

# Successful Speech Training For Your Parrot

by Risa Teitler  
Miami Springs, Florida

The method of speech training described in the following pages has been used successfully with several different species of parrots. In every case it has yielded good results; in a few cases, outstanding results. Speech training can be given to all species of parrots, from cockatiels to macaws. At the very least, you will teach your bird to say, "Hello," if you establish a good routine of speech training, using my method. It is very important to set realistic goals for the species of parrot that you are attempting to train. In my estimation, some species are limited to short phrases and tunes, while others can achieve multisyllabled phrases and entire sentences. I have had exceptional results with yellow naped and blue crowned Amazons, all species of the large macaws, and fairly good results from jenday conures, lesser Amazon species and many types of cockatoos. The African greys with whom I've worked were very good talkers, but slow to begin as compared to the Amazons. I have also been pleasantly surprised at the verbal aptitude of cockatiels, who are fairly quick studies with clear voices.

## **First Phrases**

When you begin speech training, choose a short phrase with hard consonant and long vowel sounds. I always begin with salutations, such as, "Hi!" or "Hello," which are appropriate for all birds. The greetings, "Hi!" or "Hello," should be followed by your parrot's name and this will be the full first phrase. If your bird has a long, multisyllabled name (Mortimer, for example), shorten the name into a one- or two-syllabled nickname. Then teach your parrot, "Hi, Mort!" or "Hi, Morty!"

The first phrase must be easy for the bird to say and have a minimum of syllables. Try to imitate the sound of your bird's natural voice. When speech training cockatiels and conures, I have found that the best results are obtained when I speak to the birds in a very high pitched voice. This duplicates as closely as possible the bird's natural whistling

or chattering. I have taught several cockatiels the phrase, "Hi, cutie!" In every case, the words were first heard when the bird was whistling to itself, practicing the new sound. After a while, as the birds became more confident, they could be coaxed to say the words to their image in a mirror and, later, they were taught to say the words on command.

Most Amazon parrots are capable of imitating you; however, I have found that even Amazons learn faster when I duplicate their natural chattering sound. In addition to imitating the birds' natural sound, you can positively affect the birds' rate of verbal acquisition by lending musicality to a phrase. Always accent the first and last words in a phrase, being certain to enunciate each word so that none of the phrase is lost. You may run the words into each other (as though they were one long word), but be certain to stress the consonants and vowels.

## **Keynotes and The Human Sound**

Speech training your pet parrot in your own natural voice especially if you are a man), often results in a bird that does not sound human when it talks. The human sound is accomplished by imitating the birds' voice as you exaggerate the "keynotes" in a phrase. For instance, the last word in any phrase that you teach is a keynote and should be given an upward inflection. Other "keynotes" in a phrase are the first and last letter of the first word in the phrase. The pitch of the middle words in a phrase are also considered to be "keynotes." Once you become aware of the "keynotes," you should try to compose phrases that lend themselves to this approach.

One way of doing this is by composing phrases that are in question form. This makes it easier for you to give a natural upward inflection at the end of a phrase. Another suggestion for utilizing the "keynote" approach is to compose your phrases with either long vowel sounds, such as "EE" or hard

consonant sounds, such as "T," "P," or "D." For example, the phrase, "Aho, Mate!" uses the hard "T" sound while the phrase, "Aho Matie!" uses the long "EE." Both of these phrases can be taught with equal success.

## **Building Phrases by Adding Syllables**

The first phrases that you teach should have just one or two syllables. As the bird progresses, learning and repeating the phrases that you teach, you can add to your parrot's vocabulary by building up the length of your phrases. This is done by adding syllables, one or two at a time. If you have successfully taught your pet to say, "how are you?" which is a three syllable phrase, you may go on to teach something with three, four or five syllables. It is not recommended that you add more than two syllables at a time to any new phrase. An example of building phrases by adding syllables follows. These should be taught in sequence for the best results.

- "Hi!" One syllable.
- "Hello!" Two syllables.
- "How are you?" Three syllables.
- "Got a peanut?" Four syllables.
- "What are you doing?" Five syllables.
- "How 'bout a kiss, Cutie!" Six syllables.
- "Come up and see me sometime!" Seven syllables.
- "Come up and see me sometime, big boy!" Nine syllables.
- Bye, bye! See you later alligator!" Ten syllables.

You can continue to build up the bird's ability to replicate long, involved phrases by using this approach.

## **Teaching Command Speech**

Teaching your parrot to speak, on command, implies that you want the bird to repeat a phrase after you. This is different than teaching the bird responsive speech, which implies that your parrot will give an appropriate answer or reply to a question that you ask. To begin teaching command speech, I first teach the bird to say the phrase. Once the parrot is repeating the phrase perfectly, I begin offering food rewards during the speech lesson. I have not found it beneficial to offer food reward when first teaching a new phrase, because most birds are more interested in obtaining the reward than they are in learning a phrase.

Only after the parrot has been repeating the new phrase for two weeks or more do I introduce food reward. Parrots are intelligent enough to associate food reward with repeating a phrase, if you begin to present the

reward whenever you hear the bird saying a particular phrase. Offer food reward for only one phrase at a time, or the bird will not understand that you want to hear one particular phrase. To teach the bird to talk on command, saying each phrase that you desire when you want it to, reward for the phrase that you are working on and no other. If you reward all of the bird's speech indiscriminantly, you will end up with a bird who says the phrase that pleases it the most and very little else. All of the parrots that I have taught to talk show preferences for one or two phrases over the others that it may know.

When beginning to teach command speech, it is not necessary to cut back on the bird's normal ration of feed. What I usually do is stop adding peanuts to the bird's dish, keeping them instead for rewards during the speech lesson. This is effective with most parrots. Some birds may prefer raw corn, or carrot slices or grapes, but I try to have them all work for peanuts. If your parrot takes the peanut from your hand and drops it, you may decide to cut his daily ration into two portions, feeding one half in the morning and the other half in the late afternoon. Most parrots ration themselves in this way, eating some of their food in the morning and letting the rest remain in the feed dish until late in the day. It is not necessary to make your bird hungry to teach it command speech.

**Conducting the Speech Lessons:  
Duration, Frequency, Time of Day**

The best time of day for giving speech lessons to your parrot is in the early morning and an hour before sun-down. This is when your pet parrot is most vocal and geared for listening to and repeating sounds. Mid-day lessons are also effective, as are evening lessons; for the more opportunities that you give your parrot for learning the faster he will learn. The rate of verbal acquisition is determined by several factors. One of these is the bird's sensitivity to sound. Some birds have greater auditory acuity than others, much like people. This can mean the difference between those that can carry a tune and those that are musically tone deaf. There are differences between individual parrots within a single species. Birds which have acute hearing differentiate the sounds that you are attempting to teach, separating them from all other sounds such as background noise and other human and animal sounds.

The length of your lesson can differ tremendously and still be effective. A two minute lesson, given several times a

day, is more effective than a single long lesson of 30 minutes. I find the short lesson easier to administer. I give lessons while I am feeding and cleaning cages as well as when I am just standing near a bird and talking to it.

Although the length of your lesson can vary from two minutes to 15 or 20 minutes, it is very important to establish a routine of giving lessons each day. The frequency of your lessons will in large part affect your bird's rate of verbal acquisition. Two lessons per day will work, but six lessons per day will give faster results.

**Environments**

I have never found it a disadvantage to have more than one bird in a room when giving speech lessons. In fact, my training area is occupied by many birds of various species. All of them speak and some share cages with other birds, but for optimum speech training, one bird to a cage is recommended. I do not give mirrors as toys, but reserve them for eliciting responses, as most parrots do enjoy speaking to their reflection. If mirrors are left hanging in the cage they lose the potential for eliciting verbal response.

I do not darken the room when giving lessons, nor do I cover the bird cage. I use covers for noise control only. I do not find that darkness or covers enhance a bird's concentration. You can conduct your speech lessons with the bird in its cage or on a bird stand. A mixture of these two environments is recommended, especially if you intend to attempt command speech with your pet.

**Tape Recordings and Records**

I have never used recordings of my own voice to teach my birds to talk. Nor have I used records. However, for the majority of bird owners, these can be valuable supplements to the live lesson. Most people use recordings when they are away at work. In this case, I recommend that a live lesson be incorporated into the morning routine before you leave for work. There is no substitute for the live lesson. Command speech can be taught only via the live lesson. Do not rely on recordings to teach your bird to speak. I believe that one of the benefits of the live lesson is that your parrot recognizes and appreciates the attention that you are giving it during the lesson. This personal attention is one of the main reasons that I have had such success in teaching so many parrot species to speak. Use recordings only as supplements to your live lessons and you, too, should succeed at speech training. ●



**HAGEN.**

**VITAMIN SUPPLEMENT-CONDITIONER FOR BIRDS**

- HIGH POTENCY MULTIVITAMINS SUPPLEMENT
- CONTAINS ALL ESSENTIAL VITAMINS PLUS IRON
- AIDS GROWTH AND HEALTH

**LE RÉGÉNÉRATEUR ET SUPPLÉMENT VITAMINIQUE POUR OISEAUX**

- UN SUPPLÉMENT COMPOSÉ DE VITAMINES ESSENTIELLES
- ENRICHÉ DE FER
- UN EMPLOI RÉGULIER FOURNIRA AUX OISEAUX LES VITAMINES ET LE FER NÉCESSAIRE À UNE CROISSANCE SAINTE

Net Contents 30 ml / Contenu Net 1 fl. oz.



A high potency multivitamin diet supplement for all cage birds. Regular use will ensure that all essential nutritional requirements during a bird's lifespan are fully met. Hagen Vitamin Supplement Conditioner contains among other ingredients **VITAMIN A** to promote health of plumage and skin. Also to aid resistance to disease. **VITAMIN D** promotes strong bone formation in young and nesting birds. **VITAMIN D & A** promotes quick moult and restoration of plumage. **VITAMIN B** is required for health and growth of the nervous systems. **VITAMIN C** is vitally required for resistance to infections and disease. **VITAMIN E** for mating birds and the prevention of infertility **IRON** to prevent anemia and increase the synthesis of hemoglobin.

**HAGEN**

AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL PET SHOP

DISTRIBUTED BY ROLF C. HAGEN (USA) CORP. MANSFIELD, MA 02048

CANADA ROLF C. HAGEN INC. MONTREAL, QUE. H4R 1E8

# Come Visit Us

AT OUR NEW SHOWROOM\* —  
BIG SAVINGS ON SEED, TOYS, BOOKS,  
CAGES — WE CARRY TOPPER SEED  
AS WELL AS OTHER SPECIAL MIXES.

MONTHLY  
SPECIAL!!!

Hagen Deluxe  
large parrot swing  
**ONLY \$9.95**  
(Normally \$14.95)  
(includes UPS)



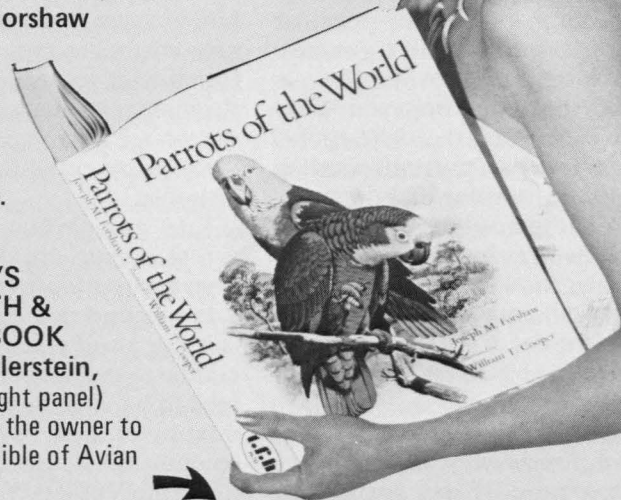
INGLEBROOK FORGES —  
\*19 E. Main St., Alhambra, CA 91801  
(213) 681-9785 or (818) 284-2724  
Showroom of Cages and Discount Bird  
and Supply Shoppe.  
Write for brochure on other products  
and/or books.



**BIRDIE CAR SEAT**  
10" x 14", fits all cars, adjustable  
heights, catch pan.  
(We pay UPS shipping.)  
**\$39.00**



**PARROTS OF THE WORLD**  
by Joseph M. Forshaw  
A 566 page  
encyclopedic  
collection,  
color illustrations  
throughout  
of all parrot types.  
**\$39.00**

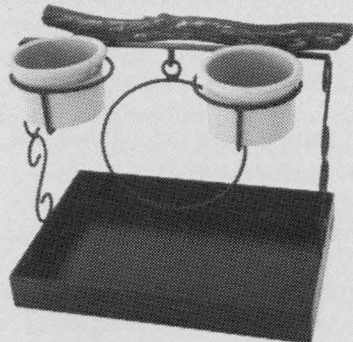


**BIRD OWNER'S  
HOME HEALTH &  
CARE HANDBOOK**  
by Gary A. Gallerstein,  
D.V.M. (lower right panel)  
282 pages helping the owner to  
be a healer. The Bible of Avian  
enthusiasts.

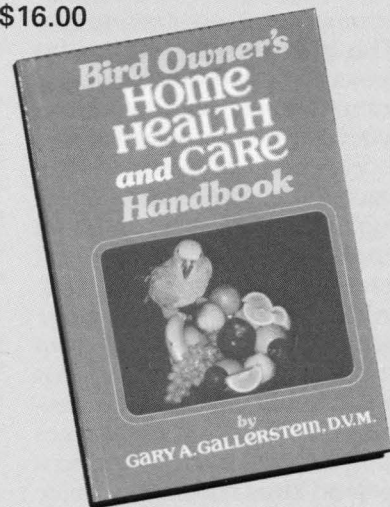
**ELECTRONIC BIRD SCALE**  
2 gram/.1 ounce accuracy.  
1000 gram/32 ounce  
capacity (PERCH and separate  
WEIGHING BASKET included  
but not shown). Uses 4 AA batteries.  
Can be used with a-c adapter.  
**\$79.00**



Take Polly Everywhere!  
**TABLE-PORTA PERCH**  
Included the two bowls and  
shipping (UPS), 12" x 16".  
**\$39.00**



**\$16.00**



**Special Notice:** BIRD AUCTIONS — we send you monthly notices of confiscated  
birds that are auctioned by the U.S. Customs Department in San  
Diego/San Ysidro, California. Time, place and list of birds sent to you each month, first class mail.  
Your notice or want ads published free of charge. Subscribe now — \$14.00 per year.

All prices include shipping (UPS)—Special additional savings if purchased at our showroom

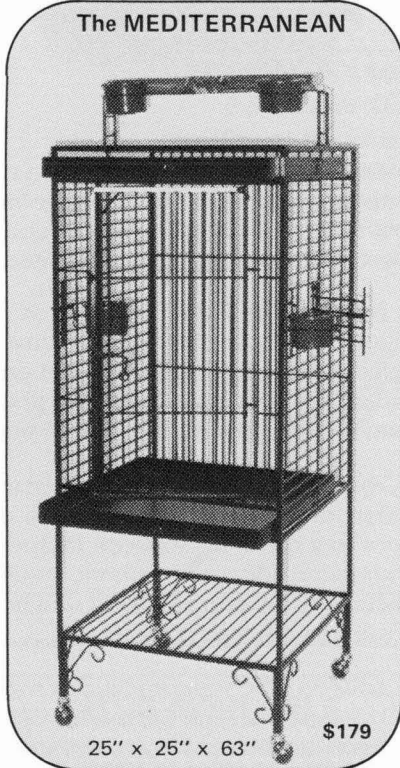
# Compare prices...

VISIT OUR DISCOUNT BIRD & SUPPLY SHOPPE—19 E. Main St. Alhambra... Topper seed, toys, etc.



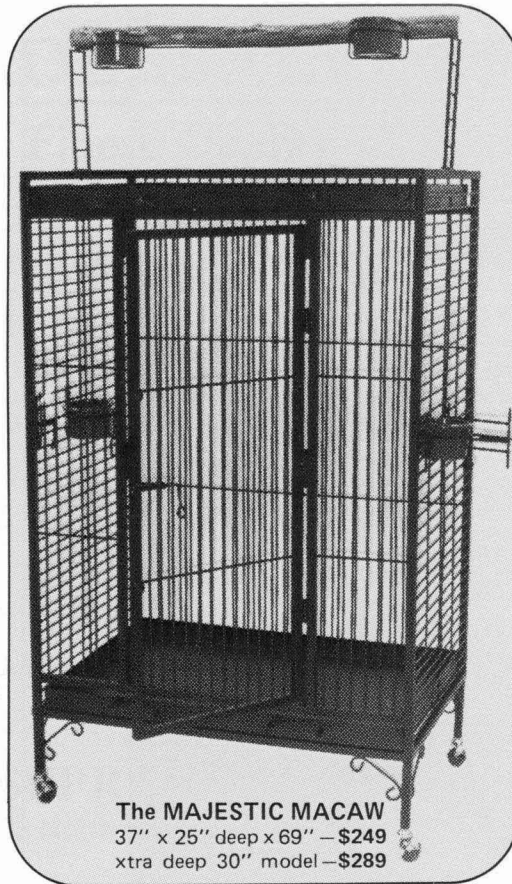
# & features

The MEDITERRANEAN

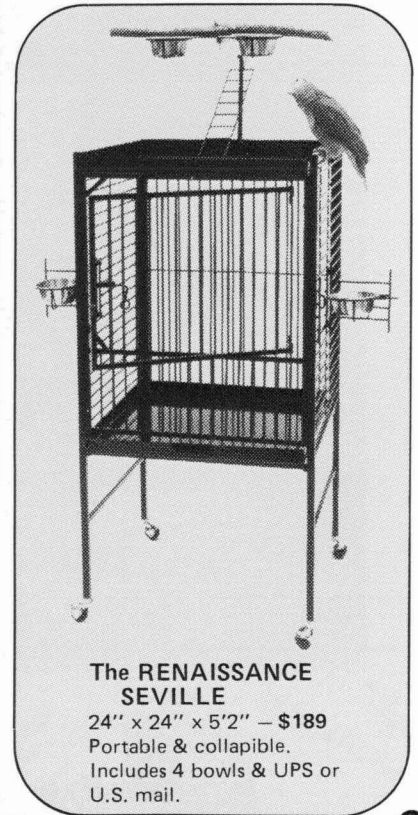


25" x 25" x 63"

\$179



The MAJESTIC MACAW  
37" x 25" deep x 69" — \$249  
xtra deep 30" model — \$289



The RENAISSANCE SEVILLE

24" x 24" x 5'2" — \$189  
Portable & collapsible.  
Includes 4 bowls & UPS or U.S. mail.

**FREE!** Your BIRDIE AUTO SEAT choice (adjustable heights, fits all cars, Of... catch pan.

OR TABLE—PORTA PERCH



...with the purchase of any cage

# ...You'll decide on...

**1** Space efficiency. . . The rectangular cage is more space efficient and practical than the round cage. Many veterinarians regard the round cage as poor housing for any bird.

**2** Horizontal bars on left and right sides of cage allows your bird easier climbing and exercising.

**3** Heavy gauge 7/32 steel with one inch spacing. Closer spacing for smaller birds upon request.

**4** Swing-out feeders — A world of convenience when changing food and water each day. A blessing to bird sitters.

**5** BOLT ACTION LOCK with additional anti-theft security hasps for locks.

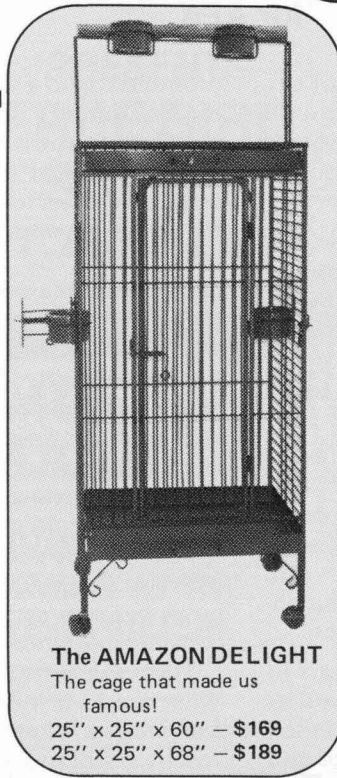
**6** Top and bottom easy glide pans make for quick and effortless cleaning.

**7** Heavy duty casters lock into the base of the cage and are an integral part of the leg of the cage.

**8** Full length doors, top to bottom, with pivot hinges, for easier access.

**9** Lead free paint.

**10** Avian engineered and quality craftsmanship. Each cage built by hand and hand-welded.



The AMAZON DELIGHT

The cage that made us famous!  
25" x 25" x 60" — \$169  
25" x 25" x 68" — \$189

**INGLEBROOK FORGES**  
19 E. Main St, Alhambra, CA 91801  
(213) 681-9785 or (818) 284-2724

I want more information.  
Please send picture and cage dimensions to:  
(please type or print)

name \_\_\_\_\_

type of birds \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

city — state — zip \_\_\_\_\_

telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
The best time is AM/PM

Special additional savings if purchased at our showroom