

Breeder Checklist

or

How to Question the Source of Your Future Lifelong Companion

Have you done your homework?

By the time you are ready to select the breeder or shop to purchase your companion parrot, you have hopefully done your homework.

- Do you know what type of behavior to expect from a parrot?
- Do you know what is required for care and feeding of the parrot?
- Are you confident that a parrot will make a good pet for you and your household?
- And have you researched the different species to get a general idea of what to expect from your prospective companion?

Well, your homework is not done! Many parrot owners make the mistake of shopping for a new parrot like they would shop for any new possession. However the decision to purchase a pet that may serve as a lifelong companion is NOT a good time to look for a bargain!

Tell me about your mother....



Image by Liz Polfus

Not surprisingly, many of the behavioral problems commonly seen in companion parrots can be traced back to difficulties encountered during early development like forced weaning and poor socialization. Therefore as a prospective parrot owner, it is essential that you identify a breeder or shop that is sincerely concerned with the physical and psychological development of their chicks.

But how will you know? Use this checklist below as an aid when interviewing a breeder or shop.

How much attention do you give your baby birds?

Not surprisingly, the answer should be “LOTS!”

However chicks need more than cuddling and attention, they require instructional interaction that teaches them to accept change and new adventures. The breeder should be able to explain or describe how they encourage exploration in their baby birds.

When do you wean baby birds?

The answer should be “It depends”.

Forced weaning on a rigid timetable can be traumatic; therefore the time of weaning ideally varies with the individual bird. This gradual process can take weeks, or even months in the larger macaws.

Caution: As a general rule of thumb, your select breeder or shop should also not sell unweaned baby birds. Both the American Federation of Aviculture and the Association of Avian Veterinarians have position statements that stress the problems that can arise when unweaned baby birds are placed with those that lack hand-feeding skills.

How are the chicks fed? Are baby birds routinely tube fed?

Ideally the answer should be NO. Tube feeding is not a nurturing process and should be reserved for emergencies or illnesses.

Routinely tube feeding ALL baby birds may indicate that the breeder raises more chicks than can be properly socialized.

Are chicks hand-raised or parent-raised?

When are hand-raised chicks removed from the nest?

The approach to hand-raising chicks is gradually undergoing a shift in aviculture. Although happy, healthy chicks can be hand-raised from the egg, bird behaviorists (and common sense) agree that chicks do best when parent-raised. Parent-raised chicks develop stronger immune systems and demonstrate healthier physical and emotional development

Under ideal circumstances, pulling an egg or chick for hand-rearing should be reserved for parrots that routinely damage their eggs, maim their chicks, or have been found to not raise chicks successfully.

Are chicks allowed to fledge (or learn to fly)?

Yes is the ideal answer although realistically not all sellers will have the facilities that allow safe flight.

Chicks allowed to fly for even for a short period of time (before their wings are gradually trimmed) are generally more secure and independent than those who never learn to fly.

Meet the baby

After carefully interviewing the seller, now you're ready to meet the baby bird.

Is the chick curious?

Emotionally healthy chicks exhibit curiosity and have a well-developed sense of exploration.

Does the chick appear to be well socialized?

When approached in a non-threatening manner, the chick should react without fear. Keep in mind there is a difference between initial shyness and fear.

- The healthy chick may be shy but can still exhibit curiosity about what is going on around them.
- The fearful chick may fling itself around OR it may seem blank and uninvolved.

Note: With some babies, it will be difficult to determine if they have received proper socialization by interacting with them for a short period of time. Signs of poor early socialization can be very subtle in some individuals. So be sure to also spend time with the breeder and watch how they interact with their babies as well.

Does the chick exhibit an ability to entertain itself?

The ability to play is a skill that not all parrots learn. The well-socialized youngster should not just want to cuddle in your arms; they are also happy entertaining themselves.

References

Bays TB, Lightfoot T, Mayer J. Exotic Pet Behavior. St. Louis, MO:Saunders Elsevier; 2006.

Blanchard S. Sally Blanchard's Companion Parrot Handbook. PBIC, Inc.; Alameda, CA; 1999.