

# PET BIRD HUSBANDRY

## HEALTH

Birds hide their signs of illness. When obvious signs of illness are noticed, the bird may have been sick for weeks. **Any sign of illness in a bird should be considered an emergency and the veterinary clinic should be called immediately. In addition, every effort should be made to avoid exposing household birds to other birds due to infectious disease transmission.** Do not board your bird at a facility where other birds are located if at all possible. If entering the house after being in a location with other birds, remove and wash your clothes in hot water and take a shower before handling your birds.

## DIET

Feed 80-90% pellets and 10-20% healthy vegetarian people food. Ideally the pellets should be free of dyes because we do not know what these chemicals do to birds. Colored pellets also make it difficult to distinguish whether a change in stool color is due to the dyes or due to a medical problem. Birds on pellets should not be given any mineral or vitamin supplements because over-supplementation will damage their kidneys. Seeds are not recommended because they are high in fat and low in vitamins and other nutrients. The malnutrition caused by a seed diet can take years before it becomes evident physically in your bird. **Poor feather quality, increased risk of bacterial and yeast infection, liver failure, egg binding, brittle bones, and a shortened lifespan are only some of the many side effects of a seed diet.** The exception is that cockatiels should be fed 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of seed daily to help balance the pellets. Fresh foods should be placed in a separate bowl from the rest of the diet and should be removed after 30 minutes.

## GOOD FOOD

- Pasta, rice (white, brown, or wild) whole wheat products
- Beans, lentils
- Vegetables (dark green and orange are best): sweet potato, carrots, squash, broccoli, peas, green beans
- Fruits (berries and fleshy fruits are best): berries, mango, papaya, melon, peach
- Nuts: limited amounts of almond or macadamia

## LESS NUTRITIOUS FOOD (FEED LIMITED AMOUNT)

- Potato
- Corn
- Apples
- Grapes
- Oranges
- White Bread

## BAD FOOD (DO NOT FEED)

- Meat and eggs (carry dangerous bacteria and are not part of the parrot's natural diet)
- Dairy products (birds are lactose intolerant)
- Junk food (chips, French fries, candy, etc)
- Caffeinated beverages and chocolate
- Seed (leads to malnutrition from high fat and low vitamin content)
- Alcohol
- Items with high sodium
- Onions and avocados (may be toxic)
- Nuts: peanuts and walnuts (sometimes carry dangerous infectious organisms)
- Saltine crackers
- Grit

## HAZARDS

### 1. Metals and Aerosols (see Toxin List)

Birds should be either inside of the cage, on a play-gym, or under direct supervision of an adult. **Parrots allowed to freely roam about their environment are at high risk for getting into trouble.** Metal poisoning is extremely common and occurs when a bird ingests an item containing a heavy metal such as lead or zinc. The only truly safe metal is stainless steel. All unidentified metal parts on toys should be replaced with vegetable tanned leather, stainless steel or durable plastic. Birds also can be easily killed by airborne chemicals. **An odor that may not bother a person can kill a bird due to their unique respiratory system.**

### 2. Other Pets and Children

Other pets in the house can be a danger to your bird. Even if your dog or cat is friendly with your bird, never allow them physical contact and never leave an un-caged bird alone with other pets. Ferrets and reptiles will actively hunt and kill birds so be extremely careful with these species. Do not allow children unsupervised access to your bird and lock the cage if necessary. Many birds have been sat upon or trampled accidentally by toddlers. Many birds will also bite children due to a child's clumsiness during handling.

### 3. Toy Safety

**Do not use toys with key rings, spring-hasps, latch hooks, twisty-ties, jingle bells or wire** since birds can get caught in them. Any bird toy can be dangerous depending on how the bird plays with it. Small toys with small C-clamp hanging devices should not be given to larger birds. If using rope toys or perches make sure the bird's nails are trimmed and that the cotton fiber is designed to break easily if the bird catches a toenail in the fibers. Any metal parts on toys that are not labeled as being stainless steel should be removed. Metal C-clamps made of stainless steel can be purchased from some bird catalogs ([www.birdlog.com](http://www.birdlog.com)) and hardware stores.

### 4. Other Hazards

Other hazards include using **ceiling fans** in the bird's presence, leaving the **toilet seat up**, letting the **toenails grow too long**, allowing your bird to **freely roam**, and allowing your bird to play with **jewelry**. In addition, do not use **mite protectors** as they emit toxic chemicals without preventing feather mites. Another hazard is when the owner goes to places that sell birds such as **flea markets, bird stores, bird fairs**, etc. **Dangerous viruses and bacteria can be brought home on the owner's shoes and clothing.** After contacting such a location, it is best to shower, change clothes, spray shoes with 10% bleach and wash any items brought home.

## CAGING REQUIREMENTS

### 1. Location

The cage should be in a corner of the room where the family spends the most time. **It should not be located in or near the kitchen due to cooking fumes. Nor should it be located in an area with high traffic flow** as this placement can increase cage aggression. Take care with placement next to windows since birds can become frightened by seeing hawks during the day and headlights from cars driving by at night. It is best for the bird to have a separate small sleep cage at night so that he can sleep 10-12 hours undisturbed in a quiet room away from the television and other noises.

### 2. Hygiene

In the wild, birds do not come in contact with their own fecal matter, feather dust, or old food items. **It is very important that the cage is kept clean and free of old feces, dust, and food.** Perches should be located so that fecal matter falls straight to the bottom of the cage without hitting other perches, toys, or food/water dishes. The cage and perches should be wiped down with soapy water or a wet washcloth once a week. Any perches with fecal matter on them should be cleaned immediately with hot soapy water, 10% bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water), or run through the dishwasher. Every 1-2 months the cage should be scrubbed well with warm soapy water or a disinfectant such as 10% bleach. Regardless of the disinfectant, the bird should be out of the room during this cleaning due to aerosol toxicity and the cage should be cleaned with plenty of soap and water after disinfection. **The food and water bowls should be clean enough for a person to eat out of.** This usually means the bowls should be cleaned daily with hot soapy water or run through the dishwasher. The newspaper on the cage bottom should be changed daily. Also **avoid kissing your bird on the face because we carry bacteria in our mouths that are dangerous for birds.**

### 3. Cage Furniture

Newspaper should be on the bottom of the cage. Do not use special bedding material such as corncob, walnut, or wood chip bedding since they can grow a dangerous fungus that can kill your bird. Perches should be appropriate to the size of the bird. They should also be varied in size, shape, and material in order to exercise your bird's feet (e.g.: Wild Walk perches). Avoid round dowel rods as well as cement and sandpaper covered perches. These perches tend to cause sores on the bottoms of the feet and they are not very effective at keeping the nails short.

### 4. Size and Type of Cage

Minimum cage size for one bird (assumes some time spent out of cage):

Type of Bird	Minimum Cage Size
Budgie	17" W x 17" L
Cockatiel/Small Conure	20" W x 20" L
Large Conure/Pionus	24" W x 24" L
Amazon Parrot	30" W x 30" L
Blue & Gold Macaw	36" W x 36" L

Good cage brands include: California Cages, Animal Environments, Neon, and King Cages.

## GROOMING

### 1. Wing trimming is recommended for birds in most households due to the difficulty in bird-proofing the home.

Trimming the wings also helps keep your bird hand tame. However, some birds do well if left flighted. The bird needs to be repeatedly shown that the glass and the mirrors are hard by tapping the glass/mirror with your hand and letting the bird get close enough to touch the surface with his beak. All ceiling fan wall switches should be taped down so they can't accidentally be turned on- The bird should be confined to his cage during cooking or other hazardous activities and the toilet seat needs to be kept down. Other household pets may need to be confined while the bird is out.

### 2. Toenails

Should not be allowed to overgrow because birds can accidentally rip their toenails off if the nails are overgrown.

### 3. Beaks

May or may not need to be groomed depending on how much chewing the bird does and if they are on a good diet. Beaks will overgrow due to malnutrition from seed diets and liver disease.

### 4. Bathing

Preferences vary with the bird. Some prefer being misted with water or showering with the owner and others to play in a clean sink with lightly flowing water or even in a bowl of wet lettuce leaves. South American parrots can bathe daily but African Greys, Cockatiels should be misted once weekly. Parrots should only be bathed in water. However, white Cockatoos can be lightly bathed with Johnson's baby shampoo to remove built up oil from handling.

## SLEEP

Birds need 10-12 hours of sleep in a quiet, dark room every night. This can be accomplished by having a separate birdcage in a room away from the TV and other family noises.

## GOOD BIRD RESOURCES

**Magazine:** Pet Bird Report ([www.petbirdreport.com](http://www.petbirdreport.com))

**Books:** Companion Parrot Handbook by Sally Blanchard

My Parrot, My Friend: An Owner's Guide to Parrot Behavior by Bonnie Munro Boane

Guide to a Well-Behaved Parrot by Mattie Sue Athan

**Catalogue:** Birdalog ([www.birdalog.com](http://www.birdalog.com))