

New Bird Guide for Parrots

A Few Things About Your New Parrot...

Try to get some good reference books and if you can subscribe to magazines such as *BirdTalk* or *The Pet Bird Report*. Remember that most books and information (including this sheet) are generalizations. If something seems odd, ask questions. A smart bird owner listens, reads and then uses common sense to make decisions. Many “truths” of five or ten years ago are now considered very outdated, others are still right on the money. Learn as much as you can and then keep learning. Your bird will thank you for it.

Housing

Your bird needs a cage large enough to spread his wings out without touching the sides. The bar spacing should be small enough that he cannot put his head through the bars. A good general rule is to purchase as large of a cage as your budget and space in your home allow. A good play perch for the top of the cage or to set in another location allows your bird the freedom to play, stretch and flap wings. Keep your bird in the cage when you are unable to supervise his activities. The cage becomes like the nesting tree for your bird and is a place of safety and security. Many people like to cover the cage with a towel at night. Your bird is used to this practice which helps the bird to feel secure and you to sleep past daybreak. Parrots love cuddly toys or sleeping huts that are available at bird marts and pet stores.

Food

Many birds are raised on a pelleted diet made by companies such as Zupreem, Pretty Bird, Harrison, Roudybush, Kaytee and others. These pellet food brands are available in local pet stores that carry pet supplies and through catalog orders. In addition to an unlimited supply of pelleted food, your bird needs plenty of fresh water. Each day, he also should get a serving of one or more of the following foods:

- Frozen mixed vegetables (cooked and allowed to cool)
- Pasta or rice – toss with mixed vegetables, cooked bean soup mix or baby food (carrots, squash, apricots, pears, sweet potatoes (can season with cinnamon, nutmeg or allspice)
- Birdie corn bread (made with apple sauce in place of the oil; adding your choice cottage cheese, spinach, mashed bananas, grated carrots, broccoli, mixed veggies, corn, etc.)
- Fresh fruits and veggies: apple, pear, banana, oranges, carrots, squash, broccoli, etc.
- Cereal—a mixture of your choice of corn flakes, rice krispies, cheerios, raisin bran, puffed wheat, etc. Avoid brands with excessive sugar.
- Seed mixture (higher quality costs more but usually contains the healthier seeds)
- Sprouted seed

Your bird can eat most foods that are healthy for you to eat. A good general rule is to feed your bird the same foods that are considered healthy for a toddler. Alcohol, excessive sweets, excessive salt, caffeine, soda, chocolate, etc., aren't good for kids or birds!

Grooming

Your bird will occasionally need his nails, wings and beak trimmed. Some bird magazines and books explain how to do this, but it may be best to have your vet or an experienced person show you how the first time. Many area pet stores offer grooming or members of a local bird club usually will help a new member or visitor trim nails and wings. Beaks should only be trimmed by an experienced person. In addition to a clean cage, your bird will enjoy access to a large, flat-bottomed bowl for bathing or a spray bath. Some birds enjoy going into the shower with their owners. Bathing on a regular basis helps keep your bird beautiful. Some parrots, if given free access, will bath several times a day!

Toys

Parrots are intelligent and playful creatures. They need toys to help keep them busy while you are not at home or are unable to play with them. Toys are available at pet stores, through catalogs, at bird marts and even in your home. Most toys have beads, leather, rope and brightly colored objects to attract your bird's attention. It is a good idea to buy several types of toys and then rotate them in the cage on a weekly or monthly basis. Place several toys in the cage, but not so many as to prevent your bird from moving about easily. Be very observant with rope toys since toenails can easily get caught and long loose strands have caused accidental hanging. Some toys are available and free. Empty toilet paper rolls, a rolled up newspaper, old tissue boxes and other household items are often a bird's favorite toy. When purchasing toys be aware of any potential hazards such as small parts your bird can break and eat or pieces that could catch a toenail or beak.

Training

Now is the time to create the behavior you want to live with for the life of your bird. Baby parrots are cute, loveable and easy to spoil. However, this spoiled baby is going to wear thin after several years. Here are a few hints to help make your baby easier to live with:

- Teach the step up command. A bird needs to do this automatically when told.
- Teach your bird to stay on his cage or play pen, don't let him fly to the floor and hunt you down. A bird on the floor or wandering around the house unsupervised can be seriously injured, not to mention the injury he could do to your furniture and woodwork!
- Teach your bird that he has to be in the cage sometimes when you are home. This is something that the bird will have to "endure" from time to time when you have guests, are working or maybe have the flu and can't deal with a peppy parrot.
- Teach your bird to step up on a stick. This is a handy thing in many situations, such as having a parrot perched out of reach somewhere.

Never hit a parrot as punishment. Birds are motivated by positive reinforcement and trust in their owners. They are willing to do things to either achieve pleasure (food, attention, and petting) or avoid displeasure (put in the cage, being picked up when they don't want to be held). Yelling "no" or "shut up" can be a reward to a parrot who loves the excitement of loud animated speech. In fact, almost any reaction from the bird's human companions can be considered part of a game for these intelligent creatures. Patience and consistency are the key factors in good training.

These are a few basics. Read a lot of books and magazines to get a well-rounded education with many approaches and opinions. Some places to start are: *Guide to a Well Behaved Parrot* by Mattie Sue Athan; *Idiot's Guide to Bird Care and Training* by Jacqueline O'Neil; *Companion Parrot Handbook* by Sally Blanchard; and *Parrots as Pets Videotape* by Steve Martin or visit www.naturalencounters.com

Potential Dangers

Common household items can be potentially dangerous. Keep your bird away from ceiling fans, electric cords, open toilets, dogs, cats, small unsupervised children, houseplants, etc. Avoid taking your bird out of doors and if you do, be sure his wings are clipped well or he is in a secure carrier. Don't sleep with your bird, you can crush him or smother him and never realize it until it is too late. Remember a parrot is curious and likes to chew. Buy toys that are the appropriate size for your bird and discard them when they are worn out and begin to fall apart.

Anytime that you suspect that your bird is not feeling well, consult a qualified avian vet immediately.

Provided by Cheryl Burns, conure breeder