

BOOK REVIEW BY DOROTHY SCHWARZ

The Bird School: This covering flighted birds and taming for parrots and other birds.

published in German, makes a welcome addition to any Parrot owner's library. Written in jargon-free language it gives a clear exposition of the

theory of behaviour science and why and how clicker training is one of the easiest, most successful methods to socialize and train our captive parrots using modern non-punitive methods. Ann Castro is a seriously committed parrot owner who has been trying out the methods she recommends since 2001.

Six years ago Ann Castro founded a non profit organization in Germany where she lives and works called Friends of the Birds. Her aim was to improve the relationship between birds and owners and thus reduce the numbers of birds who lost their homes through a breakdown in owner/bird relationships. In addition she strives to inform owners what they need to know about parrots before and after bringing them into homes.

The present training manual is a logical offshoot of her work in rehabilitating birds and helping owners understand their feathered companions. She believes that 99% of parrot problems are due to inadequate living conditions, which are then combined with owners who inadvertently reinforce the wrong behaviour and ignore the wanted behaviours. Ann does not believe that training will compensate for keeping a bird in the wrong manner. What she advocates is good training plus good husbandry - both essential to produce the well-adjusted pet parrot.

Clicker training rests firmly on the theory of behaviour science. Every living being, regardless of whether it is domesticated or not, will over time only exhibit behaviour that in one way or another is worthwhile to it. [Page 31) Training parrots using positive reinforcement methods is gaining in popularity. It is still hard to find

workshops, teachers, practitioners and similar that's why a book like this helps plug the gaps.

Ann Castro argues that anyone, child or adult, can train a bird and any bird can be trained. So why use a clicker rather than the voice? Advocates of clicker training consider that once the bird associates the clicker with the treat, reward training is easier because the click sound is more precise than the voice. You can do positive reinforcement training using the voice alone but Castro argues that using the clicker brings faster results. Many amateur trainers (I am one) use both methods.

'With clicker training,' Ann told me,
'the owner is actually being trained. And
after a while, the observation skills and
the reaction merge into everyday life. You
just start to automatically reward
behaviour that you want and ignore
behaviour that you do not want. Even if
you are not running around with the
clicker 24/7. But someone new to this is
greatly helped by following the structured
clicker training approach until it is all
internalized.'

Castro firmly advocates flighted birds for training. She says "clicker training is based on free will and positive reinforcement only. If I need to clip a bird to make it stay put - well that does not exactly sound like free will to me."

What gives this .book added value is that it is infused with the latest findings and ideas about enlightened pet bird

husbandry. Castro shows both in the text and with good illustrations how parentreared birds are equally adept at becoming well socialised birds in the home.

One of Ann Castro's aims is to focus on the well being of the bird and treating/keeping it in a respectful and loving manner that allows the bird to remain being a bird. She says, "I am very much a proponent of species appropriate keeping. And my training takes this into account and works with birds that are so kept." She demonstrates with text and pictures how the training works with flighted birds, with birds kept in pairs and even flock situations.

Clicker training. Is it an ancient art? 384 - 322 BC Aristotle

Perhaps Aristotle was the first "Clicker trainer at heart". His law of contiguity states that: "When two things commonly occur together, the appearance of one will bring the other to mind." A perfect description of what a conditioned clicker does.

Her chapter on teaching the up command gives a precise breakdown of this complicated behaviour into the required small steps. The up command is essential if your pet parrot is to be fully integrated into the household. As an avid reader of training manuals myself, I find

that this one is one of the clearest and easiest to follow. The photographs match the text closely and help the trainer visualize what is happening. So often a text describes an activity but the illustration nothing. There are also included good examples training plans and a training diary that you can adapt for you own purposes.

Ann has added a chapter on taming which is particularly useful for rehomes and parent raised birds. The latter she has found to be preferable over (commercially) hand raised birds, who often exhibit more behavioural issues (screaming, biting, plucking) when reaching sexual maturity than parent raised birds, who appear to grow up more emotionally stable. (This insight comes from her experience in rescue and consulting for problem behaviours).

Castro has carefully described the theory of behaviour science but the bulk of her chapters consist in step by step instructions how to train for simple necessary behaviours. With the ample well-chosen illustrations, the book is a total joy to read.

Resources

The book can be ordered from www. amazon.com for 24.95 Euros plus shipping or from Ann Castro's website: www.thebirdschool.org