

Birds

Are you considering a bird as a companion? Here is some information to get you started.

All birds are high-maintenance pets. Finches can live up to 10 years, canaries and budgies can live up to 15 years, lovebirds and cockatiels up to 20 years and all require specialized care. After initial startup costs, expect to spend approximately \$500-700 each year for a single, healthy bird.

Housing

It is important to provide appropriate housing to ensure your bird remains safe, happy, and well-exercised. Choosing appropriate housing for your bird can be an arduous task, and finding the type of housing that fits your bird's needs, and your lifestyle takes some research. There are many options available, but some cages that are marketed to birds are unsuitable. Caging doesn't have to be a prison. It can be a personal sanctuary for your bird with plenty of free flight time. The following information will help you to select and maintain the best possible housing for your pet bird.



Components of a Good Enclosure

Size Matters

Perhaps the most common misconception about housing birds is the size required. When it comes to cages, bigger is definitely better. Birds kept in small cages suffer from health and emotional problems and are more prone to stress-related disorders like feather plucking. They also tend to exhibit more territorial and nervous aggression with people and cage mates. For a happier, healthier bird, buy the largest cage you can afford. Keep in mind that suitable caging will generally cost more than the price of the bird, even large parrots, and will likely be the greatest start-up cost. Most cages marketed for specific bird species, especially parrots, are far too small for them, but with a bit of looking, you can find large cages and even flight cages for your bird. A general rule of thumb is that the minimum appropriate cage size allows large parrots to fully extend and flap wings and move from perch to perch without their wings bumping the sides. In addition, birds with long tails should be able to perch without their tail hitting items in the cage or the bottom of the cage. The ideal cage should be large enough to fit all perches, food dishes and toys and still allow small bursts of flight from perch to perch. Smaller birds can easily be provided with large flight cages allowing greater lengths of flight. Bar spacing (the space between cage bars) should be sized for the species of bird, as larger bar spacing will allow smaller birds to escape from the cage or may result in their heads getting stuck between bars. Small bar spacing also prevents larger parrots from comfortably climbing the bars, and they risk getting their toes stuck and twisted.

Minimum Cage Size and Bar-Spacing Chart by bird species:

Note: These sizes are the minimum required for each species. Larger cages are always ideal.

SPECIES	MINIMUM CAGE SIZE	BAR SPACING
Finches / Canaries / Budgies	24"x18"x24"	1/4"-1/2"
Cockatiels/Lovebirds/Parrotlets	24"x30"x24"	1/2"-5/8"
Ring-neck Parakeets	24"x24"x36"	1/2"-5/8"
Conures/Poicephalus/Jardine's/Caique/ Pionus/Quaker/Myers/Senegals/Lorikeets	24"x24"x36"	5/8"-3/4"
Amazons/African Greys/Eclectus/ Alexandrines/Goffin's Cockatoos	36"x48"x48"	3/4"-1"
Umbrella/Moluccan Cockatoos	42"x48"x48"	1"-1 1/2"
Macaws	48"x60"x60"	1"-1 1/2"

Safe Materials

One of the most common home hazards for birds is heavy metal toxicity. The only really safe metals for birds are Stainless Steel and Powder-Coated Steel. Ensure that your bird's cage is made from one of these materials and is not further coated with paint or other toxic materials. If purchasing a used cage, ensure there are no rust spots, as these can also be harmful to your bird. If making your own cage, ensure that both the metal used for the bars and any screws or other attachments are exclusively made of these safe materials and that all edges are smooth and safe. Some larger parrots are expert escape artists. Locks or firm latches may be required to ensure they do not escape. Ensure that any such devices are also made with safe materials.

Best Bars

Climbing is an essential activity for birds to ensure good health and strength. Cages with horizontal bars are best as they provide optimal climbing opportunities for your birds. Bars should be sized and spaced appropriately for the species and size of birds housed in the cage (see Bar-Spacing Chart above).

Essentials

Bowls

Every bird should have at least one food and one water bowl. Multiple birds often benefit from additional bowls to prevent food guarding. Bowls should be sized appropriately to the species and size of the bird. Smaller birds can have small plastic dishes that horizontal bars. Often, smaller dishes have perches attached. Larger parrots often toss or tip dishes. Screw-in dishes that firmly attach to the cage are the best choice for these birds. These dishes usually do not have attached perches, so a perch should be placed to allow easy access to the bowl.

Baths

In-cage bird baths are beneficial to all birds as they help reduce dander and keep birds clean. They also allow self-cleaning for birds who dislike being spritzed. Bird baths for smaller birds are readily available at

pet supply stores and can be provided at all times. Larger parrots can be given large, shallow, heavy dishes, such as shallow dog bowls, to accommodate their size and allow splashing and cleaning. Many birds will also enjoy being spritzed daily with warm water from a squirt bottle. It is important to ensure that your bird's cage is in an area that is warm and free from drafts, as their ability to stay warm is impaired if their feathers are wet. Note: birds will often splash water about when they bathe. Providing baths in a tiled area during out-of-cage time may be necessary for extremely messy birds.

Perches

Birds kept on inappropriate flooring or perches are prone to ailments such as foot sores and infections, arthritis or other debilitating foot issues. Providing many appropriate perching opportunities is essential to maintaining your bird's good health. Perches come in different diameters and should be sized for your bird's species and size. The bird's toes should form a gentle semi-circle around the perch. If the toes are touching or overlapping, the perch is too small. If the toes are stretched out almost flat, the perch is too large. A bird should be provided with at least three different types of perches, including one cotton rope perch. Cotton rope perches provide a softer, gentler perch for sleeping and resting. These usually only come in consistent diameters (same diameter throughout the length of the perch). Cement/Sand perches are available and can provide



opportunities for wearing down long nails and grinding long beaks. These types of perches, however, are not comfortable for birds to perch on long-term and can lead to foot problems if the bird uses these as a main perching area. They often come in varying diameters. Providing at least one varying-diameter perch is important for exercising the feet. Other good perch options are natural branch perches, swings and ledges. Perches should each be placed at different heights and coming in from different sides of the cage. Perches should be placed in front of food dishes to allow easy access and should never be placed directly above food or water dishes or baths to prevent feces from contaminating food and water sources.

Cage Liner

Cages should be lined with paper that is changed daily. Safe paper types include liner paper sold in pet supply shops and dye-free craft paper. Newspaper can also be used. The dyes used in this paper are non-toxic but may rub off and cause discoloration of feathers and feet. Particle bedding such as wood shavings is not recommended as these can cause respiratory issues.

Toys are NOT Optional

Toys serve essential purposes for pet birds, providing outlets for natural behaviours and enrichment when in the cage. Birds lacking sufficient stimulation in the cage will often suffer from boredom, depression, anxiety and self-destructive behaviours. It is important to provide new, interesting and challenging toys

regularly to keep them occupied and happy when they cannot be outside of the cage. The following categories of toys should each be included in your bird's toy collection:

- **Chewing Toys:** Toys made of bird-safe wood or other safe material should be available at all times to provide an outlet for natural chewing behaviour. While this will likely not cure birds of chewing inappropriate items out of the cage, it will provide an alternative chewing outlet that you can positively reinforce to refocus chewing on these items.
- **Shredding Toys:** Toys made from safe paper, cardboard and other safe shredding materials should always be provided to your bird to allow an appropriate outlet for natural destructive behaviours. While this will likely not cure birds of destroying inappropriate items out of the cage, it will provide an alternative shredding outlet that you can positively reinforce to refocus shredding to these items.
- **Preening Toys:** Preening toys, made from cotton rope or other safe stringy material, are especially important with species or individual birds prone to self-destructive behaviours, as well as single birds. Bonded birds will engage in mutual preening as a social activity, and single birds lack this natural behaviour. As they cannot be with their human companion 24/7 as they would with a bonded bird partner, preening toys will help to alleviate some of the anxiety caused by a lack of a preening partner. Anxious or frustrated birds will also over-preen themselves, often resulting in self-mutilation. Preening toys provide an external outlet for this self-destructive behaviour and can help to prevent self-harm in these birds.
- **Foot Toys:** Larger parrots naturally explore, hold and play with items using their feet as well as their beak. Toys they can hold and explore with their feet will provide additional mental stimulation as well as increase fine motor skills, muscle strength and flexibility.
- **Foraging Toys:** Wild birds are never provided with a simple bowl filled with all their needed food. Most of their day in the wild is spent searching for and eating various food sources. Foraging for food items in the cage can help alleviate boredom and provide mental stimulation. A wide range of commercial foraging toys are available, but challenges as simple as wrapping food in bird-safe paper or hiding it in a small dye- and glue-free cardboard box can provide an interesting challenge for birds new to foraging.
- **Puzzle Toys:** A wide range of puzzle toys are commercially available for birds. Some are foraging toys they can play with on their own in the cage, providing an automatic treat reward when they solve the puzzle, and others are interactive games owners can use to teach new tricks and to bond with their birds. The level of interest in these toys will vary by individual bird. Birds should never be forced to engage with any toy they are uninterested in, as this will cause frustration and nervousness around the item and the human companion.

When to Cage

Not a Prison

Even birds provided with 4 hours of flight time each day spend 20 hours a day in a cage for their entire lives. To help make the cage a sanctuary, not a prison, provide lots of space, things to do, and comforting items in the cage. Of course, whenever possible, provide out of cage time with the cage door open at all

times to allow access in and out of the cage as desired. When it is time to return to the cage, avoid forcing the bird in, as this will associate the cage with an unpleasant experience. As the cage is where the bird will spend most of its time, it should always be a pleasant place. Teach the bird to enter the cage on its own for a favourite treat. Once it has mastered this command, entering the cage will be empowering as it will be the bird's choice, not somewhere it is forced into against its will, and will be a much more pleasant experience for both the owner and the bird. Remember: Out-of-cage time should be supervised and take place in a bird-safe area. See the "Safety and Bird Proofing" section for more information.

Not a Punishment

To maintain the cage as a sanctuary, not a prison, never use it as punishment for unwanted behaviour. Birds do not respond well to "punishment," and positive reinforcement training is a much more effective method. Punishing a bird by placing it in its cage also associates the cage with a negative experience (an angry owner, being forced into an enclosed space, ending free flight time, etc.), which will make the cage they must live in an undesirable location. Keep the cage in a positive space where the bird enjoys spending time, is relaxed, and is never afraid to be.

Where to Cage

The Great Indoors

There are many important reasons to house birds indoors. In Canada, our seasons are too variable for pet bird species, and can cause many ailments. Predators, diseases and other dangers are also present outdoors and pose potentially lethal threats to your bird. Birds housed outdoors are more likely to be lost and die of starvation or exposure. Birds housed indoors are healthier, less stressed, and friendlier on average. Being housed indoors helps accustom them to the activities and human companions of the home. Free flight time inside is also essential for your bird's well-being and in creating a positive relationship with your pet bird.

I Want to Be With You

Birds are social animals and benefit from constant companionship. They should not be kept in areas where they will not receive a lot of human contact, as they will be more fearful of humans when you attempt to interact with them and are more prone to boredom and depression. House your bird in an area you spend a lot of time in but which is not too loud or busy. Also, avoid housing a bird in an area where children or other pets have unsupervised access.

Hot and Cold

Birds are highly temperature-sensitive and should never be exposed to great variations in temperature. The area you keep them in should be temperature-controlled all year round. The ideal temperature range for most birds is 20-30 degrees Celsius, although very young, weak, old or ill birds should be kept at the higher end of this range. Your avian vet can recommend an ideal temperature for your bird. All birds' cages should be kept out of drafts and away from radiators or other heat sources to help maintain a comfortable temperature and prevent illness.

Light and Dark

Most domestic birds come from tropical areas where they receive 12 hours of natural sunlight. Full-spectrum light is essential for birds to remain healthy. The best option is placement near a window (but not directly in front of it), where the bird will have at least one perch area in natural sunlight and one shaded to provide the option of moving in or out of the light. If you cannot provide natural sunlight, you can use an avian lamp with UVA/B. The lamp should be placed above the cage but out of reach of the birds to prevent burns. Provide a shaded and lighted side of the cage to provide your bird with both options. Remember: birds are avid cord chewers, so keep the lamp cord out of reach during free flight time and do not position the cord where it could be reached by the bird through the cage bars. Some full-spectrum lamps sold for reptiles or plants are not suitable for birds. Speak to your avian vet to determine the best light setup for your individual bird.

Safe and Sound

Birds will appreciate being housed somewhere you spend a lot of time. The sounds of the home, such as moderate-level talking, televisions and radios, are all stimulating to your parrot. However, if you have an especially noisy area of the home, you should not keep your bird there. Birds have sensitive hearing and may be frightened by the sounds of children screaming, dogs barking, or loud music. They should also be provided with an area as quiet as possible when sleeping (usually around 12 hours a night). Be attentive to your bird's reactions and find a space for your bird that makes him/her feel safe and happy. To help your bird feel more secure, the cage should be against at least one, preferably two, walls to prevent the bird from feeling surrounded and trapped. The cage will feel safer and cozier in a corner area.

Diet and Nutrition

Avian nutrition is an area of knowledge that continuously evolves as we learn more about each species' natural diet and their unique needs in captivity. Nutrition should not be undervalued when it comes to your bird. Malnutrition and various vitamin deficiencies are leading causes of early death in pet birds, and proper nutrition throughout your bird's life will provide the best possible foundation for a long, healthy life. It is essential to work closely with a knowledgeable avian vet to develop a diet best suited to your bird's species and individual health. The basic information below will introduce you to some of the general aspects of companion parrot nutrition and diet to help you keep your bird healthy and happy.

The Basics

Healthy parrots require 75-80% of their diet to be fortified, nutritionally balanced pellets, with 20- 25% fresh fruit and vegetables. Some special parrot species, like Loris and Lorikeets, require specialized diets that do not follow this plan. Please speak to your avian veterinarian for advice about feeding your individual bird.

Water

Fresh, clean water should be available at all times to all birds. Depending on the quality of your tap water, you may want to consider offering filtered or bottled water. Speak to your avian vet for more advice on water for your bird.

Pellets vs. Seeds

Seed mixes used to be the standard diet provided to all birds, from finches to macaws. However, we now know that seed-based diets are not the best choice. While a seed mix may contain a balance of needed nutrients, the reality is that birds do not view all seeds alike. Just like us, they have favourite tastes, which tend not to be the healthiest. Most birds provided with seed mixes will selectively eat the yummy, fattier ones, leaving the others. Not only does this provide incomplete nutrition, but the fat content in the preferred seeds can lead to health issues like obesity and liver disease. The ideal staple diet for all parrot species (from budgies to lovebirds to cockatoos) is a nutritionally complete pellet. Pellets should make up 75-80% of your bird's diet. Started on pellets at an early age, few parrots have trouble with this diet. Older birds, accustomed to a seed diet, can still be switched onto pellets with varying degrees of ease. Speak to your vet for advice on switching to pellets. There are a wide variety of pellets on the market, and your avian vet can help you select the one best suited for your individual bird. You should look for pellets specifically indicated for your species of bird, as they have been formulated to meet their unique nutritional needs. There are pellets of various sizes and shapes, organic pellets, and pellets formulated for various life stages and health concerns. With so many options, you are sure to find a pellet type that you, your vet and your bird will all love! Some experts advise saving seeds and nuts for treats. Others recommend removing them from the diet completely. If you choose to feed seeds and nuts, it is recommended that you buy human-grade, especially peanuts. Inferior grade nuts, packaged for birds and other animals, can be potentially toxic to your animal. Speak to your avian veterinarian for advice on feeding seeds and nuts as treats to your bird.



Fruit and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables provide added nutrients and interest for birds. The variety of flavours, colours and textures will make meals more stimulating and exciting. The greater variety of fruits and vegetables offered, the better, both for taste and for variety of nutrients. Fruits and vegetables should make up 20-25% of your bird's diet. Organic fruits and vegetables are always the best choices, as birds are sensitive to pesticides. If using non-organic fruit and vegetables, be sure to peel outer layers and wash thoroughly before feeding. Some fruits and vegetables, such as those with high water content (iceberg lettuce, etc.) and avocados, should be avoided.

Below is a list of some safe fruits and vegetables for birds. Apples, apricots, banana, blueberries, broccoli, cabbage, cantaloupe carrot, carrot tops, cherries (pitted), corn, cucumber, dates, dandelion leaves, endive figs, grapes, grapefruit, kale, kiwi, melons, mango, nectarines, oranges, papaya, peaches, pear, peppers (red/green) pineapple, plum, pumpkin, raspberry, romaine lettuce, spinach, sprouted seeds, squash, strawberries, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, zucchini

*Speak to your avian vet for a complete list of safe and unsafe fruits and vegetables and for advice about feeding your bird.

Calcium Question

Calcium deficiencies are common in seed-based diets, and many birds require calcium supplements due to deficiency. The most commonly used supplement is cuttlebone which also aids in beak filing. Some pellet diets contain sufficient calcium for your bird and will not require this supplementation. Before offering a calcium supplement, even cuttlebone, to a pellet-fed bird, consult with your avian veterinarian to prevent over-dosing.

A Gritty Debate

Some people believe that parrots require grit to help break down food in the crop, while others steer away from this. It is unknown whether grit is actually very beneficial to parrots, and they have been shown to digest their food well both with and without it. Over-eating grit can also cause health issues. Before offering any grit, consult your veterinarian about your individual bird.

Other Foods

In addition to pellets, fruit and vegetables, there are many other foods that can be offered to supplement your parrot's diet. These foods can be offered as rewards in training, socialization tools, or simply as supplements to add variety to the diet. These foods should be fed in very small amounts and not daily.

Here is a list of some safe foods that can be given to your bird: Coconut, chickpeas (cooked), kidney beans (cooked), lentils (cooked), lima beans (cooked), mung beans (cooked), navy beans (cooked), soybeans (cooked), and brown rice tofu.

Many other foods, such as pastas, breads, and even fish, egg or lean cooked meat, can be fed to certain species in extremely limited quantities. Speak to your avian vet for a complete list of safe and unsafe foods and for advice about feeding your individual bird. Cooked foods should always be allowed to cool completely before being offered to your bird. All food items, especially beans, should be removed after 4 hours if uneaten.

How to Feed

Staples

Pellets should be available all day and refreshed at least once a day. Clean water, refreshed twice daily, should also be available at all times. Fruit and vegetables should be fed in a separate bowl, and you should

keep track of what food is eaten, as loss of appetite can be an early sign of illness. This will also help you to detect any changes in eating patterns and adjust what is offered accordingly (such as eating too much of one type of fruit or vegetable). Any uneaten fruit or vegetables should be removed after 4 hours. Feeding small quantities of many different fruits and vegetables each day is preferable to feeding large amounts of fewer types.

Picky Eaters

Some birds will take a liking to one food item and neglect others, some will suddenly refuse a previously eaten food, and others are just plain picky. Don't be discouraged. If a bird is over-eating one food item, temporarily remove or reduce its availability to encourage it to eat other items. If your bird suddenly goes off a food, don't give up. Try again the next day, week, month, etc. It's important to continue providing a variety of food options to promote complete nutrition and offer a variety of tastes and textures. Just like you, birds are bored by too much of the same thing.

Multiple Birds

Multiple birds housed together will sometimes fight over access to food. Separate food dishes can be provided in this case, and birds should be monitored when eating to ensure they are all receiving adequate nutrition.

Foraging Enrichment

Wild birds are never provided with a bowl of ready-to-eat food. They have to hunt for, peel, crack, open and eat their food. The stimulation, problem-solving and exercise required by this are lacking in the easy feeding method of food in bowls in captivity. While sufficient food and water should always be readily available to birds to help them feel secure and provide needed nutrition, treat foods can be provided in more challenging, exciting ways. There are a wide variety of commercial foraging toys available, but simple brown paper bags, dye- and glue-free cardboard boxes, blank newsprint, and other safe materials can all be used to create home-made food challenges where the bird has to figure something out (open, peel, unwind, etc.) in order to get to the yummy reward. This will make treat time more stimulating and help fill the long hours of the day with an exciting new challenge!

Socialization

Food is a great motivator for most species. Finding a favourite fruit, vegetable or treat can be a great tool in winning over a new or nervous bird. You can use food as a reward for learning new tricks or just to make socialization with humans a more positive, fun experience. Feeding treats can be a great way to bond with your bird and add stimulation to your interactions by encouraging learning and exploration.

Diet-Related Concerns

Malnutrition

Birds fed a nutritionally incomplete diet, or a seed diet, are prone to malnutrition which can lead to a variety of health issues and a shortened lifespan. Some species are particularly prone to certain issues.

For example, Budgies and Cockatiels are prone to iodine deficiencies, and Conures, Amazons and African Greys are vulnerable to calcium and vitamin A deficiencies. Along with a pellet-based diet, regular avian vet visits are essential to ensure the nutritional needs of your individual bird are being met at all times. Any necessary supplementation will be advised by your vet on an individual basis and should not be provided without veterinary consultation, as too much of certain vitamins can also be harmful.

Obesity and Liver Disease

Birds fed a diet high in fat content, such as diets containing large amounts of certain seeds and nuts, can lead to obesity, a growing problem among companion birds. Obesity can lead to related health issues, such as arthritis, pressure sores, heart disease, and cancer and increases their anesthetic risk. High fat intake can also contribute to hepatic lipidosis (“fatty liver disease”), a leading cause of diet-related death in pet birds, making them highly susceptible to infections and stress. Some experts recommend removing these high-fat foods entirely from your bird’s diet, while others recommend saving these items for treats in extremely limited quantities, but all agree that seeds and nuts should not form the staples of a bird’s diet. Speak to your veterinarian for advice about feeding your individual bird and for maintaining a healthy amount of fat in your bird’s diet. A lack of flight time and adequate exercise is also a contributing factor to obesity and related health concerns. Ensuring that your bird has a large cage and at least 4 hours of flight time in a safe environment will help maintain good health.

Other Issues

Some vitamin deficiencies and poor diets have been shown to increase the likelihood of other health concerns such as feather plucking and egg-binding. Almost any health issue is made worse by poor diet and malnutrition. Maintaining a healthy, balanced diet throughout your bird’s life will help prevent illness and build your bird’s immune system to increase its ability to cope with stress and illness. Poor diets can also contribute to behavioural concerns. Along with regular veterinary exams, safety-proofing and good housing, providing a healthy diet for your bird is one of the best things you can do to help them live a long, healthy, and happy life!

Safety and Bird Proofing

Why Safety-Proof?

Home hazards are one of the leading causes of death of pet birds. Lack of awareness or momentary lapses can lead to severe or fatal injuries in a matter of moments. Because birds use their beaks to explore, they will often come into contact with dangerous and toxic items in a non-bird-proofed home. To prevent serious injury or premature death, it is essential to prevent your bird from coming into contact with any home hazards. Birds are one of the leading species of animals reported lost each year. Clipping a bird’s wings does not eliminate this threat, as they can be carried off by air currents once outside, and it is common for birds with clipped wings to be lost because of the false sense of security of this procedure. Furthermore, clipping severely restricts the essential aspect of birds’ natural behaviours – flight.

What You Can Do

Supervise

The most important thing you can do to ensure your bird's safety is to supervise all flight time outside the cage. Dedicating this time to observing and interacting with your bird will also strengthen your relationship and lead to new insights and discoveries about your bird's vibrant, individual personality.

Restrict Space

Larger homes often contain far too many hazards to adequately safety proof. Allowing flight time in a single room or a smaller area will allow you to ensure all areas to which the bird has access are safe and secure

Safety Proof

Safety proofing your home begins with an awareness of the common home hazards that face pet birds. To ensure that your home is ready for your bird, carefully read the common hazards listed below and take steps to avoid or eliminate them.

Use Common Sense

If something seems wrong or is not listed below or on another bird home hazard list, use common sense and do not allow your bird access to anything that you suspect may be harmful. Finding an avian veterinarian in your area is essential. Ask questions and ensure that your bird is examined if you suspect any illness or injury. Regular (yearly or twice yearly) exams are also important for healthy birds to detect illnesses before more severe symptoms arise.

Common Home Hazards

Kitchens

Keep them out! Kitchens are the number one room for hazards to birds. Birds should never be housed in a kitchen or have access to one when flying free. If you are unable to block off your kitchen when your bird is flying free, ensure that the following hazards are avoided:

Cooking

Smoke or steam from cooking can kill birds because of their delicate respiratory systems. They can also suffer serious injury from contact with hot stoves or pans, toasters, kettles, or any heated device. Birds have drowned in sinks, gotten caught in fridges, dishwashers, ovens, or other appliances, cut themselves on knives or sharp objects, and otherwise injured themselves. When a bird is out, all appliances should be off and closed. No one should cook or clean while the bird is out, and the bird should be discouraged from entering the kitchen if at all possible.

Eating

Many human foods are toxic to birds and can easily kill them if ingested. Common toxic foods include, but are not limited to chocolate, alcohol, avocado, garlic, onion, salt, yeast dough, and coffee (including grounds and beans), tea, colas, and other caffeinated beverages. Food should be securely out of reach of birds when flying free. Some foods, such as butter, margarine or oils, can get onto the bird's feathers and cause damage as well. Ensure that all such food is out of reach and that you closely supervise your birds at all time.

Bathrooms

Toilets, sinks and tubs pose a potential drowning hazard for birds. Toilets should be shut at all times, and birds should be kept out of bathrooms entirely if possible.

Mirrors

Birds cannot distinguish mirrors and often fly into them thinking they can fly through them. This can cause serious injuries to the beak, wings or keel. Any mirrors in bathrooms or throughout the house should be covered or have decals placed on them to show the birds they are solid objects.

Medications and Cleaning Products

Many parrots are adept at opening jars and bottles. All medicines should be securely out of reach of birds at all times. Soaps, hair dyes, perfumes, shaving creams, shampoo and other products are also toxic to birds and should always be kept out of reach. Cleaning products contain harsh chemicals which will kill a bird if ingested. Never allow your bird access to these products, and rinse all surfaces well after using them before allowing your bird to come into contact with these areas.

Heated Products

Blow-dryers, hair straighteners and curling irons should never be accessible to birds or used around them. Birds coming into contact with these appliances will suffer severe burns. Many of these items are also coated with Teflon, a product which releases toxic fumes when heated that can kill a bird. If your oven has a self-cleaning function, do not use this feature with your bird in the home, as the high heat and debris within an oven can combine to release toxic fumes. Dangerous fumes can remain in the house for several days after using the self-cleaning function.

Cords and Wires

One of the most common activities of birds is chewing. Most species could quickly bite through an exposed cord or wire, resulting in electrocution or an electrical fire. Because of the high risk of fatality, all cords and wires should be permanently out of reach of birds. Cord protectors, sold in hardware stores, can be used to cover and protect any cords that cannot be fully out of reach.

People and Other Pets

Most people unfamiliar with birds do not realize how delicate they are. Trying to grab them from the air or handling a bird when unfamiliar with it can result in serious injuries. Children should never be left unattended or unsupervised with a bird, should be restricted from handling until older and taught to do so safely, and should never be the primary caregiver for a bird. Adults unfamiliar with an individual bird should first be shown how to interact with it. Most birds will bite when afraid, and even smaller birds can

easily break the skin. Anyone in contact with the bird should be prepared for this and should refrain from shaking, dropping or flinging the bird if bitten, despite this being a natural response. These actions can severely injure the bird, and physical discipline is never an appropriate training method for birds. Careful supervision at all times to avoid stepping or sitting on a bird is also essential to avoiding death or injuries when your bird is out of its cage.

Animals

Even the calmest or sedated pet is essentially still an animal with the natural instincts of its species. Cats, dogs and ferrets are all-natural predators, and their methods of play can inflict serious harm on birds. Even pets who are not interested in playing with or chasing a bird will react to a bird startling, biting or otherwise bothering them with a natural bite or swat, which can prove fatal to delicate birds. Even in securely shut cages, birds will often have heart attacks because of the fright of being trapped in a cage with a predator on the other side. For this reason, birds should never be kept in a room to which your other animals have access, and other animals should be put out of the area when your bird is given flight time. Many people do not realize that birds can also be a threat to one another. Unfamiliar birds will often fight and can fatally wound one another. Larger species will also not see smaller birds as companions and will often attack them. Unless properly introduced for bonding purposes and carefully supervised until fully bonded, birds should not be put together or allowed access to one another, even through the cage.

Windows and Doors

One of the most common ways people lose their birds is by accidentally leaving a window or door open when the bird is flying around the house. Even the most affectionate birds will rarely return home, often getting confused or frightened once outside. Domesticated birds are not adapted to wild living. Most domesticated breeds are native to much warmer climates and do not survive our winters. Domestic birds, and other animals, are also not used to finding their own food – much of their natural food sources are also not available in this area – and are not adept at avoiding predators or hiding. Birds who are not found do not often survive for long outside. For this reason, it is essential that you check (and double-check) that all windows and doors are closed and latched when the bird is flying free in the home. Many birds with clipped wings are lost this way, as owners mistakenly think they cannot get far without full flight. Air currents can easily carry off a bird who jumps through a window, and the clipped wings will only make fending for themselves outside much more difficult and the chance of death higher. Birds should also be discouraged from perching on top of open doors. A strong draft or accidentally bumping into a door will cause it to slam shut and potentially crush or injure the bird. Keeping doors shut at all times when the bird is flying free will avoid this situation.

Cover your Windows

Birds cannot visually discern windows or mirrors and often fly into them, expecting to be able to pass through them. Broken beaks, necks, wings or damaged keels are often the result and, unfortunately, regularly result in fatalities. Covering windows and mirrors when allowing birds free flight is the best way to avoid such incidents.

Teflon

Teflon is the brand name for the coating in non-stick kitchenware. It is also used as a coating in heating devices such as space heaters, curling irons and other appliances. When heated, Teflon releases fumes that are fatal to birds. Birds should never be kept in or near an area where such items are being used. None of these items or devices should be used when a bird is flying free.

Smoke and Fumes

Birds have extremely sensitive respiratory systems, and any kind of smoke or fumes can be fatal to them. These include fireplace and cooking smoke, chemical-based cleaning products, air and fabric fresheners, machinery, and any other product that releases fumes into the air. Scented Products of all kinds are included in this list. Scented candles, perfumes, incense, or other products should never be used near a bird or when a bird is flying free. Only natural, chemical-free cleaning products should be used in the same room as a bird. Check with your vet before using any products to ensure their safety.

Plants

Many common household plants are toxic to birds if ingested. As birds commonly test things with their beaks, ingestion of items is common. You should never allow your bird access to any toxic plant, either in their cage or when flying free. Common Toxic Plants include, but are not limited to:

Amaryllis Marigold Mistletoe Ficus Morning Glory Rhododendron Rubber Plant Nectarine Tree Bean Plants Holly, Buttercups Shamrocks Snowdrops Mushrooms Red Maple Hyacinth Honeysuckle Hydrangea Oleander Oak Tree Peach Tree Iris Calla Lily Clover Bleeding Hearts

Dried plants and potpourris are often overlooked when bird-proofing but are equally toxic and should not be in an area to which the bird has access.

Lead Paint, Polishes and Veneers

Birds naturally chew, and this activity should be encouraged with appropriate chew toys. However, birds will often also chew on inappropriate items to which they have access, such as furniture, baseboards, window and door frames and other items. If these items are coated with lead paint, toxic polishes or veneers, this can be a fatal activity. Ensure that all such items are kept out of reach of birds and provide plenty of appropriate chew toys to divert your bird's attention.

Heavy Metal Poisoning

The most common metal poisoning in birds is from lead, zinc and copper. None of these materials should be used in bird caging or accessories or any items to which birds have access, as birds will often chew on items containing these materials, resulting in toxicity.

Drafts and Fans

Ceiling fans and other fans are extremely harmful to birds flying free and often result in broken bones or beaks, or even death. All fans should be turned off before allowing free flight. If using a fan when a bird is in the cage, make sure it is not pointed at the cage. Drafts from fans, windows or vents can cause respiratory illnesses and chills in birds. Cages should always be kept out of drafts.

Sunlight and Heat Sources

While direct sunlight is beneficial to birds, birds should always be able to get out of the sun when desired to avoid over-heating. Cages should always be kept away from heat sources such as fireplaces, space heaters, heating vents or radiators and the temperature should be kept regulated in areas in which birds are kept.

Hiding Spots

Birds will often seek places to hide when flying outside of the cage and will sometimes burrow under blankets, towels or in couch cushions. Ensure that you know at all times where your bird is before moving around or sitting down to avoid crushing your bird. Ensure that your bird is able to get out from under blankets and towels, as this can also lead to suffocation.

Health Care

Veterinary Care

Veterinary costs can be more expensive than that of cats and dogs because birds are considered an exotic species, and must be treated by a qualified exotic pet veterinarian. While birds do not generally require vaccinations, they should see the vet yearly for a check-up or whenever a health concern arises. Prior to Adopting: Find a bird-savvy veterinarian in your area and inquire about their prices for check-ups and other common procedures.

Common Medical Concerns

Since birds are prey animals, they tend to hide their illnesses to avoid being left behind by their group or picked out by predators. Often, by the time an illness is noticeable, it is very serious. They may continue to eat normally until close to death. Therefore, if you notice any change in behaviour or activity, consult your veterinarian immediately. Common symptoms include but are not limited to: changes in respiratory pattern (laboured or rapid breathing or making unusual sounds when breathing), changes to dropping consistency and colour, sluggish, inactive behaviour, fluffed up appearance, sneezing, vomiting, favouring

one leg, weight loss, discharge from eyes and/or nostrils, inability to perch, or other changes in common behaviour.

Finch and Canary Behaviour

Psychology

All smaller birds are prone to prey behaviours and fears. Their “fight or flight” response can sometimes result in a scared bird trapped in its cage, nipping or biting a hand reaching in. Keep in mind that type of behaviour is almost always a fear response. Try to minimize frightening behaviour like loud sounds, sudden movements and cornering to help your bird feel safe and secure around you. Building a relationship of trust with your small bird is essential to creating a calm, happy bird companion. Finches and Canaries are not as interactive with humans as parrot species and will usually not learn to perch on a finger or fly to your shoulder. These birds are kept more for their joyful songs than their social connection with humans. This makes it even more

essential to keep them in groups. You should always respect a bird’s boundaries and never insist on interaction, especially with these small species. However, finches and canaries will learn to recognize their caregivers and will often get excited and start singing when they see a familiar human or hear their voice. If provided with proper care and respect, finches and canaries will be beautiful, happy companions to share your home with.



Handling

As mentioned above, it is extremely rare for a finch or canary to feel comfortable being handled by humans. You should not expect your small bird to interact with you on a physical level. Rather, you should see these birds as companions in your home, and you can form a positive relationship with them by providing them with comfort and care and spending time speaking or whistling gently to them.

Companionship

These species naturally live in groups and thrive in the company of others of their own species. Finches and Canaries should never be kept on their own, as they do not interact with humans in a manner that fulfills their social needs. Bonding two birds can be difficult. However, if you are not able to get an already bonded pair, bonding to a partner is worth the effort. Bonded pairs are better able to cope with stress, less prone to boredom and depression, and are generally healthier and live longer. A bonded partner or group provides your birds with the companionship and social interactions you, as a human, are unable to offer them.

Interesting Facts

- Male canaries and finches are great singers and have been prized for their singing ability for centuries. Females will also vocalize, but with less range.
- Males of both species tend to be more colourful, have more intense patterns or brighter, deeper overall colouring.

Parrot Behaviour

Psychology

All smaller birds are prone to prey behaviours and fears. Their “fight or flight” response can sometimes result in a scared bird trapped in its cage, nipping or biting a hand. Keep in mind that type of behaviour is almost always a fear response. Try to minimize frightening behaviour like loud sounds, sudden movements and cornering to help your bird to feel safe and secure around you. Building a relationship of trust with your small parrot is essential to creating a tame, calm bird companion. Ultimately, these breeds form strong bonds and make loyal companions when given the respect and patience they need to feel safe. Often birds will engage in behaviour to get a reaction, and thus attention, from humans. If your bird is behaving in an inappropriate way, such as feather plucking or biting, and no medical cause or environmental trigger can be identified, the best policy is to ignore the behaviour to avoid rewarding the bird’s bad behaviour with attention. Rewarding the bird with attention and treats when it engages in positive behaviour is the best form of training for birds.

Bonding with your Parrot

Be gentle when interacting with your pet bird: once you gain their trust, they will show you great loyalty. Respect their boundaries: not all birds enjoy being picked up or touched at first and prefer to interact with you on their own terms. Birds are social, active, and intensely curious. The most important thing to do to keep your pet happy and healthy is to spend time with him/her every day and provide plenty of environmental enrichments inside and outside the cage. Like with people, birds’ personalities can vary; some can be shy or outgoing, sweet or grumpy, placid or playful. Get to know your bird’s personality and treat it accordingly: for instance, shy birds will need more socialization in order to feel comfortable around people.

Handling

When a small parrot is tame, and you have gained its trust, you can invite it to perch on your finger by gently pressing your horizontal finger on the bird’s lower abdomen, allowing it to step up from its perch onto your finger. Once your bird is comfortable, it may perch on your shoulder, head, or a convenient spot.

Companionship

All parrot species naturally live in groups and thrive in the company of others of their own species. Bonding two birds can be difficult; however, if you are not able to get an already bonded pair, bonding to a partner is worth the effort. Bonded pairs are better able to cope with stress, less prone to boredom and depression, and are generally healthier and live longer. A bonded partner or group provides your birds with the companionship and social interactions you, as a human, are unable to offer them.



Understanding Parrot Vocalizations

Budgies

- warbling: contented and happy, often falling asleep
- light repetitive screeching: happy and excited.
- sharp, insistent, repetitive screeching: scared, in pain, warning off predators or humans.

Lovebirds

- soft twittering: relaxed, calm and content.
- high-pitched screech: panicked, fearful or in pain. Indicates a warning to predators or humans.
- chirps, squeaks and shrill calls: general responses to interesting things or events.

Cockatiels

- hissing: frightened or feeling threatened. A warning to predators or humans.
- screaming: varies from communicating with other flock members to fear or pain. Try to observe the bird's other behaviours to identify the purpose of the sound.
- grinding beak: happy, content, often falling asleep.

Interesting Facts

- You can tell the sex of your bird by observing its appearance. A male budgie's cere (the nostrils and surrounding tissue above the beak) is blue, and a female budgie's cere is white, light beige, reddish or brown. It's difficult to know with Cockatiels and Lovebirds, but you can still tell the sex visually. Males tend to be brighter in colour, and females tend to be more muted or dull in colour, particularly the head and tail feathers. Have a bird-savvy vet assist you for a more accurate determination.
- Budgies can imitate sounds and voices and can potentially learn hundreds of words, as can Cockatiels with varying degrees of success.