



A Protocol for Teaching a Parrot to Station

Stationing is one of the most important behaviors you can teach your parrot. This is especially true if you have a parrot who always wants to be on your shoulder, wants to roam the floor chewing on your possessions, or who is fully flighted.

When my parrots station, this means that they stay on a selected perch(es) of my choosing (their "furniture") rather than jumping or flying off to be somewhere else. It means that I can make bird toys without interference from my feathered friends. It means that my woodwork doesn't incur more damage. It means that they get to earn lots of goodies for a very simple behavior. It's a win-win situation!

Teaching stationing is most successful if you have a variety of perches for your parrot – the cage, free-standing play gym, hanging perches and table-top perches. Parrots are dynamic creatures who appreciate the ability to change locations when out of the cage. The goal of this training is to make staying up on these more valuable for your bird than perching on you, your possessions, or getting down on the floor.

The process:

- Situate your parrot on a perch that is fairly near to you. Parrots have a well-defined sense of proximity, unique to each species, that helps them to feel secure. In other words, your parrot will probably want to be no further than 8 feet from you. Many species will want to be closer.
- This perch should have food dishes and spots to hang toys that he can access easily, without bending over.
- Provide him with one or two toys or activities that he really enjoys up on the perch. This will give him the first good reason to stay there. A foraging project is a good choice for this, but you can use anything that your parrot enjoys. If you are stuck for ideas and your parrot doesn't interact much with enrichment, try just a whole roll of white, unscented toilet paper.
- Have your food reinforcers ready and close by (in a treat pouch or a pocket).
 - Make food treats as small as possible.
 - If your bird values head scratches or small objects, you might be able to use these also.
- As he stays put on the play stand or other perch, walk over and offer reinforcers (rewards) frequently. If your parrot won't take a treat from your fingers, just drop it onto one of the food dishes
 - Use a *variable-ratio schedule of reinforcement* so that he never knows when a treat might be offered. Example: In the beginning, you might deliver reinforcers at intervals of two seconds, five seconds, three seconds, eight seconds, four seconds, twelve seconds, etc. They will need to be offered frequently enough at first that your parrot doesn't think about getting down.
 - As you see that he is remaining on the perch for longer periods of time, you can begin to increase the space of time between reinforcers.
- The time will come when he does get down, despite your reinforcer delivery.
 - If your parrot starts to get down, wait until one foot hits the floor and then go over immediately to step him up. Don't give him a lot of social attention. Remain quiet, but friendly, and put him right back where he was and give him a reward for stepping back off your hand.

- The second time he gets down, respond the same way.
- The third time he gets down, go over immediately to step him up and put him back into his cage with the door shut. Again, just be quiet, calm and friendly.
- **Most importantly**, let him out again after just a couple of minutes so that he has a chance to try again.
 - The message we want him to receive is this: “If you stay up on one of your perches, you will receive good things. If you get down, you lose the opportunity to receive these good things.” Therefore, this short period in the cage is not a punishment. It is just a brief moment for your parrot to think things through.

When you first begin to teach stationing, you will need to work on this rather intensively for periods of time. Teaching this can be messy at first, but don't despair. This will work! Therefore, try to have your first sessions when you can be on your feet and available to deliver reinforcers as frequently as needed. As your parrot develops a history of reinforcement with each of his perches, you will not have to deliver reinforcers as often.

This is a lifelong training protocol. I no longer need to have intensive stationing sessions with my flighted parrots. However, I incorporate stationing training into my daily life. I always have a pocket full of sunflower seeds and walnut pieces. Anytime I see a parrot where I want him or her to be, a treat is presented. My birds are all pretty good about staying where I want them. This makes my life a lot easier!

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