

Get Organized!

CONQUER
CLUTTER IN
5 STEPS

By Erin O'Brien

Has your bird taken over your home? Do your countertops and floors contain a month's worth of inventory from a bird shop? Do your drawers contain enough food, foraging materials and toys to serve an army of parrots? If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you may need to get organized.

Don't worry, you're not alone. Bird owners from all walks of life typically ride in the same boat. For many, sorting out bird materials and keeping them organized seems like a daunting and downright impossible task. But it doesn't have to.

Want to simplify your life? Take a few tips from some professional organizers and bird owners who know the value of plans, labels and other organizational tricks. In five simple steps, you can spend less time locating your bird's favorite treat and more time enjoying your bird's company.

1 Plan Ahead

Not sure how or where to begin? As with road trips, term papers and daily agendas, creating a plan always makes things easier. Susie Christian, a bird owner and breeder from California, knows the value of planning ahead.

"When I buy [bird-friendly table food]," Christian said, "I pour all the separate ingredients into a large plastic trash can and mix ahead of time to save precious minutes in the daily routine. Planning ahead in seemingly very insignificant areas pays off in much time saved."

2 Create A Bird-Zone

Designate almost any area, including kitchen drawers and cabinets, as your holder for all things bird-related. Or if you have the space, devote an entire room to the birds and thus eliminate the eye sore from the rest of your home.

"Give family-places around the home to enjoy the pets instead of leaving pet paraphernalia all over," said Stephen Ilott, professional organizer of Decluttering.ca (www.decluttering.ca). "Define a pet area as you would define each room by use."

"Using the concept of zoning will help to organize any room," said Robin Harisis of Room Service Personal Organizing, LLC. "Map out spaces in a room that contain like items or activities. For example, make one corner a living



space for the bird, another corner a play area and yet another corner a utility area for storing food, toys and bedding."

With the right plan, you can make any space work for you. Whether you come up with a bird section or an all-out bird room, knowing where to put toys, food and other items speeds up both the organization process and your daily routine. As Ilott said, "Knowledge is power."

3 Box It Up!

Once you set your plan, make it a reality. Counters, shelves and closet space serve as great places for bird areas, but if they don't provide enough space, invest in some boxes, containers or wall-mountable shelves.

These work wonders for pet owners, especially those with multi-pet households.

"For my multi-bird household," said Angela Ray, a bird owner from Tennessee, "one of the biggest concerns is keeping food, toys and extra dishes separated and easy to find. The best way to do this is to utilize the many types of plastic storage containers that are readily available. This makes it easy to find my conure's spare hide tent or my cockatoo's favorite travel blanket!"

"I turned three kitchen shelves into the pet supplies storage area," said Sharon Yildiz, a resident of Turkey and

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owner of a 6-year-old border collie named Savvy and a 16-month-old African grey named Clover. "Dog food is on the bottom in an airtight container. Parrot toys, training equipment and clickers are in the upper shelves."

Although Yildiz says Turkish apartments lack the luxury of closets, she knows the most important lesson of organization: With a little creativity, you can make any space work for you.

"I store stacked [newspaper] sheets under the bed [so they're] ready for the morning cage cleaning or for use with Clover's foraging tree," Yildiz said.

"I keep a toy basket, bucket or box with odds and ends on the grate so that [the birds] can pick through until they find the right thing to play with," said Linda Costello, an owner of 14 birds in Ohio. "I also use containers

Susie Christian, a bird breeder from California, has to be extra-organized because of her large flock. She ensures her birds' food is fresh by labeling it. "I religiously mark each [feed and seed] bag with the date I brought [it] home." She also color-codes her birds' food dishes; her rose-breasted cockatoos get pink bowls, Eclectus with babies get white bowls, etc. (inset photo).



box with the search for the perfect cage and stand. "Find cage stands that have storage under them," Harisis said, "and use stands or perches that can be folded or hung up when not in use."

4 Label It

No matter where you stock your foraging materials and parrot treats, remember the second most important lesson of organization: Label everything. If you throw everything into designated boxes and forget which box holds what, you defeat the entire purpose. The National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) recommends that people, "Clearly label both the tops and the sides of the container," when putting any item in storage.

"Each of my six birds has its own toy box, which houses its toys that are not currently being used, extra perches ... and any item that is specific to it," Ray said. "The storage boxes are labeled with the parrot's name and kept under the counter in the bird room."

"I religiously mark each [feed and seed] bag with the date I brought [it] home," Christian said. "I [also] clothespin a small piece of red fabric to the

outdoor breeder cages, which contain pairs of birds with babies. I certainly know which cages have the babies, but this makes it easier to service the correct cages without having to take a minute to stop and think."

Christian also uses another tactic to cut down on thought and confusion: color coding. "I have a color-coding system where the [rose-breasted cockatoos] get all pink bowls, the Eclectus get all other color bowls, and any Eclectus with babies get white bowls," Christian said. "At a glance I can tell [which bird the] bowl is intended for."

5 Keep it Consistent

The fourth most important lesson of organization is consistency. Constantly switching your routine will create clutter, confuse you and possibly confuse your bird. But by consistently maintaining the proverbial "place for everything and everything in its place," you can memorize your system in no time. This also applies to under-represented bird materials, such as veterinary papers and medical bills.

"Safety of your pet includes storing all the information you need should you suddenly need it," Ilott said. "As with every other information-related need, create a folder with all the related information, such as vet details and documentation on vaccinations, procedures done, etc ... and maintain it in a consistent place."

Keeping it consistent will also help ease your family members and roommates into the change. If they understand the system, they can help maintain your clean and clutter-free household. "Make sure everyone who shares the living space understands and can use your organizational system," Harisis said.

Late for work and in a hurry? Not a problem. With some self-discipline, you can work cheating into your consistent schedule, too. "I offer the suggestion of having a hot zone or drop zone bin, box or basket in each room," said Ilott. "This is to collect things from surfaces that are temporary and may not belong in the room. Each day, week or whatever time frame works,

this portable basket can be brought around the house to return objects to their rightful homes. This can apply to pet toys and tools."

The Bottom Line

Above all, remember that organization isn't like a mathematical equation. As NAPO clarified, "Experts in the organizing industry agree: There are no 'cookie cutter' solutions. There are many different personality types, work styles and environmental influences, so each person must find the system that works best for him or her."

The bottom line? Keep it simple. With a little planning and maintenance, you can keep your home, no matter its size, free of bird-related clutter. You can also cut down on confusion and stress. As Ray said, "Keeping parrots is supposed to be stress- and clutter-free!"

Follow these five simple steps to keep it that way. ■

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