

“Show and Tell” Parrot

Tiki, the Moustached Parakeet

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I teach English at a community college and occasionally bring in parrots for students who are interested in learning more about them. What do I look for in a “show and tell” bird? Stability is the number one attribute. A “cuddly” bird is not necessarily a stable one. Cuddly birds may fear noises to which they are unaccustomed and start or even bite. I want a calm parrot.

Because I myself am fascinated by the talking abilities of birds, I also would like a show and tell parrot to talk – reliably. Some great talkers clam up when taken out in public.

Furthermore, the bird cannot be gender or age biased. The bird should step up for and socialize with everyone, within reason.

Many people who keep birds are surprised at the show and tell parrot of my first choice, a female Moustached parrot/parakeet, Tiki. But Tiki meets all of the criteria above. She is my calmest and most reliable parrot, and she will always say “Hello” at very least to new people. She is always curious about new environments. And she is content and quiet in her travel cage when she is left alone in my office.

Asiatic enthusiasts have long recognized that the Moustached is a “sleep-er” in the pet trade. Many Moustached

Parakeets talk, and they love attention so that they can be fairly easily trained to do tricks.

Generally articles on Asiatics, or *Psittacula*, as they are also called, emphasize the necessity of handling the birds every day. I work, and I have 10 other birds and two large dogs who also need attention. There is no way that I can handle each bird on a daily basis. But Tiki is still a great pet.

It isn't that Tiki doesn't want attention. While I am doing the cages and/or feeding, she will come out if at all possible and get on my hand, arm or shoulder – whatever she can reach – giving herself the command, "Up up!" It is hard for me to avoid her because she is so quick.

Tiki loves food and usually samples anything new. If I want some of my fussier parrots to try a new food, I let them see Tiki eat it first.

Once I had Tiki with me when the Albuquerque Bird Club had set up an information booth at a local pet supply store. Anita and Bruce Sisk sat at a table on which, among other things, was a lazy susan divided into equal sections, each containing a sample of healthy food for parrots. Tiki went around and very neatly sampled something from each section, never gorging on any one. It was an extremely

methodical performance that certainly demonstrated that parrots should eat a balanced diet!

Tiki went readily to each of the Sisks and quickly became entranced by Bruce's watch. Again, very methodically and gently, she experimented with the buttons on the watch and actually figured out how to make it chime. Since she loved the noise, she repeated the performance several times, to our great amusement.

During the whole time Tiki was at the booth, she said "Hello," "Up up," and "Give me a kiss" several times and stepped up to anyone who wanted to hold her. I like to think that she was a good ambassador for parrots that day.

In addition to possessing fine pet qualities, Tiki is very beautiful. She is always in good feather despite her extreme acrobatic maneuvers. Even during molts she looks good. Her blue and pink areas are rather pronounced. Although smaller than some other Moustached Parakeets I have seen, she has great form. People are always surprised at how heavy she is for so small a bird.

Does Tiki have any disadvantages as a pet? Very few. When she becomes excited, she can be quite loud but she calms down rapidly. Otherwise she is quiet. Her noisy outbursts last less than a minute.

I can't pet Tiki everywhere or ruffle her feathers as roughly as I can with my Indian Ring-necked Parakeet. Tiki likes gentle strokes the way her feathers grow – as do most *Psittacula*. My Ring-necked is very atypical.

When I kept another Moustached Parakeet, a male (they were in separate cages), Tiki laid eggs once a year. Now that I no longer have that male, she seems to have stopped. The last time she laid five very healthy-looking egg. The first time she sat on them for several weeks and was very affectionate during her egg laying times, so I suspect that she would be that hard-to-get combination of good pet and good breeder.

Tiki plays hard with toys and loves new ones. She is very trustworthy, though, when out of her cage and does not chew anything that is not a toy. Of course, she will go into a

vacant cage to try any toys within.

And Tiki will defend herself. Once I took my Hahn's Macaw, Clover, and Tiki to the vet at the same time and had one on one arm and one on the other in the examination room. Tiki had already been examined and was watching Clover from my shoulder when he stared to crawl up "her" arm. Tiki shouted, "No! Tiki!" (She seems to use her name only to mean, "It's mine.") The vet and I had a good laugh.

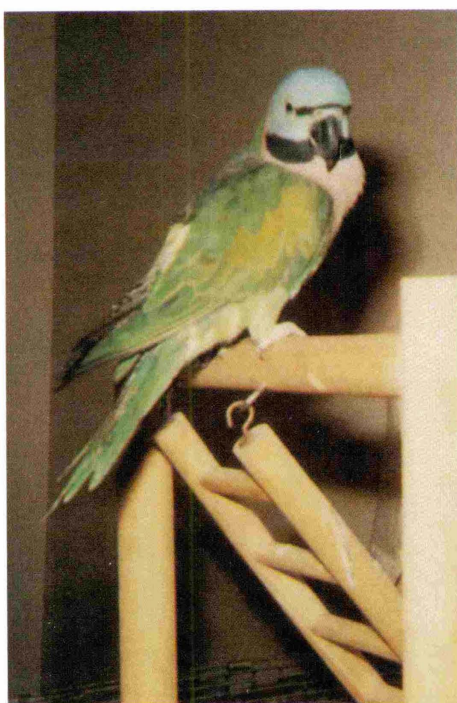
I should mention that I handfed Tiki for a couple of weeks. Amado Summer gave me a choice of two Moustached babies, both of whom made a lot of babbling sounds so I thought either would make a good talker. Tiki crawled close to my face and I chose her.

When I got her, Tiki was somewhat wary of my hands so I decided to train her the sugar glider way: I carried her inside my clothing and took her for lots of car rides. She loved this treatment, and, in my opinion, responded well to it. Baby Moustacheds naturally like dark places, and Tiki still enjoys hiding underneath the paper in her cage. When carried inside my jacket in cold weather, she only occasionally peeps her head out; she is a very well-behaved little bird.

I hope this short article gives readers a good idea of what an excellent pet a Moustached Parakeet can be. Tiki is now seven years old. Since she eats so well, I expect to enjoy my Moustache Parrot for years to come. 🦜

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