

The Phoenix Landing Foster Guide

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Overview

This guide is intended for Phoenix Landing Foster or Adopting families to answer common questions that may arise before they bring a new bird home. It also covers care during the first two weeks to help you get off to a great start.

Congratulations!

And THANK YOU for choosing to help a bird in need. Whether you are adopting the parrot or fostering her for a few months, we truly appreciate the efforts you are making for the welfare of this bird. As a foster family, we hope you will provide the bird with quality food (pellets and whole foods), enrichment activities and a wide variety of perches. Phoenix Landing will supply a cage if an appropriately-sized one did not come with the bird, and sometimes an initial supply of perches and toys. You can also find information about how to make your own toys at:

- parrotenrichment.com
- avianenrichment.com
- The Facebook page called the Parrot's Workshop.

When you bring a bird into your home, you have a wonderful opportunity to establish a positive relationship from the start, and to get ahead of problem behaviors that a bird may have picked up in previous homes. We hope this guide will help to make a smooth transition for your bird and your family and to set realistic expectations.

Above all, please be patient with the new family member. We cannot emphasize highly enough the need for patience. Understand that the first two weeks is often called the “honeymoon period” for a reason: The parrot is on high alert in a new situation and may behave with extreme caution. Your bird will reveal her true personality slowly over time, so the first few weeks will help you both be prepared for what happens going forward.

For additional information, see [New Bird? 5 Ways to Get off to a Great Start.](#)

How to Contact Your Coordinator

Region	Name	Email
Virginia, DC	Jenny Drummey	jennydrummey@gmail.com
MD, PA, DC	Debbie Russell	Debbie.birdnerd@gmail.com
Raleigh NC	Ron Stephenson	ron@phoenixlanding.org
West VA	Melissa Kowalski	melissa@phoenixlanding.org
Northeast FL	Sharon Pfeiffer	sharon@phoenixlanding.org
Western North Carolina	Ann Brooks	ann@phoenixlanding.org
Hickory, North Carolina	Liz Oliver	liz@phoenixlanding.org

If you have questions and cannot reach your adoption coordinator, send an email to contact@phoenixlanding.org.

Preparation: Before the bird comes home. . .

What food should I have on hand?

Have plenty of food available for the parrot before she comes to your home.

- Ask your adoption coordinator for the type of pellet the bird eats and order it. There are many pellets on the market today. Some are very good and some are not good at all. Always try to use an organic pellet if possible, such as Harrison's or TOPs. While not an organic pellet, Roudybush also has an excellent reputation.
- Have treats, nuts, fresh fruits and veggies on hand. A very good bird diet consists of mostly fresh whole foods, and little to no processed food. Nutriberries are excellent for

some mealtimes as well. Smaller birds like parakeets, lovebirds and cockatiels may need a quality seed like Volkmans. Seed should not be your bird's exclusive diet, and for the larger birds should probably be avoided completely.

- On our blog, you can find recommended recipes for
 - pumpkin bread: <http://blog.phoenixlanding.org/2011/06/24/pumpkin-bread/>
 - and mash: <http://blog.phoenixlanding.org/2011/03/30/the-landing-mash/>
- If your foster bird is on an unhealthy diet, transitioning to a new diet can take time and patience, but it does happen and the bird is far better off for it. To transition to a healthy diet, always include your bird's previous diet along with his new diet and decrease the previous diet slowly over time.

Where do I place the cage?

If you have other birds in your home, see the section [Quarantine](#) below. The cage should be in a place that is not high traffic but where the bird can see the family and feel a part of the family. Remember, you are your bird's new "flock" and she is now part of your extended family. The cage should provide a place for the bird to feel safe. If you place the cage near a window, be sure the bird has a place to "hide" from predators outside (in other words, the bird can get away from the window). Never place the cage directly against the window. Always leave about 12-18 inches space between the cage and the window.

NOTE: Foster families are not required to buy a cage for a foster bird. Phoenix Landing will provide a cage in one of three ways. 1. The bird comes with her cage from the relinquishing home. 2. The parrot does not come with a cage from her relinquishing home, and Phoenix Landing uses a donated cage for this parrot. 3. The parrot does not come with a cage from her relinquishing home, Phoenix Landing has no appropriate donated cages available, and Phoenix Landing must provide a new cage that the organization has purchased.

If the foster family decides to adopt the bird, and the cage was provided using method 3 above, a new cage fee will be stated at the bottom of the foster contract. This fee must be paid along

with the adoption fee. If the cage came with the original bird, or if we were able to use a donated cage, there is no additional cost for the cage.

Quarantine

If there are other birds in your home, please use good quarantine practices. For 30+ days, keep the foster bird separate from the other birds in your home. Feed the foster parrot after you feed your other birds, and clean her cage, food and water dishes last. Wash your hands after interacting with the foster bird.

Treat the foster bird as though she is sick, and you will go a long way toward preventing problems if she is.

How do I make my home safe for my foster bird?

Please coordinate your schedule so that the parrot arrives at a relatively quiet time in your household. Don't bring a parrot in, for example, if you are planning a large party in the first few days, or if you are going on vacation in a week or so. Make the first two weeks the time you establish a positive routine for the bird in the new home.

Parrot-proof any areas of the home the bird will visit. Secure all screens, if you open your windows. Be careful opening exterior doors, as your parrot may fly out. Keep toilet bowl lids down, and keep birds out of kitchens. Kitchens often have fumes or smoke from food burning, which can kill parrots.

Fans are deadly for birds. If you have a ceiling fan, you must be diligent about turning it off when the bird is outside the cage.

Change your cookware to cast iron or stainless steel. The fumes from coated cookware are very unhealthy for you and your bird and may be deadly for your bird.

Be aware of the dangers of dogs and cats, especially dogs. Many dogs have killed Phoenix Landing birds. Do not allow your dog in the room when your parrot is out of the cage.

What kinds of toys should I get and how many?

Most Phoenix Landing fosters will come with an initial supply of toys and perches that the relinquishing family includes with the parrot. You may wish to purchase a few toys, or make some cheaply on your own.

- Ask your adoption coordinator if it is known what toys the bird prefers
- Download the free [Parrot Enrichment and Activity Book](http://www.parrotenrichment.com/) by Kris Porter at <http://www.parrotenrichment.com/>
- In general, the more toys the better but there should be a minimum of 4 toys in the cage

What should I tell my family about the foster bird?

Everyone who lives in your home should know when the bird will be coming, and that they may need to modify their behavior for her safety. Determine who will clean the cage and feed the bird daily, and which places in the home the bird will be allowed. Also, please make sure that all of your family members understand that they should not reinforce negative behaviors in the bird. See the section [How do I Introduce my family to the foster bird](#) below for more information.

The First Day With Your Foster Bird

Do I have to sign anything?

Yes. Be sure you sign and receive a copy of your foster or adoption contract when you take possession of the bird. Contact your adoption coordinator if you don't have a copy of the contract.

How does the bird come home to me?

You may be asked to pick up the bird from an event, or to meet a bird in transit from another region. In either case, a carrier will be provided with the bird. If you are picking up a bird and this bird does not have a carrier, contact your adoption coordinator.

You may have to transport a cage as well, but your adoption coordinator will give you the details.

What should we do with the bird when she first arrives?

The bird will be tired and stressed. Let her settle in her cage for at least a day, maybe longer, before opening the cage door to see if she chooses to come out.

Please be patient and let the bird choose to come out to you and interact with you. A stressed bird may bite out of frustration or the additional stress may cause her to scream. These are habits that you either don't want to start or don't want to continue. Do not expect the bird to step up immediately. It may take days, weeks or months before she is comfortable doing that, as a step up depends on lots of trust building. With a new bird, it's vital to build trust from the start, and take our cues from the bird.

Each bird is unique. She may be very quiet and still as she checks out her new environment, or she may be immediately comfortable. Watch her body language for clues. Spend the first day or two observing your parrot, seeing how she looks when excited, when comfortable, when afraid. This initial non-confrontational approach will speed the parrot's adjustment time to her new surroundings and will allow her to integrate into your family sooner.

Talk to your bird and offer treats. But do this with “no strings”, i.e., no expectations that the bird will reward you with a step up.

I have another bird. Is there anything special I need to do?

During this period, be sure to watch for any signs of illness and let your coordinator know immediately if anything seems wrong. It is better to be safe than sorry. Ask your area coordinator to talk to you about “poopology.”

The First Two Weeks With Your New Foster Bird

Should I take my foster bird to the vet?

Your adoption coordinator should let you know whether the bird has already been vetted before they move the bird to you.

Your bird may need to go to the vet while you are fostering her. If she hasn't been to an avian vet for a well bird check up in the past two years, your adoption coordinator may ask you to take her in. If she is sick or injured while in your care, contact your adoption coordinator immediately and we can approve a vet visit for you.

Our standard well bird exam with a certified avian vet includes blood work and an avian chemistry panel. Depending on where your foster bird came from, his general health, the advice of the avian vet, and the results of the lab work, we may pay for additional tests for specific diseases, such as Chlamydia, but these are not standard. Additional tests must be approved by your adoption coordinator.

Phoenix Landing has arrangements with vets in all of its areas of operation. An adoption coordinator must fax an authorization form to the vet's office to approve all vet visits. If you take a parrot to a vet without authorization, we cannot reimburse you for the cost.

If you cannot reach your adoption coordinator in an emergency, send an email to contact@phoenixlanding.org.

What if the bird dies in my care?

We hate to think about it, but it does happen. Please follow these steps:

1. Wet the body down.
2. Wrap in paper towels.
3. Put in fridge: DO NOT FREEZE.
4. Contact your adoption coordinator, and cc contact@phoenixlanding.org. We will be in touch soon with next steps. We want to have the bird sent to the vet for a necropsy whenever possible so we can learn more about dangers, disease and overall parrot health.

How do I introduce my family to the foster bird?

It's so exciting to have a new parrot, isn't it? As great as it is, please be aware that you are setting the standard for the pattern of behavior the bird will expect from you. If you spend 8 hours a day snuggling with your new cockatoo (not a good idea for many reasons!), then, after a month, the novelty has worn off, the cockatoo will be used to that level of attention and may develop negative behaviors, such as screaming, biting and even plucking. In the first two weeks, pay as much attention to the new parrot as you will, on average, be able to spend with her in the long term.

Do not respond to any behavior that you cannot live with for 50 years. In other words, if the bird does something you don't like (scream, for example) ignore the behavior. Do not look at the bird, do not talk to the bird, and do not put the bird back in her cage. PLEASE make sure everyone in the family agrees to ignore bad behavior whether they interact with the bird or not. Remember to be consistent: Never respond to poor behavior.

Instead, increase the likelihood of positive behaviors by praising and giving attention to the behaviors that you like. Use the first two weeks (you may need a little longer) to find out your bird's motivators. These motivators are the key to getting your bird to do what you want it to. She may respond to a special food or petting as a reward.

Have each of your family members spend a few minutes every day just saying hello and praising your bird. "Hello, Tweets...my, you look beautiful today. Tell me about your day. I had a good day..." And remember, no strings.

How do I introduce my bird to our dog, our cat, etc?

Be extra careful about the interactions with other animals and your new parrot, including other parrots (after quarantine). Do not assume that they will get along with your new bird with no issues and do not allow them in the same room unsupervised. Never, ever have your bird and the dog, cat or ferret out together unsupervised. Regardless of how nice the cat or the dog is, they are the predator and your bird is the prey. This is a biological imperative and you cannot side step it. Ever.

Setting up a schedule

Since many parrots are from equatorial regions, in the wild they experience 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness. Birds should generally get 10-12 hours of uninterrupted sleep a night in a dark room away from the family. Covering the cage while family members talk or watch TV next to the bird's cage means that the bird will not sleep. Your bird may let you know when she is ready to sleep by using certain words ("night night"), becoming more vocal, or grinding her beak. Put your bird to bed when this behavior occurs, and note the time. The next night, put the bird to bed 10 minutes before this time.

Provide meals twice a day. Plan on providing food early in the morning and in the late afternoon/early evening. Allow access to pellets and fresh water at all times.

Additionally, plan time during the day or evening for one-on-one interaction, such as training time or play time, and provide a few hours of "ambient attention," if possible. Ambient attention is when the bird shares time with the family, preferably away from the cage, perhaps on a play

gym or stand, but the bird is simply “hanging out” and not necessarily the center of attention. Birds love to be included in family activity even when it means just hanging out with everyone.

Setting up a menu

What does your bird like to eat? What is the best food for this species? What special nutritional needs might this bird have? Nutrition is a key building block to health, and a varied diet is vital to a bird’s physical and mental well-being. If the bird is eating a seed-only diet, she will probably have a decreased life span due to a lack of real nutrition.

In general, birds need whole foods (preferably fresh and organic but frozen is good too – the key word is WHOLE versus processed), supplemented with pellets and seeds as a treat to thrive. Ask your adoption coordinator for additional information on special dietary needs for birds.

My bird isn't eating...now what?

In the first day or two in a new home, some parrots may be nervous and eat little. Offer the bird the brand of food they are used to, and offer a wide variety of treats and fresh foods as well.

Many birds respond to cooked foods, such as mashed potatoes or a grain, such as quinoa, sprinkled with condiments like cinnamon, celery seed, or cayenne.

A Sample Diet should contain a balance of nutritious foods such as organic carrots, yams, winter squash, beets, collard greens, kale, broccoli, apricots, peaches, kiwi, berries, apple, fresh sprouts, beans, well-cooked chicken, quinoa, yogurt, almonds, raw pistachios and macadamias, and an occasional well-cooked egg. Complement with seeds and pellets (no dyes).

If the bird doesn’t eat at all, contact your adoption coordinator.

My bird isn't pooping. What do I do?

Depending on the size of the bird, they can poop every 10-20 minutes. They will not, generally, poop at night when it is dark. However, if you do not see poop under where your bird has

perched for a while, be mindful. If you don't see a poop in another thirty minutes, contact your adoption coordinator.

My bird isn't playing with his toys...now what?

Parrots have their preferred play styles, unless they have never played with toys at all. Introduce new toys slowly, and offer a wide variety. Use items around the house to make cheap and interesting things to chew on, preen, and destroy. Some common toys that you can make from items around the house include:

- Plastic soda bottle filled with safe toys
- Wooden clothes pins (no metal springs)
- Baby toys, like rattles
- Sock filled with safe toys
- Sisal or Cotton Rope. Can be dyed with beet juice or other natural products.
- Phone books on plastic hanger
- Popsicle sticks
- Wood (Must be parrot safe wood. Ex: Untreated pine.)
- Plastic or stainless kitchen utensils
- Basket or box filled with foot toys (blocks of wood, plastic beads, whatever is safe for your bird)
- Untreated straw or cane

- Laundry basket filled with fun
- Sterilized pine cones (225F for 20min. Dry for 2 hours)

See Kris Porter's book mentioned above for more ideas. Continue to offer new toys, and show your bird how to play with them.

My bird won't step up, is lunging at me as if to bite, or is screaming. Now what do I do?

Stepping-up is a very sophisticated behavior for a bird. It requires maximum trust and should be the LAST thing we ask a bird to do!! PLEASE DO NOT EXPECT A BIRD TO DO THIS IMMEDIATELY, or try to force this behavior. It will BREAK TRUST.

Simple rules to follow when interacting with any parrot:

- **Never react to behavior you do not like**, and **praise and reward behavior you do like**, or, simply put, accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.
- Your bird will respond more quickly to you if you **respect his space**, **have patience** when working with him, and **let him choose** to learn on his own time.
- If you get a bite, **stop** what you are doing, and **try a different approach**. A bite **ALWAYS** means that your parrot is uncomfortable (and probably threatened) by what you are doing. Parrots are prey animals above all else. If you get multiple bites, stop touching the parrot and contact your adoption coordinator.

Learn Motivators and Study Body Language

When you are working with a new bird, take the first two weeks to learn two things that will help you greatly when dealing with all behavior: Motivators and body language.

A motivator is the thing that a bird will work for, and is usually, but not always, food. Some birds are motivated by praise or petting, but a good place to start is with food. For a meal, put a wide variety of food in a bowl, and watch which one your parrot picks out first, second, and third. Do this over the course of a few meals to determine what the bird's favorite foods are. Remove these foods from the diet, and use them only when training new behaviors.

Birds communicate through body language, and learning your bird's body language dictionary should be your primary goal during the first month of care. Body language involves how the bird holds feathers all over the body, the shape of her eye, how her feet are placed, whether the beak is open or closed, the overall stance. . .it is a total body message that communicates whether the bird is content or stressed, agitated or sexually stimulated.

During these early days, do your best to avoid negative behaviors, and you will have a much easier time in the future. Learn your bird's motivators and body language, and do not react to negative behaviors.

For specific training tips, contact your adoption coordinator, attend a Phoenix Landing event, or join our Phoenix Landing Foundation Facebook group to ask for feedback.

Other Ways to Help

Want to volunteer with us? Phoenix Landing Volunteers is our Facebook group where we post needs, such as transport. Contact your adoption coordinator, or send an email to contact@phoenixlanding.org for more information.