

## **Positive Reinforcement Training Facilitates the Voluntary Participation of Scarlet Macaws (*Ara macao*) With Husbandry and Medical Procedures**

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*Abstract:* Scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) kept under human care are excellent candidates for positive reinforcement training programs because they possess advanced cognitive abilities, have complex social interactions, long life expectancies, and a correspondingly high need for interaction and stimulation. The benefits of positive reinforcement training in mammals have been well documented; however, studies in birds are lacking. Two scarlet macaws housed at Alturas Wildlife Sanctuary (Puntarenas, Costa Rica) were trained in 10-minute sessions once daily, 4–6 times a week, for 4 months. The goal was to demonstrate how positive reinforcement training can improve the well-being of captive psittacine birds, while improving their husbandry and medical care through voluntary cooperation during procedures. The following 6 training behaviors were selected: following a target, entering a carrier, staying in the carrier, stepping onto a scale, stepping onto a towel, and drinking from a syringe. One parrot learned all 6 behaviors, while the other learned 4 of the 6 behaviors during the study period. All the behaviors mastered during the initial training period were successfully transferred to other individuals, so the birds would reliably perform them for the husbandry and veterinary staff. By the end of the study period, both macaws had also decreased aggressive behaviors toward caretakers. This demonstrates that positive reinforcement training is an effective and practical tool for teaching captive macaws to perform husbandry and medical behaviors, thereby voluntarily participating in procedures while improving their general welfare and management.