

# Minimizing Stress for Birds in Shelters



## WHAT TO EXPECT

Birds coming into a shelter environment are often traumatized. Some will appear fearful and withdrawn; others will be anxious or react aggressively. In all cases, giving a bird time to settle in and a little “TLC” will go along way towards relieving their stress.



## SIGNS OF STRESS: What To Look For

- Excessive vocalization, screaming and repetitive chirps or alarm calls; other birds may be extremely silent
- Self-injury, feather-destruction and/or stereotypic behaviors such as pacing, head-shaking, or constant rocking back and forth
- Excessive sleep, or becoming withdrawn or fearful or cowering
- Aggression to both people and other birds
- Thrashing or biting on cage bars
- Hissing, panting; fanned tail, wings held away from body, or raised head feathers may also be signs of stress.
- Increased respiratory rate; panting or open mouth breathing.
- Territorial behavior (bird looks like they're ready to charge)
- Raised head feathers and dilating pupils could be signs of aggression.



## LIMIT STRESS: What You Can Do

### Select A Relatively Quiet, Safe Area of the Shelter

- House birds away from the sight and sounds of predatory animals.
- Use a separate room where there is moderate activity, where birds can interact with caretakers, and where you can better observe their physical condition, behavior, and eating habits over a period of time.
- Avoid placing cages in the center of the room, on floors, or in high-traffic or noisy areas.
- Ideally, place cages in an area of the room that provides birds with a view of their surroundings and also allows them a section of the cage where they can retreat for privacy i.e. against a wall or in a corner of the room. For extremely timid birds, partially cover one side of the cage with a towel or a blanket to create a retreat area.

### Provide Socialization & Enrichment Activities

- As flock animals, birds enjoy and are often comforted by the company of other birds in the same room. However, do not attempt to house unfamiliar birds together in the same cage to see if they will get along, as this can result in stressing some birds, and/or in birds injuring or becoming aggressive towards one another. Birds should only be housed together if they are compatible and there is monitoring of their behavior. When in doubt keep them separate but in proximity so that physical injury does not occur.
- Birds should not be kept solitary unless for medical reasons.
- Provide appropriate toys and other enrichment activities.
- Consider keeping a radio or soft music on in the bird room.
- If possible, birds should be given out-of-cage time for exercise and socialization in a safe, escape-proof area of the shelter. Only recommended in shelters equipped with a dedicated bird-safe area and staff experienced with handling birds, and when you've determined the bird is tame, comfortable being handled, and willingly goes in and out of their cage.

### Special Considerations

- Birds are prey animals and can be startled easily by sudden movements and loud noises.
- Approach birds calmly and gently and speak in soft tones.
- Keep a consistent routine of cleaning, feeding, and socialization by familiar caregivers.
- Try not to stare at, hover, or loom over stressed birds, and avoid handling birds while wearing hats or gloves.
- Some birds are frightened by brooms or hoses, or by boxes or other objects being moved in and around their vicinity.
- Birdcages should be covered at night.



# Minimizing Stress for Birds in Shelters cont.



## Don't Want To Get Bitten By That Formidable Macaw Beak?

- Avoid grabbing or forcing a bird in or out of cages or enclosures.
- Use caution when servicing the cage to avoid provoking or scaring birds with hands or fingers. Ideally, cages should be outfitted to allow for outside access to food and water dishes.
- Never provoke a bird.
- If a bird lunges, or appears to be defensive or agitated, retreat immediately to avoid being bitten. A bird consistently attacking one specific shelter worker may indicate they would be more comfortable with another handler, perhaps one of the opposite sex.

**HERE ARE  
SOME TIPS!**



Military Macaw

Relaxed feathers and wings, holding a foot to be picked up is usually a sign the bird is receptive to being handled.



Moluccan Cockatoo

Birds with raised head feathers, dilated pupils, and a lunging posture should be approached with extreme caution or not at all. Give the bird a few minutes to calm down before you attempt to move closer.



Blue Crown Conure

Partially covering the cage and providing a high corner perch can help a bird feel more secure.



White-bellied Caique

Providing toys and enrichment helps to stimulate a bird's physical activity and relieve boredom.

## REMEMBER

Each bird is an individual; observing their behavior and reaction to surroundings will help you to identify triggers to stress and minimize their anxiety. Birds relinquished to shelters are suffering a major upheaval of their lives. Whether wild-caught or bred in captivity, by nature, they are prey animals whose physical and behavioral needs are akin to their cousins in the wild. Your patience, love and creativity will answer many of the issues they face.

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