

Parrot Care Guide

Prepared by Dr. Lucy Haile on behalf of Wellesley Animal Hospital

HOUSING

Cages

- Avoid galvanized metal cages
- Use the biggest cage possible for your bird
- Line the bottom of the cage with newspaper or paper towel

Nighttime

- Consider covering the cage at night or having a separate night cage in a quieter area so your bird can get undisturbed sleep for 12 hours a day
- Covering the cage to decrease daylight hours can also decrease the hormonal drive for some species of parrots to lay eggs

Perches

- Have a variety of different sized perches made up of different materials
- Place the perches at different heights throughout the cage

Location of cage

- Don't house your bird in or near to the kitchen due to the risk of respiratory disease caused by cooking, especially on Teflon or non-stick pans. (The toxic component is polytetrafluoroethylene [PTFE])
- Avoid candles, incense or smoking near your bird

DIET

- A good quality pelleted diet should make up 70-80% of the diet. The remainder should be a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy table foods

Pellets

- We strongly recommend a pelleted diet to ensure your parrot receives all the nutrients they need
- Roudybush, Lafeber and Harrison's are three brands of good quality pelleted diets. If unsure of which size/type of pellet to buy discuss it with your veterinarian
- Avoid pellets "mixes" which contain fruits, seeds and nuts. Your bird will often pick out their favorites resulting in an unbalanced diet
- Seeds are higher in fats and this excess can contribute to diseases later in life such as liver or heart disease. Seeds also lack essential vitamins and minerals. They should only be given as occasional training treats
- Be sure to choose a pellet size appropriate to your size of bird
- Converting a bird to pellets may take months so please be patient and feel free to contact your veterinarian to discuss different methods and tips to try if you are having difficulties

Fresh produce

- Offer once to twice a day
- Aim for 5-7 different vegetables per day and limit fruits to 2-3 times a week
- Avoid grapes, apple seeds/cores, stone fruit pips and avocado
- Focus on feeding low sugar fruits such as berries



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Healthy table foods

- Protein: small amounts of scrambled egg whites 2-3 times a week
- Steamed or roasted vegetables
- Do not feed white rice, pasta or any food containing white flour, sugar or other sweeteners
- Avoid uncultured dairy/milk products

BEHAVIOR

Socialization

- Birds are social animals and often live in flocks or mating pairs
- You can provide the social interaction your bird needs however be careful to not become a replacement for a mating partner
- Keep all physical interaction to the head and neck. Stroking further down the body can overstimulate your bird and create behavioral and physical problems
- Time on your shoulder or lap should be limited also

Training

- Your bird can be a lifelong partner and proper training will ensure your bird stays safe, has positive interactions and can decrease stress at the vets and other outings
- Teaching your bird to 'step up' or 'stay' on a perch can be very helpful in a home setting
- If your bird is flighted, we recommend teaching 'recall' so your bird can have supervised exercise around the house and safely return to you
- We recommend playing with your bird with towels from a young age and getting him used to being wrapped up gently in a towel. This will come in handy if your bird is ever unwell and needs veterinary care
- Feeding a pelleted diet allows seeds and nuts to be used for "high value" rewards during training
- Your veterinarian can advise you on how to teach these actions or can refer you to a behaviorist for one-on-one in-home training

Foraging

- Entertain your bird by making him forage for his food
- Obtain toys that encourage foraging or create them yourself by placing food inside folded up paper or cardboard such as paper towel rolls
- Teaching your bird to forage can take time so start slowly and use high value treats initially

Toys

- Rotate toys around the cage regularly
- Be sure to provide a variety of toys
- Provide at least one toy that encourages physical movement e.g. ladder, one that encourages foraging

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Bathing

- Birds need regular bathing opportunities for good health
- It is best to bathe birds in the morning, so they are not going to bed wet
- Most birds should get drenched at least once/week
- There are different methods to bathe your bird including bathing in bowls, going into the shower or playing in running water. At the very least use a misting bottle to spray your bird

HEALTH CARE

Weighing

- We recommend weighing your bird on a weekly basis. Ideally first thing in the morning to be consistent
- We recommend purchasing a small kitchen gram scale and always weighing at the same time of day
- Depending on your bird you may be able to teach your bird to stand/perch on the scale. If not place your bird inside a suitably sized plastic/tupperware container
- If you notice that your bird's weight drops by 10% of its previous body weight contact your veterinarian immediately
- If you notice a gradual decrease in weight contact your veterinarian to discuss causes
- Weighing your bird becomes especially important whenever you are changing the diet or if your bird is sick. Getting your bird used to being weighed before these events will decrease the stress during an already stressful time

Preventative Care

- New patient exams for your bird are very important. Your veterinarian can advise you on the correct nutrition, husbandry and training methods to help prevent medical and behavior problems later in life as well as doing any necessary infectious disease testing which is especially important if you have other birds at home
- Birds by nature hide signs and symptoms of illness. Yearly examinations are therefore recommended to detect diseases early. Annual bloodwork and fecal gram stains are often recommended as part of the yearly examination
- If you notice any change in your bird's behavior, appetite or droppings or your bird is acting 'fluffed' we would recommend contacting your veterinarian immediately