

What to do When a Parrot Escapes

By Barbara Heidenreich



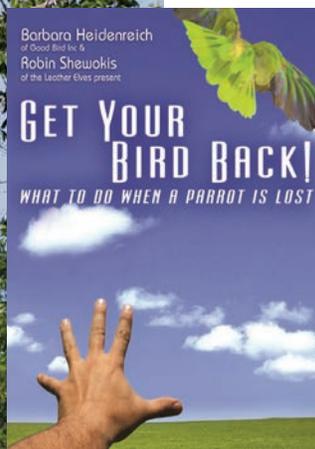
I started my career as an animal trainer working in a free-flighted bird show. I learned very early on that no matter how well trained your parrot is, there is always a risk that a bird could be lost. The reality is that a fly-off is a normal part of training birds to fly outside. In a bird show situation we do our very best to reduce risk when free flying birds. This means having many anchor birds in the area, a team of staff members trained and ready to respond if a bird were to fly off, and a very solid plan of action. Even with everything in place, a fly-off can still happen, and I can say I personally have been involved in the recovery of more lost birds than I can remember. The good thing about this experience is that I learned some very predictable things happen when a parrot flies away.



Recently, lost parrots have been making the headlines. Sometimes the parrot is lost due to reckless behavior by caregivers. Sometimes caregivers are very responsible and accidents still happen. Flight feathers that have grown back in may go unnoticed. Sometimes doors are accidentally opened when a flighted parrot is out. And sometimes things beyond our control happen. The good news is that parrots are often very easily recovered. In all my years of doing bird shows, parrots were the easiest ones to get back. This is primarily due to the fact that most pet parrots tend to seek human companionship.

Spring has finally sprung, and more people are taking their birds out to enjoy some well- deserved fresh air and sunshine. My own flock of five flighted parrots is very much enjoying their outdoor aviary. Although I don't fly my personal birds outside, I am prepared if there is an accidental escape, and you should be too. Being prepared will make a world of difference if you find yourself searching for a lost parrot.

The following are the strategies I've used over the years to recover a lost bird. You can find additional information in the DVD "Get Your Bird Back - What to Do When a Parrot Is Lost". This is a DVD Robin Shewokis and I put together. The DVD CD-ROM set includes MP3s of many different parrot calls that you can download onto your phone to help in your search. It also includes templates for lost bird flyers, and checklists that will facilitate your search. You can order the DVD set from www.goodbirdinc.com and www.theleatherelves.com. If you are in need of immediate help, the video can be viewed as an online rental right away at <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/getyourbirdback>.





Bird Is Flying Away

- Call to your bird loudly as he is flying—it may help him find his way back to you.
- As your bird is flying, do not take your eyes off of him. Note the last place you saw him, the level of his flight, how tired he looked. He may have landed in that area.
- Grab your cell phone! Start recruiting people to help the search. More eyes are important once you've lost sight of the bird.

Searching for Your Bird

- If you have a group of people, spread out and circle the area where you last saw him.
- If you cannot locate him, call to him. He may call back. Say words or sounds he knows or mimics. Most parrots are located by their screams.
- Have a recording of the parrot screaming on your cell phone. Put your phone on speaker and play this as you search.
- If he has another bird he likes, put that bird in a cage and bring it to the area where you last saw him. Walk away from the bird in the cage. It might encourage the bird in the cage to scream. This may inspire the lost bird to scream. Keep talking to a minimum so you can listen for the scream.
- Look carefully in a limited area (within 1 mile) in the early stages of your search. Parrots usually do not go far unless blown by the wind, chased by a bird of prey or extremely frightened.
- Keep in mind your parrot may see you before you see him. When this happens, parrots are sometimes very quiet. This may be because the parrot is more comfortable now that you are present.

- Despite some parrots' bright colors, they can be very difficult to see in trees. Look for movement buried in the trees as opposed to your whole bird perched prominently on the tree.

You Have Located the Bird, but He Is Out of Reach

- Once you find your bird, relax (unless the bird is in immediate danger.) It is better to let the bird sit where he is (if he is inaccessible) while you work out a strategy. Do not frantically try to grab the bird, hose or scare him down.
- If the bird has just landed, he will probably not fly again (if at all) for awhile.
- Bring the bird's favorite person and/or favorite bird friend (in a cage) to the area where your bird is located.
- Bring favorite food items, familiar food bowls and the bird's cage if possible.
- Be careful not to ask your bird to fly from a great height or a steep angle. Try to position yourself (or bird buddy, or bird cage) to allow short flights or short climbs to lower places.
- Try to lure your bird to fly or climb to branches/objects that are similar to those upon which he is sitting if possible. A bird may be too frightened to climb onto a distinctly different perch. (For example, the bird might be afraid to climb off of a tree onto a fence.) If you have no other option, expect the process to be slower, and be patient with your bird as he builds his confidence. He may also fly again if he touches the new perch and is frightened by it.
- Do not raise unfamiliar objects up to your bird to have him step onto it. More than likely this will only scare your bird to fly farther away. If you have a familiar item, you may have a chance that the bird will step onto it. Keep in mind things



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like ladders, people climbing trees, cherry pickers etc. may also scare your bird. Go extremely slowly if you resort to using these items. Stop any action if your bird looks like he wants to fly away.

- Try to call your bird down when his body language indicates he is ready to try to come down. Do not constantly call.
- Try hiding from your bird on occasion. This will create a level of anxiety in your bird which may cause him to try to come to you once you reappear. Usually birds will scream and or start moving around a lot when they are ready to make an effort to return to you. If you notice this activity, come out from hiding.
- If you hear your bird screaming while you are hiding, he may be ready to fly or is already in the air. Come out of hiding right away. Most parrots scream when they are flying in this type of situation.
- Birds also often relieve themselves and also scream right before they fly. Be alert for this. You may need to see where your bird flies. Be ready to run if necessary.

- Avoid having a crowd of people around the bird's favorite person. A scared bird may not want to fly into a crowd of strangers. Give the bird's favorite person lots of room.

The Sun Is Setting and Your Bird Is Still Out

- Parrots will usually fly again shortly before the sun starts to set. This is probably your last opportunity to get your bird back before he will begin to roost for the night. Take advantage of it. You can try to get the bird "pumped" up by yelling and creating a level of excitement. This may encourage one last flight.
- As the sun starts to set, your bird will start to fluff his feathers and get ready to roost for the night. At this point it is best to just allow him to go to sleep. Keep an eye on him until the sun has set completely. Remember his exact location.
- Before the sun rises the next day, return to that location. Your bird should still be there, unless he was frightened in the night (owls can cause this).
- Usually by 8:30 or 9 A.M. your bird will be ready to fly again or make an attempt to get to you. Repeat the steps described in the section "You have located your bird, but he is out of reach".

Your Bird Has Flown off and After 24 Hours of Searching He Has Not Been Spotted

- Contact the following people and let them know you are looking for your bird. If a person finds your bird they may contact one of these organizations.
 - Call animal control
 - Call the SPCA/humane society
 - Call local veterinarians
 - Call local zoos
 - Call local pet shops
 - Call local police
- Place an ad in the classified section of the paper for a "lost" bird.
 - Note: Don't give out the bird's band number. If your bird accidentally falls into the wrong hands this could lead to removal of the band.
- Check the classified section of the paper for "found" bird. Answer all ads. People are sometimes unaware of what they have found. A Congo African grey may be mistaken for the mythical red tailed pigeon by a helpful stranger who is unfamiliar with parrots.
- Call local TV news programs, newspapers and radio stations to spread the word.
- Post flyers that state "lost bird" in the areas you last saw your bird. You may also wish to offer a reward as incentive for people to call.
- Often times a bird is found within 24 hours of his disappearance. The trick is to find the person who found your bird before you.



Do Not Give Up

The key to getting a bird back is perseverance. Do not accept that you will not get the bird back once you have lost sight of him or her. As mentioned, I can attest that parrots are often the easiest type of bird to locate and recover. Trust me, nothing is more frustrating than searching for the silent, but observant owl who has buried himself in the bushes and has watched you walk by 100 times! Thankfully our parrots often seek out human or bird companionship if and when they have a big flight adventure.

To learn more about products and services to help you train your parrot visit www.GoodBirdInc.com

About the author:

Barbara Heidenreich has been a professional in the field of animal training since 1990. She is the President of Good Bird Inc (www.GoodBirdInc.com), a company that provides parrot behavior and training products to the companion parrot community. These products include books, DVDs, and parrot training workshops. Barbara has been a featured speaker on animal training in over 20 countries and has been published in nine different languages. She is a former president of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (www.IAATE.org) and served on the Board of Directors from 1997–2009.

Barbara also provides consulting services to zoos, nature centers and other animal facilities. She lectures regularly to the veterinary community and is an adjunct clinical instructor at Texas A & M University, Veterinary Medicine and Biological Sciences. She volunteers her expertise to support conservation projects, The Kakapo Recovery Program and the Bird Endowment. In her career she has trained animals, trained staff, lectured and/or presented shows at over 40 facilities around the world. Barbara is thrilled to have had the opportunity to train thousands of animals, from rats to rhinos. This hands-on practice with so many different individual animals has been invaluable to helping her provide caregivers the tools they need to solve behavior problems and have a great relationship with the animals in their lives based on trust. Her goal is to leave behind a legacy of kindness to animals by sharing her expertise.



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