
Denise	Do
Hurt	rene

cational programs and annual bird fairs.

- Reduce neglect, cruelty and abuse of captive birds through education and public outreach.
 - Educate the public, as well as ourselves, on the ever present danger of extinction in the wild.
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Baumgartner 4191

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Debby Mar- (314)
tin 968-
0949

Niki Shaffer (314)
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Committees

Education/Outreach Dorene (314)
Olson 569-
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Kinkade 343-
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